

Niagara River Greenway Commission Annual Report 2023



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A Message from the Director



Hello Greenway Enthusiasts,

2022 will be remembered as a **major inflection point** for our Niagara River Greenway efficacy and impact, thanks to expanded funding, staffing, proactive planning initiatives, strong new commissioners, youth engagement and more vigorous collaboration with standing committees, municipalities and agency partners.

Since its inception in 2007 Niagara River Greenway operations have been underfunded and understaffed, which limited capacity to proactively drive implementation of our bold and visionary mission to connect and enhance the ecological health of trail and open spaces across our Niagara waterfront. In recognition of the powerful potential of our small team to serve as a proactive change agent across our 2 counties and 13 municipalities our Commission authorized staff expansion from one to three. This allowed us to expand our reach into both Erie and Niagara Counties, deepening our relationships to nurture stronger community engagement and youth stewardship. We welcomed new NYS DEC Commissioner Erin Redding, Co-Chair of GESG; and new BECGSC Chair Dan Castle both of whom are highly capable additions to our Niagara Greenway team..

2022 also saw the completion our Wilson Foundation funded Lower Niagara Trail Study (LNTS) and the initiation of our Community Foundation Tonawanda Environmental Benefit Funded Youth Stewardship Program (YSP). The combined impact of \$630,000 invested has made a transformational impact on our engagement with the communities we serve. The Lower Niagara Trail Study sought to define the Lower Niagara Community's vision of regional trail connectivity that might best enhance their active recreation and economic development objectives. Through a series of 168 public engagement sessions Lisa Vitello led community meetings and we developed a visionary plan for healthier communities with better recreational assets to be implemented in phases through 2030. Our Youth Stewardship project allowed Michelle Lockett to expand our 2018 freshwater ecology awareness pilot projects in local area high schools supported by our Rotary – Greenway Partnership into much more significant engagement with 10 high schools culminating in our February 2023 Eco Summit, hosted at Linde Gas headquarters where 10 schools presented their riparian ecology projects to colleges, industry and Niagara River Greenway partners.

We are grateful for the leadership of our Governor, the New York Power Authority, our Commissioners, sister State agencies and many community partners such as the Western New York Land Conservancy, Buffalo-Niagara Waterkeeper, GObike, and many others who champion the programming that engages the community in helping to create and enjoy our ever- improving Niagara Greenway.

Best regards,

Gregory Stevens

Executive Director, Niagara River Greenway Commission

Chapter One

Niagara River

Greenway Team



Greenway Commision (16 Members)

Six (6) Ex-Officio Members

- Empire State Development (ESD)
- Department of Transportation (DOT)
- Department of State (DOS)
- Department of Conservation (DEC)
- New York Power Authority (NYPA)
- NY State Parks

Eight (8) Appointed Members

- Governor (4)
- State Assembly (2)
- State Senate (2)

Staff (3)

- Executive Director
- Community Engagement Director
- Administrative Director



Standing Committees

Niagara Host
Community

(\$3 Million/year)

State Parks

(\$3 Million/year)

Buffalo, Erie County
and Olmsted

(\$2 Million/year)

Ecological

(\$1 Million/year)

Niagara River Greenway Commission Members

- Lisa Chimera, Senate appointment 2020
- Treasurer Sean Edwards, Governor appointment, 2010
- Joseph Emminger, Assembly appointment, 2017
- Sam Magavern, Assembly appointment-*Community Liaison, 2014*
- Steve Broderick, Senate appointment- *Municipal Government Liaison, 2017*
- *New York Power Authority, Lou Paonessa 2013*
- *Department of Environmental Conservation, Erin Redding 2022*
- *Department of Transportation, Jim Cuzzo 2020*
- *New York State Parks, Mark Mistretta 2018*
- *Department of State, Ginger Ursitti 2023*
- *Empire State Development, Lynn Marinelli 2019*



Niagara River Greenway Staff Members



➤ Greg Stevens, Executive Director



➤ Lisa Vitello, Administrative Manager



➤ Michelle Lockett, Community Engagement Manager

Chapter Two

Commission History



Commission History

- On September 21, 2004 Governor George E. Pataki announced his approval of Chapter 460 of the Laws of 2004 establishing the Niagara River Greenway and creating a public benefit corporation for the purpose of creating a Niagara River Greenway Plan and its subsequent implementation.
- The Niagara River Greenway Commission was charged with creating the plan that would develop a linear system of parks and trails.
- The Niagara River Greenway plan was adopted by thirteen municipalities located along the Niagara River.
- The Niagara River Greenway plan would highlight the Niagara River in terms of its history, economic vitality and ecological significance. Key elements of this plan include increased public access to the Niagara River, development of a trail system with complimentary connections to land access points, balanced economic growth that compliments the natural scenic environment, preservation and enhancement of environmental resources and the celebration of the region's cultural, environmental and historical heritage.
- The mission and vision of the Niagara River Greenway Plan is to serve the communities located along the Niagara River in advancing the ecological and economic restoration of the Niagara Corridor to become a regional and global destination that tells the story of where we've been and where we would like to go in the future. The Niagara River Greenway Commission is tasked with stewardship of the Shoreline Trail, connecting parks, conservation areas and communities along the length of the Niagara River. This world class corridor of places, parks and landscapes celebrate and interprets our unique natural, cultural, recreational, scenic and historical heritage by providing access to and connections between these important resources giving rise to economic opportunities for the region.



Standing Committee Structure and Fund Allocation

Buffalo and Erie County Greenway Fund Standing Committee
\$2,000,000.00

Ecological Standing Committee
\$1,000,000.00

New York State Parks Standing Committee
\$3,000,000.00

Niagara County Host Community Standing Committee

- **School Districts receive 40%**

- Niagara Falls School District 14.0% (\$420,000)
- Lewiston Porter School District 14.0% (\$420,000)
- Niagara Wheatfield School District 12.0% (\$360,000)

- **Municipalities receive 60%**

- City of Niagara Falls 17.0% (\$510,000)
- Town of Lewiston 17.0% (\$510,000)
- Niagara County 13.0% (\$390,000)
- Town of Niagara 13.0% (\$390,000)



Chapter Three

Performance 2022

Finances and
2022 projects voted Consistent



Niagara River Greenway Budget 2024



					not including CFGB grant revenue or costs		
Niagara River Greenway Commission							
2020/2021 budget vs fcst	2020 budget	2020 Actual	2021 budget		2022 actual	2023/4 bud	
<u>Income</u>							
prev year Carryover	\$ 280,000.0	\$ 273,000	\$ 177,438		\$ 240,000	\$ 60,000	
2020 State Grants/ Contracts	\$ 200,000.0	\$ 200,000	\$ 200,000		\$ 200,000	\$ 300,000	
<u>Outside Grants</u>	\$505,000 (est)	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000		\$ -	\$ -	
<u>TOTAL REVENUE</u>		\$ 498,000	\$ 402,438		\$ 440,000	\$ 360,000	
<u>Expenses</u>							
Salary and benefits (50% fringe)							
Executive Director	\$ 150,000.0	\$ 150,000.0	\$ 150,000.0		\$ 141,845.9	\$ 146,101	
Admin and Niagara Outreach Coordinator	\$ 75,000.0	\$ 75,000.0	\$ 75,000.0		\$ 75,284.2	\$ 77,543	
Community Engagement Manager	\$ 80,000.0	\$ 80,000.0	\$ 80,000.0		\$ 77,894.0	\$ 80,231	
Communications staffer 50% Part time	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -		\$ -	\$ 23,430	
sub total	\$ 305,000.0	\$ 305,000.0	\$ 305,000.0		\$ 295,024	\$ 327,305	
Travel	\$ 10,000.0	\$ 288	\$ 10,000		0	\$ -	
mileage							
other travel							
NHT Admin Fee	\$ 4,500.0	\$ 6,200	\$ 8,900		9600	\$ 15,000	
Communications, printing, advertizing	\$ 10,000.0	\$ 1,938	\$ 10,000		4323	\$ 5,000	
Workshops/meeting/conferences/supplies	\$ 8,000.0	\$ 100	\$ 8,000		2478	\$ 3,000	
Contractual Services	\$ 15,000.0	\$ 5,833	\$ 15,000		5625	\$ 5,000	
operating costs, insurance	\$ 3,500.0	\$ 1,203	\$ 3,500		1013	\$ 1,100	
<u>TOTAL</u>	\$ 356,000.0	\$ 320,562	\$ 360,400		\$ 318,063	\$ 356,405	
Year end balance:	\$ 149,000.0	\$ 177,438	\$ 42,038		\$ 121,937	\$ 3,595	

Projects Reviewed and found Consistent by the Commission January 2023 to November 2023

Niagara River Greenway
Restore Corps
Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper



The purpose of the Niagara Greenway Restore Corps is twofold: to provide adaptive landscape management of recently completed living shoreline habitat restoration sites within the Niagara River Greenway and to foster stewardship of our freshwater ecosystems. Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper (BNW) developed our Living Shoreline Program in 2013, which transforms degraded shoreline environments into higher functioning ecosystems. Additionally, the program aims to close the gap between interested waterfront landowners and required resources for on-the-ground restoration, and to increase community awareness of shoreline.



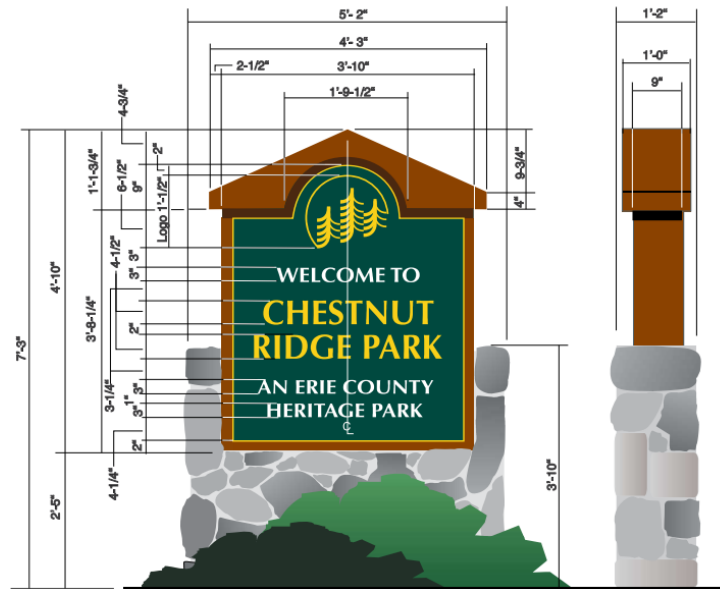
The Isle View Enhancement Project will focus on the renewal and enhancement of connections to the Shoreline Trail within Isle View Park. It will implement nearly all of the Isle View Park recommendations of the Erie County Parks Master Plan, building on Phase 1 improvements and elevating the Park into a destination along the Shoreline Trail.



Isle View Enhancement Project Erie County

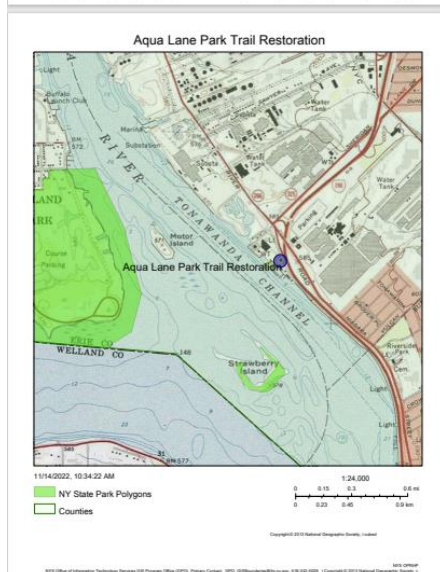
Erie County Signage Update

- The project is the addition of new wayfinding signage and replacement of old signs for Ellicott Creek Park, Isle View Park, Black Rock Canal Park, and Tow Path Park, which lie within sections of Niagara River Greenway Upper River and Headwaters. Enhancement of the county park signage is necessary to better connect the surrounding community, and visitors, to the waterfront and Niagara River Greenway. The updated signage in the county parks along the Shoreline Trail and Niagara River will contribute to the world-class stature advocated in the Niagara River Greenway Plan.



Aqua Lane Trail Restoration

Through the proposed project, the Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda Union Free School District (Ken-Ton) will engage in habitat restoration along part of the Niagara River Greenway. The district adopted a portion of the trail between Aqua Lane Park (128 Aqua Lane) and the Erie County Water Authority on River Road (3750 River Road) and is planning to increase its use as an ecological education site for students. To that end, the district will install a butterfly garden and invest in landscaping to reduce runoff. They will also install interpretive signage to highlight the Greenway's cultural and historical significance on local and regional scales. This project is important because it will promote environmental conservation and further enhance the corridor along the Niagara River. It will also align with Tonawanda Tomorrow, the Town's economic action plan, which lists increasing accessibility of the waterfront, promoting environmental sustainability, and celebrating the area's unique history and identity as some of its key guiding principles. The proposed project will further these principles and create more vibrant opportunities for outdoor education and recreation.

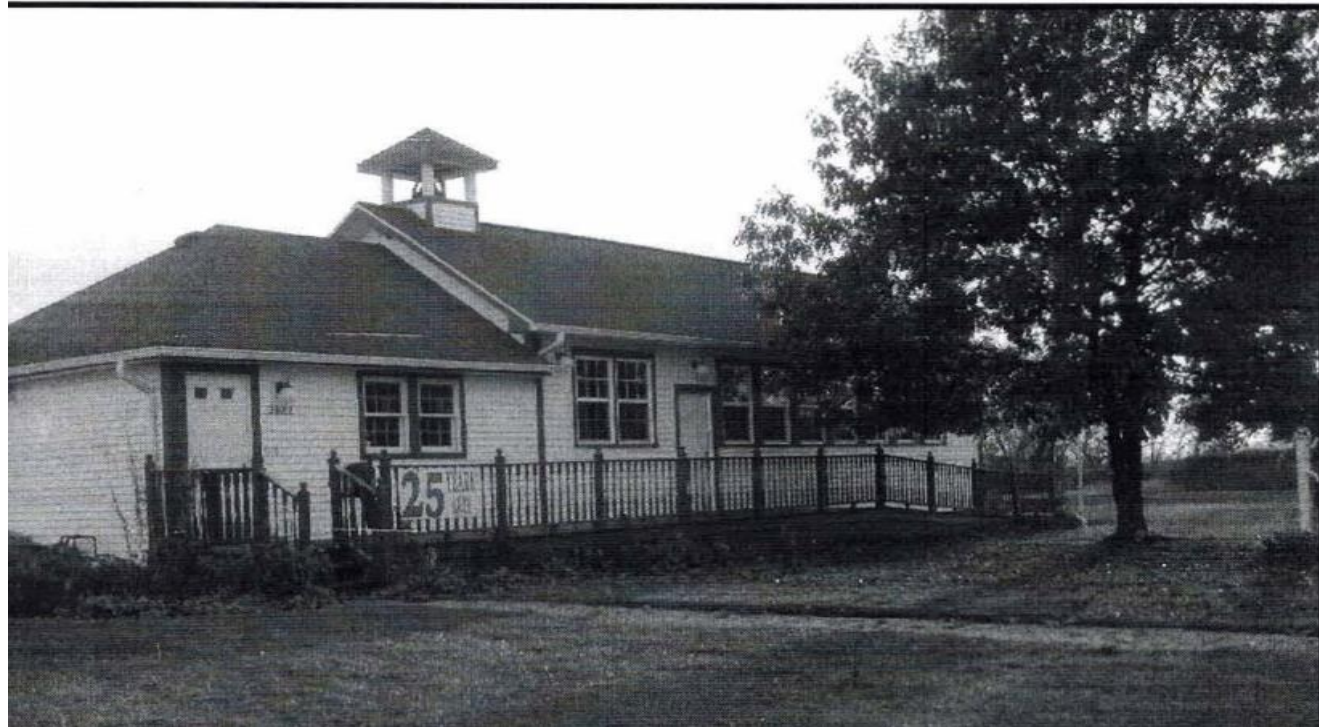


Old Fort Niagara & Village of Youngstown Niagara River Greenway Bike Trail Rest Stops

The Niagara Greenway bike trail is expanding to include a path through Youngstown, NY to Old Fort Niagara, a nearly 300-year-old fort at the mouth of the Niagara River. Old Fort Niagara has partnered with the Village of Youngstown to construct rest stops at both locations. These rest stops will both offer a 10-bike bicycle rack, a bench, and a sign with a map of the Niagara River Greenway Trail and a brief summary of the history and importance of both locations.



The Project is a continuation of other SAHS Projects funded by the Greenway Commission. Our Farm Museum Complex has been in operation since 2006 and continues to provide an important educational site for those visiting along the Greenway Trail.



Sanborn
Historical
Society
School
House
Museum

Sail Buffalo Sailing School Classroom and Storage Facility

Funds are requested to construct a 16 foot by 60 foot classroom that will also serve as a winter storage facility on the Sail-Buffalo campus located along the Buffalo River waterfront at 2 Fuhrmann Blvd, Buffalo, NY 14203. The requested classroom will serve as the principal instruction facility for the 400 children who participate in Sail-Buffalo's ten week summer day camp program

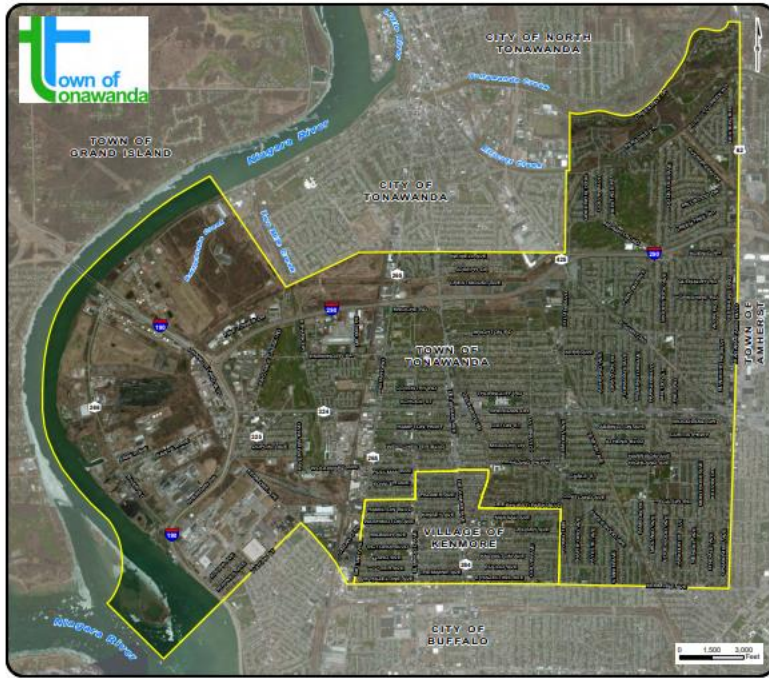




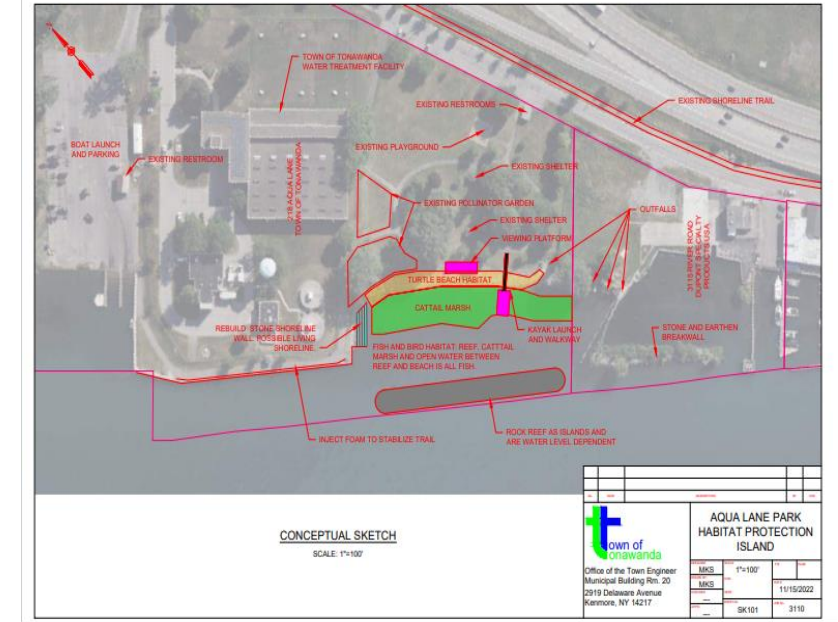
Registered Consulting Arborist along with volunteer botanists, will direct the conversion of the target area from a mass of overgrown trees, dangerous over-hanging branches, shrubs and bushes, and weeds into an ecological niche to be used as an outdoor botanical learning laboratory where participating youth will learn the importance of the delicate balance of nature as it exists along the Buffalo River waterfront and why it's necessary to preserve the structural integrity of the Buffalo River shoreline.



Sail Buffalo Riparian Habitat Restoration and Education Area



The Town of Tonawanda is seeking funding from the Niagara River Greenway to assist in the design and permitting of shoreline and habitat improvements for Aqua Lane Park. The area is in desperate need of shoreline improvements to prevent erosion from the rampaging Niagara River. The area's wildlife are in dire need of improved habitats. There are many species of birds and fish, as well as turtles, that will benefit. The design process will include ways to reclaim and restore this damaged area. The improvements will also serve to make Aqua Lane Park a destination for residents, visitors, and investors



Aqua Lane Shore Stabilization Project



Holistic Urban Land Management Lab at Silo City



The goal of the proposed project is twofold. Firstly, we aim to build a supply pathway of local ecotype native plant material, grown out locally, to meet local needs in varied restoration projects in our region. Our second objective is to create a parallel pathway of ecologically literate City of Buffalo graduates who are prepared to fill local demand for jobs in the green and blue sectors in the Niagara River Region. The project will establish new diverse partnerships, which we intend to continue beyond the timeframe of the grant cycle.



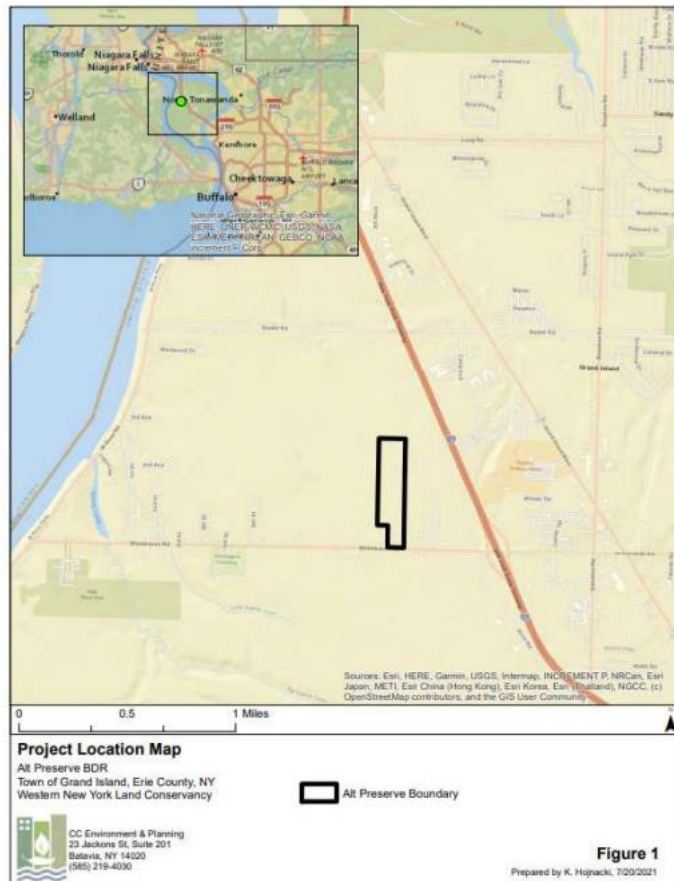
East Canal Ecological Renovation at Tifft Nature Preserve

BSNS is seeking funding from NY SeaGrant, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the Greenway Ecological Standing Committee to renovate 24 acres of riparian woodland and 0.75 miles of shoreline along the East Canal in Buffalo's Tifft Nature Preserve by controlling the dominant cover of exotic invasive plant species and revegetating the site with native species identified from nearby reference communities. The work will aid in replacement of the site's dying cottonwood canopy, an asset that provides essential stopover habitat for migratory songbirds; create an emergent aquatic vegetation zone along the canal with potential as Lake Erie fish habitat; and expand similar work done in four recent restoration projects on adjacent lands within the preserve



Alt Nature Trail and Alt Nature Center Improvements

This will be a space for environmental education; for teaching and training about ecological gardening, native plants, and habitat protection; and to serve as an information center for free public access to the trails on the Alt Nature Preserve.

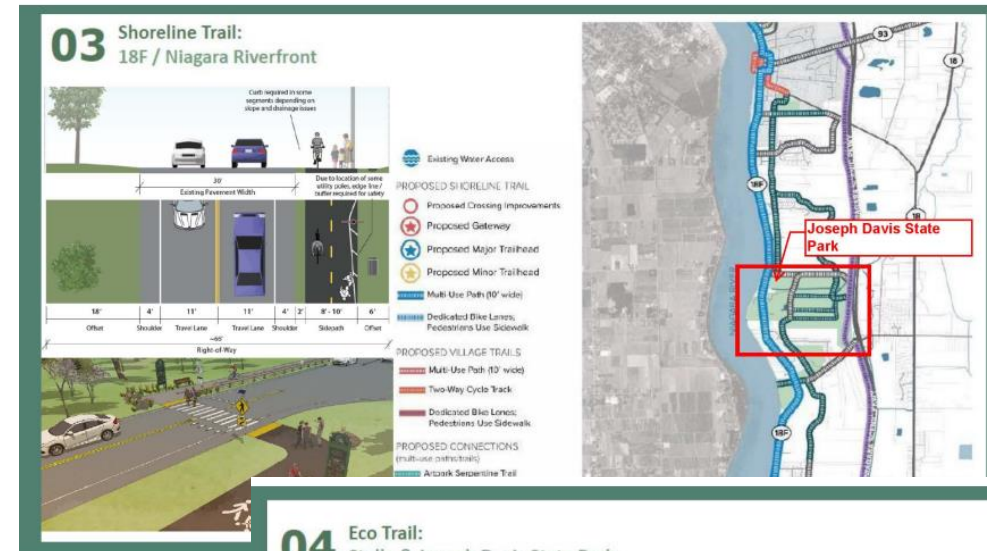


Joseph Davis State Park Site Improvements

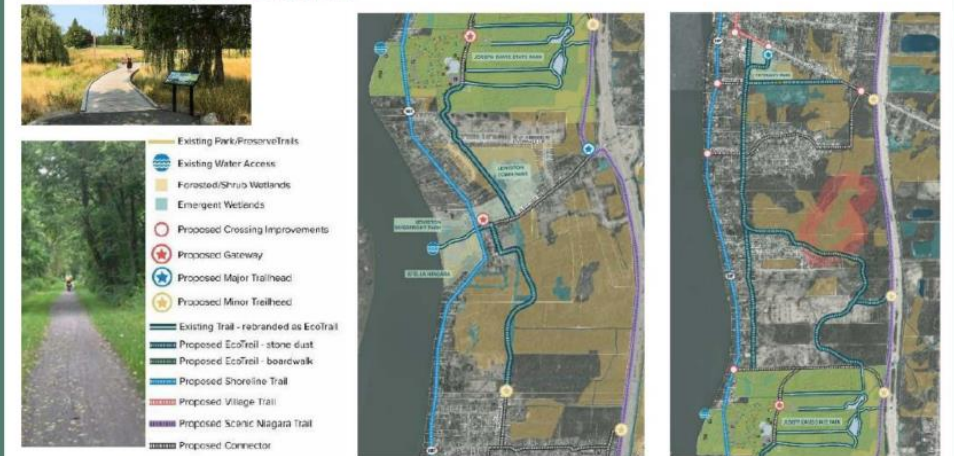
The primary work in this project consists of site improvements to the existing main parking lot area, conversion of Park Road into a multi-use trail, construction of a trailhead parking lot and better trail connections within the park and to other regional trails.



**New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation**



04 Eco Trail: Stella & Joseph Davis State Park



Protecting the Pfohl Property

The Western New York Land Conservancy will purchase and permanently protect a property on Grand Island which includes approximately 425 feet of undeveloped Niagara River frontage and 42 ecologically important acres of land (potentially up to 52 acres, based on a final survey). The land will be open to public access, and will be part of an emerging network of conserved lands on Grand Island. Undeveloped Niagara River frontage is rare, and protecting it is a priority for the health of the Niagara River and for the benefit of the community.



Lewiston Public Art Project

The goal of the Lewiston Public Art Project is to welcome visitors and trail users to Lewiston, encourage a longer stay in the area, and then lead participants—via Artpark or along Center Street—back to the Niagara River and onward towards Four Mile Creek Park, Joseph Davis Park, Youngstown and Fort Niagara.

MURAL OVERLAY



West Wall



South Wall



East Wall



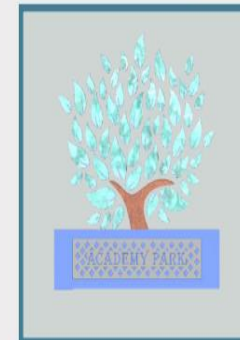
North Wall

MURAL CONCEPT



SCULPTURAL DESIGN

North Wall



Sculpture Design



Sculpture Overlay- North Wall

Chapter Four

Feature Project and Greenway Priorities





Blue Fund

Niagara River Greenway formed in 2007 has invested over \$140 million improving green infrastructure in the Niagara Region, and together with State Parks, and the Wilson Foundation, that investment will surpass half a billion by 2030; however, our communities and especially our DEI communities have yet to fully discover the joys and mental and physical health benefits of using these assets. This changed during covid, and our goal is to build on this new trend and shift our community culture toward active outdoor recreation. As a "change agent" Niagara Friends of Parks and Trails (NFPT) will organize and promote activities in the underserved communities in the Niagara Region. Working with schools, Boys and Girls Clubs and community groups to increase access to outdoor recreational opportunities by prioritizing projects that empower these communities and reconnect people to outdoor resources by improving access to physical activity in cities and towns. Friends of Parks and Trails will collaborate with community groups particularly in neighborhoods that largely consist of low-income populations to organize activities that introduce youth to active outdoor recreation.



A Partnership to
Expand Niagara
Friends of Parks and
Trails to promote
Active Outdoor
Recreation





Current Highmark Health Grant Initiatives









Niagara River Greenway Priorities

- Comfort Facilities and Bike Stations
- Programs and funding to maintain trails and amenities
- Continue with Youth Stewardship and Education
- Generating and pursuing high quality projects. Encourage municipalities to develop and propose projects that are highly consistent with the Greenway Plan
- Creating partnership signature events
- Public Art that tells a story



Chapter Five

Highlights

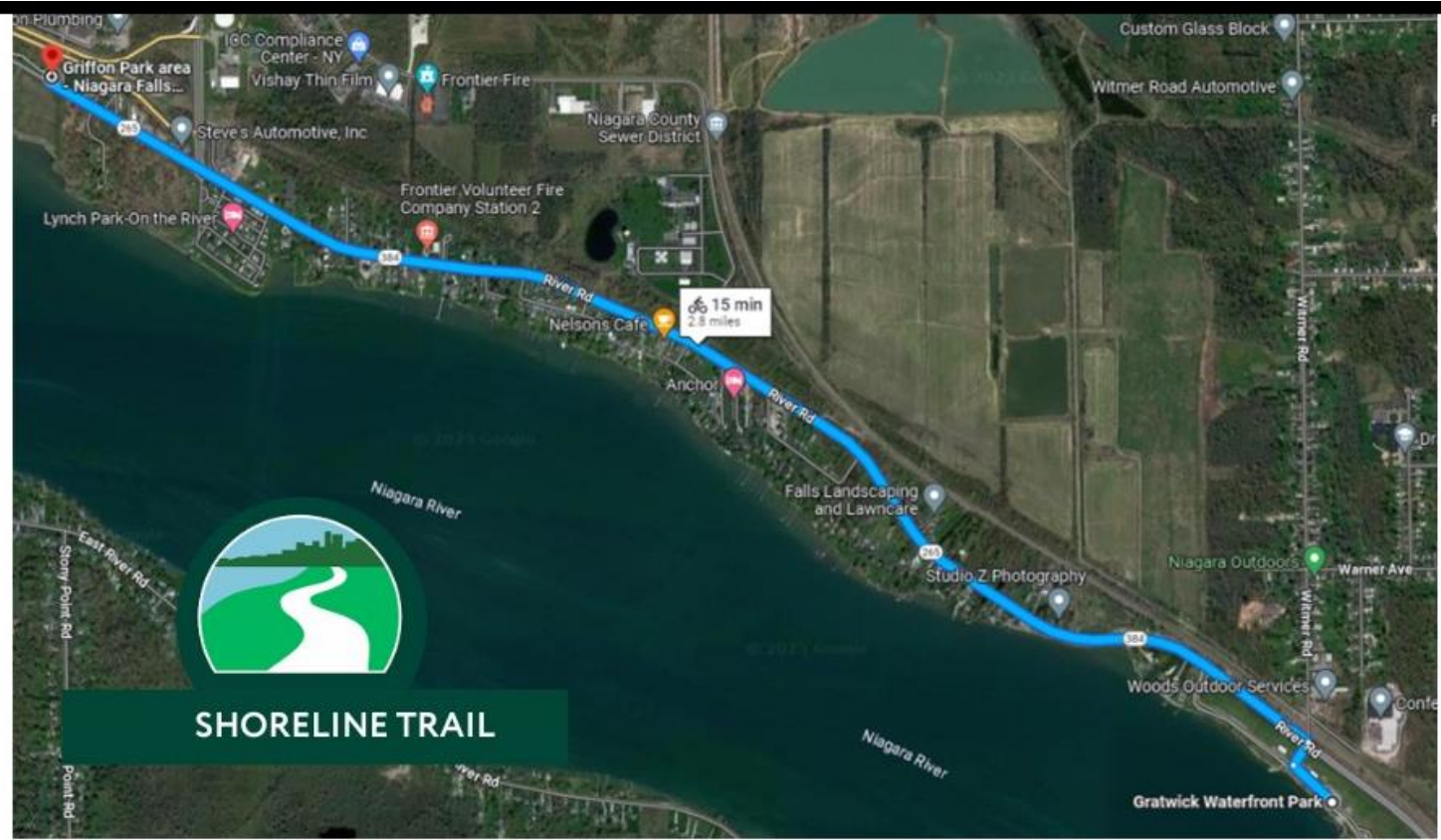




Academy Park
Public Art and
Placemaking



NYS Scenic By-Ways Project Multi-Use Trail (NY Route 265 and NY Route 384 (River Road) Pin 5760.75



PUBLIC HEARING ON SHORELINE TRAIL IN NIAGARA COUNTY





2024
Events



Centennial Bike Ride



Our Partners



RALPH C. WILSON, JR.
FOUNDATION



BUFFALO NIAGARA
WATERKEEPER®



Generating more than electricity



NIAGARA FALLS™
USA

WHERE ADVENTURE COMES NATURALLY



REDDY
bikeshare

Audubon

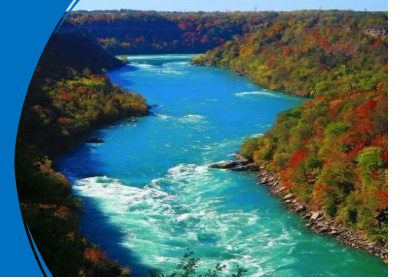


NIAGARA FALLS
NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA





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