Explore, Imagine, and Celebrate the Black River in Watertown

The Black River
Vision Plan

City of Watertown
Local Waterfront Revitalization Program

SUNY-College of Environmental Science and Forestry
Center for Community Design Research
The Black River Vision Plan
City of Watertown
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Prepared by:
The SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry
Center for Community Design Research

Prepared for:
The City of Watertown, New York

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ESF Student Team
Wendy Andringa
Eliza Barton
Joe Cavallaro
Bret Crane
Erin Ernst
Coraline Falco
Michele Folts
Jae Hyuck
Amy Kinsey
Denise Lai
Corinne Leonard
Takuma Minato
Sara Schroeder
Steve Selvek
Ian Wright
Shuang Zhai

Graduate Assistant
Michael Franco

Faculty
Cheryl Doble
Maren King

Michael Lumbis
Gary Beasley
Don Canfield
Karen Delmonic
Tim LaBouf
Nancy Weal
Dave Zembiec
The Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP)
The LWRP is a locally prepared comprehensive land and water use plan to guide local decision-making that protects the environmental integrity of a community’s waterfront resource while maximizing its potential to contribute to the city’s economic vitality and quality of life. The LWRP is a state supported program in which a municipality works in partnership with the NYS Division of Coastal Resources to develop community consensus regarding the future of its waterfront and prepare a plan to guide public and private actions that achieve this desired future. Once the city completes its plan and it is approved by the New York State Secretary of State and the Federal Office of Coastal Resources, this local plan will guide and coordinate local, state and federal actions needed to achieve the community’s goals for its waterfront.

The LWRP is designed to help communities address locally specific conditions and needs. Typically these plans address waterfront redevelopment, public access, erosion hazards management, habitat restoration and historic resource protection. Each community determines the elements to be included in the plan and the process by which they will complete this work. The plan can be developed through a single planning effort or through a series of planning studies that address one issue at a time. When completed, the plan must indicate the local implementation measures and identify specific projects and/or actions that will be necessary to accomplish the identified objectives. The plan should identify state and federal programs/assistance that would be critical to its success.

Vision Planning
The City of Watertown chose to initiate their LWRP process by involving the community in a participatory process of vision planning. This is an interactive process that invites participation of all community members and stakeholders. The intent of the process is to establish dialogue and collaboration among participants in order to discover common values upon which to base a vision plan. The vision plan describes the future that the community would like to see and in this case provides a foundation to guide the planning of the LWRP. The Vision Planning process was designed and facilitated by SUNY ESF Planning and Landscape Architecture students under the guidance of faculty and the Center for Community Design Research.

Local Organization and Outreach
As the city’s lead agency of the LWRP, the City Planning Department formed an Outreach Advisory Committee to guide community outreach, encourage community participation, coordinate local workshops and advise the SUNY-ESF faculty and students.
Working with SUNY ESF faculty, the Outreach Advisory Committee organized the participatory process of the LWRP around a series of three workshops scheduled over three months between February and April 2003. To encourage participation, local organizations hosted the first workshop. Each organization took responsibility for scheduling the workshop, and notifying its members. The general public was notified and invited through postings on local web sites, posters, fliers, letters, and newspaper and radio announcements. The first workshop was repeated four times, each in a different location and at a different time to accommodate different schedules.

The Workshops
The series of community workshops were design to facilitate public participation in the articulation of a vision for the city and its waterfront. The first was entitled Imagine, the second Explore and the third Celebrate the Black River in Watertown. The table below documents the scheduling of the workshops and the focus of the activities conducted at each.

On April 24, the SUNY-ESF students concluded their involvement in the project with a presentation at City Hall. At this presentation, the students summarized the information gathered during the workshops, reviewed the vision statement and goals and shared a conceptual design plan that captured many of the community’s ideas and proposals and illustrated the potential of their vision.

Communication
On-going communication is important to build understanding and participation. Over the three months of the workshop activity, local organizations maintained information regarding workshop schedules on their web sites and local newspaper and TV coverage provided updates on the project. The students prepared posters to document the

<table>
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<td>1. Explore the river&lt;br&gt;2/24/03&lt;br&gt;2/26/03&lt;br&gt;2/28/03&lt;br&gt;3/1/03</td>
<td>HSBC Bank&lt;br&gt;The Marcy Building&lt;br&gt;HSBC Bank&lt;br&gt;City Hall</td>
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workshop findings and story boxes to document initial research and field observations. Following the April meeting the Outreach Committee and SUNY-ESF faculty met to consider next steps including continued communication and education. The following tasks were identified and initiated.

- Display all the project documentation in City Hall lobby (Planning Department)
- Meet with the Mayor and City Council for project review (Planning Department and SUNY-ESF)
- Prepare a web based project summary (SUNY-ESF)
- Complete three sets of story boxes for display in the community (SUNY-ESF)
- Make presentations to community organizations (Outreach Committee and SUNY-ESF)

**Document Organization**
The reminder of this document is organized into sections, outlined as follows.

*Section 1: Setting and Context* provides an overview of the river and its influence on the city’s development. It also reviews recent planning studies that describe the current condition of the river and its potential to enhance the city’s quality of life and economic vitality.

*Section 2: The Vision Planning Process* presents an overview of the vision planning process that describes the workshop activities and summarizes the findings.

*Section 3: The Vision Plan*, documents the community’s vision statement and goals that were developed during the workshop process and action steps that can be taken to implement the vision.

*Section 4: Illustrating the Vision*, presents conceptual drawings and design plans that reveal the potential of this vision.

*Section 5: Implementing the Vision*, reviews key issues deserving further attention and provides recommendations to guide planning consultants, city departments and state agencies as they develop a scope of work to complete the LWRP. It also suggests next steps that the city could take to maintain public participation, grow local support, and develop an effective leadership team to forward the program.

A *process notebook* was prepared to document the workshop outreach materials, participatory activities and collected data. It is available at the City Planning Department and Flower Memorial Library.
Community planning always occurs within a context — the physical place, its history, and community values. Each planning study is influenced by the results and understanding gained from previous planning activities. It is important, therefore, at the beginning of any planning study, to understand the local conditions and events that have shaped the physical and social dimensions of the community with which you will be working.

Given the focus of the LWRP on the city’s riverfront, our background investigations focused in three areas: the physical condition of the river and its historic relationship with the city, the character and conditions of the neighborhoods along the river, and previous planning studies that have addressed the river. The information gained from these preliminary investigations was documented and shared with the community through a series of story boxes that were presented at the second workshop and displayed on a rotating basis throughout the city. The following is an overview of the understanding gained through field studies, archival research and conversations with city officials and residents.

The River and the City

From its headwaters in Atwall, the Black River descends approximately 80 miles before reaching the eastern boundary of Watertown. The river travels 3.5 miles through the city and continues 25 miles west where it flows into Lake Ontario. Formed by glacial activity during the Pleistocene Epoch more than 18,000 years ago, the river has a “U” shape with steep slopes and a flat bottom that is characteristic of valleys formed by glacier movement. While the river meanders slowly through the broad upland agricultural valleys, it drops 1,300 feet in grade by the time it reaches Watertown and descends another 120 feet as it passes through the city. This elevation change resulted in rapidly moving water that limited use of the river for transportation but provided a tremendous source of waterpower.

The Algonquian and Mohawk Indians trapped and hunted along the river but never settled. In the late 1700’s French explorers also traveled along the river. There were no permanent settlers until 1800 when Henry Coffeen, Zachariah Butterfield and six others founded the settlement of Watertown. In 1802 Jonathan Cowan created the first dam on Bee Bee Island to power a gristmill and by 1804 there was a hamlet of log cabins at the present juncture of Washington Street and Public Square. Throughout the 1800’s new industries located along the river. Following the early paper mills there were cotton and woolen mills, foundries, carriage production and in the 1900’s hydro power plants began constructing dams along the river. The period from 1880 to 1900 was referred to as the “Era of Great Prosperity.”
During that time the city’s population doubled. Industrial buildings lined the river and behind them residential neighborhoods grew first to the east, then north and finally west. The city’s prosperity was evident in the stately public buildings erected around Public Square and the large residential properties that lined Washington Street. The River’s energy fueled the city’s prosperity yet the river itself went nearly unnoticed by the general public, which viewed it as a utility, feared its power and were content that the river was hidden behind the manufacturing buildings of the city’s industrial core.

Today, much of the industry is gone. In some areas, historic structures still stand marking the city’s grand industrial past, yet in other areas the ruins of former industrial buildings and empty brownfield sites speak of vacancy and economic decline. The Black River, however, has regained a visual presence in the city and as the community looks to the future, many see the Black River as an important resource in the city’s revitalization. The drama of the river’s powerful energy, the natural beauty of the deep gorge and steep rock walls and the current recreational use all suggest that the river will play an important role in the city’s revitalization.
Neighborhoods
Each of the neighborhoods along the river has different physical characteristics, land uses and river edge relationships; as a result, each has different needs and opportunities. The following narrative provides a brief overview of the physical conditions, settlement patterns and characteristics that distinguish the eastern, center and western river corridor.

The Eastern river corridor extends from the city line on Eastern Boulevard to Factory Square. A mix of active hydro facilities, public facilities, parks and recreation areas (with water access) line the river for half the length of this corridor. Residential properties (apartments, single and two-family homes) of moderate to high density constitute the largest land use in this corridor. Only a few of the residential properties are located on the river; however, most of the homes are within a short walk of the river and recreation areas. The residential lots are generally small. Most of the homes are two-story wood framed structures, which face the street along a common set back of 15 to 20 feet. Side yards are small and most homes fill the width of the lot; spacing between buildings is very narrow. The streets are narrow and in some areas sidewalks only line one side of the street. While distances between river and city center destinations are walkable the pedestrian environment is not particularly inviting and in some locations along the river, vehicular traffic makes walking difficult. The condition of the homes varies but many are in need of repair. Sewall’s Island, one of the city’s largest industrial brownfield sites, is located on the western edge of the eastern river corridor. In its current condition this site detracts from the neighborhood but it is potentially one of the largest redevelopment opportunities on the river.

City Center extends from Factory Square on the east to Arch Street on the west and includes Public Square and the lower end of Washington Street. This is the location of the city’s earliest settlement and it is the
civic and commercial heart of the city. Set well back from the river edge, Public Square and its surrounding buildings provided a transition space between the city’s residential and industrial areas. However, there was never a physical link between the square and the river. The area between the square and the river has historically been a transportation corridor, first for the train and now for cars. Over time commercial activity in the city center has declined, and significant buildings have been lost leaving gaps in the streetscape; a number of storefronts are vacant. A successful façade program is underway and historic buildings are being renovated for new uses. Activity along

the river could contribute to the revitalization of the city center. However, this area, which for so long has turned its back on the river, will need to reorient civic, commercial and pedestrian activities to embrace the river. A riverwalk has been constructed in this area between Arch and Mill Street, but this new resource is under utilized due to the lack of convenient pedestrian connections from the city center.

The Western corridor extends from Arch Street west to the city line and includes the historic industrial area of Newell Street, residential neighborhoods, commercial development and public open space. Industrial buildings line the north side of the river; however, on the south side there was less industrial development. Industrial buildings extended along Newell Street but the land further west was in agricultural use until the 1950’s. While many of the industrial buildings in this area are no longer in active use they are smaller in scale than those on the east and have great potential for adaptive reuse. The Red Lion Brewery is an excellent example of adaptive reuse, which takes
advantage of the buildings riverside location to establish an entertainment destination. This project may stimulate similar projects in some of the adjacent buildings.

As was the case on the eastern corridor, there are very few residential properties on the river, but there are large residential areas a block or two back from the river. In this area the residential properties are generally larger than those in the eastern corridor and they have much larger street and side yard setbacks. Once past the Red Lion Brewery the river widens, the banks become lower and there are new opportunities. The Fair Grounds and Jefferson Community College along the south bank of the river provide considerable open space along the river and excellent recreation opportunities. However, pedestrian and bike access to these areas from the north is difficult and these northern neighborhoods have limited access to recreation resources. Vacant industrial sites along the north bank could be redeveloped to provide river access and neighborhood parks for the communities on the north side.

Review of Planning Studies

The Black River has been the subject of a number of recent planning studies and reports. Several focused specifically on the river while others addressed the river as part of a larger study. The students reviewed the following studies.

2003 City of Watertown Near East Side Neighborhood Improvement District Strategic Economic Development Plan
Prepared by: Behan and Associates
2002 A Tourism Plan For the City of Watertown, New York (draft)
The following overview describes the focus of each project and suggests its relevance to the continuing LWRP work.

The city’s report to the Quality Community Task Force describes ongoing planning and development projects and presents the Black River initiatives within the context of other development and preservation efforts.

The Black River Recreational Plan (1988) by Wilhelmi is the most complete documentation of the river, describing its physical characteristics, its relationship to the city and its influence on the city’s growth/development. It also provides the most specific physical planning recommendations for sites along the river. The Black River Parks Development Plan is the City’s blueprint for implementation of the Wilhelmi study.

The Black River Economic Adjustment Study (2001) by the Center for Community Studies at JCC looks at the economic opportunities associated with the Black River and is a helpful resource for the community as they assess the costs and benefits of different development and preservation actions along the river.
The Chamber of Commerce’s study, *Black River Development-Education-Promotion (2001)* illustrates the desire and vision of local individuals to capture opportunities along the river. The group’s understanding of the community recognized the need for community education and promotion regarding the river and its potential. The report presents recommendations to initiate this education and promotional process.

The *Action Planning Process (2002)* engaged community members in a broad investigation of community strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats (SWOT). It is clearly less focused on the river than the other studies but it does provide a discussion of current river issues and relates them to broader community needs and issues.

These planning studies reflect the current interest in planning and community revitalization by the city, local community groups and not-for-profits and they suggest that the city values public involvement in this process. The studies contain documentation and analysis that was useful to the vision planning process; they also revealed the following limitations in the planning process that should be addressed through the LWRP:

- Recommendations that were clearly identified in early studies come up again in subsequent studies suggesting that the city is not implementing the recommendations or that their response is not addressing the concern. Key issues, especially those that require a citywide response such as pedestrian circulation, do not seem to be addressed effectively.
- The relationship between individual studies is not apparent and it is unclear how one informs the other. It would be useful to have a citywide planning framework to direct and guide future studies and to integrate the findings and recommendations of individual studies.
- The Chamber report recognized the need for public education and promotion as part of the planning and implementation process. This is an important insight but to act on this requires a planning process that coordinates thoughtful community education and outreach with city planning and development actions.
Intent and Process
The vision planning process is designed to facilitate a community dialogue through which local residents are able articulate concerns, identify opportunities and establish a vision for their community. To be successful, the process should be designed to encourage the broadest possible participation, and to create an environment in which all community members feel welcome. In Watertown this process was accomplished through a series of community workshops organized by the Outreach Committee and SUNY ESF faculty and students. The committee guided the development of an outreach strategy, developed the workshop schedule and handled local arrangements finding meeting space, distributing notices and responding to community questions. The students prepared promotional materials, and designed, facilitated and summarized all of the workshop activities.

Two activity-based workshops were conducted, one in February and one in March. The workshops were organized around a series of separate but related activities developed to facilitate small group conversations, inquiry and confirmation. The activities were designed to explore specific community research questions. Initially, the students posed the questions on the basis of their field investigations and early conversations. Later, the community framed the questions through workshop activities and discussions.

The first workshop explored community values, identified community concerns, and brainstormed opportunities along the river corridor. Following this workshop, the students compiled and summarized the maps, surveys and community discussions. Based on the information and understanding gained through the workshop activities, the students drafted a community vision statement and preliminary goals. The students also identified a set of questions that required further investigation and developed activities to explore them. At the second workshop participants worked to refine the draft vision, reviewed design proposals and discussed programs that the city might pursue to accomplish their vision.

Workshop Summaries
The following summary of workshops 1 and 2 provides an overview of the activities conducted and highlights the significant outcomes of each. For full descriptions of the workshop activities and their documentation see the Process Notebook.

WORKSHOP 1: IMAGINE THE RIVER AND THE CITY
Community questions:
With a limited understanding of the community gained through archival research, field studies and local interviews the students
identified the following research questions that they wanted to explore with community residents.

- How do they describe their city?
- How do they value their community?
- How do they use the city and its resources on a daily basis?
- What do they see as the most significant challenges and opportunities facing the community?
- How do individuals describe their desired future for the city?

Workshop 1 Activities:

Four activities were conducted at the workshop and a photo survey was completed by a smaller group of volunteers during the following week. The list below provides a brief description of the activities.

- Entry survey – individuals described the community at the beginning of the workshop and prepared a brief vision statement at the end.
- Storyline mapping – Teams completed a mapping activity to document the way that they know and use the river and city center on a daily basis.
- Sacred places and concerns – Small groups listed and then mapped valued community resources that they would like to protect. The group then listed concerns and problems facing the city and then mapped each of the concerns that could be located in a physical place.
- Opportunities – Small groups identified opportunities (primarily along the river) that are currently underutilized that, if developed, could benefit the city.
- Photo survey – Individuals volunteered to answer a series of questions outside of the workshop about the city center by taking pictures to illustrate their answers. The survey focused on community use and perceptions of the area around Public Square and its relationship to the river.

Workshop 1 Findings:

The community descriptions of Watertown were categorized, sorted and then the number of responses in each category was tabulated. The single greatest response (by a large margin) was that “Watertown is a great place to live.” The next most frequent response was that it is “an area in decline.” Interestingly, there were an equal number of people that described the city as “an area of opportunity.” People are seeing the same condition but some focus on the decline while others prefer to see the opportunity. A number of people mentioned the area’s natural beauty and abundance of natural resources.

Several of the activities revealed community values. The sacred places mapping identified specific sites of significant community
In all, forty-two sites or buildings were identified, fifteen of which were repeatedly noted. Thompson Park was most frequently mentioned; however, eleven of the remaining fourteen sites are located in the center of the city on Public Square and Washington Street. The remaining three sites are located on the river. Several of the activities revealed that they valued well-maintained properties that reflect caring and a sense of well-being. The community takes great pride in its history and in the well-maintained historic homes and civic buildings such as the Flower Library and the Jefferson County Historical building. They are also proud of new accomplishments, the restoration of the Marcy building and Red Lion Brewery, and the public recreation facilities at the Fairgrounds, Riverwalk and Waterworks Park. The community values the natural beauty of the region and the Black River.

The identified concerns confirmed our understanding of community values. The community is deeply troubled by the abandoned industrial sites, boarded up storefronts and areas of dilapidation. It is distressing to them that these areas are so highly visible in the center of the city, along the river and at several of the gateways into the city. Sewall’s Island was the most frequently cited area of concern; however, the condition of the downtown, the poor appearance of lower State Street and the condition of residential areas along the river were also mentioned. Residents also expressed concern about pedestrian circulation noting that pedestrian pathways are often unpleasant, discontinuous and hazardous.

Community brainstorming of opportunities resulted in a lengthy list (See Process Notebook). Not surprisingly many of the sites listed as concerns were also identified as opportunities. Sewall’s Island, ranked number one on the list of concerns, was also the most noted opportunity. The participants looked at all of the former industrial sites as valuable resources that could be put to a better purpose through adaptive reuse. The Red Lion brewery stands as an example of what can be done. They recognized and celebrated the things that have been accomplished (Fairgrounds, Riverwalk, Waterworks park, and the Brewery) and see the potential to build on these successes. There is a desire to maintain and care for older parts of the community, which reflect the wear of time and to use these resources to meet new community needs. Finally, they discussed the importance of building on these opportunities in a way that each individual project will contribute to the collective well being of the city.

**WORKSHOP 2: EXPLORE THE RIVER**
Community questions:
The second workshop activities were developed to explore and follow...
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From top to bottom: At the second workshop participants developed tourism strategies, identified activity nodes along the river, and reviewed alternative pedestrian strategies for the city center.

Workshop 2 Activities:
The workshop began with an informal community review of displays including the “story boxes” recording the students’ field investigations and maps, and photo summaries from the first workshop. This was followed by a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed the first workshop summary and analysis, and shared three case studies from communities that have successfully used participatory community planning to redevelop their waterfronts. The presentation was followed by four participatory activities.

- Reviewing the draft vision – small groups reviewed and edited the draft vision statement prepared by the students.
- Exploring activity nodes on the river – Working with an aerial photo and cross section drawings of the river, small groups identified specific opportunities along the river and the improvements that would facilitate and enhance these activities.
- Connecting Public Square and the river – Small groups reviewed and critiqued three design proposals prepared by the students to illustrate alternative strategies that strengthen the connection between Public Square and the river.
- Considering tourism opportunities – Students facilitated a brain-
storming session that examined four tourism opportunities. Groups discussed the potential benefit of each opportunity, identified resources required to develop them and then identified existing resources that could be employed.

Workshop 2 Findings:
Participants were generally in agreement with the first draft of the Vision Statement and Goals and the review resulted in only minor revisions. The exploration of activity nodes along the river was very productive. Participants identified twenty-one locations that could be developed to accommodate community use and suggested appropriate activities at each. The diversity of suggested activities was impressive and included: boating, fishing, nature areas and walks, camping, picnicking, community festivals, neighborhood recreation, historic interpretation, retail and light industry. The participant’s brought an understanding of the river that was based on past experiences (many from their youth) which enabled them to talk about the sites in detail and to evaluate the feasibility of the various proposals. See Process Notebook to review the map and full description of activities.

The students prepared for review three alternative strategies to link Public Square and the river.
1. An exterior street loop connecting to the Riverwalk at Arch and Mill Streets
2. A pedestrian route creating a bridge through the J.B. Wise parking lot to the Riverwalk
3. The development of a park and pedestrian walk in the J.B. Wise parking lot with connecting pedestrian paths to the Riverwalk.

There was strong support for the proposal to improve the pedestrian character along the existing city streets and participants were enthusiastic about the use of Arch Street as a link to the Riverwalk and the Newell Street area. They stressed the importance of the Mill Street intersection in this plan and commented on the need to address pedestrian safety and to improve the entrance to the Riverwalk entrance in this location.

Participants were enthusiastic about the improvements proposed for the J.B. Wise parking lot including the development of pedestrian routes through the lot, and the addition of plant materials to enhance these routes. They hoped that the pedestrian improvements and plantings would improve the character of the parking lot and encourage the property owners to make improvements to the rear facades of their buildings facing on to the lot. However, they did not feel that they could give up the parking spaces that would be required to develop a park within the J.B. Wise parking lot.
Residents discussed the potential for commercial development to energize the Riverwalk and suggested incorporating commercial shops along the pedestrian route to the Riverwalk and providing space for vendors on the Riverwalk. The development of a flexible multiuse civic area associated with the pedestrian paths in the parking lot was proposed to accommodate a farmers market and public gatherings. This proposal was appealing to the participants but they did say that the city should continue to hold large public events on Public Square. The discussions clearly revealed broad support to improve the pedestrian circulation in the city, to develop Arch and Mill Streets as gateways to the Riverwalk and to develop a pedestrian environment in the J.B. Wise and Court Street (formerly Liberty Christian) parking lot.

There was extensive discussion regarding the pedestrian crossing of City Center Drive. The students’ plans illustrated two alternatives: the placement of a new signal west of the Mill Street intersection, and the construction of a pedestrian bridge extending from the Court Street parking lot. During the discussion, residents proposed additional alternatives including: tunneling beneath City Center Drive and the construction of a subsurface parking garage in the location of the Court Street Parking lot that would extend under the road and connect to the Riverwalk. There was consensus that there needs to be a better and more strategically located pedestrian crossing of City Center Drive to provide convenient access to the Riverwalk; however, more information will be required to determine feasibility and evaluate the different proposals.

The first workshop clearly revealed strong community interest in tourism. Participants identified eight different activities that, if developed, would have the potential to attract tourists to the city. The students conducted preliminary investigations into these identified
activities and chose four (boating, fishing, trails and historic/cultural interpretation) for further community discussion at the second workshop. The group began by reviewing the previously identified activities and then expanded on this list as documented below.

Fishing:
- River edge clean up
- Education on water quality and habitat
- Improved access to water and platforms along the water
- Clinics on fishing techniques
- Tournaments

Trails:
- Complete trail connections through the city
- Create information stations as people enter the city to inform visitors of local activities and encourage them to spend time in the city
- Implement a coordinated system of signs
- Develop year round use of the trail systems

Culture and history
- Create a history tour through the city.
- Create interpretive materials and public installations that celebrate the industrial heritage and the Black River.
- Establish a visitor’s center
- Adaptive reuse of an industrial building for a museum and visitor’s center
- Organize an annual event or festival that celebrates some aspect of community history and/or culture.

Boating:
- Improve water access for all boating activities
- Develop kayak opportunities including: access and changing

The city has developed trail systems at Waterwork Park (below) and along the Riverwalk. Connecting these trails to regional systems and extending them through the city will enhance river access, and increase tourism in the city.

Watertown’s rich history is revealed in its historic industrial buildings, monuments, and residential and civic architecture. Many of these structures and sites are located in the vicinity of Public Square (above and left) and the adjacent river corridor.
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areas, play spots, competition venues, and viewing areas
- Flat-water canoe excursions
- Tour boat excursions
- Community boating center with lessons and equipment rental
- Encourage retail shops that supply gear and provide equipment repair.
- Sponsor festivals and competitions

After completing this list, the students redirected the discussion to consider the resources that would be required to initiate these activities and identify initial actions steps. At this point it became clear that the participants had different perspectives on the potential of the various activities, and the most advantageous locations for them. Interest groups (especially the kayak and boaters) have given a lot of thought to the use of the river and depending on the group’s interest (competition or recreation) they have different opinions regarding where and how these activities should be developed. These groups became mired in the details of their differences and it was difficult to facilitate a productive discussion. This session suggests the need for a coordinated and thoughtful investigation of tourism. The process should include a market study, documentation of infrastructure requirements, and implementation costs. It should also address the potential of the various activities to attract complimentary markets. See Section 5: Implementing the Vision for a full discussion of this recommendation.
The Vision Statement:
The City of Watertown is a regional center between Lake Ontario, the Thousand Islands and the Adirondacks that boasts a friendly small town atmosphere. It values its location on the Black River and its rich cultural, industrial and architectural heritage; it seeks to strengthen its economic base and broaden the diversity of opportunities for the local community and its visitors.

Planning Goals:
1. Recognize, improve and maintain the environmental quality of the Black River and adjacent lands.
   - Actions steps:
     a) Document, disseminate and celebrate the work that has been accomplished to clean the river, including the installation of sewer lines upstream, and local projects to clean the river edge and improve public facilities. This could be accomplished through a series of newspaper articles, public television and presentations to community organizations.
     b) Develop educational programs to help the community appreciate, understand and care for the river. Work with the school district and Jefferson Community College to develop programs and integrative modules that become part of their curriculum. Look for opportunities to extend education programs into the community through enrichment (noncredit) courses, public television, service projects, workshops and festivals.
     c) Initiate an annual river edge cleanup day. Work with civic organizations, neighborhood groups and schools to recruit work teams. Assign projects, document before and after conditions, recognize contribution of each group and end the event with a celebratory community gathering. Make this an annual event.
     d) Initiate community and youth conservation projects. Identify potential projects, seek project sponsors to fund necessary material costs and organize a work team willing to carry out the projects. These projects could be part of a school service requirement, and civic organizations could take on individual projects each year. The city could seek funding to establish a youth conservation corps to hire students to work over the summer.

2. Embrace the river as an economic and recreational resource within the community by expanding opportunities along it that stimulate a balance of public and private growth.

COMMUNITY VISIT
February 8, 2003

Organization: Faculty and the city planning department meet with local leaders to develop an outreach strategy to encourage public participation in the Local Waterfront Revitalization Planning.

Getting to know the community: Students and faculty meet with Mayor Butler and the planning department for an overview of the city and a review of current and past planning studies after which Mike Lumbis lead the group on a tour of the river and surrounding neighborhoods. Over the following weeks, the students returned to conduct field investigations and research.

WORKSHOP 1
February 24 - March 1, 2003

Discovering community values: The first community workshop included a series of activities through which participants revealed the ways that they use and value their community by identifying sacred places, traditions, and activities. They also mapped areas of concern and opportunity in the community and along the Black River.

SYNTHESIS
March 2003

Summary and Analysis: The students completed summaries of the first workshop activities. A draft vision statement and set of goals were prepared based on the summaries from the workshop. Priority issues and opportunities were identified and the students began preliminary studies to investigate these further. Other students began case study research to document ways which other communities had successfully revitalized their waterfronts.

WORKSHOP 2
March 29, 2003

Considering alternatives: As the second workshop, students reviewed the findings of the first workshop activities and reviewed/edit a draft vision statement. The students also facilitated three activities that explored alternatives for pedestrian connection to the Riverwalk, activities along the Black River, and tourism development.

EXPRESSING THE VISION

Conceptual Design: After a review of the second workshop discussions, the students developed a design strategy and prepared illustrative drawings to provide a physical expression of the vision.

The Process:
Community Planning for the Black River

Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan Vision Study
City of Watertown Planning Department
SUNY ESF Center for Community Design Research
April 24, 2003
The Vision Statement
The City of Watertown is a regional center between Lake Ontario, the Thousand Islands and the Adirondacks that boasts a friendly small town atmosphere. It values its location on the Black River and its rich cultural, industrial and architectural heritage; it seeks to strengthen its economic base and broaden the diversity of opportunities for the local community and its visitors.

Planning Goals:

1. Recognize, improve and maintain the environmental quality of the Black River and adjacent lands.

Actions steps:

a) Document, disseminate and celebrate the work that has been accomplished to clean the river, including the installation of sewer lines upstream, and local projects to clean the river edge and improve public facilities. This could be accomplished through a series of newspaper articles, public television programs and presentations to community organizations.

b) Develop educational programs to help the community appreciate, understand and care for the river. Work with the school district and Jefferson Community College to develop programs and integrative modules that become part of their curriculum. Look for opportunities to extend education programs into the community through enrichment (noncredit) courses, public television, service projects, workshops and festivals.

c) Initiate an annual river edge cleanup day. Work with civic organizations, neighborhood groups and schools to recruit work teams. Assign projects, document before and after conditions, recognize the contribution of each group and end the event with a celebratory community gathering.

d) Initiate community and youth conservation projects. Identify potential projects, seek project sponsors to fund necessary material costs and organize a work team willing to carry out the projects. These projects could be part of a school service requirement, and civic organizations could take on individual projects each year. The city could seek funding to establish a youth conservation corps to hire students to work over the summer.

2. Embrace the river as an economic and recreational resource within the community by expanding opportunities along it that stimulate a balance of public and private growth.
Action steps:

a) Meet with the owners of existing riverfront commercial establishments to better understand how private and public actions might enhance their current business activities.

b) Create an overlay district along the river that will allow mixed-use development, provide incentives for desired river based development and site plan review.

c) Initiate an entrepreneurial program to encourage seasonal temporary commercial activity along the Riverwalk.

d) Extend commercial and civic activities to the river through annual festivals and community celebrations that focus on the river.

e) Form a committee that represents public and private interests to assess the benefits of the various riverfront development and tourist opportunities and to prepare a development strategy that will maximize the potential for synergy between public and private investment.

f) Participate in regional tourism planning initiatives and when possible build on or link to regional activities.

g) Explore opportunities to expand public recreation along the river through youth boating programs, equipment rentals and neighborhood parks.

h) Initiate a program to facilitate conversations between the city and river landowners to discuss issues of concern and provide current information regarding planning and development activities along the river. The intent would be to share information in a timely manner, address concerns before they become large issues and discuss the potential for collaborative public/private efforts.

Through adaptive reuse of an old industrial building the Red Lion Brewery maintains the historic industrial character of Newell Street while introducing a new commercial business that takes advantage of its river location by providing patrons an exciting view of the kayak activities below. A new deck along the riverside of the building creates an outdoor space between the building and river.
3. Establish a strong physical relationship between downtown and the river, which supports year-round businesses and services tailored to the needs of the community and visitors.

Action steps:

a) Improve pedestrian access between Public Square, Court Street and the river. Enhance existing sidewalks with plantings, trees, benches and pedestrian scale lighting. Create safe crossings at all major roads and establish a coordinated system of signs and gateways to the river.

b) Explore modification and adaptive reuse of service and parking areas between the downtown and river to extend commercial and civic activities of the city center towards the river. (See also 2d)

c) Increase the river’s visibility from the downtown center by developing pocket parks and sitting areas that provide views to the river, by installing public art that references the river and placing informational signs that direct people between the downtown and river.

The city’s new Riverwalk Park (right) is a tremendous public resource just a short distance from Public Square and the center of downtown. However, these two areas are separated by expansive parking lots, vehicular traffic, and an absence of suitable pedestrian walkways.
4. Create an inviting pedestrian network that connects neighborhoods, Public Square and the Black River and minimizes the conflict between pedestrians and vehicles.

**Action steps:**

a) Create a coordinated citywide pedestrian/bike circulation plan, develop a phased implementation strategy and fund construction. (See also 3a)

b) Develop a coordinated signage program that provides pedestrian orientation along the length of the river. Design these signs to reflect the character of the river and reference the history of the individual neighborhoods. (See also 3c)

c) Create safe pedestrian entries to the Riverwalk at Arch and Mill Streets. (See also 3a)

d) Establish safe, attractive and pleasant pedestrian walks through the J.P. Wise and Court Street parking lots that connect to a safe crossing at City Center Drive and an accessible descent to the Riverwalk. (See also 3b)

e) Create gateways where regional bike trails enter the city.

5. Recognize Watertown’s role in the larger regional and national context to coordinate the development of tourism on the Black River.

**Action Steps:**

a) Create bike routes to extend regional bike trails through the city. (See also 4a and 4e)

b) Work with existing regional tourism offices, agencies and organizations to coordinate the development and promotion of tourist activities. (See also 2f)

c) Review *The Black River Corridor Economic Adjustment Strategy: Task C*, by the Center for Community Studies at Jefferson Community College, which provides specific recommendations for collaboration and cross-promotion of river based tourist opportunities.

d) Establish a tourist center in the city to provide information and help visitors organize and schedule activities.
6. Build on the tradition of community participation to implement the river vision.

**Action Steps:**

a) Establish a local leadership team (representing the public/private sector and local non-profits) to guide the implementation of the Vision Plan and the completion of the LWRP.

b) Distribute the vision plan broadly through the community and provide educational sessions sponsored by local organizations to review and discuss the plan.

c) Maintain public participation and communication during the completion of the LWRP planning process. This can be accomplished through a local web site, media coverage, displays, and public workshops.

d) Work with the school district to develop educational programs, conservation activities and entrepreneurial enterprises that involve the students and faculty in the implementation of the vision plan.

e) Seek funding to establish a summer youth corps to hire local youth to work on river projects and community based activities along the river.

*Participation in the vision workshops has stimulated public interest in the future of Watertown and the Black River (top). It would be advisable to maintain and grow public interest and participation in the LWRP planning process. Development and distribution of educational materials such as the story boxes (bottom), and the Vision Plan flier can be used to supplement local media coverage.*
The Significance of a Vision Plan
The value of a vision plan is that it sets a direction around which there is collective agreement and it establishes a framework for community decision-making; however, there is no single prescribed way for the community to fulfill its vision. The Vision Plan establishes a set of goals, which the community desires to accomplish, and then community leaders and residents are able to identify the strategic action steps that they feel will lead to the attainment of these goals and thus the vision. In addition to providing a framework for community action, the plan also provides an evaluation framework, which can be used by the community to measure the appropriateness of public and private proposals.

The Value (or importance) of Graphic Representation
Design is a process of formulating specific responses to resolve or improve a condition. In community design, the condition, whether an opportunity or a problem, is situated in a physical place. Throughout the workshops the students used maps, aerial photos and drawings to help community participants visualize the physical conditions, characteristics and relationships along the river. This was done to facilitate a community dialogue that was grounded in the reality of physical place rather than abstract ideas. The visual images helped to focus the conversations and assure that everyone was talking about the same issue or idea. The illustrative materials also helped the participants develop and evaluate design proposals.

The Conceptual Strategy
Following the second workshop, the students prepared a Conceptual Plan to illustrate one strategy by which the city might realize their vision. A conceptual plan is a strategy that guides the organization and treatment of a site (or sites) to improve relationships or to bring new use and meaning to the site(s). A concept should provide a balanced response to three intersecting conditions that define the opportunity/problem:

- The site – The physical conditions of the place
- The program – the proposed activities
- Context – the character and condition of the surrounding area

The proposed Concept Plan acknowledges the constantly changing character of the river and its adjacent neighborhoods. It recognizes the opportunity that this condition presents to develop a variety of public activity areas along the river and at the same time it addresses the challenge, inherent in this condition, to maintain continuity and connectivity along the river. The Concept Plan proposes the design and development of individual activity nodes along the river that strengthen and celebrate the unique character of the river and shore-
Illustrating the Vision

line relationships, respond to the physical character of the area and provide a balance of regional, city and neighborhood use of the river. The Concept Plan also proposes a circulation network of pedestrian and bike routes to connect these nodes to each other and to the surrounding neighborhoods and regional trail systems (See Concept Diagram on opposite page).

Exploring Opportunities on the River

The students also developed illustrative concept drawings for the individual activity nodes identified on the diagram. The design studies document ideas and proposals discussed during the workshops, and help the community visualize the physical expression of their ideas and understand the potential of the vision plan to guide change. As the community reviews these proposals we hope that they will recognize their ideas in these illustrative designs. Each of the illustrative site designs describes:

- the design intent (what the community hopes to accomplish at the site),
- the program (the proposed activities), and
- the implementation of pedestrian circulation.

The ten pages that follow are reductions of the conceptual plan and the illustrative drawings presented to the city in April of 2003. Conceptual drawings present ideas, capture the character of a place and illustrate the spirit of the vision and, in this way, serve to guide the LWRP process. As the planning continues there will be further, more detailed investigation of the potential development sites, which will enable planners, designers and the community to refine and revise these initial proposals. As design proposals evolve and new opportunities emerge, the vision plan will continue to guide the city’s decisions and actions.
Vision Statement
The City of Watertown is a regional center between Lake Ontario, the Thousand Islands and the Adirondacks that boasts a friendly small town atmosphere. It values its location on the Black River and its rich cultural, industrial and architectural heritage; it seeks to strengthen its economic base and broaden the diversity of opportunities for local community and visitors.

Goal 1: Recognize, improve and maintain the environmental quality of the Black River and adjacent lands.

Goal 2: Embrace the River as an economic and a recreational resource within the community by expanding opportunities along it that stimulate a balance of public and private growth.

Goal 3: Establish a strong relationship between downtown and the River which provides year-round businesses and services tailored to the needs of the community and visitors.

Goal 4: Create an inviting pedestrian network that connects neighborhoods, Public Square and the Black River and minimizes the conflict between pedestrians and vehicles.

Goal 5: Recognize Watertown’s role in the larger regional and national context to coordinate the development of tourism on the Black River.

Goal 6: Build on the tradition of community participation to implement the River vision.

Expressing the Vision:
A conceptual design and planning strategy
The Black River has a continually changing character as it flows through the City that is the result of natural processes and community settlement. Design of public activity nodes along the river can strengthen and celebrate the unique character of river and shoreline relationships. The design of these nodes should respond to the physical character of the area, and provide appropriate facilities to support activities in a manner that provides a balance of regional, city and neighborhood use of the river. Pedestrian and bike routes should be developed to connect the individual nodes to each other and to their surrounding neighborhoods.
Imagining, Exploring, and Celebrating the Black River in Watertown

Design Intent:
The intent of revitalizing Newell St. is to further connect the Black River to the life of Watertown by providing bicycle and pedestrian connections from the Memorial Riverwalk and Coffeen St. to the kayak access and viewing areas.

The elegant simplicity of industrial buildings on Newell St. determines the style of site elements. This includes the use of brick, stone and metal for features, such as stone pillar lamps, spectator seating steps, the Court St. Bridge Stairway, and viewing areas.

The ambulance company on Newell St. currently uses both sides of the street for parking. By providing more parking on the river side of the street, space is made for the new walkway and bike path.

View from Court St. Bridge east to Newell St.

The old Court St. Bridge had a staircase that connected Newell St. to the upper level of the bridge. When the bridge was replaced several years ago, the staircase was not. By replacing the stairs the pedestrian connection between the bridge and river is restored. Stone and steel are used in the proposed stairwell to accentuate connections with the river and historical industrial uses.

Bike Path along City Center Drive looking east:
The pattern of paving and grass are reminiscent of the Railroad tracks which once occupied this space.

The bike path runs from Coffeen St. along City Center Drive towards the Memorial Riverwalk, as well as branching down Whitewater Way towards Newell St.

View from north side of the Black River towards revitalized Newell St.

Site locator:

Newell Street

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Design Intent: 
The design intent and character of Poplar Street Park is to integrate and connect neighborhoods with each other and the Black River by providing recreational opportunities along the river corridor. The proposed park includes open play space, fishing area, a gazebo, and picnic areas with views of the river. A river walk connects the park to Edmund Street where there is kayak access. Poplar Street Park is located within an existing neighborhood and is linked to the circulation plan for the river via West Main Street.

Pedestrian Scale Features: 
The design is oriented towards a pedestrian connection between residential neighborhoods and the Black River. Paved walkways link to a variety of activity opportunities along Black River. Consistent use of unit pavers clearly separates pedestrians from vehicular circulation. A ten-foot-wide paved pathway promotes opportunity for both pedestrians and bicyclists. Pedestrian lighting is implemented along riverfront for enhanced security and legibility.

Program: 
Paved riverfront pathway
Shorefront access points
Kayak access ramp at Edmund Street
Viewing areas
Open playing field
Picnic tables and gazebo
Small-scale parking opportunity

Site location: Poplar Street Park
Program:
Downtown Walking Loops
Continuous walking loops utilizing River Walk, Arch Drive, Court Street, and improved walkways through parking lots.

JB Wise parking lot
Pedestrian connection through parking lot, across City Center Drive to RiverWalk
Green and pedestrianized parking lot
Amphitheater for performances and festivals
Farmers market area
Basement level retail and restaurants opening onto walkways
Various opportunities for seating - walls, benches, tables and chairs
Interactive water feature near amphitheater

Design intent:
The plan and sketches illustrate a design approach to address the community's desire to create clear pedestrian linkages between downtown and Public Square (the historic core of the city) and the River Walk. The design of the city center pedestrian loop incorporates Watertown's history by referencing materials and forms of historic buildings, the railroad, and industry in order to create dynamic and interesting pedestrian scaled spaces and connections.

Pedestrian Scale Features:
The pedestrian-oriented design connects public spaces of varying size through detailed building, paving and edge materials, and changing degrees of enclosure created by building walls, plant materials and site structures. A variety of programmed and informal activities occur in the public spaces, providing the setting for watching activities, events, and people. Consistent use of unit pavers for walkways and plazas clearly defines pedestrian from vehicular circulation. The use of traffic calming measures along City Center Drive will help slow vehicular traffic and signify pedestrian crossing.

Amphitheater and Water Fountain (3)

Amphitheater and Water Fountain (3)

Farmers Market at J.B. Wise Plaza (4)

Framework Facade Structure (2)

Concept Plan
Scale: 1" = 50 ft

The character is derived from the fire-grained detail of the buildings that define Public Square. The creative re-use and adaptation of existing underutilized spaces takes advantage of interesting material and architectural characteristics. For example, completing the façade line of Public Square with a skeletal framework references the former historic Woodruff Hotel. The development of a consistent design vocabulary for paving, seating, plant material, and lighting further clarifies and strengthens the pedestrian connections.
Imagining, Exploring, and Celebrating the Black River in Watertown

Design Intent:
The intent of this design is to mark and celebrate the entryways to the River Walk. As the space currently exists, there is little to denote the approach or presence of this significant linear waterfront park. The proposed design encourages pedestrian access to the River Walk through a gateway entrance at Mill Street and a central crossing point across City Center Drive from JB Wise Plaza. At Mill Street and a central crossing point across City Center Drive from JB Wise Plaza. New paving, pedestrian scale lighting, and plant material complete the pedestrian route.

Pedestrian Scale Features:
The pedestrian scale features of the existing River Walk are continued through the use of paving, lighting, vegetation and additional elements. The pavers of the River Walk and the entries are more fine-grained and detailed, differentiating them from standard roadway paving. Lighting is proposed along the retaining wall to provide a greater sense of security. Using the retaining wall as a backdrop on which to place interpretive images will help break up the oversized scale of the wall.

Section (B) City Center Drive Cross Walk

New opportunities to view the river and waterfall are created with a cantilevered overlook platform that has the dual purpose of reducing the perceived oversize scale of the existing retaining wall. Interpretive photographic panels use the existing retaining wall as an opportunity to celebrate the growth and development of Watertown and the historic railroad industry.

Section (C) River Walk Overlook

The design draws upon the history of the site and the river walk corridor through the use of material and form references. Traces of steel train tracks and the design of the lighting structures recall the railroad industry. The proposed stone entry wall repeats the stone façade of the adjacent Black River Adventure building.

Mill Street River Walk Entrance (6)

Program:
Pedestrian gateway entrance at Mill Street
Define River Walk between Mill Street and the Rafting Company
Convenient stair/ramp entrance from JB Wise Plaza and parking.
Seasonal vending areas
Cantilevered platform overlook for view of Black River Falls
Seating along length of River Walk

Veterans Memorial River Walk (7)

Site locator; Downtown and Veterans Memorial River Walk
Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan Vision Study
City of Watertown Planning Department
SUNY ESF Center for Community Design Research
April 24, 2003
Imagining, Exploring, and Celebrating the Black River in Watertown

Design Intent:
The concept design addresses the community's concern about the current condition of Sewall's Island. The Abe Cooper site and Factory Square have been included with Sewall's Island because of the opportunities that exist in each location. The former industrial use of the sites and the community's desire for more public open space have driven the design of these spaces. The site provides recreational open space, civic space, retail and restaurant opportunities, residential apartments or lofts, and opportunities for accessing the river. The industrial character of the site is displayed through the placement of new buildings to create courtyards, the adaptive re-use of former industrial buildings, and the use of industrial materials that include rod iron, steel, glass, and cut stone.

Program:

- Sewall's Island
  - Kayak put-in provides access for skilled kayakers
  - Viewing platforms for watching kayakers
  - Various walking paths
  - Bike trail that utilizes the old rail bed and bridges
  - Picnic area and pavilions
  - Playground
  - Open fields for ball playing, Frisbee, or football
  - Civic plazas and green space for festivals
  - Restaurants with outdoor seating
  - Retail shops
  - A visitor's center

- Abe Cooper & Factory Square
  - Walking trail
  - Fishing platform with seating and viewing opportunities
  - Mixed-use building with an industrial museum, lofts, and shops
  - Multi-level plaza with lighting, seating and viewing opportunities
  - Commercial buildings
  - Neighborhood park with benches, game tables, and open space

Pedestrian Scale features:
The design aims at creating a pedestrian environment by linking various sized public and private spaces through a series of pathways. Vegetation and built structure are used to provide different degrees of enclosure, ranging from wide-open green space to inviting outdoor eating areas. A variety of activities, both programmed and informal, may take place in these spaces. Various seating opportunities, which include tables and chairs, benches, and seating walls, provide for a comfortable relaxing atmosphere. Consistent use of paving materials help define pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular areas.
Design Intent:
Hydro Park is envisioned primarily as a park for residents of adjacent and nearby neighborhoods. However, the expansive views of the river, and the Route 3 wave, make this an ideal location for viewing kayaking, occasional river related festivals, and kayaking events. The character of the park is derived from the presence and contrast of natural and manmade features existing on the site: the steep, rough natural stone escarpment that rises steeply from river and remnants of smooth concrete bridge abutments are recalled in the gateway entrance area, seating areas, and walkway edges; the pattern of rough meadow and native shrub masses along the escarpment contrasts with the mowed lawn, shade trees, and ornamental planting closer to the road. The park design locates neighborhood-oriented features within a short walk of the park entrance, including a children’s play area, seating, and picnic areas. Placement of tree plantings and design of landforms allow views to open and become more expansive as people get closer to the river.

Pedestrian Scale Features:
Exploration of the site on foot is supported through the interconnected paved walkway system, a variety of plant material, varied size spaces and interesting levels of detail. Opportunities for viewing the river as well observing play, sports and special events contribute to a high level of interest when viewed at a walking pace.

Program:
- Neighborhood Oriented Features
- Children’s play area
- Picnic areas - varying sizes
- Seating areas - varying sizes
- Multi-purpose sports field
- Walking paths
- Restrooms

- Kayak, River Viewing, and Festival Features
- Paths and seating areas on island
- Level areas for temporary bleachers
- Temporary use of field for festival activities
- Parking area at west end of site
- Temporary parking along road
- Shuttle bus stop

Site locator: Hydro Park

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The **Circulation Plan** proposes a comprehensive approach to create a circuit that supports and balances pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular travel between nodes as well as from peripheral neighborhoods and regional points outside the city. A preliminary route connecting the nodes along the river was established based on information gathered at the workshops. The final routes were determined based on availability of land and space, closeness to the river, and designation as a major path or street that can easily be accessed by the community.

The light blue circles delineate a ¼ mile radius around each node to express a reasonable walking distance associated with the node. Where these circles overlap there is a design emphasis to support pedestrian use; where there is a design emphasis to support bicycle use walking radii are farther apart.

Within the circulation route there is a focus on certain streets because of their importance to the whole route and ease of implementation. Along the route safety is stressed by the enhancement of sidewalks, creation of bike lanes, better lighting and trail markers. Curbing, trees and pavement materials and patterns help separate and appropriate the balance of pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles, which adds to the safety of the street.

The recommendations for physical improvements can contribute to the small town character that Watertown values while giving the streetscape a cohesive appearance that frames future opportunities.

The **Coffeen Street** proposal includes the slight expansion of the street for the addition of bike lanes, leaving most of the existing sidewalk and the new street tree program plantings intact. Overhead lighting and utility poles are replaced with traditional style lantern lighting to reduce visual clutter and maintenance concerns.

The **West Main Street** improvement includes change of a four-lane highway into two driving lanes and a turning lane, which accommodates which may be more appropriate for the apparently low level of traffic. This reclaimed space allows for the creation of a bike lane, a planting strip, and wider sidewalks, which increases the safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and enhances the travel experience for everyone.

**Factory Street** Scheme I reconfigures the existing two driving lanes and two parking lanes into two driving, one parking and two street side bike lanes. The pedestrian environment is improved by the maintenance and addition of curbing, street trees and traditional style overhead streetlights.

**Factory Street** Scheme II also reworks the existing road to accommodate for one parking lane rather than two. The two-way bike lanes are placed side by side adjacent to the sidewalk and separated from the vehicle traffic by a strip of trees and curbing. The placement of the bike lane in this way creates a wide expanse of paved surface on one side of the street that gives the predominantly commercial area a plaza-like character.

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**Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan Vision Study**  
City of Watertown Planning Department  
SUNY ESF Center for Community Design Research  
April 24, 2003
CULTURE AND HISTORY
An important element in any town is its ability to create an atmosphere that the entire community can be proud of. Watertown has a rich cultural history and as such it should be emphasized and understood through museums and festivals. When looking at an area that would best support these ideas, Public Square and Sewall's Island seemed the most logical in that they would provide adequate space and could be connected due to their relatively close proximity.

TRAIL NETWORK
When looking at the tourism potential in Watertown, it was realized that there were many trails scattered in and around the city. The first priority for tourism should be to extend and connect the existing trail systems to the regional system of trails. In this way, gateways could be designed to emphasize the City and its boundaries, while inviting people to visit and enjoy the historic and natural heritage that makes up the city of Watertown. Historical markers along a pedestrian and bike trail could be used to highlight the historical importance of Watertown. Once a trail network is established, the next priority would be to create a Visitor's Center in an area of historical significance that would allow people to understand and enjoy Watertown.

BOATING
Boating, both recreational and professional, seem to be of great interest to the City of Watertown. It was highly suggested that the city provide better access to these popular play spots along the river while also taking advantage of the high potential to attract people for competitions to the area. It was also suggested and investigated that flat water excursions be looked at for the river east of the Route 3 bridge. It is a venture that it would provide people with a multiplier form of boating along the river and also would help to attract other populations of people that might not necessarily enjoy such rigorous boating activities as kayaking and white water rafting.

FISHING
When considering the tourism potential for fishing, better access to the river was top priority to the members of the community. To improve access, there needed to be areas located that consisted of gentle slopes, stable shorelines, and areas large enough to allow for four or five parking spaces. Walkways would need to be built, as well as provisions for lighting, a vehicular entrance to the access point, viewing and fishing platforms, and shaded picnic areas. Possible locations for local tournaments were also explored with the idea that there would be ample room for a viewing area, a judging area, weighing and cleaning areas, lighting, and space for forty to fifty cars.

POTENTIAL CENTERS FOR ACTIVITY ALONG THE BLACK RIVER CORRIDOR

GOALS:
Tourism will allow the community to embrace the Black River as an economic and recreational resource within Watertown. The increased opportunity along the river will stimulate a balance of public and private growth. This can establish a strong link between downtown and the River which will provide year-round businesses and services tailored to the needs of the community and visitors. Tourism will also recognize Watertown’s position in the larger regional context to coordinate efforts to promote the Black River Corridor within the city.
Section 5: Implementing the Vision

Addressing key issues
The Black River is one of Watertown’s great resources. However, the city faces a unique set of challenges as it prepares a plan to protect the river’s natural and cultural resources, remediate contamination on the river’s abandoned industrial lands, and encourage new development that will stimulate economic vitality and increase public use of the river. The vision planning process revealed a number of issues that city should address as they begin to implement the vision plan. The first set of issues is related to existing physical conditions on the river corridor. The second set of issues relates to planning processes and local perceptions.

1. Physical conditions
   - Providing public river access to the Black River is not an easy task. The river drops more than 120 feet as it flows through the city and over time, the water movement has cut deep ravines through the bedrock exposing steep rock cliffs. The rapid water movement, falls, and steep face of the river edge contribute to the drama and beauty of the river corridor. These conditions also limit opportunities for public access along the river. While the visual presence of the river has increased with the demolition and removal of industrial buildings, it is still limited in the center of the city. As the city explores additional river access for recreation, safety will be an issue. During the vision planning, residents identified numerous sites where they saw opportunity for access and a wide range of activities (See Process Notebook Section 3). This inventory provides a starting point for the continuation of the LWRP planning. Current land uses and ownership patterns along the river also limit access. The 1988 Black
River Recreation Plan noted that “land development along the river has evolved into a pattern which is haphazard and inefficient; aggregate frontage and acreage are relatively idle and wasted.” (Wilhelmi, pg10) While the city has acquired additional lands since that report, land uses and ownership patterns still limit river front access and pedestrian circulation. The Vision Plan suggests a stronger relationship between the river and city neighborhoods. City planners and consultants are encouraged to explore new ways by which the city can manage land use along the river corridor to encourage desired development activities that support the goals of the Vision Plan.

- **Brownfield sites** along the Black River present both an opportunity and a challenge. Vacant industrial sites now offer views to the river, and provide the possibility of river access for recreation and environmental education. Adaptive reuse of old structures can preserve the city’s industrial past while accommodating new uses that meet identified community needs for commercial retail and office space, tourist facilities, recreation and housing. Residents identified Sewall’s Island as one of the city’s greatest opportunities and yet development of this site seems to require a lengthy and uncertain process of site investigation, documentation of contamination and development of a remediation plan. While Sewall’s Island is one of the city’s largest brownfield sites, there are many other brownfield sites along the river that could be redeveloped for commercial use and neighborhood recreation. Watertown is not the only upstate city facing the procedural challenges associated with brownfield remediation. Brownfield sites are a “quality community” issue in New York State. The Quality Community Interagency Task Force and its partners could work with Watertown to address the challenges of brownfield remediation and through this demonstration help communities throughout the state.
2. Planning processes and local perceptions

- The city, local nonprofits and community groups have sponsored a number of recent planning initiatives. After reading these studies it is not always clear how the information and recommendations of the individual projects are brought together in a larger city planning agenda. A series of disconnected projects in different neighborhoods are not always helpful. A citywide planning framework, which sets general planning goals, criteria and reporting procedures, could guide individual projects in a manner that they collectively contribute to an **integrative planning process**.

- While reviewing past planning studies we discovered a pattern of reoccurring recommendations. Recommendations presented in early studies were frequently repeated in later studies. This suggests that initial planning recommendations were not addressed and that the city may be having difficulty **implementing planning recommendations**. There could be a variety of reasons for this including a lack of detail in the study or the omission of an effective implementation strategy. In our review we came across one planning study that proposed an impractical implementation strategy and schedule that could not be accomplished in the timeframe and manner suggested. Whatever the case, implementation requires a clear and reasonable plan, public support and collaborative public and private implementation.

- While there are many exciting opportunities along the river there are also **competing interests**. The city needs a thoughtful and orderly process to investigate the various river opportunities and evaluate them on their individual merits and their collective potential. There are individuals in the community with great entrepreneurial spirit and it will be important to coordinate efforts to assure that the collective outcome of public and private investments contribute to the community vision and maximize community benefits. Currently there is considerable public discussion and debate; a coordinated evaluation process would help to focus this interest and direct energy in a productive manner.

- There are members of the community who have **negative perceptions** both about the river and the city’s capacity to revitalize its downtown center. During the vision planning, residents indicated that there are some in the community who see the river as a danger. Concern for personal safety is due, in large part, to the rapid water flow and rugged shoreline; however, there are also questions about the quality of the river water. While water quality
has been an issue in the past, recently completed sewer programs upstream have significantly improved this condition. Through workshop conversations it also became apparent that there are some residents who are so deeply discouraged by the city’s condition that they find it almost impossible to believe the city has the capacity to guide positive change. Negative perceptions can be difficult to overcome and, when they are not addressed through education and information programs, can limit local support for planning proposals. Educational programs, community celebrations and successful early projects along the river will help to counter these perceptions. Projects and activities, no matter how small, should be well publicized so that they do not go unnoticed.

**Next Steps**

1. Utilize Quality Community program resources: Watertown is currently in a unique position as one of New York’s twelve designated Quality Community Cities. The city should continue to work closely with the Quality Community Interagency Task Force, and the city’s quality community representative from NYS DOS. City leaders and the planning department should look for opportunities to use the resources and partnerships of this program to enhance their planning activities and support implementation of the planning recommendations and projects.

2. Conduct an market study
   An important aspect of this vision plan is the recognized potential of the river to stimulate the local economy through tourism and recreation. As a first step in this process we encourage the city to request assistance from the Quality Community partner agencies to conduct a market analysis of tourism opportunities identified during the vision planning. These activities include boating (kayaks, whitewater rafts, flat water canoeing, and excursions boats), fishing, heritage tourism, trails, camping, and environmental education. *The Black River Corridor Economic Adjustment Study* by the Center for Community Studies at Jefferson Community College is a helpful study and a good place to begin. *The Tourism Plan for the City of Watertown* prepared by SUNY ESF also provides useful data, analysis and recommendations. However, neither of these studies addresses the potential for heritage tourism, which was identified during the Vision Planning. (See also Tourism Research, Section 5 in the *Process Notebook*) With a market analysis, the city will be better equipped to evaluate the various economic opportunities identified during the vision planning and inform the LWRP planning process.

3. Address brownfield development
Implementing the Vision

Brownfield sites and their reuse are critical to this community. During the workshops, residents proposed a variety of exciting uses for Sewall’s Island and other brownfield sites along the river. However, the potential liability associated with the sites and the uncertainty of remediation costs prevents the city from reclaiming these sites. Watertown, like many other communities across the state needs assistance meeting the procedural requirements of brownfield remediation. Without a clear strategy to take ownership of these sites for public use or to encourage private development the city will be unable to fully realize the potential of the Black River or revitalize its city center.

Photographs illustrate existing conditions on Sewall’s Island while perspective drawings illustrate resident’s vision for its redevelopment for commercial, recreation and residential use.
4. Complete the LWRP
The Vision Plan establishes a framework to guide the completion of the LWRP. Planning consultants working with the city will be able to conduct additional investigations to determine the feasibility of the various ideas expressed in the plan, provide the detail required to make recommendations and develop an implementation plan to guide city, state and federal actions. The following comments are intended to facilitate the transition from the initial vision planning to the completion of the LWRP.

a. Forward the community vision through the LWRP Planning:
The vision planning process resulted in a strong Vision Plan; the process and the ideas that were explored created excitement and enthusiasm among the community participants. The consultants hired by the city to complete the LWRP should be familiar with the community’s vision plan, goals and initial action steps and be willing to develop a scope of work that will enable the city to advance this vision. It would be helpful for the city to convene a meeting of their hired consultant, NYS DOS representative, and SUNY ESF faculty to review the vision planning and discuss its implications for continued LWRP planning.

b. Establishing the LWRP Boundary:
The community participants in the vision planning expressed their desire to see the Black River become a more integrated city resource providing economic and recreation opportunities for the residents in adjacent neighborhoods. Participants also saw the benefit of a coordinated circulation plan that would connect all city residents to the various river resources, and extend regional recreation trails through the city. To accomplish this aspect of the Vision Plan, the LWRP boundaries should be drawn to include adjacent river neighborhoods, Public Square, the fairgrounds and Jefferson Community College. To set the boundaries along the river edge will limit the effectiveness of the LWRP and prevent the full realization of the Vision Plan.

c. Adaptation of State-established Waterfront Policies:
Adaptation of the State-established Waterfront Policies will enable Watertown to address local issues implement recommendations and of the Vision Plan and through locally prepared policies and planning procedures. The vision planning process identified numerous issues that will need to be addressed including mixed-use development, adaptive reuse and historic preservation, development of pedestrian/bike networks, and brownfield remediation. In developing revitalization policies the LWRP can model an integrative approach that examines and relates the LWRP Policies to broader city policies and to recent planning recommendations.
Implementing the Vision

Watertown has successfully developed and employed creative local strategies to facilitate facade restoration in the city center and adaptive reuse and restoration of historic buildings. The individuals involved in this work are valuable resources and potential collaborators in this aspect of the LWRP planning.

d. The conceptual strategy:
Given current land use activities, ownership patterns and the topography along the river, it is unlikely that the city will ever be able to establish a continuous open space or greenway corridor along the length of the river. However, the potential to connect a series of activity areas along the river through the development of a coordinated bike and pedestrian system was noted first in the Black River Recreation Plan (Wilhelmi, 1988) and again in this Vision Plan. The Black River Recreation Plan provides a detailed look at various pedestrian and bike routes (see pages Wilhelmi report pages 23-30) and the Conceptual Plan prepared during the Vision Planning (see page 25-26) illustrate possible pedestrian networks. The Vision Plan recognized the importance of pleasant pedestrian connections to the river and the public sites along the river. The Plan proposed a conceptual strategy of activity nodes linked by an interconnecting network of pathways (see page 25). Community members worked with the students to locate potential activity nodes and then to delineate connecting pedestrian and bike routes. Improved pedestrian circulation was high on the list of desired community improvements. The pedestrian connection between Public Square, Court Street and the Riverwalk is probably the most challenging and yet at the same time it is one of the most important. Remnants of the city’s industrial landscape such as embankments, retaining structures and abandoned rail lines and bridges, should be considered for incorporation in this pedestrian network.

A pedestrian/bike network will include new bike routes, improvements to city streets and pedestrian paths along sections of the river.

The Concept Diagram locates proposed public activity nodes and suggests pedestrian and bike routes that connect the nodes to each other and to their surrounding neighborhoods.
e. Identifying and developing potential projects
During the vision process community members mapped potential development sites and proposed activities that might occur at various locations along the river (Process Notebook, Section 3). Because the community desires to strengthen the connections between the neighborhoods and river, it will be important to study the potential for river activities to address the needs of adjacent neighborhoods and to compliment surrounding land uses. There are issues of environmental importance and concern related to development along the river, which should receive further consideration. Shoreline stability, modification of the river bottom to enhance kayak competition and the construction of structures that might disrupt water movement are some of the concerns identified during the vision planning. The river and its setting have an aura of drama and beauty. The community vision includes an inspired design response that complements the river’s rugged power and dynamic character.

f. Prepare a comprehensive implementation plan:
The LWRP should develop a sound implementation strategy and suggest land use management tools to help the city and their leadership advisory team (see 5 below) guide public and private development that fulfills the community vision. Management tools such as design guidelines, site plan review, a river overlay district and incentives programs could help the city guide private development. In the spirit of the Quality Communities Program it would be helpful to have state agencies participate in the development of this implementation plan indicating the resources that they might contribute. In addition to identifying strategies and resources it would be useful to prioritize actions and link these to identified resources.

5. Organize and empower a leadership team:
Strong local leadership will be necessary if the city hopes to attain its vision. Implementation of the LWRP will require public and private actions and investment; city government working alone will never accomplish this plan. We recommend that the city organize a leadership team charged with coordinating public and private efforts to revitalize the city center and implement the LWRP. This group should include decision makers — heads of city and county agencies, leaders of nonprofit organizations and local businesses leaders. The city could request assistance from the Quality Communities Program to help with the initial organization of this group, and to provide training and assistance during its start up period. It may be desirable to provide a staff person to work with this group. It seems advisable to begin this process immediately so that the leadership team can participate in
6. Increase public participation in community planning and revitalization:
The vision planning process was designed to facilitate meaningful participation by local residents. As the LWRP planning process continues we highly recommend that the city maintain the community interest developed during the vision planning and they increase the project’s visibility through broad distribution of the Vision Plan summary and continued media coverage. The consultants may also want to have information and discussion sessions to share progress and new understanding. Educational programs, community dialogue and participation in community improvement projects will foster understanding, and build support for the LWRP and the city center revitalization planning. Each of the Vision Plan goals has at least one proposed action step that could be undertaken by community groups (See Section 3: The Vision Plan). These range from community celebrations and festivals to cleanup projects, public art and entrepreneurial programs.

Closing Remarks

The Black River was the power behind the city’s growth and early prosperity. Today residents see the potential of the river to spark revitalization of the city center, enhance adjacent neighborhoods, and diversify recreation opportunities for all city residents. The vision planning process enabled city residents to participate in the LWRP process at the very beginning, establishing a Vision Plan that will serve as guiding framework for the LWRP planning process and a measure against which the consultant and city can evaluate the LWRP planning recommendations. In supporting this participatory process, the city made a commitment to an open and public planning process that gave residents the opportunity to clarify what they value about their community and to consider what they might add or change to improve the future of Watertown. The Vision Plan is an expression of the participant’s belief in the future of their community and their participation reveals their desire to play a role in building a better future. The ideas shared in this document will evolve as the LWRP planning continues; however, it is important that the final recommendations remain faithful to the values, and spirit of this community vision. It is also important to recognize the commitment that community members have made to the LWRP process through their participation in the vision planning. Continued public inclusion in this process will recognize this commitment and acknowledge the important role that city residents can play in Watertown’s future.
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