

**Discussion White Paper**  
**Assessment of Preservation and Development**  
**in Lowell National Historical Park**  
**at its 30-Year Anniversary**

**Where have we been and where should we be going?**

**Dennis Frenchman and Jonathan S. Lane<sup>1</sup>**

## **1. Purpose of this Paper**

To commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Lowell National Historical Park (LNHP) in 2008, the park staff has launched an initiative to engage the Lowell community in discussions about the park's future. As a means of prompting a robust dialog, the NPS has commissioned two white papers – one on the topic of educational and cultural directions for the Park and this paper, on preservation and development.

This paper reviews Lowell's situation at the time the park plan was formed, the intent and mechanisms of the plan, what has been accomplished in the park's first 30 years, and offers some directions for the role and contributions that the park may make to preservation and development in the future. At the end of the paper, a series of discussion questions are provided,

The input of staff of LNHP has been very helpful to the authors in providing data regarding activities of the LNHP and Lowell Historic Preservation Commission (LHPC); however, the views expressed in the paper are those of the authors and do not represent official positions of the NPS or other participants in this process.

## **2. Lowell before the Park**

### ***2.1 Genesis of the Park Plan***

In 1976, America's Bicentennial year, Lowell was in bad shape. Once the textile center of the nation, the city of 92,000 had lost its economic infrastructure and millions of square feet of mill space lay abandoned and deteriorating along rivers and canals. Some of these proud buildings had been demolished, replaced with vacant lots or dreary new buildings that were completely alien to the city's 19<sup>th</sup> century character. Unemployment stood at 13%, the highest rate of any Massachusetts city and among the ten highest in the US. (Riley, 1980) Investment in Lowell was at a standstill and the population was declining as young people and skilled workers left for better opportunities. "Lowell has no future," declared the chief

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<sup>1</sup> The authors were part of "The Lowell Team," the joint venture that prepared the Report of the Lowell Historic Canal District Commission (known as the "Brown Book"). This document defined the key principles that would form the basis for the LNHP. The recommendations of the Brown Book were incorporated, by reference, into the enabling legislation for the park. Segments of this paper have been drawn from an unpublished paper by Dennis Frenchman prepared in 2003.

economist of the Bank of Boston. “Government officials ought to stop wasting their time trying to save the city -- it has no hope.” (Howell as quoted in Gittell, 1992, p. 71)

The city in the 1970’s was a mixture of complex forces. Faced with bad memories of lost jobs and the gruesome site of abandoned mills, many people, led by the City Council and the city manager, wanted to erase the city’s past. They were aided by the availability of federal urban renewal funds and misguided studies, such as an MIT study of “urban systems” that extolled the virtues of modernization and considered the city’s heritage a negative factor. Another proposal by architect Victor Gruen, displayed for years in the lobby of city hall, recommended that the mills would make excellent sites for parking lots. An important mill complex and nearly all the intact boarding houses -- many of which were beautiful, substantial brick structures reminiscent of the townhouses of Beacon Hill -- were destroyed, replaced with open lots and nondescript public housing.

The drive for a different approach emerged from the grass roots. Superintendent of Lowell schools, Patrick Mogan argued that it was ridiculous for students to study the Industrial Revolution in books when the evidence of it surrounded them. He argued that the environment and people of Lowell were its best resource and potentially the best teachers about the American Industrial Revolution. But how could the city and its story be made legible to its citizens and accessible to a wide audience? Mogan, along with planning director Frank Keefe, and others searched for a new model. Pilot projects and studies were undertaken, but they were not inspiring. The National Park Service (NPS) was invited to the city, but declared that there were more beautiful mills elsewhere and the scene lacked integrity: too much had been lost (Ryan, 1987, p.309). But few precedents existed for making such judgments. There were almost no national parks in cities at the time and none that dealt with industrial heritage. Finally, U.S. Representative Paul Cronin successfully lobbied Congress to establish a study commission to determine whether the federal government should play a role in the city and, if so, to recommend in what capacity.

## ***2.2 The Lowell Historic Canal District Commission***

The Lowell Historic Canal District Commission (LHCDC) included federal, state, and local representatives, including historian F. Ross Holland, an Associate Director of the NPS based in Washington, and was chaired by Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Thomas P. O’Neill Jr. The LHCDC interviewed a series of nationally known firms before hiring The Lowell Team, a joint venture of local consultants with experience in master planning, preservation, adaptive reuse, interpretation, and educational program development.

From the outset, LHCDC and its consultants were informed that the NPS was predisposed against involvement in Lowell. Earlier NPS studies of the historic significance had found the industrial resources lacking in integrity, as some of the earliest and most beautiful mills had been lost (Ryan, 1987, p.309). Given these prior findings, the NPS leadership was not inclined to support intervention in Lowell if it did not meet their threshold of historical integrity because of those lost buildings. Additionally, NPS was concerned about establishing a commitment to a complex urban area where millions of square feet of vacant mills and hundreds of period buildings were in disrepair and economic circumstances were desperate. At the time, NPS was engaged in two major urban initiatives – Gateway National Recreation Area in the New York Region and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in

the Bay Area of San Francisco – that were proving very costly. They feared that a commitment to Lowell might absorb NPS resources almost without limit.

In framing the LHCDC’s recommendations, The Lowell Team had to address these concerns. The analysis of Lowell’s resources went beyond individual buildings and addressed the city form itself. In addition to the 5.6 mile canal system, a National Historic Landmark in its own right which remained intact, the consultants argued that the organization of buildings, sophisticated power canals, and facilities that evolved together over time made up a unique city form, the first major city in the United States designed and built for the needs of production. The historic form of the city was substantially intact and amply legible to portray the story of Lowell and the emergence of a new industrial society. The argument that the form of a city could be significant to the culture of a nation was a new idea, and preceded by over a decade UNESCO’s program to recognize World Heritage Cities, which made a similar case. (ICOMOS, 1987)

The second argument was such a project in Lowell would fill several glaring gaps in the National Park System. The system at that time included almost no sites illustrating urban design, manufacturing, science and invention, energy, ethnic minorities, and economic classes, all themes defined as critically important by the NPS. (NPS, 1972). A key achievement of the Plan was to better define the terms upon which Lowell was significant – as a industrial resource, a “working class” resource equivalent in value to more prominent NPS sites associated with the rich and famous or the wonders of nature.

Once the LHCDC and its consultants had established the national significance of Lowell, they were faced with the daunting challenge of framing a plan that could enable the NPS to address preservation of Lowell’s resources without getting bogged down with the ownership of and responsibility for millions of square feet of vacant mills and hundreds of decaying buildings, as well as the de facto stewardship of a downtown with an ailing economy. From the start, it was obvious that a partnership with little precedent would be necessary in order to address the aspects of implementation beyond NPS capability and expertise.

### 3. The “Brown Book” and the 1978 Legislation<sup>2</sup>

#### 3.1 Goals

Following the consultants’ historical analysis and approach to interpreting the significance of Lowell, they tackled the task of defining a plan that could be implemented. The Plan articulated four goals that were eventually reflected in the Plan’s enabling legislation:

- **Preservation** – to preserve the physical elements of Lowell’s environment that embodied various aspects of the social and industrial revolution of the nineteenth century; the canal system, the remaining mills, and other unique physical features of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cityscape.

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<sup>2</sup> The “Report of the Lowell Historic Canal District Commission to the Ninety Fifth Congress of the United States of America” became known in Lowell and within the NPS as the “Brown Book” because of the color of its cover. This color was chosen with care; it is the same brown seen on every national park sign in America. Moreover, the cover bore the image of one of the last contemporary textile workers in the city, Albert Biro, whose open and honest expression communicates volumes about the dignity of work and the importance of Lowell workers’ story.

- **Interpretation** – to create mechanisms to enable visitors and residents to understand and experience the significance of social, economic, and cultural forces which interacted to create an industrial community in 19th century Lowell, how these forces evolved in Lowell and elsewhere, and how they continue to shape our daily lives.
- **Development and use** – to serve as a catalyst to revitalize the cultural, economic, and physical environment of Lowell, using most efficiently the resources of all levels of government and the private sector to attract people, businesses, and investment to what many considered to be a dying city.
- **Management** – to develop the means to implement and operate the project and achieve the above goals, while respecting the limitations of existing agencies, such as the NPS, and also putting in place a capability to manage the environment and protect the historic qualities of the core of a functioning city.

Given the intense planning process, the involvement of multiple agencies and interests represented on the LHDC, and a process of community outreach, it is remarkable that the Plan successfully addressed these goals in less than fifty pages of text and illustration.

Going beyond these goals, the most succinct summary of the aim of the Plan was made by Pat Mogan, widely recognized as the originator of the concept, when he said that he wanted “... Lowell to be a good address.”<sup>3</sup>

### ***3.2 The General Theory of the Plan***

With important resources in various states of disrepair, dispersed across the core of the city, the plan faced enormous hurdles in addressing the above goals. The plan incorporated a series of innovative and interlocking strategies:

**The city should be the story.** The park vision was to convey the Lowell narrative through its cityscape. The park was conceived not just as a place, or an artifact, but as an experience that could be appreciated by interpreting and highlighting buildings and spaces - across a functioning city, not a static park - that were emblematic of workers, managers, and Lowell’s innovations. Canal boats and trolleys linking these venues would enhance the experience.

**The design would have to be strategic.** The plan recommended placing major interpretive exhibits in the Boott and Market Mill complexes at either end of the downtown to attract private investment to these large structures, to encourage visitors to walk through the downtown, and to enliven the downtown. Although the Market Mills was not the “best” or most historically important mill, the building was located ideally to intercept visitors and serve as an introductory visitor orientation center. Additionally the plan designated two districts within the city – an “intensive use” zone, which would be the focus of visitor activities and would contain the most important resources and a larger surrounding district that included other buildings and sites of historic importance that defined the context of the core resources. The latter district became the Lowell Preservation District.

**The plan must be a catalyst.** It was clear from the outset that the government could not do it all in Lowell and that the role of the NPS and federal investments would have to be limited.

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<sup>3</sup> This comment first heard by the authors in an initial interview with Pat Mogan to discuss his vision for the park at the outset of the work as consultants to the LHDC, circa 1975.

Therefore the plan recommended NPS directly purchase only a handful of buildings and offered several new kinds of partnerships of limited duration to bring expertise and funds that would not likely be forthcoming or appropriate to expect from the NPS.

**New types of partnerships would be required.** At the time the plan was prepared, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had already established a role in Lowell with its State Heritage Park and was the obvious first partner. The plan recommended that NPS do what it does best: interpret Lowell's story; develop exhibits; provide visitor and park services, including visitor transportation; restore and/or rehabilitate a small number of buildings and spaces, and; provide technical assistance and expertise. As many other activities beyond the expertise of NPS were critical to the success of the plan, the plan recommended creating a new entity, subsequently named the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission (LHPC), to provide preservation technical and financial assistance in the city, to identify buildings that would be eligible for such assistance, to work with the City of Lowell in achieving preservation, to develop educational and cultural programs, and to support private adaptive reuse of historic buildings. Consistent with this catalyst philosophy, the plan recommended that the new entity be given a limited life to do its job, after which it should be out of business.

Although the plan recommended a significant Federal investment in Lowell – a total of nearly \$40 million in 1976, with close to 80% allocated to the NPS and the remainder to the new entity – the plan avoided any speculation about the total amount of investment that would be created in Lowell and did not make any predictions about how or when the rehabilitation of the city and its resources might occur. It simply put the capability in place that could enable such efforts.

### ***The 1978 Legislation***

As the Brown Book was completed, U.S. Representative Paul Tsongas, Paul Cronin's successor, aggressively spearheaded the effort to adopt the plan and to enact legislation designating Lowell as a National Park. Tsongas and legislative aide Fred Faust (later to become the first director of the LHPC) orchestrated an effective campaign to the House Committee responsible for recommending park designation, including briefings to key legislators and supportive testimony from a cross-section of public and private sector leaders from Lowell. The legislation incorporated the Brown Book by reference, adopted its park planning concept, created the Lowell National Historical Park as recommended in the Brown Book, established the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission, and recognized the existing Lowell Development and Financial Corporation as the entity recommended to administer a preservation loan program with funds from the LHPC for this purpose.

The legislation required the LHPC to prepare a Preservation Plan, defining how it would accomplish its mandate and to prepare Standards and Guidelines for preservation as well as an evaluation of the historic significance and integrity of buildings in the park to determine their eligibility to receive future assistance. An important aspect of the legislation, accompanying the preservation incentives provided as part of the LHPC, was the requirement that the City of Lowell demonstrate its capacity to be a responsible steward of its historic environment. At the time the park was created, given the prior history of demolition, there was concern about the city's capacity to exercise this responsibility. Thus the legislation gave the Secretary of the Interior the explicit authority to withhold funds for the park and preservation district should the city not adequately fulfill its side of this bargain. One

consequence of this “carrot and stick” approach was the creation of the Lowell Historic Board in order to provide an independent capacity within the city to insure protection of resources.

#### **4. Results of the First 30 Years**

With almost no exceptions, the vision put forth in the Plan and authorized by the 1978 legislation has been realized and expanded. Key buildings identified for NPS involvement have been acquired, key development partnerships for the initial mills (Boott and Market Mills) have been completed, most of the historic mills and many other historic downtown buildings have been adaptively reused with NPS technical and/or financial assistance, many other large and small structures have been reoccupied and rehabilitated, and the basic interpretive framework proposed for the city has been put into place. Moreover, the physical elements of the plan have been expanded by conception, design, and implementation of the Canalway and the Riverwalk, not specifically recommended by the original Plan.

These improvements have nearly all been enabled by the initial partnership between the NPS and the LHPC, as well as by many other partnerships that were not specifically anticipated by the Plan but have benefited from the philosophy of partnership that park concept set in motion. It is important to note that the capabilities, funding assistance, and breadth of scope of the LHPC were pivotal in enabling both preservation and development in Lowell.

##### ***4.1 Preservation<sup>4</sup>***

Preservation efforts in Lowell over the life of the park must be understood in the context of Lowell before the park was implemented. Prior to 1976, there was little patience for preservation – favoring new construction over the 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings that, for many, symbolized the city’s decline. In fact, there was such a concern over the city’s capability to exercise proper stewardship that the plan required that the city demonstrate such capacity as a condition of continuing NPS support. How things have changed!

Since the creation of the park, historic preservation has provided the basis for much of Lowell’s economic development efforts. During the lifespan of the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission, between 1978 and 1995, close to \$5.4 million in federal preservation grants and loans were distributed to over 60 nationally significant historic resources in the Park & Preservation District. This investment resulted in close to \$52 million in private investment in these resources.

Of the 404 "A" rated nationally significant historic resources found in the index of historic properties in the Lowell National Historical Park & Preservation District, to date approximately 178 have been rehabilitated or are currently in the process of being rehabilitated. Of those remaining nationally significant resources that have been not lost to demolition, approximately 158 are still in need of some attention.

In more recent times, since early 2003, over \$200 million in preservation based-economic development efforts has been completed or are underway in the Park & Preservation District. Clearly the establishment of the National Park and preservation efforts in general have been a

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<sup>4</sup> Parts of this section are excerpted from materials provided by Stephen Stowell of the Lowell Historic Board.

catalyst for renewal and increased development activity that may not have occurred otherwise at anywhere the same scale and rate.

A significant achievement has been reuse of the District's nationally significant former textile mills, many of which are National Historic Landmarks. In an effort that is perhaps unmatched in any other community of similar size and composition, approximately 78% of 5 million square feet of mill space in the District has been rehabilitated. Within a few years, the number will rise to 84% as several projects currently underway are completed bringing the rehabilitation investment in the mills alone to \$330 million.

Strengthening and expanding historic preservation review and regulations in Lowell was a requirement of the federal law creating Lowell National Historical Park in order to ensure community actions would not be inconsistent with the preservation goals of the Park. Since the establishment of the Lowell Historic Board by the Massachusetts Legislature in 1983, over 1,900 permits have been issued within the Downtown Lowell Historic District indicating an extraordinary level of change within the downtown. The Acre Neighborhood District was created in 1999 to assist in the implementation of a Revitalization & Development Plan for this historic community within the park. Eight additional design review districts under the purview of the Board were created in 2005 in the already existing neighborhood National Register districts for purposes of demolition and new construction.

The Board also serves as the local agent representing the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for purposes of federal Section 106 and state Chapter 254 historic/environmental reviews. In addition, the Board also maintains a comprehensive survey of over 2,500 historic resources in Lowell; provides citywide technical assistance related to preservation, design, and history; works to include preservation into everyday community planning efforts; and maintains an active education and outreach program including website, newsletter, reference library, publications, house marker program, and Doors Open Lowell, the first such event in the United States when first presented in 2002.

While Lowell has achieved great success in preservation, impediments to the preservation of remaining historic resources in the District include uncooperative or incapable property owners in some cases, external market forces such as financing and real estate trends, and conflicting code, zoning, or other regulatory mechanisms. In general though, a preservation mindset has gradually replaced the urban renewal mentality from the 1960s so that today, preservation is generally accepted as being of primary importance in the community. Developers see that there is some certainty in the review process in the District overseen by the Lowell Historic Board and are willing to make significant investments as they know that their investment will not be adversely affected by inappropriate actions by others.

#### ***4.2 Development<sup>5</sup>***

In addition to design and construction of the limited number of properties that the Plan recommended be owned and managed by the NPS, such as the Mogan Cultural Center and Kirk Street Agent's House (park headquarters), and the major investment in exhibit venues

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<sup>5</sup> Some segments of the text in this section have been drawn from a working paper provided by Peter Aucella of the NPS.

such as the Market Mills visitor center and the Boott Mills, the park has played a major role in the city's economic development.

The Preservation Plan, prepared in 1979 by the LHPC, set the vision for redevelopment of the downtown and preservation district, using historic preservation as the main theme. A joint effort by the City and a business group known as the Lowell Plan funded a 1981 Downtown Master Plan that incorporated the concepts put forth in the Preservation Plan. The development that has occurred over the past quarter of a century has adhered remarkably well to those original concepts, particularly the theme of reusing existing historic structures.

While the LHPC administered the now-defunct grant program, it was required by its authorizing law to partner with the non-profit banking group, the Lowell Development and Financial Corporation (LDFC), to administer its loan program. Since the loan funds are slated to revolve until repayment to the U. S. Treasury in 2018, the LDFC continues to administer the loan program today in partnership with LNHP, targeting those historic structures that have resisted redevelopment to this day.

A development initiative not foreseen by the plan was the Canalway, a comprehensive strategy and implementation effort to preserve and enhance these unique waterways – Lowell's original National Historic Landmark District. The successful preservation and development of the Canalway and Riverwalk has resulted in an investment of over \$42 million, drawn from Federal, State, and City sources in a highly complex set of grants over a considerable length of time. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, through the former Department of Environmental Management (DEM), has also played a key role, acquiring much of the right-of-way along the Canalway, as well as, the recreational and air rights to the canal system. DEM also played a major role and provided significant funding to support development of such projects as Eastern Canal Park, Lower Locks, and the Mack Plaza/Victorian Garden. The City of Lowell assumed primary responsibility for development of the Western Canalway – Arena Reach and the Mile of Mills Riverwalk projects and has provided significant funding support that has been instrumental in the leveraging of additional project funds. Partnerships with private developers such as the Boott Cotton Mills, LLC have helped facilitate development of the Boott Canalway and created an attractive access area to the Riverwalk.

Another significant development project has been a partnership among the LNHP, the City of Lowell, the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA), the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG), and the New England Electric Railway Historical Society (Seashore Trolley Museum) to assess the feasibility of an expansion to the park's trolley system and creation of the National Streetcar Museum at Lowell, with the help of significant Federal and City funds.

### ***4.3 Development and Preservation Funding to Date***

Although the funds that have been invested in park preservation and development have been substantial, when compared to the original budgets prepared in 1976, the park has spent less than originally anticipated, while dramatically leveraging other public and private investments,.

The table below shows a comparison of projected and actual funds spent by NPS and the LHPC as well as aggregate investments by other public and private entities.

**Lowell National Historical Park  
Capital Expenditures, 1976 Projected and Actual to Date (\$ 000,000)**

	Notes	NPS	Park Entity (LHPC)	Other Federal	State Sources	Local & Regional	Private	Total
Plan, proposed (1976 \$)	1	\$31.3	\$8.7					
Plan inflation adjusted (1992 \$)	2	\$77.3	\$21.4					
Actual \$, over 30 years	3	\$30.5	\$33.4	\$15.2	\$30.4	\$21.1	\$437.8	\$568.4
% actual	4	5.4%	5.9%	2.7%	5.3%	3.7%	77.0%	100.0%

1. From Report of Lowell Canal District Commission, 1977
2. Plan, proposed, adjusted to mid-point between 1977 - 2007
3. From NPS information (see Appendix for breakdown)
4. % Distribution of actual expenditures

Several conclusions can be drawn from this table:

- **The \$64 million direct federal investment in the park through NPS and the LHPC leveraged substantial public and private funds** - over \$65 million in other public funds and nearly \$440 million in private investment over the life of the park.
- **The combined total public and private investment was over \$568 million** – this direct park-related investment represents a multiple of over 8 times the federal direct investments in the park. There has been a substantial multiplier effect on Lowell’s economy of construction and development related to this overall investment of over half a billion dollars.
- **When adjusted for inflation, the NPS received less capital funds than originally estimated for LNHP while the LHPC received more than the plan recommended** – in order to compare what was estimated in the Plan to what has been expended, the NPS and LHPC budgets from the 1977 Plan were compared to the actual expenditures to date, by source, as shown in the preceding table.<sup>6</sup> As the budgets from the Plan were in 1976 dollars, they were inflated to the midpoint between 1977 and 2007, or 1992. As the expenditures to date were tabulated in the year that they were made, over a 30-year span, they already reflect inflation.<sup>7</sup> The amount recommended by the plan for the combination of NPS and LHPC, when adjusted for inflation, was \$98.7 million, where the actual amount expended by these combined entities was \$64.0 million, despite the addition of the Canalway initiative, not defined or estimated in the plan.

<sup>6</sup> The estimates of funds to date were provided to the authors by NPS staff and are included in Attachment 1 to this paper. It is important to note that the “private” items included were only those investments that were enabled by direct NPS or LHPC investment in the buildings noted. The amounts in Attachment 1 do not include the aggregate total of all smaller buildings receiving grants or loans, nor of the other private investments made within the city without NPS participation.

<sup>7</sup> This estimate of inflation is not exact, as a correct computation would take account of the actual years when expenditures were made, information not readily available. However, as an approximation, it is indicative of the orders of magnitude involved.

#### ***4.4 Other Development***

The development effort has gone substantially beyond what was envisioned in the original plan. In addition to the private investment enumerated above, other major projects that have been implemented in Lowell, such as the stadium, arena, and University of Lowell expansion, reflect the renewed vitality of the City and its positive future. More recently the City has been highly pro-active in preparing the Jackson-Appleton-Middlesex Urban Revitalization and Development Plan, investing significant funds to prepare and make development-ready a major city site for private investment. Based on this initiative, a Boston developer, Trinity Financial, has been designated to lead this large mixed-use project. Most important, individuals, businesses, and institutions have been attracted to Lowell by the image of national significance and quality generated for the city by the park.

Observers credit the park in transforming the image of the city as a good place to locate and to do business in comparison to other older industrial cities along the Merrimack River corridor and in the region. In the end, this is probably the most significant contribution of the park in helping to transform the city into a diversified economy. Finally, Pat Mogan's early vision for the park of "a good address" is no longer a slogan, but a reality.

### **5. What Next for the Park and for Lowell?**

Clearly, the park has fulfilled the catalyst role envisioned in the plan. Much work remains to be done in the preservation sector, as there are still many buildings of national and local significance that need to be rehabilitated, although the city has demonstrated that it now possesses the capacity and the creativity to provide significant assistance. The remaining mills pose a rehabilitation challenge that local initiatives are addressing, and NPS should continue to provide technical assistance to assist in this task. The Canalway and Riverwalk went beyond the original expectations of the plan but should be completed to improve the visitor experience. A core trolley system serving park visitors is in place because of the park, but there is now an opportunity to extend this network to serve a larger community transportation role. In addition, a close look should be taken at existing facilities to determine their continued suitability for the evolving needs of the Park and its cooperators. All these items are important in completing and sustaining the physical framework of the LNHP. However, a question worth examining is whether the physical framework of the park, as envisioned in the 1976 Brown Book Plan, matches the reality of Lowell thirty years later.

#### ***5.1 Revisit the Functions, Facilities, and Linkages of the Park***

Several aspects of the park and of Lowell have changed significantly since the difficult times that preceded the Brown Book Plan. These include the substantial presence of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell and Middlesex Community College in the core of the city, the successful reuse of many of the mills for housing, bringing a new residential community to the city core, the linkages created by the Canalway and Riverwalk, the potential extension of the trolley to link with the Gallagher Transportation Terminal, the establishment of several new museums in the downtown, and the major initiative underway by the city in collaboration with a private developer in the Hamilton Canal District, creating a lively new area around the Hamilton and Pawtucket Canals between the Gallagher

Transportation Terminal and the existing NPS Visitor Center. These changes offer several opportunities to “fine tune” the park’s layout and facilities to reflect the current situation, to align with current needs, and to offer better visitor service.

- **Take Advantage of the Hamilton Canal District Project** – this project will create some dramatic opportunities for the park. With the demolition of the metal clad Joan Fabrics and Pellon buildings that lined the Pawtucket Canal close to the Visitor Center there is the opportunity to create much stronger relationships between the park facilities and these two canals as well as the Swamp Locks. Additionally, there is also the potential to greatly strengthen the visual quality of the Dutton Street entry to Lowell by making a stronger architectural definition of this corridor with appropriately scaled and designed new construction. Elements that could be considered, through a public-private partnership yet to be defined, include: a) replacement of the surface visitor parking lot with a garage, integrated with ground floor uses or facilities wrapped around upper floors of the garage; b) shifting or modifying the visitor center location to take better advantage of the Swamp Locks and proximity to the Pawtucket Canal, and; c) making stronger linkages between the Visitor Center and the existing and future Canalway. The park should study these opportunities at a serious feasibility level in tandem with the private development proposals, so that the major opportunity here does not slip away.
- **Expand the Canalway and Riverwalk** – the park should consider expanding both of these quite successful projects. Elements of the Canalway extension will be incorporated into the Hamilton Canal District project mentioned above. A major challenge for the Canalway will be connection to the west along the Pawtucket Canal, along the State-owned margin, linking to the Francis Gate Park. This could offer a very different experience than the completed segments along the urban canyons of the power canal system at the heart of the city. Such an extension could potentially create development and reuse opportunities along the route in an area of the city that has not participated in the revitalization process.
- **Assess the Implications of an Expanded Trolley System on the Park** – extension of the trolley system may require NPS to take on additional obligations and may create other opportunities, as this facility is an important transportation element of the park and visitor experience. These may include providing space for maintenance and storage of trolleys, potentially expanding exhibit and interpretive content about the trolleys, and incorporating other rolling stock in an interpretive setting, building on the relationship with the Seashore Trolley Museum. Additionally, no matter what the source of funding for an extension, NPS will want to take care with the design of trolley hardware and support facilities to make sure that they are in keeping with the character of the park.
- **Reassess the Adequacy of Park Facilities and Linkages** – as the park and related facilities have become more successful there may be additional facility requirements for both visitor spaces and “back of the house” support facilities. Potential expansion of the Tsongas Center could reduce park support spaces, and continuing operations of the concert series in Boarding House Park as well a potential expansion of the trolley system could create demand for more support space for maintenance and storage. A facility assessment is needed to take stock of existing space available to support park

operations, to estimate future space needs, and to determine what action may be required.

In parallel with a re-examination of park layout, linkages, and facility requirements, the next great challenge for the park and its community is to leverage the framework and the constituencies of the park for the benefit of Lowell, the nation, and the world. The process that led to preservation and revitalization of Lowell can benefit similar communities coping with the forces of change. In order to provide such assistance, the park and its community must develop programs that can use the physical infrastructure of the community for local and regional benefit and use the themes of Lowell as a way to address future challenges for older urban communities - including the growth of new immigrant communities and the rapid shift of many of the more highly developed nations of the world away from industrial production to the creative economy.

## ***5.2 Expanding the vision - Export the Lessons of Lowell***

LNHP has had an important national impact on NPS management approaches to nationally significant historic resources in urban and regional settings, as well as upon cities and regions seeking to protect these types of resources and to use them as a basis for enhancing local identity and economic development. Along the way, the park has encouraged a vast array of other heritage initiatives across the US and abroad. The lessons of this experience are valuable and represent one potential new mission for the park and for its community.

From the beginning, the impact of LNHP extended beyond Lowell. As the first partnership park of its kind, which used development as a tool of preservation, and a story as an asset for investment, Lowell became a model for other “heritage development” efforts across the US in several new ways:

- Lowell illustrated how the prestige and expertise of the NPS could be leveraged to successfully preserve, interpret and manage nationally significant heritage resources with limited federal property acquisition.
- The park plan was implemented not only by partnership with all levels of government but also by engaging the private sector through incentives and guidelines to invest in historic resources as part of an overall vision of what the totality of public and private efforts would add up to in the city.
- The story of Lowell was used as an asset in this process, by disaggregating historical interpretation across the city into key sites and mills, thereby raising their value and encouraging private investment in the remainder of the structures. At the same time, this approach encouraged people to move through and engage the cityscape, the real historic resource, and to appreciate how the imprint of industry shaped a community in ways more important than any individual building.
- Finally, the themes of industry, technology, work, immigration and the urban multi-cultural experience were recognized in Lowell as being under-represented as part of the nation’s heritage and underappreciated by the public. When these themes and the resources with which they are associated were given prominence and recognized as being nationally significant, this led to an array of educational and cultural programs and events that give living meaning to the park and to the city and enhance its quality of life.

- The totality of these contributions transformed the self-identity of the city from an abandoned mill town into a quality place to live and invest, empowering local citizens and officials, as well as attracting people and businesses that, on the surface, have nothing to do with the park. This is the long-term and profound significance of the project.

The experience and knowledge that resides in Lowell on how to use the story of a place to both regenerate and preserve a historic city is widely recognized and can be transferable to other locations in the US and abroad.

An important and essential element in this process has been the pro-active and creative engagement of Lowell's citizens and organizations, without whose ideas and energy all the NPS staff and funds could have accomplished only a small part of the job to date. This local cooperation and creativity have brought to life the LDFC, the Lowell Plan, the Tsongas Industrial History Center, and many other local initiatives that have built on the physical and social framework and heritage of the city. Although many other communities have benefited from comparable individual initiatives, it is the depth of collaboration among local community participants as well as the powerful interaction with talented and committed staff of NPS and the City that has nurtured many of these concepts from idea to reality. There is much to be learned about partnership processes from Lowell and the challenge is to assist others to replicate elements of this experience and to customize it to the individual circumstances of their communities, leadership, and resources.

However, it is important to note that many current staff within the NPS and the city were not involved with the establishment of the park and, naturally, have limited perspective on the groundbreaking nature of the park or the process by which it helped to transform the city. They are focused correctly on day-to-day issues of running the Park, the city, and their own institutions; but may not be fully as aware of how the park came to be, why it is important to sustain the Park vision, and the lessons it can teach. It is critical that new NPS staff absorb the concepts of partnership, education, and orientation to the "people" story of historic and current Lowell that framed the park and should influence its future.

There is a potential to reach out to those undergoing similar transformations to create international partnerships and share what has been learned to solidify Lowell's significant contribution to heritage development worldwide. Historic cities in China, India and Eastern Europe are now facing some of the same circumstances of Lowell in the 1970's and 80's. In a sense, the Lowell experience can be a model for the worldwide creative economy, not just the Lowell creative economy. This could be achieved by:

- Building up the knowledge base in Lowell and the Park about the history of the park and the transformation of the city; what happened and why; elements of the Lowell model and its "cycle of regeneration." This might be done in cooperation with the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, or other educational institutions with advanced programs in city planning, industrial history, or preservation (as has been done in Lawrence with MIT).
- Sponsoring a new round of scholarly research and publication on the Lowell experience and the broader story of industrial cities in their new incarnation;
- Sponsoring and participating in conferences, meetings and other venues for exporting the lessons of Lowell for urban regeneration; this would mean exploring some new

venues for participation such as the The International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage (TICCIH, a group affiliated with ICOMOS), the Urban Land Institute, American Planning Association, and other international counterparts;

- Working with other cities with similar backgrounds and circumstances to provide expertise, technical assistance services, and professional training in Lowell.

One way this could be pursued would be to create a national center of excellence for revitalization of historic urban areas, such as the National Main Street Center or other national centers that promulgate methods, knowledge, and produce research in other sub-specialties. This could be done through initial public seed money, but with an aim to secure ongoing funding from industry, business, and/or participating entities that wish to share results and have access to expertise. Such a center could include staff, could develop institutional affiliations, and could serve as a revenue source and center for expertise in Lowell.

### *5.3 Update the industrial story*

Lowell pioneered in the historical interpretation of the American workforce and industry and their impact on urban form and life. Through this, people came to appreciate the role of industry in shaping the American experience. This was poignant and important in the 1970's and 80's when the US was undergoing a painful process of deindustrialization and replacement of the factory work ethic that had been the reality for many American families. So now, what is the meaning of industry and the industrial city in a post-industrial era? What is the relationship of Lowell and its story to the current changes in its region and the world?

Lowell needs to advance beyond the single-minded focus on the 19<sup>th</sup> century story, recognizing that the story of Lowell and its significance also has lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some possible threads to this story include:

- **Relate technology to cities** – The regular application of science to the needs of production was pioneered in the Lowell shops and mills, giving rise to several generations of engineers, technicians and financial managers. Although, contemporary technologies no longer have the mechanical simplicity of early Lowell, where the power of water mechanically linked to looms enabled economies of production that created new urban paradigms. Today there is again a growing and increasingly sophisticated understanding of the interconnected web of innovation, investment, and technological development. Lowell, for example, can be linked to MIT and the continuing flow of technological innovation in the region that continues today. Many new innovations in biotech, genetics, and information technology are being created in cities where there is a critical mass of talent and resources that are influencing urban form, lifestyle, and culture. These linkages could be informed by Lowell's history, evolution, and renaissance.
- **Use technology as a means of communicating and building public participation** - the application of new technologies into the everyday function of the park could engage the public in the Lowell story in new ways. For example, the development of the means for local users of the park to participate in interpretation in an open source way ("wiki-interpretation") could give immediacy and richness to the program and enhance the connection between citizens and the park. Wayfinding, in situ

interpretation, and engagement with buildings, canals and personalities of the city and connections to textile cities elsewhere could all be facilitated with advanced media.

- **Promote sustainability, energy efficiency and water** – Lowell was the original carbon neutral city, drawing on the application of natural energy systems to power an entire city. It was in fact what is now being reinvented in urban experiments in several locations. In particular, hydro-power has emerged as an issue and opportunity, with rising sea levels and the need to channel and reintroduce water into river cities in productive ways rather than just seeking to wall it off – the 20th century solution that has failed. Lowell can provide a model and an inspiration in this regard.
- **Compare cities formed by the textile industry and impacts on workers** – Lowell is not alone – it was part of an industrial story that began in England in the Derwent valley, but then moved on to the Carolinas, Catalunya, Mexico, and Hong Kong and continues in China, Vietnam, and the developing world. For example, in the early 20th century Lowell technology was being used in the textile colonies that led to Barcelona’s economic emergence. What happened to these textile communities? Where are textiles being produced today? How? What are the issues? Remarkably, textile workers are still struggling for the same rights, working conditions and wages that created conflict in Lowell and in the mills of the northeast; witness the boycott of GAP stores as sweatshop facilitators. It is extremely important that Lowell’s interpretation connect to this larger, continuing and very fresh global story in real ways. Who are these people who now weave our cloth? What are their lives and cities like?

#### ***5.4 Connect to our multi-cultural society***

Lowell is a product of immigrants and through the Park has expressed its embrace of multiple groups. However, the original immigrants that built Lowell’s canals and operated its textile looms have been superceded by a new generation that needs to understand the immigrant story of Lowell – not the mills, per se, but the idea that the immigrant experience is the American experience. In this, the city and the Park have as much to learn as to teach. For example, it is remarkable that Lowell’s role as a magnet for Irish and Greek immigrants drawn by industrial economic opportunity and the critical mass of ethnic populations continues for different reasons for the Southeast Asian immigrants of today.

- **Use the park and its story as a way to engage Lowell’s new immigrant communities in the city** - The engagement of the Cambodian community as well as Latinos and other newcomers to the city should be made central to the story of the Park, consistent with its tradition of being a participant in the transformation of Lowell, to preserve its culture and history, rather than just a bystander institution. This type of multi-cultural engagement can be of great value to the city and to the park by drawing new immigrants and their community into the broader story in the same spirit as the original plan: dealing with preservation, interpretation, educational programs, events, cultural funding, and perhaps even use of and design of space.
- **Expand interpretation of Lowell’s immigrant experience more broadly to communicate its relevance to contemporary society** - Lowell – the product of immigrants and a reminder of the strength of a multi-cultural society -- could be an ideal venue to leverage the park and city assets to connect the current experience with

the earlier evolution of the city. Broader exhibits and interpretation could be a means to engage current immigrant communities and make them feel more a part of the city and its history. Initiatives by NPS could prompt others in the civic and private sector to carry the process further.

### ***5.5 Develop a local/global network***

Since the inception of the park, globalization has become a hot topic, brought on by a worldwide economy of production made possible by advances in communication such as the Internet. Another change is that, in part due to the Lowell experience, many other cities, both here in the U.S. and abroad, recognize the importance of preserving industrial heritage, particularly textile industrial heritage, and have developed projects with similar themes to Lowell, although almost none have achieved the urban regeneration success of Lowell. There are industrial heritage parks on textile themes in Britain, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Scandinavia, and China, among other countries. Yet many of these efforts remain isolated from one another and from the continuing global story of textile production. For example, advocates struggling to preserve and interpret textile mills in the Derwent Valley in Britain (a historical precursor to Lowell which has now been recognized as a World Heritage area) were surprised to discover after some time how well these goals had already been achieved in Lowell, which became a model for the Derwent project. Until recently, the French national cultural parks, many on industrial themes, were largely unaware that similar projects exist in the US, and vice versa.

There would be great benefits in developing stronger connections among these projects and the broader story and resources associated with textile cities, including:

- **Sharing knowledge about how to preserve, interpret develop and use resources and achieve urban regeneration** – Lowell will shine in this area, as a premier model;
- **Expanding interpretive programs to recognize the global nature and evolving story of textile production.** One could link the evolution of the industry from the Derwent Valley to Lowell to the Carolinas to the Llobregat River in Catalunya, to Hong Kong, for example. In fact, textiles are one of the earliest instances of industrial globalization and Lowell plays a central role in the story.
- **Linking and expanding visitation among international sites.** This could encourage visitors and tour groups to the Derwent Valley, for example, to become aware of the parallel story in Lowell and elsewhere. Cultural tourism to the US is rising dramatically as the value of the dollar falls against other currencies, and given the international interest in industrial themes, represents an opportunity for Lowell.

To develop such a network of places and projects would be relatively easy, considering the potential returns, and Lowell is in an ideal position to take a leadership role in this as the progenitor of many similar national and international projects. The basis of the network could be a web-based information system designed and managed by the LNHP in which content would be built up mainly by participation of member sites and their communities but also visitors, scholars, textile companies, and others with an interest in textile history. There are several examples of such on-line communities. From this, joint conferences, publications, research, training, tours, and other interaction would follow.

Such a network would enable the Park to make better connections to its region as well as connections to the world. It would support Lowell's mission by placing it on a wider stage linked up with other heritage sites and resources that make up the textile, immigrant, and technology stories.

### ***5.6 What should be the role of NPS?***

Many of the ideas outlined above could update and strengthen the traditional role of LNHP as a touchstone and interpreter of the American industrial experience. They also would re-energize the pioneering aim of the Park to assist in the continuing transformation of Lowell as a multi-cultural industrial city. This dual role of interpreting the past and shaping the future is what has made LNHP such a powerful and unique model.

To continue this role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, is a different challenge than it was in the 1970's. First, the park has become part of the Lowell story and needs to better interpret itself and its role in the transformation of Lowell. The lessons would be of value locally as well as to others struggling with the process of regeneration, who would form a new and broader constituency for LNHP. Secondly, the industrial city story has become more global, interconnected, and diverse. Park interpretive programs need to position Lowell in the middle of this story in a real-time, relevant way. Finally, the process of regeneration in Lowell is not complete. Physical resources remain at risk, but the city and private sector are largely capable of leading this process, with assistance from NPS. However, there will always continue to be new cultural communities that remain to be engaged: new immigrant groups and the next generation of children that are yet another step removed from the industrial experience. Others in the public and/or private may be better suited to lead some of these initiatives, but there is clearly a role for the NPS in making such partnerships happen and it needs to be defined.

These challenges for the park are sufficiently different, and important, that perhaps a major update of the LNHP plan is needed. Although "completion" of the physical artifacts that are the framework for the park would be a priority, perhaps a larger aim might be to layout a set of goals and concepts such as those presented above and how to use what is in place to achieve them, offering, on the one hand, Lowell's process as a model for others and, on the other, helping to recast the role of Lowell in addressing opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***5.7 Relationship to NPS Centennial Goals***

The National Park Service (NPS) Centennial will be in 2016. A report on preparations for the Centennial to the President identifies five organizing themes: Stewardship, Environmental Leadership, Recreational Experience, Education, and Professional Excellence. The exhibit on page 20 relates the suggestions of this paper for the park's future to these goals.

## *5. Discussion topics and questions*

1. How important is the expansion of the Canalway and Riverwalk in improving the visitor experience and reinforcing the park's constituencies?
  - a. Acquire the some or all of the canals?
  - b. Focus on the Hamilton Canal District Area?
  - c. Complete the Pawtucket Canal Loop to Francis Gate?
  - d. Other?
2. Should the park rethink its facilities and linkages to accommodate current conditions and future needs?
  - a. Fine-tune what we have?
  - b. Restudy and re-scope all areas of the park, building on the framework in place, but reflecting the most recent changes in the city?
  - c. Expand the park's preservation mandate to incorporate green technologies and development strategies?
3. How can the park and its community export lessons learned to other communities and areas that have comparable resources – in the US and abroad?
  - a. Continue on an ad hoc basis?
  - b. Develop a national, or even an international center for research and best practices?
  - c. Develop an international network of comparable venues, using the web?
  - d. Become a more prominent sponsor and convenor for sharing of lessons learned and best practices?
  - e. Other?
4. With the expanded capability of the City of Lowell in preservation and development, and absent the capabilities that were provided by the LHPC, how can the park best help with these functions?
  - a. Expand the NPS capability within the park for preservation technical assistance?
  - b. Expand NPS ability for development coordination in ways that are consistent with the park mandate?
  - c. Other?
5. How big a priority should be placed on expanding the industrial story of Lowell to engage contemporary examples elsewhere?
  - a. We're doing all we can handle on Lowell's history right now?
  - b. Place major effort into creating linkages with other places, other research, and other globalization phenomena?
  - c. Other?

6. How can the park expand its multi-cultural message to engage new constituencies in the city?
  - a. Get recent immigrant communities involved with park activities?
  - b. Incorporate interpretation on contemporary immigrant communities and how they reflect the park's ongoing story?
  - c. Other?

## Relationship of Proposals to NPS Centennial Goals

	Stewardship	Environmental Leadership	Recreational Experience	Education	Professional Excellence
<b>Revisit the Functions, Facilities, and Linkages of the park</b>					
Continuing Technical Assistance for Preservation	■				■
Expand the Canalway and Riverwalk		■	■		
Collaborate to Extend Trolley System		■			
Take advantage of the Hamilton Canal District initiative to refocus the park	■	■	■		
Reassess the park's facilities and linkages	■				■
<b>Export the Lessons of Lowell</b>					
Build local knowledge base on history and mechanisms of the park				■	■
Sponsor research and publication on Lowell and its approach				■	■
Sponsor and participate in conferences to share knowledge gained	■			■	■
Provide training, collaboration, and technical assistance to comparable cities	■	■		■	
Create a national center for industrial revitalization in Lowell				■	■
<b>Update the Industrial Story</b>					
Explore and study the relationship of technology to cities				■	
Use technology to communicate and expand user participation				■	■
Make the story of sustainability, energy, and hydropower contemporary		■		■	■
Expand the textile story globally				■	
<b>Connect Lowell the nation's multi-cultural story</b>					
Engage new immigrant communities with the park				■	
Expand interpretation to deal with national multi-cultural implications				■	
<b>Develop a local/global network</b>					
Share knowledge on urban regeneration and Lowell's experience				■	■
Connect interpretation with international textile venues				■	
Link promotion and visitation to international comparable sites				■	
<b>Update the Park Plan to reflect the above directions</b>					

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