

# Village of Dexter LWRP Monitoring Report

## June 2015

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### Community Background:

The Village of Dexter is located in Northern New York on the Black River in central Jefferson County. The village is bordered to the north, east and west by the Town of Brownville and to the south across the Black River by the Town of Hounsfield. The village is approximately .69 square miles in size with 1,052 residents according to the 2010 U.S census. Following the Black River, the Village is 1.25 miles upstream from Black River Bay on Lake Ontario and 7.8 miles downstream from the City of Watertown.

Historically, the Village's economic base was founded on water power that took advantage of the Village's strategic location at the last drop in elevation before the Black River enters Lake Ontario. The first dam was built in the early 1800s to support a sawmill and gristmill, and later a woolen mill. Pulp and paper mills dominated the late 1800s and early 1900s, supporting a railroad and even a lock and canal at the dam to allow travel on the Black River between the upstream Village of Brownville and Lake Ontario downstream. However, the canal and lock have been filled in, and all of the mills were closed by 1950, causing economic decline and deterioration of the industrial waterfront.

More recently, the Village has become primarily a residential community serving the Watertown urban center and the U.S. Army Garrison at Fort Drum. The Village retains a viable downtown commercial



district and has undertaken waterfront renewal efforts focused on recreation, tourism, and redevelopment of old industrial properties to assure long-term commercial stability. Improvements at Fish Island and Riverside Park support various recreational activities including power boating, rafting, canoeing and kayaking.

*Handicapped Canoe/Kayak Launch on the Black River in Dexter*

### Collaborations with Department of State:

Since completion and adoption of its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) in 1985, the Village has worked to advance implementation of the Program. While the Village has not applied to the Department of State (DOS) Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (EPF LWRP) for grant funding, DOS supported development of the Fish Island boat launch and park improvements in Dexter through an EPF LWRP grant awarded to the Town of Martinsburg for

development of the Black River Blueway. (See chart on Page 6: Grants Awarded - Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program).

The Village has also utilized funding from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and a legislative member item to develop recreational improvements and a handicapped canoe and kayak launch on Fish Island.

### **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 technical and financial assistance for program implementation.

DOS began the monitoring process with a letter to the Mayor asking the Village to participate, briefly describing the monitoring protocol, and including a list of survey questions. DOS followed up with a phone call to the Village asking if they had any questions about the monitoring process or the survey. DOS also explained that they would like to have a conference call between DOS representatives and key municipal officials to answer the survey questions, followed by a site visit/meeting to review the responses provided in the survey. Following the site visit, DOS would prepare a written assessment of findings to identify areas of improvement, training, or need for LWRP amendments.

The conference call to discuss the Village'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 Village Mayor, Jim Eves, described the relevancy of its LWRP, its use, and the local consistency review process.

As a follow-up, DOS staff traveled to Dexter to meet with Village representatives. This meeting focused on the Village's procedure to review projects in the waterfront area, challenges that the Village faces,



*Boat Launch on the Black River in Dexter*



and future opportunities to collaborate with DOS on waterfront revitalization projects. The Mayor then provided DOS with the opportunity to tour the waterfront area including the Fish Island, Canal Street and William Street area.

## **DOS Findings:**

### **Overview**

The Village of Dexter adopted its LWRP in 1985 to guide development within the coastal zone in a way that protects and preserves natural resources and supports development that will best utilize the potential of the waterfront. The LWRP recognizes the Black River as an important recreational resource and emphasizes the need to preserve and improve public access and use of the River.

Through implementation of its LWRP, Dexter has improved public access to the waterfront at Riverside Park and Fish Island. The Village has also made great strides in improving its infrastructure including the sewer system, supporting private investment in commercial properties. Currently, the Village is building a new Village Hall and improving Fish Island to support the growing kayaking and rafting industry.



*River rafting landing site on the Black River in Dexter*

During the tour, several waterfront issues were highlighted including flooding in the area where William Street and Canal Street meet, and lack of sufficient docking for canoes, kayaks and rafters on Fish Island. In the future, the Village would like to work with DOS to explore the potential for adding floating docks to encourage canoeists, kayakers and rafters coming down the Black River to land and visit businesses in the Village. The Village would also like to explore the feasibility of flood prevention measures that would double as park improvements on the Village property on William Street next to the rafting company's headquarters. An additional priority is repairs to the bridge to Fish Island including design features that would encourage pedestrians. These activities would be eligible to apply for funding under the EPF LWRP grant program.

Although it is thirty years old, the Village of Dexter LWRP is still used as a reference document which informs proposed waterfront development and revitalization projects. The Village suggested that the LWRP could be updated to improve the maps and make the document more readable for the average Village citizen. At the same time, the Village feels that an LWRP update is a lesser priority than pursuing funding to advance projects identified in the LWRP as well as ongoing infrastructure needs.

## **LWRP Implementation**

Initially, the Village adopted a local Environmental Review Law to implement the LWRP. The law included language to require review of projects in the local waterfront area for consistency with the LWRP policies. In 1996, the Village adopted Chapter 314, Waterfront Consistency Review, to more clearly define procedures for review of development projects for compatibility with the policies and purposes of the LWRP. In 2001, the Village adopted Chapter 325, Zoning. The zoning law includes a Waterfront Overlay District to provide additional review standards for proposed projects in the waterfront revitalization area.

The LWRP has helped the Village secure funding for local projects from the Department of State's EPF LWRP grant program (through the Town of Martinsburg), through other State agencies such as the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, and through other public and private funding sources.

### Riverside Park and Lower Boat Launch

The first set of projects that the Village implemented were development of a motorized boat launch, trailer parking, and a riverside park with picnic tables and a gazebo on the downstream side of the dam on the Black River. These recreational facilities were important to manage fishing and boating enthusiasts drawn to the River's excellent salmonid fishery. These projects were supported primarily with local funds and volunteers.

### Fish Island Waterfront Improvements

The Village's LWRP identified the need to develop the deteriorated and underutilized Fish Island property to further support recreational boating and the salmonid fishery. With funding from DEC and EPF LWRP (through the Town of Martinsburg), the Village reclaimed and installed improvements on the property that was formerly occupied by the Frontenac and St. Lawrence pulp and paper mills. The property is now open parkland, with a boat ramp, handicapped fishing platform, handicapped canoe and kayak launch, picnic pavilion and walking trail.

The Village is currently seeking funding to rehabilitate the bridge leading to Fish Island including design features that would encourage pedestrians. This bridge is in significant disrepair and unable to handle a heavy load. The Village is also seeking funding to install floating docks near the current boat launch to support the increasingly popular canoe and kayak recreational boater industry.

### Business Incubator Building

The former Dexter Sulphite Pulp and Paper Company property was identified in the LWRP as an important area to target for redevelopment. Through assistance from the Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency and the Technical Assistance Center in Plattsburgh, one of the site's structures was renovated and designated as a foreign trade zone, allowing manufacturing businesses that import raw materials to be free from paying duty until the product is exported out. Additional renovations were supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)/Rural Development's Rural Business Enterprise Program. The building now houses a sportswear company, a swimwear factory, and a commercial contracting firm.

### Village Core

Projects identified in the LWRP to improve the Village Core included commercial façade improvements, renovations to the Village Barn Department of Public Works equipment storage building, landscaping, parking improvements and pedestrian crosswalks. The Frontier Housing Corporation (FHC), a non-profit originally formed to assist with senior housing development in the Village, has also been instrumental in securing grants for Village improvements and infrastructure. FHC assisted with securing bonding from Key Bank to fund a new Village Barn, NYS Revolving Loan funding for the sewage treatment plant expansion, and grants for infrastructure improvements, public parks and recreation fields, a fishing access point, the library, and renovation of the former First Universalist Church into a museum for the Dexter Historical Society.

Some of the Village's business district is located inside the coastal zone, while most of the historic buildings and some of the business district is just outside the coastal zone. The Village continues to improve the waterfront and would like to improve connections to the business district in order to attract visitors and help local businesses thrive.

### **LWRP Document Accessibility**

Copies of the Village of Dexter LWRP are on file at the Village Office (100 Locke St.) and are accessible during normal business hours. An electronic copy of the LWRP is available on the DOS website: [http://www.dos.ny.gov/communitieswaterfronts/WFRevitalization/LWRP\\_status.html](http://www.dos.ny.gov/communitieswaterfronts/WFRevitalization/LWRP_status.html).

*Suggestion: the Village of Dexter website could link to the Dexter LWRP on the NYS DOS website.*

### **Local Consistency Review**

The Village of Dexter adopted the Waterfront Consistency Law in 1996 to provide for the protection and beneficial use of the natural and man-made resources within the Village of Dexter waterfront area. The law ensures that actions to be undertaken, approved or funded by village agencies that are classified as Type I or unlisted under Part 617 of Title 6 of NYCRR will be undertaken in a manner consistent with the policies and purposes of the Village of Dexter LWRP.

There is an average of only one project per year in the waterfront area that requires consistency review. The Planning Board is usually the first agency to review an application for a proposed project in the waterfront area, serving as lead agency for the project if they are an involved agency. The application is then circulated to the Jefferson County Planning Board for review as part of a shared services agreement. The Village Board can review the application if needed and make recommendations to the Planning Board. The Planning Board usually makes the final determination of consistency with the Village's LWRP policies. If the Village Board of Trustees or the Zoning Board are an involved agency for a project and the Planning Board is not, the Village Board or Zoning Board would serve as lead agency for the project, conduct the review, and make the consistency determination.

*Suggestion: the Village of Dexter could post the Local Consistency Law on their website.*

The Dexter local consistency review law states that the Community Development Coordinator, or in the absence of a Coordinator, the Village Clerk, shall advise applicants whether a proposed action is subject to SEQR and the local consistency law, and provide the appropriate assessment forms to applicants.

When initial review by the Village Board of Trustees, Planning Board, or Zoning Board (whichever board is lead agency) determines that a Type I or Unlisted action is contemplated in the local waterfront area (LWA), the full or short Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) shall be accompanied by a Waterfront Assessment Form (WAF).

Actions in the Village of Dexter’s LWA shall be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the policy standards and conditions listed in the consistency review law. The policy standards and conditions are a summarized version of the LWRP policies with the actual LWRP policy numbers referenced in the law. No work or activity in the coastal area subject to the local consistency law shall be commenced unless the Code Enforcement Officer has received a written determination that the action is consistent with the LWRP policy standards and conditions. The Village feels that the Waterfront Consistency Review Law, combined with SEQR and the Zoning Law, has been an effective tool for protecting waterfront resources and ensuring proposed development will advance the Village’s waterfront vision.

<b>Grants Awarded</b>			
<b>Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (EPF LWRP)</b>			
<b>Grant to the Town of Martinsburg for an access site in the Village of Dexter on the Black River Blueway Trail</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Amount of Grant</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Status</b>
2006	\$76,000	The Town of Martinsburg, in collaboration with other municipalities in Jefferson, Lewis and Oneida Counties, implemented elements of the Black River Blueway Trail Development Plan. Work included a river corridor signage program, a river guide for visitors, and construction of a handicapped accessible fishing platform in the Town of Turin, public recreation space along the turning basin in Lyons Falls, and improvements to the Fish Island boat launch and park area in the Village of Dexter. Work is intended to enhance and promote the river as a regional asset for recreation and community development.	Closed