

City of Niagara Falls USA

Niagara River Greenway Vision and Project Proposals



Prepared for the Niagara River Greenway Commission
Niagara River Greenway Planning Process
July 2006

Preface

*Remarks by Mayor Vincenzo V. Anello to
the Local Government Advisory Committee of the*

NIAGARA RIVER GREENWAY COMMISSION

Monday July 17, 2006

The City of Niagara Falls concurs with the New York State Legislative findings and intent with regards to the establishment of the Niagara River Greenway, including its definition of “greenway” to mean “a linear system of state and local parks and conservation areas linked by a network of multi use trails” and its purpose to redefine the Niagara riverfront through increasing landside access to the river; creating complementary access to the greenway from the river; augmenting economic revitalization efforts, and celebrating the region's heritage.

While the City and the County currently await designation of the Niagara River corridor by the US Congress as a National Heritage Area, there can be no doubt that the corridor has played a significant role in the history of the Niagara Frontier and of the United States and Canada. Therefore, the Niagara River communities in particular should take all necessary steps now that will continue to define the western New York experience into the twenty-first century as one of the world's preeminent places of nature.

Niagara Falls is a National Natural Landmark under state stewardship for more than a century that draws more than fourteen million visitors from throughout the world to the region each year. For just as long, if not longer, there have been those who have expressed a vision for the Niagara River corridor, that of a necklace of open space and conservation areas spread along the river. With many areas no longer being used for heavy industry, it is now time to complete that vision.

The Niagara River corridor is of unique environmental, cultural, and economic importance to western New York. It is a shared connection of communities and ecologies from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. Along the corridor, many “traditional” parks have been established including eleven state parks and fourteen local parks. New York State's only National Scenic Byway, the Seaway Trail, runs through the entire corridor. Greenway Planning is our opportunity to advance a non-traditional concept of park that transcends survey boundaries to encompass whole municipalities as part of a broader public strategy for social, economic, as well as, environmental regeneration of our Buffalo-Niagara region. Therefore, in areas that are not contiguous with the waterfront, programmatic linkages should be used by the Greenway Commission to establish consistency with its legislative purposes and intent.

Niagara Falls and Buffalo while at the heart of the river corridor, much of their waterfront has in the past been dedicated to industrial uses. Therefore, as these uses continue to wane, it is Niagara Falls and Buffalo in particular that should be at the nexus of any regional effort to redefine the Niagara River corridor and revitalize the regional economy.

Therefore, the City of Niagara Falls, the first municipality to propose a system of multi-jurisdictional riverfront recreational trails (1992), conduct a regional visioning exercise on the future of Niagara Falls and the region (1997), and propose a regional program of waterfront heritage interpretive venues or tourist “Discovery Centers” (2002), is hereby prepared to support any Greenway Commission plan that focuses geographically on the Niagara River and its adjacent tributaries, and specifically includes “identified” upland natural, open space, recreational, and scenic resources combined with a policy toward greenway land-management that is; in the first instance, designed to preserve and add to these resources, beginning with those resources that are of the highest and best ecological and/or recreational value regionally, and; in the second instance is designed to repair damage done to the land by former industrial or commercial waterfront uses.

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Introduction

After decades of technical planning and public discussion, Niagara Falls is on a firm foundation for immediate action. We already know what needs to be done and we are doing it. The Niagara River Greenway Commission Plan should base its efforts on the best ideas from dozens of different plans, reports, studies and proposals for Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and the Niagara River waterfront and craft an aggressive strategy to help Niagara Falls assume more central role in the economic resurgence of the entire region.

City projects put forth in our draft LWRP or in our award-winning *Achieving Niagara Falls' Future: Waterfront Agenda* (on which most of this report is based), or the *Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan* are feasible, have citizen support and, taken together, will have transformative impact for the region generally, but most noticeably in the City of Niagara Falls. These projects deserve to be developed and implemented. The strategy that connects these projects is straightforward and powerful. It aims to achieve the development of economy, environment, and community together and it is driven by three principles:

- ❑ **First, re-connect Niagara Falls – its downtown and neighborhoods alike – with the Niagara River waterfront.**
- ❑ **Second, repair and improve both the urban and natural environments for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.**
- ❑ **Third, develop the means to tell the compelling stories of the city and region to build the visitor industry and create meaning for those who live here.**

These principles provide a strategic framework that organizes the City of Niagara Falls waterfront projects. The principles also offer a means to evaluate and prioritize all of the projects and proposals that may follow, and therefore, should serve to guide continuing planning being carried out on behalf of all WNY communities by the Greenway Commission. Two major projects already have a broad base of public and private support. One is to complete the installation of the waterfront trail system from city line to city line. The other is to mitigate the negative impact of the Robert Moses Parkway on waterfront access, urban environment, and regional image. Completing the trail and mitigating the parkway will be important steps toward making visible the fact that Niagara is a great place to live, work, and visit. Significantly, both of these projects are moving ahead.

We must also create a regional visitor attraction—The Niagara Experience Center—as the brightest new star in what should become an expanding constellation of heritage and cultural interpretive venues. The Niagara Experience Center would be the hub of a comprehensive set of attractions and amenities collectively referred to as — *Niagara River Heritage Discovery Centers*. The Niagara Experience Center would be a point of orientation and embarkation for all major heritage opportunities throughout the bi-national Niagara region.

This recommendation is rooted in past plans and responsive to powerful global trends in travel and education. More simply put, however, it is time to let the world discover the stories of this entire region, starting in the Park-City by the falls and now being extended lake-to-lake. There

is no place better to tell the stories of the geology that formed the cataract, the Iroquois Nation, the marriage of power and industry, great feats of civil engineering, Frederick Law Olmsted's vision for the Falls, City, and Park, and of the landscape and ecology that sets a context for all of our stories. There is no better place to begin such a regional regeneration strategy than beside one of the world's best-known places.

Making this, or any, strategy a success requires that we get to work and keep talking at the same time. Many different agencies have responsibility for the sites and projects crucial to creating the Niagara River Greenway and achieving a renewed Greater Niagara Region each must work out a way to move forward. At the same time, a continuing conversation is needed to develop a broader vision for what the City and region can become. We know this much already: the Falls, the gorge, and the Niagara waterfront are the City's greatest assets and should always remain at the center of plans for its economic revitalization.

A regional strategy for creating a Niagara River Greenway should not include the investments, that must be made in hotels, restaurants, shopping facilities, entertainment venues, and other visitor amenities, if the Buffalo-Niagara region is going to capture the full economic benefit of the growing tourism market. Instead, it should anticipate that a regional greenway is meant to make such investments more attractive and more likely by a sustained focus on regenerating the physical environment particularly the region's waterfront areas, thereby reshaping its public image, and repositioning western New York as the natural and cultural counterpoint to Niagara Falls, Ontario. Private sector investors say they have been waiting for a signal that the public sector is ready to do its part to lead on such a strategy for regenerating Niagara Falls. The City of Niagara Falls' waterfront strategy and development program, together with the USA Niagara Development Corporation's downtown strategy sends that message loud and clear. The Vision needs to be extended and re-interpreted within each river community lake-to-lake.

The City wants to take immediate advantage of existing waterfront plans to build momentum to seize the major development opportunities before this community as it enters the 21st century. The community has been asked to spell out its needs and desires many times, and many times the citizens have expressed their vision.

The people of Niagara Falls know that the water is the jewel of their city. They recognize that the river, the falls, and the waterfront were the foundation on which the community was built, and will be the foundation for Niagara Falls' future. They want a city that protects, and enhances these assets – and one that is shaped by them. They want a city that achieves its prosperity by being true to its highest traditions and values, and they seek partners from outside the community to respect those best aspirations. For a variety of reasons, few of the projects and proposals in existing waterfront plans have yet been implemented. Public resources have been lacking, intergovernmental agreement elusive, market linkages and demand missing, or a clear program of action absent. Let all greenway stakeholders work to ensure that the situation has changed dramatically.

The civic administration in Niagara Falls is resolved and determined to move the city forward. The State and the federal governments have both made new commitments to create the capacity for development, and to move forward with a program of action. The moment is ripe for a strategy based on the assumption that the environmental regeneration of Niagara River communities must go hand in hand with its economic rebirth. The City's own project proposals, put forward here with other emerging initiatives in mind are heavily weighed toward the development of natural and cultural heritage, environmental repair, and waterfront access. They are understood as interconnected and interdependent with the work of the USA Niagara Corp. in redeveloping downtown Niagara Falls, New York State Parks' plans for reinvestment in their assets, and the City's own strategic master plan.

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SUMMARY

Despite the passage of time, many of the individual elements in Niagara Falls waterfront plans produced over the past two decades remain desirable and feasible. We recommend implementation of four of these major plan elements based on their capacity to recapture public access to the waterfront and attract citizens and visitors. Niagara Falls should:

- ❑ Install a waterfront trail system (and associated amenities) to extend from one city line to the other and connect Niagara Falls to the region;
- ❑ Reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway to reconnect downtown and adjacent commercial districts and neighborhoods to the waterfront access and improve environmental quality;
- ❑ Implement a comprehensive waterfront naturalization program for upper river, park, and gorge; and,
- ❑ Plan for the future of Niagara Falls' "green structure."

There are precedents in these past plans, strong public support now, and strong justification in global market trends, for investments in waterfront improvements to help tell the community and the world the compelling stories of Niagara Falls and its region. Therefore, the city and the region should:

- ❑ Develop a comprehensive celebration and interpretation of Niagara Falls' natural and cultural heritage --- featuring, and beginning with, a world class "Niagara Experience Center."
- ❑ Develop select natural and cultural heritage themes generally—begin a program of research and interpretation to develop the means to tell Niagara's stories.
- ❑ Develop select natural and cultural heritage sites, specifically (as research and/or funding is completed).

Based on this analysis, and in recognition of the community's oft-expressed vision, we also recommend the adoption of five waterfront goals to guide the regeneration of Niagara Falls waterfront in the 21st century. We should:

- ❑ Achieve the most naturally beautiful, environmentally healthy, and publicly accessible waterfront possible for the citizens of Niagara;
- ❑ Maintain power generation and existing industrial uses at appropriate locations along the waterfront;
- ❑ Celebrate & promote the unique natural & cultural heritage of Niagara to enhance the waterfront as a tourist destination and to grow the economy.
- ❑ Improve the connection between downtown and the Niagara Reservation through high-quality urban and landscape design; and
- ❑ Make sure all actions serve the interests of the people of Niagara Falls as well as those of the region, the State, the nation, Canadian neighbors, and visitors from around the world.

In addition to the city-wide recommendations listed above, and the package of heritage development initiatives linked to the Niagara Experience Center, as well as, to other (existing or future) Niagara River Heritage Discovery Centers and/or Cultural Institutions, there are also recommendations made in three discrete geographical areas of Niagara Falls:

- ❑ The upper river**
- ❑ The downtown/Niagara Reservation interface, and**
- ❑ The lower river and gorge**

(Niagara Falls is central to greenway. it is critical therefore, to ensure successful clustering and linkages for themed attractions are well established at or near the center if the strategy is to achieve broad success.)

Further, existing land uses and ownership should be explored in detail and evaluated to identify opportunities for private investment. These investment opportunities should go beyond those outlined as "public/private" in the project descriptions and analysis charts herein. They should establish the foundation for future discussions with the local and global business interests that will be making future investments in Niagara Falls's waterfront and in other Greenway communities along Corridor.

Therefore, all levels of government should act to:

- ❑ Reconcile and consolidate the waterfront plans to ensure that a physical, linear, and connective greenway can be achieved and will be recognizable to visitors to the region, and**
- ❑ Negotiate the comprehensive agreements that will be necessary so that, together with the State and federal agencies, funding can be focused on priorities with the biggest pay-off in the region's economic activity and environmental conservation. This is the essence of planning for the Niagara River, "greenway." Create and establish a legacy for Niagara's next 100 years that will ensure that Niagara is known and recognized as a special place of nature – and not just a amusement park next to a waterfall.**

The program outlined above and detailed below is a challenging one. It will require significant investments, both public and private, in basic infrastructure, visitor infrastructure, and the most significantly in the environment. It will demand great patience and continuity of vision. Moreover, it will need extraordinary cooperation and coordination among a wide array of participants. Nevertheless, it can be done. It can be expanded and extrapolated through out the River Corridor. The reward will be the achievement of Niagara's greatest possible future.

Niagara Falls Waterfront Recommended Projects

CITYWIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Bike and pedestrian trail system A.1

Direct access by pedestrians to the Niagara River waterfront is the foundation of this strategy. Therefore, as soon as possible, implement existing plans for a pedestrian and bike way to run continuously along the entire length of the Niagara Falls waterfront. It is important to make sure that the path is well connected to adjacent neighborhoods and the city street pattern for easy local access.

2. Naturalize Niagara River shoreline and gorge A.2

The waterfront should be natural and beautiful. Therefore, areas adjacent to the river, including the rim of the gorge, the Reservation, and the upper river stream bank, should be naturalized as much as possible through removal of paved surfaces and new plantings of trees and native plants. This will improve the environment and enhance the quality of views. It is acceptable to mow where needed for picnickers and other users, but the use of natural plants will cut maintenance costs and add to the enjoyment of users. Naturalizing the gorge rim will also help strengthen the buffer between city and fragile gorge ecosystems.

3. Reconfigure Robert Moses Parkway A.3

The Robert Moses Parkway presents an almost continuous barrier between the city and its waterfront. So egregious has been the intrusion that the most important planning efforts of the last two decades have all suggested ways to mitigate the impact of the Parkway. These include the Niagara Falls Waterfront Master Plan by Sasaki Associates (1992), the Citizens Map of Niagara Falls by the Waterfront Regeneration Trust (1997), the Jerde Partnership development plan for Niagara Falls Redevelopment Corp. (1998), and the Main Street Plan by the City of Niagara Falls. (2001).

A range of treatment options should be considered to reduce the negative impact of the Parkway on the waterfront environment and as a barrier between city neighborhoods and the river, falls, and gorge. These should include elimination of lanes, removal of sections of the highway, reduction of speed limits, and introduction of at-grade intersections with the intent of reducing or eliminating automobile traffic and increasing pedestrian access. The issue requires a great deal of additional technical work, design study, and public discussion. It will almost surely involve different approaches in different locations and contexts. But given the Parkway's limited value for transportation and its substantial conflicts with the goals of waterfront redevelopment in Niagara Falls, a systematic reconfiguration of the Parkway is an absolute requirement of this strategy.

4. Plan the Niagara Falls "Green Structure" A.4

Within the borders of Niagara Falls, there are hundreds of acres of old industrial lands, disused railway rights of way, New York Power Authority lands and other utility corridors, vacant lots, and otherwise unused urban land. In some ways, such lands are a burden, but they also offer a unique opportunity to expand and link the city's open space system in a way that better connects neighborhoods to the waterfront and repays the promise of the "City in the Park." These lands also extend beyond the Niagara Falls city line and thus hold out an opportunity to connect city "green structure" with the broader regional system of open space. The times to acquire, repair, and develop such lands for public uses may be long in the future. But the time is now right to survey, strategize, and plan for the recovery of these resources.

5. The City of Niagara Falls Family Museum B.1

Niagara Falls needs an excellent visitor attraction in a world-class building. Its purpose, to be the centerpiece of a system of natural and cultural heritage attractions. It will need to perform at a very high level and therefore it must be very high quality but also a family-orientated attraction in downtown Niagara Falls. Preferably, in a prime location downtown near the edge of the Niagara Reservation. A Family Museum proposal has already begun to take shape as *the Niagara Experience Center*. This experiential "center" would be the first place that visitors go when they come to Niagara Falls. It would be the place where they see exhibits to help them understand the breath and scope of the region's many and varied offerings, nature's beauty, Olmsted's park legacy, cultural venues, and local history. It would not only provide professional orientation to this great river region, but the nearby attractions as well. The museum would be designed and programmed to appeal to visitors of all ages and family situation, and to visitors from around the world. Its exhibits would be "cutting edge" - high-tech and high-touch with maximum use of interactive computers and video.

6. Brownfield regeneration and new green structures

The Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan recommends positioning contaminated lands and former industrial production lands for long-term renewal by undertaking the studies necessary to understand the type and extent of contamination, long-term priority remediation areas, the types of remediation techniques or solutions which are available, possible adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings given knowledge concerning site contaminants and feasible potential uses and associated order of magnitude cost estimates for priority site clean up. With these studies complete, the City should embark on a program aimed at reducing the impact industrial uses have had on the image residents, investors and visitors have of Niagara Falls. Brownfield regeneration offers the opportunity to introduce extensive landscape buffering along the edge of brownfield sites (undertaken in partnership with private landowners when necessary) to create interim and long-term regeneration areas where nature is allowed. The results of the program will serve to visually and physically reduce the impacts of these properties on adjacent land uses, particularly residential neighborhoods and the riverfront, and assist in recreating a more attractive image for the Niagara region generally, and Niagara Falls specifically.

Celebrating Niagara Falls' Heritage

Create a World Class Visitor Attraction

The Niagara Experience Center would be the brightest star in a constellation of other museums and interpretive sites that would constitute the "Niagara River Heritage Discovery Centers" (see below) and others throughout the city. The Niagara Experience Center would introduce visitors to the compelling stories of Niagara Falls and the region, and then direct them on to other sites where they can learn and experience more. The City of Niagara Falls Family Museum should be in a building so wonderful that people come just to see it – the same way people flock to Bilbao, Spain to see Gehry's Guggenheim. The museum should also be located where it can best provide a point of reception and orientation for visitors. And it should stimulate active street life and help connect the city with the park.

Develop complimentary Niagara River Heritage "Discovery Centers" such as:

Extending the stay of visitors – always a goal of tourism development – means expanding the array of sites and stories that can command their interest and curiosity. A major new investment in other educational and interpretive facilities in the Niagara River Corridor are required. Yet simply encouraging more will not be enough, quality in new development and in existing venues will need to be raised to match the competitiveness of the marketplace. Toward that end, we propose creation of a series of interrelated and linked museums, exhibits, and attractions to be known collectively as the Niagara River Heritage Discovery Centers. They can celebrate and interpret the many stories Niagara Falls has to tell – the Olmsted legacy, the history of civil engineering and of hydroelectric power, of the natural history and geology of the falls and gorge. Significantly, these can be developed incrementally as market and financing allows, and takes a range of forms from modest to elaborate. It is anticipated that heritage "discovery centers," whether new or existing, will populate the entire Greenway corridor, lake to lake, in a coordinated manner.

7. Frederick Law Olmsted Interpretive Center B.2

One of the primary stories to tell is about the Niagara Reservation itself and the inspiration of Frederick Law Olmsted that helped create it. We propose the renovation of either the current visitors center or the recently restored historic Horse Stable complex on Goat Island to accommodate a new Olmsted Interpretive Center. The center would explain how Olmsted's philosophy and designs influenced, not only our experience and understanding of Niagara, but also the development of landscapes throughout the nation. Olmsted understood that visitors to Niagara were motivated by a wish "to be astonished" as well as to enjoy the "pensive contemplation" of

distinctive beauty. An exhibit area in the renovated facility would provide clear directional cues to the park, as well as interpretation of the Olmsted legacy. Placing the Olmsted exhibit in the Horse Stable will make it possible to consider other future uses for the current visitors center.

8. History of Civil Engineering exhibition B.3

Niagara Falls has a rich history of civil engineering feats in the service of transportation, from early portages, to gorge railroads, and successive international bridge crossings. An interpretive exhibit beneath the Rainbow Bridge plaza could reveal this history for visitors at the same time it draws them from Prospect Point toward GorgeView Park. Signage, lighting, pedestrian amenities, and exhibits would explain the history and encourage visitors to explore the variety of other educational and "discovery" opportunities along the Niagara River gorge such as the remnants of historic bridge crossings or the site of the first railway in North America.

9. Niagara Gorge Discovery Center and trailhead expansion B.4

The geological history of Niagara Falls is already interpreted through the facilities of the Schoellkopf Geological Museum. The richness of this story and the interest of the public, however, have suggested the need for the museum to be updated, expanded, and revitalized. The New York State Office of Parks is preparing plans to expand and renovate the facility at its current location. The building, to be renamed the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center, has a magnificent view of the gorge, and has great potential to serve as a trailhead for explorations of the gorge itself.

10. Early Hydroelectric Power and Industrial Heritage Museum B.5

The development of hydroelectric power in Niagara Falls is a story of world significance warranting a major investment in interpretive facilities and program. We propose creation of a new museum to be located on the concrete platform that was the roof of the discharge tunnels of the Schoellkopf hydroelectric power plant. The museum would provide space for exhibits on the early history of electric power; provide views of the gorge and the 200-foot-high stone wall that hides the water conduits of the plant; and offer new access to industrial heritage trails in the gorge by way of an elevator built into the original elevator shaft. The programming of the museum should be developed in a way that complements interpretive programs provided at the New York Power Authority Power Vista in Lewiston.

Natural History Interpretive and Visitor Amenity Center B.6

Whirlpool State Park is a popular site for people who want to hike and experience nature in the gorge. There is a great opportunity to make these visits easier and more enjoyable and, at the same time, lessen the impact visitors make on the natural setting itself. If we create a Natural History Interpretive and Visitor Amenity Center, adjacent to Whirlpool State Park on the DeVeaux campus, we can serve visitors better and soften our footprints in the gorge.

The location already offers visitors breathtaking vistas and physical access to gorge trails and fishing spots. A Visitor Amenity Center, outside of the natural gorge environment but nearby, would provide restrooms and concessions, tourist information and interactive destination planning.

A Natural History Interpretive Center, also located outside of the gorge, would tell the stories of the culture, environment and history of the Niagara eco-region. It would also teach visitors about rare plant and animal species – especially birds – found in the gorge.

The center would also serve as an additional trailhead or gateway for gorge hikers. Access to the gorge high-bank should be provided in the vicinity of the Whirlpool Bridge. Access into the gorge and the great rapids should also be considered, perhaps by elevators. The State Parks maintenance facility should be relocated away from the gorge rim.

Develop other heritage interpretation sites:

Opportunities for expanding the array of educational and interpretive sites extend well beyond those represented in The Niagara Experience Center and the Niagara Discovery Center. The stories of continental exploration, frontier conflict, the struggle for freedom, as well as the industrial heritage of Niagara Falls, all will find their audience and deserve to be told. As each of these is developed it should be connected to the larger system of heritage interpretation facilities through information, orientation and way-finding mechanisms.

11. Love Canal Education and Interpretation Center B.7

Love Canal was a pivotal event in the history of the global environmental movement. It was the first federally declared "toxic waste disaster site," designated by President Carter in 1980. It was a tragic event in the lives of many individuals, but it also gave birth to a grassroots environmental movement that has had a tremendous impact on the world. Love Canal provided the catalyst for significant changes in the way the industry handles hazardous waste and initiated state and federal legislation resulting in more responsible management of these materials. It is an important story and needs to be told. The proposal for a Love Canal Education and Interpretation Center deserves public sector support to provide educational exhibits and programming on the role of Love Canal and Niagara Falls in the growth of the environmental protection movement. Work on such a center could involve exhibition materials in The Niagara Experience Center downtown as well as landscape interpretations at the Love Canal site or at the nearby historic LaSalle Library.

12. Develop Griffon Park interpretive materials B.8

In the late 17th century, the French explorer LaSalle built a ship, the Griffon, at a spot on the bank of the upper Niagara River. Today, the 20-acre park at the site, which was lost to the public during a decade of environmental remediation and litigation, is under redevelopment.

Planned work will restore access to the shore of the Little Niagara River, provide continuity for future trail extensions, ensure scenic vistas, and help meet local recreational needs. The site offers further potential for interpretation of early water-dependent industries, including shipbuilding, and the annals of explorers like LaSalle.

13. Buffalo Avenue Industrial heritage route B.9

Although, often understood as in conflict with the local aspiration for tourism development, the city's long and rich industrial heritage represents an

important part of the story of Niagara Falls about which visitors may want to know more. From the earliest users of mechanical waterpower, to the growth of hydroelectric-powered manufacturers, and on to modern chemical making, the stories of Niagara Falls industry deserve to be researched, developed, and told. One possibility would be to create a Buffalo Avenue industrial heritage route, which could be incorporated into a broader system of Niagara Falls heritage interpretation. New industries should be included along with older industries. Interpretation would be through kiosks and signage, supported by a map of a tour loop, with public tours of contemporary industry where possible.

14. Intake Park overlook and Fort Schlosser interpretive venue B.10

The Upper River water intakes for hydroelectric power generation provide a natural point of entry – substantively as well as logistically – to the story of electric power. We recommend the further development of Intake Park to provide both recreational access to the river and expanded interpretive opportunities.

For those entering the city from the south, Intake Park would be a logical point at which to orient visitors to a "Power Route" linking several sites related to the hydro-power story specifically and to the heritage interpretation system overall. It would also be the appropriate site to tell the story of Fort Schlosser, which was captured during British incursions in the region during the War of 1812. Located at the proposed intersection of the Robert Moses Parkway and Hyde Park Boulevard (see proposal C.6 below – "Connect City to RiverView Trail and Parkway at Hyde Park Boulevard") the park would also provide an additional point of access to the waterfront trail.

15. Adams Power Station: Transformer House adaptive re-use B.11

One of the earliest hydroelectric generation facilities in Niagara Falls was the Adams Power Plant along the upper Niagara River. It was featured in Lauren Belfer's historical novel, *City of Light*, as a symbol of the burgeoning hydroelectric industry at the beginning of the 20th century. It presents an extraordinary opportunity for reuse as an interpretive facility.

The State should move immediately to purchase the old Adams Power Plant, and State and City should negotiate with Niagara Mohawk to improve surrounding properties. The facility should be restored and included in a "Power Route" interpretive trail. This visitor route would link the Adams Power Plant with Intake Park (project B.10), RiverView Park (C.8), a "revealed" Hydraulic Canal (B.12), the Early Hydroelectric, and Industrial Heritage Museum (B.5), and the Power Vista in Lewiston. Access to the Adams site could be from the Robert Moses Parkway and from a Portage Road extension (see project C.7).

16. Reveal and Interpret the old Hydraulic Canal sites B.12

The Hydraulic Canal was a significant element in the history of Niagara Falls. It connected the upper river with the gorge across the city. It helped provide power to industry, facilitated transportation, and gave form to the city. It deserves to be interpreted and "revealed."

While any sort of thorough reconstruction is clearly infeasible, there are a variety of ways that it could be marked, remembered, or celebrated. Its distinctive diagonal section of the city could be marked by open space

and plantings; it could be remembered simply through interpretive signage; or a small section of the canal could be recreated to show what it might have been like. Such a remembrance also has potential to serve as an important cross-town pedestrian link. See project D.13.

17. Underground Railroad Interpretive site B.13

Before the U.S. Civil War, thousands of fugitive slaves, escaping from the South, came through the Niagara Frontier on their way to freedom in Canada. Like a number of locations along the Niagara River and on both sides of the international border, Niagara Falls has a rich history of involvement in what became known as "the Underground Railroad."

A local organization has expressed strong interest in developing the resources to tell this story. The Customs House at the Whirlpool Bridge is one possible location for such exhibits, and which could be part of a larger tour extending from Buffalo through Niagara Falls and on to St. Catharines.

18. Whirlpool Customhouse restoration and reuse B.14

One of Niagara Falls' lesser-known treasures is the former U.S. Customs House. The stone edifice at the Whirlpool Bridge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was built in 1863 as the point of entry for Niagara Falls and is now vacant.

It presents obvious possibilities for renovation and reuse, including as a site for a new Amtrak railway station (see project E.4.), or as a place for interpretive exhibits perhaps on the Seaway Trail or Underground Railroad.

19. Niagara Arts and Cultural Center B.15

The former Niagara Falls High School, built in 1924 and closed as a high school in 2000, is an important historic landmark and community asset. Located at the intersection of Pine Avenue and Portage Road, the building is minutes from the downtown tourist area and at the beginning of the city's "Little Italy" neighborhood. Its distinguished architecture, pleasant grounds, and gracious spaces make it an extraordinary resource for Niagara Falls. Save Our Sites, Inc., a community-based grassroots organization in Niagara Falls, has mobilized to save the school and press for its regeneration as the Niagara Arts and Cultural Center. The anticipated program for the NACC includes performance, studio, and gallery space for visual and performing artists, as well as restaurants, shops, and other community uses.

The NACC offers an unusual opportunity, not only to provide for local arts and cultural activities, but to make a connection between the local Niagara Falls community and large numbers of international visitors to the Falls. The Niagara Arts and Cultural Center needs and deserves public support to save a valuable building and bring this program to fruition.

The upper Niagara River as it runs along the Niagara Falls waterfront is a broad and breathtaking expanse of water, its power veiled by an illusion of placidness. But the waterfront is sterile and cut off from city neighborhoods by industrial land and the Robert Moses Parkway. The broad strategy for the upper river is to provide continuous access to the waterfront through completion of the pedestrian and bike trail; to improve the environment through plantings and naturalization; to mitigate the impact of the Parkway; and to expand the connections between the city and trails, recreational opportunities, interpretive sites, and the water itself.

Upper River Recommended Projects

SHORT TERM

The upper Niagara River as it runs along the Niagara Falls waterfront is a broad and breathtaking expanse of water, its power veiled by an illusion of placidness. But the waterfront is sterile and cut off from city neighborhoods by industrial land and the Robert Moses Parkway.

The broad strategy for the upper river is to provide continuous access to the waterfront through completion of the pedestrian and bike trail; to improve the environment through plantings and naturalization; to mitigate the impact of the Parkway; and to expand the connections between the city and trails, recreational opportunities, interpretive sites, and the water itself.

These plantings would also improve habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife. Modification of the shoreline to provide current breaks and other "natural" features would improve fish habitat and increase sport fishing opportunities. Implementation of this element in the shorter term might involve participation by community groups or local youth organizations in volunteer planting projects.

20. Bike and pedestrian trail system C.1

Implementation of the bike and pedestrian trail plan in the upper river area will involve construction of the trail from the Niagara Reservation to the east city line and beyond. A major trailhead is located at the Century Club site at the Grand Island Bridge and is addressed below. The entire trail would also connect the Reservation with the proposed RiverView Park, the Intake Promenade, the 53rd Street Docks, Griffon Park, other city neighborhood parks, elements of the Niagara River Heritage Discovery Centers, and beyond to Erie Canal and Erie County pedestrian facilities.

21. Naturalize Niagara River shoreline C.2

The Upper River shoreline, as it exists today, is an artificial by-product of highway construction, without visual interest or natural function. Naturalization of the Upper River shoreline would improve the character of views and the quality of the waterfront environment through the introduction of native trees and plants.

Such plantings may be used to screen from view adjacent industrial facilities, but could also serve to highlight views of the Buffalo Avenue factories, as well as to frame views of the river.

These plantings would also improve habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife. Modification of the shoreline to provide current breaks and other "natural" features would improve fish habitat and increase sport-fishing opportunities. Implementation of this element in the shorter term might involve participation by community groups or local youth organizations in volunteer planting projects.

This naturalization and/or restoration of ecological function should be extended to any and all major river tributaries and wetlands within the Greenway or LWRP boundaries or nearby such as Black Creek and the Williams Road/Colvin Boulevard wetlands.

LONG TERM

22. Reconfigure R. Moses Parkway to "boulevard" C.3

At a minimum, the Robert Moses Parkway should be reconfigured as a slow speed boulevard-style "riverside drive" from the Grand Island Bridge to Daly Boulevard in order to mitigate the negative impact of the highway on the waterfront environment, to facilitate pedestrian access to the bike and pedestrian trail and to the river's edge, and to encourage redevelopment of new, more water-dependent and water-enhanced land uses and urban built form along the waterfront. Reconfiguration must consider a reduction in speed limit, and the introduction of at-grade intersections, with an option for the provision of on-road and/or roadside parking.

23. Preserve Century Club trailhead C.4

The site of the former "Century Club" is a crucial location for the successful development and use of the waterfront pedestrian and bike trail and must be developed in a way that requires the preservation of public waterfront access. The site is highly visible to northbound motorists on Interstate I-190 approaching the foot of the Grand Island Bridge. It should serve as gateway, announcement, and enticement to users of the trail.

This requirement is not necessarily in conflict with other proposals for "intensification" of the site, but any companion development should provide significant access to the trail and to the waterfront, public amenities and accommodation for cyclists, boaters, anglers, pedestrians, and other users, and especially continuity for the trail itself, its operation and maintenance.

24. Expand Griffon Park – establish direct access to shore

Park expansion and development will include new interpretive elements, such as kiosks and signage to interpret historic events involving the explorer LaSalle and his ship, *The Griffon* and an amphitheater. The most important improvement should be to the existing launch and moorings.

Expansion should also make purposeful use of the areas between river road and the expressway and, to the extent possible, parts of the 102nd landfill, particularly areas that enable shoreline access. Other improvements should include upgrades to the picnic area, outdoors furniture, plantings, paving the parking areas and considerably more organic material, trees and other plantings. Similar to the former Century Club site, this site may be considered for intensification, but with the same reservations.

25. Restore Jayne Park and other Waterfront "linkable" parks

Restore Jayne Park and reconnect it to the Little Niagara River. Considered improvements to the 20.9 acre park include the addition of a picnic shelter, comfort station, benches, pedestrian walks along the water, installation of significant new landscaping, upgrading of playground equipment and little league accommodations,

and the addition of off-street parking. Remedies to Jayne Park are crucial in order to create a healthy, attractive, and connected green space along the waterfront. Improvements should also include dedicated canoe launch facilities.

While, every Greenway community should make a systematic effort to rehabilitate, improve and expand public parks and recreational facilities, and add new green structures whenever feasible, the City intends to implement a specific program to enhance city parks, which can be linked into a linear system of multi-use trails. Parks proposed for specific greenway improvement include: Griffon, Gill Creek, 60th St, 70th St, 91st St, Caravelle Dr, Hennepin, Hyde, Center Court, Liberty Parks, and the Abate School Playground.

26. Extend the LaSalle Expressway west to connect downtown

Consideration should be given to coordinating the reconfiguration of the RMP between the I-190 and downtown with the inevitable replacement of the Grand Island Bridges within the next twenty-year planning horizon. This major transportation improvement will offer the opportunity for the Community to relocate highway interchange functions inland, allowing the extension of the LaSalle Expressway (former railway) corridor west toward downtown, coming to grade at a new major intersection with Hyde Park Blvd. continuing along the current Buffalo Ave. alignment west from Hyde Park Blvd. This reconfiguration creates a safer more functional highway network with greater capacity and connectivity. Not insignificantly, this new configuration diminishes the relevance of the RMP as a connecting expressway, while creating new opportunities for an expanded “greenway” and associated neighborhood redevelopment.

27. Extend RiverView Trail through the LaSalle Expressway Corridor

Reconstruction of the LaSalle Expressway creates the opportunity to re-align the roadway to provide room for constructing a multi-use trail extension of the River View Trail north and east from the Century Club Trailhead (within the ROW). This establishes the continuous link between the east city line and the RiverView section of the Niagara River Greenway Trail. This section of the waterfront trail is very much a neighborhood “recreational trail” not only providing easy access to/from the river’s shore, but also linking the various LaSalle neighborhoods, which find themselves separated by the expressway.

28. Improve Cayuga Creek as a connection and its ecological function

Cayuga Creek should be strengthened as an important physical connection and new green structure opportunity linking the adjacent neighborhoods to the Upper Niagara and Little Niagara River. The creek is one of only two water-based links from the river into the city and should be actively managed as part of the city’s open space network removing overgrowth and investing in habitat restoration that improve its ecological function. While connection to the river is envisioned via establishing, a “urban canoe trail” and an exclusive canoe launch.

29. Connect City to RiverView Trail and Parkway at 53rd Street C.5

Connect 53rd Street to the Robert Moses Parkway at a city-style at-grade intersection. This will create easy access to existing dock facilities from both the adjacent neighborhoods and the Parkway itself and create a new waterfront trailhead and fishing access point. At the same time, this will calm the flow of traffic on the reconfigured parkway.

30. Connect City to RiverView Trail and Hyde Park Boulevard to Parkway at Hyde Park Boulevard C.6

Extend Hyde Park Boulevard to connect with the Robert Moses Parkway at a city-style at-grade intersection. This will provide access to the proposed Intake Park, discussed above, as well as create another new access point for the waterfront trail, and connect the trail to adjacent neighborhood streets. The intersection will also help slow traffic on the reduced parkway.

31. Restore Hyde Park and Hyde Park Lake

The City's premier park and set of recreational facilities

32. Improve Gill Creek as a connection and its ecological function

Gill Creek should be strengthened as an important physical connection and new green structure opportunity linking Hyde Park and surrounding neighborhoods to the Upper Niagara River at the proposed upgraded Intake Park. The creek is one of only two water-based links from the river into the city and could be better integrated within the city's open space network with new plantings and a natural environment emphasizing its ecological functions. While connection to the river may be very long-term proposition, at least part of the creek corridor should be improved to include an accessible walking trail.

33. Utility R-O-W's as a connection and new green structure

NYPA conduit lands and lands owned by National Grid should be improved and incorporated into a useful part of the new open space network of new green structures. In this instance expanding Hyde Park's recreational and ecological footprint east and south. This new reach used to establish an accessible walking and cycling route linking Hyde Park and Gill Creek to the waterfront.

34. Connect City to RiverView Trail and Parkway at Portage Road C.7

Extend (and turn) Portage Road to connect with the Robert Moses Parkway and waterfront trailhead at a new city-style at-grade intersection. This extension and intersection will provide new access between the trail and city neighborhoods and further calm traffic on the downgraded Parkway. It will also provide access for interpretive facilities at the Adams Plant (above) and to the proposed RiverView Park (below).

35. RiverView Park: birding area and overlook C.8

One of the richest and most promising redevelopment sites on the upper river, ironically, is often referred to as the "spoils pile." The site is strategically located on the broad upper reach of the river, and it is large enough to accommodate an ambitious and varied program of recreation, education, historic interpretation, and visitor orientation.

This program should feature a proposal such as the Audubon Society/ Buffalo Ornithological Society's idea for The Bird Observatory, taking advantage of the Upper River's status as a world-class birding area. It can also accommodate historic interpretation of the Adams intake canal and "Old Stone Chimney" and interpretation of NYPA's working boat docks.

Recreational opportunities would be largely of a passive nature with facilities for picnicking and related activities. As a trailhead to the waterfront pedestrian and bikeway, it is a site capable of providing visitor orientation to the overall waterfront visitor experience.

The processes of vegetative succession have already gone a long way toward recreating the "spoils pile" as a natural area, an evolution that should be encouraged and maintained. Overall, this must be considered a high priority project. Necessary negotiations with the Power Authority, which owns the site, should be opened as soon as possible.

36. Remove Parkway from Daly Boulevard to Main Street C.9

Create a new "south gateway" to the Niagara Reservation State Park and to downtown. Given the reconfigured through-connections from the Robert Moses Parkway to Daly Boulevard and Rainbow Boulevard, it is possible to consider the outright removal of the Parkway from Daly Boulevard to Main Street. This would allow for the conversion of the highway-style fly-over interchange at Daly Boulevard to an at-grade connection. More importantly, it will make land available for recreation, public access, green space, waterfront housing, small hotels, and bed and breakfast lodging.

This will further emphasize Daly Boulevard as a city gateway at the same time it ameliorates a major negative impact on the waterfront environment. Accomplishing this will require careful rationalizing of arrival routes, traveler orientation, and access to parking facilities.

NF State Park/ City Interface Recommended Projects

The Niagara Reservation is the most frequently visited state park in America, and well it deserves to be, for it provides access, not only to the great cataract, but also to the dramatic rapids and to other astounding views from Goat Island. But the distressed downtown area immediately adjacent is cut off from the park in many ways by traffic and an ill-designed urban environment.

The overall strategy for the interface between the Niagara Reservation and downtown Niagara Falls is to strengthen the connections between the two through landscaping, paving, and the redesign of both park and city elements, and to lay the foundations for expanded interpretive facilities and programming.

This strategy understands the physical and perceptual separation of the Niagara Reservation from the city center as a hindrance to the long-term development of economic activities in the downtown. We believe it is possible to bridge this divide by extending the park into the city, and by fostering a broader range of activities along the city-park edge.

SHORT TERM

Shorter-term projects have been selected for their likely immediate impact on the overall perception of the area, their low cost, and their feasibility, especially in terms of public control of sites and assets.

37. Create new pedestrian connections to the Niagara Reservation D.1

Recovery of the Niagara Reservation from commerce and industry was one of the great achievements of the 19th century. The 20th century, unfortunately, has seen the continuing isolation of the city from the park by highways and other infrastructure. The immediate need in this area is to reestablish simple pedestrian connections from the city of Niagara Falls to the water's edge.

There are several opportunities for near term remedies. Several streets that run perpendicular to the Niagara River rapids could be opened for pedestrians and cyclists through to the park. Other direct connections can be made from downtown into the park nearer the brink of the falls. Generally, all streets downtown should be made more pedestrian friendly. Over the longer term, it is critical that more formal connections are established between downtown and the edge of the gorge downstream from the Rainbow Bridge.

38. Change Rainbow Boulevard North and South to two-way streets D.2

As a pair of multi-lane one-way thoroughfares, Rainbow Boulevards North and South creates a

wall of traffic between the park and the rest of downtown. To calm traffic, increase pedestrian safety, and to increase local access (as opposed to through traffic) both Rainbow Boulevard north and south should be converted to two-way traffic.

In the current configuration, these streets threaten pedestrians with too fast traffic and constrain the options of motorists at the same time. The result is a traffic pattern that tends to direct motorists through and out of the downtown. The shift to two-way traffic will mitigate all of these effects.

39. Remove Parkway roadway section near the Niagara Reservation D.3

To bring the park farther into the city, and to encourage park visitors to patronize downtown businesses, the short section of Parkway that runs from the south end of the fragment of Main Street up to the bus loop near the State Park parking area should be removed. In place of the Parkway, create a pedestrian pathway wide enough to be used by emergency vehicles. As a short-term measure, and to test the impact of this measure on traffic patterns, the Parkway could be left intact but altered using large planters to stop traffic and narrow the road for pedestrians. Removal of this section of Parkway is likely to intensify and alter pedestrian traffic patterns from the city into the park. Design work should consider how best to connect pedestrian city paths and park paths, and more specifically, how to mitigate the possible barrier effect of the knoll at the park's edge.

40. Narrow Main Street fragment D.4

Like other sites in downtown Niagara Falls, The Turtle museum is somewhat isolated by the effects of heavy traffic. To increase space around The Turtle and make it easier to reach the building, the east end of the fragment of Main Street should be narrowed.

This will increase pedestrian comfort and help connect park and city, yet allow for continued diagonal parking on the south side of the hotel. This is also a measure that can be implemented in the short term using large planters.

41. Reconfigure Rainbow Boulevard South D.5

Rainbow Boulevard South is forbidding to pedestrians in part because of the quality and design of paving materials. The expanse of blacktop says "cars come first; pedestrians beware." As a traffic-calming measure, and to increase pedestrian comfort, re-pave Rainbow Boulevard South with materials of distinctive color and/or texture.

This will announce to motorists the priority of persons on foot, and visually unify the area. The area re-paved should extend from Niagara Street to south of The Turtle, as well as down the Old Falls Street pedestrian mall, and between the mall and The Turtle.

42. Improve landscaping of West Mall D.6

The West Mall provides a logical linkage between park and downtown but fails to meet its full potential. To further extend the park into the fabric of the city, and to provide a more formal entrance from the city into the park, re-landscape the pedestrian mall, beginning with work on the West Mall. This would include replacing existing at-grade plantings (which restrict movement back and forth across the mall) with a more formal grid pattern of trees on pavement. The suggestion of a connection between the West Mall and the Wintergarden would be created by installation of a tree-planted median in Rainbow Boulevard South. This would calm traffic and increase pedestrian comfort and safety. It would also serve to funnel pedestrian traffic toward the western entrance of the Wintergarden (see below).

The West Mall tree pattern should be interrupted to make two public squares that would include seating and information kiosks. The kiosks would carry information about attractions,

museums, and tourist routes. They could also play an interim role in telling the many different stories of Niagara Falls before more elaborate interpretive infrastructure can be developed. Finally, the redesigned West Mall would terminate at the park edge in a formal circle reminiscent of Olmsted's original plan for the Niagara Reservation.

43. Modify (former) Wintergarden for visual and pedestrian access D.7

As it exists now, the Wintergarden presents a physical and visual barrier between the park and elements of the downtown cityscape. To further connect the city and the park to each other, we suggest that the Wintergarden be opened up, at least during high tourist season when weather allows. This might be accomplished by retrofitting lower level windows to open, as glass garage doors do in many commercial storefronts. When security needs or weather conditions require it, the doors could be closed. This would be a minimum treatment with more thorough approaches being possible. Improved programming of the Wintergarden, itself, would also improve the sense of access into and through the building. Longer-term consider advancing full site redevelopment to a more intensive public/private enterprise.

44. Improve street conditions and landscaping around "The Turtle" D.8

Proposals to redevelop The Turtle as a major museum on Native American culture, possibly in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution, is worthy of support. Such efforts are more likely to succeed if the building can be better connected to adjacent pedestrian zones, the West Mall, and trails into the Niagara Reservation.

New paving patterns (discussed above) will contribute to achieving this goal. New plantings to help connect The Turtle back to the mall will help. So would creation of a more generous entrance facing Rainbow Mall South. Longer-term consider advancing full site redevelopment to a more intensive public/private enterprise.

LONG TERM

45. Remove parking and restore Olmsted's "Upper Grove" D.9

The most important step in the restoration of Olmsted's original design for the park – and a crucial step in improving the environment of the park overall – would be to remove (or greatly diminish the existing parking lot and replace it with a replanted "Upper Grove."

This should be done, however, taking fully into consideration the importance of parking revenues for Office of Parks operations and of maintaining easy access to The Maid of the Mist. Negotiations toward an agreement between the Office of Parks and the City of Niagara Falls or others to share revenue for parking at a location outside of the park will be required.

This would allow most parking to be removed from the park, except for off-season parking, handicap-accessible spaces, operations and maintenance, and space for bus drop-off and people mover loading. A slight modification in the original design would allow the grove to be used as an amphitheater with a temporary stage such as the one used in Buffalo's Delaware Park for summer Shakespeare productions.

46. Build new park building(s) with Olmstedian Inspiration D.10

If additional space for public amenities is required in the park, we strongly suggest a long, linear building to run along the northern edge of the Reservation. This would separate parkland from the Rainbow Bridge Plaza, creating a strong boundary to the park, and providing a barrier to noise and visual intrusions into the park.

This proposal is in the spirit of an original Olmsted idea for a building along the former Canal Street, also intended to shield the park from urban intrusions. In general, the park

should be integrated with the city as much as possible, but not with the heavily trafficked bridge approach and inspections area.

47. Redevelop buildings adjacent to park for higher quality D.12

Many of the buildings adjacent to the park are of low quality, image value, and intensity of use. The City should adopt a long-term strategy and policy to encourage property owners to redevelop these sites. New structures should be of greater bulk-density (although not high-rise) and higher quality design and materials than those presently on those sites. With continued development of the local and visitor market, we assume that some of these projects will involve new and "higher and better" uses than currently exist. New urban design standards will be developed by the City to guide redevelopment.

48. Continue linear interpretation of Hydraulic Canal route D.13

The recent development of a new linear park along Daly Boulevard has helped achieve the goal of bringing the park into the city. But the opportunity exists to extend the park and continue the new green structures, between the upper river and the gorge rim trail, as well as, between Pine Avenue and Niagara Street. Starting from Main and Fourth Streets, and following generally the path of the old Hydraulic Canal (see project B.12), the goal is to extend the linear park into the Niagara Reservation, creating a new northern gateway for the "gorge park" one of the most spectacular landscapes anywhere.

The John B. Daly Boulevard Extension from Niagara Street north to Pine Avenue, has provided an important new opportunity to extend the linear trail and new green structure through the neighborhood, linking it together with two distinct commercial districts while creating a new amenity to help future residential development. In short, the strategy is to create a world-class linear park network that just happened to feature convenient access the Niagara River.

Niagara River Gorge

Recommended Projects

The Niagara River gorge is one of the most spectacular landscapes anywhere. But, like other parts of the Niagara Falls waterfront, it is cut off from the city and its neighborhoods, and its value to residents and visitors alike is reduced. At the same time, it needs to be protected from those who do visit.

The overall strategy for the gorge area and lower river, like the other two regions of the strategy, is to improve connections between the city and the waterfront, to improve the overall physical environment of the gorge and gorge rim, to protect and restore gorge ecosystems for future generations, and to develop the means for telling the many compelling stories located there.

More specifically, the strategy is to eliminate the Robert Moses Parkway as a barrier between city and gorge, to improve pathways within the gorge, and to take advantage of the stories of hydroelectricity, civil engineering, industry, geology, natural history, and environment. In short, the strategy is to create a world-class linear park featuring the Niagara River gorge.

49. Gorge Trail System and Trailhead Improvements (low-bank) E.1

The condition of existing trails in the Niagara River gorge varies widely, impacting the accessibility of the gorge environment and the safety of users. Where necessary, gorge trails should be repaired or rebuilt. Enjoyment of gorge trails and fishing platforms at the water's edge also depends on providing access and visitor services – each appropriate to the natural condition of the gorge – at trailheads along the way. These are discussed under other elements of this strategy.

50. "GorgeView" Hike & Bike Trail (high-bank) E.2

Views from the top of the Niagara River gorge are spectacular in several directions and should be made more accessible to visitors and residents alike. A continuous system of hiking and biking trails along the gorge should be completed. Overlook facilities should be improved where appropriate. The result should be a continuous open space system providing access from the city into and along the gorge.

The Niagara River gorge is one of the most spectacular landscapes anywhere. But, like other parts of the Niagara Falls waterfront, it is cut off from the city and its neighborhoods, and its value to residents and visitors alike is reduced. At the same time, it needs to be protected from those who do visit. The overall strategy for the gorge area and lower river, like the other two regions of the strategy, is to improve connections between the city and the waterfront, to improve the overall physical environment of the gorge and gorge rim, to protect and restore gorge ecosystems for future generations, and to develop the means for telling the many compelling stories located there. More specifically, the strategy is to eliminate the Robert Moses Parkway as a barrier between city and gorge, to improve pathways within the gorge, and to

take advantage of the stories of hydroelectricity, civil engineering, industry, geology, natural history, and environment. In short, the strategy is to create a world-class linear park featuring the Niagara River gorge.

51. Reconfigure Parkway E.3

The Robert Moses Parkway presents an especially difficult barrier between the gorge and the neighborhoods adjacent to it. The pilot closure of the Parkway is an important step toward satisfying the public's expressed aspiration to be reconnected with its waterfront. A longer-term solution to the issue requires a careful evaluation, not only of the provisional closure, but also a variety of possible alternatives. One of the most promising may be the most straightforward. North of the Rainbow Bridge, consider combining Whirlpool Street and the existing Parkway in a single configuration designed to allow the greatest park area. North of the city line, include a redesign of the connections with Route 104 and Upper Mountain Road. It is crucial to remember that whatever option is adopted, it allow connections between the gorge trailheads to and from adjoining neighborhoods via the GorgeView Hike & Bike Trail.

52. New International Railway Station/Intermodal Transportation Center E.4

Niagara Falls' current Amtrak passenger railroad station is a busy facility despite its isolation from the rest of the city (over 40,000 annual passengers). New facilities for rail passengers should be created in a location with proximity and visibility to Main Street and the waterfront tourist district, and in combination with appropriate tourist-related services. The proposed "Whirlpool Bridge" location will satisfy these goals while opening Niagara Falls to new cross-border markets that can dramatically increase ridership. The City's proposal will preserve the "Old Customs House," a significant historic resource, and create a new state-of-the-art, International Intermodal Transportation Facility to link rail, highway, and airline services with prime tourist and scenic areas. These will serve the city's transportation needs far into the 21st century.

53. Devil's Hole State Park naturalization and interpretation E.5

Devil's Hole State Park is another popular site for visitors seeking access to the Niagara gorge, but significant modifications and improvements to the park and roadway infrastructures are needed to make the most of this resource. These should include a reduction in paving, reconfiguration of entrance conditions, and increase in natural areas. Create an at-grade intersection on the Parkway there with Lewiston Road, to provide an enhanced entrance/gateway for the park itself, but more importantly to "calm" traffic as it enters the city. Remove the pedestrian walkover and replace it with an at-grade crosswalk. Consolidate the parking areas. Also, provide for interpretation of the historic "Devil's Hole Massacre."

54. Establish Willow Ave as a key transportation and green structure link

Willow Avenue should be strengthened as a primary connection between the reconfigured RMP/Whirlpool Street and other major arterials to provide a strong setting for new residential development and a focus for community and neighborhood activities. Properties located on the north side of the street will be assembled to form a new waterfront "parkette" that will expand the Gorge waterfront (new green structure) eastward up to Main Street. This public space becomes an event space and a gateway creating an open space linkage into the city. The park's design and features will complement streetscape improvements along the roadway. Willow Avenue should be renamed Lockport Road to emphasize its importance as a key east/west arterial, linking the waterfront corridor, to all places east of the city. Likewise, reconstruction of Lockport Road east of Main Street will reinforce its role as a major connection to the Core City. Streetscape improvements and landscaping buffer, particularly adjacent existing vacant, blighted, and underutilized areas, will provide an opportunity to extend new green structures thereby enhancing the ability for further neighborhood renewal and investment.

Appendix A

Niagara Falls Waterfront & Greenway Strategy Project Recommendations

A. CITY WIDE

1. Complete waterfront bike trail Provides for continuous pedestrian and bicycle access to the waterfront from Wheatfield town line, through downtown, and on to Lewiston, with frequent connections to and access from city neighborhoods.
2. Naturalize Niagara shoreline and gorge Involves a range of plantings, depending on location, including trees and other vegetation to improve quality of environment, ecological function, and/or enhance scenic vistas.
3. Restructure Robert Moses Parkway Includes a range of treatments including lane and speed reduction, lane removal, new perpendicular connections to city street grid, or re-routing.
4. Plan the Niagara Falls “Green Structure” Survey, strategize, and plan for the recovery and use of old industrial lands, utility rights of way, old railroad rights of way, and other unused lands for future open space, conservation, and/or recreational uses.

*Project name Project description Control Cost **

B. CELEBRATING NIAGARA FALLS’ HERITAGE

Create a World Class Visitor Attraction

1. Create the Niagara Experience Center. Develop such a facility to serve as point of entry and primary interpretive programs for city and park. NYS/ Private \$110,000,000. (b—revised 2006)

Develop “Niagara River Heritage Discovery Centers”

2. Frederick Law Olmsted Interpretive Center. Renovate either Visitors Center or use recently renovated historic Horse Stable complex on Goat Island to house interpretive programs celebrating the designs and philosophy of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. NYSOPRHP \$1,700,000 (b)
3. History of Civil Engineering Exhibition. Install interpretive exhibits beneath the Rainbow Bridge celebrating bridge and Private transportation history. Provide lighting, signage, pathways. NYSOPRHP/ \$2,000,000 (b)
4. Niagara Gorge Discovery Center. Expand, update, and revitalize existing expansion and trailhead Schoellkopf museum structure, and provide Private for improved connections to gorge trail system. NYSOPRHP/ \$5,868,000 (b)
5. Early Hydroelectric Power and Industrial Heritage Museum. Construct new facility on roof of Schoellkopf plant discharge ports to house Public/Private interpretive exhibits and access to views, trails. Install new elevator in existing shaft. NYSOPRHP/ \$12,250,000 (b)
6. Natural History Interpretive Center. Create facility to house interpretive exhibits and Visitor Amenity Center on natural environment of Niagara Gorge, improve access to trails, and provide services to visitors. NYSOPRHP/Private \$6,300,000 (b)

Develop other heritage interpretation sites

7. Love Canal Education and Interpretative Center.* Concept suggests a 13,500 square foot Interpretation museum facility with exhibits interpreting the story of the United States' most important toxic waste disaster and the environmental movement that arose in response. Private \$6,285,000 (g)
8. Develop Griffon Park Park. redevelopment will include new play areas, interpretive materials, picnic area, amphitheater, outdoor furniture, plantings, paving, etc. Cost estimate does not include anticipated expenditure on kiosks and signage to interpret historic events involving the explorer LaSalle and his ship, The Griffon. City \$425,500 (g)
9. Industrial heritage interpretation program. Incorporate Niagara Falls industrial heritage– Buffalo Avenue route sites along Buffalo Avenue in overall heritage interpretation. City \$150,000 (a)
10. Intake Park and Fort Schlosser interpretive venue. Create an open space and interpretive programming opportunity for power intakes and site of historic Fort Schlosser, accessible by trail, Parkway, and perpendicular connection to Hyde Park Blvd. NYPA \$350,000 (a)
11. Adams Plant adaptive reuse Purchase Adams Plant and site for preservation and reuse as part of “Power Route” historic interpretation. Cost does not include acquisition. Private \$2,000,000 (a)
12. Reveal and interpret the Hydraulic Canal On state lands, mark, interpret and reveal the path of the former Hydraulic Canal to celebrate its role in power generation, transportation, and shaping urban form. City/NYSOPRHP \$2,500,000 (f)
13. Underground Railroad interpretive site. Establish site for interpretive exhibits of Underground Railroad, perhaps in renovated U.S. Customs House. City \$200,000 (f)
14. Customs House restoration. Renovate (Stabilize and restore National Register–listed structure and reuse for re–use as Amtrak Station (see E4), Underground Railroad interpretive exhibits (see B13 above) or other uses. City \$2,835,000 (f)
15. Niagara Arts & Cultural Center (NACC). Renovate the former Niagara Falls High School building on Portage Road for use as a center for visual and performing arts. Public/Private \$1,300,000 (g)

C. UPPER RIVER

Shorter term

1. Upper River bike and pedestrian Construct trail to connect the Reservation trail to east city line with the proposed Riverview and Intake Parks, 53rd Street docks, and Century Club trailhead, with possible extensions to Griffon Park and Erie County networks. NYS DOT \$2,542,709 (e)
2. Naturalize Niagara River New trees and native plants to screen view shoreline of industrial facilities, but also to highlight views of the Buffalo Avenue plants, and frame views of the river. Short–term implementation might include community/ youth volunteer role. NYPA \$850,000 (a)

Longer term

3. Reconfigure Parkway to Reconfigure Parkway from Daly Blvd. to Grand “boulevard” Island Bridge as boulevard; allow on–street parking; reduce speed limit; replace interchanges with intersections. NYSOPRHP \$3,000,000 (a)
4. Preserve Century Club Ensure that future development at this site access point allows for access to the trail, services for cyclists and pedestrians, and especially continuity for the trail itself. City/ NYS \$150,000 (a)
5. Connect City to RiverView Trail and Connect 53rd Street to the Robert Moses Parkway at 53rd Street Parkway at a city–style at–grade intersection to create access to existing dock facilities from adjacent neighborhoods and Parkway and create a new waterfront trailhead. City/ NYPA \$500,000 (a)
6. Connect City to RiverView Trail and Extend Hyde Park Boulevard to connect Parkway at Hyde Park Boulevard with the Robert Moses Parkway at a citystyle at–grade intersection, provide access to Intake Park, create new waterfront trailhead, and connect to adjacent neighborhoods. City/ NYPA \$2,000,000 (a)

7. Connect City to RiverView Trail and Extend (and turn) Portage Road to connect Parkway at Portage Road with Parkway and trail at new city-style atgrade intersection and provide access for interpretive facilities at the Adams Plant (above) and to the proposed Riverview Park (below). NYPA \$500,000 (a)

8. Riverview Park and Trail Head Create a new park area on the “spoils pile,” NYPA [included in to provide birders with opportunities to view item C1] native and migrating species and visitors in general to overlook the river. This will mean allowing on-going process of vegetative succession to continue. (e)

9. Remove Parkway from Daly Remove all of the Robert Moses Parkway Boulevard to Main Street from Daly Boulevard Exit (Quay Street) to Main Street near the Falls and convert existing fly-over interchange to at-grade connection. This will make land available for recreation, open space or housing. NYSOPRHP \$3,500,000 (a)

D. PARK/ CITY INTERFACE

Short term projects

1. Create at least three new Along the Niagara Rapids, near the brink of the pedestrian connections to the Falls, and downstream from the Rainbow Niagara Reservation Bridge, create new pathways to connect neighborhoods and downtown to the waterfront. NYSOPH \$750,000 (e)

2. Change Rainbow Blvd. N & S Change one-way streets to two ways to two-way streets. reduce speeds, calm traffic, and improve pedestrian safety and comfort. NYSDOT \$100,000 (a)

3. Remove Parkway section Eliminate two blocks of Robert Moses nearest the State Park Parkway from Main Street to the Niagara Reservation entrance. For short term, close to traffic and use planters to narrow. NYSOPRHP \$1,000,000 (a)

4. Narrow Main Street fragment Narrow the east end of the fragment of Main Street to increase pedestrian comfort, improve access to The Turtle, and allow diagonal parking on the south side of the hotel. Implement short term with planters. City \$75,000 (a)

5. Re-pave Rainbow Boulevard Re-pave Rainbow Boulevard South South for “traffic calming.” (From Niagara Street to south of The Turtle, down Old Falls Street pedestrian mall, and between the Mall and The Turtle) with materials of distinctive color and/or texture. NYSDOT/ City \$500,000 (a)

6. Improve landscaping of West Mall To better connect park and city, remove existing plantings and replace with formal grid of trees, leaving space for “public squares” with seating, informational kiosks and interpretive materials. City \$450,000 (a)

7. Modify Wintergarden for visual Redesign ground level windows – perhaps and pedestrian access with garage-style doors or demountable panels – to allow pedestrians to see through and walk through building. City \$50,000 (a)

8. Improve landscaping and Provide new plantings, and a more generous pedestrian connections at southeast entrance, to improve connections The Turtle between The Turtle and the Mall. Private \$450,000 (a)

Longer term projects

9. Remove parking and restore Given an agreement to share parking revenue Olmsted’s “Upper Grove” with State Parks, relocate parking out of the Reservation and restore Olmsted’s original design including the “Upper Grove.” NYSOPRHP \$300,000 (a)

10. Build new park building on If needed, build new space for visitor Olmsted inspiration amenities in a long, linear building to form barrier between park and bridge approach. NYSOPRHP \$2,500,000 (a)

11. Redesign/redevelop street level Work with adjacent building owners to make retail in buildings next to park design of retail frontage more open, transparent, and inviting to pedestrians. City/ Private \$500,000 (a)

12. Redevelop buildings adjacent to park for higher quality. Adopt long-term strategy/policy to encourage property owners to redevelop sites at greater bulk-density and higher quality design and materials. Private \$50–100M (d)

13. Continue linear park along On private lands, create design guidelines Hydraulic Canal route to extend the new linear park along Daly Boulevard west and north, generally along the route of the old Hydraulic Canal, to connect back to the Niagara Reservation north of the Rainbow Bridge. City/ Private \$250,000 (a)

E. THE GORGE

1. Gorge trail system and Repairs, reconstruction, or improvements to trailhead improvements gorge trails and development of new trailhead NYPA facilities including vertical access. NYSOPRHP/ \$10,675,991 (e)

2. Gorge rim pathway Construct a continuous bike and pedestrian pathway, improve or create overlook facilities, NYPA and create continuous open space amenity along the gorge rim. NYSOPRHP/ \$840,000 (e)

3. Reconfigure Parkway Reconfigure Robert Moses Parkway to make connections to city street grid, and link to NYPA gorge rim trail. Consider short-term implementation through temporary closures. NYSOPRHP/ \$40,000,000 (e)

4. New Amtrak railroad station Create new terminal facility at Whirlpool Bridge location to bring Amtrak services within more visible and convenient proximity of local tourism sites. City \$23,000,000 (f)

5. Devil's Hole State Park Create new intersection on Parkway at pedestrian walkway; provide other park improvements. NYSOPHR [included in naturalization and interpretation Lewiston Road and park entrance; remove item 3] (e)

*** Note:** Cost estimates are based in year 2000/2002 unless otherwise indicated. Items with note (a) are rough estimates based on general concept. Estimates for (b) are detailed calculation of costs based on conceptual program. Estimates for items marked (d) are broad estimates of private sector investments in response to public policy. Estimates for (e) are extrapolated from previous estimates adjusted for inflation to 2005. (A factor of 3% per year has been used for the years prior to 2000. For 2001 through 2005 the factor of 4% per year is used instead.) Estimates marked (f) are working City of Niagara Falls estimates for projects under consideration. Estimates marked (g) are more detailed, but based on previous planning studies.

Appendix B

Analysis of Precedent Plans for Niagara Falls

(Prior to the completion of the “Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan” – 2004)

Date: 1988

Plan: Niagara Riverview Park and Trail

Auspices/consultant: Saratoga Associates for City of Niagara Falls

Key recommendations:

Phase I – bicycle/walking trail from Goat Island to LaSalle and the southern city line.

Phase II – activity node at NYPA “spoils” area. Includes berming, screening and planting along industrial sites. Estimated \$1.5 million in 1988.

Date: 1989

Plan: Niagara Gorge Hiking Trail

Auspices/consultant: Saratoga Associates for City of Niagara Falls and WNYEDC

Key recommendations:

Includes development of five “trail heads” and “loops” into the gorge between Prospect Point and Whirlpool Park (with existing connection to Devil’s Hole). Cost in 1989 was estimated at \$7.1 million with options for mechanical lifts at three sites adding \$11 million more. A very phaseable project.

Date: 1992

Plan: Niagara Waterfront Master Plan

Auspices/consultant: Sasaki Associates for City of Niagara Falls

Key recommendations:

Includes gorge trail system similar to proposed above; several alternatives for reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway as a “people mover” facility; alternatives included removing sections of parkway, linking parkway to city streets, slowing traffic, re-using for transit and pedestrian. Estimated cost in 1992, encompassing proposals made above, \$28 million.

Date: 1997

Plan: Citizen Visions for Niagara Falls

Auspices/consultant:

Waterfront Regeneration Trust for Niagara Falls Redevelopment Corp.

Key recommendations:

General recommendations include (1) reconnect city to waterfront, (2) develop “Niagarain-the-park” concept, (3) improve downtown, (4) clean up environmental damage, (5) build tourism, and (6) move tourists and others better within the city.

Date: 1997

Plan: Griffon Park

Auspices/consultant: Peter J. Smith for City of Niagara Falls

Key recommendations:

(no document).

Date: 1998

Plan: A Developer Master Plan for Downtown Niagara Falls, New York

Auspices/consultant:

The Jerde Partnership for Niagara Falls Redevelopment Corporation

Key recommendations:

Expand the park experience (e.g. removal of sections of parkway and parking); repair the pedestrian fabric of downtown Niagara Falls (including streetscape standards, parking and people mover); create a new entertainment destination for the region (including gaming, retail, museums, etc.)

Date: 1986 – 2004 (Draft)

Plan: **Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan**

Auspices/consultant: **City of Niagara Falls**

Key recommendations:

Comprehensive proposals for pedestrian-bike trail, gorge hiking trails, RMP revisions and other projects.

Date: 2000 & 2002

Plan: **Achieving Niagara Falls' Future**

Auspices/consultant:

The Urban Design Project, School of Architecture and Planning

University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Foit-Albert Associates

Buffalo, New York

The Waterfront Regeneration Trust

Toronto, Ontario Canada

Key recommendations:

Install a waterfront trail system (and associated amenities) to extend from one city line to the other and connect Niagara Falls to the region;

Reconfigure the Robert Moses Parkway to reconnect downtown and neighborhoods to the waterfront access and improve environmental quality;

Implement a comprehensive waterfront naturalization program for upper river, park, and gorge; and, Plan for the future of Niagara Falls' "green structure."

Develop a comprehensive celebration and interpretation of Niagara Falls' natural and cultural heritage --- featuring, and beginning with, a world class "City of Niagara Falls "Niagara Experience" Museum.

begin a program of research and interpretation to develop the means to tell Niagara's story.

Achieve the most naturally beautiful, environmentally healthy, and publicly accessible waterfront possible for the citizens of Niagara Falls;

Celebrate and promote the unique natural and cultural heritage of Niagara Falls to enhance the waterfront as a tourist destination and to grow the economy.

Improve the connection between downtown and the Niagara Reservation through high-quality urban and landscape design; and

Make sure all actions serve the interests of the people of Niagara Falls as well as those of the region, the State, the nation, Canadian neighbors, and visitors from around the world.

Date: Post-2004

Plan: **Niagara Falls Strategic Master Plan**

Auspices/consultant:

Urban Strategies, Inc.

Toronto, Canada

Key recommendations:

The seven (7) Big Moves

- Reconnect the City to its Waterfront
- Create the Cultural District
- Initiate Public Realm and Catalyst Projects
- Transform the Niagara Street Precinct
- Create a New Neighborhood in the Daly Boulevard Precinct
- Preserve the Heritage of the Core City
- Housing Renewal and;

Nine (9) Core City Precinct Strategies...

Nine (9) General Citywide Strategies...

Establish ongoing program for Education and Leadership

Strengthen Institutional Capacity

Initial Proposal for Niagara River Heritage “Discovery Centers”

PROJECT NARRATIVE

Attractions gain by clustering. In particular, themed attractions, in close proximity, will provide greater promotional impact and more efficient management. Expanding the experience of visitors and extending their stays in the Buffalo–Niagara region requires a major investment in educational and interpretive facilities in the City. Toward that end, the City offers the following proposal: *creation of a series of interrelated and linked museums, exhibits and attractions herein after referred to as – “Discovery Centers.”* This initial proposal is derived from the expressed interest in interpreting a particular aspect of Niagara. It combines those singular interests into a more comprehensive and strategic undertaking to establish a system for exploration and discovery –something that is key in extending the length of stay. Just as important, this type of new tourism infrastructure provides focus for entrepreneurship.

The Niagara Experience Center

The point of orientation and embarkation into this “serial” should be The Niagara Experience Center Falls to be located in a prime location, at the downtown park/city edge. Such a museum’s location and design must also stimulate an active street life in the immediate vicinity and further connect the city with the park, appeal to visitors of all ages and family status, as well as, to visitors from around the world.

Exhibits within the Niagara Experience Center must begin visitors’ understanding of the geography of Niagara and the park, the history of the place, and to orient them to other heritage “centers” or attractions in the vicinity. In this way, the Center serves as the compass, as well as, the hub, for “what else is here.”

Frederick Law Olmsted Interpretive Center

One of the primary stories to tell is about the Niagara Reservation State Park itself and the inspiration and genius of Frederick Law Olmsted that helped create it and the entire international system of Niagara River parks. The City proposed the renovation of either the existing Visitor Center or the recently restored historic Horse Stable complex on Goat Island to accommodate a new Olmsted Interpretive Center. While this may be accommodated within the proposed Niagara Experience Center, Olmsted “interpretation is lacking and needs to be addressed. An Olmsted Interpretive Center could explain how Olmsted’s philosophy and designs influenced, not only our experience and understanding of Niagara, but also the development of landscapes throughout the nation. Olmsted understood that visitors to Niagara were motivated by a wish “to be astonished” as well as to enjoy the “pensive contemplation” of distinctive beauty. What are proposed therefore are the provision of interpretive materials, clear directional cues to the park, as well as interpretation of the Olmsted legacy.

History of Civil Engineering & 'Building Exhibition'

Niagara Falls has a rich history of civil engineering feats in the service of transportation, from early portages, to gorge railroads, and successive international bridge crossings. An interpretive exhibit beneath the abutment of the Rainbow Bridge could reveal this history for visitors at the same time it draws them from Prospect Point toward Gorge View Park. Signage, lighting, pedestrian amenities, and exhibits would explain the history and encourage visitors to explore a variety of educational and discovery opportunities along the rim of The Gorge such as the remnants of historic bridge crossings.

Niagara Gorge Discovery Center and Trailhead

The Niagara Gorge Discovery Center, created in 2002 still tells the geological history of Niagara Falls through the updated facilities of the former Schoellkopf Geological Museum. The richness of this story and the interest of the public, however, suggest the need for the museum's mission to be further revitalized and/or expanded. The current building location has a magnificent view of the gorge but may not be able to support an expanded mission or significantly higher numbers of visitors. Its great potential to serve as a trailhead for explorations of the gorge has been expanded in recent years but it too needs better access and marketability. The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and the City have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding under which these two primary public entities will partner with other public agency stakeholders to develop and advance an expanded "heritage and cultural" re-development program for the surrounding "gorge view" area, generally and the Gorge Discovery Center, specifically.

Early Hydroelectric Power and Industrial Heritage Museum

The development of hydroelectric power in Niagara Falls is a story of world significance warranting a major investment in interpretive facilities and program. We propose creation of a new museum or interpretive venue to be located on the concrete platform that was the roof of the discharge tunnels of the Schoellkopf hydroelectric power plant. The museum would provide space for exhibits on the early history of hydro-electric power; provide views of the gorge and the 200-foot high stone wall, which hides the water conduits of the plant; and offer new access to industrial heritage trails in the gorge by way of an elevator, if feasible, built into the original elevator shaft. Other potential sites exist for this interpretation but the combination of industrial ruins, new gorge access, and unique gorge views suggest that the site should be the first consideration.

Natural History Interpretive Center and Visitor Amenity Center

Whirlpool and Devils Hole State Parks are both popular sites for visitors seeking nature and hiking experiences in the gorge. Both of these sites are in need of visitor amenities, landscape repair, and new green structures. In anticipation of greater emphasis on the natural environment being repaired and restored, the City is suggesting the creation of a Natural History Interpretive and Visitor Amenity Center at Whirlpool State Park to facilitate and enhance additional levels of visitation. The location already offers breathtaking vistas and provides physical access to gorge trails and fishing platforms. A visitor amenity center would provide needed upgrades of restrooms and concessions, tourist information and interactive destination planning. A Natural History Interpretive Center would reveal for visitors the local natural history and environmental aspects of the Niagara eco-region, offering information on the rare plant and animal species – especially birds – found in the gorge. The center would also serve as an additional trailhead for gorge hikers.