



CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS LOCAL WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION PROGRAM COMMUNITY OUTREACH PLAN REVISED FEBRUARY 6, 2024

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The City of Niagara Falls (the City) has initiated a process to develop a Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP). The LWRP will identify appropriate land and water uses, projects, and public enhancements along the Niagara River, Cayuga Creek, Gill Creek, their shorelines and waterfronts, and the corridors leading to these areas. The LWRP will guide waterfront development and focus on strengthening tourism, economic development, and protection of natural resources and cultural assets. To advance the City's waterfront vision, preliminary designs for recommended revitalization projects will be developed to enable prompt implementation. The process will provide the necessary guidance for the completion of a LWRP which will be reviewed and approved by the New York State Department of State (DOS) and the City, as well as providing for enhanced coordination of waterfront development proposals, specifically the advancement of the redevelopment strategies, projects, and sites identified by both the City and the State.

The LWRP builds upon previous planning and improvement efforts, especially including the recent removal of a portion of the Niagara Scenic Parkway (formerly Robert Moses Parkway), the Niagara Waterfront Opportunity Area, and the Main Street Downtown Revitalization Initiative among many other projects. Documents of reference include but are not limited to; the previous draft LWRP (2004), City of Niagara Falls Comprehensive Plan (2009), the Niagara River Greenway Plan (2007), the Niagara River Greenway Vision (2006), the Niagara Falls Blueway Trail (2012), the Niagara Falls Bridge District Downtown Revitalization Initiative Strategic Investment Plan (2020), and the draft Niagara Waterfront Brownfield Opportunity Area (2019).

PROJECT TEAM

The City of Niagara Falls Office of Planning and Environmental Services will lead the LWRP process, with support from a grant by DOS, and the expertise of the consulting team which consists of EDR, MKSK, Highland Planning, and Prospect Hill Consulting. The consultant team will work closely with the City and the Waterfront Advisory Committee (WAC), more fully described in Section 4 of this Community Outreach Plan (COP), throughout the preparation of the LWRP.

The planning process will be driven by a robust community engagement process, a focus on improving economic prosperity through investment in waterfront development, and supporting projects that promote connection to the waterfront, walkability, vibrancy, dense urban development, providing a local sense of place, improving quality of life, and providing strong environmental protections. The LWRP will also identify potential projects and actions that articulate the City's future vision for the waterfront area.

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH PLAN

This COP outlines the process by which the City and consultant team will solicit input for the development of the LWRP over the next two and a half years. The COP addresses the roles and responsibilities of each team member in coordinating the logistics, communication, documentation, and schedule of all stakeholder engagement associated with the LWRP. The COP also identifies key individuals, organizations, and entities that will be involved throughout the engagement efforts. The COP is intended to create a process that is transparent, entertaining, and geared to maximize attendance and participation from all interested community members. It will be evaluated periodically throughout the two-and-a-half-year schedule and, if necessary, augmented to achieve the desired outcomes. The engagement activities are described in further detail in Section 4 of this COP.

Community participation will provide an opportunity to gather information and feedback from the community regarding the history and future of the Waterfront Revitalization Area (WRA). This input supports informed decisions regarding the revitalization of the City’s waterfront through redevelopment, balanced with protection of the abundant natural, historic, and cultural resources existing in the City. The goal of the COP is to foster communication and build a relationship between the public, the City, applicable regulatory agencies, and the consultant team during the LWRP planning process.

This plan outlines an approach to achieve the following objectives:

- Listen and respond to stakeholders and community members
- Ensure input from hard to reach and underrepresented populations through customized outreach events and strategies
- Solicit feedback and input on draft recommendations for the LWRP
- Generate excitement and interest in revitalization of the WRA

Community participation is expected to be one of the driving forces behind the successful development of the Niagara Falls LWRP. The following sections of this COP summarize the measures that will be in place to maintain effective communication between the WAC and the community throughout the process.

SECTION 2: SITE LOCATION

Figure 1 includes the proposed WRA. The area includes land along the Niagara River, Cayuga Creek, Gill Creek, their shorelines and waterfronts, and adjacent lands for connectivity to the

waterfronts. Figure 1 shows the current proposed boundary and is subject to change in the preliminary stages of the planning process.

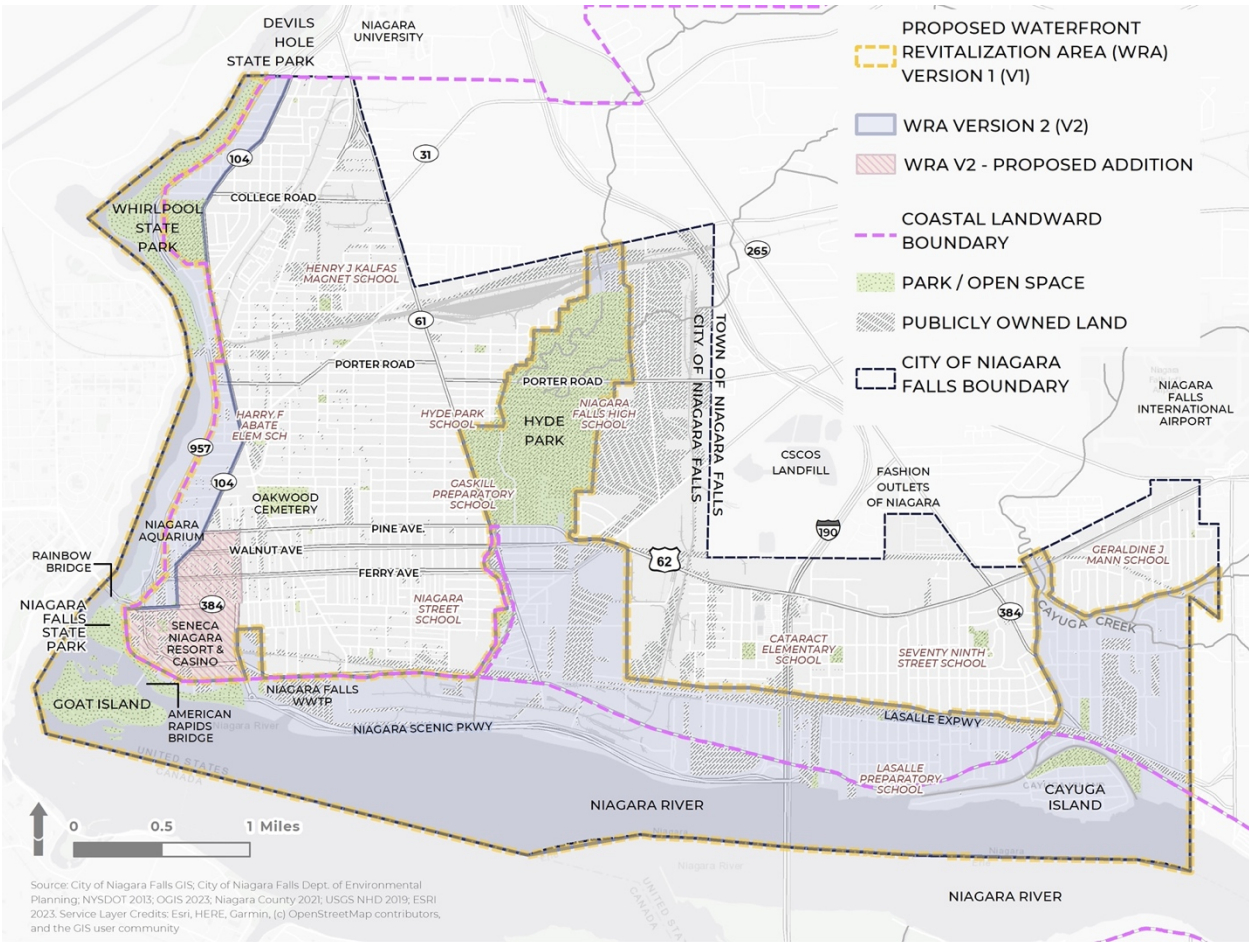


Figure 1: Proposed Waterfront Revitalization Area (WRA)

SECTION 3: SCOPE OF WORK

The development of a LWRP is a step-by-step process in which the WRA is defined and the assets, key concerns, and opportunities regarding revitalization of the waterfront are identified. Once the previous steps are completed, a vision for the WRA is created, a strategy is developed for fulfilling the vision, and specific projects and guidelines are established which work to support the realization of the vision. As stated previously, securing community support and ownership of the adopted LWRP is vital to achieving success. The specific steps and opportunities for community involvement are provided below.

- Scoping Meeting – Work with the City and the WAC to identify the goals of the COP, the opportunity for public input, identify the key stakeholders involved in the decision making, project timeline, and other key stakeholders.
- WAC meetings – Eight (8) meetings throughout the LWRP process
- Community Outreach – Ensure that the right outreach activities are planned and implemented.
 - Pre-engagement interviews – conduct up to eight (8) telephone interviews
 - Create a COP
 - Develop a stakeholder database of all stakeholders and people interested in the project for future engagement
 - Public survey distribution to identify community concerns and opportunities related to the LWRP
 - A “go-to-them” activity such as a popup event to get feedback on proposed waterfront-related uses and projects
 - Develop communications materials to support the outreach process including press releases, collateral material, and web content
- First Public Information Meeting – Host a hybrid public meeting, both in person and by Zoom, to identify the concerns and opportunities associated with the LWRP. Highland Planning will record the public meeting and post it to the project website and will provide a summary of comments and discussion. The website can be found at <https://niagarafallsusa.org/local-waterfront-revitalization-program/>.
- Second Public Information Meeting – Host a hybrid meeting, both in person and by Zoom, to review the proposed uses and projects identified through the LWRP process. Highland Planning will record the public meeting and post it to the project website and will provide a summary of comments and discussion.
- Six (6) design workshops, focused on getting input from members of the community. These will be public meetings open to all community members. More detail in Section 4 of this COP.
- Third Public Information Meeting – Host a hybrid meeting, both in person and by Zoom, to review and comment on the draft LWRP Plan. Highland Planning will record the public meeting and post it to the project website and will provide a summary of comments and discussion.

SECTION 4: COMMUNITY OUTREACH ACTIVITIES + EVENTS

WATERFRONT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The WAC is composed of stakeholders who will oversee all aspects of the project in coordination with the City and the consultant team. The committee was formed with the goal

of being representative of a variety of project stakeholders, including representatives of State agencies, business owners, landowners, residents, developers, and City officials who have a vested interest or jurisdiction over project activities or the WRA.

Bill Barrons, Property and Business Owner

Christian Campos, Property Owner

Edyta Chorostkowska, Resident

Allison Congi, Niagara Aquarium

Arlene Doss-Jackson, Resident

Jack Goeddertz, Property Owner

Vincent Iacovitti, NYS Parks

Art Jocoy, Property Owner

Karen Kwandrans, Niagara University

John Spanbauer, NF Planning Board

Michael Marsh, Business Owner

Marco Notaro, Habitat for Humanity

Louis Paonessa, NY Power Authority

Nirel Patel, Business Owner

Ray Paul, Public Entity

Lisa Routhier, Business Owner

Gary Siddall, CEO and President, Non-Profit

Brett Stewart, Business Owner

Anthony Vilardo, Public Entity

As the LWRP process moves forward, the WAC will meet regularly to discuss the project's progress and to keep the community informed of the assessment activities. These WAC meetings will coincide with significant project milestones. In advance of each WAC meeting, EDR will prepare an agenda and work with the City to distribute meeting materials to the WAC members.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The City helped identify several individuals and groups to provide insight and direction to the consultant team on how best to engage the Niagara Falls community. In June 2023, Highland Planning staff conducted four interviews with representatives of the LaSalle Yacht Club, the LaSalle Business and Professional Association, the NFC Development Corporation, and the Niagara Falls City School District. These interviews were conducted to invite these key stakeholders to participate in the LWRP planning process early and to provide insight on any ideas and concerns around public engagement and the WRA.

Interview Questions:

- What are the opportunities and concerns associated with a local waterfront revitalization program plan?
- Who should we be sure to engage in this planning process?
- Where should we hold meetings? When should we hold meetings?
- How can we best engage the community?
- Are there any “hot button” topics we should know about in Niagara Falls?

The stakeholder interviews that have been conducted resulted in the following insights:

- Social media is the best way to advertise events and updates.
- There are doubts in the community that projects will come to fruition because of plans in the past that were promised and not delivered.
- Surveys should be short and take no more than five minutes to complete.
- North Tonawanda is seen as an example of a community that is doing waterfront revitalization properly. People from Niagara Falls go there for the bars, restaurants, and breweries.
- Need family entertainment in Niagara Falls, such as movie theaters, concert venues, etc.
- Niagara Falls residents are particular about and take pride in the ways in which they describe their waterfront (e.g., above the falls, below the falls, to the south side of the falls, at the water intake, the Upper Rapids, Goat Island, Whirlpool State Park, Devil’s Hole State Park).
- Include Niagara University, the Underground Railroad Heritage Center, and the Niagara Falls Aquarium in engagement.
- People look to Canada and see all that they have and want it for the New York side as well, including bars, restaurants, butterfly conservatory, and floral clock.
- Current trails feel incomplete. There are inaccessible paths, and the parks need better restrooms, and more pollinator gardens.
- Dredging is needed so more waterways can be accessed.

STAKEHOLDER DATABASE

A database of key individuals, organizations, and entities to be involved and informed will be created and used to distribute updates about upcoming engagement opportunities and project progress. The stakeholder database will be on SharePoint.

As part of the development of a draft LWRP, the project team will engage the regional NYSDEC office, NYSOGS, Buffalo USACE District and the 9th Coast Guard District, Niagara County Soil and Water Conservation District, Niagara County Department of Health, Niagara County

Sheriff's office, Lake Erie Watershed Protection Alliance, and Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper. The consultant team will research opportunities to engage boaters associations, birders associations, and any other similar organizations that would be able to provide valuable feedback on local conditions, issues, and project ideas. Additionally, these agencies and organizations will be notified by NYSDOS as part of the 60-day review process to review the draft LWRP and provide comments on its content and reach.

ENGAGING UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS

The City of Niagara Falls is committed to a public engagement process that solicits participation from populations who are frequently underrepresented in planning processes, including immigrants, refugees, minorities, and Native Americans. Meetings will be held in different venues across the city to encourage broad participation by underrepresented populations. If needed, the consultant and the City may hire an agency to translate the survey and/or hire interpreters for public meetings.

COMMUNICATIONS / PUBLIC NOTIFICATION PROCEDURES

To develop interest and encourage participation, announcements relative to public meeting dates and venues, project status, or the availability of reports will be posted on the project website found at <https://niagarafallsusa.org/local-waterfront-revitalization-program/>. Notification of meetings or other project status-related announcements will also be provided through the City's text message blast, the City's events calendar, the City's social media platforms, and on various community-based social media outlets. Press releases will be made for local news sources including the Niagara Gazette and others. This COP, draft reports, meeting notes, mapping, and dates of upcoming opportunities for public involvement and input will be available for public review at the project website.

All public events and the survey will be publicized in the community through press releases, announcements, digital media, municipal website postings, and any other appropriate means. Meetings will be scheduled in a manner that attempts to maximize attendance and participation from all interested community members. A summary of each public outreach session and the attendees' names will be made available in written form on the website.

Examples of local communication platforms to be utilized throughout LWRP process:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- City of Niagara Falls text message blast
- Niagara Gazette

- News Section on City website
- LWRP section on City website - <https://niagarafallsusa.org/local-waterfront-revitalization-program/>
- Flyers in municipal buildings
- School board buildings (if allowable)
- Yacht club
- Business associations (Downtown, Niagara Street, Buffalo Ave and LaSalle districts)

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The Highland Planning team will engage with Niagara Falls High School (NFHS) to solicit survey responses from the student population. Should the teachers and administrators be interested, the project team will solicit students' vision for the waterfront through class sessions or essay submissions.

SURVEY

The purpose of the survey is to gather information about opportunities and concerns in the WRA as well as collect information about stakeholders who would like to stay involved or be informed about the project. Highland Planning will develop the survey with EDR and the City. Highland Planning will promote the survey through email, press release, social media, flyers, and additional communication materials that can be distributed by the City and the WAC. Highland Planning will invite teachers at NFHS to share the survey with students.

Possible Survey Questions:

- Please check all that apply:
 - I am a resident of the City of Niagara Falls
 - I work or do business in the City of Niagara Falls
 - I visit the Niagara Falls waterfront
 - I own land in the City of Niagara Falls
- What do you value most about the waterfront?
 - [Short answer response]
- What do you think the City of Niagara Falls waterfront needs more of?
 - Docks
 - Boat launches
 - Fishing Piers or landings
 - Parks
 - Waterfront pedestrian / bike paths
 - Parking

- Waterfront concert venues
- Waterfront housing
- Waterfront bars / restaurants
- New access points, new street connections, walkways, pedestrian bridges, or other transit options.
- Other [short answer]
- What are some concerns you see in or at the waterfront? (Ex: shoreline erosion, habitat loss, invasive species, marinas, regulations, etc.)
 - [Short answer response]
- Would any of the following types of mobility bring you to the City of Niagara Falls waterfront?
 - Bus/van service
 - Footpaths
 - Rental Bikes
 - Trolley / shuttle to remote parking
 - Rental Scooters
 - Bike Paths
 - Pedestrian bridges
 - Parking
 - Other [short answer]
- Do you have any other thoughts or ideas to share about the City of Niagara Falls Local Waterfront Revitalization Program?
 - [Short answer response]

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETINGS

All public meetings will take place at accessible meeting locations and will be advertised through press releases, announcements, digital media, municipal website postings, and any other appropriate means. The three (3) public meeting locations will vary through the planning process to reach different areas of the city within the LWRP boundary.

FIRST PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

Following completion of the initial drafts of Section I - Waterfront Revitalization Area Boundary and Section 2 - Inventory and Analysis of the LWRP, Highland Planning will conduct a public information meeting regarding the identified local waterfront opportunities and concerns and solicit public input regarding the completeness and accuracy of Sections I and II of the LWRP. Highland Planning will prepare meeting announcements and the distribution will be a collaboration with the City, the WAC and other stakeholders as needed. Highland Planning will

prepare a summary of attendance and a meeting summary for each public outreach session. This will be available in written form on the website.

Proposed Agenda Items:

- Share inventory and analysis findings.
- Solicit public input on the vision, concerns, alternatives, and opportunities within the study area.

SECOND PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

Following completion of the initial draft of Section IV - Proposed Land and Water Uses and Proposed Projects of the LWRP, Highland Planning will conduct a public information meeting regarding the proposed long-term land and water uses, and proposed projects within the WRA - based on identified local waterfront concerns and opportunities and solicit public input regarding the completeness and accuracy of Section IV.

Highland Planning will prepare press releases, announcements, digital media, municipal website postings, and any other appropriate means of communications. Highland Planning will prepare a summary of attendance and a written summary of each public outreach session to be made available in written form on the website.

Proposed Agenda Items:

- Present the proposed long-term land and water uses and proposed projects within the WRA.
- Solicit public input regarding the completeness and accuracy of these projects.

THIRD PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING

Following completion of the Draft LWRP and in conjunction with the 60-day review and compliance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), a third public presentation meeting will be held. Highland Planning will prepare a meeting summary identifying changes to the Draft LWRP due to the public meetings submitted to the Department of State for review and approval.

The public meeting will be advertised to the public through press releases, announcements, digital media, municipal website postings, and any other appropriate means. Highland Planning will prepare a summary of attendance and a written meeting summary of the public outreach session to be made available on the website.

Proposed Agenda Item:

- Present Draft LWRP

PROJECT AREA DESIGN WORKSHOPS

During the LWRP process, up to six projects are anticipated to be advanced and developed to create actionable outcomes. To support this process, Highland Planning will plan up to six (6) design workshop meetings, pop-ups at annual fairs or similar events, one for each potential and proposed project, to get feedback from stakeholders who would be particularly impacted by a project based on the project's location or purpose. These will be open to all members of the public, and an emphasis will be placed on soliciting feedback from traditionally underrepresented populations. These design workshops will be part of Task 14 of the LWRP scope of work.

Proposed Agenda Items:

- Discuss opportunities and concerns around site of focus
- Discuss design elements in each proposed project

KEY CONTACTS

The following key contacts are responsible for the City's LWRP Community Outreach Plan:

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SECTION 5: PROJECT SCHEDULE

