

UrbanRiver Visions



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

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 Fall River Charrette: Quequechan 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 Fall River *UrbanRiver Visions* Charrette that was held on November 23, 2002 at the Advanced Technology & Manufacturing Center. 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 Fall River 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. Fall River consultant team members also included Maria Van Dusen and FXM Associates.

Fall River Charrette

The Place

The study area for Fall River's *UrbanRiver Vision* encompasses the entire Quequechan River and the neighborhoods around it, from Battleship Cove on the west to South Watuppa Pond on the east. This area comprises the heart of downtown Fall River, including large mill complexes on either side of the river, government facilities such as City Hall, residential and commercial areas, and the I-195 corridor that runs along and over the Quequechan River. On November 23, 2002, charrette participants developed strategies to improve access to the river, and to use changes to the riverfront to enhance the visual image of the city and support its economy.

A Shared Vision

The Quequechan River and the waterfalls that once graced the western part of Fall River gave the city its name. Over the years much of the river has been covered by mill buildings and by highways, making it invisible to people on the street. Today, a large part of the river is hidden in a pipe.

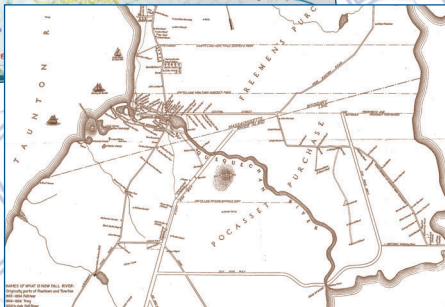
The vision that emerged from the charrette is based on restoring the river, making it visible again and completing the critical links between the river, other natural resources, and surrounding neighborhoods. At the heart of the vision is a daylighting initiative that will uncover the river and waterfalls where they have been buried and a trail network along and

around the Quequechan connecting residential areas that provide access to the waterfront for residents and visitors alike. The group envisioned a cleaner river, a result of water quality improvements including the ongoing Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) project.

Next Steps

The following steps will advance the vision:

- Support the timely completion of the Quequechan River Bike Path by securing funding and permits
- Explore funding sources for a feasibility study for daylighting and restoration of the Quequechan River; form a committee of local experts and volunteers to advance the daylighting initiative
- Initiate discussions about creating a public/private partnership to develop the vision and assess its feasibility
- Research land ownership and initiate discussions with landowners abutting the Quequechan River, Britland Park, and proposed trails
- Dedicate the 2-acre city-owned parcel adjacent to Britland Park as a wilderness park area and provide limited access to the land by adding trails and scenic overlooks
- Test water quality and monitor development in the Quequechan River corridor
- Sponsor public events to celebrate the role of the Quequechan River in Fall River's culture and economy



The Charrette

In meetings preceding the charrette, community leaders identified a number of themes that would be addressed during the event itself. These themes helped to guide the work of more than 75 individuals who took part in the charrette, held on November 23, 2002, at the new UMASS Dartmouth Advanced Technology & Materials Center (ATMC) in the South Coast Research Park on Maritime Street overlooking South Watuppa Pond. The day-long program included morning discussion groups and afternoon visioning groups.

Morning Sessions

Small group discussions focused on three core topics:

- (1) connections;
- (2) river use;
- (3) river image and economic development.

Key recommendations are listed below:

Connections Group

- Create local connections between the river and surrounding neighborhoods by developing a trail network along and around the Quequechan River
- Open up views of the river and parkland along the river from I-195, from the downtown, and from neighborhood streets such as Pleasant Street and Rodman Street
- Create regional connections to other natural resources including the Southeastern Massachusetts Bioserve, Kennedy Park, and Travassos Park
- Provide access to the wild land adjacent to Britland Park, a 2-acre parcel owned by the city; build trails to and through this land but leave the land in its natural "wild" condition
- Design and reconstruct bridges and highway culverts on the Quequechan River to provide greater clearance for boats using the river, allowing full navigation of the river
- Monitor and improve water quality, addressing residual industrial pollution and storm water management; encourage recreational activities and improve wildlife habitat
- Maintain wildlife corridors in the Quequechan River corridor
- Bring back the waterfalls below Main Street in the area of the Chamber of Commerce building
- Explore funding from the Army Corps of Engineers and other sources for a feasibility study for the daylighting and restoration of the Quequechan River; explore possibility of using the ongoing CSO project to further the daylighting and restoration project
- Form a local constituency around the ownership and maintenance of the Quequechan trail network and associated recreational amenities

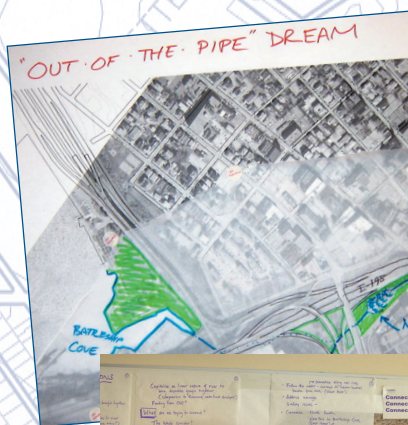
River Use Group

- Monitor and improve water quality
- Take advantage of the ongoing CSO project to move the vision forward
- Zoning changes needed to create a buffer between new construction and the edge of the Quequechan River; provide incentives to developers to provide buffers and public amenities for construction projects in the Quequechan River corridor
- Plant and maintain a vegetated buffer of trees between the highway and the rail trail running alongside it
- Promote recreational uses of the riverbank and river for fishing and swimming
- Promote boat rentals to attract visitors wanting to use the river
- Build public awareness of the river; foster respect for the river through education, signage (including painting the path of river), and celebrations (festivals)
- Explore opportunities to restore wetlands and aquatic habitat
- Develop educational programs about the river; provide outdoor classrooms along the river; coordinate programming with local schools
- Map ownership of the river and surrounding land

River Image and Economic Development Group

- I-195 was located in the Quequechan River corridor and changed the city's image; people form first impressions of the city based on views from the highway; improve the views and image of the river and the city
- Restore the falls to create a destination (just as the restored riverfront in Providence, Rhode Island has made that city a destination)
- Create a history trail along the Quequechan River, with markers and signage detailing the history of the mills, the river, and the city
- Recognize and promote the uniqueness of the granite mill buildings in Fall River; support rehabilitation and reuse of these former industrial buildings and leverage the economic opportunity created by renewal of the city's riverfront; consider lighting mill buildings at night
- Build public awareness of the river and its potential for recreation and habitat
- Develop wayfinding signage

Redefining the River's Edge



Afternoon Sessions

In the afternoon discussions, three groups of charrette participants created an annotated plan that outlined their vision for the Quequechan River. Each of these visions were presented to all charrette participants at the end of the day. They contained many shared themes and elements that are listed below.

Group 1

Group 1 focused on the desire to create "The Quequechan Trail," a network of trails along and around the Quequechan River that could connect the river corridor to adjacent residential areas and to other natural resources including Travassos Park and the bioserve to the north, Kennedy Park to the south, and Westport and Horseneck Beach to the east. The group also felt it was important to daylight the river and the falls wherever possible. Signage and monuments should be provided to mark the trails, especially in its more urban parts. Parking needed for trail users could be provided by using the empty lots at nearby mill buildings and by sharing other parking lots. Wild areas, including those north of Britland Park and south of Chace Pond, should be preserved in their natural character, opened to public access, and connected to the trail network. A "River Overlay Zone" was recommended for the Quequechan River corridor to ensure that new development is compatible with the community's vision. Discussions could be initiated with landowners abutting the Quequechan River, Britland Park, and proposed trails to discern interest in using land for "The Quequechan Trail." To implement the

vision, residents, businesses, and government could form "The Quequechan Partnership," a local constituency that would promote and advance these ideas.

Group 2

Group 2 agreed that the creation of a trail network and the daylighting of buried parts of the river should be top priorities of the city. This vision also emphasized the need for signage, parking, site plan review, and a public awareness campaign. The group suggested shared public use of city-owned land at the incinerator property, including the construction of trails across the property to connect to trails on either side. Over the long term, the group would like the city to develop an urban design plan for the Quequechan River corridor.

Group 3

Group 3 concurred with the other planning groups about the desire to daylight the river and restore the falls. They also would like to see an expansive greenspace and an extensive trail network around the river. The group emphasized the need to improve water quality and the image of the river. They highlighted the need for a public relations program in the future that could market the area and improve the community's image once pieces of the vision are implemented. At the local level, educational programs could raise awareness of water quality issues, stormwater improvements, and the need for watershed and habitat protection. The group also discussed ways of capitalizing on the area's heritage, including trails linking historical places in the area.



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The Quequechan River and the waterfalls that once graced the western part of Fall River gave the city its name and its identity. They provided the power for the mills that once drove the city's economy. Today, however, the river's potential as an amenity has been obscured by the impacts of highway construction, contaminated sediments, and sewer overflows.

The community's vision centers on the idea of restoring the river making it visible once again, freeing it from the shadow of I-195, and improving water quality. Important elements of the vision include completing a bike path along the river, daylighting portions of the river that are now buried, restoring the falls below Main Street, developing programs and signage to build awareness of the river, and creating new parkland and trails that link neighborhoods and natural areas. The technical feasibility and costs of implementing each element of this vision should be explored.

As the river is restored, the dramatic waterfall on the Quequechan River can again become Fall River's defining natural feature. Now hidden under highway ramps, enclosed in a pipe, and threaded through historic mill structures, the path of the Quequechan has long been obscured. Restoration of the falls could be the catalyst that fulfills the city's desire to link downtown and the harbor, physically and economically.

Restore the Quequechan River and Free the Falls: Fall River reclaims its lost river as a neighborhood amenity and regional attraction



Investigate the need for water quality improvements beyond the work being done for the ongoing Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) project



A historic photograph of the waterfalls that once flowed below Main Street in downtown Fall River.

Create connections from the river corridor to the Bioreserve



An artist's rendering depicting what a restored waterfall might look like in downtown Fall River.

Expand and enhance Britland Park

Make Britland Park the centerpiece of an extensive open space and trail network along the Quequechan River through physical improvements and greater accessibility. Enhancements could include steps to:

- Complete the Quequechan River Bike Path, including connections to Britland Park
- Dedicate a 2-acre city-owned parcel adjacent to Britland Park as a wilderness park area; provide limited access to this land with trails and scenic overlooks
- Construct a new boat rental and launching facility on the banks of the Quequechan River
- Enhance the visibility of the park by improving its Plymouth Avenue and Pleasant Street gateways with signage and landscaping
- Expand the park along Pleasant Street by acquiring land between Pleasant Street and the park along the driveway
- Establish park programming, including festivals, while preserving existing uses such as the soccer field and BMX bike trails

Create new green spaces and loop trails along and around the Quequechan

Bring residents to the shores of the Quequechan River and related water bodies with a network of trails and open spaces that tie back into the Quequechan River Bike Path. Explore opportunities to restore wetlands and aquatic habitat. Investigate using natural systems to clean stormwater.

Complete the Quequechan River Bike Path

Continue to work closely with the Division of Capital Asset Management (DCAM) and MassHighway to advance the city's vision and design for public access along the river. Finalize state funding for construction of this regional amenity that will act as a central spine for recreational use of the Quequechan River corridor. By linking the city to neighboring communities and regional amenities, such as the Bioreserve, the bike path will provide recreational opportunities for local citizens and regional visitors to the city.

Restore the falls to Fall River, providing a new attraction that links the downtown and the harbor

- Daylight or reconstruct the falls below Main Street in the area of the Chamber of Commerce building
- Create a park around the falls, complete with signage detailing the history of the mills and the river
- Improve the plaza on North Main Street that could overlook the restored falls

Strengthen neighborhood links to the river and its parkland

Support the timely completion of the Quequechan River Bike Path by securing state funding and local permits. Provide a network of trails between the proposed bike path, parkland, other green spaces, and surrounding neighborhoods. New trails will improve public access to recreational opportunities and to the city's natural resources. Improvements to be made could include:

- Create a link to Flint village through Travassos Park
- Create links to the Niagara neighborhood at Rodman Street and at the southern tip of Chace Pond
- Connect the bike path under I-195 along a defunct rail line to connect to the Niagara neighborhood at Rodman Street; acquire the land (between I-195, Lowell Street, Rodman Street and Lawrence Street) associated with the rail parcel by transfer of ownership from the state to the city
- Build a trail across city-owned land at the incinerator property, connecting to other proposed trails

Create zoning that protects the future potential of the Quequechan River corridor in current development planning

Create a Riverfront Overlay Zone that establishes additional criteria for development within the river corridor and that protects the long-term potential of the river area as a new recreational artery for the city. This approach would ensure that new buildings do not block future connections to the river or along the river corridor.

Preserve and enhance views of the Quequechan from I-195

Many people get their first impressions of Fall River from the elevated view on I-195. Preserve and enhance these views along the Quequechan corridor by managing vegetation overgrowth and reducing billboard and signage clutter, while acknowledging that highway screening and sound buffering are also important in residential and recreational areas. Consider placing a fountain in the river and lighting mill buildings at night.

Beautify Fall River's boulevards

The boulevards of Fall River, including Eastern, Brayton, and Plymouth Avenues, are important components of the city's open space and park system. Enhancements to the aesthetics of these streets, including banners, street trees, flower beds, lighting, and monuments, would once again make these streets into proud boulevards.

Promote boating on the River; create a water trail between Britland Park and South Watuppa Pond

- Create a navigable "Canoe Trail" on the water between Britland Park and South Watuppa Pond.
- Construct new culverts and bridges that provide greater clearance for boaters to allow full navigation of the river
- Provide connections between the Quequechan River and Chace Pond to further increase the recreation potential of the water resources in the corridor

Connect the bike path to Dave's Beach

Link the boat launch and recreational open space at Dave's Beach to the proposed bike path, making it accessible to the entire Quequechan River corridor and to the city center.

Free the Quequechan River

Daylight the Quequechan River between City Hall and Plymouth Avenue, creating a new civic amenity for central Fall River. A first step could be to paint a blue trail on the streets where the river now flows underground. The next step could be to secure funding for a feasibility study to determine the most appropriate route for surfacing the waterway. Any re-engineering of the river should include the following steps:

- Study flows and sediments in the river
- Create pathways along the river to connect the harbor to the downtown and to an enhanced trail network along the upper Quequechan River
- Improve streetscapes on streets along the new river corridor including interpretive signage and historical markers
- Assess alternative alignments for daylighting the river

Create a strong public-private partnership to advance the vision and take steps needed to evaluate the feasibility of individual elements

Key partners in this effort include the local and state governments, neighborhood residents, environmental and community organizations, and the greater Fall River business community. Initial efforts might focus on identifying funds to undertake technical studies to evaluate the feasibility of individual components of the overall vision.

