

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In 1998, the Village of Whitehall set out on the process of developing a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP), a comprehensive plan for the appropriate development and preservation of the Village's waterfront areas. Following an award for a grant from the NYS Department of State, the Village Board established a LWRP Advisory Committee and appointed a group of volunteers to develop an LWRP for the Village. Together, the LWRP Advisory Committee has been working since that time to develop and articulate a vision for the appropriate development and revitalization of the Village's waterfront areas.

An LWRP is a comprehensive program that brings together local and State government, commerce and industry, environmental interests, private organizations, and community citizens to assess current problems and opportunities and to build a consensus on the desired future of the community's waterfront. By preparing a LWRP, Whitehall has the opportunity to evaluate its waterfront resources and to devise and implement a management plan for the best use of those resources. Once the LWRP is completed and approved by the Secretary of State, Whitehall will have the local controls to guide future waterfront development and the legal ability to ensure that all actions proposed for the waterfront are consistent with the LWRP.

The Committee's objective is to set forth a comprehensive plan that will achieve these ends and at the same time assure the protection and beneficial use of our waterfront area resources and preserve the essential character of Whitehall as a year-round active and growing community. The Committee's objective is also to ensure that the vision articulated in the LWRP is one that genuinely reflects the collective will of the community. To that end, the Committee has endeavored to keep the public involved and aware of the status and progress of its work. It has surveyed the views of the community with respect to the issues at stake and to incorporate those views in the recommendations that are being developed.

Goals for the waterfront revitalization area primarily focus on the following intentions:

- Increase and improve public access to water resources
- Stimulate economic development in downtown Whitehall
- Protect and enhance natural resources

Purpose

The purpose of a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) is to promote economic development and revitalization of the Village's waterfront area, while assuring the protection and beneficial use of waterfront resources. An approved LWRP can help attract public and private investment in waterfront projects since it demonstrates a community's commitment to economic development and resource protection and contains conceptual plans for projects that make the development process more predictable and efficient. These plans help to convince entities and private developers that the projects are realistic, have public support and that money will be well spent and fit into a comprehensive plan that will ultimately protect the investment.

Legal Authority

LWRP's are authorized by the Waterfront Revitalization of Coastal Areas and Inland Waterways Act (NYS Executive Law, Article 42) and the implementation of rules and regulations for the Act (Part 600 of Title 19, NYCRR) authorizing the preparation of Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs with financial and technical assistance from the NYS Department of State (DOS). The approach to managing waterfront areas taken by New York State is unique from the approach used in other States. While State government can promote development and provide for the protection of critical resources, it is recognized that municipalities are in the best position to determine their own waterfront objectives and to adapt Statewide approaches to specific local needs. Accordingly, the Department of State has encouraged waterfront communities to prepare their own Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs.

Definition

An LWRP is a comprehensive plan that refines legislatively established waterfront policies by incorporating local circumstances and objectives. It is a grass roots effort that brings together local, State, and Federal governments, environmental interests, commerce, private organizations and community citizens to assess the opportunities and constraints and to build a consensus on the desired future of the community's waterfront area. More important, the LWRP provides a strategy for achieving that vision.

The Waterfront Revitalization Area is defined as the area that would be directly impacted by initiatives established in the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. The study area encompasses the land along and, in some instances, the surface area of, the Village's principal waterbodies and waterways. More specifically, land adjacent and in relatively close proximity (within an average distance of 0.25 mile) to the Champlain Canal is included as is land along one or both sides of Lake Champlain, depending on the Village boundary. The area also incorporates land along the eastern shore of South Bay.

Plan Layout

Section I of the LWRP identifies both the landward and waterside boundaries of the waterfront revitalization area.

Section II includes a comprehensive inventory and analysis of the Village. It begins with the natural resources, including water, land, vegetation, fish and wildlife, and scenic resources. Then it looks at community/cultural resources such as development, public access, recreation, historic and archaeological resources. Next, it discusses land and water uses and important economic activities within the waterfront revitalization area. An analysis follows which discusses the existing issues and future opportunities in the individual categories.

In Section III, the Village formulated specific program goals and objectives, which are described in thirteen waterfront revitalization policies. The Policies are comprehensive

and reflect existing laws and authority regarding development and environmental protection. Taken together, these policies are used to determine the appropriate balance between economic development and preservation that will permit the beneficial use of and prevent adverse effects on Whitehall's waterfront resources. The policies allow the community to identify their own waterfront issues and utilize local approaches to address them. Once adopted by the DOS, the policies guide any activity occurring within the LWRP boundary. Policies are organized under five headings: General Policies, Economic Development Policies, Waterfront Natural Resources Policies, Environmental Policies, Recreation and Cultural Policies.

Section IV identifies the proposed future land and water uses for the Village's waterfront revitalization area. This section details specific public and private projects that will enhance, encourage and contribute to the redevelopment of the entire Village. It also includes a Harbor Management Plan for the Village. A summary of Section IV follows on the next page.

Section V describes the local laws and regulations, other public and private actions, management structures and financial resources necessary to actually implement the uses and projects identified.

Section VI identifies State agency actions which must act consistently with the Village of Whitehall's LWRP during the implementation phase.

Approval Process

The process for approval of the LWRP involved submission of a draft to the NYS Department of State with a resolution from the Village Board declaring the document complete. The Department of State then distributed copies of the LWRP to approximately 70 State and Federal agencies for their review and comment during a 60-day review period. Coincident with this review period, the Village provides for local public review and comment on the draft. The Department of State then assisted the Village in the preparation of the final LWRP.

WHITEHALL LWRP PROJECT SUMMARY

The Village is proposing individual, related projects that will enhance, encourage and contribute to the redevelopment of the entire Village. Priority areas for revitalization are lands along Champlain Canal and lands along Lake Champlain's South Bay. These projects are illustrated in [Map 12, "Proposed Projects."](#)

As part of the LWRP, the Village of Whitehall is recommending several large projects and a series of small inter-related projects that are designed to expand the opportunities provided by the waterfront improvements funded and recently funded by the NYS Canal Corporation. The recommendations not only provide more public access to the waterfront, but also link local, regional and national trail systems and direct commerce to the downtown Village Business District to strengthen the local economy. The LWRP utilizes its rich historical resources to link and market them riding the current trend to build national heritage tourism. The LWRP includes a

number of initiatives that are based on creating a visitor base that can support a diversity of new businesses. The “Gateway” group suggested a number of initiatives that have been incorporated into the LWRP.

Extend Canalway Trail

Extend the existing trail to the south to correspond with the Town of Fort Ann’s plan to connect the Canalway Trail to Whitehall and the larger scheme to create one byway from Waterford to Canada. Potential obstacles to a continuous path are the many stream and wetland crossings that will be necessary along the canal route south. Permitting and bridge construction will tend to increase the cost of the project.

The Village of Whitehall also proposes to extend the Canalway Trail north beyond Lock 12 Road to a site to be known as the future nature and arts center. From this site, the trail continues over a pedestrian bridge onto Cooke’s Island. This route also has water obstacles that must be overcome. There are bridges that are no longer operational for vehicles but may be acceptable for pedestrian use. These should be investigated for use along the trail and to connect over to Cooke’s Island.

Ultimately, the destination for the trail north should be the old Route 9 spur along Route 22 where the wheelchair-accessible fishing site is planned on South Bay. One of the ways to avoid the wetlands would be to secure easements along the Niagara Mohawk right-of-way.

The Trail should be equipped with benches, lighting and other amenities that are part of the present pedestrian walkway at the site at South Bay.

Wood Creek Pedestrian Bridge and Trail

In order to provide the greatest amount of public pedestrian access to the waterfront, the Village is proposing that the trail on the east side of the Saunders Street Bridge running south along the Canal be extended to Route 4 and merge with the existing sidewalk as recommended in the Urban Cultural Park Redevelopment Plan. At the point at which the path intersects with the south end of the ball fields, it would cross over to the peninsula via a pedestrian bridge across Wood Creek. The trail would continue along the northern perimeter of the peninsula and the west side until it reaches the sidewalk along Route 4. It would then link up to the proposed path along the fuel tank property and form a fully linked walking trail from virtually any location along the Canal. Recommended improvements for the part of the trail where docking is offered includes adding picnic tables, grills and small covered pavilions. Some sections of the proposed path will require securing some kind of easements since much of this land is privately owned. Additionally, a trail marker should be placed at the entrance to the existing trail from the Village up Skene Mountain.

Cooke’s Island

The Village (with the Town of Whitehall) proposes to purchase or lease Cooke’s Island from the US Army Corps of Engineers and develop it into a public day-use primitive recreation area. Presently, negotiations are continuing with ACOE on ownership and compatible land uses for the island. Cooke’s Island was recently used by the ACOE to

dispose of dredging spoils from the Champlain Canal. Cooke's Island presently has no public access and is essentially vacant with a few scattered abandoned ice shanties. Only pedestrians and bicycles (emergency vehicle access would be incorporated into the plan) would have future access to the island. Such a bridge is envisioned to connect Lower Main Street to Cooke's Island. The Canalway Trail would continue on Cooke's Island where it would make a complete loop linking picnic and canal viewing sites. Cooke's Island is a prime area for viewing wildlife because of the excellent wetland habitat on the west side of the island and across the canal as well. A bird watching trail should be developed with the cooperation and guidance of the Nature Conservancy or Lake Champlain Basin Conservancy. Picnic sites should be developed along with docking areas north of Cooke's Island along east side of the Canal at the base of Austin Hill.

A formal canoe/kayak access point would be established on the island at the most reasonable point along the east side of the island. The entire area has very strong potential for the development of small-craft boating. An association who promotes this activity should establish a formal canoe/kayak route with recommended stopovers. The southwest side of Cooke's Island is presently too shallow for the passage of non-motorized boats. This must be corrected so that kayakers can completely circle the island and enjoy the total experience of viewing wildlife from the water. Dredging of this area is recommended, however, there are archaeological and cost issues to resolve before this project can go forward.

Wheelchair-Accessible Fishing Access Site

The Village seeks to provide greater access to the waterfront to persons with disabilities. As such, the Village proposes to develop the Old Route 22 road into a recreational facility with opportunities for people with disabilities, including picnicking, fishing and nature viewing. This site is located on South Bay, Lake Champlain, a coveted fishing resource. The site would be equipped with restrooms for use by people with disabilities. Toilets, sinks, mirrors, water fountains, towel and soap dispensers, and grab bars should be installed at wheelchair level. All access points should be marked by appropriate signage. An additional feature to the site is a designated non-motorized public access point.

Marina Pump-Out Facility

The Village identifies the need to provide public access to a marina pump-out facility in the Village of Whitehall. The closest pump-out facility is roughly 35 miles in either direction. Providing these services would benefit the community because they could be marketed to boaters on the Canal and attract their attention directly to Whitehall. The pump-out facility would be located at the municipal wastewater treatment facility south of Lock 12 on the west side of the canal off North Main Street. Services will accommodate virtually any size boat and will be offered for a fee to offset the costs of constructing the hookups and dock.

Economic Development Plan

The Village of Whitehall completed a Community Development and Tourism Strategy with financing from the Lake Champlain Byways Program. The "Gateway Partnership"

intends to utilize public and private partnerships to develop unique approaches to economic development and planning, tourism development, community beautification, community pride, arts and cultural development, youth and recreation issues, and industrial development. The Village recognizes the good works of this group and proposes to develop a comprehensive Economic Development Strategy that takes Gateway Partnership's work to the next level. The following ideas were developed from the LWRP and should be incorporated into this Economic Development Plan:

1. Market a sports-oriented retail and outfitter. Develop a market for canoe and kayak rentals complete with lessons and tours of the Champlain Canal, South Bay and Lake Champlain. Link this potential business with kayak clubs out of Vermont and market for inclusion of South Bay and the Canal into regional touring plan books and maps and on the Internet.
2. Promote the Canal area as a "Water Gateway" by placing banners or flagging along the waterfront. Create a plan for the water gateway and the three land gateways into the Village of Whitehall. Place interpretive signage along the Canal in view of passing boats.
3. Create an incentive plan to attract businesses to fill the abandoned and underutilized buildings in the community. Market the area as an artist colony to bolster reuse of the existing downtown structures.
4. Develop a map that highlights the museum, historical markers and area landmarks. Get other regional maps to highlight this information so that it links up with other exhibits. Establish new harbor partnerships with the waterfront redevelopment activities at Waterford and at Schuylerville. Work with area museums to exchange cultural exhibits and shared activities. Establish a tourist connection with Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain by providing access by boat.
5. Encourage the Americade motorcycle rally to include Whitehall in their recommended tours.
6. Locate one or more boats from the 1700's era to dock for the summer and provide tours. Develop a working 1776 shipyard as a destination activity for tourists. Look for other opportunities to host special boats.
7. Support ideas that promote the Adirondack and Rutland train network.
8. Expand upon the present Winterfest activities to develop a long-term winter recreational use plan for the canal.
9. Promote local business interest in a dinner theater/tour boat
10. Identify and provide the necessary support services that are needed for the Blue Heron and other boat operators on the Canal. Encourage the business community to respond

11. Provide a designated location and promote historical re-enactment's as public events.
12. Establish an overall Canal Waterfront Cultural District identity using an integrated program of signage, landscaping and streetscape design.

Water Resources Management Plan

The Village should provide for the permanent protection of the wetlands around Cooke's Island, improve stormwater runoff and control stream and canal bank erosion, provide for the protection from floods, and protect the community's water supply by developing a Water Resources Management Plan. Such plan should, at a minimum, include the following recommendations:

1. Facilitate the sale of the wetlands to the Nature Conservancy.
2. Provide for stormwater infrastructure improvements that separate stormwater runoff from sanitary wastewater throughout the Village.
3. Correct the stormwater runoff and bank erosion problem along the south side of Route 4 at Wood Creek.
4. Develop a watershed management plan for the community's water supply (Pine Lake).
5. Develop a flood management plan for the waterfront area. This should include a policy that directs the release or impounding of water at Lock 12.

Recreational Development Plan

The Village will respond to recreational issues that have come forth as a result of the LWRP planning process by developing a Long-range Recreational Development Plan. The following recommendations represent future ideas to incorporate in this plan:

1. Advocate a more regular presence of safety patrol on the Champlain Canal. Post appropriate signage at boater level so that boaters are aware of the navigation rules in the Canal.
2. Work with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to develop a monitoring and management plan for the control of non-native aquatic vegetation and the general fishery of South Bay
3. Work with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to develop a network of marked hiking and snowmobile trails on the West Mountain.
4. Promote accessibility and service at existing marinas that will accommodate the larger boats in the Canal system.

5. Enlarge the planned community indoor recreational center to accommodate a greater variety of activities.

Proposed Private Projects

Oil Tanks

This is privately-owned, 1.4 acre site, located at a principal entrance to Skenesborough Park and the central Business District, is no longer being used for its original purpose and is for sale. Because of its past use as a petroleum storage facility, there are likely significant costs related to the clean-up of the property. The Village, in consultation with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, will explore potential environmental assessment and remediation opportunities that may be available. Long-term plans for the site include use as a lodging facility or use as a public park. This land is an essential link in terms of extending the Canalway Trail.

Railroad Property

The Village will work with Washington County Local Economic Development Corporation and the Whitehall Chamber of Commerce to market the vacant property belonging to the railroad. It has the best potential as an industrial site since it is located adjacent to the rail line along Route 22. It could also be well utilized as a commercial site such as a mini-mall.

Nature And Arts Center

Determining the actual present or planned land use. These places are also depicted as recreational resources on Maps [5a](#) and [5b](#). The Arts and Recreation Commission of Whitehall are proposing Cooke's Island as a Recreation/Arts Center Project. In 1999, the Commission applied for a grant through the Lake Champlain Basin Program for \$4,295 to legally accept this donated property, assess and clean up the property, and begin to develop the property as a nature and historic education center.

Public Launch for Non-Motorized Boats

A dedicated launch site for small boats, such as canoes and kayaks, should be available at Whitehall Marina just north and west of Lock 12. This area is being improved under other funding sources. A small boat storage rack should also be provided at this site to allow for boaters to secure their property while temporarily pulled up to the site.