

THE HOOSIC RIVER REVIVAL

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

***North Adams, beautifully situated among the Hoosac, Green and Taconic mountains, has an additional resource that has been neglected for many years, the Hoosic River.**

*** The city is located at the junction of the North and South branches of the River, a location that was a boon to our 19th and 20th century industries, as a source of water power and a means for getting rid of waste.**

*** New laws and the departure of those industries have cleansed the River; flood control chutes have both tamed it and prevented the public from seeing, using, and appreciating it.**

***After years of post-industrial economic struggles, the city is recovering, becoming a hub for those involved in the creative economy.**

***Along with that recovery, the time has come to reconnect the Hoosic River to our city, to make it an attribute for recreation, economic development, and community building.**

North Adams, a beautiful city nestled below the Hoosac Range, the Green Mountains, and Mt. Greylock, became a thriving community during the 1800s. This was due in part to the industriousness of its residents, but also because it was at the junction of the North and South Branches of the Hoosic River. This fast-flowing water provided power to drive the machinery in the cotton mills; it also served as a convenient way to get rid of waste from these mills. Sadly, even within the memory of current North Adams residents, the Hoosic River ran different colors, smelled awful, and carried toxic waste. Furthermore, in the early part of the 1900s, the River often overflowed its banks and was a threat to city infrastructure and to its residents.

In response to the serious damage that occurred during these floods, the US Corps of Engineers in the 1950s constructed the flood control chutes, which you can see starting at the Eclipse Mill on the North Branch and near Noel Field on the South Branch. (There are also flood chutes in the town of Adams.) These flood chutes funnel the Hoosic River through North Adams' downtown, merging at the west end of Mass Museum of Contemporary Art. The chutes have done their job; the River is no longer a danger during heavy rains or Spring run-off. And, due to tighter environmental regulations from the Federal Government, the River presents no health threat to the City's residents.

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The departure of first the textile mills and then the City's major employer, Sprague Electric, was as threatening and toxic to North Adams' future as were those floods. But those economic losses, too, have been tamed. During the past 20 years, the city itself has gone from a dying mill town to a community in the process of being revitalized. We have seen the renovation of an old mill-factory into an Art museum, the conversion of former cotton mills to artists' studios and lofts, an increase in the number of fine restaurants, a change in the mission of North Adams State to a liberal arts college (MCLA), and lastly, commitments by elected officials and entrepreneurs to create a modernized downtown with both stores and condominiums in those beautiful 20th century commercial buildings.

A group of local residents has come together to say it is time to reconnect the Hoosic River with this revitalized community. Imagine a downtown North Adams where both branches of the Hoosic River are lovely to look at, suitable for fishing, boating and swimming, bordered by trails running through parkland, and where people come for business and socializing. The River is a natural attribute in the city, but the concrete flood control chutes that once saved the city, now hide it from view. It is important to maintain flood control, but it is also possible to combine that requirement with the goal of making the River a vital downtown attraction.

Every day, those of us who live here look to the breath-taking hills that surround this mountain valley. This Coalition of citizens and public officials believes that the enhancement of the River, as it flows through our downtown, would complete this picture of a city with outstanding recreational, cultural, and business opportunities. Most importantly, having access to the River would provide an enduring community-building amenity that will both benefit the people of North Adams and draw visitors from afar. Working in concert with HooRWA, the Hoosic River Watershed Association, whose focus is the entire River, we believe that, like Providence, Rhode Island, and our Massachusetts neighbors in Lowell and Fitchburg, our North Adams can also have a thriving downtown, making the River and its surrounding area a vital part of our beautiful city.

HOOSIC RIVER REVIVAL COALITION
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