



Urban Design
Landscape Architecture
Economic Development
Planning

Oneida County Mohawk River Greenway Corridor Economic Development & Tourism Focus Group Notes

Meeting: Wednesday, January 30th, 10:30 a.m.
Issue Date: Friday, February 08, 2008
Location: 3rd Floor Planning Dept. Conference Room,
Union Station, 321 Main St., Utica

In Attendance:

1. Edward Davis, *Lee Planning Board*
2. Fred Miller, *Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor Commission*
3. Frank Elias, *Mohawk Valley Chamber of Commerce*
4. Mark Cherry, *Oneida County Convention & Visitors' Bureau*
5. Rick Gassner, *Utica Sail & Power Boat Squadron*
6. Brian Howard, *Oneida County Historical Society*
7. Paul E. Ziegler, *Oneida County Convention & Visitors' Bureau*
8. Patricia Walsh, *City of Rome*
9. Diane Shoemaker, *City of Rome Dept. of Community & Economic Dev.*
10. Debbie Conway, *National Park Service – Fort Stanwix National Monument*
11. Marcia Kees, *NYS Parks, Recreation, Historic Preservation*
12. Chris Destito, *Board Member - OCCVB & Edge; Savoy Restaurant*
13. Sharon Leighton, *NYS Canal Corporation*

Also there from the Work Group:

Jessica Breiton, *Oneida County Planning Department*
Joe Homburger, *citizen, retired NYS DEC*
Andy Schrauth, *peter j. smith & company, inc.*
Eve Holberg, *peter j. smith & company, inc.*

#1. Describe the character of the Mohawk River Corridor, e.g. "The Mohawk River Corridor is ..."

- Under developed, a waterway running through the Mohawk Valley
- Nice place to visit, place where tourist will want to come, boating – fishing – canoe – canal improvement, family picnics, bicycle – hiking – etc., develop America – history
- A historic, current and future asset of NYS for transportation, recreation, tourism, & economic development. The corridor which had initially brought trade & commerce to upstate has evolved from a primary transportation route to a potential tourist, recreation, sporting, and even eco-tourism opportunity for NYS. The corridor links upstate cities via bikeways, pathways & the Erie Canal Corridor.

If developed and managed properly this can be a unique & important component for revitalizing upstate NY

- ...one of the most historically, culturally, and geographically significant corridors in the nation; with tremendous potential for heritage development. How is this greenway being defined?
- Connecting link between central NY & Albany; in most parts, slow flowing, laid back river; a long way from its maximum potential; to the baby boomers it is not active enough!
- Area of natural beauty, diverse vegetation river systems; rich in heritage – Erie Canal, American Revolution, commerce; filled with tangible links to our past...“small town America”; area of recreation & rich cultural opportunities
- A mostly undeveloped connection of neighborhoods, commercial, historic, & recreation areas in the City of Rome. An opportunity to market the resources of the region.
- Connecting point through central Oneida County that possesses both an engine for the transportation, recreation (seasonal), tourism & water flow movements both east/west of Rome.
- Natural, safe, connected; provides opportunities & connections between cities, towns, and their amenities; diverse; promotes healthy lifestyles, fun, environmentally & ecologically sensitive; amenities – parks, Rome Sand Plains, historical/cultural centers (Fort Stanwix), businesses, restaurants, shops
- Better known as the Canal Corridor. It is easy to access in some areas and offers the opportunity to “get out” into Nature and experience wildlife & Nature is a great setting. Currently the bike/walking path system is not complete and often force people to use busy roads rather than staying on the safety of paths.
- The Mohawk River Corridor is a great natural resource that can draw people to our area for recreational, heritage, and eco tourism and a great outdoor experience; rich in history and natural history.
- Connecting link between central NY , doesn't work in our county, quite boring in most parts – over 5 marinas along canal/river, 16 on lake, the way the river is built you have to have slow speed limit, this limits activities such as water skiing, etc.
- Visitors to Fort Stanwix do both regional and specific visits, sees park as hub to region, jumping off point
- The canal still is a transportation route, its character, name, and brand is known globally, Mohawk & Erie Canal
- Big picture; connection between places, de-emphasize this, need big picture
- Underdeveloped, I've been 100 yrs in family business that is located next to the river, people use waterways for entertainment & recreation, he did business w/ boaters, then mentioned in article, then saw boom in business, there is an opportunity to develop more business, need to utilize the façade program of the city to develop businesses to better use the water side of their business, consider kayak races

- Lived here ~10 yrs, known as 'canal corridor', river not emphasized, how many people know Mohawk River Corridor, need to bolster marketing of river
- Focus on tourism aspect
- In planning process at Rome, the canal is an undeveloped connector of neighborhoods, this is very important, it should be utilized as the connector of the region
- National opportunities need to be grasped, great advantage of natural beauty, fine cultural opportunities, there is coordination lacking to do this

#2. Barring all constraints, including time and money, what should be the economic development and tourism focus of the Mohawk River Corridor?

- Balance of development & natural setting; pocket areas for services or gathering such as family recreation areas; general clean-up of river and canal banks (what are the rules – DEC?)
- Boating; need shops & restaurants; marinas w/ facilities; need information to boaters; need business investment for review to support project
- Complete it; run the biking trail to Sylvan Beach (local); signage; linkage via bike path (not roads) to important locations (city centers); marketing
- Heritage development i.e. economic development while respecting the unique historic, cultural, and recreational assets of the region; use existing connections to Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor and Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor; provide seamless connections; tourism is only one component of economic development – what will the focus of this study be?; respect natural settings & uniqueness.
- The canal water & land must be cleared-up; the continuation of the bike trail from Genesee Street east; upgrade of public safety
- Emphasize the recreational opportunities inherent in this natural resource; establish or enhance camping opportunities & hiking trails; wintertime – a lot is ceded to the Adirondacks – why?; major tourist centers; marketing
- Unified promotion of biking, hiking, kayaking, shopping, dining, living, driving
- Connecting point(s) between municipalities along its route; adding in all the surrounding interests; i.e. Fort Stanwix, Erie Canal Village state park
- Investigating specific projects & main street corridors of each town & city and how to establish those connections; regional and local promotion; tourism – themed B&B's; signage; partnerships with private businesses; interpretive signage – environmental, historical, cultural – education
- Complete bike & walking paths along the corridor (not roads); historic signage i.e. pictures and plaques of what happened; promote the area for safety, nature, historic interests; add inns and shops to provide services to those who travel
- It needs to be a **multifaceted** approach; such as recreation, multi-use trails, eco-tourism, historic/cultural resources; needs to be done well; focus on small business versus the Rite Aid/Macy's concept

- In Watertown, with the Black River and canal, businesses historically had turned their back to this water, now they make the water a positive venue, enhance waterways, this is a good way to look at community development, our local problem is sanitation and pollution, municipalities use water as septic system, need the DEC to act upon pollution controls, look at river walk in San Antonio, TX
- It's not only garbage but pollution runoff from farmers' fields
- Water and land must be cleared-up, we need inviting shorelines, need to clean-up fallen trees in the river, bike trail on Genesee Street is on hold now, need to upgrade public safety aspect of corridor, there is some deviant behavior along the bike trail, there needs to be cooperation with law enforcement
- Need multi faceted approach, recreation overarching, but ecology can dovetail into this, it needs to be done well, we need to plan a 'trail' versus a 'route', there needs to be a trail to attract families and people
- The system needs to be completed, need a full system of biking, both eastward and westward, must run to Sylvan Beach, need signage, this is very important, there needs to be links to the different areas via bike paths, we should focus on a single system, we should make Fort Stanwix a hub of the system, we need to market the greenway, offer bike & boat tours
- Study on trail, trail counts, Rochester area significantly developed, study is of this area, Canal Corp here to support efforts, reports avail on line?, parks and trails NY administered it, (pjs to email out study)
- Lot of questions, she is not local, have a big picture look, each area has its own uniqueness, want to make connections seamless yet area is unique, keep natural setting feel, agree need additional tourism but keep natural unique settings, connect to Mohawk River Corridor and National Heritage Corridor, keep the greenway unique to area
- In a boating magazine (national publication), there are canal cruises advertised, people rent boats for canal travel, we need amenities, like San Antonio, TX, need to develop Rome harbor and Utica Harbor, should open-up Utica harbor for private business development
- There should be a balance of developed and natural areas, certain areas more prone to natural environments such as along the river, canal bike path has enormous potential, lot of business for inn and food service, a good example of bike paths is cape cod area, lot of users - bikers and walkers - there, there are spots to stop and view, mix of natural and developed settings, today people want to be active participants in travel, not just view from car, need gathering areas as hub, Rome has this potential, boat services, bike services, need infrastructure such as bathrooms, need private business partnership, also banks of river/canal not look good, they have become waste drops, there is a lot of DEC regulation on what can and can't do, need way to work with DEC to know what can do to help riverbanks.
- Complete bike/walk paths, install historical signage, promote nature of area, need better access to marsh by foot, need to provide path-user services

- Focus on diversity of uses, safety is important, need connection to communities and economic businesses
- Is it a physical or conceptual trail, with conceptual trail, consider of a shopping greenway or driving greenway, need to start with conceptual trail, drive to see historic sites, it is not just a physical trail, need unified promotion
- There is a lack of coordination PR and marketing, lot of groups acting singly, opportunity for tourism during off season (wintertime), year round use needed
- What is vision?, think of as Disney Land, different themes of each area, everyone in corridor has unique ID, need to unify corridor but keep identity, Sylvan Beach could be like a Coney Island, there could be a Native Amer. Heritage Village, Dry Dock – boat area, Utica Marsh eco area, or water park w/ active canoeing, kayaking, need for flood plain protect, wildlife protect, historical heritage protection, need to do all of this, it can be everything, there is a need to identify what these things are and get local buy-ins and promotion with coordinated effort
- However, we need to identify assets before can brand them, need to ID uniqueness before market
- Utilize what you have, put in right infrastructure
- Need marketing and infrastructure – not new, but fix what have
- Money is issue, convince state to provide funding to upgrade services and amenities all along, revitalize communities must be hand in hand with tourism, better restored villages and culture, state must work these things together – community revitalize with tourism funds
- All great ideas spoken today, have opportunity to show how to do it in state, canal is like highway, travel to other areas in state, path goes from community to community, stop at these areas along trip, great opportunity, people want to participate.

#3. What are the most significant economic development and tourism opportunities or potentials for the Mohawk River Corridor? How can they be encouraged?

- American history – starting point of the canal – Erie Canal Village; Little Italy Concept
- New facilities for boaters; transportation to shops/restaurants; police protection for boaters; signs/information for tourists; develop Utica Harbor; campsites/ camp grounds; connect to Adirondack Railroad
- Again, complete it; biking; running, walking; boating, canoeing, kayaking, canal boating; marketing, tourism promotion, packages, market internationally; tie-in with significant historic and other sites; Adirondack Railroad to the Adirondacks;
- Economic development Money for tourism/marketing to spur private investment (although river is mostly public land)
- Complete it; run the biking trail to Sylvan Beach (local); signage; linkage via bike path (not roads) to important locations (city centers); marketing; identify the major resources & assets, build infrastructure, visitor amenities, and product &

then brand it with your theme(s), (no Disney please); the people who live in this area are its greatest asset and opportunity. They haven't moved out! Mobilize them. (See www.eriecanalway.org for the management plan. The appendices identify many of these resources)

- Theme development; on-site activities; education!; availability of access & signage from the outside
- Coordinate our marketing efforts!; Identify several tourism 'centers' (e.g. Fort Stanwix, Stanley Theater/Downtown Utica, etc...) to focus tourist efforts; work out from these centers
- Fort Stanwix National Monument; Rome's Little Italy/Downtown; Bellamy Harbor Park; Erie Canal Village; Lake Delta State Park (camping); Rome Fish Hatchery; love the idea of Mohawk River "themed" tours – 3 to 5 days – history/shopping/dining/kayaking/trail/camping; need to focus on the "visible" - if they come it has got to be good
- Potential to network private business development – this will increase jobs (seasonal/permanent) to service both local/outside visitors – this will increase sales tax dollars
- Connections to : Rome Sand Plains w/ interpretive signage, Rome main streets (James St., East & West Dominick), Fort Stanwix, other businesses, & restaurants; identify current & future projects and how to connect them; market branding – when someone sees the Mohawk River Greenway 'symbol' they think hiking, biking, shopping, cross country skiing, family, safe for one person
- Better boat launch access in Utica; better advertising; development of a theme to market the corridor; canal barge rentals
- With the balance that has been mentioned in mind (i.e. multifaceted approach), small business connections that offer the services users would like from coffee to bike shops to artsy shops; critical to have the opportunity to cover the creature comforts – food, water, bathroom, parking, bike racks; if kids are happy then mom & dad are happy; need to be visitor friendly; encourage small business with micro-loans, incentive for façade improvements, etc. (tie into Main Street Program); shuttle services and connectors to make loops
- Rome fist shovel area for start of Erie Canal System; Rome's Little Italy; Fort Bore; cross roads of waterways in Rome; access in Utica; creature comforts; heritage train – revolutionary war, canal, immigration, culture; identify tourism centers – hiking center, shopping center, boating center; 1991 bus tour by Yannis(?) – went to Pittsford
- Rome starting point of canal, uniqueness of Rome should be focal point, potential for development of east side, Little Italy development, American history, Erie Canal Village, Fort Bull, Crossroads of waterways, Black River Canal crosses over, highest raised level of any canal in country at one time, cross country skiing
- Need better boat launch in Utica, need theme to market area, Rochester – Utica travel on canal
- Rome sand plains, market branding, symbol needs to invoke marketing

- Bellamy Harbor Park in Rome, project now underway, locate existing services and amenities
- Identify (location of) visitor centers to start
- Need on-site activities to keep business viable, need to draw to water, need access and signage from outside, no road along canal, start where have cluster and expand, lot of canal cleanup has begun in metropolitan areas
- Need creature comforts, key components to make positive experience, potential shuttle services, partner with Amtrak, make connecting loops, encourage small business enhancements
- Look at increasing private business and economics, sales tax drives economy, enhance grant development in communities
- Complete system, boating, canoeing, kayaking, market internationally, tie in with historic sites, Adirondack Railroad should be identified, economic development dollars for marketing are typically not used for this
- Just do it, Heritage train tours – revolutionary war sites, canal theme, etc., have many available themes, working on now heritage train tours from NYC to areas throughout NY, culture tour could be done, themed tours with rail travel to control destination, control destination is key, need to upgrade our sites, better hospitality training
- Local people are greatest asset, need to mobilize them, we are our best resource
- More campsites along canal, more active use year round, need police protection, people have perception that canal dangerous at night
- Things are happening upstate, need to marshal resources to focus efforts

#4. What specific obstacles and deficiencies are preventing the Mohawk River Corridor Greenway from achieving its tourism and economic development potential?

- Develop RV park; Develop Utica Harbor
- It's not complete...complete it and have it go to Sylvan Beach
- How will this new name – Mohawk River Greenway – mesh with the Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor name and the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor name? It could affect the identity and brand for this project. Keep it as "local" or County's plan within these larger corridors and it could work
- NYS Government & regulations
- Money!! Lack of State and local awareness of potential for tourism
- Lack of a unified voice; Money (although always available if you have a well-developed plan); comprehensive yet specific plan
- Could be zoning issues; lack of full cooperation between municipalities along the route
- Participation of all municipalities; establishing solid partnerships; finishing the trail and connections

- No unified brand (theme); local perception is poor; local government – lack of ownership of their sections; getting private citizens to risk their own money to develop the concept and start to reap benefits; Lack of signage to identify area
- Start-up fund; need to clean-up/gain access to certain lands; lack of proper understanding or seeing the big vision; safety (or perception)– volunteer bike patrol has worked on the Ohio & Erie Canal as well as the C&O Canal NHP
- National Park System, Rivers, Trails & Program; create a series of itineraries, 1-2-3-5-7 day trips; what we can accomplish in the next year or two versus what can we accomplish in the long term?
- Municipality zoning is issue, need to collect this data to make sure all coordinate
- Lack of state and local awareness of potential
- But legislators are aware of it
- Need to improve local perception of area, get people to use area
- State awareness, audit says priorities pavement for cars, keep after legislators, moneys for canal at great risk now
- Lot of development in Albany area, over 200 miles completed in last decade
- Need to open up to public, get access
- Rivers trails and conservation of Nat Parks, potential to help, having Stanwix as hub has potential to get assistance from program, she can get contact for it
- What can we do quick, themed concept, 6 or 7 trips, we set up themed trails, shopping, camping, trails, we create package trips, marketing campaign, market themes
- We have more to offer, need to market to where people are, bikes on train, complete package
- Cuyahoga River does train w/ bikes
- Adirondack Railroad needs to be brought into talks

#5. What special issues should we be aware of as we complete the Greenway Plan for the Mohawk River Corridor?

- Micro, macro, local, regional, national, and international developments
- The working together of the communities within Oneida County – Try to cut the red tape!
- Public participation; partnerships – business, cities, transportation; development of boating hubs; interpretive signage; safety; diversity – urban connection, pristine environmental connects, users, resources; tap into & utilize existing resources
- Need to coordinate the various efforts that are underway i.e. Mohawk River Trail in Rome, etc.

Session ended at 12:15 p.m.