

# Pilot Community – Village of Lewiston

## LWRP Monitoring Report

June 2010

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### Community Background:

The Village of Lewiston is located in the western part of Niagara County, Western New York, at the base of the Niagara Escarpment in the Iroquois Plain, about 7 miles north of the City of Niagara Falls and 25 minutes north of the City of Buffalo. The Village has a surface of approximately one square mile and a population of approximately 3,000 people. Lewiston's waterfront stretches for one mile along the left bank of Lower Niagara River. Directly across the river is the City of Queenston in Ontario, Canada.

The Village of Lewiston (formerly known as *The Landing*) was the site of the first European settlement in Western New York in 1720, where trading started along the river. French explorers arriving from Canada had visited the area as early as 1615. Before 1825 and the opening of the Erie Canal, Lewiston was called the Gateway to the West and had a larger population than the City of Buffalo. The Village was incorporated in 1822, and claims to be the "most historic square mile in America".

Lewiston is historically significant for many reasons, but primarily for:

- Its geography and its relation to Niagara Falls in the early commercial development of the Great Lakes region;
- Its role in the War of 1812; and
- Its position (in the early to mid-1800s) as the last stop of the Underground Railroad for escaping slaves who were seeking freedom in Canada. The Freedom Crossing Monument, dedicated on October 14, 2009, commemorates the Underground Railroad movement in Lewiston.



*Freedom Crossing Monument*

Today's trends link the upgrading of the business district with the revitalization of the waterfront to accommodate better public access, recreational boaters and community events, and create a regional tourist destination. The Village has a number of properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which have contributed to the sense of place that anchors the Village and formed the base of its main street renovation.

Lewiston's economy revolves around its heritage and its waterfront resources. Tourists and visitors flock to Lewiston, primarily in the summertime, to enjoy its many festivals, fine restaurants, musical entertainment, and to learn about its history. Thousands enjoy taking a ride through the whitewater of the Niagara River on the Whirlpool Jet Boat, which shoots through the river's Class 5 rapids and is considered one of the top five adventure rides in North America.

## Collaborations with Department of State:

Upon completion of its Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) in 1989, the Village of Lewiston has methodically worked to advance its implementation. The Village's grants partnership with the Division began in 1999 with a \$14,500 EPF LWRP grant to develop a redevelopment strategy for Lewiston Landing on the Niagara River waterfront. The strategy included the preparation of conceptual plans, cost estimates, and a project phasing plan aimed at improving public access opportunities within the Lewiston Landing area.

Upon completion of the strategy plan in 2001, the Village was subsequently awarded three EPF LWRP grants totaling \$388,000 for the construction of access and linkage improvement projects. These EPF LWRP grants have resulted in the construction of docks, a fish cleaning station and restrooms, and new pedestrian walkways. The Village also demolished and removed DPW buildings from the Lewiston Landing area to provide increased



*Lewiston Landing*

parking capacity, intended to foster tourism and recreational fishing. Since completion of these projects, the Village hosts an average of six fishing derbies annually.

The Village also acts as a “pass through” for two additional EPF LWRP awards totaling nearly \$164,000 to engage the numerous environmental organizations in Western New York in a discussion of shared issues and to develop a common agenda for action. (See attached chart: Grants Awarded - Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, Village of Lewiston.)

The Village, in cooperation with Department of State, Division of Coastal Resources (DCR), is currently preparing an amendment to its LWRP to refine the description of existing and proposed land uses in several areas to coincide with a rezoning of properties. The Village intends to prepare a more comprehensive LWRP amendment in the near future, which will reflect existing conditions, provide an updated strategy for its waterfront area, and address conflicting water uses through a harbor management component.

## 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. Additionally, this process provides a forum for the community to highlight successes, and request technical and financial assistance for program implementation.

The DCR began the Village of Lewiston’s LWRP monitoring process with a phone call to the Village’s Clerk-Treasurer to describe that the Village had been selected by DCR to participate in the LWRP monitoring project. A follow-up letter was sent to provide information relating to what the process would involve, and a list of survey questions was attached. The letter indicated 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 Village's answers to the survey questions was informative and provided the details necessary for the DCR to make its assessment. The Village was well prepared and the call took just under two hours. Anne Welch, Village Clerk-Treasurer, provided the responses.

As a follow-up to the call, DCR staff traveled to Lewiston to meet with Village representatives. Participants from the Village were: Anne Welch, Village Clerk-Treasurer; and, Michael Marino, Village Engineer. As part of the meeting, the Village described the relevance of the LWRP, its use, and where the Village stood in its implementation. The meeting provided DCR with an opportunity to more fully assess the Village'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 *Village of Lewiston Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP)*, and *Village of Lewiston Master Plan* (adopted October 18, 2004) are the key documents that guide waterfront development/revitalization and funding of projects in the Village. The Village's Zoning Law plays a key role in implementing the LWRP. Through implementation of its LWRP, Lewiston has transformed its Lewiston Landing waterfront area into a thriving mix of recreation, retail and residential uses. Concurrently, the Village has completed a multi-million dollar upgrade of its business district and strengthened the connection between its downtown and waterfront through improved signage and streetscape enhancements.

These improvements, made possible by the DCR's early investment, have resulted in a complete revitalization of the community through new, private investment. 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 Lewiston's efforts to attract visitors to the area. A restaurant is now located in a former shoreline coal silo, an excursion whirlpool jet boat company offers tours from its Lewiston Landing location, and a 72-room inn, along Center Street, opened for business in 2007. This new destination is expected to draw about one-half million visitors annually to the Lower River region who may also be visiting major events such as the Porter Cup Golf Tournament, the Artpark, Lewiston Jazz Festival, Lewiston Art Festival, and others (*Niagara County Center for Economic Development 2008*).

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, Village representatives indicated that the DCR has played a significant role in the Village'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 also helped the Village to secure funding from other federal and State agencies, as well.

A small amendment of the Village of Lewiston LWRP is being prepared to incorporate a zoning amendment – and related changes to existing and proposed land uses within the waterfront area – adopted by the Village and influencing waterfront development. Additionally, the Village plans to renew its long-term vision for the waterfront and undertake a more comprehensive planning approach culminating with an entirely updated LWRP - addressing problems of conflict, congestion and competition for space in the use of surface waters and identifying new revitalization projects and implementation techniques.

### **LWRP Implementation**

The LWRP has provided the Village with a programmatic vehicle for focusing on its waterfront resources and planning for appropriate redevelopment. The Village has completed all of the proposed projects recommended in its LWRP over the course of the past twenty-one years. The work was done in stages, based on the availability of State and federal funds to accomplish the projects.

A focus of the Village's implementation efforts has involved redevelopment of the four-block area along the waterfront, including Lewiston Landing. The LWRP identified the Village's vision for the area – to complete Lewiston Landing Waterfront Park, rehabilitate and expand private marina facilities, and improve and expand recreation-oriented and tourist-oriented commercial uses. The LWRP also described the Village's realization of the potential economic benefits of public and private waterfront investment through linking the waterfront area to the Village's commercial district to the east and Artpark to the south.

Funding under Title 11 of the New York State Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program has been instrumental to the implementation of the Village's LWRP. Awards have helped revitalize its business district and expand and enhance public access, while also boosting tourism and economic development opportunities. The Village has also worked with other State agencies to assist in implementing waterfront goals and projects, including the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and the Department of Environmental Conservation. The Village has also obtained implementation funding from the New York Power Authority Relicensing Settlement Agreements funds. The Village's Zoning Code and amendments thereto, has also been an important tool in the implementation of the LWRP.

The Village completed a redevelopment strategy for Lewiston Landing along the Village's Niagara River waterfront aimed at improving public access opportunities at five (5) publicly owned sites within the Lewiston Landing area (\$14,500 EPF). Phase 1 of access enhancements to the Lewiston Landing area were completed – implementing public access projects at two sites and including trail connections, overlooks, a fish cleaning station, and restrooms (\$113,000 EPF). New walkways and floating docks have been constructed, lighting installed, and Village Department of Public Works buildings (i.e., garage, abandoned sewage treatment plant, pump station and storage building) were demolished and removed to provide increased open space/future parking (\$200,000). A new brick walkway has been installed; erosion stabilization put in place, including a concrete retaining wall, backfill and "soil-holding" vegetation; wooden docks were removed and replaced with new aluminum docks; and, parking for additional trailered and non-trailered vehicles was built (\$75,000 EPF).

Today, Lewiston has a constant stream of visitors as a result of the waterfront redevelopment and business district improvement efforts, which has helped build private investors' confidence in the Village and its commitment to supporting local investment through financial assistance and public policy.

**LWRP Document Accessibility**

Paper copies of the LWRP document are kept in the Village Clerk's office. The document is available for review to anyone who makes a request. Additionally, the LWRP is available electronically on the Department of State website: <http://www.dos.ny.gov/opd/>

Each member of the Village Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals has a copy of the LWRP. The Village does not have the document on its website.

**Local Consistency Review**

Village 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 Village's waterfront resources. The Village uses its LWRP as a guideline and standard base for discussions for all waterfront actions.

As part of the Village's local consistency process, applicant(s) or, in the case of direct actions, the Village agency proposing to undertake the action refers the action and all pertinent information to the Planning Commission for review and recommendations regarding the action's consistency with the policies and purposes of the Village of Lewiston LWRP. The Planning Commission reviews any action that requires a permit or is proposed in the waterfront area, and provides considerations and/or recommendations to the Village Board of Trustees for a final recommendation of consistency with the LWRP. Currently, only a couple of projects are reviewed, each year. No problems have been encountered by the Village with regard to the consistency review process.

<b>Grants Awarded</b>			
<b>Title 11 Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program</b>			
<b>Village of Lewiston</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Amount of Grant</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Status</b>
1999	\$14,500	Lewiston Landing Redevelopment Plan  The Village of Lewiston will prepare a redevelopment strategy for Lewiston Landing along the Village's Niagara River waterfront. The strategy will include conceptual plans, cost estimates, and a project phasing plan aimed at improving public access opportunities at five (5) publicly-owned sites within the Lewiston Landing area: the Village's Department of Public Works site, Onondaga Trail Park, and the street-ends of Oneida, Cayuga, and Tuscarora Streets.	Closed
2000	\$113,000	Access Enhancements to Lewiston Landing  The Village will complete Phase 1 of access enhancements to the Lewiston	Closed

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		Landing area of the Niagara River. The project will implement public access projects at two sites. The improvements will include trail connections, overlooks, a fish cleaning station, and restrooms. This will further work developed under a previous LWRP grant from the EPF.	
2001	\$200,000	Lewiston Landing Access Enhancement - Phase 2 –  The Village will continue the public access enhancements to the Lewiston Landing area of the Niagara River. The project involves the construction of new walkways, floating docks, lighting, and the demolition and removal of the existing DPW buildings to provide increased green space. This will further work developed under previous EPF awards.	Under way
2003	\$75,000	Construction of Walkway, Amenities and Docking Facilities at Lewistown Landing  The Village will continue public access enhancements to Lewiston Landing on the Niagara River. The project involves the completion of the "Commons" area with a brick walkway, bank stabilization, removal of 8 deteriorated docks and replacement with 4 floating docks and 4 aluminum docks, and construction of additional parking facilities. This will further work developed under previous EPF awards.	Under way
2007	\$94,000	Western New York Environmental Coalition  The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, sponsored by the Village of Lewiston, proposes to create a Western New York Environmental Coalition to develop and implement a coordinated regional agenda for natural resources in the eight-county area of western New York. Grant funding will support a Coalition Coordinator, supplies, equipment and contractual services needed to advance the coalition.	Under-way
2008	\$69,500	Western New York Environmental Plan Enhancements  To advance an ongoing assessment of environmental programs in the eight western New York Counties, the Village of Lewiston, in partnership with the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (CFGB), will consolidate survey and assessment results, develop a website promoting findings, and address identified needs through a capacity-building fund. Grant funding will primarily support CFGB salaries, contractual services provided by the Urban Design Project and the Institute for Conservation Leadership, and the capacity-building grant program.	Under-way