

# Look and Listen Tour Notes



Coastal Lakeshore Economy and Resiliency Initiative

<b>Project Name</b>	Coastal Lakeshore Economy and Resiliency Initiative
<b>Date:</b>	May 19, 2021
<b>Meeting:</b>	Jefferson – St. Lawrence Region – Look and Listen Tour
<b>Attachments</b>	<a href="#">Jefferson-St. Lawrence Interactive Map</a>

## 1. Introduction of Project Team

EDR (prime consultant): Jane Rice, Sam Gordon, Jane Nicholson, Erica Tauzer, Sarah Krisch  
EcoLogic (subcontractor to EDR): Liz Moran, Sharon Anderson, Michelle McGinnis  
Cameron Engineering (subcontractor to EDR): Michael Keane, Andrew Martini, David Tepper  
NYS Department of State: Karen Catcher, Nancy Martel

## 2. Introduction of Steering Committee

Participants in attendance introduced themselves and their affiliations.

## 3. Brief Introduction to Mapping Exercise

Jane Rice and Erica Tauzer explained and demonstrated the interactive map activity, noting that the goal of the Look and Listen Tour is to identify and discuss key areas that are of community and regional concern when it comes to extreme water levels (both high and low).

The map, including embedded notes from the Look and Listen Tour, can be viewed at <https://edrdpc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=dcca98fa72d0430e94c3f159403fd645>.

## 4. Look and Listen Tour

Three break-out rooms were utilized to focus on certain sub-areas of the region due to the extent of shoreline. Participants were assigned to a room based on their affiliations and area of expertise and interest.

**Sub-area 1 (Lake Ontario):** T Ellisburg, T Henderson, T Hounsfield, T Brownsfield, T Lyme, V. Sacketts Harbor, V. Dexter, V. Chaumont

**Sub-area 2 (Western St. Lawrence River municipalities):** T. Cape Vincent, V. Cape Vincent, T. Clayton, V. Clayton, T. Orleans, T. Alexandria, V. Alexandria Bay, T. Hammond, T. Morristown, V. Morristown

**Sub-area 3 (Eastern St. Lawrence River municipalities):** T. Oswegatchie, V. Waddington, T. Lisbon, C. Ogdensburg, T. Louisville, T. Massena, V. Massena

### 4a. Discussion from sub-area 1 (Lake Ontario municipalities)

- Town of Lyme – Point Peninsula

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- Called the “Failing Shores” area
- South Shore Road/Beach Road – rebuilt several times. Gets hammered during high water
- Isthmus Road – High water/high wind, transportation issue; Between Beach Rd and S. Shore Road – wetlands. No private homes
- Culverts need to be cleaned. Beach Road is permitted to be raised
- Area also referred to as “Boater’s Beach.”
- Safety of residents is an issue – emergency access compromised during high water events
- Majority of area is private property
- Recommendations for project implementation?
  - It seems REDI projects have not been prioritized over other (private) projects
  - Expressed support for natural systems to provide protection (i.e., along west shore, the wetlands (in red Risk Area)), but homeowners want rigid shores to protect their homes, and a lot of the shoreline is under private ownership, so this is an issue
- Village of Sacketts Harbor
  - Main concern for publicly owned areas (Harbor area/Navy Pt.) – 2017 and 2019 (April) - Public docks previously completely submerged; docks rendered unusable. Structures to be rebuilt. Market Sq. Park (along Main St.) became flooded, unusable.
  - Ontario St – privately owned area. Bears the brunt of waves. Brown Shores Road (REDI project; being elevated). Bolton’s Beach – privately owned. Residents have built bulkheads to protect properties.
  - Henderson Harbor – significant impact on tourism; docks and gas pumps underwater. Leeward orientation- does not experience wave impacts but gets inundated. Village of Clayton - gas tank underwater.
- Town of Ellisburg
  - Town of Ellisburg – Sandy shoreline – shoreline where erosion is a natural process, natural ecosystems. Natural asset. Beach maintenance is dependent on areas not being “armored.”
  - Was 2017/2019 good or bad for this area?
    - Cannot say good or bad. Ecosystem adapted to periods of high and low water. Sediment has created or renourished natural beaches. This dynamism needs to continue. Shoreline modification would interrupt this natural process.
  - Opportunity to bring in a regional perspective.
  - Opportunity to apply natural, ecologically compatible shore walls.
- Other discussion topics
  - There are 1000s of existing homes, camps, cottages, businesses. Zoning will not change the current situation.

## 4b. Discussion from sub-area 2 (western St. Lawrence River municipalities)

- Chippewa Bay area - noted that in many settings wetlands extend to the water's edge. Need guidance on what types of plantings on private property could improve resiliency.
- Highly varied surficial geology. Granite outcrops interspersed with swampy areas. Challenge to on-site septic systems as well as other issues. Community guidance would be appreciated
- Discussion of how flood damage affects marinas and overall tourism & businesses
  - Flood damage to many areas (on map, noted how few slips are full)
  - Low water impacts - "in August when the gates open (releasing water downstream) many seasonal residents just take their boats out and leave"

*Prompt from facilitator (Jane Rice): Any observations about ecosystem impacts of fluctuating water levels?*

- Ecological benefits to low water
  - Cattails die back which opens passages into the wetlands
  - Interplay of ecosystem services and economic impacts. Example: natural fluctuation in water levels helps spawning of pike, which then improves angling, which in turn aids tourist economy.
- Discussion of perception that IJC and Plan 2014 are to blame. Need help communicating the reality of IJC's role and relative magnitude of controls on lake levels.
- Comments that REDI focused on high water
- T of Alexandria - invested in steel to raise docks, now they are too high. Add steps (ex. Goose Bay). Observation that historic boat houses along river have steps. "we don't need stuff that shortens our season!"
- The SL River is not the Seaway. Managing for shipping needs too restrictive
  - Multiple uses and ecosystem services
  - Shipping is still going on during low water, are stated minimum requirements accurate?
- Concern for public safety when water levels are low- emergency services cannot access area
- Frustration about permitting requirements for navigational dredging

*Prompt from Jane Rice: Refocus discussion on issues of wastewater management*

- Save the River is about to publish a booklet
- Need for sewer lines to serve shoreline areas
- Modular wastewater treatment plants can be expanded to handle flows from new collection areas (A Bay, Clayton, Orleans, Alexandria)
- Will need funding support for households to connect to the laterals

## 4c. Discussion from sub-area 3 (eastern St. Lawrence River municipalities)

- Water level management

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- A lot of discussion this year (2021) about low water levels along the river, reasons debated
- Comment that there's not a lot that locals can do. Water levels are regulated by Plan 2014b, IJC is the master of that plan and the regulation
- Led to discussion about the purpose of CLEAR – prepare towns with the ability to respond to high and low water events
- Question: What exactly does the risk area define? Risk of erosion, risk of flooding, or risk of low waters?
- Current strategies to add shoreline resiliency
  - Canada operates a 'Natural Edge Program' that encourages and educates shoreline property owners of native plants to place along the shoreline. At a property owner's request, a crew is sent out to evaluate the property and identify suitable plants (free), and give specific recommendations of how the landowner can create a more resilient property
  - Towns of this part of the River (T of Oswegatchie, T of Lisbon) have limited land use regulation. There is no zoning in either town, no site plan review. They view their land as their own domain. Starting to see that they're being a little more interested in land regulation, having adopted some new regulations regarding solar farms because of a recent boom of solar in the area. This could mean that these towns are starting to be more receptive and open to land use tools.
  - Municipalities have land-use regs for numerous reasons, some are viewed as beneficial, some are viewed as hindrances. It's often difficult to use land use codes to solve today's problems. Some municipalities have LWRPs in place, this seems to be a better approach than relying on local zoning.
    - Waddington – somewhat adequate in code
    - V of Waddington – looking to do a revision to that
  - Working with shoreline property owners is often difficult. Property owners are very concerned about water levels, but also protective of their camps. No one likes someone telling them what to do on their own property, but some may be receptive to other resources such as the natural edge program
    - NYSDEC has experience working with homeowners to protect their docks and add resiliency. People are most often more interested in flood protection rather than erosion protection; they're not the same thing. Important to keep in mind when talking with people
- Septic systems
  - Environmental Facilities Corp has released a second round of septic replacement funds. St Lawrence County received additional funding to allocate to the area extending from Hammond to Oswegatchie
    - Eligibility is extended to property owners with deficient septic tanks along shorelines on the priority waterbodies list. The program provides funds to cover up to 50% of septic replacement cost (up to \$10K)

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- Properties within 250 ft of high-water mark are eligible; some properties move septic systems out of problem area. Many lots are very small, so it is difficult to move into lower risk areas
  - A lot of people don't know this funding is available! A lot of it is word of mouth.
  - St. Lawrence County has pretty strong level of interest, County sent postcards to everyone on eligible waterbodies
  - The program does not provide funds for administration costs associated with delivering the program to their communities. Therefore, the counties and individual municipalities need to use their own municipal funds/staff/time to carry out the program. St. Lawrence County has been successful in delivering this program by partnering with the SWCD and hiring an administrator for the program. It is a great program but requires a lot of collaboration to make it happen.
- Regional approaches to wastewater management
  - There seems to be a high interest in Jefferson County for more public sewer systems
  - Tom Henderson has talked about making public sewer available, hasn't been able to go anywhere
  - Long linear distances are problematic regarding infrastructure and development costs, particularly in areas that are dense in limestone – extremely expensive to build
  - An additional layer of concern is that many of these homes are seasonal residences, operating costs and maintenance can be problematic
  - NYSDEC representatives referred to a natural based resiliency program operated by a not-for-profit that works with lake associations and homeowners' associations to address sewer systems/public sewer infrastructure options
- Vulnerable shorelines
  - The shoreline is irregular; some areas are more impacted by erosion than by flooding.
    - East of the City of Ogdensburg to Red Mills: higher bluffs, flooding isn't an issue, but erosion is. Typically, high banks with silty tills. Even though these areas don't show up on DEMS, erosion is an issue due to the nature of the shoreline.
  - Coles Creek State Park
    - Mentioned as a place of concern during REDI
    - Park and boat launch are particularly vulnerable
  - From Waddington – East, the area is very susceptible to low water impacts brought on by dam management. The area marinas have had to re-arrange docks to get

boats in the water. This is also an area for popular fishing events. Tournaments had to be rescheduled due to low water events.

- Has been some work to look at different dock set ups (floating docks)
- T of Louisville is particularly impacted by this issue (Larry Legoue is the supervisor, he would be a good contact)
- Waddington currently working on installing floating docks
- Potential resources
  - Clerk's association, building permits via code enforcement
  - In St Lawrence County, each town or village has a code officer, part-time positions, most code enforcement is done on a complaint basis. Some people are more forthright about getting proper permitting than others. Code officers/clerk association is moderately active in St Lawrence County. Jefferson County operates differently, some municipalities delegate codes enforcement authority to the County by agreement.

## 5. Group Discussion Summaries – Top Concerns

- Sub-area 1 – Lake Ontario Region
  - Ecosystem services -health of the natural systems, role of wetlands and barrier beach, natural areas vs engineered systems – what are we going to do to protect them in the long-term, what can we do to bring resiliency back to areas that have undergone degradation or damage. Make sure we don't overharden or over-engineer these areas.
  - Private property owners – making sure they have the information and tools to design/install/maintain natural systems that are resilient to fluctuating water levels
  - Safety of residents – access to the water (low areas, bridges), making sure that they have access in emergency events
- Sub-area 2 – Western St. Lawrence River
  - Tourism – strong need to ensure communities have access to water, extent of the tourism season is important to keep as robust and long as possible
  - Ecological health
  - Wastewater management (individual septic systems and public collection & treatment systems)
- Sub-area 3 – Eastern St. Lawrence River
  - Some communities do not utilize zoning and land use tools. Shoreline private property owners are more receptive to voluntary programs. Voluntary programs should be developed and made available to local property owners to provide specific guidance and resources on how to build resiliency into their properties (e.g., natural edge program).

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- Need to identify some formalized networks to distribute information to local property owners on resiliency strategies (clerks association, homeowners associations)
- Recommended strategies for updated land use regulations, floodplain development ordinances; helpful to guide property owners and municipalities

## **6. Next Steps**

Our next Steering Committee Meeting will be **June 16 at 10 AM**.

Community Workshop #1 is scheduled for the evening of **June 29<sup>th</sup> from 6 pm – 7:30 pm**. This meeting will be virtual. The EDR project team will be sending out an emailable 'Save the Date' postcard that the SC can use to distribute info to community members. PLEASE DISTRIBUTE WIDELY.

In addition to these written notes, comments captured during the virtual tour can be viewed at the map. Continue to share photos of how water level fluctuations affect your community.

**Copies To: All members of the Jefferson-St. Lawrence CLEAR Steering Committee, Consultant Team, and NYSDOS representatives.**

*Meeting notes were prepared by Michelle McGinnis of EcoLogic. If there are any discrepancies, please notify our office within three business days of receipt.*