INTRODUCTION

Corning Preserve Park is an essential piece of Albany’s urban fabric that extends to the far eastern edge of the City. Bordered by I-787 to the west, Livingston Ave Bridge to the north, the Hudson River to the east and pump stations to the south, the 11-acre park is the City’s most direct outlet to the waterfront. Located only ¼ mile downhill from City Hall and downtown Albany, public access is primarily limited to a single pedestrian bridge over I-787 and a circuitous route from the warehouse district for those travelling by car. Connectivity to Corning Preserve Park is highly disrupted by an overwhelming 12 lanes of moving traffic, some elevated, that comprise Interstate 787 and its frontage roads, and a freight rail line nestled within the highway corridor. Through the Corning Preserve Master Plan, Capitalize Albany and the City of Albany have endeavored to help stakeholders visualize the park’s role within the community and add value to the future development of the Corning Preserve and Downtown Albany.

COMMUNITY INPUT

The consultant team moderated a public input process to gain perspectives from current and prospective park users and community stakeholders. They presented precedent images that helped community participants visualize the riverfront park’s exciting potential. This valuable exchange allowed the planning and design team to identify park users and take an inventory of park elements, infrastructure and experiences that were important to them. The dialogue offered a rationale behind prioritizing a park improvement development program outlined below.

A series of events were held to engage public participation including:

Advisory Committee Meetings: Project Advisory Committee meetings were held on August 27, October 17, November 20 and December 19, 2013.

Public Events: An Open House was held on October 17, followed by a Public Workshop on October 19, 2013.

As a result of these meetings an extensive preliminary park development program including goals and objectives was prepared.
CORNING PRESERVE PARK | PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

PRELIMINARY PARK DEVELOPMENT AND ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

The following outline includes amenities, programs and capital improvements to be considered in the development of the Corning Preserve Master Plan-Phase 2 as part of the Albany Downtown Tactical Plan. These goals and objectives were identified in the consultant’s initial Master Plan Advisory Committee Meeting held at Capitalize Albany on August 27, 2013.

Connectivity | objectives

• Provide a link to Hudson River Valley Greenway river trail and Erie Canal trail entrance
• Increase parking access for boating, vehicles and trailers, regatta events, spectators and restaurant visitors
• Enhance arrival sequence and aesthetics from parking facilities to waterfront amenities
• Provide additional pedestrian access to the waterfront
• Provide an off-road continuous bike trail through the park
• Identify and promote transit stops and increase transit stops
• Create a more welcoming experience
• Enhance the Maiden Lane bridge, currently an impediment to access for cyclists
• Improve access to southern and northern sections of Phase 2 along the waterfront
• Enhance access along Broadway and mitigate its “highway” feel
• Livingston Avenue bridge (railroad bridge) is a great opportunity for bicycle and pedestrian access across the river that should be explored
• Dunn Bridge connection requires significant upgrades and focus may be best placed elsewhere
• Need more accessible (ADA) parking near the performance and northern parking areas
• The Maiden Lane pedestrian bridge requires aesthetic enhancements: murals, interpretive elements, shade, landscape
• Connect to north warehouse district both visually and physically. Prioritize pedestrian and cyclist needs and connectivity
• Broadway has nice plantings; these improvements or similar attention should be given to riverfront access under over-passes where conditions are currently less-inviting
• Provide a dedicated bike route west of the ponds to reduce conflicts with pedestrians along the waterfront

Waterfront | objectives

• Redefine water’s edge to enhance use and River access
• Enhance public safety
• Increase capacity to accommodate multiple large groups
• Add dock space to accommodate more boats like the Half Moon and Clearwater in deep water
• Provide more transient boat dock space for daily visits
• Selectively clear vegetation along the river edge
• Enhance the ground plane planting scheme along the river
• Transform the river’s edge with a boardwalk or promenade
• Consider establishing activity zones along the linear park i.e. quiet enjoyment, group activity, water access, event space etc.

Branding/Identity and Iconic Element(s) | objectives

• Change name to “Corning Preserve Park”
• Establish recreation/tour boat access and docking facility
• Consider a significant architectural or interpretive element

Adapt Existing Amenities | objectives

• Consider a kayak boat launch to the north
• Restore worn turf and underutilized open space areas
• Provide a variety of opportunities for seating, gathering and people watching
• Provide area for court games like volleyball
• Avoid intrusive railings; maintain open views to the river
• Diversify the park’s planting plan and create seasonal and visual interest
• Create oven views across the stage to/from the river during performances
• Open views toward the ponds
• Improve access to the southern restrooms and define a use for vacant building space adjacent to the restrooms
Corning Preserve Park | Program Development

Preliminary Park Development and Enhancement Program (Continued)

North and South Ponds | Objectives:
• Use for non-motorized boat access to the Hudson River
• Provide dedicated kayak launching area
• Replace culvert connections to River with open channels with overhead pedestrian bridge crossings
• Enhance the ponds: dredge, maintain depth, eliminate odors, armor edges, landscape, build habitat island
• Foster more complete flushing in tidal change
• Aerate ponds
• Establish a perimeter walk for the North Pond
• Provide amenities and pond access for winter skating
• Provide seasonal displays and aesthetic enhancements

Establish Mixed-Use Recreation and Public/Private Venue to the Park’s North End | Objectives:
• Provide a park building overlooking the north pond with restrooms, restaurant, boat house, or other program space
• Set parking back further from water and share parking under I-787 (office parking not used on weekends).
• Create a new pedestrian connection to downtown at playground location
• This area may be more conducive to night activity. Concentrate a critical mass of night activity here.
• Tie into North Broadway retail/dining as extension of dining/entertainment district

Infrastructure/Support Facilities | Objectives:
• Provide a permanent non-motorized boat (scull, kayak) storage facility
• Provide a skate and bike rental facility; bike share program
• Provide path lighting
• Provide boat launch parking area lighting
• Provide a police satellite office
• Provide security cameras
• Provide emergency call stations
• Identify and add needed utilities (potable water, electric, wi-fi)
• Create a more pedestrian friendly environment along the north-bound frontage road
• Add evergreens for more sound attenuation, windbreak, and backdrop to deciduous foreground within park

Revenue Generation / Maintenance and Operations | Objectives:
• Understand State restrictions on commercial use and revenue generation
• Return revenue generated through park activities back to the park for ongoing maintenance and operations
• Provide a maintenance plan to accompany capital improvements. Create dedicated revenue stream from vendors, concessionaires, etc.
• Create pavilions to rent out for functions
• Provide a covered open structure w/ power and/or water. Provide a venue for summer day camps etc.
CORNING PRESERVE PARK  |  PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

DETERMINING THE FINAL PARK DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The preliminary program outlined above was intended to be further refined as the consultant team engaged in additional stakeholder outreach and concept plan preparation. Public participation included the following events.

**User Surveys (Figure 1)**

Visitor surveys were distributed during the afternoon of the September 6 Jazz Festival and at the Open House on October 17 and the Public Workshop on October 19, 2013. Arbor Hill and South End Neighborhood Associations’ also participated in the survey. Over 150 surveys were completed by participants.

**Open House (Figure 2 and 3)**

A community open house was held on October 17, 2013 at the Capital Repertory Theater where over 80 individuals participated in the two-hour session. Illustrations depicting existing conditions, park improvement constraints and opportunities, and potential transportation improvements were displayed for participant review. Attendees were given the opportunity to voice their opinion through a two visual study exhibitions. The first was a series of precedent images selected by the Consultant team. Participants were given red and green stickers to place next to the images they found useful and those they found to be out of context. The second, were a series of park improvement and transportation enhancement exhibits. Participants were given the opportunity to spatially mark their comments, concerns and suggestions. A scrolling slide show representing the waterfront park’s existing conditions accompanied the Open House session.

**Public Workshop (Figure 4)**

A public workshop was held on October 19, 2013 at the Palace Theater. Over 30 individuals participated having the opportunity to view improvement constraints and opportunities and potential transportation enhancements. Attendees also participated in a visual preference study by selecting images from a portfolio provided by the Consultant team and attaching these and comments to a large scale aerial plan of the park study area. The visual preference exercise was followed by interactive discussion between participants, City Staff and the Consultant Team.

![Figure 1. Data recovered from the public survey](image-url)
Figure 2. Participant review example on “Opportunities” exhibit

Figure 3. Visual preference study results (one of nine total image boards)
Figure 4. Participant comments and images on large scale aerial plan
Our open house, workshop sessions and advisory committee meetings allowed the consultant team to identify program priorities and the critical criteria by which to evaluate them. Please refer to the Program Evaluation Matrix in the following pages. The Consultant team prepared this matrix to hone in on a park enhancement program for Corning Preserve Park. The matrix includes an extensive list of potential park improvements contained in the left column entitled “Program Element.” Each improvement was then evaluated against important criteria (top row) identified by stakeholders and survey, open house and workshop participants. The purpose of this exercise was not to omit specific needs but to identify and measure requests to ensure that the proposed plan fully responds to all community priorities.

We identified the program elements that met a minimum of 12 (more than 50%) of the 21 criteria noted and summarized these below. The evaluation also identified the most prevalent criteria, that is, the criteria that would be satisfied by the greatest number of program elements. The Park Improvement Plan Criteria below includes the criteria that will be met by a minimum of 22 of the 49 program elements.

**PROGRAM PRIORITIES**

The following physical improvements identified via public outreach satisfy a majority of critical criteria also identified through stakeholder and public engagement.

- Improve access for boating, vehicles and trailers, regatta events, spectators and restaurant visitors and provide transit stop locations
- Provide an off-road continuous bike trail through the park and a clear link to the Hudson River Valley Greenway and the Erie Canal trail entrance
- Establish pedestrian and bicycle access on Livingston Avenue bridge
- Create a new pedestrian connection to downtown at the park’s north end
- Expand the park toward the warehouse district and close Colonie Street roadway; provide a new playground
- Provide a multi-purpose boat house (dining, museum, community space, restrooms, etc.)
- Enhance the ponds (aesthetics, access and recreation programming)
- Establish a perimeter walk for the North Pond
- Provide river steps access to the River as a potential iconic element for the park
- Establish an Iconic element eg. illuminate the Livingston Avenue Bridge
- Restore worn turf/open space areas for multi-use
- Improve access to the southern restrooms and re-program vacant space as bike rental concession or other park amenity; provide access for tour boats
- Enhance the performance area for spectators and everyday park users and maintain an open stage atmosphere with visibility from the River landward

**PARK IMPROVEMENT PLAN CRITERIA**

The following criteria identified by stakeholders and meeting participants are expected to be addressed by the program priorities identified above.

- The need for the program element was specifically and repeatedly expressed at Open House and Workshop
- Amenity will attract private investment
- Amenity would be a regional attraction
- Amenity would be a local attraction
- Amenity would be a year-round attraction
- Amenity will support programs and activities to attract a broad range of park users
- Enhancement will facilitate city-wide connectivity
- Enhancement will promote adaptive re-use of an existing amenity
- Feature is suitable for waterfront setting and is flood resilient
- Improvement will enhance public safety
- Use and structure is permitted by land use
- Improvement is a potential short term initiative
SPATIAL PLANNING FOR PROGRAMMATIC ELEMENTS

As a response to the public outreach session the Consultant team prepared a concept plan that spatially organizes the major program elements. The benefit of this iterative process strives to lead to a truly activated public space.

1. Improve access for boating, vehicles and trailers, regatta events, spectators and restaurant visitors, and provide transit stop locations. Convert right lane of Quay St. to back-in angled parking.

2. Provide an off-road continuous bike trail through the park and a clear link to the Hudson River Valley Greenway, the Erie Canal trail entrance and the south waterfront. Provide wayfinding, pedestrian amenities and pathway lighting.

3. Establish pedestrian and bicycle access on Livingston Avenue bridge

4. Create a new pedestrian and cycling connection to downtown at the park’s north end through the OGS parking facility and Clinton Avenue viaduct

5. Expand the park toward the warehouse district and close Colonie Street roadway; provide a new playground

6. Provide a multi-purpose boat house (dining, museum, community space, restrooms, etc.)

7. Enhance the ponds (aesthetics, access and recreation programming)

8. Establish a perimeter walk for the North Pond

9. Provide river steps access to the River as a potential iconic element for the park

10. Establish an Iconic element eg. illuminate the Livingston Avenue Bridge

11. Restore worn turf/open space areas for multi-use

12. Improve access to the southern restrooms and re-program vacant space as bike rental concession or other park amenity; provide access to tour boats

13. Enhance the performance area for spectators and everyday park users and maintain an open stage atmosphere with visibility from the River landward

14. Enhance park connection via the Maiden Lane pedestrian bridge, provide bike access ramp on west end of bridge, and improve plaza space along Broadway