Canton Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP)

Waterfront Advisory Committee (WAC)
Meeting #2 Summary Notes

January 15, 2026
6:00PM – 8:00PM
Canton Municipal Building / Virtual (Zoom)

Attendance

LWRP Committee
Tom Langen, Committee Chair
Wayne Cuthbert
John Danis
Tom Greene
Kara McLuckie
Leigh Rodriguez
Keith Zimmerman

Department of State
Greta Alvarado

Barton & Loguidice
Dan Theobald, Project Community Planner
Keith Ewald, Managing Community Planner

Absent
Meghan Richardson
Tim Bacon

The second meeting of the Waterfront Advisory Committee (WAC) for the Town and Village of Canton's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) focused on advancing the technical foundation of the plan and setting the stage for the Inventory and Analysis phase. The goals of the meeting were to:

- Present and discuss the draft Community Participation Plan (CPP).
- Review the draft waterfront boundary and discuss next steps for refinement and coordination with NYS Department of State (DOS).
- Introduce Section II of the LWRP, Inventory and Analysis.
- Facilitate a discussion to gather local knowledge related to waterfront conditions, issues, and opportunities.
- Outline next steps for the committee and the consultant team.

Dan Theobald (B&L) opened the meeting by reviewing the agenda, which included:

1. Committee Business
2. Community Participation Plan
3. Waterfront Boundary
4. Inventory and Analysis Overview
5. Brainstorming Discussion
6. Next Steps

This project was prepared with funding provided by the New York State Department of State under Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund.

1. Committee Business

The committee approved the summary notes from Meeting #1. Dan provided a brief project update on the project website and Dan discussed the potential addition of an interactive map on the main page to display the project boundary; committee members expressed support for this idea.

Dan also introduced an interactive mapping tool for the committee to test. He explained that the map is intended to serve two purposes: to allow committee members to share input on issues, assets, and general comments related to the waterfront, and to test the functionality of the tool so it can be refined prior to its use for broader public engagement.

Tom suggested that the map would benefit from clearer instructions, particularly regarding the use of different pin types. The current map includes three pin options: issue, asset, and general comment. Tom recommended defining the purpose of each pin more clearly. Dan noted that having multiple pin types could be confusing and suggested that a single pin type with clear instructions may be more effective. Dan also clarified that any comments submitted by committee members through the map would be used for internal discussion only.

2. Community Participation Plan

Dan reviewed the overall project schedule and provided an overview of the Community Participation Plan, including the proposed outreach methods and timing. Discussion focused on the sequencing of outreach activities and how to best introduce the project to the broader community.

Committee members suggested launching online outreach prior to the first in-person public engagement. The committee felt this approach would allow community members to visit the project website, review background information, and interact with online engagement tools before attending an in-person event. This sequencing was viewed as beneficial in building early awareness and helping participants arrive at in-person engagement opportunities better informed and prepared to ask questions or provide feedback.

It was agreed that the project website should be launched first, followed by an online interactive engagement tool, ahead of the initial in-person outreach. For in-person engagement, the committee suggested tabling at an existing community event rather than hosting a standalone meeting. The Dairy Princess Parade, which takes place during the first week of June, was identified as a strong potential venue for this initial public engagement activity.

3. Waterfront Boundary

Dan presented the updated waterfront boundary and highlighted the areas revised since the previous committee meeting. The primary revisions were focused around the Village of Canton and included an expansion of the boundary. Dan also reviewed the expansion of the boundary to include the 1,000-foot buffer area in Pyrites and showed how the boundary was extended around the Indian Creek Preserve to adjacent roadways, consistent with NYS Department of State (DOS) guidance.

Dan explained that he and Village representatives met with Greta Alvarado (DOS) the day prior to the meeting to review DOS comments on the boundary. He noted that while there was initial concern that

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DOS might object to including the Indian Creek Preserve or the Little River, DOS supported their inclusion. DOS agreed that the lake and waterways within the Indian Creek Preserve appear to connect to the Grasse River and Oswegatchie River, and that the Little River connects to the Grasse River, supporting their inclusion in the waterfront boundary.

Tom noted that, for justification purposes, the LWRP should document that the Indian Creek area was historically navigable and that historic maps exist showing this navigability. Dan agreed and noted that including these maps in the Waterfront Boundary section would help strengthen the justification. Tom also noted that the Little River is actively paddled and connected to the Grasse River.

John noted that West Front Street, in Rensselaer Falls, extends beyond the Village boundary into the Town and ends at a dead end. This area outside the Village is included in the waterfront boundary. He clarified that some maps incorrectly show the street continuing beyond the dead end, when in reality the land beyond is privately owned and there is no existing street or public right of way. John also noted that while development proposals have been considered in the past, the area is too environmentally constrained to develop, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has indicated it cannot be developed due to site conditions.

John also mentioned a past proposal for a canoe launch at County Route 15 and Johnson Road, which is within the Waterfront Revitalization Area but outside the Village of Rensselaer Falls. He noted that the idea was ultimately abandoned due to rocky conditions.

4. Inventory and Analysis Overview

Dan introduced Section II of the LWRP, Inventory and Analysis, and discussed its purpose and importance in establishing the foundation for the LWRP. He explained that this section documents existing conditions and trends along the waterfront and provides the basis for developing the vision, policies, and projects in later sections of the LWRP. Dan reviewed DOS expectations at a high level and outlined the major topic areas that will be addressed, including: demographics and trends; natural resources and water quality; flooding and climate-related risks; land use, ownership, and zoning; public access, recreation, and connectivity; infrastructure and utilities; economic and market conditions; and cultural, historic, and institutional assets. Dan noted that the meeting would include an overview of demographics and trends, while the remaining topic areas would be discussed in more detail during the brainstorming portion of the meeting to capture local knowledge and perspective.

As part of the demographics and trends overview, Dan reviewed population, age, housing, and economic indicators. During the discussion on age, Keith recommended further refining the analysis to focus on the 18 to 24 age cohort to better reflect Canton's role as a college town. Questions were raised regarding whether college dormitories and prison cells are included in housing unit counts.

Following the meeting it was clarified that, under U.S. Census Bureau definitions, these facilities are classified as group quarters and are not included in the housing unit totals, even though the residents are counted in population figures.

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Keith also noted an apparent discrepancy between the increase in total Village housing units from 1,808 in 2010 to 1,979 in 2020 and the relatively low percentage of new structures shown in the "year structure built" data.

Following the meeting, further research explained that this difference can result from housing unit increases due to conversions, reconfigurations of existing buildings, reclassification, or data updates between census years, rather than new residential construction.

The committee emphasized the importance of clearly highlighting poverty and economic vulnerability in the Inventory and Analysis. Members noted that higher educational attainment associated with the college population can mask underlying poverty issues, and that county-level indicators consistently show poverty as a concern in Canton. The committee stressed that demographic data should be used intentionally to support the goals of the LWRP, particularly in shaping projects that provide free, accessible recreational opportunities and improved waterfront access for families and residents in need.

5. Brainstorming Discussion

Dan framed the discussion by outlining the goals for this portion of the meeting: to confirm key issues and assets within the waterfront area, identify priorities and emerging themes, and flag areas that warrant deeper analysis. For each topic area, Dan reviewed relevant subtopics, prior discussion from the kickoff meeting, information from the 2018 Grasse River Waterfront Revitalization Plan, and preliminary research completed for Section II.

Public Access, Recreation, and Connectivity

For public access, recreation, and connectivity, Leigh noted that Taylor Park Community Beach is currently closed for swimming due to flooding damage, and its long-term future remains uncertain. The site does include a boat launch, which continues to provide river access. The committee discussed the lack of consistent wayfinding and interpretive signage directing people to the Grasse River and referenced prior recommendations from the Grasse River Blueway Trail and related marketing and signage concepts. Ongoing efforts through the Village's Complete Streets Task Force were noted, including improvements along the Canton Trail, with signage concepts modeled after those used on the Remington Recreational Trail.

Access along the Little River was also discussed. While the river is generally accessible and used for paddling, fallen trees are typically left in place per Army Corps of Engineers guidance, which can affect navigation. Additional discussion focused on a town-owned kayak launch along the Little River at County Route 27, which serves as a popular access point, including trips paddling downstream to Taylor Park.

Tom noted an informal kayak and canoe launch location along County Route 15 near the Indian Creek Nature Preserve on the Oswegatchie River, highlighting the limited formal access points in that area.

Keith Ewald noted a previously proposed pedestrian crossing connecting two parks, which was initially funded through the LWRP but ultimately abandoned due to safety and flooding concerns. While Tom acknowledged that the earlier proposal was not feasible, he expressed interest in revisiting the concept of a safe crossing between Heritage Park and the Sculpture Garden as part of future planning efforts.

Cultural, Historic, and Institutional Assets

It was noted that St. Lawrence University (Old Campus District) will be added to the historic assets. There wasn't much discussion about this topic.

Economic and Market Conditions

The committee discussed how several recommendations from the 2018 Grasse River Waterfront Revitalization Plan related to land use regulation and waterfront protection have since been addressed. The 2018 Plan noted that no specific waterfront land use or protection districts existed at the time and identified an opportunity to revise zoning and land use regulations to better protect and enhance the riverfront while supporting appropriate development. Leigh confirmed that, following adoption of the 2018 Plan, both the Town and Village have taken regulatory action to implement these recommendations. The Village has adopted a Waterfront Overlay District, and the Town has adopted a Watercourse Protection Overlay District, providing a regulatory framework to guide development, protect natural resources, and support long-term waterfront revitalization efforts.

Natural Resources and Water Quality

The committee discussed several natural resource considerations affecting the Grasse and Oswegatchie Rivers. It was noted that a grant has been awarded for shoreline stabilization at Willow Island, and both the Town and Village expressed interest in expanding recreational and community events at this location in the future. Committee members also highlighted environmental stressors affecting waterfront infrastructure, including late-summer high rainfall events and ice scouring. Grasse River Heritage noted that ice scouring has previously damaged riverfront facilities, including the removal and replacement of boardwalk sections. In addition, DOS has provided Water Quality Assessment fact sheets that B&L will use to support analysis of the Grasse River, Oswegatchie River, Little River, and the Indian Creek Preserve as part of the Inventory and Analysis section.

Infrastructure and Utilities

The committee discussed transportation and pedestrian infrastructure needs within the waterfront area, particularly along Main Street / Route 11. Keith noted that the existing traffic configuration, including turn-only lanes, can be confusing for drivers and may warrant an updated traffic study. He referenced intersection improvements implemented by Clarkson University as examples of practical changes that could be applied in Canton. Keith suggested coordinating with NYSDOT to explore reorganizing traffic patterns and incorporating pedestrian safety measures, including the potential use of a demand-response pedestrian crossing signal to improve walkability and safety near the waterfront.

Flooding and Climate-Related Risks

Flooding and climate-related impacts were identified as ongoing concerns throughout the waterfront area. Committee members cited recent flooding at Willow Island in 2024, as well as recurring issues related to undersized stormwater infrastructure within the Village. There was discussion about the need for a study of stormwater outfalls and opportunities to improve drainage village-wide, including how drainage improvements could affect river flow and water quality. Additional concerns included shoreline hardening within the Village, washout damage to a parking lot owned by the public housing authority,

and the increasing frequency of late-summer high rainfall events. Ice scouring was also noted as a recurring issue, with past damage to riverfront infrastructure, including boardwalk sections that required replacement.

Land Use, Ownership, and Zoning

The committee discussed land use considerations along the Grasse River, including ongoing redevelopment efforts. It was noted that a Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) study is underway for the Grasse River corridor, along with a Restore NY project focused on the former Triple A site. These efforts were identified as important inputs to the LWRP, particularly in understanding ownership patterns, redevelopment constraints, and opportunities for reinvestment within the waterfront area.

6. Next Steps

B&L:

- Submit 2nd Draft of Section I to DOS;
- Final Edits to Community Outreach Plan and send to DOS;
- Draft Inventory and Analysis (Section II);
- Share Project Website & Interactive Map; and
- Send out slides.

Committee:

- Use Interactive Map to enter comments related to Issues and Assets

7. Meeting Adjourned

The meeting concluded at 8:00 p.m.

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