

Public Comments from the New Communities' Welcome Workshops

On March 25, 1997, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission held a public meeting at the Burrillville High School, with presentations from speakers and workshops among participants, to welcome into the Corridor the new communities of Burrillville, Glocester and Smithfield. The meeting was well attended and the discussions lively. Below are the summary comments from participants.

What are the most important connections and contributions of your community to the American Industrial Revolution?

- The mills, waterways and railroad routes.
- The dams that created ponds changed the landscape and have recreational potential today.
- Spring Lake as a recreational area specifically established for workers; traditional worker recreational areas still have recreational potential.
- Burrillville as major woolen manufacturer: the mills themselves and the mill villages of Stillwater, Worcester, Harrisville and others.
- The Stillwater Mill Complex which has potential for restoration.
- The influence of Austin Levy as a philanthropic industrialist: he built worker housing at many sites, community buildings in Harrisville, contributions which still survive today.
- The dominant role of Job Armstrong in Glocester.
- The historic mills of Chepachet and their role in the American Industrial Revolution.
- Both the mills and farms of Smithfield, which was also a transportation center, a busy route to Connecticut.
- Individual stories and history are more important than the sites themselves.
- People of the valley: workers from all ethnic groups – French, Irish, Yankee – and their local folklore.
- Churches. Village identities. Road names that tell history.
- Historic houses of owners and workers.

- The Steere Family.
- The orchards of Apple Valley

What critical issues are facing the protection and promotion of your community's historical, cultural and natural resources?

- Balancing economic and preservation needs.
- New housing developments are changing landscapes.
- Access to the River is needed.
- Need to identify potential railroad lines for use as hiking trails.
- Mill sites should be preserved.
- Brownfields need to be redeveloped: actively market and reuse old mill buildings, for commercial uses, housing, new industrial uses and small businesses.
- Commercial districts and concentrated historic villages need sewerage: cannot rely on septic systems.
- Lack of sewerage in Chepachet in particular is critical, key to further promotion and development.
- Pollution of the Chepachet River is a great concern.
- Difficult to get people to agree on downtown revitalization in Pascoag: potential for partnerships for development and preservation.
- US Route 44: debate around two or four lanes; buildings in Harmony at risk from expansion of Rte 44.
- Effect on Chepachet of widening of routes 102 and 44.
- Increasing traffic is a concern.
- Mills and houses are in danger of arson.
- Burrillville: lack of a land trust.
- Dams in Burrillville are failing or about to fail.
- Zoning regulation: development is strict in Burrillville, but no historic zoning in either historic district.
- Chepachet's historic district has historic zoning.

- Gloucester: the preservation of two historic schools needs technical assistance, options; potential for partnerships.
- Smithfield: establishment of historic districts and land trust is desired; how to develop them?
- Floating island in Waterman & Bowdish.
- Leaking Penstock and Chepachet old mills.
- Opportunities for town support for events - i.e. Whitewater Championships.
- Ways of letting people know what's happening.

What places or issues were left out of the presentations and are important landmarks in the local and regional community?

- The stories of Austin Levy and of the mill builder Tinkham.
- Spring Lake Beach and its Arcade.
- The Harrisville Arts Festival.
- Theater groups at Assembly: the Theater Company of Rhode Island, the Shoestring Players.
- The annual Canoe Race from Harrisville to Nasonville (Clear Branch River): part of a series in New England.
- Burrillville: the mills and villages of Oakland and Mapleville, including the Mapleville Historic District.
- Presentation featured too much of Slatersville in North Smithfield.
- Not enough natural features: the Gorge, Georgiaville, Mowery Park, the Spring Cove recreation area.
- Round Top Fishing Tourney.
- Expansion of White Mill Park through land acquisition.
- Consult Walks and Rambles in Rhode Island by Ken Weber.
- The only state-maintained cross-country ski trails in Rhode Island.
- The 200-acre forest in Harrisville.
- The Nipmuc River. Gloucester Heritage Park (Rt. 44). Boat ramps.
- North/South Trail.
- Old railroad bed from Pascoag to Nasonville: possible hike/ bike trail. Burrillville owns a section.

- Clarify boundaries: George Washington Management area and Durfee Hill; Round Top State Park missing; Killingly Pond larger than on the map.
- Ocean State Power is a good neighbor and partner.
- Gloucester: Peckhan Farm at the head of Chepachet River.
- Smithfield: the farming area of Wionkhiege Valley.
- Restoration of Sweeney School.
- Pascoag: the former mill site behind the Credit Union as a potential park.

What single most important issue will shape the future of your community over the next ten years?

- Urban sprawl: housing developments, growth patterns, concern over "McDonald Types" in town.
- Protecting historic resources vs. franchises and new development.
- Need to find a balance between residential and commercial development.
- Preservation of open space.
- Public access to river. Promoting youth with the river as a resource.
- New transportation patterns will affect historic downtowns for economic sustainability.
- The expansion of Route 44.
- Sensitive road improvements to preserve village character; i.e. Route 44 in Gloucester.
- Advertising! Connection to the Heritage Corridor a Plus.
- Weakness of the dams: who controls them, who is responsible for repairs?
- Water connection with Towns.
- In Smithfield, Burrillville and Gloucester, find funding for Greenways to protect from large scale land development.
- Gloucester: controlled development based on sewerage plans.
- Burrillville: follow the comprehensive plan.
- No historic district commission in Burrillville to respond to State and local plans.
- Main Street, Pascoag: potential for restoration and economic revitalization.

- Endangered One Room School House in Chepachet.
- Potential park (on private land) acquisition at Tarkiln Pond.
- Land Stripping at sand/gravel operations in Glocester and Burrillville.
- Threat of spills from the Factory Mutual test lab.
- Chemicals from the tire dump in Smithfield.
- Rehabilitation of the mills. Historic roads rehabilitation.
- Education. Taxes and schools. Land and housing values.
- Holistic approach to history rather than village by village.

On March 3, 1997 the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor held a public meeting with presentations and a workshop to welcome two new communities into the Corridor: Worcester and Leicester. The meeting was well attended and the discussions lively. Below are the summary comments from participants.

1. What are the most important connections and contributions of Worcester and Leicester to the American Industrial Revolution?

Worcester

- Its role as hotbed of entrepreneurialism & inventiveness (e.g., Ichabod Washburn)
- Its contribution to the textile, wire and abrasive industries, especially as center for early wire making
- Its role as an important transportation center for New England
- Diversity of city's former manufacturing economy
- Largest industrial city on non-navigable waterway
- Largest concentration of Three Deckers in New England
- Location on the Blackstone River and Canal.
- The P&W Railroad and its terminal at Union Station
- The craftsmen and artisans who built various local landmarks like Mechanics' Hall.
- Multi-culturalism: mills attracted various ethnic groups (60 languages once spoken here)
- Various ethnic parish churches that could be promoted as part of city's ethnic history (e.g., St. John's on Temple Street for Irish history)

Leicester, MA

- The carding industry and its related tanning and wire industries.
- Pliny Earl and Ichabod Washburn, key founders of the carding industry which contributed to success of cotton-manufacturing.
- Diversity of housing for workers & owners (Cherry Valley)
- Kettle Brook area as municipal reservoir system for Worcester
- Kettle Brook area as former Quaker community connected to Earl and Washburn families

2. What critical issues are facing the protection and promotion of Worcester's and Leicester's historical, cultural and natural resources?

Worcester

- Worcester's ongoing projects need integration into Heritage Corridor's strategic master plan
- City park system is historically significant; needs maintenance but city funding limited (e.g., Middle River is little known park; needs better promotion)
- How are traditions of older ethnic neighborhoods interpreted when they are changing/dispersing?
- Flooding issues in Green Island neighborhood
- Need to restore vitality of neighborhoods (properties being abandoned/demolished)
- Redevelopment of Union Station
- Reclaiming urban "brownfields"
- Expansion and promotion of existing recreational resources
- Continue to improve water quality of streams and river
- Need to maintain & upgrade water supply infrastructure
- Need to connect municipal bike-trail system to the Blackstone Bikeway

Leicester

- Leicester lacks process for raising public awareness of historic and natural resources
- Recognizing what's important to local residents vs. what's important to visitors
- An emerging bedroom community that will need growth planning and historical preservation efforts to maintain its rural/small-town character
- Need central clearinghouse for information on environmental and historic preservation issues
- Growth pressure on remaining undeveloped land
- Promoting commercial development (not industrial development) while preserving rural feel
- Rochdale's historic church is threatened.
- Need for passive recreational trails in Kettle Brook Reservoir area (How to allow public use and not abuse?)
- Heritage Corridor Commission's signage program needs to be extended to added communities
- Need to create more permanent open space
- Kettle Brook area as important natural resource
- Mid-State Trail needs development and connection to Blackstone Bikeway
- Several historic mills, like Smith's and Chapel's and the Knitting Mill, need preservation and re-use
- Need to add Olney Pond to Towtaid Park
- Making sure Leicester isn't treated as "stepchild"

3. What important places, assets or issues were omitted from the presentations that are “landmarks” to your communities?

Worcester

- The support of Clark University
- Worcester as important college community (need to involve more colleges in heritage efforts)
- Worcester Diners
- Worcester Art Museum
- Rebuilding & preserving Quinsigamond Village through connection to Rt. 146 Mass Pike interchange
- BV minor league baseball
- The restoration of the Quinsigamond Firehouse and School
- Norton Company
- Seven Hills
- Green Island
- Worcester as a college community
- Coes and Patches Reservoir
- Strong ethnic roots and sense of heritage
- Worcester as manufacturing city with strong entrepreneurship (past and present)
- Opportunities for interpreting and celebrating ethnic cultures

Leicester

- Towtaid Park in Cherry Valley
- Valley Falls and its three mill sites
- The Kettle Brook area between Main & Stafford
- Historical contributions of the Green family
- Mt. Pleasant Farm
- Historic Greenville Public Library
- Hope Cemetery in Middle River
- Headwaters of Blackstone River as an important natural resource (Kettle Brook area)

4. What most important issue will shape the future of your community over the next 10 years?

Worcester

- Rt. 146/Mass Pike connection and park features
- Revitalization of Union Station
- Commuter potential between Boston & Worcester
- Transportation network opportunities & problems
- Increased opportunities for parks & green space recreational & open space
- The need for political unanimity, cooperation, leadership & vision
- Protection of the waterways
- Funding resources & limitations
- Rebuilding Worcester’s once prominent manufacturing heritage (i.e., good paying jobs)
- Bringing minorities into the life & soul of the city
- Improved public education
- New changes in Downtown (Convention Center & Medical City) - good or bad?

Leicester

- Extension of sewer line along Rt. 9; requires comprehensive plan for new growth to follow
- Balancing growth & development and keeping rural quality in Leicester (Will large development projects improve or degrade quality of life?)
- Planned reuse of mill sites
- Transportation network opportunities & problems
- The need for political unanimity, cooperation, leadership & vision
- Protection of the waterways