

A Strategic Plan for the Wawayanda Creek
Village of Warwick
New York

A Strategic Plan for the Wawayanda Creek

Presented to:

The Village of Warwick
Orange County, New York

Mayor Michael Newhard

&

Village Trustees:

Barry Cheney

William Iurato

William Lindberg

George McManus

Acknowledgements

Our deep appreciation for all the support, inspiration and guidance from Mayor Michael Newhard and the Village of Warwick Trustees

Special thanks to Commissioner David Church for the support of the Orange County Department of Planning

We are grateful for the generosity of the following people who contributed their time, knowledge and expertise:

- Sue Gardner, Albert Wisner Public Library
- Richard Hull, Warwick Historical Society
- Matthew Ryan, Orange County Department of Planning
- Kevin Sumner, Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District
- David Washburn, REIS Inc.

Our work on this plan included outreach to many individuals, community groups and organizations in the Village of Warwick and the larger Warwick community. We are grateful for their interest and willingness to help with this complex endeavor. We met with representatives of organizations including Sustainable Warwick, Warwick in Bloom, Warwick Conservancy, Warwick Merchant’s Guild, Warwick Historical Society, the Warwick Valley Central School District, and the Warwick Valley Gardeners.

Our thanks to the following people who generously contributed their talent, ideas and enthusiasm:

- Raymond Bryant, Maureen Charde, Everett Cox, Kate Eicher, Linda Fay, Sharon Green, Peter Lyons Hall, George Hayes, Mike Holt, Howard Horowitz, Geoff Howard, Jo Hull, Richard Hull, Deb Iurato, Michael Johndrow, Eric Karlin, Ken Kolwicz, Deborah Krol, Dan Mack, Jane Madis, Jean May, Andy McLaughlin, Susan Metzger, Patti O’Connor, Eileen Patterson, Bill Olsen, Beth Roessler, Jo-Ann Rome, Annette Sanchez, Edward Sattler, Bill Schmick , Robert Schmick, Mary Beth Schlichting, Deborah Sweeton, Megan Tennermann, Jason Touw, Larry Wheelock, Herb Wolff

Table of Contents

Presentation 3

Acknowledgements..... 4

Table of Contents 5

Mission & Introduction..... 6

Comprehensive Plan 6

Study Area Description 6

Study Area Map..... 7

History.....8–10

1903 Historical Map..... 11

Existing Conditions and Challenges 12

Assets & Opportunities..... 13

Areas of Interest-General..... 14

Primary Corridor Map..... 15

Area of Interest ‘A’ Mitchel Mall 16–17

Area of Interest ‘B’ Railroad Green..... 18–19

Area of Interest ‘C’ South Street Parking Area..... 20–21

Area of Interest ‘D’ Bank Parking Area 22–23

Area of Interest ‘E’ Old Ice Pond Site..... 24–25

Area of Interest ‘F’ Memorial Park 26–27

Watershed & Water Quality..... 28–31

Ecology & Natural History 32–39

Strategies: Landscape Improvements 40–43

Strategies: Landscape Maintenance 44

Strategies: Community Connections..... 45

Wayfinding & Interpretive Signage..... 45

Railroad Right-of-Way..... 45

Railroad Heritage Corridor 45–46

Assembling Pedestrian Connections 46

Bridges and Village Style..... 46

Community Advocacy..... 46

Artist’s Rendering: South Street Linear Park..... 47

Executive Summary..... 48

Appendix ‘A’ - Grants & Technical Assistance 49

Appendix ‘B’ - Maintenance Recommendations..... 50

Appendix ‘C’ - Ecologist’s Survey 51–54

End Notes 55

Prepared By:

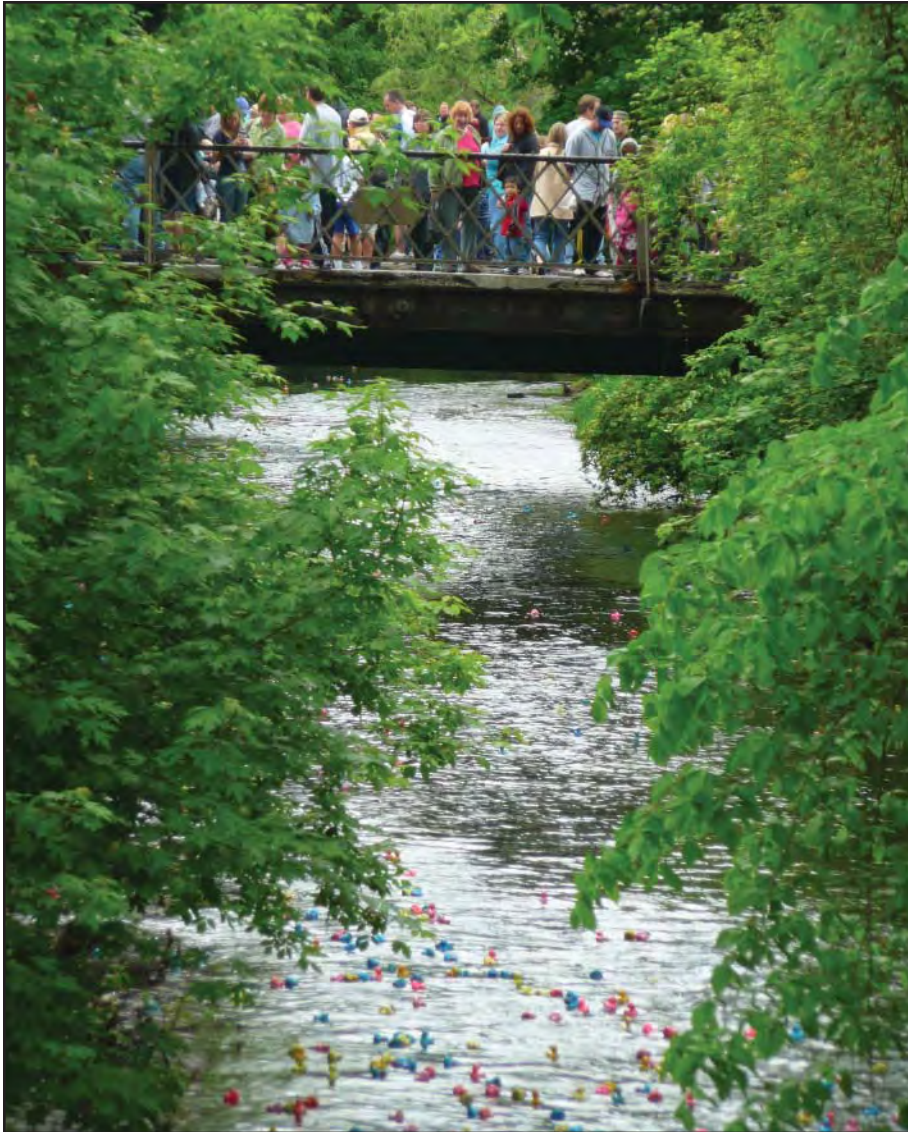


PO Box 778 Grahamsville, NY 12740
tel: 845-985-0202
email: bzt@restainodesign.com
web: www.restainodesign.com

Team Members:

Barbara Restaino, Registered Landscape Architect, LEED AP
Simon Gruber, Consulting Environmental Planner
Spider Barbour, Ecological Consultant
Sven Hoeger, Creative Habitats
David Munford, Graphic Artist

March 17, 2012



Mission

The mission of this study is to present a concrete, creative course of action for revitalizing the corridor of the Wawayanda Creek that flows through the heart of the Village of Warwick.

Introduction

The Village of Warwick is a vibrant and visually attractive community within Orange County that has retained much of its historic small village character and strives to keep its compact center of small shops, restaurants and pedestrian friendly businesses intact. Even so, the Wawayanda Creek, which has had an influence on the Village’s original physical development, is a neglected natural and community asset. This Strategic Plan addresses some of the challenges posed to integrating portions of the Creek into the Village fabric as well as exploring its potential as a visual and ecological resource and methods of enhancing these attributes.

Village Comprehensive Plan & Central Place Documents

This Strategic Plan is a natural progression following the recommendations put forth in the Village of Warwick’s Comprehensive Plan of January 2004, and that furthermore incorporates the Central Place Strategy that was prepared for the Village in 2000.

The Central Place Strategy lists the Wawayanda Creek as an underutilized open space and recommends creation of a “linear trail to enhance pedestrian movement to and within the downtown”.¹ During the study, a charette was conducted to elicit the community’s vision for the future of the Village. The Wawayanda Creek corridor was highlighted as an important open space area to be restored, enhanced and to be made more readily accessible, although its existing character as a public space was rated low compared to other Village public spaces.

Furthermore the charette results showed a public desire to emphasize the Village’s pedestrian friendly environment and include amenities such as street trees, plantings, benches, attractive signage and historic lights in

future projects. These preferences apply to this strategic plan. The Village of Warwick Comprehensive Plan lists the Wawayanda Creek study and landscape improvements as a priority, emphasizes the Village’s pride in being a walkable community and reiterates its concern with design standards and promoting Village historic vernacular style in streetscapes. In the Parks and Recreation Plan section of the Village of Warwick Comprehensive Plan, it states:

“This stream remains an unappreciated yet vital environmental feature in the Village. The Creek corridor itself can tell much about the history of Warwick. Importantly, the Creek could become an attractive addition to the downtown business area if, in the area of the South Street Parking Lot, the stream was cleaned and the banks landscaped. The Creek also provides an immediate potential link between the downtown and other important features ...”²

Study Area Description

For the purposes of this Strategic Plan, the core study area focuses on the Wawayanda Creek corridor within the important central business district of the Village of Warwick that developed adjacent to it from Elm Street on the West, to Forester Avenue on the East as well as the contiguous Village lands that the Creek flows through, most specifically the 56 acre Memorial Park. The two important tributaries of the Wawayanda Creek that join the Creek within the study area, Mistucky Creek and Witch’s Brook, and ancillary tributaries, will be addressed but in much less detail. The formal study area extends 25 feet from the top of bank and includes all adjacent Village lands; however the strategic plan includes examination of linkages, synergies and other community development efforts to form a holistic picture of the role and potential of the Wawayanda Creek within the Village.



WAWAYANDA CREEK PRIMARY CORRIDOR - STUDY AREA
VILLAGE OF WARWICK, NEW YORK



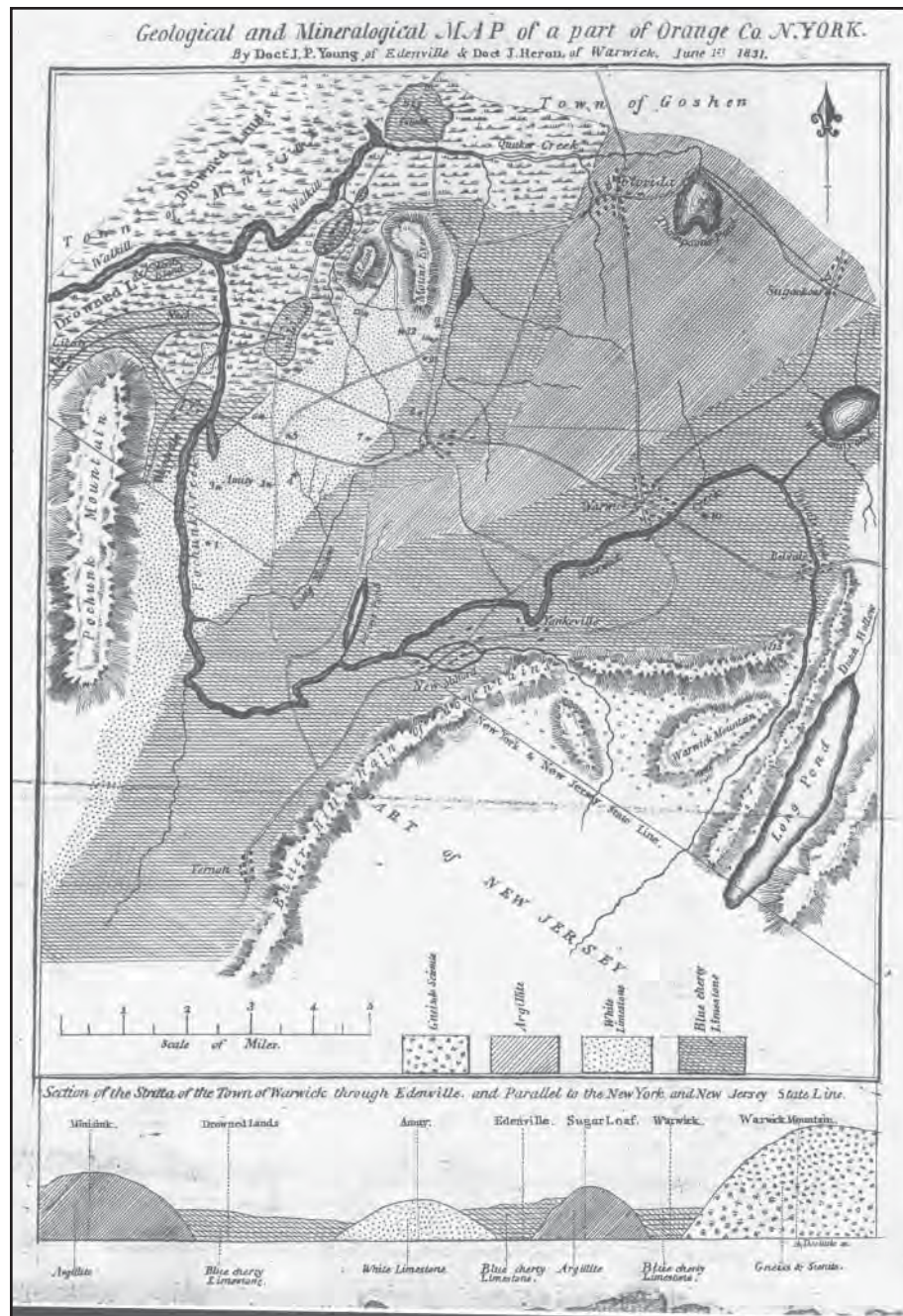


Figure 1
1831 Geological and Mineralogical Map by J. P. Young and J. Heron

History

Although sometimes obscured by current land use, the Wawayanda Creek with its tributaries is the natural water course that first attracted humans and shaped the development of the area that is now known as the Village of Warwick. Archeological evidence shows that humans had a presence in the Warwick Valley area for 12,000 years and had established permanent settlements for about 2,000 years before the Europeans settled in the region according to Dr. Richard W. Hull in his *Short History of the Warwick Valley*. He describes the richness of the area in natural water resources: "The native population benefited from the plentiful springs of fresh water and the Wawayanda Creek which teemed with fish and fowl..."³

The Wawayanda Creek corridor became part of the hunting and trading routes that linked the Hudson and Delaware Rivers. This foot path, known as the Wawayanda Path, later became the Kings Highway in colonial times and is part of the present day local road system.

The path along the Wawayanda Creek is described on the *Warwick Valley in 1805 Map* showing the location of the Village of the Mistucky Indians (a local settlement of the Minsi Tribe, a branch of the Leni Lenape) on the tributary of that name just south of the Village, whose Chief, Chuckhass,

signed the deed for lands covered by the Wawayanda Patent in 1703. This map also shows the northern tributary, Witch's Brook that joins the Wawayanda from the north and written on the map by Mrs. Vanduzer, the first state appointed local historian is: "where lived Penelope believed to be a witch, about 1800-1856".⁴

These early patents were a form of land speculation involving large tracts of wild lands and passed from one grantee to the next, sometimes being declared invalid. The lands now containing the Village and a good portion of the stream corridor were granted for a time to Benjamin Aske and ran from Wickham Lake on the east to the Sidney H. Sanford farm on the west. He named the parcel Warwick and began selling off portions to the first European settlers.

Wawayanda Creek is called Warwick Creek interchangeably on various early maps and the appellation used appears to be the preference of the map maker. There have been several entertaining stories over the origination of the name Wawayanda but the most probable source is from the Native American root word Wawai or Waway meaning "winding around many times".⁵ It is a fitting description for the circuitous route of the Creek as it flows from Wickham Lake through the Village and then south to New Jersey and snakes back again in a northerly direction to join the Wallkill



Figure 2
Bridge on the Wawayanda River by Jasper Francis Cropsey, 1882

in New York. The early map pictured in Figure 1 illustrates the wandering nature of the creek as well as the various naming conventions. It is interesting to note the beginning of the Creek's tributary (now called Long House Creek) originates far into New Jersey before it joins the major stream. The area called 'Drowned Lands' is now the black dirt farming country at Pine Island.

One of the most descriptive historical accounts of the Wawayanda Creek is by Eliza Benedict Hornby in her book of local Warwick history and lore: *Under Old Roof Trees* published in 1908. In a chapter exclusively written about the Wawayanda Creek, she reveals aspects of the Creek and the community that grew around it that can either be noted as a rich history or extracted as information that might be relevant to a more complete understanding of the Creek and possibly useful for its restoration. She describes the Creek during the early 19th century as a bucolic stream with an abundance of suckers and eels that delighted young fishermen; and furthermore as a site for chilly baptisms, fine swimming, exuberant sheep washings and early industry such as mills.

Near the Main Street bridge (Oakland Avenue) there was a fulling mill, a process of cleaning woolen fabric whose proprietor, Ariel Chase, looked after the tollgate that stood by the mill.⁶

In 1828, Mr. Frederick Dolson erected a dam and grist mill on the Wawayanda backing-up water and creating a disease ridden impoundment: "From this Warwick was changed from a healthful locality to one scourged by agues, fevers.... Numerous deaths occurred, not only in the village, but on its bordering lands, and far down the stream even into New Jersey."⁷ During a flood and aided by a mysterious local youth the dam was fortuitously destroyed; the impoundment forbidden to be rebuilt and the land redistributed at the direction of a Village committee.

The gently sloping green banks, the graceful low reaching elms, the natural steps leading down to the water, the pastoral beauty...

Although it is difficult to tell if the following is an idealized portrayal of the Wawayanda Creek, it is evident that its aesthetic quality was compelling during earlier times: "The gently sloping green banks, the graceful low reaching elms, the natural steps leading down to the water, the pastoral beauty..."⁸ E.B. Hornby furthermore describes studying and "botanizing" by the Wawayanda Creek on the hot days of summer as a pupil and teacher at the Warwick Institute (once located north of the Creek on what is now parking for Warwick Valley Telephone). Throughout the chapter on the Wawayanda she notes specific flora and fauna although mostly in their common generic names as she relates various tales. These include: cardinal flower, wild plum, osiers, pokeberry, sumac, elm, alder, white pine, otter, lynx, deer and muskrat.

Famed mid-19th century outdoorsman and local hero, Henry William Herbert, or Frank Forester as he was popularly known, hunted, fished, and celebrated the Warwick environs including Wawayanda Creek in various sporting publications and in his book *The Warwick Woodlands*. In his writings he describes an area with a rich diversity of waterfowl once found locally.

"They sprang quite unexpectedly from behind a willow bush, on the Wawayanda Creek, and I dropped them both quite dead somewhat to my own astonishment....Until I recovered them I supposed that they were young wood ducks, but on examination they proved to be young green-winged teal, of that season in their immature plumage."⁹

The noted Hudson River School painter Jasper Francis Cropsey who lived in the Warwick area for part of his artistic career, found the Wawayanda Creek a fitting subject. He believed that landscape painting was the highest form of art and his 1882 painting *Bridge on the Wawayanda River* expresses the aesthetic quality of the Creek and the surrounding countryside during that period (Fig. 2).



Stonework Foundation of the "W.T. Anderson Building" Seen From the Pedestrian Bridge over the Wawayanda Creek



View Downstream of Historic Buildings from the 1883 Bank Street Bridge



One of the Original Iron Bridges Most Likely Crossing The Wawayanda Creek at Forester Avenue (originally Lake Street). Photo Courtesy of the Warwick Historical Society

The settlement pattern of the Village as shown on the Pre-Civil War maps indicates that most of the modest growth occurred on the northwest side of the Wawayanda Creek. Such businesses existed along Main Street with their backs to the Creek and were represented by establishments such as J. S. Pelser, Cabinetware & Undertaker; and P. W. Demerest, Grocer & Confectioner.¹⁰ This pattern changed with the coming of the Warwick Valley Railroad in 1860 which utilized the open southeastern floodplain area of stream corridor for constructing a railroad yard, depot, and supporting commercial interests including lumber and coal yards on Railroad Avenue; and a cooper, marbleworks and mill in the area that is now the South Street parking lot. At that time the railroad line terminated in the Village at what is now Oakland Avenue. The Creek would become significantly more channelized and obstructed with railroad bridge abutments when the Lehigh & Hudson River Railroad consolidated in 1882 as a link for freight between western and New England states (See Fig. 3). The line was extended to the west and a new passenger station was built in 1893, an architecturally significant structure that is now part of the Village Historic District. Passenger service was discontinued in 1939 and the railroad went into bankruptcy in 1972. Currently a freight line runs through the Village sporadically, primarily at night but the tracks and right-of-way structures remain a major presence adjacent to the Creek.

Many of the structures on Main Street whose rear lots line the Creek are in the Village Historic District were built during these affluent railroad years and are still used for business and retail use. Some of the significant existing historic buildings in the central business district are part of the 1976 “Historic Building Survey.” Those adjoining the Creek include the Van Duzer Insurance Building (1870), a brick structure that was originally a Post Office that sits on the corner lot of Main and South Street; The Independent Order of Odd Fellows Hall (1860), of wood clapboard construction; the W.T. Anderson Building, (1890) a brick Romanesque Revival structure that was a department store; and the V.B. Vandervort Building, (1860) a clapboard building that was originally a pork and veal establishment. Many of these buildings retain their original cut stone or masonry foundations adding character and interest to the stream corridor in this area.

There are other examples of significant historic architecture that do not show up on the building inventory that was the basis for the mapped Historic District but are nevertheless important to the Wawayanda Corridor such as the First National Bank Building (now Chase Bank) on the corner of Main and Bank Streets whose rear foundation walls along with neighboring buildings form a channel for the northwest side of the Creek in this area.

The historic bridge at this crossing was erected in 1883 and is the only remaining ornamental iron bridge left in place in the Village. Although it does not comply with modern New York State Department of Transportation specifications, retaining this bridge is important to keeping the historic character of the stream corridor and the central business district. A replacement pedestrian bridge, the Carriage Path Footbridge, was erected in 2000 next to the W.T. Anderson Building that connects the South Street parking area with Main Street and borrows the style of the original iron bridges in the design of the railings and lighting.

An important brick building that is located on the south side of the Creek at Oakland Avenue is the Warwick Valley Hotel Building (1862), now the headquarters of the local independent newspaper, the Warwick Dispatch.

A 1921 account of work to improve the natural pool used for swimming on the Wawayanda Creek at Memorial Park reveals that water quality most likely was adequate for this use. “The big clam shell dredge of the L&H has been working in the park to enlarge and deepen the swimming pool. The weedy part at the east end has been removed...and a new channel will run directly from the pool to the bridge.”¹¹

In 1934, construction of a ‘new’ retaining wall along the Creek bank at the rear of the Odd Fellows Hall replaced a dry stone wall that was giving way.¹² Observing the present channel, it is evident that over the years several stone walls were replaced on structures that line the Creek in the central business district.

A large ice pond was located at the mouth of the Mistucky Creek where it empties into the Wawayanda near the railroad tracks that shows up on the Village of Warwick 1903 Map (Fig.3) as well as aerial photographs from the 1950’s This pond site has been filled in and is currently a vegetated marshy area.



Plaque at Bank Street from the only Remaining Historic Bridge in the Village