

Town of Germantown Local Waterfront Revitalization Study

INITIAL ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES & VISION REPORT

September 2017

WATERFRONT VISION

The Germantown waterfront is a link to the Town's colonial past and a gateway to its future. It helps define our identity as a Hudson River community that is a desirable place to live, work, play and visit.

Our improved waterfront parks will provide a wider variety of recreational opportunities and an attractive setting for educational and cultural activities.

Improved connectivity will tightly integrate the waterfront into the community, linking the riverfront parks to each other and to regional land and water-based trail systems.

The Germantown waterfront will be made more resilient and protected from sea level rise to ensure that its bounty is shared by future generations.

Our enhanced waterfront will create a destination that attracts both residents and visitors and promotes economic activity in the Town.

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Task 12

Prepared by:



Town of Germantown
Local Waterfront Revitalization Study
Project Advisory Committee

With Assistance from:



DELAWARE ENGINEERING, D.P.C.
CIVIL & ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING



**Department
of State**

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1.0 Introduction

The Town of Germantown has received a matching grant from the New York State Department of State (NYSDOS) to develop a Local Waterfront Revitalization Study. The purpose of the Study is to improve public access and recreational use of the Hudson River and Roeliff Jansen Kill while protecting and preserving natural resources. The Study's long range goals are to foster waterfront revitalization, sustainability and economic investment within the Town. The Study will assess existing waterfront access and recreational resources, identify issues and opportunities, develop conceptual plans for improvement projects and actions, and recommend implementation steps. The Study is not intended to be a full Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) and will not have the regulatory impact on Town governance of a full LWRP.

The Town of Germantown Waterfront Advisory Committee (WAC), with the assistance of Delaware Engineering D.P.C., developed an Inventory and Analysis of existing conditions in the Waterfront Revitalization Study Area. The results were presented at a community visioning workshop on April 22, 2017 and public input was solicited. Based on the Inventory and Analysis, public input and policies in Executive Law Article 42 §912, the Initial Issues, Opportunities and Vision Report describes key waterfront issues, articulates a draft community vision, and identifies short, mid and long term projects.

2.0 Germantown Waterfront Vision

The WAC has developed the following draft vision for the future of the Germantown waterfront:

Waterfront Vision

The Germantown waterfront is a link to the Town's colonial past and a gateway to its future. It helps define our identity as a Hudson River community that is a desirable place to live, work, play and visit.

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Expanded Vision

Germantown's two Hudson waterfront parks, Cheviot and Lasher, are links to the Town's colonial past and gateways to its future. They served as landings for the Palatines, as small but vital ports in the 18th and 19th centuries, and then transitioned to non-commercial use in the 20th century. Today they are used for recreation, but they also shape and affirm Germantown's character as a rural yet sophisticated Hudson River community.

Germantown's Roe-Jan Park links the Town to a major Hudson tributary, the Roeliff Jansen Kill, which in turn links the Town to the Roe Jan's headwaters in and near the Berkshires. Whereas the Hudson is a large river of winds, tides, and commerce, the Roe Jan is a creek best suited for trout fishing, reflection, or even a fast paddle in a small boat.

Our parks need connections in order to work together and also integrate with regional recreational resources. We envision a linear park connecting Lasher and Cheviot, new sidewalks to connect the Town center to the Hudson, and bike routes that link our parks to the new Empire State Trail. Our parks need upgrades to better support newer forms of recreation such as kayaking and paddle boarding, while also improving facilities for traditional activities such as boating and picnicking. Parking is scarce, but so is lawn space, so we need to maintain a careful balance. Access points need to be improved to ensure that the waterfront is tightly integrated into the community, so all can share its bounty.

Germantown's Hudson waterfront has always been an economic driver for the Town. When the parks were ports, the economic impact was obvious. Now that our parks are "parks", their economic impact is more subtle. Our waterfront is an important component of Germantown's identity as a Hudson River community that is a desirable place to live, work, play and visit. Maintenance and revitalization of our waterfront recreational resources will enhance tourism, increase economic activity and spur investment in the Town.

For the parks to continue to thrive, they must be protected from the adverse impacts of global climate change, especially sea level rise. The most at-risk park is Lasher, but all of the parks need to be made more resilient. We must ensure that our waterfront resources are preserved for the enjoyment and appreciation of future generations. The parks can also provide an ideal setting for informational signage illustrating our heritage and history, educational activities that highlight efforts to protect environmental resources, and cultural activities that bring the community together.

The view of Germantown from Olana was one of Frederick Church's favorite vistas, and he painted it often in the mid and late 19th century. He valued his view down the Hudson just as we value our views both up, down and across the river. Because of steep rocky banks along much of

Germantown's shoreline there has been very little development along the river. The views of Germantown from the Hudson, and of the river from the western flank of the Town, remain much as they were in Church's time. Our parks let everyone experience this collage, from the deck of a bass boat with rod in hand, from the seat of a kayak, or on a blanket on a park lawn. Our waterfront is our shared future.

4.0 Waterfront Goals

In order to further the Town's waterfront vision, the Waterfront Advisory Committee has defined the following general waterfront goals:

- Improve waterfront access and connectivity
- Make the waterfront resilient
- Improve recreational resources
- Create a destination
- Celebrate Germantown's history
- Protect environmental and scenic resources

5.0 Key Waterfront Issues

The following key waterfront issues has been identified during site visits, discussions with community leaders and preparation of the Inventory and Analysis:

- **Sea Level Rise**
Sea level rise is a critical issue that will impact the waterfront and reduce the limited land area in the parks in the very near future. Flooding is already an issue at Lasher Park.
- **Shoreline Erosion**
Bank erosion is currently affecting the Town's waterfronts especially at the north end of Lasher Park where there is no rip rap stabilization.
- **CSX Rail Corridor—Waterfront Access and Safety**
The CSX rail corridor separates the Town from the waterfront with only two authorized public access points at the park rail crossings. Several unauthorized access points and an impromptu riverfront trail have been established which create safety and liability problems.

- **Water Chestnuts**

Water Chestnuts are an invasive species that cover approximately 1 mile of the waterfront each summer from Cheviot cove to the end of the Germantown flats. The 6-8 foot vines form a dense bed that prevents the passage of boaters and kayakers from June to September.

- **Limited Parking**

Parking is very limited at Cheviot and Lasher Parks on busy days and summer weekends.

- **Limited Amenities**

Amenities are limited at the waterfront parks. Additional picnic tables and benches, bathrooms, improved landscaping, a pavilion for social events, and kayak/boat storage would provide more opportunities and increase park usage.

- **Inadequate Signage**

Utilization of the waterfront parks could be improved by an integrated signage system that directs residents and visitors to the Town parks and other points of interest. New signage/kiosks could also provide historical Town and riverfront facts and boating safety information.

- **Hudson River tides and currents**

Swift tides, currents and waves in the Hudson can pose a danger to boaters and kayakers. Lasher Park would benefit from a dedicated small craft launch area to provide a gentle introduction to river currents for kayaks, canoes, and other non-motorized small watercraft.

- **Maintenance and Repair**

Both waterfront parks are in need of maintenance and repair. The Cheviot concrete boat launch is damaged by use and weather and needs repair.

- **Litter and Trash**

Trash from the river washes up on the shoreline and is dumped along the railroad tracks, riverbank and at the parks. Underbrush, fallen trees, and driftwood create unsightliness.

- **Lighting/Security/Fire Protection**

Increased lighting and potential security cameras at the parks would increase safety and help prevent illegal activities such as garbage dumping and vandalism. A dry hydrant at Cheviot Park would improve fire safety in the Cheviot area.

6.0 Community Visioning Common Themes

The Waterfront Advisory Committee reviewed the public input received at the first Community Visioning Workshop and identified the following recurrent themes:

1. Increase access to the Germantown waterfront with a pedestrian bridge over the tracks and improved RR crossings.
2. Improve connectivity between the waterfront parks with a walking trail and/or boardwalk and between the hamlet and waterfront with sidewalks.
3. Provide more parking on site or within a walkable distance.
4. Provide places for canoe/kayak rental, storage, and improved launches. Provide lessons and demonstrations.
5. Provide safe places for swimming and provide swimming lessons.
6. Need clear and improved signage highlighting waterfront history, safety and park rules.
7. Provide more facilities including benches, pavilion/bandstand, port-a-potties, etc.
8. Flooding and sea level rise need to be addressed, especially given the current limited waterfront acreage.
9. Provide food trucks/café/farmers market/concessions/picnic areas.
10. Respect rights of neighbors.

7.0 Short, Mid and Long Term Projects

In order to implement the Town's waterfront vision, the WAC has identified potential short, mid and long term projects which are categorized according to their level of complexity and permitting and funding requirements.

7.1 Short Term Projects

Short term projects are small projects that the Town could accomplish in the upcoming year within existing budgets and/or with community support.

- **Overall/Multi-Site Projects:**

1. Ensure there are properly sized ADA compliant handicapped accessible parking spots and signage at all parks.
2. Respect rights of neighbors (throughout all terms, incorporate in all plans.)
3. Protect natural resources and wildlife (throughout all terms, incorporate in all plans.)

4. Investigate solutions and potential funding for controlling water chestnuts.
 5. Initiate discussions with Amtrak/CSX about potential waterfront trail, land acquisition/easements and pedestrian bridge.
- **Cheviot Park:**
 1. Enforce speed limit and rules for no lights or noise after dark.
 - **Ice Dock Parcel:**
 1. Clear brush and create campsite.
 2. Advertise site as a waterside accessible carry-in/carry-out campsite.
 3. Connect site to Hudson River Greenway Water Trail.
 - **Lasher Park:**
 1. Trim tree in circle.
 2. Add osprey platform (with G-Tel assistance.)
 - **Palatine Park:**
 1. Create brochure/trail map with marked vistas.
 2. Mark and maintain hiking trails with educational signage (with Boy Scout assistance.)
 - **Roe-Jan Kill Park**
 1. Clarify lease with Sportsmen's Club.
 2. Remove "Need Permit" signs.
 3. Provide more information about public events to encourage use, promote availability,
 4. Clean brush and create path on Town Park side to the Roe-Jan Kill waterfront.

7.2 Mid Term Projects

Mid term projects are somewhat larger projects that would require grant funding and/or budget approval from the Town in upcoming years.

- **Overall/Multi-Site Projects:**
 1. Provide historic markers/interpretive signage highlighting waterfront history, wildlife, safety, park rules, etc.
 2. Initiate water chestnut control program.
 3. Perform title searches to answer outstanding land ownership questions (Lasher underwater parcel 148.-1-60, Ice Dock Parcel 158.-1-87, Cheviot causeway, "Van Tassel waterfront", and "Phillip Rockefeller Landing".)
 4. Recommend that zoning regulations permit "water-enhanced uses" such as restaurants, cafes, farmers markets, museums, mixed use retail/residential in waterfront areas.

- **Cheviot Park:**
 1. Repave existing boat launch.
 2. Repair/cover existing exposed rebar in boat launch.
 3. Install dry hydrant.
- **Ice Dock Parcel:**
 1. Construct grill pit.
 2. Construct composting latrine.
- **Lasher Park:**
 1. Create green belt between waterfront and parking area running north from boat launch circle to park's grassy area, with benches and sidewalk.
 2. Provide additional on-site parking.

7.3 Long Term Projects

Long term projects are large projects that will improve accessibility and resiliency of the Germantown waterfront parks. However they will require significant grant funding for land acquisition and/or construction and many have significant permitting requirements.

- **Overall/Multi-Site Projects:**
 1. Improve connectivity between the waterfront parks by creating a walking trail/boardwalk with fencing/vegetative buffer (requires land acquisition from CSX).
 2. Elevate parks with fill to protect against sea level rise (first priority is Lasher Park, then Cheviot and Ice Dock.)
 3. Create sustainable shorelines at waterfront parks (first priority is Lasher Park, then Ice Dock and Cheviot).
 4. Continue water chestnut control program.
- **Lower Main Street:**
 1. Purchase land from CSX for public access on both sides of tracks.
 2. Connect central hamlet to riverfront with a pedestrian bridge and sidewalks.
 3. Provide additional parking by sewer pump station.
 4. Respect private property rights, define boundaries between private lands/public access.
- **Scenic Overlook:**
 1. Construct a walkway connecting the Palatine Park Road sidewalk at Route 9G to a waterfront overlook with a small sitting area.

- **Lasher Park:**

1. Construct a community pavilion/multi-use structure.
2. Construct a handicapped accessible floating small boat launch and/or a small boat launch ramp.
3. Provide kayak and canoe storage/rental.
4. Provide bathrooms.
5. Construct a walkable pier.
6. Provide alternate parking area off-site for overflow parking.
7. Investigate expanding park area into Town owned riparian rights parcel (coordinate with DEC/ACOE).

- **Palatine Park:**

1. Make Lake George South open for swimming and lessons.
2. Permit and encourage kayak/canoe lessons and demonstrations.

- **Roe-Jan Kill Park**

1. Construct handicapped accessible walkway from the Town Park parking lot to a lookout/platform on the Roe-Jan Kill waterfront.