

Section II - Inventory and Analysis

A. Historical Context

1. Location

The City of Little Falls is located in the heart of the Mohawk Valley region of New York State on the banks of the Mohawk River/Erie Canal. The City is approximately 60 miles from Syracuse to the west and Albany to the east, and is the City of Utica is ten miles to the west.

2. Early Settlement and Notoriety

The City's history is closely related to the Mohawk River and Canal development. In colonial and Revolutionary War days, Little Falls became important because of its river location and topography. Westward traveling settlers and their goods (and later armies) traveling by river or along the river valley had to travel through the Little Falls Gorge and portage at the "little falls" - which dropped more than 40 feet. The City gained early notoriety as "The Gateway to the West" because of its unique and strategic location. Rapid and abundant water power also resulted in the development of grist and saw mills in the area in the late 1700's.

3. First Lock and Canal

In 1797, the Inland and Lock Navigation Company completed the first canal and lock along the north shore of the Mohawk River to circumnavigate the "little falls". This canal was one of the first canals built in America, and consisted of five wooden locks which were later rebuilt in stone. Remnants of one of the original stone locks exist at the corner of Lock and Elizabeth Streets at the entrance to the Riverside Industrial Park.

4. Construction of Erie Canal and Industrial Development

In 1811, the Village of Little Falls was incorporated and, in 1823, construction of the original Erie Canal was completed along the south shore of the Mohawk River. To connect the Village with the Canal, an aqueduct over the Mohawk River and basin was constructed. The deteriorated remains of this original aqueduct remained until just a few years ago when the final section collapsed into the Mohawk River channel and is now identified by an historical/interpretive marker.

The original and reconstructed Erie Canal in Little Falls included four stone locks. The remains of one of these locks exist within State lands adjacent to current Lock 17. The availability of water power and the canal brought significant development to Little Falls in the middle and late 1800's. Terminal facilities along the river and canal made Little Falls a marketing place for dairy products, and the City became a farming, as well as a manufacturing, center. Cherry-Burrell Corporation, a manufacturer of dairy equipment, was

established in the Village and became one of the area's largest industries. Additional textile, paper, and grist mills, factories, and warehousing, were constructed along the Mohawk River and Erie Canal on Loomis, Seeley, and Moss Islands, which separated the Erie Canal and free-flowing Mohawk River channels.

Significant 19th century industries included the Asteronga Mill of the Gilbert Knitting Company on Seeley Island and the Adirondack Woolen Company on Moss Island. With the exception of the Phoenix Mill building, however, all industrial and related structures on Moss and Seeley Island have been demolished. Today, in the City's older industrial area, the Burrows Paper Corporation remains the City's largest industry.

5. Construction of the Barge Canal

Little Falls became a city in 1885 as the population and economic activity continued to increase. The new Barge Canal, completed in 1916, included the construction of Lock 17, which replaced the four locks of the old canal. At the time, "The Big Lock" was the highest lift lock in the world, and one of the great engineering works of the many created during the new Barge Canal construction. Over one mile of solid rock had to be removed from the route of the old canal bed to facilitate construction of the Barge Canal in Little Falls. Today, Lock 17 remains the highest lock in the New York State Canal System and one of the highest in the world.

6. Industrial Decline in the City

After World War I and after the City reached a population high of 13,029 in 1920, the textile industry declined and many mills left the City and moved south. Related industries such as machine shops also closed. The population dropped steadily from 1920 to 6,159 in 1980 as a result of the industrial and business stagnation and decline.

7. Recent History

Since the early 1970's, the City has effectively utilized a variety of Federal and State assistance programs in its efforts to counter the effects of age, economic disinvestment and distress. Of major significance has been the phased development of the Riverside Industrial Park, located between the rail lines and northern shore of the Mohawk River/Erie Canal. Other significant projects have included the construction of a Thruway connector bridge, two urban renewal projects, a series of HUD Small Cities programs, development projects in the Industrial Park, the construction of a hydroelectric power plant between the Canal and Mohawk River, and efforts to revitalize "Canal Place" in the City's waterfront area.

Although the population of the City dropped further to 5,829 by 1990, the above revitalization efforts have helped to stem disinvestment in the City and along the waterfront. In 1995, the State of New York prepared the *Canal Recreationway Plan* in an ambitious attempt to plan the revitalization of the State Canal System. In this plan, Little Falls was designated one of seven "Canal Harbors" by the State. This planning effort has contributed significantly to the renewed interest in the Erie Canal and in the continued

improvement of the Little Falls waterfront. The preparation of this LWRP is a product of this renewed interest and the City's desire to properly guide redevelopment efforts and protect its valuable canal and water resources.

Soon after the preparation of this LWRP commenced, the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced a "Canal Corridor Initiative" designed to help revitalize distressed communities along the Erie Canal and other canals of the New York State Canal System. The LWRP incorporated the elements of the City's Canal Corridor Initiative, and provides the framework for continuing revitalization efforts in the years ahead.

B. Regional Setting

As noted above, the City of Little Falls is located in the Mohawk Valley Region approximately 10 miles east of the City of Utica. Little Falls is a highly strategic canal location because of its historical significance, and its location as the boating midpoint between the Hudson River to the east and the Canal System centerpoint at Syracuse. The Regional Setting Map ([Map 3](#)) locates the City in the Mohawk Valley Region in the context of the *NYS Canal Recreationway Plan*.

The City of Little Falls has been suffering from economic disinvestment and a shrinking population base for several decades. Similarly, the Mohawk Valley Region has also struggled economically. The closure of Griffiss Air Force Base in nearby Rome and abandonment by several major industries has left the Mohawk Valley Region in a critical economic condition, with an eroding employment base, a negative self-image, and a desperate need to take better advantage of tourism resources and non-manufacturing development opportunities. Although the preparation of a *Herkimer-Oneida Counties Economic Adjustment Strategy* has mobilized the business, education, governmental and not-for-profit sectors, all parties have agreed that there is no silver bullet - no magic answer to solving the region's severe economic problems.

Despite weak regional and local economic conditions, the City of Little Falls, because of its unique location and waterfront resources, can become an important regional economic and tourism resource in the years ahead.

Of significant importance is designation of the Mohawk Valley Corridor as part of New York State's Heritage Area System (HAS), formerly the Urban Cultural Park Program. As a Heritage Area, the Mohawk Valley is utilizing the concept of heritage-based tourism as a means to help achieve economic revitalization on a regional basis. With its unique historical resources, Little Falls can be an important participant and beneficiary of this initiative.

C. Erie Canal and Mohawk River

The Erie Canal and Mohawk River divide Little Falls into northern and southern sections as the two waterways flow completely through the City. In the western section, the Erie and the Mohawk are coterminous. In the eastern section, the Erie Canal follows a land-cut route to the south while the free-flowing Mohawk River closely parallels the Canal to the north. The two watercourses are separated by Moss and Loomis Islands, which are described in detail in the following section.

The Erie Canal is the backbone of the New York State Canal System, which also includes the Champlain, Oswego and Cayuga-Seneca Canals. The entire Canal System, illustrated on the [Regional Setting Map](#), totals 524 miles, and the Erie Canal encompasses 340 miles of that total. From its tidewater level at Troy, the Erie Canal rises through a series of locks to an elevation of 565 feet above sea level at the Niagara River. As noted previously, with a height of 40 feet, Lock 17 in Little Falls is the highest lift lock on the NYS Canal System.

The Erie Canal was constructed largely for commercial boating and shipping via cargo barges, but this use has declined substantially over the years. The Canal System is now used almost entirely by recreational boaters.

The Mohawk River is the largest tributary of the Hudson River and drains an area of 3,400 square miles. The Mohawk River flows over 148 miles from its headwaters near the Delta Reservoir in northern Oneida County to its confluence with the Hudson River at Cohoes. The River contains numerous rapids, and was not navigable in certain stretches (including Little Falls) until the Erie Canal was constructed.

D. Natural Features

The City of Little Falls' most dominant natural features are the Mohawk River/ Erie Canal and the high cliffs which rise above the river channel. These cliffs, known as the Fall Hill Ridge, create a beautiful landscape and urban setting for the City. As noted previously, the Mohawk River and Erie Canal divide the City into northern and southern sections. The larger, northern section rises from the river at a 10 percent slope for approximately one-half mile. This area includes the City's commercial center and a large portion of the population. Development stops where the slope becomes a steep escarpment which rises to over 1,000 feet above sea level and almost 700 feet above the river. The ridge is the highest elevation along the Mohawk River/Erie Canal.

The area south of the Canal/River includes a very narrow strip of development, barely 500 feet in width, known as the "South Side". A steep cliff known as the Rollaway (so called because lumbermen cutting timber once rolled their logs off the cliff to the river below) rises 400 feet above the river along the south side of the river. Flat lands above the Rollaway are now farmed. Thus, the City is situated in a "bowl" with steep cliffs overlooking and confining its development.

The City's third major natural feature, in addition to the Mohawk River and steep cliffs, is Moss Island, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and owned by New York State. It has been designated a National Natural Landmark due to its unique geological characteristics and natural resources. Moss Island contains one of the best and the largest collections of "potholes" in the United States. Potholes are unique geological abrasions formed by an ancient waterfall that flowed when the ancestral Mohawk River drained the Great Lakes. The island also contains important numbers of moss and fern species and plants not common to this region of New York State, a hydroelectric power plant, and Lock 17.

Moss Island is actually the eastern portion of a single, man-made island between the Mohawk River and Erie Canal created when the Erie Canal was reconstructed and enlarged in 1916. Fill from the canal construction served to connect Moss, Seeley, and Loomis Islands and created, in effect, one island. The total island is approximately 30 acres. Moss Island comprises the eastern portion and is approximately

18 acres, while Loomis Island comprises the western portion and is approximately 10 acres. The “islands” are connection by a narrow strip of land (formerly Seeley Island) of approximately two acres. The dividing line between Moss and Loomis Island is the South Ann Street Bridge and Benton’s Landing transient dock area.

E. Existing Land Use

1. General Overview

The Mohawk River, and the City’s topography and overall rugged character, have significantly influenced its development. Virtually the entire City has a hillside location, and all major transportation routes run east-west through the narrow river valley corridor. The Mohawk River, Erie Canal, CSX rail lines, and NYS Route 5 are all crowded into a corridor only several hundred yards wide. Industrial areas, including the Mill and Elizabeth Street areas and the Riverside Industrial Park, share the narrow corridor of relatively flat land along the Mohawk River/Erie Canal.

To the immediate north of the river corridor is the Central Business District, which includes a major portion of the City’s commercial uses, multi-family houses, most public buildings, and many churches.

Extending from the Central Business District are the East End, West End, West Monroe, and Monroe Street residential areas. These areas house most of the City’s population in one and two-family homes situated on small lots. The North Side area includes the “upland” portion of the City, which is sparsely populated and separated from the City by the Fall Hill Ridge described in the previous section.

To the south of the Mohawk River and Erie Canal is the South Side neighborhood, which includes approximately 200 residential structures intermixed with commercial and industrial uses.

Wedged between the north and south side areas of the City are the City’s older industrial areas, Canal Place and the Riverside Industrial Park.

The Waterfront Revitalization Area includes the area between the CSX rail lines and the Erie Canal known as “Canal Place”; the South Side; Loomis and Moss Islands; the Central Business District; the Riverside Industrial Park; and the River Road area, which includes the area between Route 5 and the Mohawk River that is east of the intersection of Route 5 and East Main Street. These sub-areas may be described in detail as follows.

[Map 4](#) illustrates the existing land use in the City of Little Falls.

2. Canal Place

Canal Place includes the area bounded by the CSX rail line and the Erie Canal to the north and south, respectively, and by the limits of the City’s older industrial area to the east and Hansen Island and Lock Street to the west.

South Ann Street

At the heart of Canal Place is South Ann Street, which includes Canal-era row-buildings that house first-floor commercial and upper-floor residential uses. These row-buildings have been rehabilitated using a combination of public and private funds, and include one of the area's premier restaurants and an art gallery, among other commercial uses. Since 1987, over \$1 million in public and private funds have been invested along South Ann Street in the Canal Place area.

South Ann Street also includes two multi-story mill buildings, a renovated restaurant and a former train station that is now a restaurant. The Mohawk Mill is a five-story, 37,000 square foot structure that is in very poor condition. The City, through the Urban Renewal Agency, has recently acquired this building and is completing improvements to the building that will prevent further deterioration, and, hopefully, establish partnership with the private sector to adaptively reuse the entire building using public and private funds.

The second former mill building at Canal Place, located immediately adjacent to the Mohawk Mill and known as "25 West at Canal Place", has been privately renovated as an Antique Center with residential use on the third floor.

On the corner of South Ann Street and West Mill Street is Sterziner Park, a passive park and public gathering space that has been constructed using State and local funds on the site of the former Allegro Shoe Company, which was demolished in 1987.

East and West Mill streets and Elizabeth Street

East Mill Street (east of South Ann Street) provides access to the City's older industrial area. This area includes a Burrows Paper Mill; the Feldmeier Equipment Co. (formerly Cherry-Burrell); the Vincent Manufacturing and Sun Belt Industries operations; and several vacant industrial buildings. George's Lumber Supply is also located on East Mill Street.

West Mill Street (west of South Ann Street) also includes several older industrial and commercial buildings - many with redevelopment potential. These buildings include a second Vincent Manufacturing building known as 20 West at Canal Place; the Donovan Welding and Andrew Little Buildings; a former lumber supply building; and a current chimney construction/repair and service operation.

Also, located on West Mill Street is the Powerhouse Arts Center, a converted power station is now used as a private residence and for a variety of arts-related events.

Elizabeth Street continues to West Mill Street at the intersection with the western Route 167 bridge access ramp. This street is the location of the former Gilbert Knitting Building which, in recent years, has housed several small industries and business ventures. Elizabeth Street terminates at the Lock Street intersection and provides access to Hansen Island, which is the location of Redco Foods - a major City industry and manufacturer of tea, and Riverside Drive - the access road serving the Riverside Industrial Park.

3. South Side

The “South Side” is an isolated neighborhood of residential and non-residential uses tucked between the Erie Canal and Mohawk River channel and a steep cliff. This neighborhood area provides housing for approximately 350 persons, and is home to several heavy commercial/ industrial-type operations. The most dominant entity on the South Side is the Little Falls Lumber Company. This operation occupies 2.2 acres of land between State Route 167 and the Canal. Wood storage sheds and other Lumber Company operations buildings are intermixed with generally well-maintained residential uses along Southern Avenue.

The South Side is the location of the Canal Terminal Building and associated pedestrian and boater access improvements, which now establish the City as one of eight major canal harbor centers serving recreational boaters.

The NYS Canalway Trail extends into the South Side from Finks Basin to the east, and terminates just east of State Route 167 near Flint Avenue in the “West Shore” residential neighborhood. This area includes densely developed one and two family residential structures; a few commercial uses including an auto repair shop operation; and a church. Residential uses also extend along Flint Avenue, which parallels NYS Route 167 and the steep cliffs noted above. Columbus Park, a small neighborhood recreation facility, is located adjacent to Route 167 and the Erie Canal.

Other South Side land uses include a tool and machine manufacturing operation and lands used by a local fuel oil company that are largely vacant. The fuel company property includes three large abandoned oil tanks and several small buildings. These uses also border the Canal harbor center.

4. Loomis and Moss Islands

These islands were described in detail in the Natural Features section above. The islands are important local resources. Moss Island is extensively used by rock climbers, studied by geologists and geology students, enjoyed by naturalists and others. Loomis Island has enormous development potential because of its strategic location at the heart of the Little Falls waterfront area.

As noted above, Moss and Loomis islands are connected at the area now known as Benton’s Landing, which includes several deteriorated residential properties with excellent redevelopment potential, as well as a short-term boat dock facility along the canal bulkhead. The recently completed improvement and expansion of Benton’s Landing was a key component of the City’s Canal Corridor Initiative.

5. Central Business District

The Little Falls Central Business District includes approximately 50 acres of commercial, mixed-use and public buildings and resources that border the waterfront. The CBD is linked to the

waterfront via NYS Route 167 and a deteriorated underpass that extends over and under the main line of the CSX railroad tracks.

The spine of the Central Business District is Main Street, which extends in an east-west direction. From Albany Street to the connection with the Route 5 arterial west of the CBD, Main Street is a one way street with traffic flow from east to west. Albany Street, which generally parallels Main Street, carries traffic through the CBD west to east. The Route 5 arterial functions as a CBD bypass.

The north side of Main Street within the CBD is comprised of mainly two and three story structures that generally include commercial uses on the first floor and housing units on the upper floors. Most of these structures are in a deteriorated state. Much of this deterioration, however, is camouflaged by a sidewalk canopy structure constructed in the early 1980's using Local Public Works funds from the Economic Development Administration. The canopy was renovated, but will need ongoing maintenance in the future.

The areas between Main Street and Albany Street in the CBD are previous Urban Renewal Areas. The dominant land use in this area is Shopper's Square, the City's first Urban Renewal project. This mall-type structure houses retail commercial uses, including the City's only food supermarket. This project was constructed in 1965 and is now in need of major renovation, revitalization, or redevelopment. The property has recently been sold, and first phase improvement actions have been initiated.

To the west of Shopper's Square is a six-block area that was redeveloped as Downtown Renewal Project II, which was completed in 1974. This project resulted in the construction of the Herkimer County Trust Company headquarters building, the Little Falls Best Western Motor Inn, and several commercial and smaller office buildings that have remained in excellent condition.

The Little Falls Central Business District also includes the Rockton Plaza senior citizen high rise; the Snyder Apartment building and several other large multi-family residential buildings; City Hall; the Post Office; and a number of churches.

6. Riverside Industrial Park

The Riverside Industrial Park extends along the north shore of the Erie Canal/Mohawk River channel just west of the tip of Loomis Island, where the two channels merge, and includes modern, one-story industrial buildings that are set back from the shoreline. Buildings are screened from the water by heavy vegetation in most locations. Manufacturers in the Riverside Industrial Park include the Empire Fiberglass Products, Inc., Hale Manufacturing, Inc., Burrows Machine Works, LaSalle Industries, and the Burrows Recycled Pulp Operation. At the extreme western end of the Industrial Park is the Mohawk River Park, which includes the City's boat launch, floating docks, and a small picnic area.

7. River Road Area

The River Road portion of the Waterfront Revitalization Area includes the extreme eastern portion of the area along the north shore of the Erie Canal/Mohawk River south of Route 5.

Development along this area is limited to the Little Falls Sewage Treatment Plant and CSX rail lines. River Road closely parallels the Erie Canal/Mohawk River, and virtually no land in this area is feasible for development.

F. Land Ownership Patterns

The Waterfront Revitalization Area includes State, City, and privately-owned properties. Major State-owned properties include the Canal Terminal on Southern Avenue, Moss Island, and land surrounding Lock 17. City-owned properties (including property owned by the Little Falls Urban Renewal Agency) include: the Canalway Trail and West Shore railroad right-of-way; a strategically-situated parcel at Benton's Landing; Sterziner, Eastern, and Columbus Parks; a former gas station on East Main Street; and an undeveloped commercial parcel on Route 5. The Urban Renewal Agency also owns the Mohawk Mill building in the heart of Canal Place. Key privately-owned properties include Loomis Island buildings in the Canal Place area, and lands adjacent to the Canal Terminal site.

Land ownership patterns are shown on the Ownership of Lands and Key Properties Map ([Map 5](#)).

G. Public Access and Recreational Resources

The Waterfront Revitalization Area includes several significant recreational resources and public access facilities. These may be described as follows:

1. Canal Terminal Building and Rotary Club Park

The Little Falls Canal Terminal Building is located on Southern Avenue on a 1.6 acre site along the southern shore of the Erie Canal/Mohawk River. Originally used exclusively for canal maintenance operations and storage, the eastern portion of the building has been recently renovated as a service center for canal travelers. The building has been renovated using State funds and matching volunteer labor provided by the Little Falls Rotary Club. The building includes restrooms and shower facilities, among other amenities. The area to the east of the terminal building has been improved with picnic tables, fireplaces, and a canal information station, and is known as Rotary Club Park. The entire area includes a concrete bulkhead and boat mooring posts.

The *NYS Canal Recreationway Plan* recommended that the Canal Terminal Building be adaptively reused as a charter-boat office, operations center with interpretive exhibits, and a visitor information-distribution component, which have been implemented. The *Plan* also called for the installation of floating docks, a waterfront promenade, street furniture, and additional parking and lighting. Many of these improvements have been implemented and it is anticipated that additional public access enhancements will be developed which will continue to strengthen the ability of the City to take advantage of canal-related tourism opportunities.

2. Benton's Landing

Benton's Landing includes a bulkhead cut-out and transient docking area that provides boater access to Canal Place and the northern side of the City, and is located at the foot of South Ann

Street. This very important facility needs to be expanded and improved with additional dock space, installation of interpretive signage, pedestrian facilities, and landscaping. Bulkhead and dock improvements remain critical needs at Benton's Landing.

3. Lock 17 Lock Park

Adjacent to Lock 17 along the southern shore of the Erie Canal/Mohawk River is a small park area that includes fishing access facilities, a small environmental education building, parking, and the remains of an original Erie Canal Lock. This park provides access to Lock 17 and Moss Island from the South Side and Thruway Access Road (NYS Route 169).

4. Mohawk River Park

At the western end of the Riverside Industrial Park is a small park area that includes a boat launch, picnic pavilion, picnic tables, fireplaces, floating docks and parking.

5. Columbus Park

Located on the southern shore of the Erie Canal/Mohawk River adjacent to Route 167, Columbus Park provides play equipment for small children and grassed area for general recreation. This park is City-owned and maintained.

6. Moss Island

As described in previous sections, Moss Island is a geologically significant island enjoyed by rock climbers and naturalists which is a National Natural Landmark because of its unique "pothole" formations. The island is approximately 18 acres in size, and can be accessed via the Lock 17 Lock Park and the hydro-electric facilities access road off South Ann Street.

7. Canalway Trail

One of the first segments of the Canalway Trail was developed on the former West Shore Railroad right-of-way between Route 167 and Finks Basin. This is a paved, multi-purpose trail approximately one mile in length.

8. Loomis Island

Although Loomis Island is owned privately, it retains potential as a recreation and possibly mixed-use resource. Strategically located at the point where the Erie Canal and Mohawk River channels separate, Loomis Island would be a prime location for waterfront promenade, trail and water access improvements.

The City has recently proposed the concept of developing a Whitewater Park along the Mohawk River, and Loomis Island would be an integral part of that development, primarily as an access route to the river.

The eastern portion of the island is the site of a gas utility operation that is no longer in use. This site encompasses just over 4 acres and has economic redevelopment potential.

9. Other Public Access Points

Three actively-used bridges extend over the Erie Canal and/or Mohawk River. The Theodore S. Wind Bridge provides access to the City from the New York State Thruway and offers views of Moss Island and Lock 17. The Route 167 Bridge is the primary means of access between the City's north and south sides. This bridge has been the subject of considerable planning in recent years by the NYS Department of Transportation because of its deteriorating condition. The bridge extends high over the CSX rail line, Canal Place area, and the Erie Canal/Mohawk River, and must be improved to provide safe vehicular and pedestrian passage to and from the City's north and south sides.

The South Ann Street Bridge links Canal Place with Benton's Landing, Loomis Island and Moss Island. This bridge extends over the Mohawk River channel. A fourth bridge is the Danube Street Bridge, which extends above the Canalway Trail gorge and connects approximately 20 households to the South Side.

A fifth bridge in the Waterfront Revitalization Area is the South William Street Bridge, which has been closed for many years. This bridge extends over the Mohawk River from East Mill to Moss Island and could play an important part in the development of a comprehensive waterfront trail system in the City.

10. Eastern Park

Although this park is not related to the waterfront, it is a prominent recreation facility in the Waterfront Revitalization Area and includes a bandstand, several paths, benches, and stately trees. A portion of the park functions as a play area for Benton Hall, a major elementary/ middle school in the WRA.

H. Historic Resources

The history of Little Falls is closely tied to the Mohawk River and Erie Canal. Within the Waterfront Revitalization Area, significant historical resources can be found that reflect and relate to the extraordinary history of the City and its waterfront. These resources include the following: ([Map 6](#))

1. Early American Lock Canal

The first American commercial lock canals were constructed by the Inland Lock and Navigation Co. in Little Falls and Rome in 1797 which set the stage for the development of the Erie Canal and the New York State Canal System. The remnants of one of these early canal locks exist at the corner of Lock Street and Elizabeth Street near the entrance to the Riverside Industrial Park.

2. Erie Canal Lock

A well-preserved stone lock from the Erie Canal as first enlarged in the mid-1800 is located near Lock 17 on State-owned lands.

3. Lock 17

Constructed in 1916 as part of the Barge Canal enlargement phase, Lock 17 gives Little Falls an example of three lock systems utilized along the Mohawk River. With its extraordinary height and views, Lock 17 is perhaps the most visually spectacular, and engineering-wise, the most significant, lock in the New York State Canal System.

4. Mohawk River Aqueduct Site

The original Erie Canal was linked to the north shore of the City by a stone aqueduct which extended over the Mohawk River to a basin near the present-day South Ann Street. This feeder to the Canal was 214 feet long, 16 feet wide, with walls 14 feet high. It once had three arches, one of 70 feet and two others of 50 feet each. The last remnants of this aqueduct collapsed several years ago.

5. Herkimer Home

Johan Jost Herchheimer was one of the early settlers (1725) of the Mohawk Valley. He was a farmer who also engaged in trade and transport on the Mohawk River. Herchheimer owned over 5,000 acres in the Mohawk Valley, including the portage lands around Little Falls. The Herkimer farmstead, including its elegant brick Georgian-style mansion, is now a State Historic Site known as the Herkimer Home. This site is located just beyond the limits of the Waterfront Revitalization Area, but its presence impacts the area and future tourism in the City. Johan Herchheimer's son, Nicholas, was a wealthy and prominent Mohawk Valley citizen who gained fame as a militia commander during the Revolution. His actions at the Battle of Oriskany established him as a major martyr to the cause of American freedom.

Nicholas Herkimer's house was purchased by the State in 1913, and has been completely restored. The 19th century barn is now a Visitor's Center which houses exhibits and audio-visual programs. The homestead is the site of many colonial, military and handicraft demonstrations throughout the year, including the famous "Sugaring Off" in March, which attracts thousands of visitors to the site.

The original and enlarged Erie Canal of the 1800's extended through the Herkimer homestead. Although the original "Clinton's Ditch" is now overgrown and the Canal aspects of the homestead are not prominent, their existence represents an excellent educational opportunity. Combined with the Canal resources in the City described above, these resources provide Little Falls with examples of virtually every Canal development phase. Only the Schoharie Crossing State Historic Site in Fort Hunter has comparable examples of canal development at a single location.

6. Mill Buildings

The Waterfront Revitalization Area includes several mill buildings which reflect the City's industrial history. The two stone mills in the Canal Place area and the former Gilbert Knitting Mill dominate the northern shore of the Canal/River corridor. The two stone mills are no longer used

for manufacturing, and the Gilbert Knitting Mill has been subdivided for use by various small industries and storage. The Asteroga Mill building stands vacant adjacent to the South William Street Bridge on the former Seeley Island.

7. South Ann Street Row Buildings

The South Ann Street row-style residential/commercial buildings were built around 1875 and are among the last examples of buildings of that type along the Canal.

8. Little Falls Historical Society Museum

This museum occupies a restored 1833 bank building on South Ann Street between Main and Albany Streets. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the museum contains exhibits of Little Falls memorabilia, genealogical files, gift shop, authentic bank vault, and other antique items.

9. Other Significant Buildings

Although not listed on the National or State Register of Historic Places, the Little Falls City Hall, the Burrell Building and the Little Falls Public Library on Main Street are significant structures because of their architectural qualities. A fourth significant structure in the downtown area is Benton Hall, a combined elementary and middle school that underwent a major renovation. This building anchors the eastern end of the Central Business District.

Other significant buildings in the Waterfront Revitalization Area include the many churches in the Central Business District - the Academy Apartments building on East John Street, the Masonic Temple on Prospect Street, the Little Falls Lumber Company Warehouse (56 West Mill Street), the McKinnon Warehouse and attached Donovan Carriage Shop (24 West Mill Street) and attached Donovan Building on West Mill Street, and the aforementioned Gilbert Knitting Mill at 151 Elizabeth Street.

I. Water Quality

Surface waters in New York State are classified according to “intended best use” from Class AA (for drinking or food processing without treatment) to Class D (waters not suitable for the propagation of fish). Between these extremes are Class A (for drinking or food processing with approved treatment), Class B (for contact recreation and other uses except drinking or food processing) and Class C (for fishing and other uses except drinking, food processing and contact recreation).

In Little Falls, water quality is designated as Class C east of Route 167 and Class B west of Route 167. The City of Little Falls Sewage Treatment Plant is located on the north shore of the Canal east of Route 167 in the River Road section and discharges treated effluent into the River/Canal as permitted by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Overall, water quality in the Erie Canal/Mohawk River within the City is good and should pose no constraints on future waterfront development.

J. Environmentally Sensitive Features

The Little Falls Waterfront Revitalization Area includes several environmentally sensitive features, including the following:

1. Flood Hazard Areas

The combined Canal and Mohawk River floodplain extends along the entire waterfront. The 100 year flood boundary is illustrated on the Environmental Features Map ([Map 7](#)) and includes a large portion of the Riverside Industrial Park; the area along Southern Avenue; and portions of the Canal Place area, including a very small portion of the industrial area east of South Ann Street.

Areas within the Waterfront Revitalization Area **not** within the 100 year flood zone include Route 167; Flint Avenue and the South Side residential area; Loomis and Moss Islands; Benton's Landing; the Canal Place commercial area, including South Ann Street and Sterziner Park; the Central Business District; and the River Road area.

2. Wetlands

Although several large wetland areas extend along the Mohawk River/ Erie Canal to the east of Little Falls, there are no wetland areas within the City's Waterfront Revitalization Area.

3. Landfill and Hazardous Waste Sites

The Little Falls landfill is a designated Class 2a inactive hazardous waste site north of the Waterfront Revitalization Area. This area does not impact the WRA and will not impact waterfront development.

4. Moss Island

As noted in previous sections, Moss Island is a National Natural Landmark and contains one of the best and largest collections of geologic "potholes" in the United States. Moss Island also contains unique vegetation not typically found in the central New York region.

5. Steep Slopes

As previously described, City topography is dominated by high cliffs known as the Fall Hill Ridge, which rise above the Canal and river system and encircle the City. To the south, the topography includes an especially steep escarpment known as the Rollaway, which is almost 700 feet above the Canal. Development along, or impacting, these steep slope areas should be avoided, and their natural beauty protected.

Steep slopes will limit future development along the canal and river in Little Falls, but also serve as an asset because of the spectacular scenery provided. Development along the River Road area and the north shoreline along the Thruway access road (Route 169) is virtually prohibited due to the steep slopes and rock conditions.

6. Upland Disposal Sites

There are seven upland disposal sites utilized as part of Canal System maintenance in the Little Falls area, but they are not located within the Waterfront Revitalization Area.

K. Fish and Wildlife

No classified wildlife habitat areas have been identified in the Waterfront Revitalization Area. The Mohawk River is, however, an excellent fishery and the area around Lock 17 is known as a fishing “hot spot”. Bass fishing is particularly popular in the Little Falls area.

Other fish common to the area include blueback herring, carp, yellow perch and bullheads, among others. Fishing along the Canal and River is popular, and a handicapped fishing site exists at the Lock 17 Park.

L. Zoning

The City adopted a Master Plan in 1970 and related zoning regulations, which has been significantly updated since. Although some provisions of the zoning regulations have been updated, there have been no major changes to the zoning districts since the regulations were adopted except as noted below.

The Master Plan and zoning regulations classify many areas along the Mohawk River/Erie Canal as suitable for industrial development. Heavy manufacturing (M-2) districts encompass the entire Canal Place area and the Riverside Industrial Park. Loomis Island is currently zoned for light manufacturing (M-1) use. Although the South Side was, until 1991, zoned for commercial (C-2) and light manufacturing (M-1) use, a change has zoned the eastern portion of the South Side for residential (R-1) use. The M-1 zone north of Route 167 should have remained unchanged by this action. The portion of the Waterfront Revitalization Area that is north of the CSX train line is zoned for commercial (C-1 and C-2) use in the Central Business District, and residential use in the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Lands that are adjacent to the Canal and the Mohawk River, and anticipated to be the continued focus of revitalization efforts, are located in primarily manufacturing and commercial zones. M-2 zones permit such heavy industrial uses as metal and steel fabricating shops, foundries, and processing plants. M-1 zones permit truck terminals, fuel storage, commercial kennels, and concrete plants, among others. The C-2 commercial districts permit retail stores, motels, gas stations, restaurants and heating, plumbing and air conditioning shops, among others. As noted above, however, the southern shore of the Canal has been rezoned R-1, which does not reflect existing or the desired future land use of the area.

The present zoning of the Waterfront Revitalization Area is illustrated on Existing Zoning Map ([Map 8](#)). As highlighted in the following section, updating the zoning and land use regulations, particularly those that impact the WRA, are a high priority action by the City.

M. Summary of Key Waterfront Issues

Waterfront development in the City of Little Falls is expected to contribute significantly to an overall City revitalization over the next 10 to 15 years. The City’s strategic location, unique and beautiful setting, and

waterfront features, combined with the renewed local, State and Federal interest in Erie Canal revitalization, present the City with a timely opportunity to appropriately plan for this revitalization.

Many significant steps have been taken to date by the City and the private sector to advance waterfront revitalization, but several key waterfront issues must continue to be addressed. These issues are summarized as follows.

1. Land Use Regulation

Canal Place revitalization was initiated twelve (12) years ago with the demolition of the mammoth six-story Allegro Shoe Company manufacturing building at the corner of South Ann and West Mill Streets. This demolition served to open the entire Canal Place area to the rest of the City, and changed the entire perception of Canal Place as a heavy manufacturing area to an area very appropriate for commercial and residential use and development.

Over \$1 million in public and private funds have been utilized over the past 10 years to rehabilitate buildings, create housing units and park areas, eliminate blight, and provide direct access to the area from the Erie Canal itself.

During the preparation of this LWRP, one of two largely vacant former mill buildings was innovatively converted to an antique center and riverfront housing complex. Plans to rehabilitate the Mohawk Mill have been advanced, and low interest loan funds have been made available to assist in the financing of critically needed improvements.

On the South Side, public access and boating infrastructure at the Canal Terminal Building and Rotary Park property have been undertaken which establish the City as a major canal harbor center.

Clearly, the vision for the Little Falls waterfront has changed since 1970. The waterfront is no longer exclusively perceived as the City's industrial area. A new vision as a vibrant residential, commercial, mixed-use and public recreation center has emerged.

A special "Waterfront District" was enacted with appropriate design controls instituted to insure this new vision can be realized. Historic features must be preserved and enhanced, and older buildings adaptively reused and redeveloped. Land use and design regulations are waterfront issues of central importance to the City.

2. Linkage of the Waterfront with the Central Business District and North Side

With the watercourses of the Erie Canal and the Mohawk River and the CSX train lines separating the northern and southern portions of the City, access and transportation issues are central to waterfront revitalization in Little Falls in several key areas.

Safe vehicular and pedestrian access via the Route 167 Bridge is critical to waterfront revitalization in the City and to South Side residents, as well. The NYS Department of Transportation prepared plans for the reconstruction of the Route 167 Bridge. Of great importance to waterfront revitalization is how pedestrian access is incorporated into these plans. Bridge improvements must facilitate safe pedestrian access to and from the north and

south sides, and to the Canal Place area, as well. A separate pedestrian bridge or elevator must be incorporated into bridge reconstruction plans that address this critical need.

The problem of effectively connecting the north and south sides of the City extends beyond the need to improve the Route 167 Bridge. The improvement of South Ann Street and the Route 169 corridor between Main Street and Benton's Landing are critically important. Creating a larger docking area at Benton's Landing is critical to improving access to Canal Place and the CBD via watercraft and linking the Canal Harbor with the north side. Providing a secondary emergency access between the north and south sides has also been discussed as an important need, but no financially achievable solution to this issue has been developed to date.

3. Canal Harbor Development

As mentioned previously, considerable investment by the NYS Canal Corporation and the Department of State used for the construction of infrastructure and boater access improvements have established the City as one of seven major Canal harbor centers. Additional improvements will further strengthen the ability of the City to take advantage of canal-related tourism opportunities.

The City of Little Falls believes this Canal Harbor is critically important to the revitalization of the South Side neighborhood and the City as a whole. At present, the Little Falls Lumber Company dominates the South Side and Southern Avenue area and owns approximately 2 acres of land around the Canal Terminal Building and along the waterfront. The City would like to see the lumber company consolidate their operations, and open up the waterfront to public use to the extent feasible. Screening heavy commercial and industrial uses from the Canal Harbor area and shoreline would significantly enhance the long range development of the waterfront. An important waterfront development issue is how Canal Harbor development can help improve the Southern Avenue neighborhood coexists with current businesses and, at the same time, meet the needs of canal recreationalists.

Also, the long term redevelopment of two fuel oil properties is also very important. These properties are strategically located with respect to Canal waterfront revitalization, and could potentially be redeveloped in a manner that enhances rather than detracts from waterfront revitalization.

4. Canal Place Development and Loomis Island

The redevelopment of the Canal Place mill buildings has been previously discussed. Other buildings in the Canal Place area, including the Vincent Manufacturing, Donovan Welding, Andrew Little, and Gilbert Manufacturing Center Buildings, also have extraordinary redevelopment potential. How and to what extent these buildings can be adaptively reused is an important waterfront revitalization issue.

Similarly, Loomis Island contains a vacant, one-story structure formerly used by a dairy company as a distribution facility. The island also includes a gas utility property and three vacant and deteriorated residential structures near Benton's Landing. As part of the City's Canal Corridor

Initiative, one structure has been acquired and demolished to facilitate the expansion and improvement of Benton's Landing. Two buildings on the north side of Mohawk Street offer a variety of commercial and/or residential redevelopment opportunities, and the gas utility property has economic development potential. The western end of Loomis Island as a whole has redevelopment potential, as well. Potential development options proposed in the past have included housing, camping, and general recreation, among others. Determining the highest and best use for Loomis Island, and undertaking the island's development, is a very significant waterfront revitalization issue.

5. Central Business District Improvement

The Waterfront Revitalization Area includes the Central Business District. As described above, it is very important to the City to link the CBD with the Canal and waterfront improvements on the South Side and at Canal Place. A recently completed project helped to physically link the CBD with Canal Place by improving South Ann Street north of the CSX train line and the underpass that currently connects the two areas. The underpass improvement, however, is not believed to be the ultimate means of connecting these two important City areas. Careful planning needs to be examined for above-ground alternatives to this transportation issue.

The improvement of the Central Business District, including redevelopment of the Shoppers Square shopping mall, improvement of the Main Street commercial area, and upgrade and expansion of housing in and around the CBD, are important development issues in the WRA.

6. Future Industrial Development and Expansion

The growth of industry in Little Falls is severely constrained by topography and the limited availability of developable land with access to utility service. How the City can maximize industrial development opportunities in the Waterfront Revitalization Area is an overall development issue.

To maximize industrial development and expansion opportunities, the City needs to consider the following actions:

- Enhancement of the City's Revolving Loan Fund to leverage and assist expansion projects by new and existing industries.
- Purchase of undeveloped lands owned by LaSalle Industries within the Riverside Industrial Park.
- Extension of utility service to undeveloped lands on Route 167 owned by Eastern Herkimer County Industries, Inc.
- Purchase of the gas utility property on Loomis Island, and redevelopment of this property in a manner that supports economic and Canal revitalization goals.
- Reuse and redevelopment of older, vacant and underutilized industrial structures in the waterfront area.

- Improvements to the Sewage Treatment Plant to facilitate industrial expansion projects in the years ahead.

The implementation of each of these actions represents key waterfront issues within the overall context of maximizing industrial growth opportunities in the WRA.

7. Capitalizing on Heritage Tourism

The entire Mohawk Valley Region in general, and the City of Little Falls in particular, are endowed with historic, cultural and natural resources that create an opportunity to achieve, or, at a minimum, contribute to community revitalization through heritage tourism. Heritage tourism is predicated upon the concept of utilizing an area's historic assets as a means to help regenerate and invigorate local and regional economies. The Mohawk Valley has recently been the fifteenth location incorporated into the State's Heritage Area System (HAS), which formerly was called the Urban Cultural Parks Program. This was the State's first regional designation and recognizes the historic significance of the Mohawk Valley and the opportunity to reuse historic buildings, interpret local history, and promote heritage tourism in the area.

How the City of Little Falls utilizes and capitalizes on heritage tourism at both the regional and local levels is an important issue relative to waterfront development. The City needs to undertake revitalization efforts consistent with the heritage tourism concept, and in a manner that enhances the City's unique historic and cultural features.

8. Regional Synergy

As one of seven Canal Harbor Centers, Little Falls has been recognized for its strategic canal system location and importance in a State-wide and regional context. Revitalization of the WRA must reflect a regional synergy, and an awareness of other waterfront and canal-related projects in the area and even State-wide.

The *NYS Canal Recreationway Plan* has first and foremost recognized the need to develop the Canal System as a system in which each improvement or development action impacts the whole system, or at least other communities or facilities in the region. The redevelopment and revitalization of the Little Falls Waterfront Revitalization Area must be undertaken in a manner that is consistent with the *NYS Canal Recreationway Plan* and other actions being undertaken and/or planned in the Mohawk Valley Region.

9. Achieving Revitalization on the Local Level

The revitalization of the waterfront has been initiated through both State and local "grassroots" actions. Many diverse and active local groups and organizations have stepped forward to promote and improve the Erie Canal in Little Falls. Many local groups have effectively donated time, labor and funds to improve conditions and enable others to enjoy waterfront resources in the City, including the following:

- Canal Place Development Association;
- Little Falls Citizen's Advisory Committee;

- Mohawk Valley Recreation Trail Task Force;
- Little Falls Historic Society;
- Mohawk Valley Center for the Arts;
- Little Falls Family YMCA;
- City of Little Falls Beautification Committee;
- Little Falls Urban Renewal Agency; and
- Little Falls Canal Celebration Committee.

An important waterfront revitalization issue is how best to focus and incorporate the future efforts of these groups and organizations in the overall plan implementation effort.