CHAPTER 6:
Other Local Initiatives

A multitude of local projects are currently underway within the Onondaga Creek watershed and creek corridor and these will undoubtedly increase in the future. Current projects include those related to municipal improvement/public services, transportation, community revitalization, regional planning/visioning, water quality monitoring/protection, and greenspace enhancement. As of 2008, more than 40 different projects and initiatives in the Onondaga Creek corridor were ongoing or pending, each with particular objectives, funding sources, timelines, and managing entities (A full list of ongoing and pending projects can be found in Appendix K). A partial review of these projects demonstrates that many have goals related to those outlined in the Onondaga Creek Conceptual Revitalization Plan (OCRP). Other projects have missions and functions that are not intrinsically related to the creek, but affect the creek, and could thereby hinder or advance the goals of the OCRP.

This chapter focuses on identifying a process for examining interactions between the OCRP and other projects in the watershed. By scrutinizing connections between the OCRP and particular projects, we will foster communications and capitalize on unexpected synergies that further strengthen and motivate our community to implement its vision along the Onondaga Creek corridor. Three different initiatives are evaluated using the process detailed below.

A major step in considering the connections and potential synergies between an existing or proposed project and the recommendations for Onondaga Creek revitalization is to evaluate the project in regards to the five main watershed goals:

1) What are the connections between the project and the OCRP water quality recommendations?
2) What are the connections between the project and the OCRP human health and safety recommendations?
3) What are the connections between the project and the OCRP ecological health and habitat recommendations?
4) What are the connections between the project and the OCRP access, recreation and use recommendations?
5) What are the connections between the project and the OCRP education recommendations?

More specifically, components of the project may be compared to the region-specific Revitalization Maps, as well as the watershed-wide recommendations presented in Chapter 5. To illustrate the synergies and challenges between a project and the revitalization recommendations, three example projects will be discussed in further detail.

Example 1: Onondaga Creek Walk

The Onondaga Creek Walk is planned to be a pedestrian/multi-use path that follows the creek corridor. The first segment of the walk was completed more than a decade ago, by the City of Syracuse, as a creek-side trail through Franklin Square that extends toward Onondaga Lake along the Inner Harbor.

Two new creek walk projects, referred to as Phase I and Phase II, are currently underway to extend the trail southward through the city; and complete the connection to Onondaga Lake. (A third segment, Phase III, will eventually continue the trail to the south boundary of the city at Dorwin Avenue).

Phase I will include construction of the walk from Franklin Square, south to Armory Square and northward along the Inner Harbor to the shore of Onondaga Lake, where the creek walk will eventually link to Onondaga County's proposed Loop the Lake Trail. The Phase I plan has been approved and construction is scheduled to begin in 2008 using state and federal transportation funding.

Phase II will include an additional segment of the trail between Armory Square and Kirk Park (to Colvin Street). Currently, the city has hired an engineering consulting firm, Barton & Loguidice, P.C., to conduct a feasibility study of potential routes and amenities. Funding for Phase I is provided by Federal Highway Administration (SMTC, 2007). Phase II will be funded in a similar manner. Because both phases of the ongoing creek walk project are funded with transportation department dollars, the primary function of the creek walk is to provide an alternative transportation route for walking, jogging, bicycling, and skating according to transportation standards set by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) *Highway Design Manual*, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) *Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities*, and the American Disabilities Act (ADA) *Accessibility Guidelines*.

The project designs will also include improvements to the pedestrian experience, such as lighting, signage, benches, and safety. The city government is aware of the restrictions imposed by the funding source and is seeking complementary funds for additional creek walk enhancements such as trees and other amenities that may not be covered by transportation monies.

Evaluating Watershed-Wide Interactions

1. What are the connections between the Onondaga Creek Walk and the OCRP water quality recommendations?

Under the watershed-wide goals, one recommendation related to water quality is the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for the control of storm water. *Channel reconfiguration* and *renaturalization* (see Question #2) of the streambanks will also improve water quality. If design specifications of the creek walk include BMPs that protect the creek from runoff, such as vegetative swales or pervious paving, then the creek walk could accommodate the goals of the OCRP.

2. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP human health and safety recommendations?

Watershed-wide recommendations for human health and safety include modifying the creek velocity through channel reconfiguration and renaturalization of stream banks and floodplains. Placement of the creek walk in relation to the existing stream bank will impact the space and clearance available for any possible future creek channel modifications (including channel-widening, installation of meanders, or reconstruction of floodplain). To avoid precluding future stream channel modification projects, the creek walk should be located to allow setbacks from the creek bank, especially in open areas where it is possible. Conversely, determination and identification of creek segments with the highest feasibility for channel modification may have to be investigated in the near future, in order to assist with the planning needs of many creek-side projects, including the creek walk project. Communication and collaboration will be essential in the preservation of areas and properties suited to future channel reconfiguration projects.

3. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP ecological health and habitat recommendations?

Recommendations listed under the goal of ecological health and habitat include increasing native riparian vegetation for fish and wildlife habitat. The allowance of a buffer zone or allotment of space necessary for a future vegetative strip along the creek's edge, including wetlands and floodplains, could not only help meet this goal, but also accommodate flooding, improve water quality, and increase the aesthetic value and pedestrian experience of using the creek walk.

4. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP access, recreation and use recommendations?

One of the strongest connections or synergies is the role the creek walk will play in terms of creek access, recreation, and use. Specific watershed-wide recommendations under this goal called for the establishment of a trail system that would connect neighborhoods and provide creek access for multiple uses, of which both phases of the creek walk project help achieve.

5. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP education recommendations?

The creek walk has several connections to existing and potential educational features along the creek corridor, in that the creek walk will connect and provide increased access to establishments such as the Museum of Science and Technology (MOST) in Armory Square, a number of local schools, historic sites and museums in downtown Syracuse that highlight past cultural and economic influences on the creek, and numerous parks and natural features that could be used as outdoor learning settings for schools (including access to the creek/riparian corridor at parks for science lessons, stream monitoring lessons, wildlife observation, classroom/public stewardship projects, and access to future features such as the proposed Southside *Onondaga Botanical Garden and Arboretum*).

Evaluating Region-Specific Interactions

In looking at the region-specific recommendations outlined in the plan, the location of the proposed creek walk project stretches across the Franklin Square, Clinton Square, Armory Square, Southside, and Botanical Garden regions or "project bundles." Many OCRP components envisioned for these regions, including scenic use areas, signage, improved lighting, rest stops, pedestrian corridors, foot/bike paths, natural fencing, and pedestrian bridges, are compatible with the components proposed by the creek walk project. However, the question concerning trail placement and space requirements for future hydrological modification particularly pertains to the Southside area and Botanical Garden area, where the creation of meanders, compound channels, and restored wetlands are envisioned.

Further inquiry or investigation into the options and flexibility of the project plans and requirements may lead to the finding that some modifications can be made that would easily reinforce the synergy between the creek walk and the revitalization plan, while other discrepancies or obstacles may be more challenging to overcome because of funding or logistical reasons.

Photographs: Sections of existing creek walk, inner harbor, Syracuse

Example 2: The Connective Corridor

The Connective Corridor initiative, led by Syracuse University, showcases art, culture, and community resources along a 1.5 mile, "L"-shaped strip of the city that connects downtown Syracuse to University Hill. The corridor intersects Onondaga Creek in downtown Syracuse at Fayette Street. The goal of the project is to promote economic development, tourism, and residential growth by investing in historic landmarks, cultural institutions, and private developments within the corridor, including places such as the art district, Columbus Circle, Armory Square, the OnCenter, Everson Museum, and the Fayette-Firefighters Park. An emphasis will be placed on improved transit options within the corridor, not only to provide walking, biking, and riding opportunities, but also to promote interactions between the student population on University Hill and their host city. In addition to a Connective Corridor shuttle bus, investments along the corridor route will also include pedestrian and bike friendly features, unique lighting, public artwork, interactive technology, urban reforestation, and enhanced green spaces. Funding and support for this project is provided by Syracuse University, New York State, federal appropriations from U.S. Congressmen James T. Walsh, U.S. Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton, the City of Syracuse, National Grid, and Time Warner Cable.

Evaluating Watershed-Wide Interactions

1. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP water quality recommendations?

Watershed recommendations for water quality suggest using BMPs for storm water management. In addition to using BMPs to prevent storm water runoff from the transportation routes of the Connective Corridor from entering the creek, another potential synergy exists in the possibility of incorporating public art, technology, and innovative storm water management designs. For example, sculpture pieces or public fountains or water features that utilize recycled rainwater can enhance public spaces as well as manage and reuse storm water. Innovative storm water management designs and materials can also combine technology and storm water management with public space enhancement through use of the water in botanical features, green space, and gardens. Such innovative approaches can reduce the volume and rate at which stormwater reaches the creek and improve water quality through greater filtration.

2. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP human health and safety recommendations?

Similar to the creek walk, the placement of the Connective Corridor's transit pathways (at the point they cross the creek) have the potential to conflict with future plans to make hydrological modifications on the creek channel or create a floodplain area. Placement of the transit pathways should be made with these objectives in mind.

3. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP ecological health and habitat recommendations?

The revitalization plan recommends the use of native vegetation. The green space plans and enhancements that are implemented as part of the Connective Corridor can compliment the OCRP by incorporating native species on sites near the creek.

4. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP access, recreation and use recommendations?

From a watershed-wide perspective, the Connective Corridor is similar to the creek walk project in that it supports creek access, recreation, and use. Although the Connective Corridor intersects, rather than paralleling, the creek, it will serve as a vital transportation corridor and linkage between neighborhoods. Additionally, the reforestation and green space development components of the Connective Corridor reflect OCRP recommendations for maintaining open space, and incorporating creative, multi-use options for creek related access and recreation.

5. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP education recommendations?

The Connective Corridor also has the potential to support the watershed-wide recommendations related to education. Features such as signage, markers, kiosks, and informative public art could be coordinated and/or standardized via the OCRP among projects such as the creek walk and the Connective Corridor if information about the cultural, historical and natural ecology of Onondaga Creek is incorporated into the project's interactive technology features (potential examples might include interactive media about the creek or watershed, or public outreach about creek-side facilities, such as nearby sewage treatment facilities).

Evaluating Region-Specific Interactions

Many OCRP components, such as scenic use areas, signage, improved lighting, rest stops, pedestrian corridors, foot bike paths, natural fencing, and pedestrian bridges, are compatible with elements of the Connective Corridor. Examining the region-specific recommendations, the Connective Corridor intersects the creek within the Clinton Square region or "project bundle." The vision for this region included recommendations for storm water management demonstration projects, an art deco pocket park, trail and pedestrian enhancements, and the creation of floodplain. The adjacent Armory Square region envisioned featuring a "Living Machine" exhibit at the MOST that would demonstrate water filtration technologies, as well as promoting cultural and historic sites. These recommendations have the potential to connect strongly to the Connective Corridor's plans for public art, greenspace, multi-use transportation routes, technology features, and focus on historic landmarks.

In this example, the potential for synergies and the similarities in goals and visions is substantial. Consideration of the watershed-wide and regional recommendations of the creek plan can only strengthen the similar goals and visions that the revitalization of Onondaga Creek and the Connective Corridor Initiative both share.

Photograph:
Concept for the Connective Corridor developed by Field Operations with CLEAR

www.connectivecorridor.syr.edu

Example 3: The Near Westside Initiative

The Near Westside Initiative Inc., is a non-profit development corporation established with the goal of revitalizing Syracuse's Near Westside (Urban CNY News On-line Edition, 2007 October 15). The boundaries of the Near Westside neighborhood are South Geddes Street on the West, Onondaga Creek on the East, West Fayette Street to the North and West Onondaga Street to the South (Bogucz per. comm.). The Initiative is modeled in part on the highly successful Artist Relocation Program in Paducah, Kentucky and is envisioned as an interdisciplinary creative community of residences and workspaces for artists, designers, technologists and innovators.

The Near Westside Initiative currently involves activities targeted in an eleven-block area of the northeast corner of the broader neighborhood. Former warehouse and commercial structures in three blocks encompassed by West Fayette Street, Wyoming Street, Tully Street and West Street will be constructed or renovated using innovative environmental technologies developed by the Syracuse Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems. Development of improved residential housing is targeted in an eight-block area around Skiddy Park and Blodgett School (Bogucz pers. comm.). Funding support for this project is provided by federal and state sources and Syracuse University.

Components of the project include:

- Construction of a WCNY broadcast center and education center on a vacant parcel at West and Marcellus Streets;
- Rehabilitation of the Case Supply and Lincoln Supply buildings into mixed-use commercial/residential facilities;
- Construction or rehabilitation of 50 units of affordable "green" housing for current and future city residents in a several-block area located around Blodgett School and Skiddy Park and extending eastward to the Arts, Technology & Design Quarter developments. (Rebuilding the Upstate Economy City-by-City, 2007)

The Near Westside Initiative overlaps with the Armory Square potential project area (See Revitalization Map F1). It can also be reviewed in terms of its potential synergies with watershed-wide recommendations, and prominent and proximate position to the creek as it flows through downtown.

Evaluating Watershed-Wide Interactions

1. What are the connections between the Near Westside Initiative and the OCRP water quality recommendations?

With its emphasis on using green technologies in the construction and rehabilitation of residential and commercial properties, the Near Westside Initiative has the potential for lowering the quantity and improving the quality of storm water runoff generated on the Near Westside. The strategic use of stormwater best management practices such as rain gardens, green roofs, rain barrels, and tree planting in construction and rehabilitation can enable this to happen.

2. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP human health and safety recommendations?

Any new construction or property rehabilitation along the creek in the City of Syracuse should undergo sewer separation so that the storm waters are not co-mingled with sanitary effluent. Reconstruction of the sewer system associated with projects such as the Westside Initiative will reduce the bacteria discharge to Onondaga Creek currently resulting from an old, decaying and leaking combined sewer system. This will ultimately have a profound effect on human health for individuals accessing creek waters. To the extent that the use of *green technologies* reduces storm water runoff and will compliment a separated sewer system, there will be additional water quality improvements, beside pathogen reduction, that make contact with the creek safer.[1]

3. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP ecological health and habitat recommendations?

Similar to the other case study project, the use of native and indigenous plant species in restoration project and community green spaces has the

[1] For an important summary of potential hydraulic impacts of sewer separation on Onondaga Creek, see: Black J and Endreny T. 2006. *Increasing stormwater outfall duration, magnitude and volume through combined sewer separation.* Journal of Hydrologic Engineering 11(5):472-481.

potential to be a strong connection between the Near Westside project and the OCRP recommendations. One specific example might include the potential use of native plants species in the neighborhood reforestation plan currently under development by State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) students.

4. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP access, recreation and use recommendations?

The connection between improving access, recreation and use of Onondaga Creek by residents in the Near Westside may be via linking the neighborhood to Armory Square and the Creek Walk by the pedestrian bridge proposed in the Armory Square project area (see Revitalization Map F1). Another means of access is the Connective Corridor. For example, any signage that links the neighborhood to the Connective Corridor, could potentially link the neighborhood to the creek, if signage to the creek is included in the area of the Connective Corridor that crosses the creek.

5. What are the connections between the project and the OCRP education recommendations?

There is the potential to use green technologies as part of the Near Westside Initiative to engage students and residents in learning about how to protect the creek. For example, students at Blodgett School who are participating in SUNY ESF's program about Onondaga Creek could take a tour of the green technologies as part of the curriculum. Youth participating in an environmental corps on the Near Westside could assist with the design and installation of green technologies such as rain gardens.

While it is unrealistic to assume that every component of every project will inherently match the recommendations of the revitalization plan, a conscious review of similar goals and potential synergies can help to strengthen the long-term viability of the creek corridor via outreach and public education, as well as to promote communication and collaboration among decision-makers, stakeholders, and the public.

Photographs:
Green Infrastructure from the City of Portland Green Street Program