

UrbanRiver Visions

An initiative of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Secretary Bob Durand, in partnership with the City of Easthampton



Dear Friend of Community Preservation:

UrbanRiver Visions is the Community Preservation Initiative's newest project. The initiative provides community leaders with the tools, information, and technical assistance necessary to help them plan for future growth. This new project represents an important next step because it helps facilitate the community's vision and planning to explore ways in which the downtown can be revitalized using the river as a focal point. All of the initiative's efforts have the same goal, to empower communities to make balanced and forward thinking growth decisions that preserve and enhance the quality of life in our communities and throughout the Commonwealth.

Rivers have long defined the core of many of the Commonwealth's urban areas. The harnessing of these rivers for power and manufacturing characterized the Commonwealth's growth in the nineteenth century as a center for commerce and prosperity. The legacy of this era is reflected in the mill buildings that define the heart of many cities and towns and represent a celebrated element of our built environment. Recently, our communities suffered with several decades of decline in the industries these mills once housed. The legacy of land and water pollution that accompanied earlier industrial development has been a burden to our communities.

Now, many communities are poised to reexamine the role of their rivers as a source of urban vitality, as an amenity, and as an attractor of new enterprises and jobs. UrbanRiver Visions is designed to take these efforts a step further by working with individual communities to help shape their future and reconnect them to the river, making it once again a focal point for commerce and community.

This project defines and provides the framework for reclaiming these rivers as environmental and economic assets, integrating them back into our civic lives. It is a celebration of rivers, communities, and creativity.

I hope that you find the accompanying information useful. Electronic versions of these documents are available on the UrbanRiver Visions web site at www.urbanrivervisions.org. I wish you the best of luck and I look forward to continuing our partnership as we work to make these dreams a reality.

Very truly yours,

Bob Durand



UrbanRiver Visions Easthampton Charrette: Lower Mill Pond/Manhan River

The communities of Athol, Chicopee, Easthampton, Hudson, Fall River, Lawrence, and Worcester held charrettes in the fall of 2002 as part of EOE's UrbanRiver Visions project. After the charrettes, all the communities came together in Hudson on December 19, 2002 to share their visions. Each of the UrbanRiver Visions communities seized this opportunity to define its vision for the future. The visions reflect an overall community consensus about the relationship between the community and its riverfront. These visions represent important starting points that can continue to be refined and modified over time in response to new information, opportunities, changed circumstances, or unforeseen difficulties.

This poster summarizes the findings of the Easthampton UrbanRiver Visions Charrette that was held on September 21, 2002 at the Eastworks mill complex. The charrette resulted in a vision plan and action plan that are summarized here. This side of the poster documents community goals, issues, and possible next steps. The reverse side includes a Vision Plan and describes actions needed to achieve this vision.

Additional charrette information is on file at the Easthampton Planning Department in a project binder that contains verbatim notes from the charrette, copies of powerpoint presentations, base maps, and other technical information.

For additional information, please visit www.urbanrivervisions.org

UrbanRiver Visions Consultant Team:
EOEA selected Goody, Clancy & Associates and its team of consultants to provide professional assistance to each of the communities in the program. Easthampton consultant team members also included Maria Van Dusen and FXM Associates.

Easthampton Charrette



The Place

The study area for Easthampton's UrbanRiver Vision includes Lower Mill Pond, the mill complexes fronting it, and connections from this area to the Manhan River. The future Manhan Rail Trail will soon trace the edge of the Lower Mill Pond and serve as a catalyst for opening this area to public view, and linking it to the center of the city two blocks away. Charrette participants came together on September 21, 2002 to shape strategies for improving water access, establishing a Lower Mill Pond Park, strengthening connections between neighborhoods and open space, and promoting redevelopment of mill complexes fronting the pond.

A Shared Vision

While a century and a half of industrial use and then abandonment have hidden its potential, Lower Mill Pond, its banks, and surrounding mill buildings is a critical resource at the geographic heart of the Easthampton community. If properly cared for, Lower Mill Pond can become a beautiful recreational commons and redevelopment catalyst.

Every bit as big as Nashawannuck Pond just upstream, Lower Mill Pond with its 35 acres of water is large enough to fulfill several important roles. It could be a front door to Easthampton, welcoming people arriving from Northampton by car and

bicycle. It will be a nexus of pedestrian and bicycle connections between neighborhoods and no longer a barrier. Like Nashawannuck Pond, Lower Mill Pond could be a wonderful boating, fishing, and skating location and in time could be a swimming pond for the children who live in the old mill neighborhoods. It could be a nature preserve with its wetlands and two thirds of its shoreline protected as habitat. It could be a downtown municipal park along a portion of its north shore with a diversity of attractions, including shoreline paths and overlooks, an art walk, canoe launches, picnic tables, a food concession, a performance area, a skateboard course, and a bicycle path. No longer a back door, Lower Mill Pond could be the front yard for over two million square feet of mill space much of which will be redeveloped in the coming years for housing, commercial, and light industrial uses.

Lower Mill Pond has the potential of becoming a vivid and memorable place in the minds of residents and visitors - one enjoyed every day and in every season. Many parts of this shared vision can be started immediately with modest resources. Other parts will take longer to implement, but the vision is clear and is shared by many residents of Easthampton.



Next Steps

These next steps will advance the vision:

- Complete the Manhan Rail Trail and develop signage for it. Assist property owners in cleaning up the "backs" of their mill buildings along the trail
- Research land ownership, water rights, and regulatory controls
- Consider public ownership and control of Lower Mill Pond
- Define a Lower Mill Park program and budget money for a master plan
- Organize volunteers to clean up the banks, clear key views, and eradicate water chestnut and other invasive plants
- Sponsor public events to celebrate the pond and use the arts to transform its image in the minds of residents and visitors
- Establish a Friends-of-the-Mill Pond Park group and sponsor a yearly event to drive progress forward

The Charrette

The charrette, held at the converted Eastworks mill building on September 21, 2002, brought together approximately 70 local leaders, activists, and community residents.

A site walk preceded the charrette on the evening of September 20 during which up to 20 participants walked the study area and began a dialogue about issues and opportunities.

Redefining the River's Edge



Morning Session

In the first round of facilitated discussions small groups focused on three main topics: (1) connections and open space; (2) water use; (3) mill redevelopment.

Key recommendations include:

Connections & Open Space Group

Important goals discussed in the group included re-establishing historic connections to local residential neighborhoods, providing views of the pond, creating a more useful and beautiful park along the northwest bank of the pond, and preserving the natural character of the southern and eastern sides of the pond. The new rail trail undergoing construction was treated as a potential major spine of activity, with access and views from the path being a major consideration.

Water Use Group

The group came up with a number of desired uses, including swimming, fishing,

and boating. Potential barriers to these uses were aired and addressed; concerns of water quality and invasive vegetation were important considerations for any future use of the pond. Also discussed was the issue of ownership, as the pond itself is currently privately owned. The group suggested some sort of public ownership of the pond, with help from local community organizations for maintenance.

Mill Redevelopment Group

Important considerations in the discussion were establishing acceptable and preferable uses for the mills and identifying obstacles to reuse. The group called for a mix of uses in the mill complexes, but also believed that flexibility in determining mill building uses would be important for success. The group emphasized the importance of financial and political support from local leaders. They favored an increase in the density of uses, and were not averse to new industrial uses as long as they were compatible and complementary to existing uses.

Afternoon Session

In the second round of discussions, three groups of charrette participants created annotated plans for the Lower Mill Pond. These visions were presented to whole group for comment at the end of the day. The visions contained many shared themes and elements that are listed below. These plans provided the basis for development of the final vision plan.

Group 1

Group 1 stressed the need for pedestrian connections around a preserved mill complex and an improved pond, the rebuilding of one of the historic bridges over the pond, and the enhancement of important site gateways with interpretive and wayfinding signage. Particular attention was given to the existing skate park and parking lot on the waterfront, which the group believed has potential as an improved public "destination" park.

Group 2

Group 2 expressed a number of ideas and concerns similar to Group 1, including the importance of enhanced gateways and an active public park at the location of the existing skate park. Group 2 also emphasized a need for trail loops around the Lower Mill Pond, the rebuilding of both historic bridges over the pond, and a more direct connection between the pond area and the Manhan River to the north. The group also recommended an area for greater habitat preservation to the south of the pond.

Group 3

Group 3 concentrated heavily on how the mill complexes could be transformed to benefit the overall character of the area, including pedestrian passages through and between the buildings, and removal of non-viable structures. A looped hiking trail all along the pond's shores and the selective removal of waterfront vegetation for improved views were also important suggestions.



Lower Mill Park: A new front door for Easthampton's Mill District



An improved Lower Mill Pond will be a catalyst for the redevelopment of historic mill buildings facing the pond.

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Though partially hidden and forgotten after a century and a half of industrial use, Lower Mill Pond is a critical resource at the geographic heart of the Easthampton community and holds a key to the future livability and prosperity of the city.

Every bit as big as Nashawannuck Pond just upstream, Lower Mill Pond with its 35 acres of water is large enough to fulfill several vitally important roles in Easthampton. It will be a front door to Easthampton, welcoming people arriving from Northampton by car and bicycle. It will be a nexus of pedestrian and bicycle connections between neighborhoods and no longer a barrier. Like Nashawannuck Pond, Lower Mill Pond will be a wonderful boating, fishing, and skating location and in time could be a swimming pond for the children who live in the old mill neighborhoods. It will be a nature preserve with its wetlands and two thirds of its shoreline protected as habitat. It will be a downtown municipal park along a portion of its north shore with a diversity of attractions including shoreline paths and overlooks, an art walk, canoe launches, picnic tables, a food concession, a performance area, a skateboard course, and a bicycle path. No longer a back door, Lower Mill Pond will be the front yard for over two million square feet of mill space, much of which will be redeveloped in the coming years for housing, commercial, and light industrial uses.

Lower Mill Pond has the potential of becoming a vivid and memorable place in the minds of residents and visitors - one visited and enjoyed every day and in every season. Many parts of this shared vision can be started immediately with modest resources. Other parts will take longer to implement, but the vision is clear, and is shared by many residents of Easthampton.

Create "Lower Mill Park"

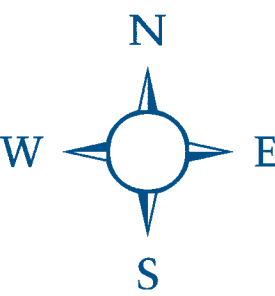
- Create a destination park with a mix of active and passive uses that attracts a wide variety of people
- Expand the skate park and basketball court but relocate them away from the water's edge
- Improve the public boat ramp
- Create a waterfront path accessible to everyone
- Provide seating and a performance area with views of the pond
- Provide an information kiosk, interpretive signs, and other amenities for bike path users
- Improve the aesthetics of the existing parking; reduce the size of the parking area
- Clear and thin existing vegetation to improve key views to Lower Mill Pond and Mt. Tom
- Provide a generous walking path along the north shore separate from the paved bicycle path. Maintain an open park-like landscape along this path with links to scenic overlooks
- Cluster seating and picnic benches at the overlooks

Incorporate public art in the park, on the pond, and along the trails

- Provide opportunities for permanent and temporary public art
- Create links to gateway spaces and at Eastworks and at other locations
- Provide opportunities for youth art activities

Create a nature trail along the Manhan River

- Establish an informal nature trail through conservation land along the Manhan River
- Provide loops back to Pleasant Street and the Lower Mill Pond
- Provide signage and trail guides to help people find their way



Create a distinct gateway to Lower Mill Park from the Union Street commercial area

- Create a gateway on the bicycle path that welcomes people to the Lower Mill Park and provides access from the park to the commercial district. It could include:
 - A sculptural gateway element that marks the trail
 - An information kiosk, wayfinding signage, and a trail map
 - Bicycle racks, a water fountain, a public phone
 - Streetscape & traffic calming improvements at the Union Street crossing
- Possible dedicated parking in Union Plaza lot

Promote use of the future Manhan River Rail Trail by pedestrians and bicyclists

- Connect the Manhan River Rail Trail to neighborhoods and open spaces with path spurs

Strengthen connections between Pleasant Street and Lower Mill Park

- Incorporate public ways between and through the mill buildings. Locate public uses along these passages
- Provide additional landscaped parking areas on underutilized sites to support use of the mills and Lower Mill Park

Create a Park Gateway at Ferry Street

- Create an eastern gateway to the park that welcomes people to downtown Easthampton and Lower Mill Park. It could include:
 - An information kiosk, wayfinding signage, and trail map
 - Streetscape & traffic calming improvements at the Ferry Street crossing, potentially including a traffic light
 - Dedicated parking for bike trail users and other visitors
- Provide dedicated parking in lots awaiting redevelopment

Consider new opportunities for reuse of city property along the Manhan River and Broad Brook

- Explore the potential of city land east of Ferry Street for active sports. Consider uses such as a BMX bike track that would not be appropriate near the Lower Mill Park or residential districts

Reopen Shar's Grill

- Restore the old train station shed as a diner to support park use
- Provide seating on a deck or terrace overlooking the pond

Promote reuse of the Ferry Street Mill complex

- Restore and reuse the historic Ferry Street Mill complex taking full advantage of the frontage on the Lower Mill Park
- Remove unviable or less significant buildings as necessary and use space for parking and landscape improvements
- Concentrate industrial uses at the rear of the mills while preserving the front sections for clean uses that benefit directly from water views

Create an esplanade on Ferry Street

- Reinforce the link between the New City neighborhood and Lower Mill Park and establish an attractive front along the Ferry Street Mill complex
- Remove the nose-in parking lot that blocks the view (city to acquire land from Ferry Street owner)
- Install a public walk and green esplanade along the pond edge
- Install a ramp and small dock for pedestrian access to the water's edge and for canoes and kayaks

Provide limited public access to the South Shore of Lower Mill Pond

- Provide an informal narrow path along the south shore between Ferry Street and the proposed new pedestrian bridge providing boardwalks where necessary to cross sensitive natural areas
- Minimize clearing and protect native habitat along the banks of the Lower Mill Pond
- Encourage the landscaping of the cemetery to improve its visual and habitat value while respecting its purpose

Create a new pedestrian bridge linking the Everett Street area to Lower Mill Park

- Construct a new pedestrian bridge at the site of the former mill bridge taking advantage of the existing right of way and piers
- Enhance the bridge with public art and make it accessible to all

Secure public control/stewardship of Lower Mill Pond and improve water quality

- Consider full ownership of the pond and shore by the city or a land trust entity
- Define the Lower Mill Pond Watershed
- Improve water quality - long term
- Improve brook habitat for fish
- Remove invasive aquatic plant species
- Undertake partial or full dredging to improve pond condition - long term
- Preserve existing shoreline vegetation and habitat with particular attention to the south shore, the tributary, and the eastern end of the Lower Mill Pond
- Develop interpretive and wayfinding signage

Create new "Front Doors" from mill buildings to Lower Mill Park

- Support redevelopment of mill buildings for uses that benefit from the riverfront site and park; build on the success of Eastworks as a mixed use development including housing
- Improve building facades facing Lower Mill Pond; improve the character of parking areas; create new entrances; encourage uses that extend activities out from mill buildings into the park
- Support a possible education center within one of the mill buildings with a focus on history, ecology, and/or art
- Remove outmoded structures as necessary and use space for parking and landscape improvements



New boat landings and launch points will support a major increase in recreation on the water.



A range of programmed activities and artful park structures could be developed to attract people of all ages and backgrounds to the new Lower Mill Park.

