



Watertown City Council
Monday, January 24, 2022
7:00 p.m.

WORK SESSION AGENDA

The City Council meeting is open to the public. Everyone must wear a mask.

Discussion Items:

1. Industrial Park Second Access
 - John Renzi, Renzi Food Service
2. Stormwater Management System
 - Michael Delaney, City Engineer
 - Patrick Keenan, Superintendent of Public Works
3. Sewall's Island Hydro Redevelopment
 - Hari Achuthan, Convalt Energy, Inc.

January 18, 2022

To: The Honorable Mayor and City Council
From: Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager
Subject: Industrial Park Second Access

City Center Industrial Park has one vehicular access point via Bellew Ave. South to Arsenal Street. It was expected when the infrastructure was built that a second access point and improvements at the intersection of Arsenal Street and Bellew Ave. would be needed as the park filled with businesses.

Renzi Food Service has voiced their concern about not having a second access for their trucks.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is studying alternatives for access, but the primary objective of their study is to improve access for emergency vehicles.

A proposal to extend Waterman Drive is in the 2021-22 Capital Budget. The narrative page is attached. The preliminary estimate is \$4,600,000. The funding would come from borrowing.

The purpose of discussing this at the Work Session is to determine whether the Council wishes to move forward with the project.

**FISCAL YEAR 2021-2022
CAPITAL BUDGET
INFRASTRUCTURE
STREETS**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION	COST
<p>Waterman Drive West Extension Design</p> <p>Construction of a 2,400 linear foot road extension through the existing Flanigan plaza and Coleman Avenue connecting Arsenal Street to Waterman Drive. The project would consist of property acquisition, storm sewer improvements, sidewalk, reconfiguration and striping of the plaza as well as modification to the existing signalized plaza entrance. The cost includes estimated engineering, construction and construction expenses.</p>  <p>Funding to support this project (along with construction) will be through the issuance of a 15-year serial bond with projected FY 2023-24 debt service of \$421,667.</p>	<p>\$4,600,000</p>
TOTAL	\$4,600,000

January 18, 2022

To: The Honorable Mayor and City Council
From: Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager
Subject: Stormwater Management

The City's stormwater system is designated as a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4). This places additional obligations on us for controlling stormwater. After many years of addressing water pollution caused by sewage, the Environmental Protection Agency has turned its sight toward pollution caused by stormwater run-off. Run-off picks up contaminants and carries them to water bodies.

The goal of a successful stormwater management system is to reduce the rate of flow through the system and to improve the quality of the water. This can be done with retention ponds and many communities are now using other green infrastructure such as bioswales and rain gardens.

The City's efforts to date have been primarily separation of the storm and sanitary systems to reduce sanitary overflow events into the river. However, the stormwater will eventually have to be cleaned. We have tested a couple of methods, including rain gardens and flexi-pave in J. B. Wise Parking Lot. Five cyclonic separators have been installed that cause solids to settle out of the water. Street trees are also considered to be a stormwater control method. The trees intercept rain and slow its progress to the ground and take up a lot of water when it does make it to the ground.

Another concern is that we seem to have been getting intense rainstorms more often. This has caused water flows that have exceeded the capacity of our system in some locations.

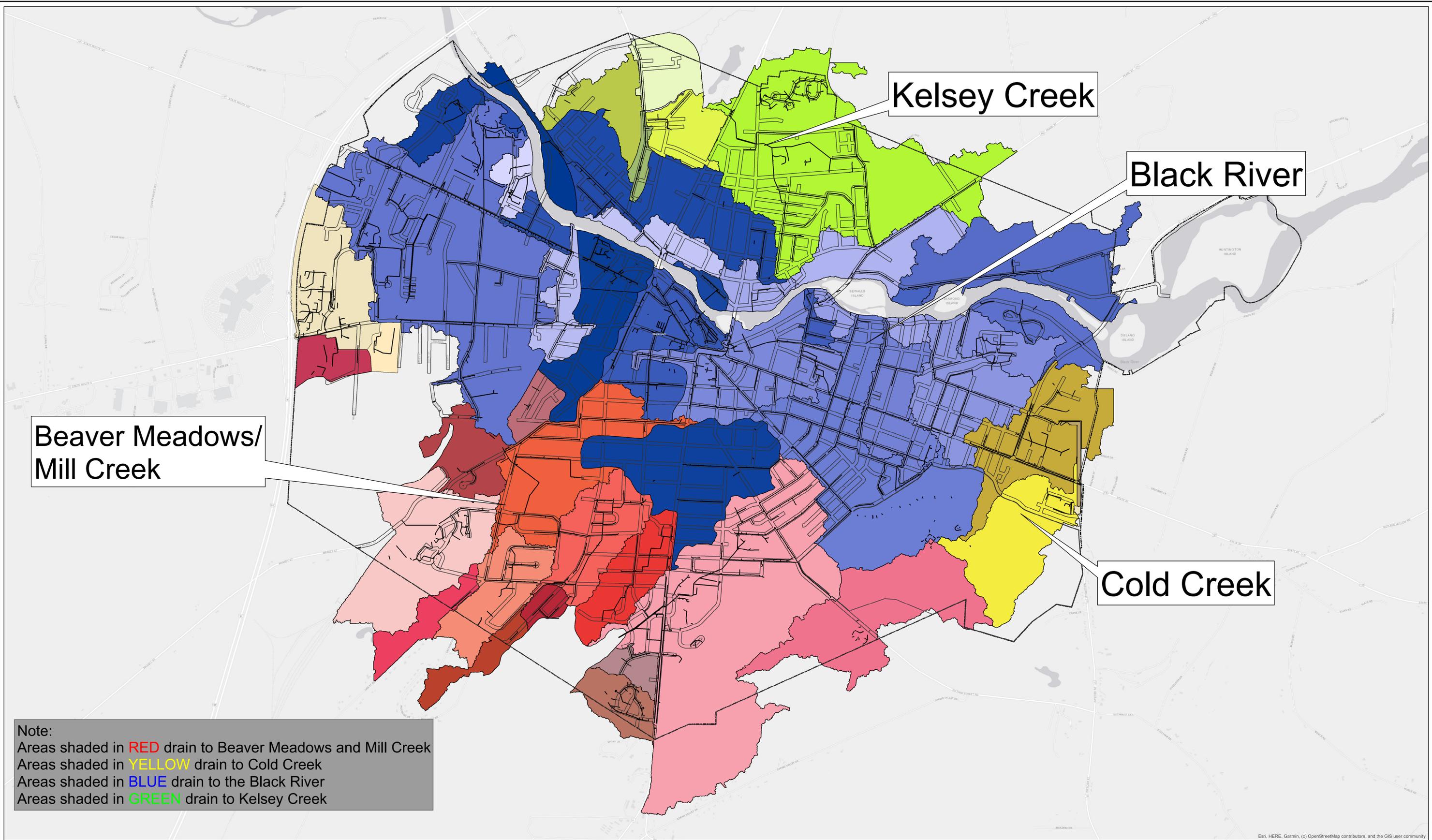
The City is in need of an up-to-date Stormwater Management Plan. A sewer investigation report was prepared by Stearns & Wheler in 1986 and updated in 2006. A Long-Term Control Plan was prepared by City staff in 2008. The City Council agreed with the idea of using ARPA to prepare the plan at the August 9, 2021 Work Session.

Unless the current Council objects, staff will proceed with obtaining an engineering proposal to develop the plan. The basins draining into City Center Industrial Park will be looked at first. Renzi Food Service has concerns with how the drainage is impacting their current and future expansion. A map of the drainage basins is attached.

A method of financing the stormwater system that I think the Council should consider is a Stormwater Utility Fund. This would be like the Water Fund and the Sewer Fund. An article about Ithaca's utility is attached.

Fees would be set based on how much water a property contributes to the system. This can be determined in different ways, but usually involves a calculation involving the amount of impervious surfaces (i.e., roofs, paved areas). Credit can also be given for properties that have on-site stormwater management. The current budget contains \$75,000 to do a rate study.

The financial benefit of creating a separate utility is that it takes the cost of stormwater out of the General Fund. Stormwater maintenance is currently budgeted at about \$500,000. This does not include any capital projects. Utility charges apply to tax-exempt properties, so the cost will be spread over a larger base. Also, properties with more impervious surfaces will pay more than those that have less, such as single family homes.

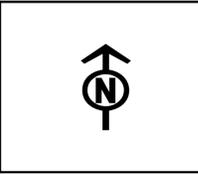


Revision:	Description of Revision:	Date:	By:

Project:	Stormwater
Title:	Stormwater Drainage Basins



CITY OF WATERTOWN, NEW YORK
GIS DEPARTMENT
 ROOM 305B, MUNICIPAL BUILDING
 245 WASHINGTON STREET
 WATERTOWN, NEW YORK 13601
 TEL: (315) 785-7793 EMAIL: gis@watertown-ny.gov



Project:	Stormwater Drainage Basins
Requested By:	Approved By:
Drawn By: M. Owen	Date:
Date: 1/18/2022	Map Number:
Scale: 1 inch = 1,000 feet	

Emerging Stormwater Management Options in New York: Overview of the City of Ithaca Stormwater User Fee Case Study

Simon Gruber

Executive Summary

The cost of constructing, maintaining and operating municipal infrastructure for managing stormwater runoff and drainage is a significant portion of many municipal budgets in New York State. In recent decades, several trends have increased the overall cost of meeting municipal stormwater management responsibilities, including the implementation of the Phase II stormwater management regulations¹ based on the Federal Clean Water Act, which created new requirements for municipalities with stormwater conveyance infrastructure that are designated as municipal separate storm sewer systems, or MS4s. Another trend that is adding to the burden on stormwater infrastructure is the increasing incidence of larger rainstorms in recent decades, a trend that is very evident in weather records going back to the 1950s and 1960s (and this shift is larger in the northeast U.S.² than in any other part of the nation). The recent focus on the benefits of green infrastructure for reducing runoff and managing stormwater to protect water quality and reduce risks from runoff and flooding is an important evolution that is driving interest in new financing approaches and other options to improve the cost-effectiveness and efficacy of stormwater infrastructure. Finally, revising the way stormwater costs are allocated to specific properties based on benefits each property receives from municipal infrastructure is yet another driver for improving stormwater policies and programs. This article provides an introduction to one approach for revamping a local municipality's financing mechanism for stormwater costs, based on the City of Ithaca's experience after they implemented a stormwater user fee model through a local law adopted by the city in August 2014.³

Introduction

The Clean Water Act, which was adopted into U.S. law in 1972, created a framework for protecting and restoring water quality through regulations and infrastructure improvements that initially focused mainly on municipal and industrial wastewater treatment and other measures to address point source pollution. Over time, it became evident that nonpoint source pollution carried in stormwater runoff is another major cause of water quality impacts and Federal and state programs began to focus on addressing this through education, demonstration projects, research and regulations. Best management practices for managing stormwater, including retention ponds, were included in many development projects, and more recently, practices known as green infrastructure have emerged as the more effective way to protect water quality in many situations. Green infrastructure (GI) -- including smaller rain gardens and larger bioretention areas, vegetated swales, porous pavement, street trees, rainwater harvesting, and

¹ Stormwater Phase 2 Final Rule – An Overview, Dec. 2005, available at <https://www3.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/fact1-0.pdf>, accessed Jan. 30 2018.

² See map in Figure 2.18, *Observed Change in Very Heavy Precipitation*, at this website about the National Climate Assessment – this map illustrates the 71% increase in storm events defined as the heaviest 1% of all events in the northeast U.S. from 1958 to 2012. Available at <https://nca2014.globalchange.gov/report/our-changing-climate/heavy-downpours-increasing>. Accessed Jan. 30 2018.

³ This Ithaca law is Chapter 283: Stormwater Utility, adopted by the Common Council of the City of Ithaca in August 2014 as L.L. No. 3-2014, and it's available at <https://ecode360.com/29575854>. Accessed Jan. 30 2018.

green roofs, among others – is a design approach that focuses on managing runoff on the site where it originates, starting with reducing the impervious surfaces (paved surfaces, buildings and other areas that don't absorb rainwater) that produce runoff in the first place. Many GI practices also use vegetation as a key part of the treatment process, and in the growing season, trees and plants help retain and evaporate large amounts of water, thereby reducing runoff. The plants in vegetated landscapes and GI systems, including soils, play a critical role in filtering pollutants and restoring water quality.

In new development projects, it is easier to incorporate green infrastructure practices into site plans and designs. Finding space in areas that are largely built-out, including denser urban areas, is more challenging, and when it's not financed as part of a new development, finding funding sources to implement GI retrofits to restore urban water quality is another barrier. A significant portion of the total pollutant loading reaching waterbodies in areas like the Hudson Valley region in New York originates from older, developed areas with a lot of impervious surfaces. Innovative ways are needed to address these legacy pollution sources, and improved financing mechanisms for long-term municipal operations and maintenance costs are one important avenue for addressing these challenges.

In recent years, a lot of research has focused on developing financing and regulatory strategies that can incentivize the implementation of GI practices to reduce runoff from private properties. Another key priority that's directly relevant for understanding the stormwater user fee approach and rationale involves the importance of equity and fairness in allocating the costs of stormwater infrastructure appropriately, so that property owners are paying enough to cover the cost of their fair share of the cost for municipal stormwater systems. The stormwater user fee is a regulatory and financing mechanism that enables a more equitable allocation of these costs, by linking the cost assessed to each property more directly to the amount of runoff that property generates each year, using the amount of impervious surface as the indicator for runoff quantities. An additional benefit of this approach, which is incorporated into the Ithaca law and in user fee models in other states, is that it creates a direct incentive for property owners to implement green infrastructure retrofits to reduce runoff, and to thereby reduce their annual cost for stormwater charges.

For municipal leaders and other stakeholders in New York who are interested in implementing a user fee model for allocating and assessing stormwater costs, a key question is whether this approach is authorized under state law. As it turns out, based on the legal analysis and viewpoints available, the answer to this question is complicated and not clear. A draft white paper that was written for the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) in 2007, *Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Funding Document*, provides a detailed analysis of many relevant state laws.⁴ In this paper and in several educational presentations sponsored by the Hudson Valley Regional Council in the last several years, Bob Feller, the white paper's author, suggested that the user fee approach is the better approach for addressing the financing, equitable allocation and water quality restoration goals outlined above. But in his legal analysis, Feller concluded that while there is no prohibition in state law that clearly states municipalities are not authorized to implement user fees for stormwater costs, there is also no law that clearly enables this approach. After reaching the same conclusion, but some apparent confidence that a carefully-structured law could potentially withstand any legal challenges, the

⁴ Available at [www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/funddocdraft\(1\).pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/funddocdraft(1).pdf), accessed Jan. 29, 2018.

City of Ithaca decided to implement a user fee for assessing stormwater costs. After completing a lot of research and planning, this law, *Chapter 283: Stormwater Utility*⁵ was adopted in 2014, and it's believe to be the first one of its kind in NY State. As this article is being finalized in late January 2018, there have not been any legal challenges to the Ithaca law and the implementation process has reportedly been fairly straightforward.

Overview of City of Ithaca Stormwater User Fee

The City of Ithaca is a designated MS4 municipality, and as such, it is subject to stormwater management requirements of the NYS DEC for MS4s, which is important for understanding the context for the user fee law's implementation and its long-term implications. At the same time, drainage and simply managing runoff from a quantity perspective is a fundamental priority for municipal stormwater managers. The Ithaca stormwater program is addressing both quantity and quality issues, and runoff reduction is, in general, an important proxy for achieving water quality goals.

As a starting point for developing the new stormwater law, Ithaca officials and staff were faced with one major task, among others: they had to identify all the costs and budget lines related to stormwater management in the existing municipal budget framework. In the past, these costs were incorporated in budgets for a number of departments and staff, and identifying and quantifying these costs was a time-consuming process requiring a lot of staff time. Another step that required a lot of time was the use of GIS (geographic information systems) to analyze aerial imagery to calculate the extent of impervious surface on each tax parcel. This analysis determined that for 1, 2 and 3 unit residential properties, the average extent of impervious surfaces on these parcels is 2,300 square feet. Ithaca used this number to establish an Equivalent Dwelling Unit annual flat stormwater user fee for these properties that was set at \$48/year. For larger properties, including commercial, institutional and industrial sites, the annual stormwater fee is based on the same ERU, with fees assessed in increments of 0.25 ERUs at \$12 each. Owners who reduce impervious surfaces or mitigate runoff in other ways can apply for credits based on the amount of the reductions, and once these credits are approved, their annual fee is lowered. A lot of information relevant for property owners is available at the city's website.⁶

In this framework, larger residential properties and non-residential uses have the option to reduce impervious surfaces or to mitigate stormwater runoff on site in other ways, and after the City verifies these retrofits have been implemented, the annual stormwater fee will be reduced accordingly. Ithaca decided that the administration costs for this program would outweigh the stormwater user fees received if they included a variable-fee structure for 1-3 unit residential parcels. The law therefore specifies \$48/year as the flat fee for these parcels.

Some key points regarding the advantages of this approach for Ithaca include the fact that this user fee now enables collection of about \$130,000/year from Cornell University, whose

⁵ Chapter 283: Stormwater Utility, Adopted by Common Council of the City of Ithaca 8-6-2014 by L.L. No. 3-2014. Available at <https://ecode360.com/29575854>, accessed Jan. 30 2018.

⁶ FAQs about the stormwater user fee are available at <https://www.cityofithaca.org/520/Stormwater-User-Fee-FAQs>, and basic information about stormwater management and requirements for MS4 municipalities is at <https://www.cityofithaca.org/316/Stormwater-Management>, accessed Jan. 30 2018.

properties comprise a large part of the city that generate a lot of runoff, while under the old approach (which depended on property taxes for stormwater costs), the university paid nothing because it is exempt from property taxes. While most municipalities would not realize such a substantial boon (unless they had a similarly large percentage of tax-exempt properties), some additional revenue would be gained by assessing fees on tax-exempt properties in most places. Also, as noted above, by allocating existing costs more equitably, this approach can be presented to property owners and others in the community as a fairer, more transparent way of assessing costs based on each owner paying their fair share. In Ithaca, the city calculated that the average homeowner had previously been paying about \$100/year, and during the adoption process for the stormwater user fee, they explained to the public that the new law would result in cutting their annual cost by half. All non-profit organizations that are tax-exempt are subject to the Ithaca user fee. Another key aspect of this approach is that municipal stormwater costs are shifted away from being collected via property taxes – and therefore, they are apparently not subject to the local government tax cap in NY State that has been a major challenge for many local governments.^{7 8}

Ithaca's implementation of this stormwater user fee law entailed a large investment of staff time, as noted, for research, analysis, program development, public outreach, and initial implementation. After the first three months of implementation, however, they found that the amount of staff time required for administration of the program returned to roughly where it had previously been before they began this process, and they did not hire any new staff for this program.

With the stormwater user fee in place for several years now, the City of Ithaca's stormwater program has recently used some the funds collected for modeling and analysis of streams, with a focus on identifying flood risk mitigation options. In this context, one key, outstanding question regarding the legality of how these funds can be used involves costs for construction of stormwater infrastructure, and costs for illicit discharge detection and elimination, public education and participation, reporting to NYS DEC, and other steps required for MS4 municipalities as part of their annual stormwater management programs. In Feller's 2007 analysis for NYS DEC, he wrote: "When available, user fees can only be employed to fund the operation and maintenance portion of the costs."⁹ The City of Ithaca, however, is apparently using some of the revenue collected for costs that might be deemed to be outside the realm of "operation and maintenance". For preparation of this article, available resources did not permit a more detailed analysis of how the existing statutory laws and precedents in case law might view this question.

⁷ Aaron Lavine, City Attorney for the City of Ithaca, at May 9, 2017 workshop, Emerging Stormwater Management Options for Protecting Streams & Water Quality, presented in Orangetown, NY. Videos of presentations at this workshop are available for viewing at <https://vimeo.com/channels/1248904> and Aaron Lavine's slides from this workshop, entitled *Implementing Stormwater User Fees in New York: the Ithaca Experience*, are being posted online at the website of the Hudson Valley Regional Council in conjunction with publication of this article – visit <http://hudsonvalleyregionalcouncil.org/> for more information.

⁸ Bob Feller's 2007 white paper for NYS DEC also seems to support this conclusion. See p. 38, where this paper states: "User fees are not governed by the real property tax law. Instead, they are considered to be payment for the provision of services." See [www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/funddocdraft\(1\).pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/funddocdraft(1).pdf)

⁹ See p. 5. Accessed Jan. 30 2018.

Conclusion

As described in the beginning of this article, water quality protection and restoration are the primary goals of the 1972 Clean Water Act, which is one of the key drivers for local government stormwater management requirements and programs in New York. Meanwhile, basic drainage and flood risk mitigation have been critical priorities in communities across the globe for millennia. In the modern era, green infrastructure – which relies on engineered systems relying heavily on environmental elements including soils, plants and trees, has emerged as the preferred approach for capturing and reducing runoff and filtering out pollutants. We are therefore seeing an integration of multiple goals, some newer and some older, and technologies and management strategies for achieving these goals are steadily evolving. At the same time, minimizing costs for municipalities and property owners, and allocating costs fairly, are also key priorities. As stormwater management and water quality programs mature in New York and other states, newer policy and financing tools are needed to facilitate more effective implementation of the best management practices that we know are protective of water quality. While there is a great deal more to be learned, the Ithaca stormwater user fee law and associated programs provide a valuable model for a coordinated approach that can potentially improve the ability of municipalities to incentivize water quality restoration as well as continuing to fund basic drainage needs.

Resources

City of Ithaca user fee law creating a user fee structure for stormwater management costs: Chapter 283: *Stormwater Utility*, Adopted by Common Council of the City of Ithaca 8-6-2014 by L.L. No. 3-2014: <https://ecode360.com/29575854>

Link to videos of May 9, 2017 workshop entitled “Emerging Stormwater Management Options for Protecting Streams & Water Quality: An Educational Workshop for Municipal Officials, Watershed Organizations and Other Stakeholders”, presented by the Hudson Valley Regional Council and partner organizations: <https://vimeo.com/channels/1248904>

Stormwater Phase 2 Final Rule – An Overview. US EPA Fact Sheet, Dec. 2005
<https://www3.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/fact1-0.pdf>

US EPA introduction to nonpoint source pollution issues:
<https://www.epa.gov/nps/what-nonpoint-source>



**Hudson River
Estuary Program**

A Program of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

"This Project has been funded in part by a grant from the New York State Environmental Protection Fund through the Hudson River Estuary Program of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation."

January 18, 2022

To: The Honorable Mayor and City Council
From: Kenneth A. Mix, City Manager
Subject: Sewall's Island Hydro Redevelopment

Attached is a Letter of Interest from Hari Achuthan, President & CEO of Convalt Energy, Inc., for development of the Sewall's Island Hydroelectric Power Plant. Convalt is developing the solar panel manufacturing plant at the airport.

The dam site of interest is at the downstream point of the island. It is identified on the attached map.

Mr. Achuthan has also indicated an interest in other redevelopment of the island. We shared the Sewall's Island/ Factory Square Redevelopment Plan with him. The plan can be seen on the City's website under Departments/Planning & Zoning/Plans, Policies, and Studies. A supplement to the plan has been proposed to us by Thomas Walker, Jr., which is attached. This has also been shared with Mr. Achuthan.

Mr. Achuthan will be attending the Work Session to discuss his proposal.



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Tel: +1.212.683.0400

December 29, 2021

Mr. Kenneth Mix
City Manager
City of Watertown
245 Washington Street, Room 302
Watertown, New York 13601

Sub: Convalt Energy's Non-Binding Letter of Interest to City of Watertown ("City") for development of Sewall's Island Hydroelectric Power Plant ("Project")

Dear Mr. Mix:

As a follow up from our meeting last week, we hereby submit our Non-Binding Letter of Interest for the development of the Project.

Convalt Energy, Inc. ("Convalt") is a vertically integrated renewable power company that develops, owns, and operates renewable power projects, including solar power, waste-to-power, and wind power. Convalt is in the process of establishing a solar panel manufacturing plant in Watertown, New York. Convalt has the capacity and expertise to re-establish and operate the hydro power plant at the Sewall's Island site. Additionally, Convalt is willing to develop this Project via its own investment, including obtaining the necessary approvals and permits from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ("FERC").

Convalt proposes the following:

1. Convalt seeks to own the Project along with associated lands to develop the Project and the associated substation needed to evacuate the power generated. To initiate the development process, Convalt proposes to purchase the land for a nominal fee. Based on the current development process advised by FERC, we expect the development process to take three to four years.
2. Convalt proposes to provide annual income to the City starting on the Date of Commercial Operation ("COD") by providing a portion of the revenue generated by the Project or providing a flat fee payment at the time of bank loan disbursement for the construction of the Project, such option to be selected by the City.



We believe Convalt can add value and help drive revenues for the City via the income generated from this Project while also creating additional jobs and providing much needed baseload electricity.

We would like to discuss this further with your office and seek the support of the City for this Project. We are available to meet any time after January 5, 2022.

Thanks,

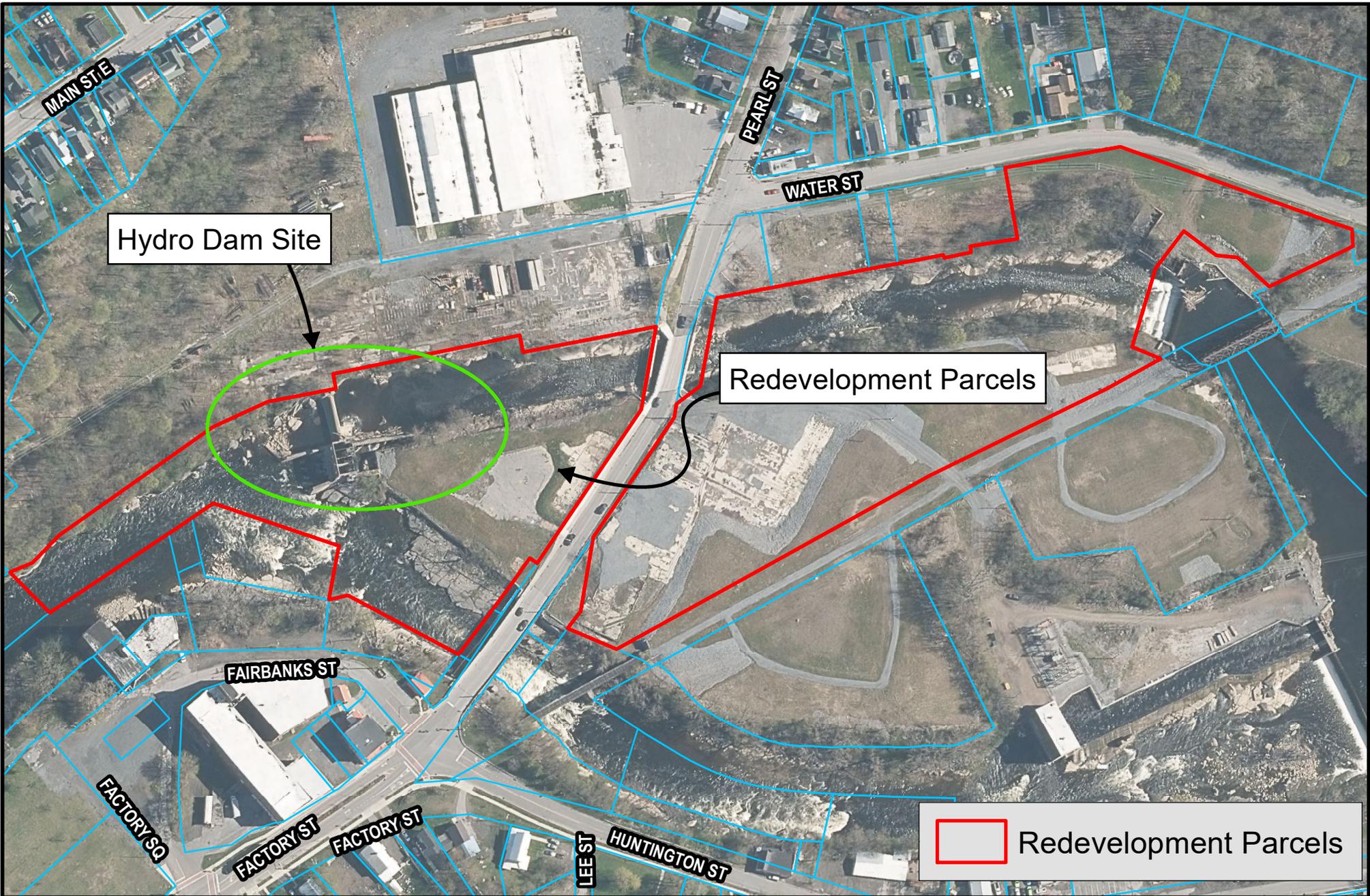
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hari Achuthan', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Hari Achuthan

President & CEO

Cc: Mr. Jeffrey Smith, Mayor – City of Watertown

Cc: Dave Zembiec, CEO – Jefferson County Industrial Development Agency



Hydro Dam Site

Redevelopment Parcels

Redevelopment Parcels

CITY OF WATERTOWN, NEW YORK
 GIS DEPARTMENT
 ROOM 305B, MUNICIPAL BUILDING
 245 WASHINGTON STREET
 WATERTOWN, NEW YORK 13601
 TEL: (315) 785-7793
 EMAIL: gis@watertown-ny.gov

Drawn By:					
Date:	1/18/2022				
Approved By:					
Date:					
Scale:	1 inch = 200 feet				
Map Number:					
Revision:	Description of Revision:		Date:	By:	



Project:
 Title:
 Sewall's Island

Sewall's Island Redevelopment Plan

LOCAL HERITAGE SUPPLEMENT

Conceived and Authored by: Larry Gordon, Thomas Walker, Steven Massaro



This Local Heritage Supplement to the existing Sewall's Island Development Plan (the "Plan") is intended to present ideas and perspectives not included in the "Plan." While the "Plan" is comprehensive, this moment in time presents an opportunity to utilize the Sewall's Island Redevelopment potential as a vehicle for restoring and reanimating Watertown's rich heritage and *identity* that has dissipated across decades of decline, demolition, and loss of locally headquartered enterprise. As such, this Supplement does not comment or expand on the categories of housing, retail, restaurants, lodging, theater, arts, startup incubators, etc. already addressed within the "[Plan](#)."

Background

Early histories of Jefferson County and Watertown feature the area's natural resources—the Adirondacks, Tug Hill, Lake Ontario, and the Black River that links them all together. The Black River gave shape to the region and energy to an economic engine that attracted early settlers and industrialists eager to develop the tremendous power that the many falls and cataracts naturally offered. From its headwaters deep in the Adirondack mountains of Herkimer County

NY, the river stretches 125 miles until it empties into Lake Ontario at the mouth of the mightier St. Lawrence River in Jefferson County NY. Along the way, the river drops more than 1600 feet in elevation, or 13 feet per mile. This elevation drop creates the fantastic potential of stored energy that industry utilizes for manufacturing and power generation.

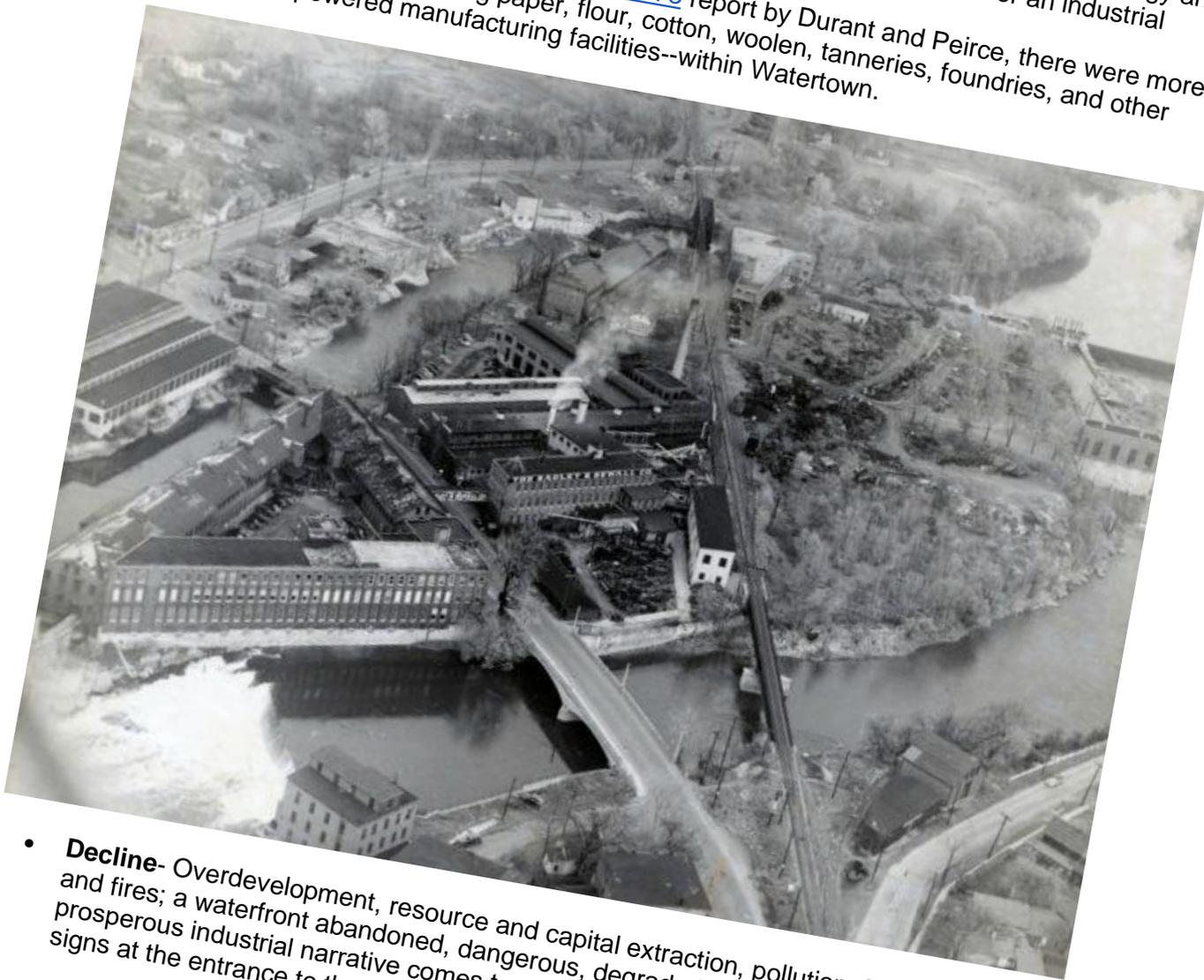
The Black River was the prominent, enabling condition that led Watertown to become what it was and create the powerful and prosperous class of industrialists. These community builders are largely forgotten today, except in the names of buildings, monuments, streets, and a few legacy businesses. Over time, as processes and demand for paper products declined, the river was shunned as a site of toxicity, danger, and blight and shielded from public view. Once mighty paper mills and manufacturing centers became abandoned and fell into disrepair. Old industry processes created harmful by-products usually allowed to flow into the river untreated. These by-products became the seed of Super Fund cleanup sites. As the knowledge of these sites became apparent, cleanup efforts began and after many long years of remediation, most have been removed and the river has been returned to its natural state.

We believe the Black River is the neglected heart and soul of Watertown, the hidden gem that captures the story we wish to tell about ourselves, through all its many life cycle stages. What if we took stock of this *origin story* of Watertown, and began to retell it in exciting new ways that capture its energy and innovation? How can redevelopment of Sewall's Island revitalize and reanimate historic artifacts and mute objects, combined with the memories of people still living and the historical record, to tell that story? What would that look like?



Life Cycle Phases

- **Initial attraction** of the Black River to early settlers as a source for nascent industrial power and almost limitless proximate timber resources of the surrounding counties, Tug Hill, and the nearby Adirondack Mountains.
- **Settlement** In the early history of Jefferson and surrounding counties, the Black river had importance from a commercial standpoint as of now, but also in a different direction; then the waters were used for both manufacturing and navigation purposes, abundance of newly discovered Hydroelectric Generation, coupled with an
- **Development** of natural resources, fueled Watertown's growth.
- **Growth/Investment/Innovation-** Innovations in efficient water turbine technology and dams for stability of river flow fulfilled the growing demands to power an industrial economy.
- **Maturity and Prosperity:** Per an [1878](#) report by Durant and Peirce, there were more than 50 mills--including paper, flour, cotton, woolen, tanneries, foundries, and other hydro powered manufacturing facilities--within Watertown.



- **Decline-** Overdevelopment, resource and capital extraction, pollution, fear of the river, and fires; a waterfront abandoned, dangerous, degraded, and neglected. Watertown's prosperous industrial narrative comes to a disappointing end. "The City of the Future" signs at the entrance to the city were unceremoniously removed.

- **Renewal-** Demolition, sewage treatment, brownfield remediation, river hazard cleanup, some degree of preservation by neglect, return of recreation (rafting, kayaking, and fishing). Sewall's Island Development can also be an opportunity to reclaim our past and build our future.

A New Generation's Opportunity

Sewall's Island is a blank slate for development -- a once-in-a-century opportunity to reclaim an urban island in the heart of downtown Watertown. It took many decades of decay, demolition, and environmental remediation to reach the point where development is now possible.



- **Positively impact the future trajectory of the community** by transforming a languishing district into a flourishing jewel of Northern NY. Help turn the corner for an urban center that has been in decline since the mid-1960s when it was eviscerated by Urban Renewal.
- **Embed a “heart and soul” into the center of Sewall’s Island development** efforts, making it a unique *place* by foregrounding the identity of Watertown in a way that cannot be replicated elsewhere, where nothing like this exists in the United States!
- **Excite the community** by highlighting Watertown’s inherently unique qualities.
- **Preserve, share, communicate, and celebrate Watertown’s heritage of courage, ambition, industry, innovation, and creativity**, as well as the natural beauty and power of this Adirondack River; interpreting Watertown history in a context of regional resources and forest commodities--historically a hub for economic development.

- **Counteract external influence** and profit extraction by reasserting local initiative, agency, risk taking, as well as the homogenizing effects franchises, chains, and fast food outlets have exerted on local identity.
- **Help community members (both residents and expats) reimagine their hometown and themselves with pride.**
- **Inspire the hopes and ambitions of youth** by reanimating local history via engaging exhibits that illustrate the local heritage of bold action and innovation.
- **Recenter local history and small towns like Watertown as engines of economic development and innovation in American history**; eschew stereotypes of backwater outposts.
- **Attract local residents for regular use and become a regional destination for visitors.**
- **Integrate with Adirondack Park, Lake Ontario, and regional trail systems**, including heritage trails with markers, the Seaway Trail, Pathway to History, etc..

Elements for the Sewall's Island Development Plan

This supplement advocates for expanding the original mission of “celebrating the river” to a mission of celebrating our local heritage in a development plan that can achieve both economic and community goals. The three elements below represent our initial proposal for how to achieve this mission.

- **Element 1 (Identity, History, and Education): The Museum of Water Power, Innovation, and “Industrial Heritage Area”** to preserve and illuminate the industrial and innovation heritage of the community.
 - Seeded by the [Kinne Water Turbine Collection](#) on display in the basement of the Jefferson County Historical Society.
 - Use line shaft hardware salvaged/reclaimed from remaining factory buildings in the district to demonstrate how water powered industry in Watertown from the 1800s through early 1900s.
 - Tell the story of the Black River from the time of the earliest settlers to present day (natural history). Explain and show how the relationship between the community and the river has changed dramatically over time (cultural history).
 - Tell the story of industries and innovation that happened here and how innovations from Watertown impacted the greater world (economic history).
 - Park-like setting with *safe* access to previously unavailable vistas to provide visitors with a *visceral* experience of the natural beauty and awesome power of the Black River.
- **Element 2 (Entertainment and Recreation): ‘One-of-a-kind’ Water-Powered destination theme park.** (e.g. Water Powered Ferris Wheel, Zip Line down the river, Kayak and Raft Rides, Water Slides, etc.). We conceive the theme park as a profitable entity that will subsidize and confer economic self-sufficiency across the entire portfolio.
- **Element 3 (Community Life): Community Living Room/Regional Hub-** a place for the community (and region) to meet, socialize, and experience Watertown in a new way around coffee, beer, fireplace, deck overlook, etc. (e.g. Bicycle, XC Ski, or hiking destination).

How?

- Create an overwhelmingly attractive vision, purpose, and narrative for Sewall's Island and Factory Square redevelopment.
- Find our tribe of supporters and stakeholders.
- Build support ("buy-in") by evangelizing benefits to the community.
- Build early 'proof of concept' prototype to test feasibility, attract funding, create awareness, build interest, and desire.
- Identify and understand detractors and prepare to address resistance.
- Identify, inventory, protect, and re-claim industrial hardware and architectural features that could be repurposed into interpretive museum displays.
- Create a feasible project roadmap towards realization of the vision.
- Create a funding plan (can we find a way to call this 'Infrastructure'?)
- **Promote and Enhance Sewall's Island attractiveness to private developers** by demonstrating the community's commitment to transforming Sewall's Island into a 'one-of-a-kind' local and regional attraction.



Dozens of discarded Millstones can still be found strewn across the banks of Sewall's Island as reminders of Watertown's once booming industrial eminence. (Photo by Steven Massaro)