

**CHAPTER 2**  
**REVISITING THE**  
**ORIGINAL PLAN**

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

## Chapter Review

For this study, we reviewed the original conceptual plan for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park that was first developed in 1988/89 as a part of a larger seminal study for the entire Connecticut Heritage Park System. In this chapter, we assess the degree to which the original study pertains today, including its intended nature and magnitude, and the physical implementation of the Visitor Center. We note both the similarities and differences that have taken place in the external environment, as well as the effects resulting from implementation of the Park since 1988/89. We make special note of impacts resulting from changes in the region's expanding tourism infrastructure. We conclude with a clear distinction between the current reality of the Park as defined by the legislation that was enacted in 1987, the implementation of the state park that is planned for the immediate future, and the ultimate vision of the Park as a national heritage area.

## Summary Conclusion About the Original Plan as it Pertains Today

Following a thorough review of the Master Plan that was originally prepared for the Thames Maritime Heritage Park in 1988/89, we have drawn the following overall conclusion:

The basic plan is sound. Most of the resources identified in 1988/89 still exist and are involved in support of the project (e.g. state bond funding for construction, State Parks operating support, municipalities involved in leadership roles, etc.). The Heritage Park will encompass multiple sites, as originally proposed. All program components originally proposed still pertain. Although the Visitor Center is not on the waterfront as originally proposed, its current proposed location next to the Water Street garage is in close proximity to the water.

However... changes in the environment and the way the project is being implemented have established a new base line characterized by certain conditions, as described in the balance of this chapter.

The balance of this chapter reviews the similarities and key differences that have transpired since 1988/89. We indicate where and how the changes have re-shaped the "base line" from which this Implementation Plan has been prepared.

## Significant *Similarities* in the Park's External Environment

The following aspects of the park and its regional setting remain substantially the same as when the Park Master Plan was first developed in 1988/89:

- No major new maritime or cultural attractions have been added to the local mix of attractions.
- No additional major community celebrations, events or festivals have been added to the mix of community activities.
- Connecticut Department of Environmental Planning (DEP) is the lead agency for Park development and operations.
- The project area (i.e. its general physical boundaries) have not been changed.
- Capital Theatre on Bank Street has not been restored.
- There is no usable state-owned boat landing on the Groton side of the river, although efforts are now underway to finalize a site.
- The transportation infrastructure/access is fundamentally the same.
- Federal involvement in the attractions of the region has not increased, and there is still no federal involvement in the Heritage Park itself.
- There is no new local organizational mechanism that promotes cultural/heritage development in the region.
- The stock of hospitality and visitor services facilities in Groton and New London remains relatively unchanged.

## Significant *Differences* in the Park's External Environment

The following aspects of the park and its regional setting are new or have substantially changed since the Park Master Plan was first developed in 1988/89:

**People and Personalities.** The municipalities of Groton and New London now have appointed senior staff members who are associated with and actively working toward development of the Park.

**Defense Reduction Impacts.** Announced federal defense cutbacks have led to dramatic changes in the local economic environment. The presence of the Navy at the Sub Base and at NUWC is changing, as is the private employment situation at major defense contractors such as Electric Boat. The economic conversion study prepared in 1990 by Arthur D. Little, Inc. suggested a number of possibilities for economic development that have become community priorities (including the Thames Maritime Heritage Park).

**New London R/UDAT Study.** This urban planning study in mid-1989 proposed a number of recommendations regarding physical improvement of New London's central business district, several of which have been implemented (see below).

**Beautification, Streetscaping, and Other Physical Improvements.** Captains Walk is now closed, and State Street has been re-opened to traffic. Thames Street has undergone street and curb improvements. The City of New London has acquired the waterfront parcel next to City Pier. The South Water Street streetscaping program has been completed in New London. The Lena Building (on State Street in New London) has been rehabilitated.

**Significant *Differences* in the Park's External Environment  
(continued)**

**Attractions Planning and Tourism Development Activities. As follows:**

**Master planning at the Aquarium, Seaport, and Garde Arts Center.**

**The structure and funding of State Tourism Districts has changed.**

**Mystic Coast & Country becoming a strong tourism marketing force.**

**Development at the Mashantucket Pequot Reservation**

**(Foxwoods Casino, Indian Museum, Resort Development).**

**Feasibility study of the Sea Quest (formerly Ocean World) proposal.**

**A & T Interactive Technology is implementing touch-screen info kiosks.**

**Williams Park Historic District is on the National Register.**

**Major cultural resources convening as an "Arts Alliance".**

**Significant changes in several attractions. As follows:**

**Foxwoods casino has become a major player in the region's economy.**

**Garde Arts Center has become a performing arts leader.**

**Thames Science Center has established a satellite operation in Newport while it cuts back its operations in New London.**

**Ocean Beach continues to re-develop, but not a full build-out.**

**Ledge Lighthouse restoration process has begun (de-salination and sanitation facilities).**

**Copp Estate on Thames Street in Groton has been acquired by the Antiquarian & Landmarks Society.**

## Significant *Differences* as a Result of Park Implementation Since 1988/89

The following changes have occurred as a result of Heritage Park implementation since the 1988/89 Master Plan was developed:

Legislation. Sites in New London and Groton have been "designated" (the original plan did not propose site designation.). A citizens Advisory Board has been mandated.

Early Action and Milestones. As follows:

Legislation creates the Heritage Park.

State bonding passes for visitor center design, exhibits, and construction.

The state and municipalities officially "cut the ribbon" to dedicate/open the park.

Municipalities approve local sites and appoint advisory board members.

Advisory Board meets monthly.

Advisory Board committees working and active.

Visitor Center site selected next to Water Street garage;

*Not* on immediate waterfront as originally proposed.

Richard Sharpe Associates selected as visitor center architect.

Advisory Board appointed and meeting (open to the public).

## **Impact on the Park Resulting from Changes in the Region's Tourism Infrastructure**

**Changes in the region's economy are motivating increased tourism planning and implementation in the area. Re-invigoration of the tourism industry of Southeastern Connecticut is evidenced by:**

**Mystic Coast & Country's successful targeted (metro New York City) marketing program .**

**Increased revenue for the Southeastern Connecticut Tourism District.**

**A major new node of regional visitor activity at the Foxwoods Casino.**

**Many attractions are undertaking master planning and expect to expand and/or re-position themselves in the near term. The planning grants awarded to several major attractions by the Corporation for Regional Economic Development (C-RED) reflect this activity. Master planning efforts at the Coast Guard Academy may change the magnitude of attractions there, and the Nautilus Memorial is considering the need to expand.**

**Sea Quest (formerly Ocean World) has received support to conduct a feasibility study.**

**The increasing importance of tourism to the region since the original Heritage Park Master Plan was prepared means a potentially larger tourism role for the Heritage Park than was originally anticipated.**



## Summary Issues Arising from Park Implementation Since 1989

Early actions to implement the Heritage Park since 1989 have given rise to considerations that must now be addressed in the Implementation Plan:

**Visitor Center Development.** Location of and funding for the visitor center building and exhibits are now set. It is proceeding subject to an approved final plan for its design, program and site development.

**"Designated" Collaborators.** By legislation, certain sites have been designated to be participants in the heritage park program. However, the role of the sites has not been delineated, and the sites themselves are not yet in agreement as to their appropriate role and relationship to the Park.

**Advisory Board Role.** Even though the Heritage Park Advisory Board and its committees are up and running, the legislation that mandated this body provides no explicit definition of its governing authority or role.

**Resource Development.** Many new people, organizations and technologies have emerged as possible resources for Heritage Park development. Unfortunately, most of these opportunities have yet to be tapped. Federal cutback impacts may actually help generate federal economic adjustment resources.

## Conclusion

The ideal implementation plan will start with an honest assessment of the current reality and move toward the creation of an ultimate vision. The core of the plan will then address the actions and strategies needed get from the *current reality* to an *ultimate vision*.

Our 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. Without making this distinction absolutely clear, there can be no unified and cohesive implementation plan.

The Implementation Plan in this report is a road map for sequential, progressive development of the Thames Maritime Heritage Park. As shown on the following diagram, the 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.

# Implementation Plan

**Phase 1  
Legislative  
Mandate**

**Phase 2  
Early Implementation  
State Heritage Park**

**Phase 3  
Fully Developed  
National Heritage Area**

**Ultimate Vision**

**Current Reality**

**A State Park**  
**A Place**  
**A Building**  
**Personnel**  
**"Another attraction  
like any other"**  
**Advisory Board**  
**Designated "sites"**

**Immediate Next Steps**

**Strategic**  
Attractions development  
Tourism  
Transportation  
Interpretation  
Collaborations  
Mgmt/ Governance  
Funding and Financing  
Phasing

**Contextual**  
Physical Setting  
Community Leadership  
Industry Standards  
Economy/marketplace

**Distinct Regional Identity**  
**Clear themes**  
**Mass of attraction**  
**Major attraction**  
**Defined role and responsibility  
for "designated sites"**  
**Collaborations among local orgs**  
**Full transportation system**  
**Significant Visitation**  
**Governing Board of leaders**  
**Funding**  
**Identifiable economic impact**