

Saranac Lake River Walk

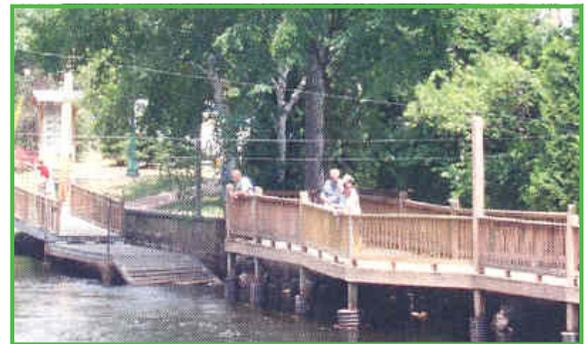
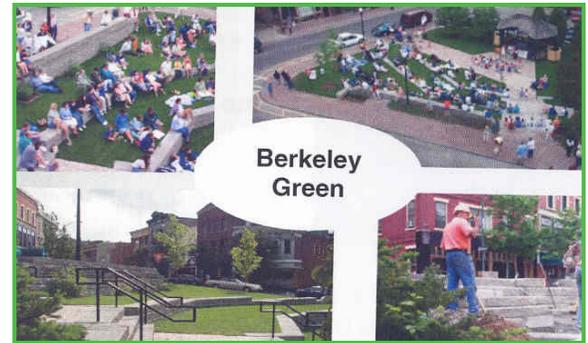


Problem

The Village of Saranac Lake wanted to turn the river that wove through its center into a centerpiece and attraction.

Background

In 1909, Landscape Architect Edward Clark Whiting developed a master plan for this small town of 5,000 residents that relegated the river to the Village's "backyard." It was primarily used as a service area behind buildings lining Main Street. In 1992, dialogue began about how to redesign the river corridor and a study was commissioned to design A Conceptual Plan for River Access.



Solution

With the Conceptual Plan as the guiding force, the community undertook the realization of a river walk that would provide transportation, recreation, environmental, and economic benefits. The corridor was divided into six distinct segments, three of which were constructed entirely by volunteers: the Hydro Point, the Boardwalk, and the Esplanade.

Each point along the walk had its own unique features. The Berkeley Green was a particularly important project, as it was sited at the intersection of two primary roads and serves as the "commercial anchor." The Green was transformed into an outdoor performing arts center that offered tiered seating and prime public space. Other unique amenities installed included canoe launches, fishing sites (some handicap accessible), and even a kayaking course.

Common design elements to each segment included environmental buffering between the river and impervious surfaces, pedestrian bridges and boardwalks, pedestrian scale lighting, benches, signage, and native arboretum-style plantings.

Community involvement was significant in the process. Not only did government agencies, nonprofits, and corporations donate funds, but 700 individual donors did as well. Land donations from local businesses and families were also of great benefit. Many organizations pitched in to construct several of the segments; two Boy Scouts earned their Eagle Certification through enhancing the River Walk. Other volunteers were from middle and high school classes, the Youth Center, the Student Conservation Association, the High School Art Class, residents from the Senior Citizen Center, and work crews from two Adirondack prisons. A great deal of planning work to define goals, obtain funding, and to realize implementation and maintenance was done by members of the River Corridor Commission, the Rotary Club of Saranac Lake, and the Village Improvement Society. In addition, all second grade classes are enlisted to plant annuals within the River Walk corridor each year as they receive instruction on the riverside flora and fauna. As a result of such high community involvement, vandalism is minimized and long term support is assured.

Saranac Lake River Walk—Saranac Lake, NY

Initial funding of \$508,000 came from a TEA-21 Enhancement Program grant. Barton & Loguidice, P.C., Consulting Engineers were hired to design and provide construction inspection and administration.

Results

There were visible economic, social, and environmental benefits from the project. Prior to implementation, there was a 60 percent vacancy rate in the village downtown, while afterwards, only two vacant storefronts remained. Existing businesses reported substantial revenue increases. Socially, the River Walk provided greater access to the river in places where it was inaccessible previously. Walking among residents increased, and more people were attracted to downtown for performances and civic functions.

Environmentally, a vegetative buffer provides a natural filter for run-off from the Village streets and parking areas, while also providing habitat. New retaining walls stabilized shorelines and enhanced deep water habitats. Volunteers now clean the river on a regular basis, and school children are educated on the environment and regional ecology.

Contact

Deborah McDonnell
Director of Community Development
(518) 891-0490
<http://www.saranaclake.com/develop.shtml>

Images Source

Institute of Transportation Engineers Pedestrian Project Award Application. Saranac Lake Office of Community Development.
<http://www.ite.org/awards/pedproject/Saranac.pdf>

