

## CHAPTER 3: VISION AND PRINCIPLES

### 3.0 VISION AND PRINCIPLES

#### A. Vision for the Niagara River Greenway

The Niagara River Greenway is a special place, encompassing significant natural, cultural, recreational, scenic and heritage resources. It is also a way of integrating the ideas and stories that bring the Niagara River corridor to life and reveal this region's interdependence, its place in history and its connections to the natural and built environment. The Niagara River Greenway is also a planning framework. It represents a tangible initiative that various constituents, organizations and municipalities can organize around, advancing local and regional agendas for community livability, environmental sustainability, and economic revitalization. The general support for the concept of the Greenway can help overcome rivalries and encourage greater cooperation and opportunities for partnerships. For this planning framework to work effectively, it must be built on a consistent vision for the Niagara River Greenway.

There is consensus about the importance and value of the Niagara River corridor. From local governments to various grassroots organizations, there is a long history of grassroots planning related to waterfront and greenway issues. These efforts have been focused around specific issues, such as

watershed protection, environmental preservation, trails planning, neighborhood revitalization, and brownfield redevelopment. They have also been organized around particular projects. Numerous non-profits and other stakeholder organizations have worked hard on improving a wide range of specific assets along the greenway, such as heritage sites, parks, creeks, waterfront access, habitats, and more. As the active public participation evidenced throughout this process has shown, there are many individuals, municipal leaders and organizations who are passionate about various aspects of the Niagara River Greenway, and who care deeply about its future.

This long history of planning, the diversity of groups working to achieve a better quality of life in the communities along the River, and the advocacy that has occurred throughout this effort all underscore the broad support and appeal of the Greenway. While there has been debate over specific issues, there has consistently been support for the concept of a Niagara River Greenway that seeks to preserve, enhance, integrate and promote those elements of the River corridor that help make this a special place. Building upon that support, the Commission has adopted the following Vision Statement for the Niagara River Greenway:

#### **Niagara River Greenway Vision Statement**

*The Niagara River Greenway is a world-class corridor of places, parks and landscapes that celebrates and interprets our unique natural, cultural, recreational, scenic and heritage resources and provides access to and connections between these important resources while giving rise to economic opportunities for the region.*

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Several points in this Vision Statement merit emphasizing.

### ***The Niagara River Greenway is world-class.***

Niagara Falls, the centerpiece of the Greenway, is one of the great natural wonders of the world. To quote from the National Parks Service, “At Niagara we encounter a natural phenomenon that is overwhelming in its magnitude and deeply embedded in popular consciousness.” In addition to the world-class importance of the Falls, the Niagara River Greenway also includes internationally significant birding areas, unique ecosystems, and world-class architecture. The development of the Greenway presents opportunities to add to this list of world-class features, with new activities and projects of equal caliber.

### ***The Niagara River Greenway is a corridor.***

The River, the Greenway and its resources extend as a linear corridor from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. Although the jurisdictional boundary of the Greenway is based on municipal lines, the heart of the Greenway and the focus of most activities will fall within the area nearest the water.

### ***The elements of the Niagara River Greenway that make it special include its places, parks and landscapes.***

Many landscapes create the corridor, including open spaces and conservation areas, parks and recreational sites, working industrial lands and now-vacant brownfields, cities and residential neighborhoods. These places and their diversity contribute to the experience of the Greenway.

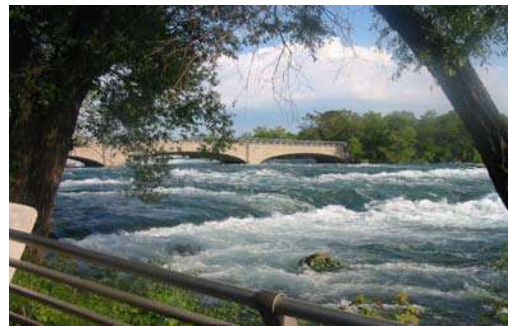
### ***The Niagara River Greenway is a place to celebrate and interpret shared resources.***

The many unique ecosystems and environmental features merit both protection and greater appreciation. The Greenway is dotted with dozens of cultural attractions and venues, and a myriad of events enliven

the corridor and contribute to the experience of the Greenway. There are vast recreational opportunities on both land and water, ranging from active pursuits to passive enjoyment of the landscape. The Greenway can make these more accessible. The Greenway contains a diversity of sceneries that tend to get taken for granted, but which stun visitors with their quality. The history and heritage of this region runs deep, touching every aspect of the American experience from the rich history of the Native Americans who first lived along the shores of the River to the modern day. The Greenway is a physical place where people can experience and obtain a greater understanding of these rich resources. The Niagara River Greenway presents an opportunity to contribute to the economy of the region by promoting economic and tourism opportunities that capitalize on the region’s rich inventory of ecological, heritage, recreational and cultural resources.

### ***The Niagara River Greenway will serve as a circulation system for the region that will improve access and connections throughout the area.***

The Greenway will physically connect parks, recreation, waterfront sites and other resources to each other and to the surrounding areas, through trails, interpretive signage, gateways, overlooks and other linkages. It will also create emotional and experiential connections. The Greenway, as a conceptual framework, will knit the diverse elements of the region into a more coherent whole.



**The Rapids above Niagara Falls**

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### B. Overview of Public Participation Efforts

Preparation of the Niagara River Greenway Plan has provided meaningful opportunities for local leaders, stakeholders, and the general public to provide ideas and insights into the development of the plan. Outreach has been extensive and diversified, using a variety of techniques and forums for disseminating information and soliciting input. Information about the Greenway and dialogue with the various stakeholder groups even precedes this current plan, having been initiated in relation to the New York Power Authority relicensing efforts, when numerous interviews and meetings were held with representatives of governments, agencies, environmental groups, non-profits and other interests.



**Public Meeting for the Greenway Plan**

The public participation element for the project has included workshops, stakeholder meetings, website postings, brochures, interviews and public meetings. Particularly in Niagara County, the local press has provided consistent attention to the project. Public input has also been structured into the design of the Niagara River Greenway Commission. All meetings of the Commission have been open to the public, with advance notice provided to the media.

The legislation establishing the Niagara River Greenway Commission set up two subcommittees, which have met regularly for the express purpose of communicating progress and obtaining feedback on the planning effort. The Local Government Advisory Committee provides an avenue of communication with the local government leaders who will be responsible for adopting the plan. The Citizen Advisory Committee provides the opportunity for various stakeholder groups and members of the general public to be informed of progress being made, and offer any comments or concerns they may have. Both forums have also been used by participants to recommend specific projects and concepts for inclusion in the Niagara River Greenway Plan.

A summary of public participation is included in Appendix B.

### C. Principles for the Niagara River Greenway

The principles for the Niagara River Greenway represent the general values that will guide greenway planning into the future. These basic principles have been presented and discussed in various venues, and have received broad general support on the part of the wide range of groups that have been actively involved in the development of the Greenway Plan.

The focus of these principles is to facilitate the implementation of the vision established for the Niagara River Greenway. They promote high-quality, ecologically sensitive and sustainable activities and development. All actions within the Niagara River Greenway should be evaluated against these principles, not only to assess their validity, but to help improve the quality of efforts that move forward.

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The guiding principles for the development of the Niagara River Greenway are:

- **Excellence** – Existing Greenway resources are globally significant and Greenway projects will meet world class standards.
- **Sustainability** – The Greenway will be designed to promote ecological, economic and physical sustainability for long-term viability and effectiveness.
- **Accessibility** – The Greenway will be designed to provide and increase physical and visual access to and from the waterfront and related resources for a full range of users (youth, seniors, persons with special needs).
- **Ecological Integrity** – The Greenway will be focused on maintaining and improving the health, vitality and integrity of natural resources and wildlife habitats. Emphasis will be placed on restoring and retaining ecologically significant areas and natural landscapes, both in and over the water and upland.
- **Public Well-Being** – The Greenway will be designed to achieve and promote physical and emotional wellness through the experience that it offers to the public. Availability of both land- and water-based recreational facilities, and access to both active and passive recreational opportunities should be considered in the development of Greenway assets.
- **Connectivity** – The Greenway will increase connectivity and access (trails, pathways, parks, water access), promote the continuity of open space and habitats, and provide for connections to related corridors and resources across the region, including connections across the international border with Canada.
- **Restoration** – The Greenway will be designed to encourage the restoration of ecological resources, the appropriate reuse of brownfields, and the revitalization of existing urban centers along the corridor.
- **Authenticity** – The Greenway will establish a clear sense of “place” and identity that reflects the traditional spirit and heritage of the area. Projects and activities should have a connection to the character, culture and/or history of their location.
- **Celebration** – The Greenway will be designed to celebrate local history, diversity, cultural resources, and the natural and built environments, and will seek to share this diverse tradition with local residents and visitors to the region. Projects that support education, interpretation are encouraged, as are events and activities that help build social interaction and shared experiences.
- **Partnerships** – The focus of the Greenway will revolve around cooperation and reciprocal compromise. Relationships and partnerships must be formed and strengthened to achieve coordination and integration of efforts throughout the Greenway.
- **Community Based** – Greenway planning will reflect the preferences and plans of the local communities, while respecting other stated goals and the communal vision of the Niagara River Greenway.

The above principles present a guide to actions and development within the Niagara River Greenway over the long-term, so that the cumulative effect of projects is to move toward achieving the shared vision for the Niagara River Greenway. The principles are applicable to municipalities without waterfront lands as well as those fronting the River. They promote access and connections, including trail linkages. They support high quality, ecologically-sound projects throughout the region. They are fundamental enough to remain relevant over changing circumstances, providing consistency with flexibility. However, they are also necessarily abstract. The following section describes the goals that have been developed to help operationalize these principles.

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### D. Greenway Goals

The planning process for this effort revealed a number of concepts that represent what is seen as the core of the Niagara River Greenway. These benchmark concepts are important to achieve in order to realize the full potential of the Niagara River Greenway. They are articulated here as goals. They form the basis for the priorities articulated in the next Chapter, and were the inspiration for the Implementation Concepts. These goals are very interrelated, with considerable overlap between them. The goals will achieve an improved quality of life for area residents and an enhanced visitor experience.

These goals represent the primary goals that need to be accomplished at the outset of this process in order to fulfill the vision for the Niagara River Greenway. As the Greenway develops, additional goals will emerge that build upon this foundation, but the core goals identified here are the initial focus. The Niagara River Greenway Commission has limited resources, in terms of funds, staff or other resources, and cannot undertake an ambitious agenda of items. The Commission's most effective position is to take a leadership role, and set the general direction for the hundreds of collective actions undertaken by a variety of public sector and private sector entities that will incrementally help create the Greenway. Therefore, these goals are simple and limited in number, to maximize their near-term impact.



Tonawanda Gateway Harbor

#### *Improve Access*

Residents during the public participation process made it clear that they value the assets of the Greenway, and welcome better opportunities to be able to enjoy these resources. Establishing a multi-use trail network across the Greenway is one way to enhance access. Gateways welcome visitors to the Greenway and promote access. There is support for increased opportunities for water-side access, including “blue line,” or water-based trails. Scenic overlooks, interpretive centers, signage and wayfinding systems also help promote access, by making it easier to navigate the Greenway. The Niagara River Greenway will facilitate ways for people to take advantage of the full range of resources and activities along the River.



Niawanda Park, City of Tonawanda

#### *Make Connections*

Most fundamentally, the Greenway is a means to forge better connections across the region. These connections include physical connections that link destinations and communities, and the development of a multi-use trail along the length of the River is a primary goal of the Greenway. Connections also include conceptual linkages: how do people understand the Greenway? How do they navigate through the Greenway? How do they understand the



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connections between the people, the history and the environment of the region?

The Greenway is a communal concept that stretches across two counties and over thirteen municipalities. The Greenway will promote improved physical connections between the many assets of the Greenway. It will promote improved coordination among the many partners that make up the Niagara River Greenway, and the Greenway will foster the greater integration of the stories, resources and features that make up the Niagara River Greenway.



**Strawberry Island**

### *Protect and Restore Environmental Systems*

There is a strong sense of stewardship for the ecological and environmental features of the Greenway. Restoring the environmental health of the region is seen both as an important goal and a critical input into the success of the Greenway. There is passionate support for a Greenway that protects and restores the region's environmental systems, which is a necessary step for the future revitalization of the region's economic health. There is also strong interest in providing interpretive opportunities to increase public awareness of the value of these resources, and build a greater constituency for regional environmental assets. The Niagara River Greenway will protect and restore the environmental resources of the region through habitat restoration, reclamation of

damaged areas such as brownfields, and preservation of unique and threatened ecological resources. The Niagara River Greenway Commission will encourage interpretive opportunities to inform the general public about environmental resources and their importance.



**Statue of Tesla, Niagara Falls**

### *Celebrate History and Heritage*

There is great excitement for a Greenway that helps the region celebrate and share its history with the world. In public outreach meetings, sessions of “Telling the Story” elicited the greatest participation and enthusiasm. There are literally hundreds of stories about this region, ranging from those of national importance, to the lesser known and personal stories of individuals who lived in the region. The Niagara National Heritage Area Study has outlined many of these stories, which help create a shared identity and pride for the Greenway and help connect its people, local residents and visitors alike, to the region. Additional stories from the Erie County portion of the Greenway follow similar themes. The Niagara River Greenway will increase opportunities for celebrating the area's rich history. The Greenway will form a thematic framework for interpretation and improve coordination of interpretive activities.

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### *Spark Revitalization and Renewal*

There is an understanding that the Greenway can help spark revitalization, reinvestment and renewal in the cities and communities along the corridor through sustainable development, tourism and improved quality of life factors. Reuse of brownfields and support of downtown “Main Street” development is also a goal. Economic revitalization as an activity is not the focus; rather, it is the result of good planning and an emphasis on the other features of the Greenway. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, the livability of a place, including the natural environment, the built environment, the culture and recreational offerings all contribute to attracting residents, visitors and investment. Economic prosperity will be the natural outcome of making the types of improvements that further the other goals of the Greenway.



**Third Street, Niagara Falls**

### *Promote Long Term Sustainability*

While the focus in planning is often on new facilities and projects, there are many existing resources and assets that comprise the Niagara River Greenway. In order to strive for excellence, these resources will require care and maintenance to ensure that they remain functional and attractive assets

into the future. The Niagara River Greenway will promote the long-term sustainability of existing sites and features through continued investment in regional assets, and rehabilitation and improvement of aging facilities.

### *Extend Olmsted's Legacy*



Frederick Law Olmsted was instrumental in saving Niagara Falls and portions of the Niagara River corridor from over-

development at a time when commercial and industrial development threatened the integrity of the landscape. Olmsted's vision for the Niagara River corridor was truly revolutionary and it established a legacy that is important to maintain and enhance. Olmsted's vision extended beyond the “Niagara Reservation.” He envisioned a necklace of parks and open spaces along the length of the River, from Front Park in the City of Buffalo and stretching north of the Falls. Olmsted's design for the Buffalo Park system included open spaces and connecting parkways that provided access to greenery at a municipal scale. The Niagara River Greenway will integrate open space and connections to provide access to a diversity of resources at a regional scale. Efforts undertaken under the leadership of the Niagara River Greenway Commission will preserve Olmsted's vision, building a legacy for future generations.