

Designation: The Use of Information-based Strategies in Planning and Preservation

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture and Department of Urban Studies & Planning in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degrees of
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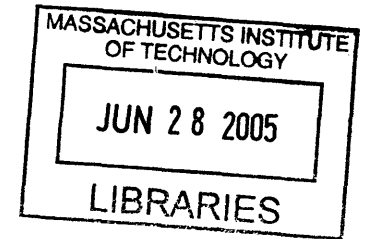
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores one tool of government action – information – and its influence on local policy and planning. This thesis is not a comprehensive account of information-based strategies, which would require far-reaching analysis. Instead, this thesis explores designation as one example of an information-based strategy that is used in planning and development. Specifically, this thesis explores how the act of designating an area as a national historic site (“designation”) can, if at all, influence local policy and planning and, subsequently, shapes our built environment. Using the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor as a case study, I demonstrate that information strategies such as designation can provide a vital and dynamic planning tool for government.

Designation presents a new approach to preservation and development by encouraging dynamic, cross-boundary partnerships that are simultaneously committed to common goals and dynamic enough to respond to the complexities of place. Designation allows local communities to maintain a place-specific approach to planning, while operating within a larger regional network. In the case of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, designation united twenty-four communities across a bi-state region between Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Designation in this region cultivated a coherent and dynamic vision that, when coupled with the organizational structure, can be seen in the physical environment of the Valley. At one scale, this is shown by the reintegration of underused or abandoned structures and the conversion of older structures for new uses. At another scale, communities embraced the river as a source for recreation and now promote recreational uses along its shores. At the regional level, communities work to create new regional recreational and interpretive networks.

Designation, when used by the Federal government as a tool has the ability to strengthen local governmental bodies as well as society to respond to changes in the economy, culture and environment. Designation as a tool links economic development and cultural programming with preservation efforts within communities and across traditional planning boundaries. Yet, because of a heavy reliance on partnerships, the success of designation as a tool for preservation and development is strongly associated with several key factors relating to the physical, economic and social qualities of place. These include the economic stability of the community, the availability of physical resources for heritage redevelopment, the engagement of the local government, the level of support of the local private sector (both the general public and private sector institutions), and the support and organization of the state.

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Chapter One An Introductory Text

This thesis is about information and the built environment; specifically about how information strategies are employed to shape our built environment. Though information strategies are utilized by both public sector (government agencies) and private sector (companies) for a variety of reasons, this thesis is principally concerned with those strategies related to preservation and development.¹ Over the past few decades, society has exhibited an increasing demand for the preservation of significant resources. This increasing demand coupled with an increasingly uncertain future for federal funding of preservation programs created pressures on the federal government to find new strategies. Information presented a

¹ For an international perspective see Adrian Phillips, "Turning Ideas on Their Head: The New Paradigm of Protected Areas," *The George Wright Forum* Vol. 20 No. 2 (2003): 8-32.

strategy for the federal government to address these demands while not taking on the role of primary funder. This thesis examines the use of information strategies to influence municipal level planning and policy and how, in turn, this shapes our built environment. Here, information strategies are seen as catalyzing actions by the federal government meant to encourage action by municipal level governments, private sector entities and individual citizens in preservation and development.

How does information differ from the other tools used by government to shape the built environment? In his examination of the 'tools of government action' in *Preserving the Built Heritage*, J. Mark Schuster, explores the tools of government action with regards to the

preservation of art, architecture and culture.² As discussed in his book, these tools are generic categories and represent the “fundamental building blocks with which the government [city, state or national government] implements heritage policy...”³ Schuster places these tools into five categories - ownership & operation, regulation, incentives (and disincentives), property rights and information.⁴

Ownership & operation is possibly the most familiar of the tools and involves the preservation of heritage resources through the direct acquisition of these resources by the government itself. Regulation, on the other hand, involves the preservation of resources through the government regulation of resources held by private individuals or institutions. Similarly, incentives involve the provision of benefits to others who preserve heritage resources in accordance with a desired government policy. The government can also implement a preservation policy through the creation, distribution, and enforcement of new property rights.

² J. Mark Schuster with John de Monchaux and Charles A. Riley II (eds.) *Preserving the Built Heritage – Tools for Implementation* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997): 5-7.

³ Schuster (1997): 5.

⁴ In their examination of the ‘tools of government action,’ Schuster, de Monchaux and Riley build off the arguments of Lester Salamon and Christopher Hood (Lester Salamon, ed., *Beyond Privatization: The Tools of Government Action* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1989); and Christopher C. Hood, *The Tools of Government* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1986). Their book provides the general framework for the discussion of government tools of action throughout this thesis.

Information is the least familiar of the tools of action used by government for preservation. For the most part, information presents a low-cost alternative to other tools, such as ownership & operation. But the many factors leading to the low-cost of information relative to the other tools are also the key differences. First and foremost, information lacks the certainty of ownership & operation or regulation. The impact of information strategies can be slow to realize; their influence may not become visible for a long time. This is because information is a ‘soft’ action; it lacks the binding rules of regulation to push results. Information also lacks a power structure; it lacks the complete control of ownership & operation or the enforcement of regulation and property rights.⁵ Yet, information can easily take many different forms, including the dominant technology of our time: the internet. The lack of formalized rules and the lack of power structure combined with the ability of information to take many forms allow it to be employed by both governmental and non-governmental entities to influence the actions of others. The use of information to influence others with regard to the built environment is the particular focus of this thesis.

The ability of information to be more readily utilized by a variety of entities encourages collaborative action. Collaboration, or partnerships, enables information to address a multitude of scales in the built environment from the building, to the village, city and region.

⁵ Schuster (1997): 100-123.

Through collaboration, the partners are each able to maximize their use of the other tools of action. In this sense, information encourages not only collaboration and partnerships, but also spurs a dynamic commitment to preservation by a multitude of entities.⁶

The federal government utilizes information strategies in a variety of ways to promote preservation and development. For example, the federal government uses information in an educational capacity; information is used to explain how government programs function or to tell us the story of a significant place or person. Information is also used as a threshold action; it triggers other actions. “Listing “(an example of which is the National Register of Historic Places) is perhaps one of the most familiar information strategies employed by government in this regard. Listing is often a qualifier for historic tax credits (an incentive action). In addition to listing, designation (of which Yellowstone National Park is an example) presents another information strategy employed by government for preservation. While both are information strategies, listing and designation are separate processes and have very different consequences. Listing is generally a locally-based process; nominations are most frequently brought from local leadership for sites of local significance. While designated sites are also listed, listing

⁶ “Collaboration and Conservation, Lessons Learned in Areas Managed through National Park Service Partnerships,” eds. Jacquelyn L. Tuxill and Nora J. Mitchell, Conservation Study Institute (Woodstock, VT: Conservation Study Institute, 2001): 4-10.

does not qualify a site for designation.⁷ This thesis focuses on designation.

The federal government utilizes a variety of designations to promote conservation and preservation. Designation is reserved for resources of national significance. National Park designation, for example, generally describes large wilderness areas owned and operated by the federal government where hunting and mining is prohibited. National Historic Sites and National Historical Parks both apply to historic areas; National Historic Sites for individual properties; Historical Parks for multiple properties. In another example, National Heritage Areas (including heritage corridors, urban cultural parks and heritage parks) are Affiliated Areas. While these areas are designated by Acts of Congress or the Secretary of the Interior, they receive limited assistance from the federal government.⁸ This thesis focuses on one particular National Heritage Area: the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, and asks: What difference does designation make?

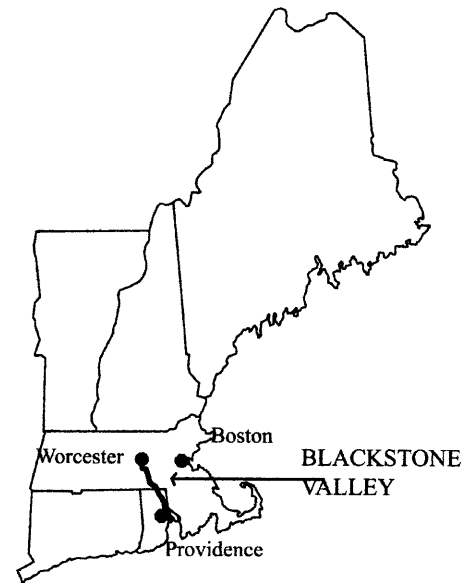
The Blackstone Valley presented both a designated area and a place. Through a case study of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, I will argue that designation has created a regional

⁷ Beth Savage and Marilyn Harper, “My Property is Important to America’s Heritage What Does That Mean?,” 1993, US Department of Interior, National Park Service, National Register, History and Education. (1993), 4 January 4 2005 <<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/myproperty/>>

⁸ “Designation of National Park System Units,” March 2000, National Park Service, 6 February 2005 <<http://www.nps.gov/legacy/nomenclature.html>>

approach to preservation and development that unites the local planning and policy of two dozen communities in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. In the case of the Blackstone Valley this regional approach is based in two concepts: the construction of a regional narrative and the regional-historic perspective. The regional narrative is a story of the past, in this case the transformation from agriculture to industry, told through the places of today. The regional-historic perspective is an approach to contemporary planning issues such as economic development that incorporates the historically significant qualities of place. Rather than review the influence of designation on each municipality, I have chosen a selected group of community case studies from which to approach the research. Through the case studies, I hope to provide common threads through and highlight specific initiatives within a superstructure about the larger question of designation as a tool for preservation and development.

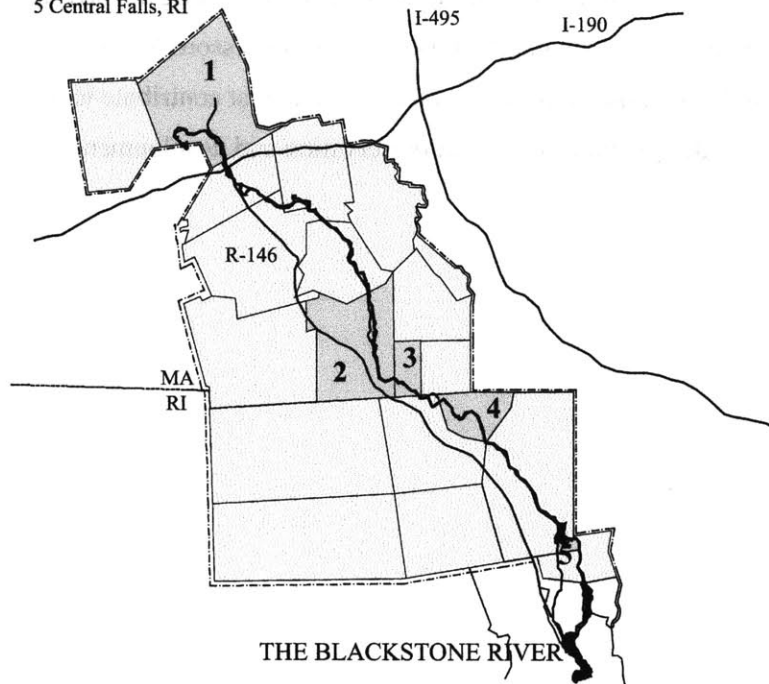
Following from this text, Chapter Two establishes designation within a continuum of strategies used by the federal government through its primary agent of conservation and preservation, the National Park Service. This Chapter includes a brief history of the National Park Service (and System) and contrasts designation with other strategies such as ownership and operation. While designation is similar to ownership and operation as a way to link the idea of heritage to physical place, its reliance on partnerships to carry out the goals of



conservation and preservation differs greatly from ownership and operation.

Chapter Three focuses in on the relevant background information on the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. The chapter includes a brief history of the Blackstone Valley to establish the national significance of the region required for federal designation. This is followed by a description of the legislative history of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and the limits placed on actions of the federal government within the Corridor as established by the legislative act. The chapter concludes with a brief description of several fundamental information strategies

- 1 Worcester, MA
- 2 Uxbridge, MA
- 3 Millville, MA
- 4 Woonsocket, RI
- 5 Central Falls, RI



employed by the Corridor to promote preservation and development in the Valley.

In Chapter Four I outline the research methodology used in this thesis. The foundation for this method is a selected group of community case studies. The five selected communities represent a range of demographic characteristics (state, size, median household income) that I felt might influence designation as a tool for

preservation and development. I also selected communities where designation seemed to have either more or less influence. Also in this chapter I describe my use of qualitative research to evaluate the influence of designation. Specifically, I interviewed over a dozen selected individuals throughout the Valley including town planners, local businessmen and non-profits. Together, these individuals represent a group of people from both the public and private sectors that have varied experiences with designation.

Chapters Five and Six build off of the previous chapters in order to analyze the web of action created by designation and how this shapes the built environment. To do so, I have divided the five case studies into two groups according to the prevailing characteristics of their physical environments: the urban-industrial communities and the more rural communities. A chapter is dedicated to the evaluation of each group. Using initiatives from each of the selected case study communities, I hope to illustrate the many different ways that designation influences these communities.

In Chapter Five I focus on the more urban-industrial communities of Woonsocket, Worcester and Central Falls. I trace the influence of designation on the physical environment through each community's approach to contemporary planning issues like economic development. Initiatives include, for example, the reintegration of underused buildings in the contemporary context as well as efforts to create regional recreational networks. Using the three case studies in

this chapter, I argue that designation functions more effectively as a tool in preservation and development in communities that can more easily tie into the regional narrative, recognize the regional-historic perspective as a valuable approach to contemporary planning issues and, lastly, have the support of the community for designation.

In Chapter 6, I evaluate the influence of designation on the more rural communities of Uxbridge and Millville. Here, I trace the influence of designation on the preservation of the unique qualities of place from the pressures of suburbanization. Initiatives include the protection of the unique pattern of development of the Valley's mill villages as well as the protection of open-space from development. Using the case studies of Uxbridge and Millville, I argue that while designation does motivate collaborative action with various state agencies as well as the private sector, its utility as a tool for preservation and development can be limited by a lack of support from the broader community.

Finally, using the case studies and projects from Chapters Five and Six, Chapter Seven makes a broader statement about designation. The findings of these studies suggest that as a strategy for preservation and development, designation creates a regional identity that serves to link together large, fragmented lands and integrates heritage preservation with economic development. I also contend that information strategies encourage collaborative, cross-boundary and regional visioning; a process that differs greatly from the top-down,

centralized approach taken by government through such actions as ownership & operation and regulation. Furthermore, designation leverages the resources of a variety of partners, including the private sector, in meeting these goals. Drawing from the lessons learned through this research, I comment on the factors that contribute to the success of designation as a tool in preservation and development.

Chapter Two

Nature's Cathedrals to Living Landscapes: The NPS and the evolution of heritage

Designation is used by many governments to further the goals of conservation and preservation. But the emphasis placed on designation, in and of itself, is rather unique in the United States. The ways in which the federal government uses designation have changed, paralleling both an evolving idea of heritage and changes in the national economic context. In particular, an over-extended federal budget and a new private sector interest in heritage brought about by the rise of heritage tourism. These forces helped transform designation from the hidden hand of ownership & operation. Designation by the federal government became a dynamic planning tool for preservation and development used to catalyze partnerships and spur action by other levels of government and the private sector.

Changes in the use of designation corresponded to a broadening attitude about the complexities of heritage. Yet common among these many changes is a concept of heritage that is inextricably linked to place.

“Designation [be it as a national park or a national heritage corridor] is perhaps the ultimate articulation and respect for a place and its associated story, each new park [or corridor] physically embodying a ‘sense of place’ in the country’s collective consciousness.”¹

From the creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, designation has served to permanently bind the idea of heritage to physical place.

¹ Rolf Diamant, “From Management to Stewardship: The Making and Remaking of the U.S. National Park System,” *The George Wright Forum* Vol. 17 No. 2 (2000): 32.

designation as a National Park reflected a respect for nature and a desire to preserve these vast wildernesses in the mist of the country's westward expansion. In fact, the idea of wilderness was so inherent in the early park-making that many believed that national parks were solely for the western lands; vast wilderness was not a quality of lands in the east.²

While the need for national parks was seen as important from the beginning, the creation of national parks has always been a politically contentious issue.³ With the early parks such as Yellowstone and Yosemite, designation was exclusively a tool of ownership & operation. Early parks such as Yellowstone were viewed as an "operational responsibility."⁴ As more parks were created, some politicians called the legislative acts designating these parks "park barrel bills." These politicians contended that designation was more about political favoritism than the conservation of national resources.⁵ As a result of this contention, the national park represented a struggle for the federal government and, as a result, the management of these

² Diamant (2000): 32-44.

³ The care and maintenance of the national parks remains a controversial political issue with significant percentages of the nation's natural resources like coal and oil contained within their boundaries. For example, the Department of the Interior manages over 30% of the nation's oil, natural gas and coal. ("Increasing Renewable and Traditional Energy for American Families," *US Department of Interior*, 1 May 2005 < <http://www.doi.gov/initiatives/energy.html>>)

⁴ William C. Everhart, *The National Park Service*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983): 12.

⁵ Everhart (1983): 147.

early parks was inconsistent. Management shifted between various federal agencies including the Forest Service and even the Department of War until the National Park Service (N.P.S.) emerged as the nation's primary agency for conservation and preservation.⁶

President Wilson established the National Park Service within the Interior Department in 1916 and created the unified system for management and stewardship we know today.⁷ The conservation of wilderness through ownership & operation remained the primary strategy of the National Park Service until 1935.⁸ At this time, the economic pressure of the Great Depression brought about the New Deal. Together, two components of New Deal legislation, the Historic Sites Act and the Federal Writer's Project both of 1935, served to expand the mission of the NPS beyond the conservation of wilderness through information-based initiatives. The Historic Sites Act called for a NPS survey of historic sites to better enable the agency to "preserve for public use historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance."⁹ Through the Federal Writers Project, local writers produced over 1,200 guides that detailed local histories; the act served to bring the knowledge of local histories to people outside the local

⁶ Everhart (1983): 147.

⁷ Diamant (2000): 33.

⁸ There were also historic battlefields in these early years, but at the time these were still part of the War Department (Diamant (2000): 35.).

⁹ *Public Law 49 Stat. 666; 16 U.S.C. 461-467*

area and around the country.¹⁰ As people became more aware of the unique stories of places around the country, the idea of heritage expanded past strictly wilderness to include these places of historic and cultural interest.

Over the next fifty years, the umbrella of the National Park Service extended to include a variety of resources. While many of these resources were identified by the National Park Service, very few would transfer into the ownership structure of the federal government. Nonetheless, the NPS owns and manages parks, monuments and battlefields, as well as seashores, memorials, parkways, scenic trails and recreations areas (to name a few).¹¹ Over 300 million people use these resources.¹² But while the economic benefits of tourism were enormous, the sheer size of lands stretched the resources of the NPS. The federal government sought new ways to carry out its preservation goals: partnerships.

As opposed to ownership & operation, designation was used to spur others to action through partnerships. As mentioned earlier, designation was seen as a cost-effective alternative to ownership & operation because it transferred the financial responsibility of ownership & operation throughout the partnership entities.¹³ For

example, from the federal perspective, the government provides annual funding of approximately \$2 million the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, a 400,000 acre NPS partnership region. In comparison, the Cape Cod National Seashore, a 43,605 acre area located in Massachusetts and maintained directly by the NPS, has an annual federal budget of \$5,806,000.¹⁴ Furthermore, while National Park designation is permanent and required on-going funding, the new partnership designation did not involve permanent funding from the NPS (this was an inherent characteristic of the new partnership model). Partnerships do provide a cost-effective alternative to ownership & operation in the present and into the future, but for the NPS partnerships are not limited to financial relief.

As the report “Collaboration and Conservation – Lessons Learned from National Park Service Partnership Areas in the Western Unites States” states:

Public interests and recent congressional designations are expanding partnership approaches and creating new formulas for national recognition and new roles for the National Park Service.¹⁵

While partnerships enable the NPS to extend its resources, they also help promote a broader support for conservation and

¹⁰ J. Glenn Eugster, "Evolution of the Heritage Areas Movement." *The George Wright Forum* Vol. 20 No. 2 (2003): 51.

¹¹ Everhart (1983): 188.

¹² Diamant (2000): 32.

¹³ “Collaboration and Conservation, Lessons Learned in Areas Managed through National Park Service Partnerships,” eds. Jacquelyn L. Tuxill and

Nora J. Mitchell, *Conservation Study Institute* (Woodstock, VT: Conservation Study Institute, 2001): v-vii.

¹⁴ “Cape Cod National Seashore Information,” *Cape Cod National Seashore*, 13 March 2005 < <http://capecod.areaparks.com/parkinfo.html?pid=1269>>

¹⁵ “Collaboration and Conservation, Lessons Learned in Areas Managed through National Park Service Partnerships” (2001): v.

preservation through community-based initiatives. Designation united otherwise disparate groups and created a new role for the NPS: steward. When operating with a partnership approach, the role of the NPS was no longer to manage but to guide. The report, “Collaboration and Conservation”, is one of many reports published by the NPS, the Conservation Study Institute and others about how the NPS can promote conservation and preservation goals by more effectively guiding others (non-NPS partners). Their focus is predominantly on the institutional organization of the NPS itself and how to create “a sustainable environment for partnerships” within the NPS.¹⁶

Other literature raises a different perspective about partnerships: partnerships enable the NPS to extend conservation and preservation to more resources.

People are raising their field of vision beyond the often fragmented preservation of individual areas, structures, and critical habitats to focus on how the benefits of parks and responsible stewardship can be integrated into the connecting fabric of people’s lives.¹⁷

For example, as the article “A Vehicle for Conserving and Interpreting Our Recent Industrial Heritage” points out, in 1978 the NPS created a public-private partnership with the Lowell National Historical Park. The designation of the Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts in 1978 marked the first federal designation of

¹⁶ “Collaboration and Conservation, Lessons Learned in Areas Managed through National Park Service Partnerships,” (2001): vii.

¹⁷ Diamante (2000): 42.

industrial heritage. The federal government recognized that “industrial sites are important milestones in the history of humanity, marking mankind’s dual power of destruction and creation that engenders both nuisances and progress.”¹⁸ The designation of Lowell National Historical Park helped to shape a new NPS partnership model that focused on industrial sites and infrastructures: heritage areas.

According to the NPS, heritage areas are viewed as “an experiment in ways to conserve and celebrate the nation’s national and cultural heritage.”¹⁹ The NPS now uses designation to preserve areas of national significance where people actually live and work as a catalyst for heritage development; the idea of heritage again expanded past wilderness and historical parks to include areas of human activity. The Heritage Area designation ties together many different perspectives of place: heritage tourism, economic development, historic preservation and environmental resource protection.

Heritage areas are seen as having mass appeal which, in turn, has led to the rapid rise of this NPS model in the last two decades. Heritage areas have been referred to as “an accelerating phenomenon” in preservation.²⁰ Heritage areas are a distinct preservation model in

¹⁸ Constance C. Bodurow, “A Vehicle for Conserving and Interpreting Our Recent Industrial Heritage,” *The George Wright Forum* Vol. 20 No. 2 (2003): 70.

¹⁹ “More about Heritage Areas,” *National Park Service US Department of Interior*. 3 January 2005 <<http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/FAQ/prgrm.htm>>

²⁰ See Sarah Peskin, “America’s Special Landscapes: The Heritage Area Phenomenon,” March 2001, *National Park Service*, 1 May 2005 <

that they combine the natural and cultural preservation tradition of the NPS with urbanism. With this new NPS model, “the heritage of designated areas, and the associated architecture and infrastructure, is utilized as a basis for revitalization, both in an economic and cultural sense, regaining valid meaning for contemporary society.”²¹ These resources, therefore, require a multitude of new skills. In addition to the historic preservationists and landscape conservators that were traditionally associated with the planning, development and management of our heritage resources, heritage areas now require the skills of architects, planners and economic development specialists.²²

Heritage areas present a new kind of place, one where people want to preserve the past and improve the present in order to make a better future. As urban designer Dennis Frenchmen observes in “Narrative Places and the New Practice of Urban Design,” these places require a new kind of design.²³ These places also need to *communicate* the past to the people of today. But it is not a passive interpretation or an isolated story of the past set against the present. Instead, heritage areas require a new kind of active interpretation. Heritage areas tell the story of the past through the public experiences of today; they are what

Frenchmen calls “narrative places.” As such, designation can be used as a new tool in preservation *and* development.

The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor is one of the earliest examples of the “heritage area.” These new areas represent a kind of ‘living landscape.’ With designation, the federal government specifically outlined the goal of this Corridor as “preserving and interpreting for the educational and inspirational benefit of present and future generations the unique and significant contributions to our national heritage of certain historic and cultural lands, waterways and structures within the Blackstone River Valley.”²⁴ This thesis examines how designation has influenced the built environment of the Blackstone Valley.

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/FAQ/prgrm.htm> and Paul Bray, “The Heritage Area Phenomenon,” *CRM* Vol. 17 No. 8 (1994): 3-4.

²¹ Bodurow (2003): 70.

²² Bray (1994): 3.

²³ Dennis Frenchmen “Narrative Place and the New Practice of Urban Design,” in *Imaging the City*, eds. Lawrence J. Vale and Sam Bass Warner Jr. (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2001): 257-283.

²⁴ State of Rhode Island, Planning Council State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor*. (Providence: State Planning Council, 1990): 1.5.

Chapter Three

The Significance of Place: Past, Present and Futures of the Blackstone River Valley

Congress designated the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor on November 10, 1986 (Public Law 99-647); it was an experiment in preservation and development. Today, the designation includes two dozen communities along the Blackstone River which runs forty six miles from its headwaters in Worcester, Massachusetts until it empties into the Narragansett Bay in Providence, Rhode Island. Along its course, the river drops a total of 438 feet in elevation making it an ideal source of waterpower. Due to the natural power of the river, and the remarkable ingenuity of the Valley's early settlers, the Blackstone River Valley is considered the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution.¹ It is the national

¹"The Corridor," John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission. 15 May 2004 < <http://www.nps.gov/blac/>

significance of this story as told through the people and places of the Blackstone Valley that warrants federal designation.

History of the Blackstone River Valley

The physical landscape of the Valley is a unique contrast of post-industrial urban remnants such as mill buildings, mill villages and open farm-land. In 1790, Samuel Slater engineered the first water-powered textile mill in the United States along the banks of the Blackstone River in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The ability of these early settlers to spin yarn by machine combined with the waterpower of the Blackstone River sparked the intense development of industry in the Valley in the 18th and 19th centuries. This system is still referred to

[the_corridor/the-corridor.html](http://www.nps.gov/blac/the_corridor/the-corridor.html)>

as the “Slater System.”² Because of the Slater System, the Blackstone River represents the first widespread use of waterpower for industry in the United States. Businessmen and industrialists followed Slater’s lead and soon textile mills and other factories took their place within the Valley’s landscape. Mill villages and towns developed around these new centers of employment.³

In 1796, area businessmen initiated the construction of a canal to transport their goods between Worcester and Providence. The waterfalls that made the Blackstone River an ideal source for waterpower made it difficult to transport the increasing number of goods generated on its shores. The canal was completed in 1828 after being stalled for many decades by competing interests in Boston. But, by 1847, the construction of the Providence & Worcester Railroad made the canal obsolete. The advent of low-cost ground transportation enhanced the transport network in the Valley and soon an intense industrial pathway existed between New England’s second and third largest cities.⁴

² Christine Schultz, “The Blackstone River’s Industrial Evolution,” *Yankee Magazine* April (2001): 66+.

³ Douglas M. Reynolds and Marjory Myers, eds., *Working in the Blackstone River Valley: Exploring the Heritage of Industrialization* (Woonsocket: Rhode Island Labor History Society, 1991): 15-17.

⁴ State of Rhode Island, Planning Council State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor*. (Providence: State Planning Council, 1990): 1.5.

Yet like many industrial areas in the north, the Blackstone River Valley experienced a marked decline in the 20th century. The decline of northern industries followed the southern migration of the textile industry. The south promised better weather, an escape from growing labor problems and the opportunity to invest in newer technology and methods. The loss of industry also meant a loss of jobs and people followed industry out of the Valley. The Blackstone Valley continued to experience significant decline (or economic stagnation) through the middle of the 20th century.⁵

The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor

In 1985, Rhode Island Senator John Chafee sponsored legislation to designate the Blackstone Valley as a National Heritage Corridor. This legislation was the culmination of lobbying efforts begun in the early 1980s by local businessmen. Area manufacturers had been joining together for years to publish brochures in an effort to attract tourists from the eastern shores to their factory outlets in the Valley. As more and more tourists came to the Valley, they not only wanted to shop in the outlets but explore the Valley. These businessmen saw this interest from tourists as an opportunity for the Blackstone Valley and, as a result, lead early efforts for the development of a tourism council in the Rhode Island portion of the

⁵ *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* (1990):1.5-1.8.

Blackstone Valley.⁶ This group, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, would come to lead the efforts that lead to designation.

By recognizing the national significance of the Blackstone Valley, designation helped the Corridor communities and private entities attract more attention within the larger tourism networks in New England. Tourism is a large component of the economies of both Massachusetts and Rhode Island; it is the third largest industry in Massachusetts and the second largest and fastest growing industry in Rhode Island.⁷ And while the state tourism industries are largely driven by the beaches to the east, heritage tourism is becoming an increasingly popular component of people's trips. In the United States for example, a historic activity or event was included in a trip by approximately 84.7 million adults over the past year.⁸

The growing popularity of heritage is a key factor driving the preservation, and development of, the heritage product. Heritage

⁶ Schultz (2001): 78-79.

⁷ In 2001, more than 28 million people a year visit Massachusetts spending over \$13.3 billion, generating \$791 million in state taxes revenues and supporting 147,300 jobs. (Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, 10 February 2005 <http://www.massvacation.com/jsp/static_in/about/what.jsp?cat=82>) Tourism generated \$3.26 billion in sales revenues in Rhode Island in 2000 which was part of a larger trend of increases in sales with each successive year (\$1.87 billion in 1996). (Rhode Island Division of Tourism, 10 February 2005 <<http://www.rihospitality.org/tourism/tou01.html>>)

⁸ 41% of travelers visited what could be described as a heritage product – a designated building, landmark or monument - and 28% visited a designated historic community or town during their trips. (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 0 February 2005 <http://www.nationaltrust.org/heritage_tourism/benefits.html>)

products can include a historically significant building, landmark, monument, or even a historic community or town.⁹ In the case of the Blackstone Valley, the contemporary landscape still reflected the story of the Valley and, more importantly, the national story of our transition from an agrarian-based society to an industrial society. The Blackstone River itself is punctuated by several historic dams and mills, like the Slater Mill. Also remaining are remnants of the Blackstone Canal and toe-path as well as many historic mill villages, structures and Native-American trails.

Through heritage development, post-industrial cities began to tell the story of the past through the people, places and structures of today. In the case of the Blackstone Valley, the historically significant story combined with an existing, but perhaps decaying, industrial fabric provided a unique chance for the communities. Valley communities viewed the remnants of their industrial past in a new light; these structures and spatial patterns were no longer reminders of the past but now held countless possibilities for the future.

The initial act of Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. The purpose of the designation was consistent with the heritage corridor model: “to retain, enhance, and interpret, for the benefit and inspiration of present and future generations, the cultural, historical, natural, recreational, and economic

⁹ National Trust for Historic Preservation, 10 February 2005 <http://www.nationaltrust.org/heritage_tourism/benefits.html>

resources of the Corridor, where feasible, consistent with industrial and economic growth.”¹⁰

The Corridor Commission

Two years later in 1986, a subsequent act by Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission. The Commission is comprised of representatives from federal government, state government, local government and private citizens. The Secretary of the Interior appoints the nineteen members of the Commission with the exception of two private citizens who are appointed separately by the Governors of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The Commission meets on a quarterly basis (at a minimum). Members serve three year terms and receive no compensation for their time. Most importantly, the composition of the Commission representatives reflects the integrated purpose of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

The federal government’s role in the Corridor comes through the Department of the Interior. The federal government appoints the members and is represented by one commissioner (a delegate from the National Park Service). Three representatives represent each state government. In Massachusetts these include the Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Management, the Director of the Office of Economic Development and the Executive Director of the

¹⁰ *Public Law 99-647-Nov.10,1986*

Massachusetts Historical Commission. Similarly, the Director of the Department of Environmental Management, the Director of the Department of Economic Development and the Executive Director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission represent Rhode Island.¹¹ The local governments are each represented by four commissioners.¹²

The act also establishes the authoritative boundaries of the Commission. The Commission is the primary federal authority in the Corridor and therefore has the authority to review all other actions by federal agencies within the Corridor.¹³ Consistent with the organizational model, the Commission is not authorized to own any land, but rather its efforts are directed towards planning, education and coordination. The Commission is also authorized to fundraise, enter into cooperative agreements with both governmental and non-governmental agencies and form advisory groups as they pertain to the interests of the Corridor.¹⁴ But the Commission’s main responsibility is to assist with the flows of government funds to the Corridor and,

¹¹ *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor*(1990): 3.9.

¹² *Public Law 99-647-Nov.10,1986*

¹³ Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission. *The Next Ten Years: An Amendment to the Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan*. Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Commission, 15 May 2004 <<http://www.nps.gov/blac/who/tenyear.htm>>

¹⁴ *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* (1990): 3.5.

more importantly, generate a consistent vision (plan) for future activity within the Corridor.

The Commission's plan was to "complement" state plans in terms of historic preservation, land use, tourism development and other forms of economic development. The Commission developed inventories for historic and tourism resources, design guidelines and standards, a land use management plan, an economic assessment and an interpretive plan. The documents fall into two categories – vision plans to assist the local agencies conceive of action agendas and documents to support the Commission's own information and incentive-based strategy. The plan makes clear the Commission's hopes to accomplish its goals "through incentives, through advocacy, through the force of ideas and public opinion, through task forces and demonstration projects..."¹⁵

The vision documents include *Design Guidelines and Standards*, the *Land Use Management Plan* and the *Economic Assessment*. The *Design Guidelines and Standards* encourage local municipalities to adopt regulations to preserve the unique qualities of the Corridor's built environment. Through the *Design Guidelines*, the Commission encourages municipalities to subscribe to three main ideas: "preserve rather than destroy," "rehabilitate in ways that preserve and complement the existing historic fabric and style of building," and "design new buildings that respect the historic character

¹⁵ *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* (1990): 3.5.

and values of the neighborhood."¹⁶ The *Design Guidelines* include a summary of architectural styles and common building materials present throughout the Valley. The *Land Use Management Plan* recommends strategies for local municipalities to support new development while maintaining the unique qualities of the existing landscape. Similarly, the *Economic Assessment* identifies existing businesses that are impacted by the Corridor activities (such as tourism) and suggests growth scenarios.

Information documents include the *Historic Resources Inventory*, the *Tourism Inventory* and the *Interpretive Plan*. The *Interpretive Plan* is built around the *Historic Resources* and *Tourism Inventories*. The *Historic Resources Inventory* includes over 500 examples of man-made structures (buildings, landscapes, archaeological sites) within the Corridor. The *Tourism Inventory* identifies exiting tourism resources in the Valley including attractions and facilities.¹⁷ The *Interpretive Plan* recommends programs, themes and strategies to foster an "understanding and appreciation of the Valley's unique role on the regional and national stage."¹⁸ It also includes specific methods of interpretation like brochures, special events, kiosks and signage.

¹⁶ *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* (1990): 2.3.

¹⁷ *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* (1990): 2.1- 2.6.

¹⁸ *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* (1990): 2.3.

The *Interpretive Plan* provided the foundation for the Commission's information-based strategy. The Commission provides information and interpretation to the Valley's nine visitor centers. The Commission itself does not own or operate any of the centers. The visitor centers are owned and operated by a variety of public and private groups. For example, a visitor center is located within the Roger Williams National Memorial which is owned and operated by the federal government.¹⁹ A visitor center is also located within the Slater Mill which is owned and operated by a private, non-profit group.²⁰ Information centers are also located in Woonsocket and Uxbridge with plans underway for another in Worcester. These information centers will be detailed in the later chapters of this thesis.

Another aspect of the federal information-based strategy is the Blackstone Valley Institute. The Institute is funded by the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Commission and shares information of interest to communities within the Corridor. The information is available to municipalities, their business owners and residents. The Institute is primarily an internet-based source of information, but also offers workshops, consulting services, seminars and technical assistance. The web-site alone provides a wealth of information (including case studies) about downtown revitalization, community

¹⁹ Roger Williams National Memorial, National Park Service, 15 May 2004 <<http://www.nps.gov/rowi/>>

²⁰ Support Slater Mill, Slater Mill, 15 May 2004 <<http://www.slatermill.org/Support.htm>>

planning, open space preservation, riverfront renewal, historic preservation and regional planning.²¹

A more recent aspect of the Commission's information-based strategy is the *Design Review Manual*. Published in March 2003, the *Design Review Manual* provides "a guide to developing an architectural assessment ordinance in Massachusetts and Rhode Island Blackstone Valley Communities."²² The *Manual* introduces several forms of another tool of government action used for preservation – regulation. These include local historic districts, site plan review and design review.²³

In the end, the information-based strategies employed by the Commission are used to motivate action by the local communities. "...the Commission has no power to compel consistency with the vision."²⁴ Per the legislative action, the Commission lacks the ability to directly own, regulate or enforce the vision. Consistent with the heritage corridor model, the Commission hopes that an integrated vision enables the various levels of government to each maximize their

²¹ Blackstone Valley Institute: About the Institute, National Park Service, 15 May 2004 <<http://www.nps.gov/blac/institute/about%20the%20institute/abouttheinstitute.html>>

²² *Design Review Manual*, Blackstone Valley Institute, 15 May 2004 <<http://www.nps.gov/blac/institute/resources/library/library.html#bvip>>

²³ *Design Review Manual*, Blackstone Valley Institute, 15 May 2004 <<http://www.nps.gov/blac/institute/resources/library/library.html#bvip>>

²⁴ *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* (1990): 2.

own use of the tools of government action within the Blackstone Valley.

The Power of Designation

In and of itself, designation inspired a change in perspective among residents with regards to their surroundings. It is through this change in perspective that designation comes to interface with, and is able to influence, local planning and development. Of particular importance to the influence of designation on the Valley communities are several large-scale regional infrastructures that not only provide valuable links through the Corridor but literally tie together the Corridor communities. These larger scale regional infrastructures include the Blackstone River, transportation infrastructures like the highways, recreational infrastructures like the bike path and the regional narrative path.

New highway infrastructure not only provides greater access in and through the Valley for residents (and potential residents) but make the Valley communities more accessible to the larger tourism industries in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The “third ring,” according to Dr. Mullins, connects Nashua to the north, Worcester to the west and Providence to the south.²⁵ The ring results from two significant infrastructure investments: the upgrading of the primary north-south route through the Blackstone Valley, Route 146 and the

²⁵ John Mullins, personal interview, 31 January 2005

construction of Route 99 in Rhode Island. Coupled with favorable real estate prices, the improved transportation infrastructure created an apt opportunity for both potential home-buyers from Boston and businesses looking to relocate. For example, Rhode Island was able to attract several large corporations including Fidelity Bank, CVS Corporation and Cross Pens. As a result, the Blackstone Valley simultaneously experienced the pressures of growth west out of Boston as well as growth north out of Providence along Route 146.²⁶ This trend continues today. For example, the Valley experienced a 5.1% change in population between 1990 and 2000 alone (as a region, New England experienced a change in population of 5.5%).²⁷

The highway infrastructures also improved access into the Valley for potential tourists. The Blackstone River is the region’s primary physical attribute and narrative infrastructure along which many points of interest including historic mill villages and, of course, the mills themselves are located. But years of heavy industrial use and poor waste water treatment practices had left the river polluted. For example, toxic sedimentation had lead to the loss of anadromous fish as well as poor water quality. The clean-up of the river was the key to future success of the region. Fortunately, already existing volunteer river clean-up efforts like Project ZAP had been hard at work since the

²⁶ J. Mullins, personal interview, 31 January 2005

²⁷ Report of John H. Chaffee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, National Park Service , January 20 2005 <<http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/REP/black.pdf>>

early 1970s. They sought the reduction of pollutants in sources contributing to the pollution of the Blackstone River such as storm water and wastewater through regulatory action, the improved flow of river and fish species in the river by amending the dams and increasing the appreciation of the river through education. Their efforts were further bolstered by designation which focused the energies and resources of various levels of government, private sector entities and additional Valley residents. Although there remains a lot of work, of particular importance to this thesis is that the river is open for recreational boating and canoeing with the water quality much improved since 1986.²⁸

The successful transformation of the Blackstone River from a source of pollution to a source of recreation allowed the river to serve as the primary armature for future preservation and development initiatives throughout the Valley. Designation had not only motivated the communities to act, but also served to provide a broad-based, regional framework on which the public and private sectors were able to attach their own initiatives. Through the case studies for this thesis, I hope to illustrate that designation has presented a cohesive but place-specific approach to regional preservation and development that was capable of leveraging the resources of the states, the municipalities, non-profits and the private sector.

²⁸ Decade of Research Show Major Improvement in Blackstone River, The University of Rhode Island Pacer, 2 December 2004 <<http://advance.uri.edu/pacer/march2003/story2.htm>>

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

The purpose of this research is to examine the influence of designation on local planning, and through this knowledge develop a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the success of designation as a tool for preservation and development. The research is designed around two primary components. These two components are a group of case study communities selected from the the 24 communities in the Valley and personal interviews conducted by myself.

Case Study Selection

I selected a total of five case studies from the 24 communities of the Blackstone River Valley National Corridor based upon a range

of characteristics that, at the time, I hypothesized to factor into the influence of designation. These characteristics ranged from state (Massachusetts or Rhode Island) to demographic metrics like median income and population (Source: 2000 US Census). In addition, selection criteria included whether or not the community had a planning department, the number of significant resources in the community and the perceived number of initiatives related to designation (both historic resources and tourist bureaus).

- I selected case studies to represent communities from both states – Massachusetts and Rhode Island. This was done in order to discern the role of state policy in the influence of designation on local planning.

- Case studies represent both large and small populations within the Valley range. With regards to small communities, I hypothesized that it may be easier to reach consensus therefore making it easier to adopt bylaws. In addition, there may be fewer issues at play in the community dynamic. I also thought consensus may be harder to reach in large communities and larger communities may be wrestling with other socio-economic issues that detract energy and resources from preservation and development.
- Case studies represent a range of Median Household Incomes within the Valley range. As defined by the US Census Bureau, Household Income is the total (money) income received by all members of the household over age fifteen in one calendar year. I thought that median income might weaken the influence of designation at both lower median incomes and at higher incomes. Communities with low median household income may not have the flexibility of resources to dedicate to designation and communities with a high median household income may not see the opportunities of designation as necessary.
- Selected communities have different planning entities: a local planning department or a planning board. The presence of a planning department indicates that there is a local planning entity able to advocate for planning initiatives. The lack of a planning department may indicate either a lack of planning tradition in the community, the lack of resources to support a planning department or the lack of a local advocate for planning. In other words, the lack of a planning entity may result in fewer initiatives related to designation.
- The presence of existing significant historic or tourism resources may indicate that communities are more actively

engaged in designation, and therefore designation exhibits a greater influence. These resources could include, for example, an historic place (building, etc) related to the regional narrative that allow the community to draw attention in the regional story. The presence of a Corridor tourism office, for example, may indicate a “hotspot” for support of designation.

- Lastly, I conducted a quick overview of planning initiatives for each community that I thought may relate to designation. These initiatives included (but were not limited to) historic districts, scenic road, master plans, zoning bylaws and riverfront overlay zoning. Although not an exhaustive list, the list showed some communities to have more initiatives than others. I selected case studies that seemed to have a lot of initiatives and communities that seemed to have fewer.

Using these criteria, a total of five case study communities were selected: Worcester, Uxbridge, Millville, Woonsocket and Central Falls. Taken together, these communities reflect a range of factors thought to lead to the greater influence of designation or to present a barrier to the influence of designation.

Worcester is located at the northern end of the Corridor in Massachusetts and is the largest case study with a population of 172,648. The median income is \$35,623. The Office of Economic Development is in charge of planning initiatives. Although located at the headwaters of the Blackstone River, the canal is no longer a prominent feature in the urban fabric of the city. Furthermore, initiatives related to designation remain in the early planning stages.

These include plans for the development of the newest Corridor information center and a feasibility study to daylight portions of the canal (the canal is now in a culvert).

Located in Rhode Island, Woonsocket is the next largest case study with a population of 43,224. The median income of Woonsocket (\$30,819) is well below the Corridor median of \$55,101. Yet, Woonsocket appears to have a great number of initiatives linked to designation including, for example, a Riverfront Overlay District and the Museum of Work and Culture. Planning is done by the Department of Planning and Development. The Blackstone River runs directly through the town and there are many mill structures still in existence.

It is also the location of the Corridor headquarters for the National Park Service.

Located just north of Providence, Central Falls is the other case study from Rhode Island. It has the lowest median income of all the Valley communities (\$22,628). From initial investigation Central Falls lacked historic and tourist resources. It also seemed to lack initiatives that could be linked to designation. It does, however, have a planning department.

Located in southern Massachusetts, Uxbridge borders Rhode Island. The community has a median income (\$61,855) that is above the Valley-wide median (\$55,101). It also has several significant ties

Source: 2000 US Census	Worcester	Woonsocket	Central Falls	Uxbridge	Millville
State	MA	RI	RI	MA	MA
Population (Valley Median = 12,983)	172, 648	43,224	18,928	11,156	2,724
Median HH Income (Valley Median = \$55, 101)	\$35, 623	\$30,819	\$22,628	\$61,855	\$57,000
Planning Entity	Office of Economic Development and Planning Board	Department of Planning and Development	Planning Department	Town Planner and Planning Board	Planning Board
Historic Resources	Few	Many	Few	Many	Few
Initiatives	Few	Many	Few	Many	Few

to the Corridor such as the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park, the River Bend Farm (a Corridor information center) and the Blackstone River itself. So, it seemed to have a good number of initiatives linked to designation and has a town planner. It is also the location of the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Finally, Millville is the smallest community in the Valley with a population of 2,724. The median income (\$57,000) of the community is around the Valley-wide median (\$55,101). The Blackstone River flows through the town and the town is also the location of the best remaining example of the canal locks (the Millville Lock). Based on my initial survey of initiatives, it appeared that Millville had few initiatives related to designation. It also has a planning board as opposed to a planning department.

Personal Interviews

Based upon these five communities, I selected a list of interviewees to represent individuals from both the public and private sectors and that have varied experiences with designation. I added additional interviewees during the interview process as I received recommendations from people I interviewed. Naturally, some people did not respond to my attempts to reach them. The final list of individuals and their interviews provide the primary qualitative research method used in this thesis. The individuals selected

represented the local business community, town planning departments, state offices and non-profits.

I approached each interview using a similar method. I conducted all but one of the interviews in person over the course of several months during the winter of 2005. I used a short series of questions as a general framework to approach what was generally an informal, conversational interview methodology.¹ For example, I asked interviewees what influence, in their opinion, designation has had on local planning, their experiences working in a heritage corridor and their work with the federal government in other capacities. I also asked their opinions on such topics as state policy, partnerships and the successes and drawbacks of designation with regards to local planning. Lastly, I asked interviewees to identify projects that they felt were attributable to designation. Certainly, there are many initiatives underway in the Blackstone Valley, but it was the projects identified by the interviewees that formed the basis for the projects included for evaluation in this thesis.

Interviewees include:

Dr. John Mullins, Dean of the Graduate School, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

¹ Interviewees were asked to and did give permission to record the interviews. These tapes remained confidential and were destroyed in June 2005.

Bernard Fishman, Executive Director, Rhode Island Historical Society

Robert Billington, President, Blackstone Valley Tourism Council Inc. Chairman, Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission

Dan Morgado, Town Manager, Town of Shrewsbury

William Scanlan, Director, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission

Joel D. Matthews, Director, The Department of Planning & Development, City of Woonsocket

G.L. (Lee) Gaudette, Gaudette Insurance Agency, Board of Directors and Member-at-Large, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce

Ken Crater, Grafton Land Trust

Stephen Bishop, Director of Blackstone Projects, City of Worcester Executive Office of Economic Development

Phil Brown, President, UniBank, Board of Directors, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce

Kenneth Redding, UniBank

Lawrence Gall, Deputy Associate Regional Director, Planning and Partnerships Northeast Region, National Park Service

William Wallace, Executive Director, Worcester Historical Museum

Richard Greenwood, Project Review, State of Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission

Floyd Forman, Planner, Town of Uxbridge

Raymond Bacon, co-director, Museum of Work and Culture

Chapter Five

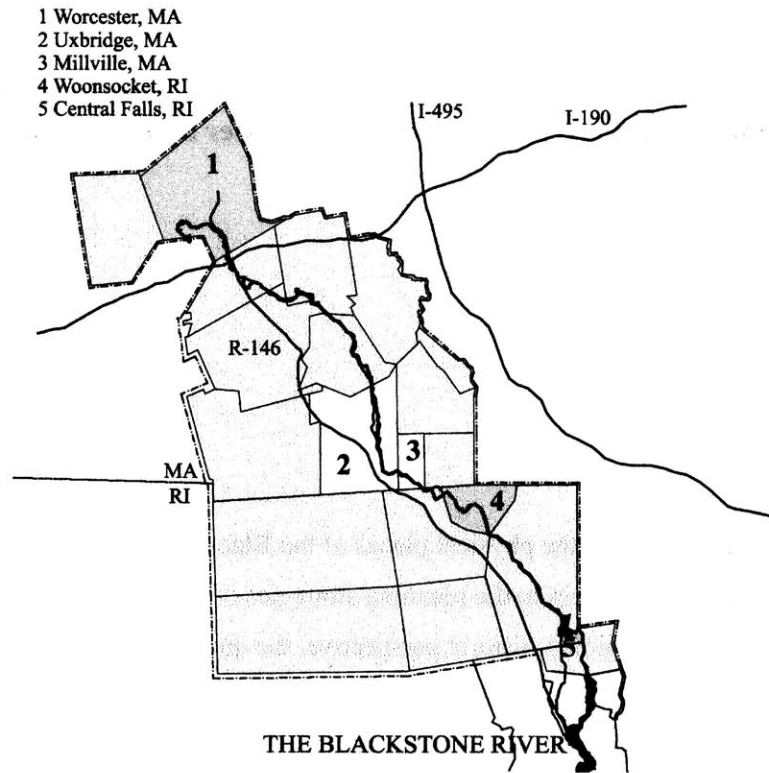
The Urban-Industrial Place: Woonsocket, Worcester and Central Falls

The Blackstone Valley's national reputation as the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution led to its designation. This significance extends to the present-day material environment of the Blackstone Valley. According to all of the interviewees, designation had a profound influence on the Valley; communities now recognize the value in their physical landscapes.

Designation called attention and gave value to the physical landscapes of the Valley and unified the communities of the Valley with a regional identity. Communities began to actively preserve and articulate these significant resources. Communities were motivated to express this significance through their physical places and use the historic significance of this regional identity to inform contemporary planning issues. The regional narrative, the story of industrialization

conveyed through the physical places of the Blackstone Valley, became a component in the planning strategies of the communities. In addition, the regional-historic perspective, the qualities of the Valley that reflect this heritage (the scale and pattern of development, for example) shaped contemporary housing and economic development strategies. Yet, although designation unified these communities with national significance, the influence of designation on the built environment varies across the communities I selected.

Over the next two chapters, I will demonstrate the different degrees of influence of designation on these communities and how the qualities of place (physical, economic and social) effect designation as a tool for preservation and development. While this chapter examines the influence of designation on local planning in Woonsocket,



Worcester and Central Falls, chapter six examines the influence of designation on local planning in Uxbridge and Millville. Woonsocket, Worcester and Central Falls are the three largest case studies and their populations are also above the Valley-wide median. They also have the three lowest median incomes. Furthermore, their median incomes are significantly below the Valley-wide median. Yet, what really

separates Woonsocket, Central Falls and Worcester from Uxbridge and Millville is the quality of their physical environments. The communities in this chapter are characterized by a more urban, industrial fabric whereas the other two are characterized more by open space.

Woonsocket RI

The Woonsocket story is one of industry and immigration. The rise of industry can be traced to the Blackstone River itself. The Blackstone River makes its single largest drop in elevation as it flows through Woonsocket on its journey to Providence. The Woonsocket Falls provided early industrialists with a source of power. Mills soon took their place on the steeply sloping land beside the water. By the middle of the 19th century Woonsocket ranked third in industrial production in the State of Rhode Island, which was, at that time, the most industrialized state in America. These mills and their accompanying mill villages set out the dense pattern of development that characterizes Woonsocket today.¹

Built in close proximity to the mills, the mill villages housed the many immigrants that came to Woonsocket to find jobs. While Woonsocket's population was comprised of a variety of ethnicities, by and large the largest immigrant group in Woonsocket was French-

¹ Douglas M. Reynolds and Marjory Myers, eds., *Working in the Blackstone River Valley: Exploring the Heritage of Industrialization* (Woonsocket: Rhode Island Labor History Society, 1991): 15-18.

Canadian. The early industrialists all over New England had undertaken significant efforts to recruit workers from Canada, taking out ads in the local newspapers as well as sending recruiters to Canada. By 1900, one quarter of the population of the French territories had followed the promise of opportunity south into New England.² They settled in many of the industrial centers of New England, with many coming to work in the mills along the Blackstone River in Woonsocket. Woonsocket was once known as “the most French city in the United States.”³ By the end of the 19th century Woonsocket was a bustling industrial center with the river as the center of activity. Yet, like the other communities in the Blackstone Valley, this boom would only last until the middle of the 20th century when Woonsocket suffered with the decline of industry. Like other communities in the Blackstone Valley, Woonsocket turned its back on the river and regarded it as a liability. The river was a polluted reminder of past prosperity and it flowed through what was now underused and neglected urban fabric.

The designation of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in 1984 reawakened Woonsocket’s connection with Blackstone River. What was once thought of as a problem – the river – became the foundation for redevelopment.

² Anita Rafael, *La Survivance- A Companion to the Exhibit at the Museum of Work & Culture* (Woonsocket: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1997): 6.

³ Rafael (1997): 6.

For years and years, the Blackstone River was a dirty, smelly, body of water that ran through the middle of the city which people dumped in, dumped on, and had very negative feelings about. [They] never stopped to consider it being any type of a resource whatsoever. Once there was recognition on a national level that we had something of value I think it changed attitudes radically. And everything that has happened since, whether the bikeway project or individual projects up and down the Blackstone River, has been based upon a total change in attitude that we had something of value to build from as opposed to something that you ignore and dump on.

- Joel Matthews, Director, Department of Planning & Development, City of Woonsocket⁴

Designation inspired the City to embrace the industrial history of Woonsocket and “link to a larger endeavor”- the Blackstone River Valley.⁵ With this goal in mind, the City crafted a vision for the future: reinvent the Blackstone River. Woonsocket’s vision for the future used the regional-historic perspective, the idea that the industrial past of the Valley was part of our national heritage and should be preserved and interpreted, to inform and enhance such local initiatives as economic development and recreation. These initiatives contributed back to, and enforced the new regional identity of the Blackstone Valley.

In 1991, Woonsocket adopted its Comprehensive Plan. A Comprehensive Plan is required of each individual community by the State of Rhode Island by the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning

⁴ Joel Matthews, personal interview, 14 March 2005

⁵ Department of Planning and Development, *City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island Comprehensive Plan Spring 1991* (Woonsocket: City of Woonsocket, 1991): 7-8.

and Land Use Regulation Act (Chapter 45-22.2 of the General Laws). It is part of a state-wide planning effort to coordinate the actions of state, local and federal entities with regards to the physical, economic and social goals of the state and to maintain the voice of local governments in the development of state-wide goals. The Plan contained eight sections: housing, economic development, natural and cultural resources, services and facilities, open space and recreation, circulation, land use and the heritage corridor. According to Joel Matthews (Director of Planning and Development, the City of Woonsocket) Woonsocket included the heritage corridor in the Comprehensive Plan because they “found the opportunities that the designation was going to give us was worthy of a separate element with a series of goals and objectives.”⁶ The Comprehensive Plan outlined the City’s commitment to its vision that included the river as a source of recreation, Woonsocket as a tourist destination and a historic built environment adapted for contemporary use. Now, less than 20 years later, we can trace this vision through a series of initiatives including the opening of the Museum of Work and Culture, the reuse of historic structures and the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan. These initiatives when woven together help demonstrate how designation can motivate local planning efforts that complement larger preservation and development goals.

⁶ J. Matthews, personal interview, 14 March 2005

In general, the influence of designation was viewed by my interviewees as two-fold. First, designation in and of itself affirmed the pride that Woonsocket residents had in their community. This effect is not to be underestimated. This pride translated into a desire to preserve and protect their heritage and heritage resources, including both the river and industrial structures. The benefits derived from designation allowed residents and local government to focus on quality of life in Woonsocket. With the improved highway infrastructure, specifically the completion of Route 99 (the Industrial Connector), growth was anticipated. Designation helped the City to prepare for growth and to align the growth with the unique historic qualities of Woonsocket.

Second, designation attracted both local and non-local tourists. Heritage tourism was rapidly becoming a component in economic development strategies and the story of Woonsocket fit well into this niche.

The creation of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor has put the history of Woonsocket in a larger context; it has given this history a national significance. It also gives the City a “hook” to stimulate and multiply the benefits of local projects in economic development and recreation within a cooperative regional framework. Its existence and related programs will serve to enhance the image and the quality of life for Woonsocket.

- City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island
Comprehensive Plan Spring 1991⁷

⁷ *City of Woonsocket RI Comprehensive Plan* (Spring 1991): 4.

In its 1991 Comprehensive Plan, the City of Woonsocket set out to explore possibilities for tourism sites and activities to link their story of industry and immigration into the larger regional narrative of the Blackstone Valley. The City specifically looked at incentive options that would encourage recreational uses along the riverfront and retrofit the aging industrial fabric (Woonsocket had a high proportion of buildings over 50 years old). At the time, a concept was slowly emerging to redevelop the Woonsocket Rubber Company at Market Square (an area of town that borders the river) as the Labor History Museum to tell the story of Woonsocket's immigrants.⁸ But, ultimately designation would turn this concept into a reality. Designation brought new intensity to these ideas and attracted new partners (and therefore resources) to the planning process. The community used the museum's development along with the relocation of the NPS headquarters to Woonsocket as a take-off point for future and broader redevelopment in the downtown.

In 1992 the National Park Service announced that the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor headquarters would relocate from Uxbridge, Massachusetts to Woonsocket, Rhode Island. The Corridor staff was simply outgrowing their home in a small, law office.⁹ The headquarter offices would occupy the historic Victorian style train depot in the center of downtown Woonsocket

⁸ Rick Greenwood, personal interview, 30 March 2005

⁹ Raymond Bacon, *Toward the New Millennium* (Woonsocket: The City of Woonsocket, 1999): 243.

owned by the State of Rhode Island. The move established a hybrid ownership & operation arrangement that involved federal, state and local governments with all partners benefiting from the move. For the City of Woonsocket, the National Park Service (NPS) headquarters became a primary anchor to support the transformation of the downtown; the City considered it "a major factor in the rejuvenation of Main Street."¹⁰

According to Raymond Bacon, the relocation of the NPS headquarters established the city as a tourist attraction. Not only would many NPS information-based programs about the Corridor run out of Woonsocket, but the NPS rangers, perhaps the most explicit expression of the National Park System, would be operating out of Woonsocket as well. The rangers would therefore be available to assist with and attend many events at local sites in Woonsocket. The NPS rangers would undoubtedly lend credibility to many of the other tourist initiatives in the City, including what would become the Museum of Work and Culture.¹¹

The Museum of Work and Culture opened in the former Lincoln Textile Mill at Market Square in 1997. From the planning stages, the Museum was a collaborative effort between the City of Woonsocket, the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Woonsocket Industrial Development Corporation and the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. The museum is owned by the City of

¹⁰ Bacon (1999): 243.

¹¹ Raymond Bacon, personal interview, 5 April 2005

Woonsocket, funds from the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission contributed to the construction, and it is run by the Rhode Island Historical Society. The RI Historical Society is responsible for the majority of the fundraising for the facility (the additional construction funds as well as yearly operating expenses) with the Corridor supplying some additional funds in the form of grants for exhibits. According to Bernard Fishman (Executive Director, RI Historical Society), this partnership between the Corridor, the City and the Historical Society is critical to the museum's continued operation; if one entity would drop out of the partnership the museum would have to close. Still, there is no written agreement regarding how this partnership functions just a common support of the museum's mission among the partners.¹²

I am not sure that we could have developed the Museum of Work and Culture without the help of the Corridor. And [the museum is] an important tourist and visitor's amenity in the area; it is a culturally significant enterprise.

- Bernard Fishman, Executive Director, Rhode Island Historical Society

The Museum of Work and Culture serves as one of the nine information centers for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (it provides information in the form of maps and pamphlets as well as informal recommendations from the museum staff). Through the history of Woonsocket, the exhibit tells part of the larger, regional narrative; the story of the immigrant labor force that

¹² Bernard Fishman, personal interview, 23 February 2005

supported the Valley's industrial growth and prosperity. As one of the earliest information centers, the planning for the Museum of Work and Culture helped establish the path for the development of the Corridor's future information centers, what Rick Greenwood refers to as the 'thematic breakdown of the nationally significant themes of the Blackstone Valley.'¹³

It was a complex story that involved technology, ethnicity, immigration, the canal and transportation history; a fairly diverse, not large in national terms, but a very complex set of places in between. You could not tell that story in one place effectively so it was decided to use different nodes to talk about different themes.

- Rick Greenwood, Project Review, State of Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission

Following from the Museum of Work and Culture which told an urban story of immigration and ethnicity, additional information centers spoke to the other significant themes. For example, as I will discuss in the next Chapter, the River Bend Farm in Uxbridge would tell the story of transportation and the effect of industrialization on the agricultural landscapes of the Valley.

The combined impact of the relocation of the NPS headquarters and the opening of the Museum of Work and Culture intensified the transformation of downtown. Since the opening of the museum, the adjacent mill building (the Falls Yarn Mill) has also been

¹³ R. Greenwood, personal interview, 30 March 2005

restored and is used for retail. On the other end of downtown, the Stadium Theater project is a collaborative effort involving an array of public and private sector entities. The theater had closed its doors in 1990 after operating since 1926. The closing had been met with sadness from the City's residents; soon the Stadium Theater Foundation was formed to raise funds for the structure's purchase and renovation.¹⁴ The first goal was to raise enough funds to purchase the theater (\$238,000) which it did in 1998. The Foundation then set out on a major effort to raise the funds necessary for its renovation. This would require over \$1 million.¹⁵ These funds came in the form of grants from the state and federal government such as the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), as it is often the case that historic preservation is not an economically viable option for private sector entities.¹⁶ Joel Matthews, Director of Woonsocket

¹⁴ Although the work continues, major rehabilitation issues like the repairing building envelope (including the roof) and code compliance have been addressed. In addition, the theater's lobby complete with frescoes and elaborate embellishments has been restored (Stadium Theater Performing Arts Center. March 5 2005 < <http://www.stadiumtheatre.com/>>).

¹⁵ Bacon (1999): 232.

¹⁶ One funding source was the U.S. Economic Development Administration. Funding from the EDA is based upon project inclusion in a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), an economic development strategy for a collection of communities that are part of an Economic Development District. Woonsocket, along with the other RI communities in the Blackstone Valley, is part of the Northern Rhode Island Economic Development District. The Stadium Theater project was submitted for funding assistance as part of the CEDS. This grant complimented the additional funds raised from other state entities and from private fundraising efforts (Statewide Planning Program. EDA Public Works in Rhode Island, 1996-2000. Statewide

Planning, states that there would have been no EDA funding without the recognition of designation.¹⁷

Designation also motivated the City to commit to developing recreational areas along the river that would boost the significance of the River in the City and tie Woonsocket into the larger recreational networks in throughout the Corridor.

The City, built around the Blackstone River, has an opportunity to capture its River frontage to create a continuous parkway, which can be incorporated into the Heritage corridor system. The city will continue to pursue rehabilitation and development of its own Corridor-related parks facilities as well as taking an active role in the coordination of regional developments.

- City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island Comprehensive Plan Spring 1991¹⁸

In its Comprehensive Plan, the City established a goal to develop park facilities and other recreational and interpretive initiatives along the river. One such facility is River Island Park, located adjacent to the Museum of Work and Culture in Market Square. Constructed in 1993 with funding assistance from the Corridor, the park provides both visual and physical access to the Blackstone River. This park was a component of a larger plan, also outlined in the Comprehensive Plan,

Planning Program Technical Paper Number: 156. Providence: RI Department of Administration, 2004).

¹⁷ J. Matthews, personal interview, 14 March 2005

¹⁸ *City of Woonsocket RI Comprehensive Plan* (Spring 1991): 31.

for a River Overlay Zone that protects the riverfront and the unique character of the built environment surrounding the river.

The 1991 Comprehensive Plan proposes the River Overlay Zone as a goal to move towards in the future. Over the next decade, the idea was further developed as projects such as the Museum of Work and Culture and River Island Park helped build momentum for the continued revitalization of the downtown:

“...the Museum of Work and Culture, the renovated Falls Yarn Mill building, the Thunder Mist hydropower generating station and the River Island Park recreational area, significant community assets. As such, Market Square, serves as a key activity node in the Downtown area and a major focus of the City’s revitalization efforts.”

- Downtown Riverfront Revitalization Plan
Woonsocket, Rhode Island¹⁹

The idea was finally adopted as the Downtown Riverfront Revitalization Plan in 2003. The 2003 Plan combines the development of recreational areas (ownership & operation) with efforts to preserve and/or adapt more of the aging mill structures along the riverfront (incentives). It encompasses over 129 acres of land on both sides of the Blackstone River. The primary element of the recreational components of the plan is the implementation of the Woonsocket section of the Blackstone River Bikeway. The Blackstone River Bikeway is planned to extend almost 50 miles through the Valley tying

¹⁹ Urban Design Group, *Downtown Riverfront Revitalization Plan Woonsocket, Rhode Island*, The Department of Planning and Development, The City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island (2003): 7.

together Providence and Worcester. When complete, the bikeway will link into larger regional recreation networks such as the Eastern Greenway (a national network). The bikeway effort is currently a fragmented effort involving many agencies within the two state governments as well as local governments. Because of the complicated land acquisition and funding requirements, the bikeway effort has been slow.²⁰ Still, the City of Woonsocket sees the bikeway as an important catalyst for the further revitalization of downtown Woonsocket.

According to the Revitalization Plan, once completed, the bikeway will not only provide city residents with a source of recreation, but will stabilize the surrounding neighborhoods by increasing property values and fostering economic development.²¹

The second largest component of the Riverfront Plan is the redevelopment of the underused mill structures along the river for housing. This area of Rhode Island is growing as Providence expands and as large office complexes in Lincoln are constructed. Joel Matthews estimates that almost 70% of the riverfront area has either been converted to contemporary use as housing and mixed use developments. For example, the Narragansett Knitting Mills, the Bernon Mills, and the development of new housing on a now vacant former mill complex (fired destroyed the mill) have been converted to

²⁰ Wheels Turning Slowly for Blackstone Valley Bikeway. Worcester Telegram & Gazette. 2 December 2004 <<http://www.ltolman.org/99arch/516blackstone.htm>>

²¹ *Downtown Riverfront Revitalization Plan Woonsocket, Rhode Island* (2003): 12-14.

housing. In addition, the redevelopment of several other mills such as the Stone Mill buildings is currently in the works and there are plans to redevelop industrial structures on Allen Street. These projects have sparked the redevelopment of more mills and the City is currently exploring options to further encourage this type of redevelopment through the use of incentives.²²

In conclusion, while it seems likely that the story of Woonsocket was to be told regardless of designation, the story most certainly would have manifested itself differently. By the time of the Corridor's designation, movement was already underfoot in the State of Rhode Island to tell Woonsocket's story.²³ But, the story would have reflected a narrower focus of just Woonsocket as opposed to broadening its focus to contribute to the regional narrative. As opposed to being a solitary story told on one site, the incorporation of the regional-historic perspective meant that the story of Woonsocket was told throughout the city.

Woonsocket is an example of one type of influence of designation – a local community poised to take advantage of designation. First, the local government and private sector entities (residents and non-profit institutions) were all ready for and supportive of designation. Second, designation benefited from the City's systematic approach to integrating both the regional narrative and the regional-historic perspective into local planning initiatives. Certainly,

the relocation of the NPS headquarters to Woonsocket attracted more attention within the region and the state. Yet, this systematic approach focused the attention and resources of the city and the other partners (including private-sector, state and federal entities) on specific initiatives within the community. As a result, the influence of designation on the built environment of Woonsocket can be traced through a series of initiatives undertaken in the city since designation in 1984.

These initiatives result from the use of a variety of the tools of government action, and various combinations of these tools. Designation spurred a mix of public-sector ownership & operation arrangements. As the evidence demonstrated, although some projects include the use of ownership & operation by the City of Woonsocket itself other projects function as partnerships between a variety of public and private sector entities. Yet, local government maintains a constant presence in all of the initiatives. In addition, incentives from the state and various federal agencies enable the local government to shape development to complement the larger preservation and development goals. Incentives also prove critical to the financing for many of the projects.

As a result, although a larger community with a lower median income, Woonsocket's systematic approach enables the community to leverage its own resources to take advantage of the attention from designation and improve its own quality of life. Progress in Worcester,

²² J. Matthews, personal interview, 14 March 2005

²³ R. Greenwood, personal interview, 30 March 2005

on the other hand, has been slower to materialize. Due to a different combination of similar factors, the influence of designation has yet to become manifested in the built environment of the city.

Worcester, Massachusetts

In Worcester, the majority of the initiatives relating to the Corridor have yet to become physically manifested in the built environment. Much of the evidence presented in this case study relates to the early planning stages. This evidence includes plans for a Worcester Visitor Center (the largest project related to designation in the Massachusetts Valley communities) and a private sector planning effort to daylight the now-gone canal. Nonetheless, designation seems to lack the utility as a tool for the preservation and development in Worcester that it enjoys in Woonsocket.

The critical mass in the north [Worcester] is not fully engaged [in the heritage corridor] at this point. Until that really happens whatever may come after marginalizes its opportunity for success if Worcester is not a strong participant, doesn't understand the significance of being part of a national heritage corridor and is not programming around it.

- Stephen Bishop, Director of Blackstone Projects, City of Worcester Executive Office of Economic Development²⁴

The Blackstone Canal was completed in 1828 and provided access to the Atlantic Ocean (via the Providence River) from

²⁴ Stephen Bishop, personal interview, 16 March 2005

landlocked Worcester, transforming it from a shire town to an industrialized city and canal port. The Canal came into Worcester from the south through the low-lying lands in the Green Island district. It terminated in a turning basin located near present-day downtown Worcester. The Canal enabled businessmen in Worcester to expand their commercial markets. As in Woonsocket, immigrants and populations from the rural surroundings came to Worcester in search of employment. As a result, the population of Worcester doubled in less than fifteen years. Yet, with the advent of the rail which followed the route of the canal, the canal became obsolete in 1848 and it was soon considered a total failure. Before long, the canal was being used as an open sewer by the City's growing population. Eventually, the canal was buried in a culvert in 1893 to control the stench.²⁵ As a result, the Blackstone Canal was erased from the urban environment of the city and the city's story. Without the canal, Worcester's tie to the regional-historic perspective of the Blackstone Valley was severed. Without a specific tie to its heritage, significant effort on the part of Worcester to regain its place within the regional narrative was necessary. The City of Worcester had to rediscover and embrace the Blackstone Canal and its place in its history. This missing link, combined with hesitation on the part of Worcester to fully engage the

²⁵ John Carter, "Burying the Canal," *Dead and Buried: The Graveyard of Worcester's Blackstone Canal*, 13 February 2005 <<http://john.ourjourneys.org/blackstone/burial.html>>

regional-historic perspective, has resulted in a stalled effort to realize the potential of designation.

In 1996, after much lobbying to Congress by the Corridor Commission and presentations from all new communities, the Corridor was reauthorized and the boundaries of designation were expanded to include the whole of Worcester.²⁶ Providence and Worcester were viewed as the end nodes of the Corridor region from a historical point of view and from an organizational point of view. The Blackstone River and Canal ran from Worcester into Providence and the expanded boundaries meant that the entire region was included in the designation. Prior to this, the Corridor was not actively engaged in any of the communities north of Uxbridge, nor were these communities actively advocating for designation.

There wasn't a lot of advocacy on the part of the towns from Sutton, Millbury and even that part of Worcester to really get more involvement or require more involvement. Since the reauthorization ten years ago we have seen more consistent presence from the heritage corridor up here.

- Stephen Bishop²⁷

The inclusion of Worcester would also strengthen the regional narrative. The Corridor Commission and staff began to actively pursue linking Worcester into the regional narrative after the initial designation in 1984. Due to the lack of engagement from Worcester, the first approach by the Corridor staff would need to be different from

Woonsocket's approach; it would emphasize education. The Corridor funded a series of historic markers in the City to tell the story of the canal. The markers, 7 in total, run a two and a half mile route south out of downtown. They describe a variety of stories related the Blackstone Canal including the financing of the construction of the canal, where the water came from to supply the canal, the bustle of life that surrounded the canal and the story of the Irish immigrants who built the canal by hand (they were prohibited from working in the mills) and made their lives in tenements in the area.²⁸ But in order to bring the end-node concept to fruition, the broader Corridor concept would need to become a more significant component of the City of Worcester. Similar to Woonsocket, and its Museum of Work and Culture, the linchpin for future development in Worcester will be an information and interpretive center that helps link Worcester's story to the larger regional narrative.

The plans for Worcester's information center present a shift in the City's strategic development: the facility would be used to reorient large portions of land on the east side of the City. Plans are underway to construct the northern-most information center at the headwaters of the Blackstone River in Worcester, near the path of the historic canal. This larger planning effort is called the Quinsigamond Village Revitalization. The Quinsigamond Village Revitalization is a public-private partnership involving the City of Worcester, the Corridor staff,

²⁶ Bob Billington, personal interview, 23 February 2005

²⁷ S. Bishop, personal interview, 16 March 2005

²⁸ S. Bishop, personal interview, 16 March 2005

state agencies like the Department of Environmental Management and the Highway Department as well as many private entities, including the Worcester Historical Museum. The effort seeks the economic revitalization of Quinsigamond Village through the redevelopment of a historic manufacturing building as the information center for the Blackstone River Valley and a visitor's center dedicated to the larger Worcester area.²⁹

[The Corridor staff] is involved in the visitor's center project but also revitalization in the Quinsigamond village area. With planning funds, they supported our revitalization of Quinsigamond based on the development of that visitor's center.

- Stephen Bishop³⁰

In the early stages of the effort and to oversee its management, the City of Worcester brought in a planner, Stephen Bishop, as Director of Blackstone Projects for the Economic Development Office. His salary was paid for by the Corridor during his first year in order to spark Worcester's engagement with the region. This collaborative approach of the Corridor helped transform what traditionally may have been a closed planning effort by the City of Worcester into a catalyst for the continued preservation and development of the Valley.

The reason why we did a grassroots planning effort[in Quinsigamond Village] was an understanding of, and the

²⁹ "Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor," Executive Office of Economic Development, 13 February 2005 <<http://www.worcestermass.org/development/blackstone.html>>

³⁰ S. Bishop, personal interview, 16 March 2005

heritage corridor's understanding of, context. Putting the facility in there without looking at the context of the village and looking at the opportunities to leverage success from the visitor's center for the benefit of the community.

- Stephen Bishop³¹

The planning effort for the interpretive portion of the facility was further bolstered by the active involvement of several large non-profit entities including the Worcester Historical Museum and the Worcester Convention and Visitors Bureau. Worcester Historical Museum wanted to relocate its operations to the visitor center in order to serve as steward of that node of the narrative path. The Worcester Convention and Visitors Bureau would operate the visitor portion of the facility.³² Like the Museum of Work and Culture, the support of the private sector and the partnership approach is considered critical to continued development of the facility.

We have very strong commitment, especially the Worcester historical museum and its leader [William Wallace]. From an institutional perspective in Worcester, he's been involved in a lot of the projects and has been really one of the significant partners in Worcester from a non-profit side.

- Stephen Bishop³³

The Worcester Historical Society has taken a much needed role in the development of the facility, motivating, encouraging and leading the

³¹ S. Bishop, personal interview, 16 March 2005

³² William Wallace, personal interview, 29 March 2005

³³ S. Bishop, personal interview, 16 March 2005

collaborative crafting of the City's story by a multitude of museums and non-profit historical entities in Worcester.

Designation led to the rediscovery of the significance of the Blackstone Canal to Worcester's identity. The canal led to the rapid rise of industry in the city, propelling what was an agrarian-dominated town towards its future as a manufacturing powerhouse. As a result of the renewed interest in the canal, a group of individuals lobbied the Corridor for the funds necessary to study the possibility of reintegrating the canal into the urban fabric.

Americans have this absolute love affair, an affinity for water and Worcester is probably the largest city in the 19th century that was built not on a waterway. [The day-lighting of the canal] has got tremendous potential from my standpoint.

- Dr. John Mullins, Provost of University of the Massachusetts-Amherst and specialist in mill town revitalization³⁴

The study, called "Free the Blackstone," examines the possibility of day-lighting portions of the canal, or perhaps replicating portions of the canal. Yet, while the City acknowledges the power of "the canal theme," the City Council and administration are not fully committed to the concept of the Canal District.

There is still a sense that it is great if it happens, but frankly, they [the City Council] will support it verbally when they are out in public but it is really [about] getting a level of commitment that this is real, that this is something that has value, and [that] we want to move forward with it.

- Stephen Bishop³⁵

³⁴ John Mullins, personal interview, 31 January 2005

Unlike Woonsocket, Worcester remains unprepared to take advantage of designation. First, as Mr. Bishop admits, "there's still a learning curve in understanding the significance of the heritage corridor."³⁶ This lack of understanding translates into a lack of a systematic approach to broader redevelopment that complements the larger preservation and development goals of the region. Worcester's integration of the regional-historic perspective into its economic development strategy is incomplete and, therefore, the city remains unprepared to focus any attention or resources brought by either the state or federal government. While interviewees noted that a lack of state (Massachusetts) interest resulted in the lack of action, this lack of state interest could result from Worcester's decade-long stall in preparations. Second, the lack of physical (visible) resources which tie the City of Worcester to the regional identity of the Corridor creates a barrier to heritage development around these resources. As opposed to Woonsocket, Worcester lacks (visible) physical heritage products like the river or the canal which can be used to link the city to the regional identity. To date, a non-local entity (the Corridor Commission) created the only tie to the regional narrative – the historic markers. Certainly, when complete the information center will tie the city to the regional narrative. However, as this evidence showed local government has yet to take an active role in this project and has resigned leadership to private sector partners. Until the city recognizes the potential of

³⁵ S. Bishop, personal interview, 14 March 2005

³⁶ S. Bishop, personal interview, 14 March 2005

designation and creates a systematic approach to focus the resources of partner entities (including the private sector) designation as a tool for preservation and development will remain limited.

Central Falls, RI

Like Woonsocket and Worcester, Central Falls is an industrial town. Located along the Blackstone River just north of Providence, Central Falls is the smallest, most densely populated community in the Valley. In fact, it is so small that its boundaries are hard to distinguish from the surrounding cityscape of Pawtucket. Currently, almost 19,000 people live within the City's 1.2 square miles.³⁷ Although, at this point, designation has had little influence on the City of Central Falls, the city still presents several key factors concerning the use of designation as a tool for preservation and development.

This lack of influence can be attributed to several things, one of which is physical resources.

The section [of Central Falls] that the Blackstone River goes through does not really offer any scenic or historic benefits. The piece that goes through Central falls is just kind of there and there's not much as far as physical attraction and as a water resource. And the historic context, the buildings, the mills, there doesn't seem to be too much there to work with.

- Joel Matthews³⁸

³⁷ "EDC Profile: City of Central Falls," Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, 5 February 2005 <http://www.riedc.com/riedc/ri_databank/31/254/>

³⁸ J. Matthews, personal interview, 14 March 2005

In addition, while the Blackstone River flows through the city, two factors create barriers for its reinvention as a recreational amenity. The immediate banks of the river are rather steep making public access difficult and costly (the construction of accessible ramps, for example). Central Falls is an extremely small area. This limits the availability of pre-existing, but underused structures for conversion. These underused structures allow for adaptive reuse as part of the regional narrative, as was the case in Woonsocket. Central Falls is limited in these built resources. Moreover, much of the river front land and structures are still tied up by heavy industrial uses.

The small scale of Central Falls limits not only the physical resources but also the resources coming into the city via the tax base. As a result, Central Falls is wrestling with larger economic issues and therefore does not have the flexibility or resources to dedicate towards the goals of designation. Central Falls has the lowest AMI of all twenty-four communities in the Blackstone Valley. In addition, property values in Central Falls are also low. So despite having the highest tax rate in the state, Central Falls has continuously ranked the lowest in tax capacity index (a measure of the community's property tax base against the state average). The community has ranked last in the state in wealth per pupil since before 1978.³⁹ During the recession of the 1990s the State of Rhode Island took over the city's school

³⁹ Results: Education in Rhode Island 2004, Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council, 10 March 2005 <http://www.ripec.org/matriarch/MultiPiecePage.asp_Q_PageID_E_63_A_PageName_E_EducationRI>

district as a result of these internal financial problems. It is the only community in the state for whom this has been necessary.⁴⁰ Central Falls highlights a larger problem of the growing disparity between urban communities and non-urban communities. But for the purposes of this thesis, it is a significant hurdle in order for the city to turn its attention and resources towards designation.

Although not mentioned by interviewees, a lack of identification with the regional identity by the residents of Central Falls is a barrier for designation. While the story of the Blackstone Valley reflects the story of Woonsocket residents it does not reflect the story of the residents of Central Falls. As a result, the City's residents may not be as invested in designation as the residents of Woonsocket. Like its neighbor to the north, Woonsocket, Central Falls is a story of immigrants. Immigrants came to work in Central Falls which was, at the time, the industrial district of Smithfield and then Lincoln. The Irish were the first to come in the beginning of the 19th century, followed by the French-Canadians and then the Polish at the end of that century. This wave of immigration continued into the 20th century with new residents coming from Syria and Lebanon.⁴¹ But, as opposed to Woonsocket, Central Falls' story largely continues today. Almost 40% of the city's residents are Hispanic. They came to Central

Falls from countries like Guatemala, Colombia and the Dominican Republic to work in the remaining mills.⁴²

Although designation has had little influence on Central Falls to date, the city presents important evidence. For Central Falls, the qualities of place – physical, economic and social – combine to create a substantial barrier for designation as a tool for local government. However, designation creates a potential for communities to leverage limited resources as part of a larger vision and has the ability to catalyze partnerships. As the next chapter will show, in communities that, like Central Falls, where designation does not enjoy the support of local government or the broader local community, the other partners must take a more active role.

Lessons

These three case studies show the range of influence that designation can have on urban communities. When woven together, these case studies highlight several significant lessons with regards to the influence of designation as a tool for preservation and development.

On the one hand, key factors related to the community itself contribute to the success of designation. The influence of designation benefits from a local government willing and able to systematically

⁴⁰ J. Matthews, personal interview, 14 March 2005

⁴¹ *Central Falls, RI* (Woonsocket: Blackstone Rive Valley National Heritage Corridor, 1999)

⁴² "EDC Profile: City of Central Falls," Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, 5 February 2005 < http://www.riedc.com/riedc/ri_databank/31/254/>

integrate the regional-historic perspective with contemporary strategies of economic development. As the case studies demonstrated, a lack of integration can result from economic instability, as in Central Falls, where communities are wrestling with larger economic issues. A lack of integration can also be attributed to a lack of motivation on the part of the local government. Here, Woonsocket and Worcester are at opposite ends of the Corridor and exhibit two different perspectives towards the regional historic. In Worcester, there seems to be a hesitation on the part of the City stemming from the financial requirements of the specific initiatives as well as skepticism about the value of designation itself.

To their credit Rhode Island has been better at understanding the value of this designation and of having the organization in hand...Rhode Island was quicker on the uptake, in terms of enlightened self-interest, their participation with the heritage corridor.

- Stephen Bishop⁴³

Whereas, Joel Matthews, Planning Director for the City of Woonsocket believes that:

The most significant aspect of the designation was recognition by the people who live in Woonsocket, and live in the Blackstone Valley, that the resource of the Blackstone River was something of value, something that the City should develop plans around.

- Joel Matthews⁴⁴

⁴³ S. Bishop, personal interview, 16 March 2005

⁴⁴ J. Matthews, personal interview, 14 March 2005

From this followed a motivation to integrate both the river and the industrial heritage into the contemporary context. The City's first major move was a strategy for integration. Then, the City actively took advantage of the resources (incentives) provided with the federal designation to accomplish these goals.⁴⁵

It is certainly clear that several other things contribute to the Woonsocket's ability to successfully complete their initiatives. Woonsocket has an engaged private sector that identifies with the regional narrative. The broader community supports designation-related initiatives to tell *their* story. Woonsocket also has pre-existing physical resources, most importantly the Blackstone River itself. When taken together, these key factors (motivated local government, engaged private sector and pre-existing physical resources) provide fertile ground for designation as a tool for preservation and development. As a result, designation influences many scales throughout the city.

Designation has the ability to create a 'multiplier effect' for preservation and development by catalyzing partnerships. Partnerships are important because they leverage more resources, therefore broadening the influence of designation. In Woonsocket, the local

⁴⁵ With regards to growth, Interstate 495 in Massachusetts provides a foil/lesson for the communities along Route 146. While many attempts have been made to create a regional development and resource management strategy for the Interstate 495, these attempts have come in conflict with what several interviewees characterized as the strong land-owner ethic in Massachusetts.

government's integration of the regional-historic perspective into its local planning allowed the community to better leverage other resources to realize its own preservation and development goals. As a result, the resources of local government are strengthened by the commitment from other levels of government and the private sector.

This is not the case in Worcester or Central Falls where initiatives related to designation do not enjoy concentrated partnerships. Yet, these two case studies still contribute significant evidence about designation's ability to catalyze partnerships. In response to the local government's weak support of designation in Worcester, the role of the private sector has become even more significant in pushing planning initiatives. Although the private sector is unable to fully realize these projects on their own, their continued push supports the continued discussion of designation as tool for preservation and development in the city. Moreover, the lack of support from the private sector in Central Falls only compounds a lack of attention towards designation by the public sector. Central Falls lacks private sector entities like the Worcester Historical Museum and the Worcester Convention and Visitor's Bureau, whose active engagement strengthens the diffuse efforts of the broader private sector in Worcester. In addition, unlike Woonsocket, Central Falls lacks resident identification with the regional narrative.

Partnerships proved critical to Woonsocket's ability to implement a broad strategy for redevelopment that is aligned with the larger regional vision. Partnerships enabled Woonsocket to maximize a variety of combinations of the other tools of government action to realize initiatives. In particular, early redevelopment resulted from a combination of various ownership & operation arrangements and funding through a variety of incentive-based sources. The city linked into the regional narrative via the Museum of Work and Culture and the NPS headquarters (both hybrid ownership & operation arrangements). The city then sought the development of recreational initiatives to link into the larger recreational networks of the region (again, ownership & operation). In addition, the city provides incentives to the private sector to support the preservation and redevelopment of the city's aging industrial fabric.

Certainly, the renovation of historic structures requires extensive funding resources from a variety of sources. But, to date, this advantage has only favored the Rhode Island communities via funding from the EDA.⁴⁶ Designation in and of itself makes communities, like Woonsocket, more competitive for grants from a variety of sources. Furthermore, collaboration provides communities with another competitive advantage from these same funding sources.

⁴⁶ In order to be eligible for grants from the EDA, you must be part of an Economic Development District (EDD). The EDD is a group of communities working together to create and submit a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to the EDA. While the Rhode Island communities are part of an EDD, the Massachusetts communities are not.

Both Rhode Island and Massachusetts planners felt that state and federal funding sources looks favorably on collaborative applications.

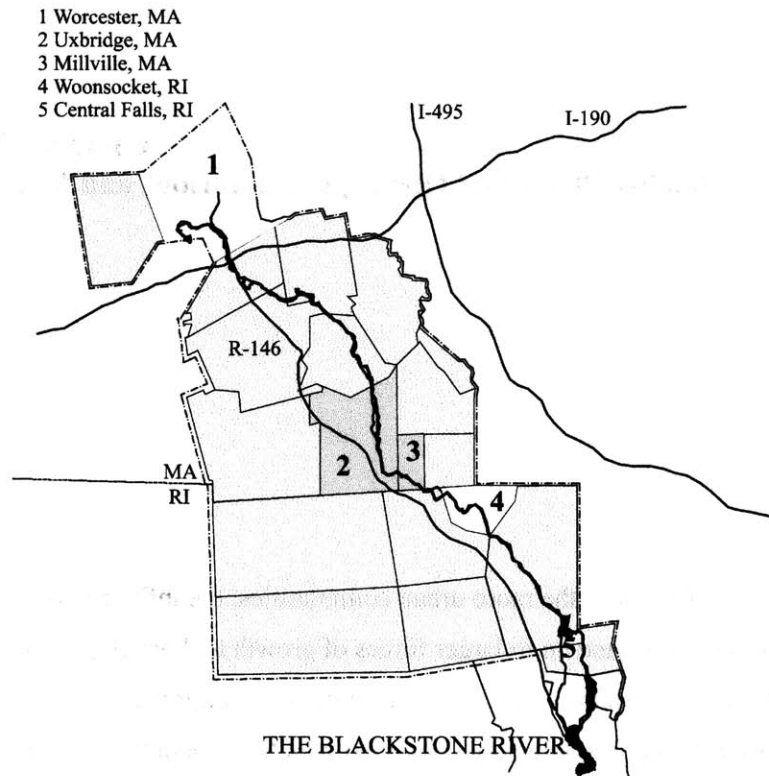
We now turn to the evaluation of the two other community case studies: Uxbridge and Millville. I will argue that the influence of designation takes different forms in these communities because of the quality of the physical environment. Yet, it is clear that while the influence of designation is manifested differently, similar and complimentary lessons can be learned about the use of designation as a tool for preservation and development.

Chapter Six

Smaller Places and Open-space: Uxbridge and Millville

In this chapter, I examine two rural communities in the Blackstone Valley: Uxbridge and Millville. Like the urban communities in the previous chapter, Uxbridge and Millville have stories to tell and these stories are reflected in their physical environments. For communities like Uxbridge and Millville, the unique qualities of place are defined by the small-scale development patterns of the historic villages and large amounts of open-space that remain from the Valley's agricultural heritage. These aspects are a significant part of their stories. As a result, the influence of designation is felt more acutely through the ability of these communities to preserve their unique qualities of place from the external growth pressures for suburbanization.

Similar to the more urban communities, the influence of designation is tandem to larger forces of growth and development in the region. Certainly, the growth resulting from improved transportation infrastructure combined with the economic growth outwards from Boston and Providence is not attributable to designation. It is not that the Blackstone Valley would not have experienced this growth, but rather that it would have experienced this growth differently. This is particularly so in the communities, like Uxbridge and Millville, that are characterized by low population densities and significant amounts of open space as opposed to the denser post-industrial urban environments of Woonsocket or Worcester. But, as was the case in the previous chapter, this influence



varies highlighting several other factors that either strengthen or limit designation as a tool for preservation and development.

Uxbridge MA

Similar to the larger communities, the regional narrative and the regional-historic perspective are evidenced in Uxbridge. The physical landscape of Uxbridge is a contrast between the agricultural and industrial histories of the Valley. Originally a Nipmuck Indian

village, Uxbridge was predominantly focused on agricultural production until the end of the 18th century. It is the location of the second textile mill in the Valley as well as the geographic center of the Valley and therefore the canal. As a result, it was a common stopping point for boats making their way down to Providence, and this spurred a rise in the town's own textile production. Today, Uxbridge is still home to some of the Valley's largest mill structures, including the Stanley Woolen Mill, as well as significant amounts of open land once used for farming.¹

Uxbridge presents an interesting case in which to study the influence of federal designation on local planning. Throughout its development, Uxbridge has not been a planned community; it is marked by what is described by several interviewees as a particularly strong land-owner ethic. The town (total population nearly 12,000) prefers action by the private sector and the control of the land-owner to the government regulation of property. Not surprisingly, the strong land-owner ethic translates into a lack of buy-in from the broader community for the preservation and development goals of designation. Yet, as this case study will show, this is countered to some extent by the more intense involvement in planning initiatives of private sector entities like the Chamber of Commerce as well as state agencies.

By far, the largest physical component of the regional narrative in Uxbridge is the Blackstone River. As was the case in

¹ *Blackstone Canal – Northbridge – Uxbridge, MA Towpath Walk* (Woonsocket: Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, 1997)

Woonsocket, designation inspired the community to embrace the river as a resource. But the many years of industrial use had polluted the river, and if the river was to really become a resource once again, it would need to be cleaned up. One of the first steps towards this goal was taken by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management (MA DEM). The MA DEM acquired a polluted junkyard along the Blackstone River to begin the restoration of the river and watershed. The junkyard became the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park. The park comprises over 1000 acres between Uxbridge, Millville, Northbridge and Blackstone. The MA DEM in conjunction with the Army Corps of Engineers is currently evaluating ways to further clean the area and encouraging the Town of Uxbridge to enforce regional environmental regulations and develop local environmental regulations.² But it seems likely that this will come into conflict with the local preference for minimal government regulation of property rights.

Uxbridge's primary tie to the regional narrative is one of the nine information centers for the Valley. It is operated through the collaborative effort of the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Corridor. As part of the regional narrative, the River Bend Farm center farm tells the story of the transformation from farming to

² Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission. Natural Resources Inventory and Assessment. Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Commission, 15 May 2004 < <http://www.nps.gov/blac/discover/images/NRIRecommend.pdf> >

industry in the Valley. Visitors can not only obtain information about the Corridor distributed here by the NPS, they can also access trail systems and the Blackstone River.

Another influence of designation comes through the integration of underused structures into the contemporary context. Like the larger communities, designation has spurred the preservation and reuse of buildings that otherwise would have either remained underused or perhaps demolished. Located in the center of Uxbridge, the Uxbridge Inn, while of historic architectural interest, was slated for demolition to be replaced by a national chain pharmacy. It had ceased operating as an inn many years ago and was unable to be supported by contemporary economic development. But, despite the desire of local groups to preserve the structure it was considered unfeasible: restoration "defied economic justification."³

In an effort to save the structure from demolition, the Corridor staff continued to reach out to private sector entities until they were able to find willing partners to restore the structure.

At the last moment, the Corridor was able to find a player who had the wherewithal and the interest in doing a gut rehab of that building [the Uxbridge Inn] and when it's done it's going to be magnificent.

- G.L. Gaudette Insurance Agency, Board of Directors and Member-at-Large, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce⁴

³ G.L (Lee) Gaudette, personal interview, 15 March 2005

⁴ G.L Gaudette, personal interview, 15 March 2005

Ultimately, a collaborative effort was crafted that included both for profit and not for profit private sector entities including Savers Bank and the Uxbridge Historical Society. Together, the groups crafted a strategy to purchase the structure from its present owners (who were in the process of preparing for demolition), restore it, and reopen the building as a local bank. Local businessmen, like Phil Brown (President of UniBank in Uxbridge) contend that the project “would not have happened had it not been for the Corridor being ultimately involved.”⁵

The Blackstone River and Canal State Park and the Uxbridge Inn both illustrate the ability of designation to leverage the resources of the private sector and create partnerships to accomplish conservation and preservation goals. But, while successful, these initiatives are limited in scale; they involve only individual properties. Ownership entities like the MA DEM either supported preservation or, in the case of the Uxbridge Inn, efforts were required by the Corridor to find owners willing to preserve historic resources. The Route 146 Overlay District demonstrates the limits of designation as a tool for the larger scale preservation of resources, such as open-space, where it clashes with the beliefs of the broader community with regards to the government regulation of property.

The Overlay District planning effort explored the impact of such topics as land use, parking standards, building heights and

⁵ Phil Brown, personal interview, 18 March 2005

landscaping on one intersection of Route 146 in each town, creating a vision for the kind of development they wanted to see. An interviewee describes the initiative as:

...A multi-year effort of a lot of people trying to vision what they wanted for the Valley and then actually putting something in place to affect future development.

- William Scanlan, Director, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission⁶

With the technical assistance of the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, Uxbridge, Northbridge, Sutton and Douglas participated in a grass-roots collaborative planning effort to envision the pattern and quality of future development along Route 146. The local business community of southern Worcester County supported the state highway initiative to construct a new interchange of Route 146 at the Massachusetts Turnpike. They considered it a powerful key for the redevelopment of area. But the communities through which the highway passes (Northbridge, Uxbridge, Sutton and Douglas) did not want to accept the types of development that typically occupied the sides of highways. They did not want future development to conflict with the existing quality of place. As Phil Brown stated, they wanted to “preserve the heritage and quality of life that we have.”⁷

⁶ William Scanlan, personal interview 15 March 2005

⁷ P. Brown, personal interview, 18 March 2005

The Corridor helped us see the value of doing the zoning overlay up 146 [the Route 146 Overlay]; it was very much a partnership because they helped us develop the model, but our chamber folks went out, sold it and got it done.

- G.L. Gaudette⁸

The four communities lobbied the State of Massachusetts for funding to conduct a planning study to encourage future development that was in line with the existing qualities of place. With funding for the study in hand, a 4-community task force was formed comprised of local planning officials, town planners, planning board members and some town administrators along with staff from the Corridor Commission and the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce. Their efforts focused on how new standards could be used to encourage development that would complement the unique qualities of the area. The taskforce crafted design standards and created a Route 146 Overlay District. Then, the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce presented the study to the town planning boards with support from the Corridor staff and Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission.⁹

The initiative met with success in only two of the four towns; Northbridge and Sutton adopted the overlay district while Uxbridge and Douglas did not. Although only in place for several years, the existence of the Overlay District has impacted the character of

development along Route 146. As a result, for example, of the setback requirements buildings are built farther from the road and projects must include significant landscaping along the road. This helps to maintain the more rural character along portions of the roadway.

The two buildings in the Sutton Industrial Park would not have been the way they are had it not been for the Overlay District. They would have been closer to the road, they would have been uglier. There is landscaping in front of them that never would have been there had it not been for the Overlay District. The same thing in Millbury at the mall [which] I can assure would have been 180 degrees opposite of the way it is now had it not been for the input of the Town of Millbury, the Corridor Commission and, specifically, the town planner in Millbury who has been very involved with us in the Overlay District and trying to preserve the quality that we have here.

- Phil Brown, President, UniBank¹⁰

Yet, whereas the bylaw received the support of Northbridge and Sutton communities it conflicted with the strong land-owner ethic of Uxbridge. Uxbridge residents viewed the setback requirements as a land-taking and therefore did not support the bylaw.

So it [the Overlay District] worked in Northbridge because there were enough people on the bus who were locals to get the buy-in from the rest and in Uxbridge there was no one of the bus.

- G.L. Gaudette¹¹

⁸ G.L. Gaudette, personal interview, 15 March 2005

⁹ G.L. Gaudette, personal interview, 15 March 2005

¹⁰ P. Brown, personal interview, 18 March 2005

¹¹ G.L. Gaudette, personal interview, 15 March 2005

At least in Uxbridge, we've got one or two people in particular who think that if the government is going to tell you that you can't use 20% of your land then the government ought to pay you for it. And while it [the Overlay District] may be a great idea, no one is coming forward with a check to say 'we're now taking 20% of your land and you can't use it.' And I think that's the real issue.

- Kenneth Redding, UniBank¹²

Uxbridge is an example of one type of influence of designation – a local community where there is a strong land-owner ethic and a lack of planning tradition. Moreover, a lack of broader buy-in from the local community to the value of the regional-historic perspective creates a significant road block to the ability of designation as a tool in preservation and development. These factors limit the influence of designation as a tool for preservation and development because it removes local government from taking many of the actions that, as demonstrated by Woonsocket, benefit designation. In effect, this lack of support for government action removes local government from a leadership role in the preservation and development of the community's built environment.

Yet, Uxbridge still presents important evidence about the ability of designation to catalyze partnerships. While the adoption of Overlay District bylaw by Northbridge and Sutton highlights the affect of designation to catalyze partnerships and influence local planning, the failure of Uxbridge to adopt the bylaw evidences designation's

¹² Kenneth Redding, personal interview, 18 March 2005

inability to succeed where it clashes with basic, philosophical differences.

People view it [the overlay district] as an infringement on their property rights. That is the bottom line. The sense that I'm getting from the folks who don't support the overlay district is that it was way too restrictive in terms of infringing on people's property rights.

- Kenneth Redding¹³

Yet, where local government is removed as a strong partner, other partners take a more active leadership role in planning initiatives and the integration of the regional vision. In the case of Uxbridge, the Chamber of Commerce plays an active role in planning and development in the community. Similarly, other private sector entities are relied upon to preserve and reuse the abandoned and underused structures. Lastly, as with the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park, other partners – like the state and federal governments – play an active role in the integration of the regional narrative. In communities, like Uxbridge, where the use of the other tools of government action (like regulation) by local government is limited, the use of ownership & operation by the other partners becomes critical to the integration of the regional vision into the local community.

In conclusion, while these initiatives demonstrate the invaluable ability of designation to catalyze action across many levels of government and the private sector, a lack of buy-in from the community residents and local government, these initiatives will

¹³ K. Redding, personal interview, 18 March 2005

remain isolated as site-specific initiatives. Moreover, without a concerted planning effort to preserve the unique qualities of place, the historic aspects of the physical landscape (the open space) remain threatened by suburbanization. Yet, as the next case study demonstrates, Uxbridge does not represent all rural communities in the Valley.

Millville MA

Originally part of Mendon and then Blackstone, Millville is located just across the Blackstone River from Uxbridge and along the historic route of the Blackstone Canal. Not incorporated as a town unto itself until 1916, Millville is the youngest town in the State of Massachusetts and the only town in the state to go bankrupt. The town's residents worked in a number of mills and factories in the town, including the U.S. Rubber Company which was the primary source of employment for town residents. The company went out of business after the stock market crash of 1929 and its closing ultimately lead the Town of Millville into bankruptcy.¹⁴ Today, the town's commercial area still reflects the small-grained, dense pattern of development that characterized the Valley's early mill villages.

It may appear that designation has yielded little influence on Millville, but as Dr. John Mullins, Provost of University of the Massachusetts-Amherst and specialist in mill town revitalization,

¹⁴ *Millville, MA - Walking Tour* (Woonsocket: Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, 1997)

contends: Millville is “so small that if you just tweak it a little bit good things happen.”¹⁵ Millville is the smallest community in the Blackstone Valley with a population of under 3000, but, just like the largest of communities, the influence of designation on Millville can be traced through the regional narrative and the regional-historic perspective. Designation motivated the community to actively preserve significant qualities of place. This included not only the preservation of significant structures that allow Millville to tie into the regional narrative, but the use of the regional-historic perspective to shape contemporary development.

By bringing the national spotlight to Millville's physical environment, designation has enabled this small town to use its resources to link into the larger, regional story. These resources include its downtown and the best remaining example of the forty-eight locks that once allowed passage along the Blackstone Canal. With the help of the Corridor and various state agencies, these resources have been actively preserved by Millville allowing the town to tie into the regional narrative. The preservation of the Millville Lock is a collaborative effort of the Town of Millville and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management.

The historic nature of the downtown commercial area also reflects an aspect of the larger story of industrialization. Unlike Uxbridge, the Millville community actively supports preservation of

¹⁵ J. Mullins, personal interview, 31 January 2005

these resources. The community successfully adopted Village Center Zoning to preserve the historic nature development of the downtown commercial area. A special zoning overlay was created to protect the mixed-used development of the existing village center and ensure that any new construction will be compatible with the existing fabric both in scale and in its relation to the street.¹⁶

Millville is an example of one type of influence of designation – a very small local community leveraging its limited physical resources to take advantage of designation. As opposed to Uxbridge, Millville demonstrates that the support of the broader community for the regional-historic perspective can strengthen designation as a tool for preservation and development. Here, the local community took advantage of the attention and resources brought by designation to preserve its unique qualities of place such as the partnership used to preserve the Millville Lock.

Moreover, the support of local residents enables designation to be coupled with other tools of government action. In the case of Millville, the small population was able to reach consensus and adopt bylaws (regulation) to preserve what are a limited number of resources. Like Woonsocket, Millville was poised to take advantage of designation – but in a different way. Millville’s characteristics as a

small community with limited physical resources did not present a barrier to designation as a tool for preservation and development.

Lessons

Like the previous three case studies, these two case studies illustrate the range of influence of designation on various communities. While these case studies reflect some of the same influences as in the larger communities, they also add other dimensions to the influence of designation. These other dimensions include the influence of designation on the forces of suburbanization, the conflict with basic philosophical differences like home-rule and the involvement of private sector organizations, like the Chamber of Commerce, and state agencies in pushing forward the preservation and development goals of designation. In addition, the broader support of the community is critical to designation as a tool for preservation and development

Designation helps communities like Uxbridge and Millville leverage their small-town resources to become part of a larger regional narrative. Uxbridge and Millville tie into the regional narrative in two different ways: through the built environment and the rural character of the communities. Designation caused a change in perspective with respect to the existing resources of the Valley and communities began to actively preserve their unique qualities of space. Designation is attributed with:

¹⁶ “Village Center Zoning.” State of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. 5 March 2005 <<http://commpres.env.state.ma.us/Publications/PTBO/Village-Center.pdf>>

Calling attention to the heritage aspects of farming as an activity or as a cultural component of our area which if you go back prior to the designation of the area I don't think would have been necessary seen that way.

- Ken Crater, Grafton Land Trust¹⁷

Designation has not halted growth in the area, but as third generation Blackstone Valley businessman G.L. Gaudette contends "it would have been much worse."¹⁸ Designation helped communities see the value of preserving the qualities of space that are unique to different parts of the Valley; residents and communities would have a reason to no longer reluctantly accept sprawl.

Furthermore, these cases studies highlight the ability of designation to create partnerships for preservation and development and leverage the resources of strong, locally-based private sector entities as well as state agencies. In Uxbridge, for example, the preservation and reuse of the Uxbridge Inn evidenced the ability of designation to mobilize private sector resources. The involvement of the Chamber of Commerce in the Route 146 Overlay effort particularly unique:

One would think of a chamber as just marketing and promoting development and encouraging anything to come in. But [the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce has an attitude of: 'Yes, that is part of our mission, but we don't just want any kind of development. We want something which is going to be a real asset to the region.' And again that goes

back to the Corridor in terms of that basic understanding of what makes that area unique and how to preserve it.

- William Scanlan¹⁹

In Millville, the community used another tool of government action (regulation) to protect the compact development of their downtown that reflects the pattern of development of the mill village's early commercial area. The adoption of Village Center Zoning by Millville demonstrates their desire to approach contemporary planning issues conscious of the regional-historic perspective. In Uxbridge, however:

There was no real foundation of local citizens who decided they wanted to do planning and then encourage development of a certain type.

- William Scanlan²⁰

In addition to public sector entities, these case studies also show the mobilization of private sector resources around the preservation and development goals of designation. Private sector entities saw the goals of designation as similar and/or complementary to their own preservation and development goals. Community entities such as the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce (of Massachusetts) who had worked for years to promote economic redevelopment for southern Worcester County tapped into the resources realizing that:

¹⁷ Ken Crater, personal interview, March 16 2005

¹⁸ G.L. Gaudette, personal interview, 15 March 2005

¹⁹ W. Scanlan, personal interview 15 March 2005

²⁰ W. Scanlan, personal interview 15 March 2005

There were very significant synergies between the Chamber's mission which was to promote economic development and protect quality of life and the Corridor's.

- G.L. Gaudette²¹

Together with the case studies of the previous chapter, these two case studies demonstrate the many different ways designation can influence local policy and planning. The case studies also highlight the ability of designation to catalyze partnerships and enable these partners to maximize a variety of the other tools of government action to reach these goals. I will now use the lessons learned in these two chapters to comment on the factors that contribute to (or detract from) the success of designation as a tool for preservation and development.

²¹ G.L. Gaudette, personal interview, 15 March 2005

Chapter Seven Conclusions

The federal government provides annual funding of approximately \$2 million dollars to the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, a 400,000 acre region. Over half of the Blackstone funds go to support capital projects in the Valley while \$600,000 supports the Corridor staff and operating cost. The remaining \$400,000 is allocated through the National Park Service to pay for the park rangers.¹ Yet, while the federal government has supplied the Corridor with some direct resources, designation itself has influenced local planning in the Corridor communities. But that influence has not been uniform.

The five case studies explored in this thesis illustrate the variety of influences that designation has had on local planning and,

¹ Bob Billington, personal interview, 23 February 2005

subsequently, on the built environment of the Corridor. Designation had proven to be a powerful motivator for both preservation and new development that is aligned with place. This motivation stems from what Dr. John Mullins refers to as “the psychology of action.”² Valley residents now saw the surrounding landscape under the spotlight of national significance, a significance that warranted designation. As a result, they began to treat it as a resource rather than a liability.

[Designation] puts this area and individual towns on a national stage and I think that’s something that is often underappreciated in terms of the impact.

² John Mullins, personal interview, 31 January 2005

- Stephen Bishop, Director of Blackstone Projects, City of Worcester Executive Office of Economic Development³

Action was, in turn, shaped by the new regional identity. In the case of the Blackstone Valley, designation created a regional identity that connected the 24 separate communities of the Blackstone Valley and spanned the state border. Many of the communities were motivated to integrate the regional narrative and the regional-historic perspective into contemporary planning strategies. Designation helped communities recognize that there is great (historic) value in the physical landscape and that this landscape should be preserved. In addition, designation helped communities appreciate that these unique and historic qualities of place can, and should, inform contemporary planning strategies such as economic development and growth management.

The loss of industry that had resulted in the economic downturn of the Blackstone Valley had created negative feelings among residents about the Valley itself. They no longer viewed the surrounding environment with pride and possibility, but rather saw the Blackstone Valley as “the lost Valley of Massachusetts.”⁴ The economic downturn had stagnated growth in the area; the Valley was marked by a neglected, deteriorating industrial fabric and a polluted

³ Stephen Bishop, personal interview, 16 March 2005

⁴ G.L. Gaudette, personal interview, 15 March 2005

river that served as a constant reminder to residents of the Valley’s lack of progress. In those days, the Valley was:

A series of mill towns all of which had gone belly-up, whether we are going from Millbury to Sutton to Whitinsville to Uxbridge not to mention Millville and Blackstone. All of them were in terrible shape and there was more of a climate of despair than anything else.

- Dr. John Mullins, Dean of the Graduate School, The University of Massachusetts-Amherst⁵

But the loss of industry, by stagnating growth, has ironically also preserved the distinctive qualities of the Valley’s past. The Valley remains a unique contrast of industrial and agrarian landscapes; urban remnants such as the mill village are juxtaposed against open farmland. Designation helps these communities view these remnants in a new light. Designation imbibes the landscape of the Blackstone Valley with renewed contemporary value.

Designation [be it as a national park or a national heritage corridor is] is perhaps the ultimate articulation and respect for a place and its associated story, each new park [or corridor] physically embodying a ‘sense of place’ in the country’s collective consciousness.

Designation has cultivated a new interest in the Valley’s post-industrial landscape; communities now look to both protect and capitalize on their unique local qualities. But rather than viewing these

⁵ J. Mullins, personal interview, 31 January 2005

⁶ Rolf Diamant, “From Management to Stewardship: The Making and Remaking of the U.S. National Park System,” *The George Wright Forum* Vol. 17 No. 2 (2000): 32.

objectives parochially, designation has resulted in a different approach to these objectives. Public and private sector entities and residents have broadened their focus. In other words, they no longer think parochially. According to Stephen Bishop, “there was willingness on the part of the communities [both public and private sectors] to at least engage in a regional planning dialogue.”⁷ Designation brings a sense of regional identity to the Valley which informs locally based planning efforts. Localized initiatives are now pursued within the regional framework and with attention paid to the regional vision. This regional identity is shaping local efforts in two ways: through the construction of the regional narrative and the influence of the regional-historic perspective as an approach to contemporary planning issues.

Designation as a National Heritage Corridor has helped communities and private entities attract more attention within tourism networks. In the case of the Blackstone Valley, the contemporary landscape still reflects the story of the Valley and, more importantly, the national story of transition from an agrarian-based society to an industrial society. The Blackstone Valley is now a tourist destination, something that was not a possibility without designation.

Prior to the Corridor coming in nearly 20 years ago, if someone had said that the Blackstone Valley is going to be a tourist destination they would have been laughed out of the room; we didn't think of ourselves as a tourist destination.

- Kenneth Redding, UniBank⁸

⁷ S. Bishop, personal interview, 16 March 2005

⁸ Kenneth Redding, personal interview, 18 March 2005

The fundamental framework of the Corridor's tourism program is a regional narrative path. While tourism was already a large component of the economies of both Massachusetts and Rhode Island, the state tourism industries were largely driven by the beaches to the east and in Massachusetts the mountains to the west.⁹ But heritage tourism became an increasingly popular component of people's trips. In the United States for example, a historic activity or event was included in a trip by approximately 84.7 million adults over the past year.¹⁰

In the 1980s, the Blackstone River, along with the structures and spatial patterns of the Valley, was no longer a reminder of what the Valley had once been but now held countless possibilities for the future. It was a critical change in perspective. The Valley was no longer twenty-four 'lost' communities.

[The Valley is] no longer a community on a slow death march but rather one that's in a renaissance; all of a sudden there is willingness to invest in the community and preserve its character.”

- Ken Crater, Grafton Land Trust

Valley communities were motivated to look for ways to reintegrate these resources into the contemporary context as a way to integrate themselves into the regional narrative.

⁹ Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, 10 February 2005 <http://www.massvacation.com/jsp/static_in/about/what.jsp?cat=82> and Rhode Island Division of Tourism, 10 February 2005 <<http://www.rihospitality.org/tourism/tou01.html>>

¹⁰ National Trust for Historic Preservation, 0 February 2005 <http://www.nationaltrust.org/heritage_tourism/benefits.html>

Designation proved critical to the Valley's ability to retain, protect and capitalize on the unique resources of the area. At the largest scale, designation has spurred the reinvention of the river, the region's unique physical attribute, from an industrial power source to a place of recreation. The Blackstone River was considered by many to be the first polluted river in the United States and for many years Valley residents turned their back on the river. It is now becoming the centerpiece of the Valley and the focus of its historical narrative. Communities are pursuing river-based initiatives such as Riverfront Overlay Zoning to link their riverfronts not only back to their communities but with the new network of open-spaces and recreation nodes. Designation has also hastened the succession of the canal's tow-path into a regional bike way. These regional recreation networks, in conjunction with the regional narrative, further strengthen regional identity, which in turn exerts influence on local planning.

Visitors to the Valley can now trace the industrial heritage of the United States through the significant places of the Blackstone Valley. Both the agrarian landscape and the post-industrial landscape have been adapted for contemporary use and meaning.

Local communities and private sector entities have begun re-evaluating the underused and abandoned industrial lands, looking to retrofit these places for new uses. As the case studies illustrate, structures are used to reinforce the narrative path through their reuse as information centers, museums, or historic buildings and places open to

the public. The Museum of Work and Culture, River Bend Farm and the Millville Locks are cases in point. These underused places, in addition, are reintegrated into the contemporary context and adapted for other new uses; mill buildings were converted to housing or commercial use. Communities have also looked to protect their unique qualities of place from contemporary growth pressures. Examples include the preservation of historic patterns of development such as the Village Center Zoning in Millville as well as the preservation of rural quality of the landscape as seen in the Route 146 Overlay.

While the projects themselves are evidence of the influence of designation on local planning, they also highlight several key factors that lead to the success of designation as a tool in preservation and development. As a tool of government action, designation is a new way of accomplishing preservation and development goals. It is, after all, seen as a way to spur action by others and, therefore, relies heavily on partnerships. As a government tool, designation avoids the permanent commitment [of funding, operation and maintenance] from the federal government. Designation does not require certain actions by others, like regulation does. Instead, designation seems to hide the role of federal government in local efforts. For example, residents know that the Corridor "is a federal program, but think of it as a National Park Service program."¹¹ Instead, as an information-based tool used by the federal government, designation attempts to motivate

¹¹ G.L. Gaudette, personal interview, 15 March 2005

the actions of others including state governments, local governments and the private sector, including non-profits, for-profits and, even, individuals.

I think their main contribution is that they have not told communities what to do. They have provided information and resources for communities to figure out on their own under the umbrella of 'let's try to preserve what we have as this unique resource, which is the Blackstone Valley.' But they have let the communities go about implementing what is appropriate for them and not have the federal government tell them 'this is what you should do.'

- William Scanlan, Director, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission¹²

It is clear from these case studies and initiatives that, in fact, much of the work is accomplished through collaborative efforts. More importantly, though was that Valley residents were inspired by the collaborative efforts now taking place in their communities.

The most important thing they have done is brought the unique and individual aspects of each of the communities along the river together working as one group. There's a kind of synergy that exists in this corridor where you get people from diverse backgrounds and diverse interests coming together and putting things together that makes sense.

- Kenneth Redding¹³

The case studies illustrate a variety of partnership arrangements involving local government, state agencies, the Corridor and the private sector. Initiatives like the Museum of Work and

Culture and the future Worcester Visitor's Center are not only the result of a collaborative planning effort but will continue to be operated as a partnership. In the case of the Museum of Work and Culture, local government (the City of Woonsocket) teamed up with two non-profits (RI Historical Society and the Woonsocket Industrial Development Corporation) and the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor to bring the museum to life. The museum is still operated as a collaborative effort between the local government and the non-profit historical society with the Corridor providing funding assistance for the museum's exhibits. Similarly, the future Worcester Visitor's Center will be a collaborative effort spearheaded by non-profits such as the Worcester Historical Museum with significant assistance from the Corridor as well as state agencies like Mass Highway for its construction. The Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park, on the other hand, is operated by a partnership between the State of Massachusetts and the Corridor. But, as these initiatives also point out, the ability of these partnerships to result in action is assisted by several key factors that enable them to leverage resources better including engaged private sectors and existing infrastructures.

As a tool for preservation and development, designation clearly benefits from an engaged private sector. Non-profits like the RI Historical Society and the Worcester Historical Museum play key roles in both the realization and continued operation of the Valley's

¹² William Scanlan, personal interview 15 March 2005

¹³ K. Redding, personal interview, 18 March 2005

historic resources. This is also true in the case of the Route 146 Overlay and the role of the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce as an advocate for the initiative in the community. The Route 146 Overlay also illustrates how the lack of community support for such initiatives can create a barrier for the successful implementation of other tools, like regulation, that further the goals of development that is in line with the unique qualities of place. Lastly, as is the case in Central Falls, the lack of residents that identify with the regional identity or narrative can create a barrier for designation as a tool for preservation and development.

But the breadth of partnership and collaborative effort is limited. Many of the partnerships are vertical partnerships; as Bob Billington said, “you generally do not see a lot of collaboration between communities.”¹⁴ In other words, partnerships tend to involve locally-based entities – local governments as well as locally based private entities – working with a variety of state agencies and the federal government. Collaboration between communities generally occurs only on a project by project basis when a direct need arises, and only on a small-scale (building) scale. Aside from the Route 146 Overlay there were really no other major multi-community planning efforts taken in the Valley. Furthermore, there have been no community planning efforts that cross the state line. Although the bikeway is planned to extend throughout the Valley, the collaborative

efforts are limited to the logistics of where the path will come out of one community to link to the next.

They all share the bike path because that is linear and goes through all the communities, but here is not a lot of collaboration on that.

- Bob Billington, President, Blackstone Valley Tourism Council Inc. Chairman, Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission¹⁵

Furthermore, although each half of the bike path is funded by its respective state, there is little cooperation between the two states in planning.

I think that is the one partnership that really never emerged. Just in dealing with the bikeway, there has been very little cooperation or interest on the Massachusetts side. Projects such as water pollution and issues like that, I have not seen a lot of cooperation between the two states. I’ve seen quit a bit of cooperation between the state and the local communities at least on the Rhode Island side, but not between the State of Massachusetts and the State of Rhode Island.

- Joel D. Matthews, Director, The Department of Planning & Development, City of Woonsocket¹⁶

This occurs in economic development as well. At the present time, business entities on the Massachusetts side are not engaged in planning with Rhode Island except for tourism. As Phil Brown President, UniBank and Chairman of Economic Development for the Blackstone Chamber of Commerce states: “We’re more involved in

¹⁴ B. Billington, personal interview, 23 February 2005

¹⁵ B. Billington, personal interview, 23 February 2005

¹⁶ Joel Matthews, personal interview, 14 March 2005

economic development that's taking place in our market place which is our Blackstone valley, not on the other side of the Blackstone valley."¹⁷ To date, bi-state efforts are predominantly focused on tourism promotion. So it is only regional identity that serves to connect all these groups. Groups work along side each other for the same goals, but not together.

I do not believe that we are engaged on a business level as effectively as we could be with the Northern Rhode Island Chamber. But that state-line issue is tough, that's a big line. When I ride my bike I don't notice it.

- G.L. Gaudette, Gaudette Insurance Agency, Member-at-Large, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce¹⁸

Lastly, as a tool for preservation and development, designation is also assisted by pre-existing structures that are poised to take advantage of the opportunities of designation. Because little direct support is provided to communities from the Corridor itself, the Corridor relies heavily on the ability of its partners to obtain the resources necessary to support initiatives. Designation does, though, provide a competitive advantage to the communities to assist them in leveraging resources from a multitude of sources including federal and state governments as well as the private sector. Both designation and collaborative planning efforts garner more points in the grant application process.

¹⁷ Phil Brown, personal interview, 18 March 2005

¹⁸ G.L. Gaudette, personal interview, 15 March 2005

The influence of designation in local preservation and development is favored both by integration with the state power structure and the existence of other organized entities that are ready and able to take advantage of designation. Integration with the state power structure enables communities to leverage more resources. Not only do these communities receive more attention from individuals connected to Washington, but they also tend to receive more funding from state agencies. Rhode Island has lobbied more for funding through the Corridor concept. This is evidenced by the greater number of larger projects focused on the Rhode Island side of the corridor such as the Museum of Work and Culture, the Stadium Theater and the completed portion of the bikeway as well as many other projects not included in this research (such as the recent Kelly House). To date, the Worcester Visitor's center is the largest funding commitment by the Corridor in Massachusetts. This is followed by the River Bend Farm in the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park. As Stephen Bishop contends: "I think that Rhode Island just understood faster what this was and what the potential was [for designation]."¹⁹ In addition, the organization of state agencies in Rhode Island, in particular the Department of Transportation, contributes to the state's more rapid completion of the bikeway. In Massachusetts, the slow pace of the bikeway has a lot to do with a lack of ownership by any single state agency which is the result of the splintering of multi-modal

¹⁹ S. Bishop, personal interview, 16 March 2005

transportation responsibilities between the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Mass Highway Department.

Thus, the success of designation as a tool for preservation and development is strongly related to a variety of other factors. Designation can be a powerful tool of government action, an example of an information-based strategy for preservation and development. Collaboration across different public and private entities has proven to be influential in advancing the goals of preservation, resource protection and economic development and designation is one way to foster that collaboration.

Regional identity became a component in the localized planning efforts of the Valley's communities. But it also, motivated the communities to link planning efforts across the Valley. As an information-based tool for preservation and development, designation served to connect the public interests and market pressures of today with a desire to preserve the past. Designation motivates and enables a variety of entities of interests – government bodies, private businesses, non-profit agencies and individual citizens – to work together to achieve the common, but diffuse goal of preservation and development. It provides for a dynamic, place-specific approach to preservation and development. In doing so, designation features the broader social significance of heritage and the depth and complexity inherent in place. Designation cultivates “a living landscape where its long and nationally pivotal history is still visible through thousands of

structures in distinctive landscapes and accessible through the living memory of its residents.”²⁰

²⁰ Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. National Park Service. 15 May 2004 < http://www.nps.gov/blac/the_corridor/the~corridor.html >

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