

Appendix 3 – Focus Group Session Summary

The following summarizes responses that were recorded at each of the three Focus Group Sessions held in the City on May 2, 2002 with respect to obtaining information relevant to the development of the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. A list of participants from each focus group is also included.

Focus Group 1 – Business / Economic Development

Attendees: George Akel, Akel/Lane Development
Bernadette Blaisure, NYSEG
Lisa Brown, Crowley Foods
Sherry Eaton, Gorgeous Washington
Tony Ferrara, Binghamton University
Diran Kradjian, Kradjian Enterprises
Daniel Lord, BPBA – Binghamton Professional Business Assoc.
Nikki Lord, BPBA
Carolyn Price, Binghamton School District
Sally Robb, M&T
Chris Papastrat, Park Diner
William Von Iderstein, NYSEG
Gary Leatz, Binghamton Plaza
Chris Klein, City of Binghamton
Laurie Kimball, City of Binghamton
Carin Webb, City of Binghamton
Mylene Serrano, City of Binghamton
Kimberly Thaler, peter j. smith & company, inc.
Mary Kopaskie, peter j. smith & company, inc.

Focus Group Questions

If anything was possible, and there were no constraints (i.e. time, budget, etc.), what is your personal “ideal vision” for the Binghamton waterfront?

Active waterfront

Barge by Tompkins Street - Dinner/Show on the water

Pedestrians along the waterfront – more pedestrian bridges

Cyclists

Fishing

Restaurants

Amphitheater – South Washington Street Bridge – Symphony

Clean and environmentally pristine

Pedestrian access is important.

Dredge river to accommodate small boats – ACOE was supposed to dredge.

There are dykes along the way – is this an obstacle.

Landing point – put boat in and head to other surrounding communities - “Water Taxi”
– link communities.

Increased navigation on the river.

Binghamton topography – steep – water passes through quickly.

Different from Owego – flattens and water pools.

Inflatable Dam – could be a solution – is this cheaper than dredging?

*We have beautiful rivers but have not capitalized on them – what is the result of
Confluence Park – 1st step in the right direction – how effective will this be?*

Shouldn't be too big of a project – “hesitant”.

Safe – all days of the year at all times.

Flood walls are necessary – how do we combine with safety – and all the amenities –
benefits of being along the water – capitalize.

Pedestrian traffic that moves around.

Lost the Pops on the River event – certain amount of liability – City has discontinued.

From a business perspective – needs to be balanced with business.

The professional community – the arts community – retail

People like to walk and shop.

Should bring the community together.

Draw attention to CBD – as an attraction.

Business community should play a vital role – important for the viability of the river –
can't just be limited to recreation.

Shops, restaurants – always busy – centered on the downtown.

Historic preservation is also important – people need to understand what Binghamton
was – part of the Erie Canal system.

*What do you see as the biggest obstacles and constraints currently facing the City, and
particularly the waterfront that need to be addressed in the plan?*

There is a lot of interest in the waterfront.

Many people have a wait and see attitude.

People are concerned about their personal safety.

Attitude in the area – people are negative towards anything that is new or different.

Money is always a huge impediment.

End up with less than we might have had.

Topography itself hurts the city.

Banks are steep – prevents “building” in certain areas

Development only at key points along the River
People at the water – is there an issue with this?
Personal safety issue – perception
So many plans – come and go – people do studies and nothing ever happens
Don't believe anything will ever change
Profile of the City is not high enough
Often ignored – “Destination USA” is an example
Binghamton wasn't even considered as the “Gateway” to the State
How can the City increase its profile?
Politics may get in the way once in a while
Need economic strength combined with political strength
All the special interest groups must come together – political, environment, arts, education – people focus on their own issues and often ignore the larger picture - This is a hurdle being worked on – but more can be done
Safety is a perception – more people help make the user feel safe – need to avoid feelings of isolation
Weed and seed program – the City needs to work on making people feel safe
More Police – Safety issue is a perception and then it becomes a reality – police on bicycles
Need capital investment – piece meal approach may not work – need money to get this done
People need to see progress – trails, phones, maintenance
Need to see a significant change
Topography is not perfect – capital resources should be focuses on specific projects and areas – start small and work from there
Focus on downtown first – then move on
The length of the waterfront is immense
Fortunate to have a vibrant downtown – large department store and three hotels
Maximize Visibility all times of the day
Destination
We also have cold weather – have to consider the seasons – four seasons of use not just the summer
Not enough people or money
Need money from state, federal and private sources
Federal funding is short in NYS – we need more
Senators don't get money for all of NYS – money goes downstate –
Private dollars are profit driven
Need to attract students and elderly – downtown housing
Have people populate the downtown area
Cooperation is essential
Seed money – construction, more development and then other things follow
Money, Planning, Coordination

Need to get the entire community behind
A united voice
More regional cooperation
What is good for one community is good for the entire county
Encourage people to spend money in the City, County and Region
20-30 governmental units impact the University alone
Have to benefit the entire Southern Tier
Education – NOW – to children, the elderly, the general public – start now to get people to buy-in to the project
People must respect the project
Get in to the schools and have the children take ownership

What specific issues, if any, would you like to see addressed in the LWRP that are directly related to business, development and economic opportunities?

Development of a single plan – have a vision
Have a clear idea of where the waterfront is going
Regional Vision
We start, we stop, we start, we stop, we do a little we stop – and on and on
It's our community – we need to find the ownership – this is a good thing to do – we are all going to benefit
Do projects really well – focus on “Phase 1” and then move on
Restaurants and shops attract people
Linking the various facilities along the River – start small to achieve the vision
Washington Street – 45 members – mostly grass roots – dedication of the people who live and work there have made this work – people feel ownership
Willingness to work with the City on the overall vision
The BBPA – can be used as a conduit – they can promote the waterfront – musicians to donate time
City - Sponsor events – on the waterfront, concerts – can help to get people to the waterfront

Focus Group 2 – Recreation and Environmental Organizations

Attendees: Susan Cowing, League of Women Voters and EMC
Tom Carter, Triple Cities Runners Club
Anna Kinney, Finch Hollow Nature Preserve
Dave Ligeikis, NYSDOT
Jo Malinen, West Side Neighborhood Association
Larry Reistetter, Broome County Parks and Recreation
Kristin Schafer, Triple Cities Hiking Club
Chris Klein, City of Binghamton

Aurie Kimball, City of Binghamton
Kimberly Thaler, peter j. smith & company, inc.
Mary Kopaskie, peter j. smith & company, inc.

Focus Group Questions

If anything was possible, and there were no constraints (i.e. time, budget, etc.), what is your personal “ideal vision” for the Binghamton waterfront?

2 visions

San Antonio – riverfront

1 - Our downtown – more retail – near the CBD – splits the business district

2 - Other vision – series of dams to create usable water on both rivers – summers are dry – river’s edge – walking and hiking trails

Boats on the water

More use of the river – both high and low water – see watercraft infrequently – in Owego there is water skiing

Sail boats, canoes, skulls – BU rowing team

ACCESS – there is very little right now – Confluence Park is a start

Need trails – places for people to stop and have picnics

Vision needs to extend beyond Binghamton

Clean river – there is a lot of dumping in the river – need to keep clean

South side – flood walls are unattractive – but necessary

Murals on the walls – competition – block by block – children

Bridge is wonderful – more landscaping is needed on both ends – native plant materials

South side of the bridge needs additional amenities

How can the “hard walls” be softened

Trail system – that links the entire region – walkers, runners, in-line skaters, baby strollers, cyclists – non-motorized vehicles and boating

Parks along the way – attractive is important

Pleasant and safe

This will increase the quality of life and the number of people that use the trail

Safe, flat track – people want this – they will use

People would use trails

People want active places to go

Eugene, Oregon (as an example) paved paths along and across the rivers, link with neighborhoods, marked, maintained, mileage increments, wide enough (10-15 feet wide) – critical so there is not congestion and so that it is safe without conflicts between users, lighting

Otsiningo Park – heavily used – link the waterfront with this Park

Grants will be necessary

This will take time

Keep views open – this is important for safety reasons – visibility is important

Picnic areas, site furniture, water fountains

What do you see as the biggest obstacles and constraints currently facing the City, and particularly the waterfront that need to be addressed in the plan?

Secluded areas could be an issue – creates safety issues

Signage is important

Flooding is an issue that has to be considered

Floodwalls – how can you plan a trail with these in place

Park should be built in conjunction with the Susquehanna River Basin Commission

Releases (if things are dammed) during the summer could impact other parks/communities in the region

Whatever happens in the Susquehanna will impact the entire region – can't plan this in isolation

Money – who will pay for all of this

There have to be clear priorities

How much are tax payers going to have to pay

The sounds of the river and uses could impact the neighborhoods

Security

There is a lot of private property that extends along the river – west side of Chenango in particular

Maintenance and clean

Obesity is an epidemic – federal money to increase how walkable communities are to help this issue

Susquehanna River Basin Commission

Winter maintenance – ice build-up

Don't want to limit to only summer months – ice build-up – damage could occur and limit use in the cold months

Removable or permanently tied down

Bolted in place so that they are easier to maintain (no weeds), and then they are not stolen

Very conservative area

This will be very expensive – City residents don't want to pay more taxes for anything – want taxes to be stable or even decrease

Marketing in the proper way is essential

Show the long-term benefits

Quality of life – connect to health for publicity

People are looking for attractions when they relocate

Vestal – rails to trails – DOT money – Enhancement Program – more applications for extension

What specific issues, if any, would you like to see addressed in the LWRP, which are directly related to recreation opportunities and the environment?

Water quality – the cleaner the rivers, the more people will use the amenities
Regionally – this is an issue – the rivers used to be very polluted – this is not the case anymore
Need to change people’s perception of the rivers – so that people see them as amenities rather than something you turn your back to when you develop
Education of the public is essential
Identify the top visual areas of the rivers
The connector bridge – There are outstanding views – 201 Bridge
Need to enhance these types of amenities
Viewing platforms
Take advantage of the spectacular parts of the rivers – identify and enhance these areas
Could help to promote the area to outsiders
Nodes – tied together
Greenways study – completed by the County – the City is trying to follow this to the greatest extent possible
Ultimate – all on the riverbank – but sometimes we may have to move the trail and into the neighborhoods
Signage and marking is key if this occurs – residents need to cooperate
NEED TO LINK ALL THE TRAILS
Link all the segments together – Regional momentum – link the entire community
People might commute to work on the trail system
Community needs to be more pedestrian friendly – sidewalks are essential – people need to have a choice

Focus Group 3 - Tourism

Attendees: Betty Casey, Roberson Museum
Steve Contento, Ross Park Zoo
Gail Domin, Visitors Center and Susquehanna Heritage Area
Judi Hess, CVB
Dick Jacobs, CEO, AAA
Chris Klein, City of Binghamton
Laurie Kimball, City of Binghamton
Kimberly Thaler, peter j. smith & company, inc.
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Focus Group Questions

If anything was possible, and there were no constraints (i.e. time, budget, etc.), what is your personal “ideal vision” for the Binghamton waterfront?

San Antonio – restaurants, shops

Floodwalls are an issue – but can we have mixed use, dinner boats

Walkways and bikeways are important

Create a destination

Two hotels on waterfront are important – Roberson across the river – natural springboard

Downtown to find these activities

Owego – Front Street area – shops, restaurant

Encourage a length of stay – zoo – link with other attractions in the region

Create a destination

Attract and encourage to stay

Doesn't have to be really unique – tremendous rest area – have people stay over-night or two

Already a great family destination

Size of community – location off the highway – inexpensive – pushing for people to come for a long weekend – the price of things are so low – there are great golf courses – all of these things should be linked

River needs better access – public involvement is essential

Make it easy for people to get to the river

Access is essential – easy – business and attractions – trail, walkways, docks – these things enhance the entire waterfront

Great marking to link with surrounding communities and attractions

Nodes and hubs of activity – parking and then people go off and enjoy the City

Can't even get to the waterfront right now

Pops on the River – sponsorship was an issue – got expensive to do on the river

Amphitheater on the River to be able to bring in events

People on a dock – music on land – potential behind Roberson

Pedestrian Bridge activities

Utilize the facilities that are there for tourism attractions – “Dance on the Bridge”

More water – potential to dam – dredging – water in the river during the summer is really low

More usable in the wintertime – 6 months out of the year there is snow or cold weather

Keep momentum – closed pavilions, cross country trails, ice fishing – winter activities – ice rink on the trail – flood the trail

Riverwalk is a key

What do Susquehanna and Chenango (land of the stinking onion) mean

Festival of lights along the river – bonfires, First Night – lighting the City buildings

Music along the river

What do you see as the biggest obstacles and constraints currently facing the City, and particularly the waterfront that need to be addressed in the plan?

Funding – money

Perception

Discouragement – we’ve tried this before

People fear that illegal activity will occur

NIMBY

Justification – losing population and getting older – if it’s too OUT THERE – it won’t fly

Need to revitalize the downtown

Start simple and build off of this

Link with activities that are occurring now

Things happening now have to be considered

This should work in conjunction with the things going on

City welcomes new ideas and will try new things

Have to get the public on board

City supports many of the things going on

Weather is an issue – things should be usable year-round

Parking to allow convenient access to the riverfront

Good current on the river – water doesn’t freeze

10 foot wide strip – can you get pedestrians and cyclists on this narrow an area

Floodwall is also a reality

Need to look at both sides of the river

Bank is steep on both sides – canoe access is difficult – near Roberson – could banks be reshaped

Two rivers – different characteristics

Some uses may be more appropriate only on one river

There is a regional plan to be considered

Intangibles impact the quality of life

People are active – young families look for these activities

They want to get outside

Some inactivity during the cold months – some things could be used – try to avoid drain on maintenance

Try to attract people – business – limited traffic during some parts of the year – this could limit people’s willingness to invest

Vendors that can pull out during the winter

Year-round activity – access by locals and tourists

Reduced hours in the winter

What are other communities doing

There is a PR issue – regional attraction to use downtown Binghamton as a kick start
– regional riverbank and trail concept
Investments are tied together
There has been a lot of planning and little done
Some small successes – need more – people need to have confidence
Overcome the typical negativism that people often have
What will be different this time – why is this different
Development must link and continue – expand outside of the downtown – tie into
existing successes
Needs to be bigger than the City of Binghamton – they need to have regional
cooperation and linkages
Bring in the surrounding communities for consensus – reach out to communities that
may be able to benefit from this project – buy-in

*What specific issues, if any, would you like to see addressed in the LWRP that are
directly related to the tourism industry?*

Northern community – so the number of people visiting varies greatly during the year
Binghamton is a great City – this area can prosper and the waterfront can act as a
catalyst – economic deterioration is a reality
Key is to have more activities – shops, retails, restaurants, vendors
Places for tourists and locals
People want to be by the water – they link to the water
Safety issue – make sure secure, well lit and that they are safe – this area is safe
People have to feel safe – perception is key.
Development of shops – don't duplicate what is occurring – something that is unique
and affordable
Have to consider tourists and residents – who supports when
Issue with shortening the “Party on the Patio” – City has to be careful of this – it's hard
to get people to invest in a community – this is short-sited
Businesses say it's hard to get young people and they don't want to stay
Activities for young people are important
Outside activities are important
City Council needs to recognize the importance of young people
Trying to attract business – they will invest other places if there is no cooperation
Don't let the special interests dictate policy
Negotiations rather than ramming things down people's throats
Barriers need to be broken down – more cooperation – why things are happening
Politics have to be put aside
There are things worth seeing here – need to convince those in charge of how special
the area really is – inherently beautiful, natural, industrial history
Rivers are a theme

Blend of existing facilities helping each other is important
Start spending City money won't get support unless you can prove that people are going to come in – routine maintenance is often ignored – these things need to be taken care of often