

Town of Amherst
Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP)

Community Outreach Plan
May 2019

INTRODUCTION

Although not primarily known as a water-oriented community, the Town of Amherst possesses a vast amount of waterfront land. The Town's northern border is defined by Tonawanda Creek, a navigable waterway that provides both public and private access. In 2015 Ellicott Creek, which traverses the center of the Town, was classified as a designated inland waterway. The presence of these two significant creeks enables Amherst to take advantage of the State's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) initiative to create a comprehensive plan for enhancing waterfront properties, maximizing public access and preserving the quality and beauty of these resources.

Amherst has already created waterfront amenities enjoyed by the public such as trails, parks and passive recreation areas, but many opportunities still exist. In 2006 the Town prepared an LWRP with the Town of Pendleton along their shared boundary formed by Tonawanda Creek. Though not adopted, that plan identified several important projects that will be re-assessed for inclusion in this current LWRP effort. In addition, Amherst recently adopted a Recreation and Parks Master Plan, which will provide information for identifying needs and potential projects.

One of the most prominent sites included in the LWRP is the former Westwood Country Club property, a 172-acre parcel that is centrally located in the Town. Recently purchased by a developer, the land has been the subject of much attention in recent years, due in part to its size, its availability for development, and its proximity to residential neighborhoods. The future use of this property is a key component in the overall LWRP endeavor and is expected to generate robust community participation.

With the inclusion of Ellicott Creek in its LWRP, Amherst's boundary will surround the boundary created by the Village of Williamsville for its own LWRP as that creek also crosses the Village. Amherst and Williamsville will be working closely to ensure consistency and compatibility among the two plans.

OUTREACH PURPOSE

The extensive amount of property proposed within the Amherst LWRP boundary results in a significant number of waterfront landowners. While many of the lands adjacent to Tonawanda Creek along the Town's north border are large rural lots, the properties abutting Ellicott Creek are

much more numerous, as this creek runs through the middle of the Town and abuts smaller suburban parcels.

As the LWRP will ultimately regulate land use within the designated boundary, the input of affected property owners and overall Town residents is crucial to public acceptance of the document. Amherst has structured its outreach program to include several modes of input to involve as many individuals, groups and agencies as possible to create a comprehensive and feasible product.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The LWRP process involves multiple stakeholders including both governmental and non-governmental agencies described below:

NYS Department of State (DOS)

The DOS Office of Planning and Development oversees the LWRP program and is the primary contact for all participating municipalities. The DOS also provides funding through the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) as well as technical assistance throughout the project. As sponsor, DOS requires quarterly updates of project progress. In addition, that office reviews and comments on key task milestones and provides overall project oversight. The Town has applied for an EPF grant for its LWRP; grants are expected to be awarded at the end of 2018.

Town of Amherst

As the applicant for the LWRP, the Town has primary responsibility for day-to-day administration and management of the project. Various individuals, departments and boards will be involved:

- Town Board – The five (5) member Town Board will be informed of all activities and provided copies of all documents related to the LWRP for their review and comment. This board has the authority to approve the final document. Their involvement in public meetings will enable them to stay apprised of community sentiment about the project and inform their decision-making.
- Planning Board – The seven (7) member Planning Board will be provided drafts of all LWRP documents for review and recommendation to the Town Board.
- Advisory Committees – Representatives from various committees will be relied upon to provide comments on their areas of expertise. These include but are not limited to:
 - Conservation Advisory Council
 - Historic Preservation Commission
 - Arts & Culture Committee
 - Youth Board
 - Recreation Commission
 - Senior Citizens Board

- Traffic Safety Board.

Waterfront Advisory Committee

The Committee will meet periodically to hear staff updates on the project progress and provide feedback. They will take part in the waterfront tours to familiarize themselves with the areas being studied. Their presence at public meetings will also be important to allow them to hear resident feedback and engage in the community dialogue.

Project Consultants

The Town is in the process of engaging a professional planning consultant to guide the development of the plan and facilitate all community outreach activities. Also required for this project may be an environmental consultant and legal counsel.

LWRP STAKEHOLDERS

Preparation of the LWRP will require the expertise of many stakeholders that include agencies, groups and individuals with knowledge that will enhance the final product. The following have been identified as likely participants:

Amherst Waterfront Advisory Committee (WAC)

The WAC is made up of 28 members representing Town departments, State/regional agencies, elected officials, schools, homeowner groups and the general public. The following individuals are members of the WAC:

Town Representatives

- Brian Kulpa, Supervisor
- Maggie Hamilton Winship, Director of Strategic Planning
- Dan Howard, Planning Director
- Ellen Kost, Assistant Planning Director
- Jeff Szatkowski, Landscape Architect
- Mary-Diana Pouli, Executive Director, Youth & Recreation
- Sharon Rich, Chair, Arts & Culture Committee
- Elizabeth Graczyk D'Agostino, Chair, Amherst Conservation Advisory Council

Elected Officials

- Bonnie Kane Lockwood, representing NYS Rep. Brian Higgins
- Chris Fahey, representing NYS Rep. Brian Higgins
- Jennifer Dunning, representing NYS Assemblywoman Karen McMahan
- Jonathan McNulty, representing NYS Sen. Ranzenhofer
- Thomas Loughran, Erie County Legislator, District 5
- Katrina Zepowitz, representing Erie County Legislator Edward Rath III, District 6

Educational Institutions

- Anthony Panella, Superintendent, Amherst Central Schools
- Scott Martzloff, Superintendent, Williamsville Central Schools
- Gerry Stuitje, representing Superintendent Tony Day, Sweet Home Central Schools
- Tonga Pham, Associate Vice President - Facilities, SUNY Buffalo
- Ryan McPherson, Chief Sustainability Officer, SUNY Buffalo
- Mark Alnutt, Director of Athletics, SUNY Buffalo

Business Interests

- Colleen DiPirro, Past President, Amherst Chamber of Commerce
- Matt Roland, Director of Planning & Development, Hamister Group
- David Mingoia, Chair, Amherst IDA

Residents & Special Interests

- Judy Ferraro, resident
- Tim Trabold, resident
- Nate Hartrich, President, Morningside Home Owners Association
- Francis Kowsky, SUNY Professor Emeritus (retired), Olmsted Scholar
- Benjamin Vilonen, Manager, Department of Public Works, Village of Williamsville

State and Federal Agencies

- NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- US Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE)
- NYS Department of State (NYS DOS)
- NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)
- NYS Canal Corporation
- Empire State Development Corp.
- SUNY at Buffalo

Municipal Representatives

- Amherst Supervisor and Town Board
- Planning Board
- Zoning Board
- Amherst Departments (Planning, Engineering, Building, Highway, Youth & Recreation, Attorney)
- Erie County Department of Environment and Planning
- Erie County Soil & Water Conservation
- Village of Williamsville
- Other adjacent municipalities

Local Agencies and Groups

- Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper
- Amherst Chamber of Commerce
- Amherst Industrial Development Agency
- Amherst Historic Preservation Commission
- Amherst, Sweet Home and Williamsville School Districts
- Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village
- Nature Conservancy
- Western New York Land Conservancy
- Cornell Cooperative Extension

Recreational Groups

- Go Bike Buffalo
- Golf Courses (Oakwood, Audubon, Par 3)

Neighborhood Representatives

- Keep Westwood Green
- property owners
- Agricultural District representatives
- homeowners associations

OUTREACH METHODS

1. Advertising

Raising public awareness of the LWRP project is of utmost importance to make the public aware of the Town's effort and to publicize upcoming meetings and events. To that end, the Town will utilize various methods to get the word out, including but not limited to local newspapers, Town website, neighborhood newsletters, and poster distribution. Posters and notices will be distributed throughout Town Hall and other Town buildings, the four Town libraries and other public gathering spots such as recreational facilities and schools. Television and radio outlets will also be notified of upcoming meetings.

2. Public kickoff meeting

The first meeting for the project will be a public kickoff meeting proposed for early Fall 2018. Notice of the meeting will be placed in the *Amherst Bee* and on the Town website. This will be the first opportunity for the general public to learn about the LWRP project. Town staff will be present to explain the project, answer questions and accept comments. Maps showing the proposed LWRP boundaries for both creeks, along with panels highlighting the program's

purpose and timeline, will also be available. Afterwards a summary of this initial meeting will be posted on-line for public review and comment.

3. Informational meetings / workshops

The Town will conduct 3 public meetings to allow staff to present information regarding the recommended projects identified in the LWRP and provide a forum for give-and-take among attendees. The meetings will be held at different locations in the Town to encourage attendance.

- Meeting 1 – after completion of Inventory & Analysis (Public kickoff meeting)
- Meeting 2 – after completion of Section IV (Proposed Projects)
- Meeting 3 – after completion of the draft LWRP document

4. Site tours

The Town scheduled five (5) tours of the waterfront area in August and September 2018. All members of the Waterfront Advisory Committee were invited to participate. Each tour lasted 2-3 hours long, and most involved both walking and driving. Tours included short stops at key areas and points of interest, as well as ‘interviews’ with key landowners to gain their perspectives on issues/problems. Tour participants were asked to identify concerns and opportunities they observed, and this input will be assembled for use as the LWRP document is prepared.

At the conclusion of the site tours, the Waterfront Advisory Committee will meet to review overall impressions of the LWRP area including site conditions, issues and opportunities. This input will be a valuable resource for preparation of the LWRP document.

5. Social media

The use of social media will be important for collecting feedback to supplement the other public events. The Town will utilize Facebook and Twitter as means of communicating events and obtaining input. The Town website will include a link to documents and maps prepared for the LWRP, as well as contact information for anyone wishing to comment on the process or ask questions. The Town may also wish to create a webpage for the LWRP. The website/webpage will be updated as the project progresses.

6. Charrette

The use of a design charrette will create an opportunity for the public to participate in a detailed discussion and explore various options for a specific site(s) within the LWRP boundaries. The most obvious site is the former Westwood Country Club which should involve many resident participants.

AMHERST

One Town ~ Two Waters