

Background and Project Process

Background and Study Area

In 2003, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission funded a visioning project for the main stem of the River from Millbury, MA to Pawtucket, RI. A significant component of this project was a design charrette for the Fisherville Mill site in Grafton. Detailed analysis and design, combined with public participation, produced conceptual site plans that reflect the opportunities and constraints present in the rehabilitation of historic mills and villages.

As a result of the original visioning process, this Master Plan project focussed on the three South Grafton mill villages (Farnumville, Fisherville, and Saundersville) and the Blackstone River Corridor that links them. Each village contains characteristics that distinguish them yet all three areas share similarities. The most significant common feature is the Blackstone River, which played a significant role in the historical development of all three villages. Most notably, each of the villages contained significant mill complexes which utilized the river as a source of power for the manufacturing process. These mills provided jobs for many residents of the villages and were a catalyst for the development of the area and the sense of community that still thrives.

Today, the river is no longer utilized in the manufacturing process. In fact, several of the mill buildings that were once key elements of the villages' industrial economies, as well as the villages' identities, have been lost and of those remaining, most are presently vacant. There is increasing development pressure to utilize/re-develop many of the properties in the villages for various purposes including commercial, retail and residential uses.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to develop a strategic policy Plan for protecting, preserving and promoting significant cultural, historical and environmental characteristics of the South Grafton mill villages and the Blackstone River Corridor in Grafton.

The project inventoried significant cultural, historical, and environmental resources, or assets, within the project area. Using the inventories, community planning workshops were conducted to identify a "vision" for this part of Grafton, as well as to develop a strategic plan that includes specific goals and objectives for achieving the vision. A prioritized list of recommendations and actions identified by the project participants, and estimated costs for implementing such, are included in the Plan, along with suggested time frames and identification of potential funding sources for their completion.

In addition to creating this Master Plan document, the Project serves as a means of educating the community's residents about the numerous resources and assets that exist within this unique area. The community workshops allowed both project organizers and participants to present and exchange knowledge and ideas about the project area in an organized meeting forum. Citizens, non-profit organizations, and various Town boards, committees and departments all have expressed a strong commitment to planning for the future of the South Grafton Villages and the Blackstone River Corridor. It is anticipated that creating further awareness of the valuable assets of this area will result in an even greater level of enthusiasm than presently exists.

A Vision for South Grafton's Mill Villages:

Preserve and promote the cultural heritage and economic viability of the Saundersville, Fishersville and Farnumsville villages through the interpretation and enhancement of their significant natural features, historic fabric and recreational opportunities.

Goals:

- Provide comprehensive streetscape improvements including sidewalks, street trees and pedestrian-scale lighting.
- Develop “flexible”, incentive-based zoning techniques that allow for a variety of uses within the area.
- Identify, and interpret to the public, key portions of the Blackstone Canal at Leland’s Landing, Fishersville and along Depot Street and south of the Farnumsville Mill.
- Improve Subdivision Regulations for residential development which promote the protection of water quality and wildlife habitats including the use of stormwater best management practices (BMP’s).
- Increase both physical and visual connectivity between the three mill villages through circulation improvements, view corridors and public spaces.
- Increase recreational use of the region by establishing additional access points and hiking trails and providing appropriate parking facilities.
- Develop several small-scale commercial areas adjacent to interpretive areas to serve local residents as well as visitors.