

NARRATIVE:

NORTH FERRY STREET PUMP HOUSE, OVERLOOK, AND RIVERWALK IMPROVEMENTS

The City of Schenectady is applying to the New York State Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation for a Heritage Areas System Grant for the refurbishment of the historic North Ferry Street Pump House, a working facility on the Mohawk River owned and operated by the City of Schenectady, and for associated site improvements at the facility and the adjacent Riverfront Park. These improvements include creating a bosque and river overlook, reconstructing the existing parking lot, providing new period lighting, landscaping, stone walls, period fencing, railings and brick pavers.

This project will enhance and provide a focal point for an existing greenway that runs along the river and is a component of the master plan for Schenectady's Urban Cultural Park system, is a part of the area proposed to replace the portion of the Mohawk-Hudson Bikeway that currently traverses city streets, and is included in the area designated by the Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor Commission as of special historic significance with significant implications for tourism and economic development in the region. The project area comprises slightly more than one acre. The site location is indicated on the State Department of Transportation Urban Area Map for Schenectady-North included with the application.

The Pump House, a public works project which dates from the second decade of the twentieth century, is a brick and stucco structure with limestone detailing. The facade exhibits crumbling or missing mortar, deteriorated limestone trim, and stucco in need of reconditioning. The building is surrounded by a chain link fence. The Riverfront Park currently consists of a bituminous walkway running along the river. An existing retaining wall on the riverbank adjacent to the Pump House is structurally sound, but the area needs a general clean-up. The adjacent parking area holds approximately 10 cars. The project area lacks a designed landscape and plantings. (Accompanying photographs, keyed to an enlargement of the DOT map, document existing conditions.) The site is zoned as a Recreation and Open Space District.

The Pump House site and its environs are historically significant. According to a history of the area written by Joel Henry Monroe in 1914 (*Schenectady Ancient and Modern*, published by W.F. Humphrey, Geneva, NY), Schenectady was "a place of much commercial consequence," being at the foot of navigation for commerce to the west, beginning as early as 1715. Water traffic was the primary means of commerce and Schenectady, by virtue of its location just west of the impassible falls on the Mohawk between Schenectady and the Hudson River, made Schenectady "the most important town in the Province outside of New York." Monroe states that this prestige in ship commerce continued more than one hundred years.

The earliest river navigation saw the use of small bark or log canoes, constructed in the manner of indigenous American canoes. Monroe states there were 323 of these boats in service on the Mohawk by 1723, when the volume of commerce demanded larger and stronger boats, resulting in the use of the bateau,

a flat-bottomed boat that was paddled, towed or poled by eight to ten men.. This in turn was succeeded by the Durham, also flat-bottomed and with more cargo space and sails. In addition to its role as commercial center, Schenectady was also a boat building center. By 1815 passenger boats, similar in style to the Durham, provided daily service on the Mohawk as well. Wharves, warehouses and shipbuilding concerns dominated the banks of the river until they were destroyed by fire in 1819. With the advent of the Erie Canal in 1823, the harbor was not needed and was never rebuilt.

The site is adjacent to the Stockade, the oldest area of the City, which was founded in 1661. The Stockade has been placed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. The Stockade has remained essentially residential since the time of the fire. Some buildings survived the fire and date from the early 1700s. Since many of the early settlers were of Dutch origin, homes in the Stockade reflect the Dutch influence with their high gables and narrow deep lots. Through preservation and restoration efforts of residents and owners, the Stockade exists today as an impressive example of urban revitalization. The Pump House site and Riverwalk, while not officially within National Register boundaries, is viewed as a part of the Stockade area.

The pumping facility was originally built to pump water from the Mohawk River into the City water supply system. The original pump house on the site (Attachment 1) was built by the Schenectady Water Company in 1871 (year of completion). According to information provided in *History of Schenectady County, N.Y. 1662 to 1886* (New York: WW. Munsall & Co. 1886), the pumping system, known as the Holley system, involved pumping the water, piped from the river, from a large cistern or well built under the ground near the margin of the river. The stone walls of the well and a surrounding course of gravel and sand purified the water before entering the well. The present pump house, built about 1913, replaced the original structure. When the water supply was moved to a nearby well field, the pump station continued to serve the City, and now the Village of Scotia, as a sewage pump station. The facility is owned, operated and maintained by the City of Schenectady. The operation and maintenance of the pump house and site are funded under the City of Schenectady Sewer Fund. The adjacent parking lot and walkway are owned and maintained by the City of Schenectady.

Today the riverfront area provides exceptional opportunities for recreational activities such as biking, walking, and picnicking. There is also potential for pleasure boat tie-ups nearby. The entire area, known as Riverside Park (it is sometimes referred to as Rotundo Park), comprises about 6 acres. This area runs more than 1/3 of a mile along the banks of the river, linking to Washington Avenue and Schenectady County Community College.

This area is a component of the Schenectady Urban Cultural Park Management Plan, which includes among its Park Objectives to “develop Mohawk Riverfront to its full potential as a recreational area.” and also sets as a goal to “utilize fully Schenectady’s natural resources” (please refer to Attachment 2). The Management Plan sets forth specific performance standards which include improvement to “the appearance of parks in the Urban Cultural Park,” to increase “the number and location of overlooks developed,” and to increase “the number of persons visiting and using the riverfront area (Attachment 2). The site also relates directly to the Urban Cultural Park theme of “Labor and Industry” and subtheme of “Transportation,” with the historic commercial boat traffic mentioned above. (Attachment 3 shows the boundaries of the west area of the Urban Cultural Park with the project site within those boundaries.)

In addition the Riverwalk would provide a connection to the existing Mohawk-Hudson Bikeway near the area where the bike trail heads west along the Erie Canal and a bikeway segment along city streets crosses the river and enters Collins Park in Scotia (Attachment 4).

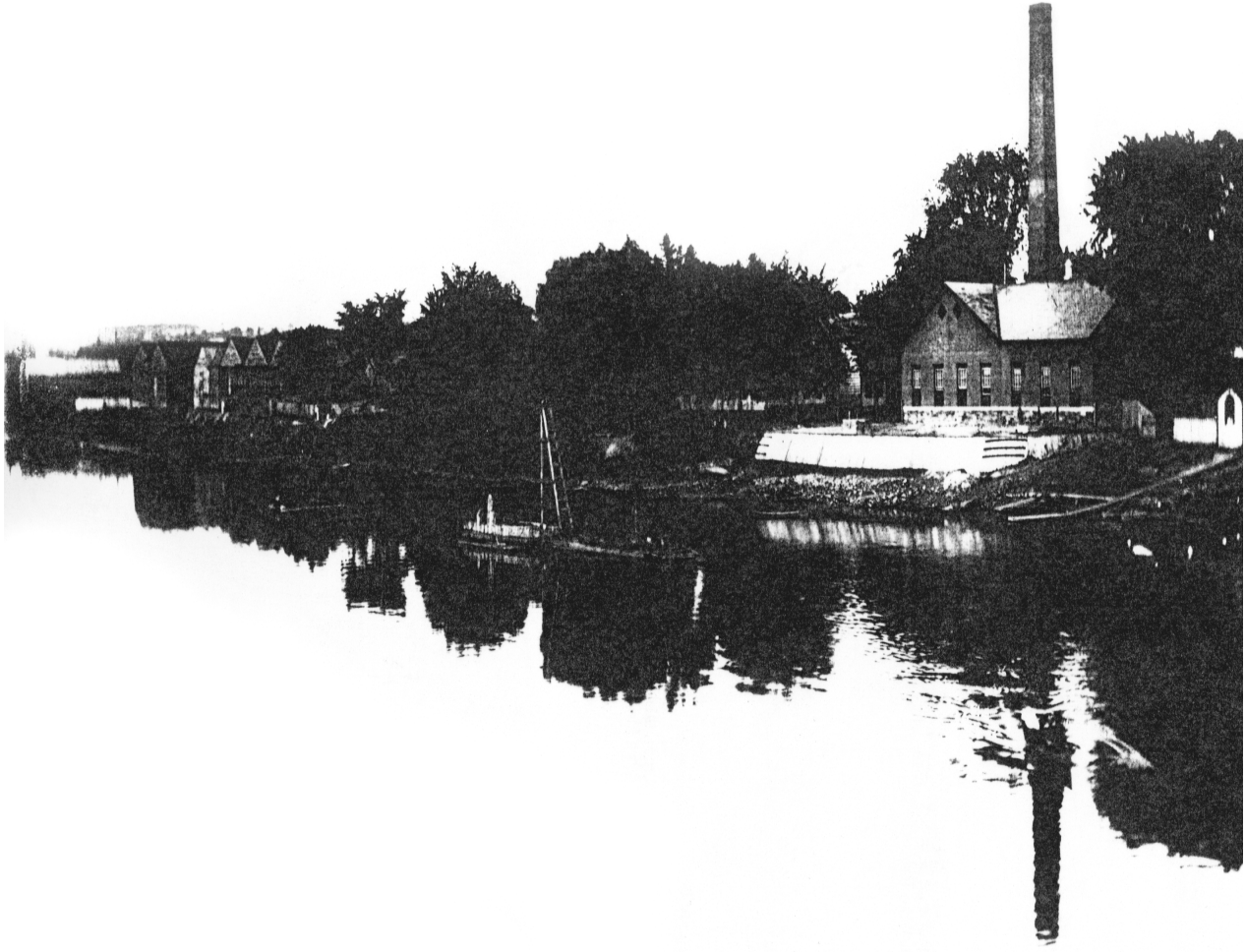
The schematic site plan for Pump House, Overlook and the Riverfront Walk is presented graphically in the attached drawing (Attachment 5). The components have been designed to encourage pedestrian use of the area. The Pump House itself will be refurbished by reconditioning the stucco, repointing the brick and masonry, restoring the limestone at the door surrounds, and repainting the structure in a period-appropriate color. The proposed work also includes rebuilding of concrete stairs and replacement of another set of concrete stairs, installation of a new cornice board, reglazing window panes, replacement of exterior doors with insulated doors, and resetting the existing copper roof edge. The chain link fence is replaced with a high ornamental steel fence. The existing parking lot is reconfigured, repaved, and curbed; landscaping screens and softens the area. A brick-paved walk lined with trees leads from the street to a gathering space by the river. The focal point is a cannon, which has been relocated on the site and is set on a paved, elevated area, facing the river. Beyond the cannon is a river overlook defined with an ornamental railing. A bosque of trees, benches, and pedestrian-scale lighting invite walkers and bikers to stop and view the river. Interpretive signage will display information about the industrial history of the river.

Since this project qualifies as an Unlisted Action under State Department of Environmental Conservation regulations, a short Environmental Assessment Form has been completed and is included with this application. A Joint Application for Permit (DEC/USACOE) and a NYS Barge Canal Permit Application have been submitted to the appropriate agencies. Copies of these applications are enclosed.

This project is proposed and supported by the City of Schenectady. The proposal involves only city-owned land; the site and the Pump House building are currently and will continue to be maintained by the City. The project has been brought to the schematic site plan stage. Upon notification of award of grant, the City is prepared to go into the final design and preparation of contract documents for bidding. The expected construction start date is April 15, 2001.

The project has been endorsed by the State Senator Hugh T. Farley, Assemblyman Paul Tonko, Assemblyman James Tedisco, the Schenectady Heritage Area of the Schenectady Department of Development, the Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor Commission, Schenectady Stockade Association, and by several residents of the Stockade area. The letters of endorsement are included with this application.

ATTACHMENT 1



Former North Ferry Street Water Works from a photograph in the collection of the Schenectady County Historical Society (undated).

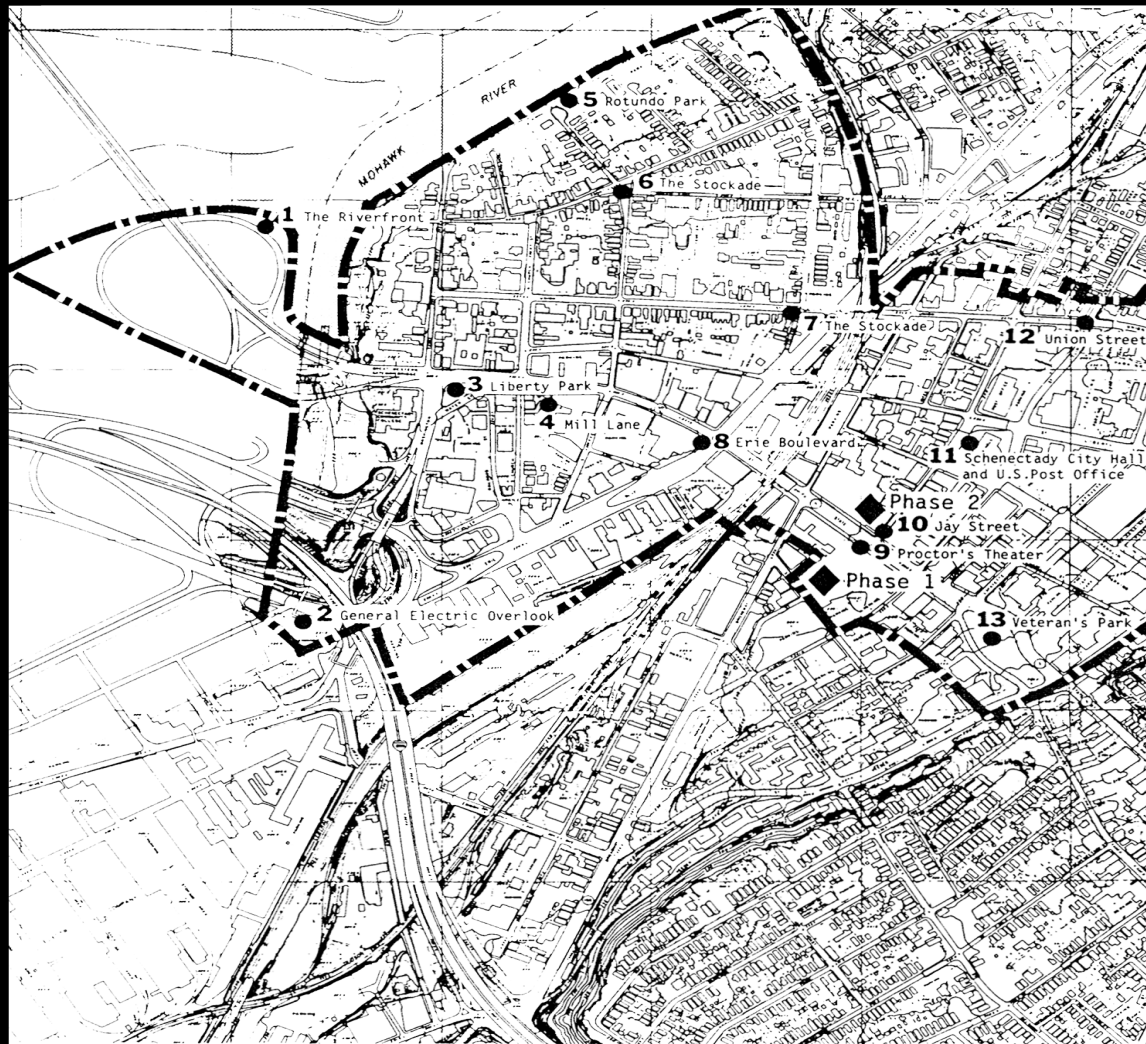
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ATTACHMENT 2

Table 3: Recreation

SYSTEM GOALS	PARK GOALS
Promote the <u>recreational use</u> of the settings for active and passive pursuits.	Provide interesting urban recreation. Enhance the recreational potential of more traditional park settings. Enhance City residents' and Park visitors' perception of, and participation in, sightseeing and other passive recreational pursuits. Utilize fully Schenectady's natural resources.
PARK OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE STANDARDS
Undertake improvements at various passive parks in the Urban Cultural Park. Establish scenic overlooks of community and integral components of the UCP. Develop Mohawk Riverfront to its full potential as a recreational area. Encourage the staging of relevant cultural festivals and events.	The appearance of parks in the Urban Cultural Park. Number and type of cultural festivals held and level of public interest. Number and location of overlooks developed. Number of persons visiting and using the riverfront area.

From *Schenectady Urban Cultural Park Management Plan*, 1986, Table 3, Page 27.
3, Page 4



Schenectady Urban Cultural Park

Bockhurst Fish Hutton Katz
Planners & Architects

0 750 FT 1

3. Park Concept West



UCP boundary
Visitors' Center
Interpretive Node