

Pilot Community - City of Oswego
LWRP MONITORING REPORT
June 2008

Community Background:

The City of Oswego is located in Upstate New York, at the confluence of Lake Ontario and the Oswego River. The City and its port are centrally located along the St. Lawrence Seaway System, linking Oswego to major national and international trade markets. The Oswego River, a canalized waterway which is part of the State Canal System, flows through the downtown and divides the City into east and west sections. Cumulatively, Oswego's waterfront is approximately 9 miles in length – 3 miles along Lake Ontario, and 6 miles total for both banks of the Oswego River.

Oswego's economy and heritage have long been associated with shipping, and the City represents one of the oldest ports in the Nation. The Port of Oswego is the largest on the U.S. side of Lake Ontario, located just 45 miles from the entrance to the St. Lawrence Seaway, and is the northern terminus of the State's 524-mile canal system. Although its importance as a commercial port diminished over the years, it has recently seen a resurgence with the addition of new cargo opportunities. Increases in port activity have raised the Port cargo to over 1 million tons, graduating the port to a high usage port designation by the Army Corps of Engineers. Primary cargoes are in the bulk commodity market, while the Port has surfaced over the past few years as experts in handling project and heavy lift cargoes including energy equipment and windmills. The roster of companies utilizing the Port of Oswego includes some of the largest commodity shippers in the world, and the Port is now considering expansion plans to accommodate additional cargo.

The expansion of the Port of Oswego will have a ripple effect into the community, serving as a catalyst for development. But in the past, along with the previous decline of port-related industry, the waterfront and downtown became economically distressed. Today, the rebirth of the downtown is largely linked with the revitalization of the waterfront to accommodate public access, recreational boaters and community events, and create a regional tourist destination.

Upon completion of its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) in 1986, the City has methodically worked to advance its implementation. The focus of these efforts has involved development of the *Riverwalk*, a 1.5 mile long promenade extending along both the east and west sides of the Oswego River adjacent to the downtown; improvements to Wright's Landing Public Marina, including transient dock rehabilitation; pedestrian walkways and linkages; and, infrastructure improvements to increase the efficiency and use of the Port of Oswego.

Revitalization of the City's waterfront has had a very positive impact on the local economy and quality of life. In Oswego, 15 grants totaling almost \$1.6 million of EPF LWRP funds to implement the City's Riverwalk and improvements to the harbor has spurred over \$16 million in private investment as hotels, restaurants and other businesses have opened along the waterfront and in the downtown. (See attached chart of Department of State Division of Coastal Resources (DCR) Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) Grants awarded to the City.)

Oswego is now one of seven major harbor centers along the NYS Canal System and provides an array of docking facilities and services for transient boaters which has greatly improved the ability of the City to take advantage of canal-related tourism opportunities. New projects continue to spin off from the activity that surrounds the Oswego River and Lake Ontario waterfronts.

The City is currently preparing a comprehensive amendment to its LWRP to reflect existing conditions, provide an updated strategy for its waterfront area, and address conflicting water uses.

LWRP Monitoring Process:

The goal of the monitoring process is for the DCR to assess a community's consistency with its LWRP, and to understand implementation activities and decision-making procedures related to the LWRP. Secondly, this process provides a forum for a community to highlight successes, and request technical and financial assistance.

The DCR began the City of Oswego's LWRP monitoring process by sending a letter to the City's Office of Community Development, stating the City had been selected to participate in LWRP monitoring. A list of survey questions was attached. The letter provided information relating to what the process would involve – indicating that a conference call would take place between DCR representatives and key municipal officials to answer the (survey) questions; a follow-up site visit/meeting would be arranged to review the responses provided in the survey; and, following the site visit, DCR would prepare a written assessment of findings to identify areas of improvement, training, or need for LWRP amendments.

The conference call to discuss the City's answers to the survey questions was informative and provided the details necessary for the DCR to make its assessment. The City was well prepared and the call took just under two hours. Participants from the City were: Mary Vanouse, Community Development Director; and, Anthony Leotta, P.E., City Engineer.

As a follow-up to the call, DCR staff traveled to Oswego to meet with representatives of the City at the Community Development Office. As part of the meeting, the City described the relevancy of the LWRP, its use, and where the City stood in its implementation. The meeting provided DCR with an opportunity to more fully assess the City's implementation of its LWRP and clarify several items discussed during the call. The meeting concluded with a tour of the waterfront.

DCR Findings:

OVERVIEW

Overall, the City's LWRP and 2020 Vision Comprehensive Plan are the key documents that guide waterfront development/revitalization and funding of projects in the City. The City's zoning ordinance plays a key role in implementing the LWRP. Through implementation of its LWRP, Oswego has converted neglected areas into a thriving mix of community parks, marinas and waterfront walkways. Concurrently, the City has worked to connect its downtown with the waterfront and aggressively tackled the revitalization of abandoned sites and buildings.

These improvements have provided a balance of employment opportunities and other economic benefits as well as public access for recreation and tourism – critical to the success of Oswego's Harborfest, which attracts over 300,000 visitors to Oswego every year. Many of the completed LWRP implementation projects have been done using EPF LWRP funds, in partnership with the DCR. (See attached chart.) During the monitoring process, City representatives indicated that the DCR was a critical component of the City's successful waterfront redevelopment, and it would not have been possible to achieve without the financial and technical assistance from the DCR. Having the LWRP in place has helped the City to secure funding from other federal and State agencies. An amendment of the City of Oswego LWRP is underway to renew its long-term vision for the waterfront and maintain course in achieving its vision. The City's amended LWRP will identify several new revitalization projects and implementation techniques. The amended LWRP will also include a harbor management plan to address problems of conflict, congestion and competition for space in the use of the harbor, surface waters and underwater lands.

LWRP IMPLEMENTATION

Oswego's vision was for a revitalized downtown and increased waterfront activity with new parks and promenades on Lake Ontario and the Oswego River. The LWRP has provided the City with a programmatic vehicle for focusing on its waterfront resources and planning for development.

The City of Oswego Zoning Ordinance, amended during the preparation of the LWRP, is an important element in the implementation of the LWRP. No LWRP implementation actions involving new or modified existing physical facilities can be undertaken without meeting the requirements of the zoning ordinance. City representatives, during the monitoring process, referred to the zoning ordinance as "king in Oswego". Through adoption of design guidelines for zoning overlay districts, areas along the riverfront and downtown uses must be consistent with the area's historic character.

The City has completed all of the proposed projects recommended in the LWRP over the course of the last twenty-two years. The work was done in stages based on the availability of State and federal funds to accomplish the projects. Of significance to note - the City has remained committed to the LWRP and implementation projects because the local program was developed with strong community support and stakeholder participation from the beginning.

A focus of the City's implementation efforts has involved development of the Oswego *Riverwalk*, a 1.5 mile long promenade extending along both the east and west sides of the Oswego River adjacent to the downtown. The *Riverwalk* has been completed and includes a pedestrian walkway, transient boat docks and services, pavilions, and a performance amphitheater. The City methodically designed and constructed the *Riverwalk* using several grants from the EPF LWRP. The City has also made dock and public utility improvements to Wright's Landing Public Marina, infrastructure improvements to increase the efficiency and use of the Port of Oswego, and additional public access and boating facilities with pedestrian connections to piers and linear parks. Additionally, the LWRP was the basis for master planning for Fort Ontario, a State historic site which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places – which led to a State grant for a new Port Authority entry road, and an additional state grant for streetscape revitalization.

As a result of the waterfront redevelopment efforts, the City has experienced citywide economic revitalization. Oswego is now one of seven major harbor centers along the NYS Canal System and provides an array of docking facilities and services for transient boaters which has greatly improved the ability of the City to take advantage of canal-related tourism opportunities. In addition, *Riverwalk* is key to bringing people downtown and the City organizes and sponsors several events throughout the year for this purpose. The annual Harborfest, for example, results in a substantial economic benefit, including a direct impact of \$7.5 million in expenditures.

Additional projects and private investment such as building restorations have resulted from the momentum gained by the success of the LWRP implementation. The City has made great progress in proposing reuses of former industrial sites, such as the Fitzgibbons building site and the Breneman Shade Cloth Factory. Private investors now have the confidence that the City of Oswego is committed to making investment through financial assistance and public policy - and they are responding by investing in Oswego's future.

The City is currently working toward completing amendments to its LWRP, which will identify several new revitalization projects. As in the past, the City will continue to seek out funding to advance implementation of its amended LWRP and complete those new projects – including State assistance under Title 11 of the New York State Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. In addition, the City would like the DCR to assist with the following issues and projects:

- Advice in managing conflicts related to trucking activities, to and from the Port.
- Funding and training for a GIS system so that waterfront parcels can be digitized.
- Awareness of local consistency review documentation.

LWRP DOCUMENT ACCESSIBILITY

Paper copies of the document are kept in the community development office, mayor's office, city engineer, and public library. The document is available for review to anyone who asks. The City does not have an electronic copy of its LWRP or have the document on its website.

The DCR can assist in this matter and will provide the City with CDs containing the LWRP document, which the City should pass to each of the Planning Board members, and other key agency members. Once the City has an electronic copy, the City should put the LWRP on its website. This will occur when the amended LWRP is finalized.

LOCAL CONSISTENCY REVIEW

City agencies, local officials and the public are aware of the LWRP and the consistency requirements associated with it. The LWRP has been instrumental in protecting the City's waterfront resources. City representatives cited an example where the LWRP was used to ensure the viewshed of Fort Ontario, along with the view of the Oswego Harbor West Pierhead Lighthouse (listed on the National Register of Historic Places), were not compromised by a grain elevator. Larger development proposals have not been a prevalent in the City.

As part of the City's local consistency process, applicant(s) or, in the case of direct actions, the City agency proposing to undertake the action, refers the action and all pertinent information to the Common Council Legislative Planning Committee for review and recommendations regarding the action's consistency with the policies and purposes of the LWRP. Review of the proposed action's consistency and preparation of written recommendations to the referring city agency are to be completed within thirty (30) days of a complete referral. The Mayor has final responsibility for ensuring that local actions are in compliance with the LWRP policies.

The City says this process is not effective and proposes changes to its Local Consistency Law, in conjunction with the LWRP amendment, to provide a workable framework for agencies of the City of Oswego. Responsibility for review of actions for consistency with the LWRP is proposed to be removed from the Common Council and delegated to the Planning Board. The Planning Board is very active and its members are familiar with project reviews in accordance with the City's zoning ordinance, and make certain that uses are consistent with the LWRP.

City representatives mentioned the need to document all reviewed decisions, which presently is not done. City representatives suspect that not all actions subject to consistency review have actually been going through local consistency review. Currently, only a couple of projects are reviewed, each year.

The City has requested that the DCR provide it with local consistency training.

GRANTS AWARDED TITLE 11 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND LOCAL WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION PROGRAM CITY OF OSWEGO			
Year	Amount of Grant	Project Description	Status
1995	\$25,000	Redevelopment of Vacant Breneman Industrial Site	Closed
1996	\$60,000	Riverview Canal Trail	Closed
1996	\$90,000	Breneman Site Clearance	Closed
1997	\$35,500	Oswego River West Bank Redevelopment Design	Closed
1998	\$241,000	West Side Riverfront Redevelopment	Closed

GRANTS AWARDED
TITLE 11 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND LOCAL WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION PROGRAM
CITY OF OSWEGO

1999	\$175,000	Oswego River West Bank Linear Park Extension - Phase 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · completion of the construction of a new seawall along the full length of the waterfront (450 linear feet); · completion of the construction of the 8-foot-wide public walkway located directly adjacent to the seawall, including decorative railings and post lighting; · construction of an approximately 180 linear ft. pedestrian walkway linking the esplanade with West First Street; and · construction of an approximately ½-acre public parking area adjacent to the esplanade and West Schuyler Street to serve esplanade users. 	Closed
2000	\$100,000	Oswego River Walk West Park - Phase 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Phase 3 included provision of facilities for transient boaters, walkways to the new riverfront park extension, and enhanced access to the central business district. 	Closed
2001	\$170,600	Wright's Landing Marina Complex Improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Repair and renovate the main dock at the Wright's Landing Marina Complex, complete dockside utility improvements, and renovate a pre-existing public restroom and shower facilities. 	Closed
2002	\$20,000	City of Oswego Local Waterfront Revitalization Program Update	<i>Underway</i>
2002	\$150,000	Westside Riverfront Walkway Enhancement Project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Repair and renovate the walkway at the southern end of the esplanade; install benches; and, provide further handicapped accessibility improvements. 	Closed
2003	\$55,000	Construction of Docking Facilities and Utility Services at Wright's Landing Marina <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Replace the dock and dock fingers of the "white dock" at Wright's Landing Marina Complex, install dockside electric and potable water service, and upgrade electric service. 	Closed
2004	\$100,000	Design and Construction of Wright's Landing Marina "Red Dock" Improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Design, engineering and construction for the replacement of the 270-foot "red dock" and its 18 dock fingers, installation of electric and potable water service on the new red dock, and upgrade of electric service at the Marina. 	Closed
2005	\$110,000	Construction of Wright's Landing Marina "Blue Dock" Improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Install electric, cable and potable water service at the "blue dock" - upgrading electric service to the marina, and purchasing and installing three power and safety pedestals with fire extinguisher and life buoy at the White, Red and Blue Docks. 	<i>Underway</i>
2006	\$50,500	Construction of Wright's Landing Marina "White Dock" Improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Extend the "white dock" to accommodate four additional slips - allowing boats to 45' in length, and adding electric, cable and potable water services. 	<i>Underway</i>
2007	\$214,956	Captain's Quarters Conference Center Pedestrian and Parking Enhancements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Construct a public parking lot and pedestrian corridor on East First Street, adjacent to an existing hotel and the site of the proposed Best Western Captain's Quarters Conference Center. The developer of these facilities will donate the land for the parking lot and pedestrian corridor as part of this project. 	<i>Pending</i>