

LOWELL
WATERWAYS
VITALITY
INITIATIVE



2024

Priorities & Projects

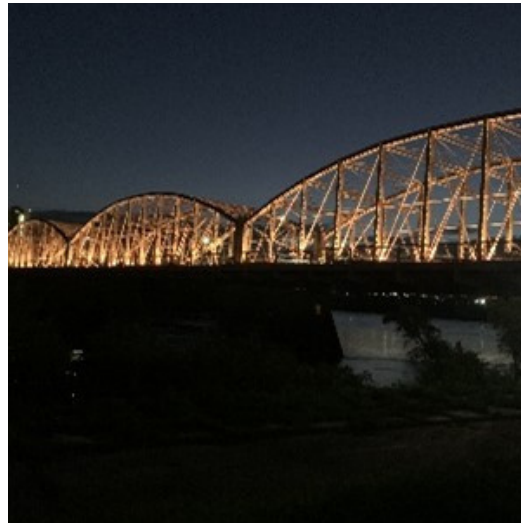
LOWELL WATERWAYS VITALITY INITIATIVE: 2024 PRIORITIES & PROJECTS

The Lowell Waterways Vitality Initiative (LWVI) is a nonprofit partnership, whose primary partner is the Greater Lowell Community Foundation.

The mission of the Lowell Waterways Vitality Initiative is to enhance the everyday experience of people in Lowell by making the city's historic waterways more accessible, active and vibrant.

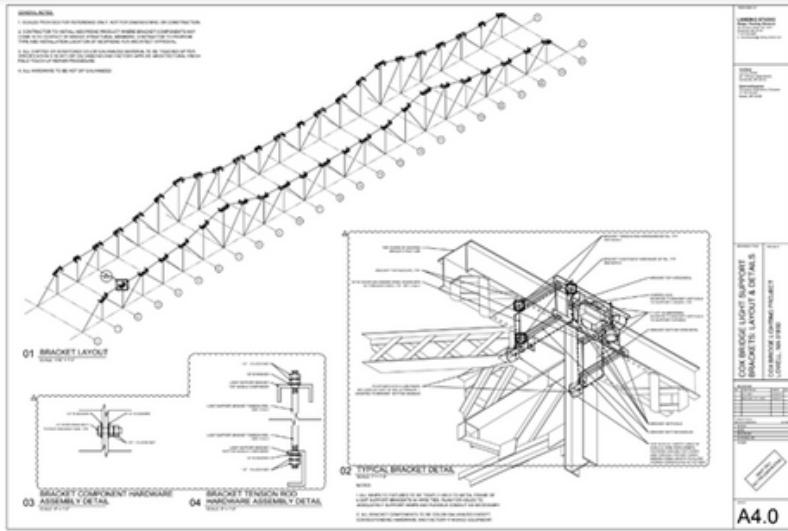
LWVI is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as expanding partnerships, and involving youth in with Lowell's waterways and cultures.

The LWVI has implemented several initiatives called out in its Action Plan. Priorities and public involvement were reassessed in 2019 through 2021 due to the impacts of COVID-19 on public activities and fundraising limitations. These are LWVI's key accomplishments to date, current project plans, and long-term objectives.



COMPLETED PROJECTS

John E Cox and Joseph R. Ouellette Memorial Bridges

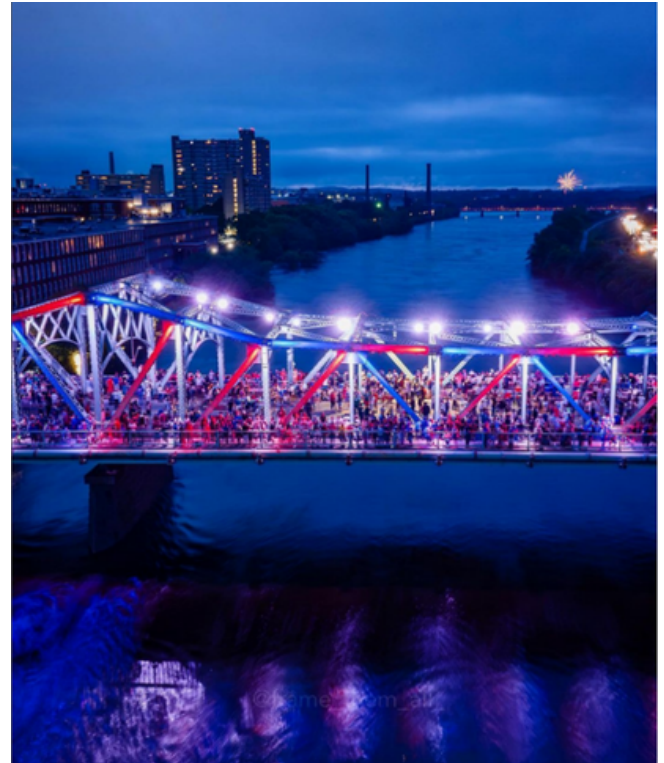


Architectural plans for the Cox Bridge, designed by Landing Studios.

A major goal of the Waterways Action Plan was to light important features focusing attention on the Merrimack River and other rivers and canals. Without the Merrimack, Lowell would not have been founded or come into international prominence. The lighting of John E. Cox (Bridge Street Bridge) and Joseph R. Ouellette (Aiken Street Bridge) saluted the resource that is the Merrimack River and its linkages between the downtown and neighborhoods.

The John E. Cox Bridge was outfitted with over 220 colored LED lights in 2018. The lighting of the bridge was celebrated with a neighborhood event including games, food, and music. The event took place on both sides of the river, effectively “bridging” Centralville and the downtown. Since 2018, the bridge has displayed a variety of seasonal and special lighting including festive lights for holidays, as well as for special causes.

In 2023, safety lighting was added under the Cox Bridge in support of the Centralville River Path Improvements being spearheaded by DIY Lowell



John E. Cox Bridge, 4th of July 2023. Waiting for the fireworks display sponsored by the City of Lowell. Photo: Tim Sousa



Ribbon cutting for DIY Lowell's Centralville River Path project. Waterways supported by installing safety lighting under the Cox Bridge. Photo: DIY Lowell



Joseph R. Ouellette Memorial Bridge. Photo: Henry Marte

The Joseph R. Ouellette Memorial bridge saw the addition of over 200 white LED lights and was activated in October 2022. The uplighting of the bridge accentuates its unique historic lenticular truss style. With both lighting projects completed, LWVI is working to install ControlBright, which will allow for programming changes to be done remotely.

The Greater Lowell Community Foundation holds and maintains the maintenance fund for both bridge lighting projects.

Lower Locks & the Eastern Canal

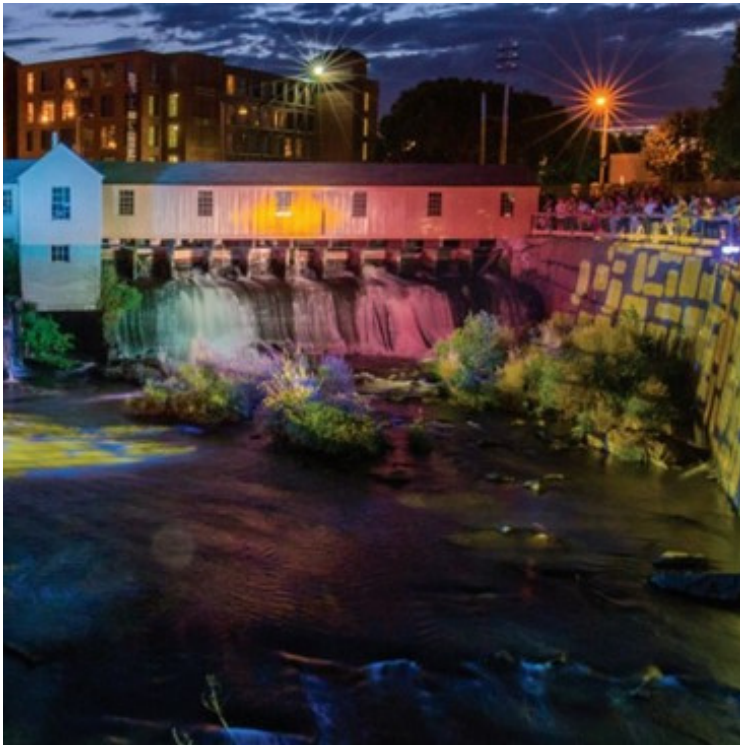
Originally built as a transportation canal in 1796, it is now framed by Middlesex Community College and the former UMass Lowell Inn & Conference Center.

Flower boxes were installed on the Eastern Canal Bridge on East Merrimack Street, in proximity to the Lower Locks to highlight and beautify water locales. The flowers are updated seasonally by the LWVI team and maintained in partnership with Middlesex Community College.



The Waterways team (and two young volunteers) after planting flowers on the bridge spanning the Eastern Canal.

Hamilton Canal Innovation District (Pawtucket, Hamilton, and Merrimack Canals)



Demonstration lighting of the Swamp Locks in 2016. Photo: Lowell Sun

The Action Plan emphasized that the City's economic development plans for the Hamilton Canal Innovation District (HCID) should preserve green space and access to waterways.

Since the Action Plan's writing, several of these development projects have been completed including the new Justice Center, new municipal parking garage (a second garage is under development), mixed used housing and office space.

The installation of "Hydro," a public sculpture in Utopia Park has also been completed. Access to the HCID has been improved with the opening of the Niki Tsongas Bridge over the Pawtucket Canal and the connection of Jackson Street to Dutton Street through the redevelopment of the Lord Overpass.

The Action Plan envisioned highlighting Swamp Locks lighting features similar to the demonstration lighting event in 2016 (pictured above). LWVI commissioned AE Event Systems to design and create permanent lighting of Swamp Locks, which was completed in early 2024. Thematic lighting programs will correlate to lighting programs on the Cox Bridge.



AE EVENT
SYSTEMS

LOWELL SWAMP LOCKS LIGHTING, PRE-VISUALIZATION

Design By:

Duncan MacKinnon

11/10/2021

Design mock-up of permanent lighting of the Swamp Locks, designed by AE Event Systems.

CURRENT PROJECTS & PRIORITIES

Ecumenical Plaza (Western Canal)

The original Action Plan called for this underutilized public asset to be reimagined from a visitor and community point of view. In 2017, a group of community volunteers held the first Points of Light Lantern Celebration at Ecumenical Plaza. LWVI has been, and continues to be, a supporter of the Points of Light Celebration, which has now become an annual event.

In 2023, a temporary sculpture was installed with support from MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative. The emphasis of Waterways, local institutions and the area community is to realize the plaza's full potential.



Aerial view of Ecumenical Plaza during the Points of Light Lantern Celebration. Photo: Tim Sousa



Artist Jay Hungate installing "Journeys of Perseverance" in Ecumenical Plaza. Photo: Henry Marte, Marte Media



Recent community input session on Ecumenical Plaza, hosted by Lowell Waterways Vitality Initiative. Photo: Fred Faust

LWVI is leading the ongoing efforts to engage the City of Lowell, DIY Lowell, Boott Hydropower, the Lowell Housing Authority, Acre residents and other groups to improve Ecumenical Plaza for public use and enjoyment.

LWVI has hosted community input sessions about Ecumenical Plaza upgrades with community members and stakeholders. As a result, several ideas for physical improvements to the plaza, as well as small-scale activations from these efforts have been compiled. LWVI is currently working on a plan to best implement these plans

The initial focus of LWVI's Lighting Grants program is focusing on St. Patrick's and Holy Trinity churches, located on opposite sides of Ecumenical Plaza.

Construction on the permanent lighting of St. Patrick's church (pictured) is expected to start in the spring of 2024.



Demonstration lighting of St. Patrick's church during the 2023 Points of Light Lantern Celebration. Photo: Fred Faust

Merrimack River (John E Cox and Joseph R. Ouellette Memorial Bridges)



Rendering depicting the possibilities of the Merrimack River and surrounds from the Action Plan, prepared by the Solomon Office.

LWVI's current priorities for the Merrimack River (surrounding the Cox and Ouellette bridges) are focused on recommendations from the Action Plan to create more active uses and events to complement tourism and the local economy.

This includes engaging and partnering with the City of Lowell, DIY Lowell, Lowell Litter Krewe, the Centralville Neighborhood Action Group, and other stakeholders in the celebration and care of the Ouellette Bridge, Cox Bridge, and Gold Star Park. Further, LWVI is advocating for capital improvements, ongoing maintenance and lighting of pedestrian paths, including the Riverwalk and the Riverwalk extension.

The LWVI is exploring the lighting of additional prominent Lowell properties. This includes the smokestacks that line the Merrimack River, such as those located at Boott Mills, Massachusetts Mills, and Renaissance on the River.



The LWVI team tours at Mill No. 5 during a recent tour of buildings and smokestacks downtown.



Test lighting of the Wannalancit Mill smokestack.

Lower Locks (Pawtucket and Eastern Canals, Concord River)

The Action Plan included restoration of important lock and gate structures, the lock transportation system and expanded pedestrian access. However, critical improvements to the area were outlined in the City's Engineering Study, developed in 2021. LWVI's current priority for this area is to advocate for these improvements with Lower Locks owners and partners.

Lucy Larcom Park (Merrimack Canal)

The Action Plan recommendations for the Merrimack Canal and adjacent Lucy Larcom Park included improvements to support four-season activities and the transformation of the area as a magnet for daily activities. Currently, LWVI is working with the City of Lowell's Cultural Affairs and Special Events office to coordinate special thematic lighting of the Merrimack Canal with the Cox Bridge lighting events. LWVI will also seek opportunities for integrating the new Lowell High School development with Waterway's lighting, art, and cultural activities.



Merrimack Canal illuminated. Photo: Jennifer Myers



Lower Locks Gatehouse at night. Photo: Jon Geer

Other Priorities

Over the years that the LWVI has been active, several other priorities have emerged to enable us to continue our work and promote the care and stewardship of Lowell's greatest resource: its waterways.

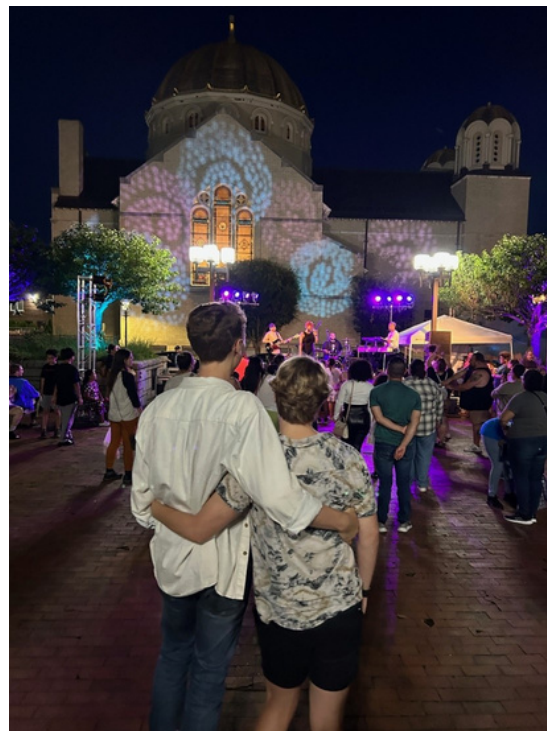
Community & Youth Engagement:

Make a commitment to social equity and diversity by expanding partnerships with existing youth programming and water-related programs and events. Examples include the Southeast Asian Water Festival, Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust, Project Learn, Lowell Public Schools, the Lowell National Historical Park, and Harvard Graduate School of Design. Establish a youth engagement summer grant program helping to educate young people in activities that connect to Lowell's canals and rivers in order to promote culture, history, and environmental responsibility.

Fundraising:

Expand LWVI fundraising efforts through:

- Focusing on local donors linked to special projects.
- Exploring grant opportunities.
- Using high-visibility projects, such as the Ouellette Bridge and Cox Bridge lighting, as a 'megaphone' to solicit support and funding for Waterway's priorities.
- Working with the Lowell Heritage Partnership and other public entities to obtain funds to implement joint projects. An example is the need to fund major improvements at the Lower Locks.
- Petitioning the City Advisory Committee for priority Community Preservation Act Funds.
- Continuing to work with the Lowell Legislative Delegation and Congressional office to identify available project funding.



Spectators at the 2023 Points of Light Lantern Celebration. Photo: Fred Faust

Future Projects & Priorities

Ecumenical Plaza (Western Canal)

- Explore the lighting of the Western Canal in the area of Ecumenical Plaza.

Merrimack River (John E Cox and Joseph R. Ouellette Memorial Bridges)

- Enhance connection between Gold Star Park and Cox Bridge Lighting, including events and downtown linkages.
- Identify strategies for lighting other Merrimack River bridges, including the Rourke Bridge replacement.
- Consider public art enhancements and additional river features.

Lower Locks (Pawtucket and Eastern Canals, Concord River)

- Seek major improvements and access to the Lower Locks; restore lock chambers and boat access.
- Develop relationships with various cultures and ethnic groups in the city to promote and assist with activities that feature use of waterways.

Hamilton Canal Innovation District (Pawtucket, Hamilton, and Merrimack Canals)

- Illuminate works of public art, including the Hydro sculpture at Utopia Park.
- Preserve greenspace and consider water features to call attention to the canal junction and so-called industrial canyon
- Complement historic mill structures such as the “ghost bridge” over Jackson Street with temporary and permanent public art.
- Expand boat tours, including potential commercial vendors.

Lucy Larcom Park (Merrimack Canal)

- Support events based on central downtown location.
- Work with the City of Lowell, Lowell National Historical Park, and Boott Hydropower to develop recreational activities in and around the Merrimack Canal, including ice skating.



Sunset over the Northern Canal.
Photo: Fred Faust

Conclusion

The Lowell Waterways Vitality Initiative looks to Lowell's rich history as the basis for a more rewarding and inclusive future. We are excited about that future and the many available opportunities.

Public input and participation are vital and welcome! If you have a project in mind, comments on existing programs, or wish to receive regular updates as to plans and events, please contact Jon@glcfoundation.org

Officers and Staff

The Co-Chairs of the Waterways Action Plan Initiative are Fred Faust and George Duncan (honorary). Jay Linnehan, as CEO and President of the Greater Lowell Community Foundation (GLCF), serves as representative and fiscal/administrative officer. Staff members are Jonathan Geer and Laura Tavares. Thanks also to our partners and volunteers, who provide invaluable services. Thanks also for the generosity of the GLCF, its leadership and entire staff, for irreplaceable support and services.

History of the Lowell Waterways Vitality Initiative

The LWVI was introduced publicly in January 2016 following an extensive community dialogue. A steering committee of community leaders was created, multiple visioning sessions were held, and demonstration projects conducted. The result was the February 2017 Lowell Waterways Vitality Initiative Action Plan. The main goals of the Action Plan are to:

- Create an economic, cultural, and environmental improvement strategy along the waterways that complements Lowell's historic character.
- Design lighting features to enhance attractiveness, visibility, and public safety.
- Work with property owners and partners to encourage waterside areas for retail, restaurants, galleries, and other compatible uses.
- Partner to promote events that make the city more distinctive and attractive.
- Soften concrete and brick areas with gardens and artwork and improve way-finding signs to make waterways more accessible.

With a small staff and the benefit of volunteers, the LWVI formula for impacting the community relies on partnerships. Key partners are the Greater Lowell Community Foundation, Lowell National Historical Park, City of Lowell, Lowell Heritage Partnership, Lowell State Delegation and the office of Congresswoman Lori Trahan, and others. Looking ahead, LWVI is excited to bring its projects and goals to fruition.

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