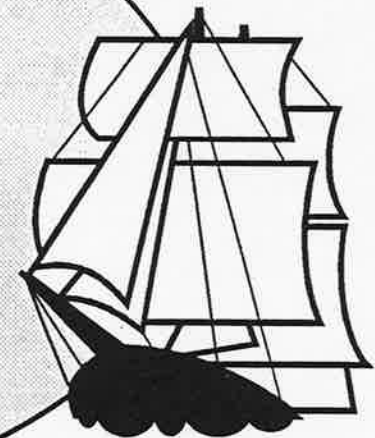


Thames Maritime
Heritage Park

**IMPLEMENTATION
PLAN**



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Thames Maritime Heritage Park Implementation Plan

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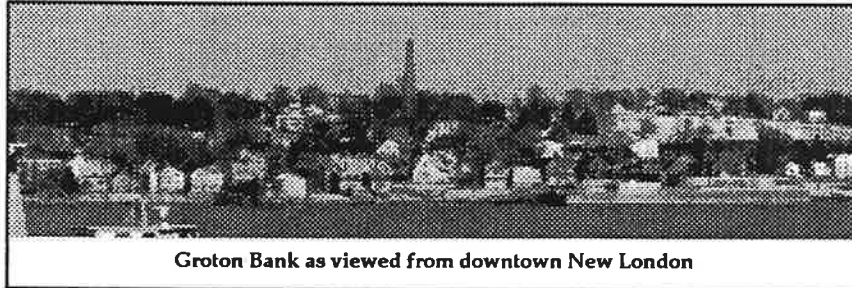
CHAPTER 1
EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

THAMES MARITIME HERITAGE PARK IMPLEMENTATION PLAN. Prepared by QL CONSULTING, INC. and The Office of Thomas J. Martin 1994.

Introduction

Background

The Thames Maritime Heritage Park is a heritage-based recreational and educational attraction encompassing a new visitor center and affiliated historical sites located in the Town and City of Groton and the City of New London, in Southeastern Connecticut. These three municipalities straddle the estuary of the Thames River at Long Island Sound.



Groton Bank as viewed from downtown New London

The Thames Maritime Heritage Park is one of six sites that comprise a proposed Connecticut heritage park system. This heritage park system is part of Connecticut State Parks, within the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation of the state's Department of Environmental Protection.

In 1987, state legislation officially established the overall state heritage park system, as a vehicle to utilize historic preservation to expand economic development opportunities. The legislation outlined general parameters for park management in partnership with the communities in which the parks are located. The legislation stipulated procedures and guidelines for designating local sites to be included in the heritage parks.

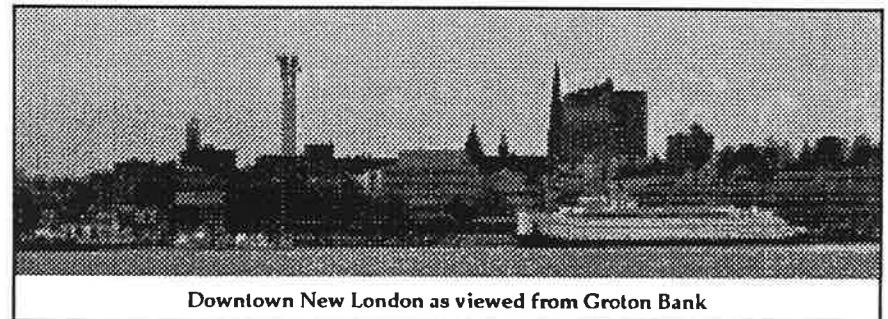
Several major milestones for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park have occurred since 1987. A bond issue set the capital funding

for a Thames Maritime Heritage Park visitor center in New London, and a boat dock on the opposite (Groton bank) side of the Thames River. A general master plan for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park was prepared in 1988/89, as part of a larger statewide study for the entire Connecticut Heritage Park System. In 1990, a ribbon-cutting ceremony by the City of New London officially created the park. In 1992, Richard Sharpe Associates, architects, under contract to the state, prepared preliminary architectural programs and design schemes for the heritage park visitor center. Since early 1992, a local heritage park Advisory Board has been meeting regularly to review initial park implementation.

These formative activities were being undertaken without any explicit guidelines for park implementation. It was in this setting that the Corporation for Regional Economic Development (CRED is an agency funded by the Connecticut Department of Economic Development) awarded a study grant to the City of New London to undertake an implementation plan for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park. The firm of QL CONSULTING, INC (Lexington, Massachusetts), in association with The Office of Thomas J. Martin (Cambridge, Massachusetts), was retained to carry out the study.

Study Purpose and Process

The Thames Heritage Park Implementation Plan provides a road map for six important strategic components of the heritage



Downtown New London as viewed from Groton Bank

Early actions to implement the Heritage Park since 1989 will affect future implementation of the park. The legislation creating the heritage park sets specific policies and procedures that are just now being put to practice. Certain initial sites have been designated to be participants in the heritage park program, but explicit roles for the sites have not been delineated; nor have the sites themselves yet come to consensus as to their appropriate role and relationship to the Park. While the state will assume early management responsibilities for the park, a long term community-based governing body has yet to be established. The people, organizations and technologies that could be resources for Heritage Park development have yet to be solicited for their commitment

The comparison of the original master plan and the situation of the heritage park today reveals a significant distinction between the current reality of the Heritage Park, and the ultimate vision for its full implementation and impact. This Implementation Plan recasts the Park from its current reality as a legislative mandate, through its initial development as a state park, and offers the possibility for an ultimate vision of the region as a National Heritage Area.

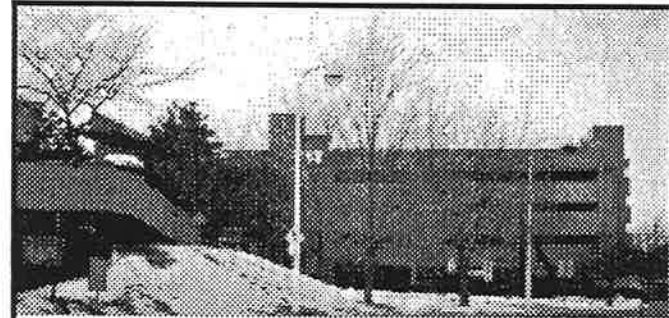
Visitor Center

" A visitor center with *sizzle* is the recommended option at this time".

Overall "Visitor Experience"

A visitor center can play many roles for the traveler. The *traditional visitor center* is a source of basic information, services, and amenities. Most highway visitor centers fall into this category. A *visitor center with "sizzle"* provides more than the basic services of a traditional center; it is designed to be a vibrant place, with staff

who can interpret the area's history and provide visitor planning services (directions, reservations, helpful hints, etc.). The "sizzle" might include interactive interpretative exhibits, multi-media presentations with compelling thematic messages, and venues for community activities (educational programming and special events). Such additional components will attract visitors who might not otherwise stop and stay in the area.



Proposed Visitor Center site in
Downtown New London, Connecticut
(South Side of Water Street Garage)

The *Visitor Center "Plus"*, is a major tourist attraction unto itself, through the addition of one or more major recreational or educational features (e.g. IMAX/OMNIMAX-type theater), or the addition of a unique feature attraction (e.g. a tall ship). The "plus" feature can make the visitor center equal to, or greater than, the historic sites of the area.

The selection of a visitor center orientation is guided by many factors, including site availability, market demand, available budget (for capital and operating expenses), local leadership and commitment, and the overall magnitude of the project itself. Given these factors, the visitor center of the Thames Maritime Heritage Park can and should be more than a traditional visitor center. However, the financial and human resources required for the Visitor

Visitor Center Interpretive Components

Within the overall concept of "Place Museum", the following Heritage Park interpretive components should be reviewed with the exhibit design firm responsible for implementation of the exhibitry in the visitor center :

Welcoming Video. Upon arrival, the visitor should pass through an informal seating area with a TV Monitor to view a 3-5 minute introductory video on the heritage park. The video should tell the visitor what the park is, how to use the visitor center facilities, and the best way to take advantage of the attractions included in the park.

Interactive Information Kiosk. This interactive touch-screen system (such as the system developed by Analysis & Technology) should be placed in close proximity to the Welcoming Video.

Topical/thematic Film. The first major interpretive component should be a multi-media (film/ slide/video, audio) presentation in a theater within the visitor center. The presentation should be approximately 10 to 20 minutes in length and should focus on one or more themes of the heritage park/region. A series of films should be produced and shown in staggered order so that the visitor will find new material when returning for repeat visits in the future.

"Time Line" Wall. This exhibit would feature a larger-than-life physical matrix of themes and time periods. The time line would be presented both verbally and graphically, interspersed with audio/video materials on those sites within the heritage park area that reflect a particular theme shown in the time line.

Model of the Estuary. Models of geographic regions can be implemented in a number of formats, including: floor insets (glassed-in for walk over or recessed for walk around); landscaped outdoor settings; or enclosed scale models (as at Mystic Seaport).

Permanent Interpretive Exhibit. The visitor center should include a non-changing permanent exhibit that addresses selected themes of the park as "bundles" (for example, whaling, shipbuilding, economy, commerce and industry, people, etc.).

Showcase Gallery. Space should be allocated for quarterly or semi-annual changing exhibits mounted by one or more "designated" collaborators (see section on "Collaborations") The Showcase Gallery would promote area sites and whet the visitors appetite to see the larger collections at the sites themselves.

Visitor Center Space Requirements

	Low	High	Average
Visitor Information	500	750	625
A&T Info System Kiosk	25	35	30
Visitor Planning	300	500	400
Visitor Services	300	500	400
Theatre	1,200	1,800	1,500
Permanent Exhibitry (Time line Wall, Estuary Model, Interpretive Exhibit)	5,000	6,000	5,500
Showcase Gallery	1,000	2,000	1,500
Classroom / Multi-purpose	300	400	350
Gift Shop	500	1,000	750
Subtotal	9,125	12,985	11,055
Support Space (45%) Offices, Circulation Toilets, Storage, etc.	4,106	5,843	4,975
TOTAL:	13,231	18,828	16,030

Within most of the current heritage park sites, professional staff resources for collaborations are extremely limited. Most have but one paid staff person — often on a part-time basis — to fulfill programming, administrative and curatorial duties. None of the heritage park designated sites has a full-time educational coordinator to work on behalf of community collaborations. Indeed, several of the “designated” park sites are not programming organizations at all (e.g. Ocean Beach Park, Ledge Lighthouse, Sub Memorial, Thames Street). Linkages with the Mystic area attractions are not as strong as their geographic proximity might suggest. The large attractions of Mystic are simply not considered part of the heritage park area; nor are the heritage park sites considered to be part of the Mystic area attractions.



1833 Robert Mills U.S. Customs House
Museum of American Maritime History

Levels of Collaborative Participation

In order to acknowledge and respect the diverse capacities of the area’s historical and cultural organizations, two classifications of participation should be included in the collaborations strategy.

Collaborators. “Collaborating” organizations would actively and directly participate with Heritage Park pro-

grams: as exhibitors at the Visitor Center Showcase Gallery, and as programmers of community educational activities sponsored by the Heritage Park.

Affiliates. “Affiliate” sites” would participate with the Heritage Park because of a thematic relationship, but, due to their limited resources, they would not participate as full active collaborators. Affiliates would be noted in park brochures, and would have markers on trail and guide maps, but would not be expected to provide resources for collaborative programming.

Roles and Responsibilities of Collaborators

In order to work effectively together, it is essential that each and every collaborating organization be committed both to the principles of collaboration as well as to the practical implementation of a collaborative strategy for the heritage park. Those organizations with the greatest available resources will be able to participate more heavily in the park’s early implementation of a collaborative strategy; as time passes and local cultural resources grow, other collaborators will join in the process more actively. In any case, depending on their respective resources, collaborators will be expected to participate to some degree in mounting, or contributing works to the changing exhibits displayed in the Showcase Gallery (see Visitor Center Strategy); in meeting regularly to set policies and plans for the park’s collaborative activities; and on a cooperative basis, in providing volunteer resources for docents, exhibit openings, receptions, community education programs, etc.

Benefits for Collaborators

In return for their willingness and ability to collaborate with the Heritage Park, the collaborator organizations should receive a number of direct and indirect benefits. Visibility in heritage park maps, signage, auto and pedestrian visitor loops, and information materials at the visitor center will increase visitation at the collabo-

Transportation

Successful heritage communities offer comprehensive, convenient, and multi-modal visitor transportation systems. Such a transportation system will include good maps, clear signage, centralized transportation services, a number of sites to visit within walking distance of drop-off points, pedestrian and auto routes, and recreational transportation components to meet visitor market demand.

Transportation services in the immediate vicinity of the proposed New London visitor center are truly comprehensive, encompassing an ample parking deck, active AMTRAK Station, several major ferry services, intercity and regional buses, and an active municipal pier featuring seasonal tour and charter boat services. The state-owned boat dock, to be constructed on the Groton side of the Thames River across from downtown New London will provide the capability to link Groton attractions with the New London transportation hub.



Transportation Center
New London, Connecticut

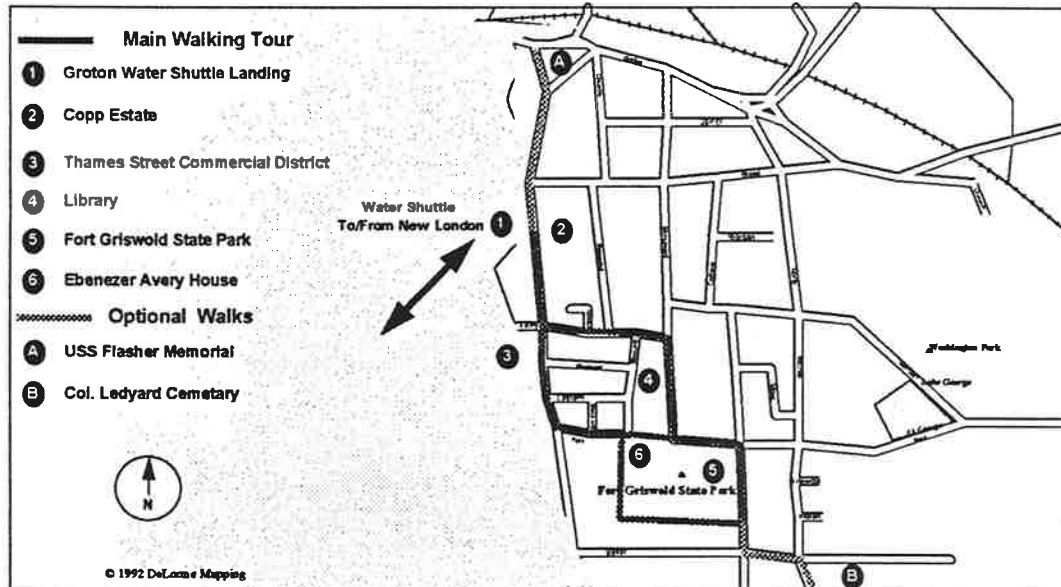
Components of the Visitor Transportation System

The transportation strategy for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park should target auto, pedestrian, and mass transit.

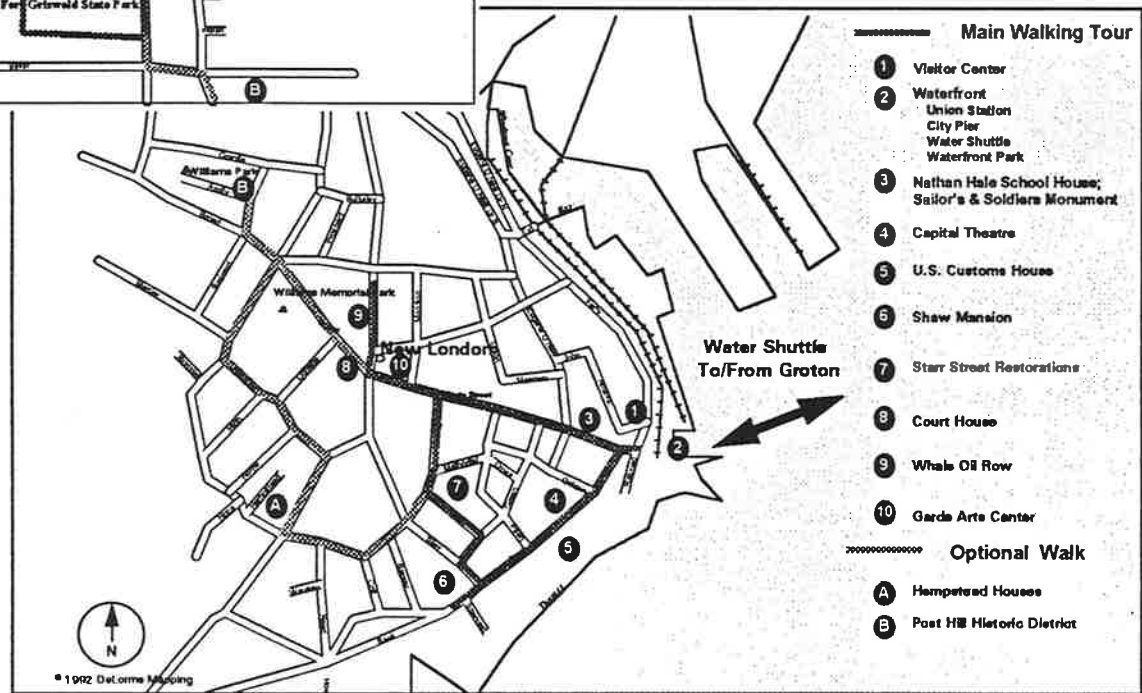
Auto, Self-Guided Tour. In the early years of the Heritage Park, the primary mode of transportation will be the automobile. Auto directional, auto route and support signs (see inset next page) will be necessary to adequately direct visitors in their cars. These signs would include a Heritage Park logo, as well as the specific information required to negotiate an auto tour route. A well-designed interpretive map will need to be developed to help auto travelers easily find their way to the sites and through the region.

The auto route shown on the following page provides for loops that could easily be expanded if additional sites are included in the Park. The Visitor Center, downtown New London, USS Nautilus Memorial, Fort Griswold, Coast Guard Academy; and Ocean Beach Park should be used to feed people into the other attractions of the Park. Many sites, such as the Nautilus Memorial and the Visitor Center, already have parking in place. Other sites, such as Fort Griswold and the Coast Guard Academy, may have parking constraints that will need to be addressed as the park visitation expands.

Groton Pedestrian Loop



New London Pedestrian Loop



Mass Transit (Surface). The site of the Visitor Center in New London is currently where the mass transit systems of the region converge, including the AMTRAK Station, Cross-Town Ferry, inter- and intra-city buses. This provides a unique opportunity for linking into these systems. The original plan called for a surface bus shuttle between sites, and this is still the long-term objective of the plan when critical mass of visitation (i.e. sufficient market demand) is achieved.

Attractions Development

"The best available attractions development option in the immediate future ... is to build on current development plans for the visitor center. If and when funds become available, more attractions "mass" can be added. The designation as "National Heritage Area" would add significant attraction development resources to the region".

Mass of Attraction

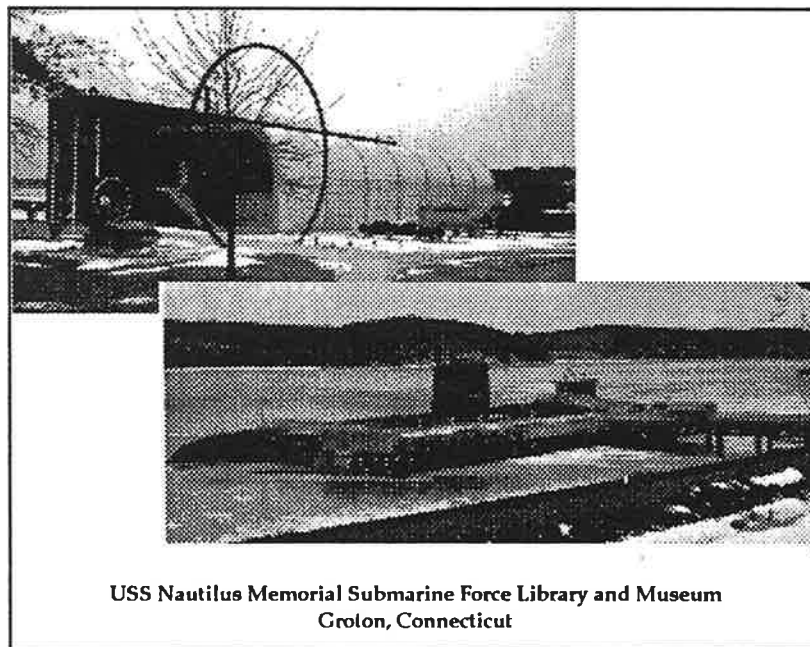
A major objective of the Heritage Park Implementation Plan was to assess the "critical mass of attraction" that would be necessary to draw a substantial number of additional visitors to the region. Expanding the mass of attraction tends to expand visitation across the full spectrum of attractions as illustrated on the following page. The current immediate physical setting of the Thames Maritime Heritage Park does not have a pre-existing critical mass of attraction; in short, more is needed.

Anchor Attraction. Mass of attraction can be created by a large-scale attraction within the immediate proximity of the park. There is no attraction currently large enough and nearby enough to be the visitation "anchor" for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park. The USS Nautilus Memorial, the largest year-round cultural attraction in the immediate area (photos at right), is relatively remote to the other park sites, and accessible only by automobile. The large attractions in Mystic (Marinelife Aquarium and Seaport) and Ledyard (Foxwoods Casino, proposed museums, etc.) are too far away to be considered part of the heritage park. Of the other existing area sites, most have too small visitation and organizational

resources to fulfill the role of anchor.

Collaborations. Several organizations working together can sometimes create attractions "mass". Collaborations are starting to appear between and among the arts, cultural, and historic organizations of the Thames Heritage Park area. Perhaps these seminal efforts will grow into strong and ongoing programming opportunities; however, at the present time, without a formalized collaborative mechanism to bring these groups together, the attractions have no unified voice or direction, and cannot develop cohesive programming or marketing opportunities collectively.

National Park Service Presence. There is a clear and obvious benefit to the involvement of the National Park Service in a heritage community (note Lowell, Boston, and Salem, Massachusetts). Given the rich history and wealth of historical resources of the



USS Nautilus Memorial Submarine Force Library and Museum
Groton, Connecticut

Long Term Attractions Development Strategy: National Heritage Area Designation

For the long term attractions development strategy, the heritage park could become a major attraction in its own right, but not without major public funding. The state may be one source for this funding, but state funding alone will not provide the organizational stability and infrastructure that major attractions require. In this regard, it is suggested that the Thames Maritime Heritage Park be positioned for designation by the National Park Service (NPS) as a National Heritage Area. The federal government, through the National Park Service, has proposed new resources to support heritage areas throughout the nation. The designation of the Thames Maritime Heritage Park as a "National Heritage Area" would add significant attraction development resources to the region.

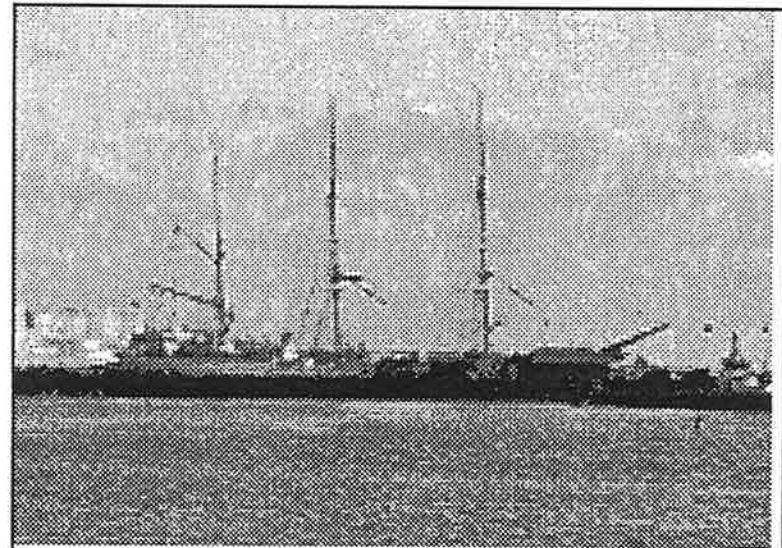
The National Park Service (NPS), which itself has been conserving, preserving and interpreting historic sites and cultural resources for many years is now examining the emerging field of "heritage areas". Heritage areas distinguish themselves by:

- encompassing multiple sites with common or related interpreted themes;
- blending many disciplines relating to cultural conservation;
- joining together disparate professional interests and community objectives: historic preservation and conservation, economic development, education, recreation and tourism; and
- a strong orientation to partnership management and governance, by which local and state public and private interests work in collaboration with the NPS to bring all elements of the heritage area into a cohesive community development focus.

"National Heritage Area" is a concept of federal designation of (and involvement in) communities and regions where signifi-

cant historic, cultural and natural resources can be comprehensively interpreted and preserved. The area will be characterized by a "critical mass" of cultural resources (organizations, sites, events, traditions, customs, history, people, etc.), as well as a critical mass of community involvement (from the public and the private sector at state and local levels).

National Heritage Area draft federal legislation proposes that a select number of communities and regions will be eligible for research funds to determine if the community should be designated as a National Heritage Area, as well as substantial implementation funds over multiple years to operate a national heritage area locally. The Thames Maritime Heritage Park sets the stage to meet the criteria for eligibility that has been proposed for the National Heritage Areas initiative.



**Tall Ship U.S.S. Eagle
at Berth in New London**

Strategy Components for Promotion and Marketing

Visitor Center On-Site Promotional Activities

Personal contact with State Park Rangers
 Southeastern Connecticut Tourism District
 Printed Media
 A&T Interactive kiosk
 Interpretive displays (e.g., Estuary Model)

Signage

Interpretive Information
 Directions
 Consistent Design
 Focus on "Designated Sites"

Printed Brochure (State Parks) for Heritage Park

Print Media (Brochure) at all sites within the Heritage Park

Comprehensive Map

Auto tour
 Walking Trails
 Area Hospitality, Services, Retail, etc.

Utilize Existing Fulfillment/Distribution Channels:

Southeastern Connecticut Tourism District
 Mystic Coast & Country
 State Visitor Centers
 Other State Parks in CT
 Regional/Local Tourism Agencies and Chambers

Build a working relationship with Public/Private Tourism Agencies

Develop Promotional Campaign(s) with SE CT Tourism District

Packaged Programs
 Events-based (festivals, holiday-time, etc.)
 Cross-selling attractions Regional Attractions "Passport")

Roles and Responsibilities for Promotion and Marketing

Entity	Functions
Visitor Center	Visitor Center Personnel Exhibits News Articles
Heritage Park Collaborators/ Sites	Site Brochures Site Personnel Passport Promotion
SE CT Tourism District	Area Guides Advertising Visitor Center Personnel
State Parks	Interpretive Guide Interpretive Map
State DOT	Highway Signage State Maps Highway Visitor Centers
State Department of Commerce	Television Advertising Vacation Guide Pre-planned Tours Telephone Response Familiarization Trips
Mystic C & C	Television Advertising Print Advertising Area Guide A&T Kiosk Joint Promotions w/ Travel Industry
Travel Industry	Joint Promotions with Mystic C & C Distribute Brochures Distribute Maps

- ◆ tourism interests (attractions, marketing, hospitality, etc.), and
- ◆ educational community (administrators, parents, teachers, students, etc.).

Current Management Environment

The current environment of park management is distinguished by the following characteristics:

Operational Guidelines. The State Legislation that created the Heritage Park is the only source to provide direction for the management of the park. The legislation is extremely general and provides no explicit guidelines. In short, the guidelines must be created.

Human Resources: Governance, Staffing and Volunteers. The stewardship of the park is currently vested in multiple sources. Clear and explicit lines of authority, responsibility, and accountability need to be drawn.

Management Strategy

The following actions should be included in the management strategy for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park:

Visitor Center Design and Construction. The heritage park is in need of a tangible "result" that would get the community enthusiastic about, and involved with the project. The most immediate available result is the design, construction, and grand opening of the Visitor Center. This component of the Heritage park should proceed without delay.

Visitor Center Operations. Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Bureau of State Parks will be the initial operating agency for the Heritage Park, and will assume a large initial role in operating the Visitor Center. Initial staff should

be hired well before the grand opening. If possible, an existing site should be identified to serve as an interim office and Visitor Center prior to the grand opening of the new facility. Later on, the state should work with a locally-based "Friends of..." group to help staff and program the center and its community programs.

Short Term Governance. In the immediate term, the Heritage Park leadership should work with the Southeastern Connecticut Tourism District (SECTD) and other area organizations and agencies to identify and secure supplemental staff/volunteer support that may be needed to complement DEP personnel.

Long Term Governance. In the long run, the heritage park will be governed and operated by an entity that brings all stakeholders – state and local – actively and effectively into the management equation. Efforts should begin immediately to create the "*Thames Heritage Partnership Commission*" (a description follows). A long term organizational plan should be prepared to establish a formal mission statement for the Park, and define the role and responsibilities, representation and composition of its governing body. As soon as possible, local leadership behind current heritage park activity (i.e. the City of New London, the City and Town of Groton, and State Parks) should begin the process of:

- ◆ defining the new commission,
- ◆ advocating for the state legislation required to formally create and authorize it, and
- ◆ recruiting local leaders to participate actively as members in it.

Thames Heritage Partnership Commission

The Thames Heritage Partnership Commission would be a new entity to steward the Heritage Park components. Specifically, the Commission would address operational and policy-level issues that cut across different functional areas (i.e. no other single entity can handle the given issue otherwise). These issues include:

Long-term Strategy

“... regardless of the outcome, the process itself to secure federal designation as a National Historic Area will expand the park’s capacity, stability, and impact on the region”.

This Implementation Plan provides a road map in each of the key strategic aspects of the Thames Maritime Heritage Park (visitor center and interpretive orientation, collaborations, transportation, management, attractions development, and tourism promotion). The Implementation Plan also addresses a question that was posed at the beginning of the study process by the State of Connecticut, the City and Town of Groton and the City of New London, namely:

What would it take to maximize the economic impact of the Heritage Park on the region by making it a “major” attraction, beyond what we have planned so far?

The Plan suggests that the resources – both financial and human – are not currently in place to embark on a major attractions development effort as part of immediate heritage park implementation. Rather, the plan suggests that the park proceed to design and construct an exciting visitor center “with sizzle” on the New London side of the river, and a boat dock on the Groton side. The plan outlines other strategies to organize the leadership of the region (cultural and civic) to steward the park, and to maximize the impacts that can be accomplished at such a level of development.

For the long term, while additional in-state resources may

become available to enlarge the scope and magnitude of the heritage park, a far larger opportunity lies in the positioning of this region as a designated National Heritage Area.

One of the major lessons learned from other heritage communities is that when the National Park Service (NPS) is present in such communities, the resources, stability and clout that are necessary for heritage development are usually also present. Furthermore, because the financial and physical resources provided by the Park Service are generally not otherwise available, NPS involvement, can create new and potentially dramatic local economic impact.

In the past, the NPS has generally not relied on the participation of local resources to carry its projects forward. This is one federal agency that typically has brought its own funds, people, and facilities to make a project work. Once committed to a project, the Park Service tends to stay with it for the long haul (Lowell and Salem, Massachusetts are good examples of NPS efforts that have survived through difficult local conditions). As an important side benefit, the Park Service operates with impeccable standards of quality that tend to have dramatic quality-of-life impacts on local communities.

The involvement of the National Park Service in a community or region requires extensive prior effort. The local area establishes its credibility by building sound organizational structures and by demonstrating community participation in existing heritage programs and projects. It is therefore critical to implement the “immediate next steps” outlined in this plan. These activities will respond to federal guidelines that require evidence of a high degree of participation by state and local community stakeholders. Serious collaborative discussions between and among the local municipalities, the state, and community business and civic leaders will show broad based involvement. While the current Heritage Park Advisory Board and its committees have met regularly, these meetings cannot be construed as broad-based participation of community leaders.