

MAKING LIVABLE AND ATTRACTIVE WATERFRONTS

Introduction

In the past twenty-five years there has been a significant transformation in the use of waterfront areas across the United States. The decline in manufacturing and the abandonment of many waterfront industrial properties offer new opportunities for livable and attractive waterfronts. Many of the communities in New York are recognizing that their waterfronts are their greatest assets in revitalizing the economy, environment and the quality of life. The City of Beacon, New York is among them.

The City of Beacon is located 60 miles north of New York City on the banks of the Hudson River and 90 miles south of the New York State Capital at Albany.

This paper intends to study and analyze the Long Dock Beacon Waterfront Development Project in the City of Beacon, New York, as described and analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project which was prepared by the Matthew D. Rudikoff Associates, Inc. for the Scenic Hudson Land Trust, Inc. (Scenic Hudson) and Foss Group Beacon, LLC (Foss Group).

The Long Dock Beacon Waterfront Development project is a successful waterfront redevelopment effort that aims to bring life back to the City's waterfront, and revitalize the economy and environment.

1. Changing the Waterfront

1.1. Need

Historically, the Hudson River has been a major focus of the regional development as a commercial transportation corridor and passageway, and is responsible for the evolution of waterfront cities and major industrial centers in the 19th century, including the City of Beacon.

During the 20th century, changing technology and social structures prevented much of the industrial uses occupying riverfront parcels, and left many communities with degraded waterfronts, contaminated soils, and deteriorating, abandoned structures.

Once the importance of the Hudson River from an ecological, functional, economic and recreational perspective was clearly recognized, government agencies, civic groups and citizens focused on riverfront lands as a key to revitalizing and reestablishing social, economic, spiritual and physical connections to the river. Acquisition or redevelopment of vacant or underutilized waterfront lands, historic riverside and river-view estates became a strategic focus of municipalities such as Beacon, and for like-minded organizations, including Scenic Hudson. In 1972, the Federal Coastal Management Act created incentives for States and local communities to plan the redevelopment of their waterfronts. In New York State, New York State Department of State (NYS DOS) was charged with implementing the program to facilitate coastal planning.

With the City of Beacon's adoption of its Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) in 1991 which was funded and approved by NYSDOS in 1992, the need for economic development that promotes and makes available the resources offered by the waterfront was formalized. The importance of the Hudson River to its communities, the State, and the Country was more recognized at the Federal level with the designation of the Hudson River as an American Heritage River.

1.2. Land Use Regulations

As noted above, the City had completed and adopted an LWRP in 1991 which was then followed by changes to its Zoning Map and Ordinance. The City of Beacon LWRP establishes 17 policies to enhance public access to, and utilization of, the waterfront; to support related development and revitalization; and to protect identified waterfront resources and recommended the rezoning in order to “encourage appropriate recreational and open space uses of public lands and revitalize underutilized private lands at the riverfront.” These policies addressed specific locations and opportunities, and also more general areas and resource issues. A central goal of the City of Beacon LWRP was accomplished with the rezoning of the City's waterfront to its present WD Waterfront Development and WP Waterfront Park Zoning Districts.

Purposes of the WD Zoning District, as outlined in the LWRP, are as follows:

- To stimulate the revitalization of the City and its waterfront by establishing a well designed central focus for the City's waterfront area.
- To provide for land uses consistent with the Beacon Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan, including residential and waterfront commercial uses, to serve as a catalyst for the economic and physical revitalization of the entire waterfront area.
- To encourage a mix of uses on the waterfront with a consistent set of design standards to assure a unified and comprehensively planned development that will function effectively and achieve a high standard of site planning and architectural design.
- To eliminate deteriorated structures and incompatible, visually unattractive or otherwise deleterious land uses.
- To increase pedestrian public access to, and the potential for the enjoyment of, the waterfront and to integrate that access with existing and anticipated pedestrian public access opportunities on adjacent public lands.

The LWRP calls predominantly for waterfront park and waterfront development uses of the Long Dock Peninsula and shoreline to the south, in order to:

- Encourage revitalization of underutilized lands at the riverfront.
- Encourage public access to the waterfront.
- Encourage complementary interface between the publicly and privately owned lands at the riverfront, including a potential pedestrian linkage between Riverfront Park and Denning's Point.

Further, the LWRP identifies five high priority projects considered necessary for revitalization of the waterfront area. The “Long Dock Peninsula”, where the Long Dock Beacon Waterfront Development project is located, is one of them.

2. Long Dock Beacon

2.1. Background

The proposed Long Dock Beacon project is a planned waterfront revitalization project for a significant waterfront land consisting of three separate abutting parcels which together total approximately 25 acres of upland. The site covers the majority of the lands referred to as the “Long Dock Peninsula” by the City of Beacon Zoning Ordinance.

It is proposed in accordance with a development agreement between the Scenic Hudson, a nonprofit environmental organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Hudson River, its riverfront, its majestic vistas and working landscapes beyond, and the Foss Group, a single purpose entity formed to own and operate the mixed-use development, and which shares Scenic Hudson's values regarding environmentally responsible development, sustainability principles, and community participation.

The subject property is the former location of the historic Long Wharf, at one time the central focus of river access and commerce for the City of Beacon. After the development of rail transportation on both sides of the Hudson River along its shoreline which resulted in the decline of river dependent travel, and with additional fill, the subject property was transformed into a significant rail yard. Later, after railroad use declined with the expansion of automobile transportation, the subject property was utilized by various industrial uses including bulk fuel storage, salt storage and a railroad/barge transfer facility. In more recent time, much of the subject property has been inactive, with only limited uses remaining at the site, including the existing Dutchess Boat Club which is still in operation today on an annual lease and the former Beacon Salvage which closed in 2000.

2.2. The Project

As described in the Draft EIS, Long Dock Beacon is proposed as a sustainable transit-oriented development, growing out of an extensive community planning process run by Scenic Hudson. The project totals approximately 163,110 SF of gross floor area in addition to the existing 4,000 SF of gross floor area associated with the Red Barn (which is the only existing building to remain). The proposed new gross floor area consists of the following components:

- Hotel and Conference Center
- Red Barn: The Adaptive re-use of the existing building for community based educational uses, such as boat building or other community oriented programming.
- Greenhouse: For community education uses
- North Boardwalk and Public Plaza: A public gathering place overlooking the Hudson River which would provide panoramic views to the north, south and across the river.
- Quiet Harbor: For non-petroleum powered recreational river-oriented activities, including canoeing, kayaking, windsurfing, and other human-powered vessels and electric motor craft.
- Scenic Hudson Park at Long Dock
- Parking
- Infrastructure Utilities

The proposed project involves two requested zoning text amendments to the existing City of Beacon Zoning regulations applicable to the underlying WD Zoning District. The first pertains to the interconnected bulk standards relative to “maximum building height” and “minimum building setback;” and the second pertains to the interior location and extent of office use space permitted.

2.3. Planning Process

2.3.1. Land Acquisition

In 1997, Scenic Hudson acquired two parcels, approximately 21.2 upland acres of former industrial sites, at Beacon waterfront to enhance its efforts to protect, preserve and restore the Hudson River and its riverfront as a public and natural resource. In 2000, the organization also acquired fee title to a third and the final WD zoned parcel in Beacon, which includes an additional approximately 3.5 upland acres. With these acquisitions, Scenic Hudson secured all of the privately-owned lands within the City’s WD Zoning District.

2.3.2. Purpose, Goals and Objectives

The Draft EIS states that the purpose of Long Dock Beacon is to demonstrate that a strategically situated Hudson River property can be developed so as to meet the environmental goals of protection of resources and public access, while providing increased opportunities for recreation with the economic goals of appropriate private development, job creation, and increased tax base ratables.

Objectives and principles were put in place to create a model urban waterfront restoration project with public parkland, environmentally sensitive economic development, reclaiming and recycling abandoned industrial land. The Scenic Hudson had four primary goals for the site:

- **Public Access:** Entice the public to the waterfront to enjoy the River, the views, and recreation in its natural setting.
- **Environmental Restoration:** Restore existing natural resources to a healthier state, including remediation of contaminated soils and restoration of on-site wetlands.
- **Linkages:** Provide easy to use connections to Main Street, the train station, Denning's Point (part of Hudson Highlands State Park in Beacon), Dia:Beacon (Art Museum), and the City's trail system.
- **Appropriate Redevelopment:** Demonstrate the highest environmental principles through the design of a mixed-use development for the site, which is appropriate to this riverfront location, compatible with Beacon's historic character, and which utilizes the latest environmentally friendly technologies.

And the following additional objectives as provided in the Draft EIS:

- **Economic Viability:** Upon completion, the proposed development should consist of a mixture of uses that realistically address the market place and insure its long-term economic viability as a private undertaking.
- **Scaled Development:** The proposed development should be accommodated in a pedestrian oriented collection of buildings set in a village environment that preserve water views and accommodate parking in a manner that does not overwhelm the site.
- **Green Architecture:** The project should: incorporate new technologies and designs that are energy efficient; utilize innovative heating and cooling systems and energy sources; use recyclable materials; adopt native plantings and ecologically sensitive construction and paving materials; and site buildings to reflect seasonal climatic conditions.
- **Contextual Design:** The architectural style and materials selected for the project should be innovative, yet acknowledge its Hudson Valley location, the region's architectural history, and the waterfront. It should also complement the public design program being established for the shoreline that will provide the project with waterfront access and linkages to civic, recreational and cultural amenities.

2.3.3. Master Planning Process

The Master Planning Process included the following steps:

- A Community Advisory Committee convened; which included Beacon residents, business people, City representatives, and regional planners
- A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for a development team
- Foss Group selected as the developer
- Development agreement established for:
 - the parameters of the development of the public and commercial components
 - details of the planning and permitting process
 - the financial arrangements between the entities
 - the required steps leading to a long-term ground lease of an approximately 8.5 acre portion of the project site to Foss Group in exchange for market-rate rent payments once the lease is in place
- Alternative designs and the Special Permit Waterfront Development Concept Plan prepared
- Various master plan scenarios were developed through series of public meetings and workshops concluding with the preparation of the 'Final Master Plan' as summarized as "The Project" above.

Throughout the process the goals of Scenic Hudson and the community has incorporated in the design of the development and the master planning process. The master planning process resulted in a set of all-encompassing goals and strategies, as outlined in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the project that have shaped the project. These are as follows:

- Give Value to the Land
- Promote Public Accessibility to the Site
- Develop Sustainably
- Preserve Public Views
- Meet the Budget
- Give the Site a Magical Identity

2.3.4. Public Participation and Visioning Process

Scenic Hudson organized a series of community planning sessions. Over 200 people participated in the meetings, during which residents described their vision of the waterfront site. This process was done in the context of the goals set forth for the WD Zoning District. The public's vision for the waterfront included a place to enjoy the river, to get an ice-cream cone or a meal on the riverfront, to have a hotel or bed and breakfast for visitors, to go fishing or boating, for festivals and cultural events, and to walk, bike, or rollerblade.

The Draft EIS provides that at the visioning sessions, participants were shown three different concept plans with a range of uses and densities that reflected their earlier input, and then participants were asked to select the plan which best reflected their vision. As the result of the community's response to the concept plans, a "Conservation and Development Template," which illustrated the kinds of uses and density favored by the community was created.

This extensive public planning process has served as a model for public participation responsive to the ideas, issues and suggestions of the community.

2.3.5. Environmental Review Process and Alternatives

New York's State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) requires all state and local government agencies to consider environmental impacts equally with social and economic factors during discretionary decision-making. This means that these agencies must assess the environmental significance of all proposed projects (action) they have discretion to approve, fund or directly undertake. If an action is determined to have potentially significant adverse environmental impacts, an "Environmental Impact Statement" is required.

SEQR benefits the public, agencies and project sponsors in many ways. The public can:

- Participate in scoping the draft EIS
- Review SEQR documents, and
- Provide comments to agency decision-makers participate in SEQR hearings on the environmental impacts of the project

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) concisely describes and analyzes a proposed action which may have a significant impact on the environment. The EIS is available to the public for information and comment. An EIS must include:

- Description of the action, including its need and benefits;
- Description of the environmental setting and areas to be affected;
- An analysis of all environmental impacts related to the action;
- An analysis of reasonable alternatives to the action;
- Identification of ways to reduce or avoid adverse environmental impacts.

Type I actions and Unlisted Actions may require preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

The Long Dock Beacon project consisted of a Type I action and determined to have potentially significant adverse environmental impacts requiring the preparation of an EIS.

The EIS has analyzed four different alternatives for the project site, as required.

- Alternative 1: No Action
- Alternative 2: Reduced Impact
- Alternative 3: Alternative Use and/or Layout
- Alternative 4: More Intensive Development

As stated previously, the community collaboration and planning process undertaken by Scenic Hudson involved Beacon citizens, stakeholders, and City officials. Discussions among these groups resulted in the identification of the scale and massing of the development and the types of uses that the community envisioned. After considering alternative development plans, including both smaller and denser commercial and housing scenarios, the community visioning process resulted in a "Conservation and Development Template" that became the Final Master Plan for the site.

3. Conclusion

The Long Dock Beacon Waterfront Development project is a successful waterfront revitalization project that would bring life back to the City's waterfront, and revitalize the economy and environment by fulfilling the objectives of the LWRP through a clear vision and planning process built with consensus through extensive public involvement and significant stakeholder input.

End Note

The project specific information included in this paper is based on the Long Dock Beacon Draft Environmental Impact Statement, prepared by Matthew D. Rudikoff Associates, Inc. in 2005.

References

Matthew D. Rudikoff Associates, Inc., *August 15, 2005, Long Dock Beacon DEIS*

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