

Thames River Heritage Park



The Thames River Estuary has been home to a living, working waterfront since before the American Revolution. Residential and commercial buildings bear witness to the central role of the region in the New England whaling industry, while dry docks and cranes testify to the continuing presence of shipbuilding and the center of American submarine design, construction and naval operations. Massive forts once guarded the shore, while the Coast Guard trains today's coastal defenders on the river and the coast. Heritage is a vital part of daily life along the Thames.

The concept for a **Thames River Heritage Park** to celebrate the rich and continuous engagement between Groton, New London and the Thames River has been around for more than 50 years. As early as 1966, planners at the Southeastern Connecticut Regional Planning Agency saw the potential in such a park to highlight the unique culture of the area, encourage heritage tourism, and produce economic development for the region.

In 1987, the Connecticut Legislature established a statewide heritage park system, identifying the Thames Estuary as the most promising area in the state for such a park, and designating it as a model site. In the ensuing 20 years, with more than \$2 million in state funds invested in the park project, much was accomplished, but full implementation was not achieved. By 2005 the effort faded away.

Today, much of the original rationale for developing the park remains compelling, and the major impediments to completion have disappeared. In fact, with the

scheduled arrival of the National Coast Guard Museum to downtown New London in 2017 projected to bring as many as 500,000 visitors per year to the Thames region, now is a perfect time to reactivate and complete the park project.

Unlike a conventional state park with a fixed boundary and finite resources, the Thames River Heritage Park will draw together historical and contemporary sites, communities and institutions on both sides of the Thames, providing a unified framework within which visitors may experience the Thames region's excellent existing attractions. Four anchors—Fort Trumbull State Park, Fort Griswold Battlefield State Park, the Submarine Force Museum, and soon the National Coast Guard Museum—will provide the necessary visitor services for the park. The anchors will be tied together by new physical connections, including a water taxi system that will allow visitors to experience the Thames River itself as an attraction while moving between sites.

At each anchor site, strengthened pedestrian and bicycle linkages and clear signage will better connect to smaller heritage attractions like the Avery-Copp House or Shaw Mansion, and to restaurants, shopping and historic districts in Groton and New London. Mobile technology will increase the availability of information and interpretation throughout the Park and allow for the coordination of schedules and events between participating attractions.

The Thames River Heritage Park has the potential to make the region as a whole greater than the sum of its individual parts. At once enriching each of the local partners by making it part of a larger network, the park will help define the region's cultural identity, encourage sustainable tourism, and with minimal investment produce a substantial regional economic impact.

For more information on the status of the Thames River Heritage Park project, please visit averycopp-house.org/thames.

Planning for the Thames River Heritage Park has been supported by the Avery-Copp House in Groton, Connecticut and prepared by the Yale Urban Design Workshop (YUDW), a community design center affiliated with the Yale University School of Architecture in New Haven, Connecticut. The current Thames River Heritage Park Plan, developed in deep consultation with local and state representatives and officials, citizens and stakeholders is now in final preparation by the YUDW and will present a new strategy for the establishment of the Heritage Park. All images and text are © 2014, Yale Urban Design Workshop, all rights reserved. For more information, visit architecture.yale.edu/udw.





NEW LONDON CONNECTICUT GROTON

The Thames region, including Groton and New London, is home to an extraordinary array of heritage sites and attractions and an active and vibrant working waterfront. In one or two days, visitors can see the site of a revolutionary war battle at the Fort Griswold Battlefield State Park,

board the world's first nuclear submarine, the *USS Nautilus* at the Submarine Force Museum, experience 19th century life at the Avery-Copp House or learn about the region's important maritime history at the Custom House Museum and Shaw Mansion. Visitors and residents alike will be able to experience the

region in a new way, taking a ride on the water taxi that makes the river itself an attraction – riders will experience the estuary's stunning natural and man-made geography as they move from site to site, leaving their cars behind.

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