

City of Tonawanda LWRP Monitoring Report June 2014

Community Background:

The City of Tonawanda is located in Western New York at the junction of the Niagara River and Erie Canal in the northwest corner of Erie County. The City is bordered to the north across the Erie Canal by the City of North Tonawanda, to the south and east by the Town of Tonawanda, and to the west across the Niagara River by the Town of Grand Island. The City is approximately 3.6 square miles in size with 15,130 residents according to the 2010 U.S. census and lies equidistant - approximately 10 miles - from downtown Buffalo and Niagara Falls.

Historically, the City's economic base was dependent upon the transportation advantage offered by its location along the Erie Canal System. More recently, it has become more of a residential community serving the Buffalo and Niagara Falls urban centers. The City retains a viable central business district adjacent to the Canal, and has undertaken substantial urban renewal efforts in recent years to assure long-term commercial stability.



Tonawanda Gateway Harbor along the Erie Canal

The Cities of Tonawanda and North Tonawanda form one integrated economic and social community. These residents share financial institutions, commercial establishments, health facilities, and recreation areas.

The collaboration between the City of Tonawanda and the City of North Tonawanda is demonstrated by the creation of the Gateway Harbor – a major boating destination at the western terminus of the Erie Canal.

The City of Tonawanda Waterfront Revitalization Area encompasses roughly three miles of shoreline along the Niagara River and Erie Canal, as well as one-mile along the Two Mile Creek corridor. Roughly 70% of the City's waterfront is publicly-owned and developed for public recreation, including Veterans Memorial Park, Isle View Park, Niawanda Park, and Gateway Harbor. These parks offer boating and fishing opportunities as well as picnic areas, restrooms, and parking. Bike trails along the waterfront, parks, and open spaces, offer additional recreational activities. A portion of the Tonawanda Central Business District also lies within the waterfront area.

Collaborations with Department of State:

Since completion of its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) in 1987, the City has worked to advance its implementation. The LWRP was originally approved in 1987, and subsequently amended in 1993 to better reflect local conditions and issues. The Department of State has awarded ten (10) Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (EPF LWRP) grants totaling \$555,096 to the City of Tonawanda. (See attached chart: Grants Awarded - Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, City of Tonawanda).



Multi-use trail along Niagara River

These EPF LWRP awards have allowed the City to invest in its waterfront area by enhancing public amenities, including development of the Gateway Harbor.

LWRP Monitoring Process:

The goal of the monitoring process is for the Department of State (DOS) to assess a community's consistency with its approved LWRP, and to understand local implementation activities and decision-making procedures related to the LWRP. Additionally, this process provides a forum for a community to highlight successes and request, as needed, technical and financial assistance for program implementation.

DOS began the monitoring process with a phone call to the Mayor, asking the City to participate and briefly describing the monitoring protocol. A follow-up correspondence was sent to the city outlining the monitoring process along with a list of survey questions. The correspondence indicated that a conference call would take place between DOS representatives and key municipal officials to discuss the survey questions and responses; a follow-up site visit/meeting would be arranged to further review the survey; and, following the site visit, DOS would prepare a written assessment of findings to identify areas of improvement, training, or need for LWRP amendment.

The conference call to discuss the City's answers to the survey questions was informative and provided much of the details necessary for the DOS to make its assessment. During the call, the Mayor Ron Pilozzi, City Engineer Jason LaMonaco, and City Administrative Assistant Richard Planavsky described the relevancy of its LWRP, its use, and the local consistency review process.

As a follow-up, DOS staff traveled to the City of Tonawanda to meet with City representatives. This meeting focused on updating the LWRP, as well as future opportunities to collaborate with DOS on waterfront revitalization projects.

DOS Findings:

Overview

The City of Tonawanda LWRP was originally approved in 1987, and subsequently amended in 1993 to better reflect local conditions and issues. The LWRP noted that conditions along the waterfront reflect an existing untapped potential for creating a uniquely vibrant urban waterfront environment building on the excellent system of public parkland.

The LWRP also served as the impetus for increased intermunicipal collaboration with the City of North Tonawanda and accelerated development of their shared Erie Canal waterfront to spur private investment in their respective downtowns. The LWRP established long-term revitalization strategies identified water-related recreational activities such as boating becoming increasingly important elements in the cities initiative to stimulate economic growth and promote use of the downtown's waterfront location as a catalyst to downtown investment and retail activity. To advance the community vision, the LWRP set forth projects aimed at increasing public access.

The LWRP has served the community well, however it is now seen as outdated. The City has received a 2012 EPF LWRP award to prepare an LWRP update. The amended LWRP will focus on updating the inventory and analysis, as well as the projects to advance public access and waterfront revitalization. In particular, the City is interested in planning for a promenade at Niawanda Park and Niagara Street streetscape improvements. The City may also explore updating its consistency review law, adopting a site plan review law, and consider expanding the LWRP boundary to include Ellicott Creek.

LWRP Implementation

In order to implement the LWRP, the City created a Waterfront Revitalization Board consisting of five members representing a mix of waterfront property owners, waterfront businesses, community organizations and the general citizenry. The Board assists in the control and regulation of the LWRP. The City also adopted a consistency review law to ensure actions to be undertaken within the Local Waterfront Revitalization Area (LWRA) by boards, departments, offices, other bodies or officers of the city are consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the policies and purposes of the LWRP.

The City also adopted two restrictions for the LWRA; the storage of hazardous and solid waste material is prohibited within the LWRA and all public and private marinas within the LWRA are required to include pump-out facilities for sanitary and other associated wastes.

The LWRP has helped the City to secure community development funding from the Department of State's EPF LWRP grant program as well as other funding sources, including the Niagara River Greenway. The City has obtained funding through the Niagara River Greenway Commission to design and construct a pavilion in Niawanda Park along the Niagara River waterfront and a shoreline stabilization project.

Gateway Harbor

The LWRP has been instrumental in helping the City realize its potential by creating partnerships with the NYS Canal Corporation, and securing funding to complete plans to construct an array of boater infrastructure needed to establish the area as the first of eight canal harbor centers for recreational boaters. The City of Tonawanda has received several EPF LWRP awards to develop their side of the Gateway Harbor to highlight the City's Erie Canal heritage and accommodate public recreational use. The greatest challenge was the fragmented nature of the site, which is intersected by bridges, streets, and waterways. A continuous pedestrian spine now links three distinctive outdoor spaces, and a seawall with boater services has transformed the area into a marina where boaters are encouraged to linger and come ashore. Original canal remnants are incorporated into the design of a stone amphitheater and a gateway feature marks and interprets historic alignments.



Tonawanda Gateway Harbor - The stone terraces create public space, where steep banks once precluded access.

Today, the Gateway Harbor is a major attraction along the Erie Canal catering to boaters and tourists who travel the Niagara River and Erie Canal. Gateway Harbor provides a perfect backdrop for civic events and festivals to promote the community of the Tonawandas and downtown business, including the immensely popular annual Canal Fest – an 8-day festival shared by the both cities, drawing an annual estimated attendance of over 200,000 people.

The construction of Gateway Harbor has also resulted in noticeable economic benefits with the openings of new restaurants and a tour boat operation soon after the harbor's completion.

Fishing Pier

Continuing its waterfront revitalization activities, in 2005, the City utilized an EPF LWRP grant to identify future projects and prepare conceptual designs and cost estimates. Through the grants public planning process, the City identified the need for wheelchair-accessible fishing access to meet its goal of offering access for all of its residents and visitors. To address this need, the city proposed construction of a ADA compliant fishing pier at the confluence of Ellicott Creek and the Erie Canal, adjacent to the historic Benjamin Long Homestead, built in 1829.

This location is ideal as there is currently dock space for boaters and a promenade area and it's across the street from the city's Senior Citizen Center.

In 2012, the City received an EPF LWRP grant to transform an underutilized and dilapidated pedestrian bridge abutment into an ADA accessible fishing pier to accommodate wheelchairs and serve the physically challenged. Construction is expected to be completed in 2014.



Conceptual design for fishing pier

LWRP Document Accessibility

Copies of the City of Tonawanda LWRP are on file at the City Office at 200 Niagara Street and are accessible during normal business hours. An electronic copy of the LWRP is available on the DOS website.

Local Consistency Review

The City of Tonawanda LWRP Consistency Law was adopted in 1986 to provide for the protection and beneficial use of the natural and man-made resources within the City's waterfront area by ensuring that actions classified as Type I or unlisted (under Part 617 of Title 6 of NYCRR) to be undertaken, approved or funded by City agencies will be undertaken in a manner consistent with the policies and purposes of the LWRP. At this time, the City also created a Waterfront Revitalization Board which reviews all environmental assessment forms (EAF), waterfront assessment forms (WAF) and environmental impact statements (EIS) prepared for proposed actions in the local waterfront area, and prepares specific recommendations concerning such actions.

The City is aware of local consistency review law; however, since it is rarely used they are not intimately familiar with the review process set forth in the law. Most years there are no proposed projects which require consistency review. As part of the LWRP evaluation process, DOS staff reviewed the local consistency review law with the Mayor and discussed the process and consistency review requirements. For example, the City was not aware that each City board or department must maintain a file documenting each consistency determination, including any recommendations received from the Waterfront Revitalization Board and any finding pursuant to law. The City will now disseminate this information to appropriate staff to ensure consistency determinations are kept on file. As necessary, the City will consult with DOS consistency unit on proposed actions.

LWRP Section V describes the consistency review process as well as existing local laws and regulation necessary to implement the LWRP.

Grants Awarded Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (EPF LWRP) City of Tonawanda			
Year	Amount of Grant	Project Description	Status
2012	\$235,596	LWRP Update and Implementation, Fishing Pier Construction - The City of Tonawanda will update its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program to reflect changes over the past 25 years. This will involve an examination of issues and conditions, a new inventory and analysis, review of policies, revised zoning requirements, and consulting with federal, state and local agencies on new polices and projects. The City will also construct a handicapped-accessible fishing pier with a concrete walkway along the mouth of Ellicott Creek and the Erie Canal.	Open
2004	\$30,000	Construction of Ellicott Creek ADA-Compliant Fishing Pier The City of Tonawanda will construct a handicapped-accessible fishing pier and wheelchair access ramp and sidewalk along Ellicott Creek opposite the historic Long Homestead, to serve an increasing number of physically-challenged visitors and senior citizens. This work is part of the City's ongoing development of Gateway Harbor, and furthers work developed under previous EPF awards.	Open
2005	\$25,000	Planning and Design of Revitalization Projects for Gateway Harbor and the Niagara River. The project team will identify future waterfront revitalization projects and prepare designs and cost estimates. This will further work developed under a previous EPF award.	Closed
2003	\$40,000	Construction of Transient Docking Facility for Tonawandas Gateway Harbor - The City will construct 640 lf of transient dockage in the Erie Canal to accommodate increased boat usage of the Tonawandas Gateway Harbor. The transient facilities will provide a linkage with the land-based Longs Point Park, the Canalway Trail, and downtown businesses. The project will further work developed under previous EPF awards.	Closed
1999	\$50,000	Canal Harbor/Ellicott Creek Bulkhead and Walkway Reconstruction - The City will reconstruct the shoreline wall and public walkway at the confluence of Ellicott Creek and the Erie Canal and construct handicap access improvements. The project will increase public use of adjacent shoreline trails, parks, and docks. Tonawanda is a regional canal harbor center.	Closed
1998	\$25,000	Niagara River Riverwalk Retaining Wall - The City of Tonawanda will repair the concrete retaining wall along the Niagara Rivera adjacent to the River Walk and River Edge Townhouse. Erosion of the retaining wall has caused sink holes and other conditions hazardous to pedestrians and fishermen	Closed

Grants Awarded			
Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (EPF LWRP)			
City of Tonawanda			
Year	Amount of Grant	Project Description	Status
		who frequent the waterfront. The initial repair work would facilitate continued maintenance by the City.	
1997	\$50,000	Canal Harbor Development - Ellicott Creek Boating Facilities - The City will construct improvements along Ellicott Creek to serve boaters and Canal System users. Proposed improvements include docks, lighting, utilities, and signage. The project would advance local and state efforts to establish a Canal System harbor center at Tonawanda.	Closed
1996	\$80,000	Canal Overlook Park - The project involves development of Overlook Park, a public recreational facility to be located along the Barge Canal shoreline off of Young Street to the east of the Renaissance Bridge on land owned by the NYS Canal Corporation. Proposed improvements for the park include the following: creation of amphitheater seating; signage; various site improvements to accommodate public recreational use; and extension of water and electrical service to the site.	Closed
1995	\$15,000	Canal Harbor Preconstruction Plan - The City of Tonawanda will complete the planning and design of boating and recreational facilities along the Barge Canal at Ellicott Creek.	Closed
1994	\$4,500	Erosion Mitigation Plan - The project involves the preparation of a component of a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) pursuant to the provisions of NYS Executive Law, Article 42.	Closed