

CUYAHOGA VALLEY NATIONAL PARK
National Park Service

**A Conceptual Framework For
Enhancing Visitors' Experiences**

Prepared as part of Task Order T6163080012 for the:
Cuyahoga Valley National Park – National Park Service
Brecksville, OH 44141

Under:
NPS Harpers Ferry Center IDIQ Contract No. C118007004
for “Interpretive Planning Services”
Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

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February 23, 2009

Cuyahoga Valley National Park
Visitor Experience Planning For Park Facilities

Final Report:
A Conceptual Framework
for Enhancing Visitors' Experiences

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INTRODUCTION

Under the leadership of Jennie Vasarhelyi, Chief of Interpretation, Education and Visitor Services at Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP), Interpretive Solutions, Inc., consulted with the park regarding visitor experience planning for park facilities, with a particular focus on six of the park's visitor centers. The park's interpretive staff posed two important questions: Are the visitor centers providing maximum value to visitors? How could they be made more effective? A scoping trip in November 2008 was followed by a two-day workshop on February 17-18, 2009, during which the project team addressed the answers to those questions.

Purpose of the project

The purpose of the project was to facilitate a visitor experience/interpretive planning process to develop a vision for the next generation of visitor-use facilities in Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

CVNP currently has multiple visitor centers, each providing similar services (staffed information function and static exhibits). Only a small percentage of park visitors enter a visitor center each year (less than 100,000 of the 2.5 million visits), and that number is declining. The small, dispersed visitor centers respond to the park's dispersed visitation, as well as the large inventory of historic structures that the park wishes to interpret. However, the attendance record has caused the park to question the visitor center model. The visioning exercise considered ways to diversify how historic buildings contribute to the visitor experience, as well as how to improve facilities that should remain visitor centers, allowing them to play a more vital role in the visitor experience.

Executive Summary

The following report describes the recommended approach to improving the visitor experience in detail. However, the proposed actions can be summarized as follows:

1. Create a centrally located visitor orientation center at Boston that introduces all park and Canalway themes and helps visitors create personalized, custom itineraries that will shape their park experiences in accordance with their particular preferences and interests. If it can be acquired, the building known as Zielenski Court could possibly be adapted to create such an orientation center.
2. Canal and Hunt Farm become theme- or activity-focused "visitor centering hubs," repurposed and renamed, and with a more limited orientation function.
3. Canal-themed interpretation is based at the Canal Center, freeing up space in the Boston Store for other uses.
4. Repurpose MD Garage; find alternate location for the artist group's show.
5. Create a dynamic "time travel" atmosphere at Canal, with offerings such as first-person interpretation, mule statues, music, period games and contests, lock demonstrations, a full-scale reconstruction of a canal boat, period food, themed retail, and compelling, hands-on, interactive media.

6. Research the possibility of recreating a period canal side store in the Canal Center.
7. Upgrade the parking lot, path from train, and backside of the Canal building to create a more dynamic sense of arrival.
8. Create an activity center at Hunt Farm that allows for a series of changing activities throughout the year, as an attraction to repeat local and recreational visitors.
9. Create theme-based play/activity spaces for children at all main visitor hubs.
10. Partner with Countryside Conservancy, Hale Farm & Village, and CVNPA to create an interpretive experience that focuses on land use, sustainable agriculture, and the park themes Cultural and Natural Interplay and Watershed Connections.
11. Make snacks available at every visitor hub.
12. Improve outdoor interpretive media at every visitor hub.
13. Provide/improve basic comfort amenities for recreational visitors based on visitor feedback
14. Kendall Lake Shelter will continue to provide winter sports equipment rentals in season; at other times of the year, it will be available both for programming and for rental.
15. The Szalay House will not be assigned a public role, although it may be appropriate for administrative uses. Other residential buildings included in the study will be released from interpretive use, but may serve as intern housing or for artists in residence.
16. Wilson's Mill's long-term role in the park's interpretive program is yet to be determined, but short term strategies call for the park to work with the Wilson family to provide some interpretation of the mill on site and on the park website.
17. Hostel/barn recommendation
18. Kiosk recommendation

Goal of the project

The goal of the project was to create a vision for visitor services that synchronizes existing themes with park venues and interests of priority audiences; examines, diversifies and improves use of the visitor centers; and includes entrepreneurial strategies that involve park partners. The project considered what audiences will do to be engaged in park themes; found a "home" or a place in the park where each theme can be conveyed; and recommended the best visitor services and/or facilities to connect visitors to the themes.

Visitor facilities included in the project

The park has a great number of structures within its boundaries. However, the following six facilities were the focus of the study:

Canal Visitor Center, located adjacent to Lock 38

Boston Store Visitor Center and associated buildings, located near the center of the park

Hunt Farm Visitor Information Center and associated buildings, presently the southernmost visitor facility in the park
Wilson's Mill, a privately owned operating grist mill and feed store
Szalay House, located near Hunt Farm Visitor Information Center, the park ranger station, and a canal lock
Kendall Lake Shelter, the park's headquarters for outdoor winter recreation (cross country ski and snowshoe rentals)

“Associated buildings” refers to the fact that there are a number of residential buildings that have recently or are about to become available to the park (in addition to twenty some such buildings already under park ownership). The consultant team visited four of these so that their possible uses might be included in the facilities planning process. These were the Vernon Booty and Nina Stanford houses, which are located in the vicinity of the Stanford Hostel, the Johnston-Rohde house, located next to Boston Store, and the Szalay House in Everett

In addition to the Canal, Boston Store, and Hunt Farm visitor centers, the Frazee House welcomes visitors on summer weekends. A former visitor center, Happy Days Lodge now serves as a conference center and venue for special events and programs. The Frazee House and Happy Days Lodge are not part of the current consultation.

FACILITIES DESCRIPTIONS

Canal Visitor Center. The northernmost park visitor center is housed in a building that historically served as a store at canal side near Lock 38. It is the only park visitor center near the towpath that has a good-sized parking lot. Inside, Eastern National provides a retail function selling park-related items. Exhibits on two floors are somewhat outdated and lack engaging elements. The lower floor is dedicated mostly to photographs (and a nice model of a lock and mill) showing life on the canal in historic times. Upstairs, a series of exhibit cases presents a chronological history of inhabitants of the valley, beginning in prehistoric times. The exhibits need more variety and more compelling connections for visitors. The exhibits are permanently installed, with little space available for changing exhibits. Use of a lecture hall in the basement is compromised due to frequent flooding at the site.

Wilson's (Alexander's) Mill. Wilson's Mill is a private business operated out of a privately owned building on land most of which is leased from and owned by the national park. It is a third-generation-operated grist mill and feed store representing the area's long history of water-powered mills along the Cuyahoga River and the canal. The mill is not interpreted at present, but its stories link closely to agriculture and transportation themes at the park. With the lease soon to expire, the interpretive use of Wilson's Mill is open for debate. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but has not been water-powered since a flood in the 1970s. The mill is not handicapped accessible, and it is a working mill, so visitors cannot safely observe the milling process as the mill is currently configured.

Stanford Hostel. This 30-bed facility is only utilized at roughly 10% capacity, with highest usage in the summer. It has been a concession, but the park is working towards leasing it to CVNPA. It is close to the trail that leads to Brandywine Falls. The CVNPA and Park are looking for a more productive use for the building, which will require some renovations. New primitive campsites are to be added nearby. These will be the first camping spaces within the national park. The hostel's associated barn is an historic property, presently used to store bikes and other recreational equipment, but with careful management, it could be a useful program facility during warm weather seasons.

Former Vernon Boodey house. This small residential building located north of Stanford Hostel lacks historical integrity, and therefore is available for use as program space or a rental facility.

Former Nina Stanford house. Located between the Stanford Hostel and Boston Store VC, this residential building is slightly more spacious than the Boodey house, but exhibits more historical integrity. It is quite close to occupied private residences.

Boston Store Visitor Center. The village of Boston consists of the Boston Store; the MD Garage; the Trail Mix; and other residential-type buildings, including the Johnston-Rohde house, soon to become available to the park. There are a number of private residences located nearby in the village, so sensitivity to the Boston neighbors is

important. Boston Store is centrally located in the park, making it accessible to visitors entering from any direction. Lack of a water system in the village tends to suppress extensive development.

Boston Store Visitor Center. The visitor center is operated by park interpretive rangers and volunteers. Current exhibits consist of static and not-very-compelling displays on canal boat building. There is a small shop operated by Eastern National, and a very nice modern conference room on the second floor, accessible by elevator, which the CVNPA rents out through its “Extraordinary Spaces” program. The exhibit space in the building is not air conditioned. The visitor center has a pleasant porch wrapping around two sides of the building, and there is a small barn associated with the property that is available for repurposing.

Trail Mix. The snack shop has been a popular destination for recreational and other park users. It offers take out food and snacks. Its success has led the CVNPA, which operates the shop, to consider opening branches in other parts of the park.

Johnston-Rohde house. This house is located next to Boston Store’s designated overflow parking lot, and across the canal from the visitor center. It is a small, residential building.

MD Garage. Local artists stage juried art shows every month from April through October in this period garage (weekends only). They provide a valuable service by creating changing exhibits throughout the high season with very little effort on the part of the park. CVNPA handles the sales (for a commission) out of the Trail Mix facility. The building could be put to better programmatic use.

Hunt Farm Visitor Information Center. This visitor center is in a charming location right next to the towpath and the Szalay farm stand, but it is underutilized by the public. Many visitors arrive via the towpath. It is a fairly short walk or hike along the towpath from Hunt Farm to the Beaver Marsh, a popular park attraction. The center contains offices and a few interpretive panels on various topics. Assets include a spacious, unheated two-story barn, and a nice big yard, both of which would be ideal for certain kinds of programming. The Szalay farm stand does a roaring business in sweet corn from July through September.

Szalay House. This spacious residential property features larger rooms than any of the other residential properties surveyed. The space is welcoming and includes a stone fireplace. The house has an accessibility issue: bathrooms are on the second floor. It is right next door to the park ranger station, and to a canal lock, and offers ready access to the towpath. There is virtually no parking available at the house, but it is a short walk to parking areas at Hunt Farm. The circular driveway would be convenient for bus drop-off and pick-up.

Kendall Lake Shelter (aka Winter Sports Center). This rustic stone structure is an impressive product of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. It once served as a popular park visitor destination. Before CVNP was established, the lake provided recreational activities year-round, including swimming, tobogganing, fishing, and ice skating. Swimming and tobogganing were discontinued first. Today the lake's use is even more limited because the ice no longer freezes reliably and because of the mess left behind by an overpopulation of Canada geese. People do picnic at the shelter. After flood damage to the dam is repaired, the lake will be refilled and restocked for fishing. The main use for the building currently is for lessons and rental of cross country skies and snowshoes when there is sufficient snow. People also sled on the hill across the lake from the shelter, where there is additional parking. There are bathrooms on the lower level of the shelter. No concessions other than coffee are available (for a donation). Barn swallows have been a problem, but the open areas have been screened to keep them out.

Due to the reduced use of the lake and shelter, the parking lot is much too big. Scout Troops in the area have a long history of use of the Kendall Lake Shelter. It also hosts the opening ceremonies of the annual Winter Special Olympics. The building may be suitable for day programs. It is near the Ledges, a rock formation that is a popular place for hiking.

STAKEHOLDERS AND PARK PARTNERS

The Cuyahoga Valley National Park Association. The park's friends group, the CVNPA, is an organization remarkable for its entrepreneurial culture and business plans that emphasize revenue generating strategies. They run a successful food concession, operate the residential Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center at a profit (arguably their biggest success story to date), provide in-park public programs, rent out event and meeting spaces in the park through their Extraordinary Spaces program, and have recently opened a retail store in Peninsula selling park- and nature-related items, especially for young children. The store, called Park Place, is just getting started, so it is too early to gauge its success. Other CVNPA innovations include on-line auctions as fundraisers, selling "Adopt an Acre" park shares via Facebook, and sponsoring art shows and concerts in the park. They also supply the park with an impressive army of 2,000 volunteers, now under the leadership of a new volunteer manager hired by the park and coordinated by the Association in a collaborative relationship. Volunteers provide interpretive services and help with fundraising. All CVNPA volunteers are considered volunteers for the park.

This ambitious group continues to seek ways to support the park. For example, the success of the Trail Mix concession at Boston has led to the possibility of opening a similar concession in the north end of the park, depending on potential usage. Future plans under consideration also include development of a life-long learning institute, following the Chautauqua model, that would provide in-depth overnight or residential learning experiences linked to park themes for adults, families, and children. This project is still in the early planning stages. The program would require more upscale facilities than those currently available; existing historical buildings would require considerable rehabilitation.

CVNPA relations with the park are excellent, with effective two-way channels of communication firmly in place.

The Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad. The CVSR, a Park partner, runs between the outskirts of Cleveland and Canton, Ohio, with stops in Cuyahoga Valley National Park at Rockside, Canal Visitor Center, Brecksville Station, Boston Mill, Peninsula Depot, Indigo Lake, and Botzum. The railroad offers excursions through and beyond the park. With automobile parking quite limited at the Boston and Peninsula centers, the train is a valuable source of transportation for visitors.

In addition to enjoying the scenery and the interesting outing, some passengers ride to farmers markets held in the park, or to cut Christmas trees. The Bike Aboard program allows cyclists to ride the train in a separate car especially fitted for bicycles, and then bike back along the towpath (or vice versa). In addition, regular special events (wine-tasting tours, Thomas the Tank Engine events, and the Polar Express at Christmastime) spur interest in the park.

About 150,000 visitors per year enter the park via the railroad, but few of these access the park's visitor centers. Of these, the Canal Visitor Center offers the best access to train passengers, but recent schedule changes allow little time for visitors to walk the quarter-mile to the visitor center during their short layover. The train schedule really drives programming at Canal. If trains could lay over longer, or arrive more frequently, or allow visitors to catch the next train rather than the one they came in on, passengers would be afforded more time to enjoy demonstrations of the lock operation and the like.

School groups often ride the train as an outing, but rarely get off in the park. Sixty percent of passengers make reservations; forty percent are walk-up customers. As the railroad's website is updated in the coming months, the capacity for online reservations and ticketing will be added.

The railroad has a marketing plan in place that calls for an increase in ridership to 100,000 per year within five years. In part, this ambitious target depends upon the railroad's ability to extend service into Cleveland proper.

Park rangers have in the past offered on-board interpretation from the north to the south end of the park, but park management has recently invested in an audio program, to be delivered via 600 sets of headphones, that will be GPS-triggered, and will offer interpretation as the train passes through the park.

Countryside Conservancy. The Cuyahoga Valley Countryside Conservancy (CVCC) is a private, non-profit corporation working to re-envision and rebuild local/regional farming and food systems in northeast Ohio. Its relationship with the park has created a unique program that hopes to connect the public not only with the park's agricultural history, but also with some of the most compelling issues of the day, including energy independence, global warming, and universal health care. Its program of placing real farmers on real farms doing real sustainable farming in the park is a cutting edge idea that could help distinguish this park on an international level and give it an active voice in the local food and landscape preservation movements. The Conservancy's initiatives include helping CVNP revitalize the picturesque old farms still surviving in the park by leasing them to farmers who farm sustainably; creating and supporting two ongoing seasonal farmers' markets; and a growing number of educational initiatives intended to support and encourage the relocalization and re-scaling of food production and consumption and to increase understanding of how food is transported historically and in the present.

Plans for a "farm school" to teach agricultural/food awareness to children, and perhaps even farming techniques to adults to want to learn to farm, are in the works. The CVNPA has a strong interest in supporting this kind of program, perhaps in Chautauqua-style learning environments that involve residential stays, in partnership with Countryside Conservancy.

The CVCC partnership provides some fascinating interpretive opportunities that are extremely relevant to today's and future issues, but the Conservancy's story is not very

evident to park visitors. Aside from a few signs designating “Family Farm” status to some of the farmsteads, the most tangible evidence of these small-scale farming initiatives are the goat herds that can be seen in various areas of the park. The storylines that can spin off from the agriculture/local food story should be strongly emphasized as part of the park’s interpretive programming.

Eastern National. Eastern National is an association operating in more than 130 national parks and other public trusts. The organization operates educational retail outlets at three CVNP locations, at the Boston Store, Canal and Peninsula visitor centers. All of the products and publications offered to visitors have educational value and are related to park resources. They include trail guides, wildlife guides, books, park-related pins, patches and apparel, and National Park Service items. Park-related material, especially clothing, are best sellers.

The Canal Visitor Center retail operation is Eastern National’s largest in the park. It provides home base, office and storage space for the organization. The greatest number of park-related products, and the widest range, is offered at the Canal center, which functions as a welcome center to the park for visitors from the north. Retail space is divided into three different corners at Canal, while at Boston, exhibits were recently removed to make a consolidated retail space for sales. Products at Boston echo those at Canal, but with fewer offerings. The Peninsula store is located in the Railroad Depot/Visitor Center. The limited number of the products offered there focus on railroad themes. As the number of trains on the scenic railroad has increased by seven, sales have improved at the Peninsula outlet. Visitation is up by 4,000 in the last year, and includes not just passengers on the railroad, but hikers and cyclists as well.

At one time, Eastern National operated sales outlets at Hunt Farm Visitor Center, the Environmental Education Center, Happy Days Visitor Center, and the Winter Sports facility at Kendall Lake, but these outlets did not generate sufficient revenue, and were closed. Of these, Happy Days was probably the most viable, due to its location convenient to many of the park’s trails.

Metroparks. Two different “Metro Parks” organizations operate educational and interpretive facilities in and near CVNP. Cleveland Metro Parks operates the Leonard Krieger Canalway Center just north of the park, as well as the Garfield Park and Brecksville Nature Centers, the Ohio & Erie Canal, Bedford, and South Chagrin Reservations, and various hiking and biking trails. MetroParks, Serving Summit County, also has a presence in the park. Their holdings and/or facilities in or near the park include Furnace Run, Deep Lock Quarry, Hampton Hills, O’Neil Woods, and the F.A. Sieberling Nature Realm. In addition, both Cleveland Metroparks and the CVNP host visitor centers that focus on the history of the Ohio & Erie Canal.

These two park systems are invaluable partners for CVNP, with activities and programs that complement park programs on many levels. The overlapping jurisdictions make it difficult for visitors to understand “who is in charge” at any given venue. But even if visitors may not be perfectly clear as to which of these jurisdictions they are enjoying at a

given time, taken together, all the organizations collectively provide enormous educational and recreational benefits. It is said that, logically, Clevelanders (from Cuyahoga County) tend to think the entire towpath park is part of Cleveland Metro Parks, while there is greater emotional attachment to the national park as an entity at the southern, or Summit County, end of the park. No matter what jurisdiction they think they are in, visitors know of and respond favorably to “the towpath,” a well-known and much appreciated area amenity, which is the central motif and literal backbone of the Cuyahoga Valley experience.

Ohio & Erie National Heritage Canalway and Ohio & Erie Canal Byway.

The Canalway is a national heritage area that includes the Towpath Trail, Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railway, Ohio & Erie Canalway Byway, and Cuyahoga Valley National Park. It is managed by the Ohio & Erie Canalway Association (OECA). The northern, or Cuyahoga County portion of the Canalway is represented by the nonprofit organization Ohio Canal Corridor, while the southern three counties (Summit, Stark and Tuscarawas) are represented by the Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition. Both these organizations, along with the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, provide technical support and assistance to the Canalway.

The Canalway’s original management plan called for a number of visitors centers along the path of the canal (perhaps one for each of the four counties), but officials are now beginning to rethink that need. It may be that interpretive kiosks might fulfill the same need at less cost, and still be available to provide information for longer hours than visitor centers would be. The Canalway’s internet presence is an important part of future planning, as many visitors will gather information, including maps, via the Canalway website.

The Ohio & Erie Canal Byway is a unit of the National Scenic Byways Program. It provides travel itineraries and visitor information for those traveling the scenic and historical route. The Byways program encourages exploration, activities and discovery along the Towpath Trail, the byway’s most prominent feature.

Hale Farm & Village. This in-holding site owned by the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland presents living history programs about historical farming practices in the area, making them a valuable partner as CVNP tells its farming story. Hale Farm has announced its own partnership with Great Lakes Brewing Company (GLBC), an Ohio-based, socially and environmentally friendly brewer of award-winning craft beer. The farm will grow organic farm vegetables, herbs and flowers for use in GLBC’s restaurant, using centuries-old gardening techniques combined with modern organic culture. The program ties in conceptually with Conservancy approaches.

KEY TARGET AUDIENCES

While the parks facilities and programs are open to a wide range of visitors, certain audience segments are particular targets of the project. These are:

Recreational visitors. A 2005 visitor study identified that 95% of park visitors identify recreation as their primary reason for visiting the park. Many are repeat visitors (85%) and from Ohio (91%).

School-based audiences. Cuyahoga Valley National Park has a 128-bed residential environmental education center, but does not have facilities specifically designed and dedicated to school day trips to the park.

Underserved audiences. The park's location between two urban centers, Cleveland and Akron, is not reflected in the visitor population. The park has long recognized the need to increase urban resident use of the park because the legislative purpose of the park calls for providing for the "needed recreational open space necessary to the urban environment." Lack of convenient transportation may be part of the problem, but there may be cultural issues at work, as well. However, LRIP calls for the park to define new audiences more broadly to include youth and other groups under-represented in NPS visitation.

Families with children. There are few offerings in the park, especially interpretive media, that are specifically targeted to families with children. The main feature of the park, the canal towpath, sees heavy use by recreational cyclists and hikers, but the speed and intensity of that use render biking on the towpath fairly dangerous for all but older kids. Family-oriented programming must consider a) food, b) bathrooms, c) safety, and d) how long does it take to get there and how far from the car to the event/activity?

Visitors from outside the region. While 91 percent of visitors are from Ohio, with the park's name change to Cuyahoga Valley National Park in 2000 (from Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area), out-of-town visitation is growing and is expected to continue to do so.

Residents and organizations in local communities. The percentage of out-of-state visitation has been increasing since the park's National Park designation, but it is still less than 10 percent of the total. It is likely that at least eighty percent of the audience will continue to come from nearby counties, and as such they may visit repeatedly.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The following general observations were offered not only by the consultant team, but also by many of the stakeholders and park staff consulted during the trip.

- CVNP is an amazing, dynamic park with incredible visitation numbers and outstanding support from a phenomenally energetic friends' group, the CVNPA. The recreational facilities associated with the canal towpath alone ensure significant repeat visitation, although the park remains unknown to many potential visitors.
- The park's place within the larger Ohio & Erie National Canalway heritage area makes it a part of a larger experience for visitors. This will become increasingly the case as the various towpath segments are joined.
- The existence of the park in this setting is nothing short of a miracle, given that its acreage could just as easily have ended up as "one big housing development." It is a great gift to the people of Ohio, as well as to the nation.
- As a place where industry and nature have collided over time, the park provides the perfect venue to discuss issues relating to land use, watershed management, natural resources, environmental conservation, sustainable agriculture, and the evolution of national transportation networks and how they have aided national development, and sustainability.
- Volunteers are invaluable to park operations, and their numbers – about 2,000, – are phenomenal.

CVNP INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Interpretive themes for Cuyahoga Valley National Park were created in 2003 as a part of the development of a Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP). The themes were reaffirmed when the LRIP was updated in 2008. The current project did not call for the evaluation or assessment of the existing themes, but simply sought to make sure that the park's visitor centers are doing their part to help convey park themes to varied audiences.

The themes, as articulated in the LRIP, are as follows:

Parks to the People. In keeping with Cuyahoga Valley's long history as a place for retreat from urban areas, Cuyahoga Valley National Park is the product of a national movement for the establishment of parks for use by people in an urban environment. The park is valuable for discovery, exploration, and recreation that renew mind, body, and spirit in rural settings often unavailable to urban residents.

Park as Classroom. The diverse array of natural and cultural resources in the valley offers opportunities for learning, discovery, and revelation. Lessons of conflict, adaptability, ingenuity, and interdependence illustrate broader trends in many disciplines, particularly ecology and American history.

Cultural and Natural Interplay. The resources of Cuyahoga Valley National Park exist singly, but also meld together into a mosaic of pastoral landscapes that were created and continue to be transformed by the interplay of geologic, ecological, and cultural forces. Understanding human interaction with the valley environment from prehistoric to present times can serve to generate inspiration and encourage discussion of a modern land ethic.

Watershed Connections. The Cuyahoga River connects Cuyahoga Valley National Park into the largest system of freshwater in the world. This river that burned gave international attention to water quality issues and encouraged action through the passage of environmental legislation, especially the Clean Water Act. Understanding the watershed connections demonstrates the potentially far-reaching impacts of land preservation and individual daily decisions on environmental health.

Natural Diversity. Cuyahoga Valley National Park provides refuge for a surprising and rich natural diversity that results from the valley's unique geography and geologic history. Its location in a transition zone between major regions of the country, combined with its glacial history and varied topography, makes it home to a unique species composition. This includes an unusual variety of plants and animals, including rare, threatened, and endangered species, whose survival depends on park protection.

Evolution of Transportation. In manners representative of national trends in transportation, people have used the Cuyahoga Valley as a transportation corridor from prehistoric to modern times, using the advantages presented by its topography and overcoming its obstacles. Through changing technologies, people have sought

opportunities from economic growth to freedom and have felt transportation's impact on their daily lives.

Impact of the Canal. As part of a 19th-century transportation infrastructure, the Ohio & Erie Canal was among the most successful of America's canals during the period canals contributed to the growth of the nation. By creating linkages among regions, it contributed to the development of a national market economy while stimulating community growth locally, regionally, and nationally.

The interpretive themes in the context of the visitor centers

Many modes of interpretation besides those in the visitor centers are used within the park, including wayside exhibits, public and educational programs, the park's publications and website, and informal interpretation. The visitor centers are not the only means through which visitors can access park themes. However, the focus of the project was to access interpretive services provided via visitor centers only.

Every audience member should have access to each of the park's themes with each visit. Not every visitor will choose to access all the themes, but they should have the opportunity to be exposed to each of them if they wish. Every theme should have a "home" in the park – not necessarily a building, but a geographic place or at least cyber location where one can be guaranteed access to it. All of the themes should be available during every visit. The current project focused in particular on the role of visitor centers in conveying park themes.

Parks to the People and Park as Classroom. These two themes address the reasons for the park's existence. The first discusses the park as part of a national movement to create parks for use by urban people that builds on the Cuyahoga Valley's long history as a retreat in a rural setting. It describes the park as a place for renewing the mind, body and spirit of city dwellers. The second theme speaks to the great diversity of resources that create opportunities in the park for learning across many disciplines, especially ecology and history. Park visitor centers do not address the history of the park's creation directly, but the vast array of activities and resources they advertise should make visitors aware not only of learning opportunities, but of the park's role as a retreat from the cares of city life.

Cultural and Natural Interplay. This theme was clearly written with the programs of the Countryside Conservancy in mind, although the story of human impact on the Valley goes far beyond that wrought by farming. Helping people understand the impact of human interaction with the ecological setting in the valley has important policy implications for the future that, as the theme states, "can serve to generate inspiration and encourage discussion of a modern land ethic." This important theme needs its own place in the park, where visitors can be made aware, not just of the history of the human presence in the Valley, but of its future, especially emphasizing Conservancy issues like sustainable land use, energy independence, nutrition, and small scale production of local

foods. The ongoing presence of agricultural experimentation within the park boundaries is a unique feature, and one that ought to be emphasized.

Watershed Connections. The watershed theme ties in so perfectly with the “Cultural and Natural Interplay” theme, that it might well be linked in interpretation. Both themes deal with the impact of human activity on the ecology of the Valley. Both discuss public policy issues, both involve decisions about land use, and both themes touch upon matters that will shape the nation’s future and have a far-reaching impact on quality of life, economic survival, and the future shape of society. While watershed stories might well be addressed adjacent to the river through the use of wayside exhibits, public programs, and other methods, the park might also consider addressing watershed concepts along with those of land use and cultural/natural interplay.

Natural Diversity. The Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center does a wonderful job addressing park ecology for a targeted audience. In addition, several waysides in the park address natural science. General audience visitors to the area may be well served in general nature education by the centers operated by Cleveland Metroparks and Metro Parks, Serving Summit County. Yet the CVNP theme focuses on the unusual degree of natural diversity arising from the Valley’s unique geography and geology and its location in a transition zone between major regions of the country. By leaving interpretation of the natural surroundings exclusively to the two Metroparks organizations, that theme may not be addressed as directly as it might be. The “Natural Diversity” theme requires a stronger interpretive link with park audiences.

Evolution of Transportation. The canal represents the most evident transportation story in the park, although the presence of the scenic railroad hints at another. The historical role of the Cuyahoga Valley as a transportation corridor is not explicitly addressed, nor are visitors introduced to changing modes of transportation and their impact on everything from the national economy to daily life.

Impact of the Canal. The visitor centers at the park address this theme at Boston and Canal. The theme could be consolidated at the Canal Visitor Center, an appropriate location near the canal lock, freeing the Boston Visitor Center for other themes, or for changing exhibits. The canal interpretation should be more interactive and participatory, and it should be broadened to address the role of the canal, not just as a feature of Ohio history, but as part of a wide-ranging network that brought profound changes to the American economy in the early to mid-19th century.

THE ISSUES

Visitor centers do not provide optimum value. Few visitors access them. They do not provide compelling stories or experiences. The exhibits are quite static, and do not offer much interactivity. They are outdated and do not present interesting topics. There is nothing in the visitor centers to encourage return visitation. There is no facility available for changing exhibits. They look like they are closed even when they are open.

Visitor centers should contribute significantly to presenting all the park's themes. Every audience segment should have access to each of the park's themes with each visit (except school groups, who will more likely focus on a single theme). Not every visitor will choose to access all the themes, but they should have the opportunity to be exposed to each of them if they wish, and all of the themes should be available during every visit. Themes can be presented or introduced in visitor centers, but the focus for visitors should be to get out into the park to enjoy its resources.

There is a need for more depth to the park experience: deeper immersion into the natural and cultural resources in addition to the recreational resources. How can visitors get better connected intellectually and/or emotionally to the park's themes? How can the park encourage a dialogue with visitors? How can the park leverage its extensive partnership network to provide additional visitor experiences?

There is a need for more support for recreational visitors. The park's towpath is a huge draw for people who might not otherwise visit the park, but are recreational users getting the full benefit of what the park has to offer? Could they be better served? Should there be more comfort features and amenities available? Is there a way to introduce them to park themes in unobtrusive ways? Can opportunities be found to share park themes without disrupting visitors' primary reasons for being there?

There is a need for more interpretive media/facilities targeted specifically to families. Other than Junior Ranger publications, the park offers little interpretive media that is appropriate for families with children. Wayside and visitor center exhibits offer little of interest.

Day programs for school groups need to be reinvigorated. This is an underserved audience, but an extensive informal survey of other interpretive venues and some schools indicated that school field trips are becoming increasingly challenging to schedule. While the park has a great deal of potential to provide outstanding curriculum-based programming, careful assessment is required before planning for an expansion of the program.

There is a need for better after-hours access to information and interpretation. How can visitors get information when visitor centers are closed? Because of the variety of types of audiences for park resources, there should be a variety of ways for accessing information about them.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

General principles

The workshop group developed a set of general principles to guide decision-making:

1. Rather than thinking of visitor centers as bricks-and-mortar buildings offering indoor experiences, think of them as “visitor centering nodes:” places where visitors can center themselves physically in the park, as well intellectually and emotionally, through a variety of means, whether indoors or out. Look for ways for the buildings to complement and support the larger park experience. The priority should be to get visitors out of the buildings and into the park where they can experience park resources first hand.
2. A single location within the park should be designated as the “main” visitor center, where new visitors to the park can be oriented to what is available and all themes should be introduced.
3. Visitors will enter the park from any of a number of entrances. They will not necessarily access a centrally located visitor center first, so every “visitor hub” must necessarily include some park orientation elements. However, each visitor hub does not have to be “all things to all people:” orientation will be focused on the main visitor center.
4. Each of the other “former” visitor centers should be interpreted with a particular theme- or activity-based focus that is unique in the park.
5. Consider staffing “visitor hubs” with volunteers so rangers can get out among the people.

Summary: an approach to the problem

The following list of steps provides a quick overview of the proposed approach:

1. Create a centrally located visitor orientation center at Boston that introduces all park and Canalway themes and helps visitors create personalized, custom itineraries that will shape their park experiences in accordance with their particular preferences and interests. If it can be acquired, the building known as Zielenski Court could possibly be adapted to create such an orientation center.
2. Canal and Hunt Farm become theme- or activity-focused “visitor centering hubs,” repurposed and renamed, and with a more limited orientation function.
3. Canal-themed interpretation is based at the Canal Center, freeing up space in the Boston Store for other uses.
4. Repurpose MD Garage; find alternate location for the artist group’s show.
5. Create a dynamic “time travel” atmosphere at Canal, with first-person interpretation, mules, music, period games and contests, lock demonstrations, a full-scale reconstruction of a canal boat, period food, and compelling, hands-on, interactive media.

6. Research the possibility of recreating a period canal side store in the Canal Center.
7. Upgrade the parking lot, path from train, and backside of the Canal building to create a more dynamic sense of arrival.
8. Create an activity center at Hunt Farm that allows for a series of changing activities throughout the year, as an attraction to repeat local visitors.
9. Create theme-based play spaces for children at all main visitor hubs.
10. Partner with Countryside Conservancy, Hale Farm & Village, and CVNPA to create an interpretive experience that focuses on land use, sustainable agriculture, and the park themes Cultural and Natural Interplay and Watershed Connections.
11. Make snacks available at every visitor hub.
12. Provide outdoor interpretive media at every visitor hub.
13. Provide basic comfort amenities for recreational visitors – water, hooks and benches in restrooms, etc. – at all main visitor hubs.
14. Kendall Lake shelter will continue to provide winter sports equipment rentals in season; at other times of the year, it will be available both for programming and for rental.
15. The Szalay House will not be assigned a public role, although it may be appropriate for administrative uses. Other residential buildings included in the study will be released from interpretive use, but may serve as intern housing or for artists in residence.
16. Wilson's Mill's long-term role in the park's interpretive program is yet to be determined, but short term strategies call for the park to work with the Wilson family to provide some interpretation of the mill on site and on the park website.

Discussion and conclusions

Boston. Boston becomes the centrally located main visitor hub where orientation to park resources, features and themes takes place. It is in the middle of the park, equally accessible from Cleveland or Akron, and convenient to the area's major highways. Local people know how to find it due to its close proximity to Boston Mills, a popular ski resort, and it would be easy to direct out-of-region visitors there. It is close to Peninsula for full-service access to food, and the Trail Mix shop is available for snacks. Carrying capacity in Boston proper is less threatened. The town becomes more pedestrian-oriented and perhaps better for families.

Zielenski Court. The Park may have an opportunity to acquire the two-story former store known as Zielenski Court (and two associated buildings). By creating a Visitor Orientation Center in this building, the Park realizes several advantages. The building is right on the railroad and not far from the towpath. While space for parking would still need to be analyzed, parking near Zielenski Court would ease parking pressure in central Boston, near the present Boston Store Visitor Center. The building is large enough to accommodate an orientation desk and facilities, a

multimedia orientation film, retail space, and exhibits introducing both Park and Canalway themes, and the ways they are interconnected in space and time. It would be a particularly good place to emphasize the themes Parks to the People, and Park as Classroom.

Orientation at Zielenski Court would center on first-time visitors, although all would of course be welcome. The main function of the center would be to orient visitors to what is available, to help them create an itinerary that is customized to their own needs and interests, and to send them out to experience the resource. Exhibits and other interpretive media would introduce each of the Park and Canalway themes, but the point of the Orientation would be to facilitate enjoyment and experience of the park's resources. Think of the orientation center as the place where visitors can package their visit, create custom itineraries, and buy into experienced-based agenda for their visit. It is an information resource oriented to sending visitors out into the park with better information and tools than they started with.

For example, the park's Natural Diversity, Human Impact and Watershed themes would be emphasized in the orientation center, since no other "hub" would particularly feature them. Visitors would use the orientation center to create park itineraries that would guide them toward the park resources that best highlight their interests.

The Zielenski Court building itself is historical, and warrants its own interpretation on site.

Boston Store. All canal-themed interpretation moves to Canal Center, freeing Boston Store first floor exhibit space for other uses that promote repeat visitation by recreational audiences. The space, which is light, airy, pleasant and sunny, has many possibilities for repurposing. It could become a comfortable "Third Place" or congregating space, with amenities like a gathering place as indoor extension of the porch, a leisure space in which to relax after towpath use. The store's porch on two sides of the building could provide a comfortable place to hang out, especially if outfitted with comfortable rocking chairs, cushions, perhaps board games, etc. The building could provide a place for activities, a program launch site, or a place to feature fresh, high-quality exhibits on a rotating basis, giving visitors a good reason for repeat visitation, and creating a marketing hook for the park.

In other ideas, Boston Store could become a resource "library" where visitors can pursue park themes in more depth. Or it could become a center in which visitors are invited to create and contribute content. This could range from simple techniques, like a board (or webpage) where people could record recent wildlife sightings, to more technological approaches, with visitors creating podcasts or vidcasts that incorporate

their own perspectives, in effect sharing their interpretation of the park with others.

MD Garage. This space should be repurposed for programming or hands-on, participatory exhibit space that is family-friendly. It is a good adaptable space for changing or flexible uses, although suitable for warm season use only. The Park's Evolution of Transportation theme would fit well in the Garage, perhaps offering a series of large scale transportation vehicles that children could climb on and go into (a canalboat, locomotive, Conestoga wagon, automobile, for example) while learning about transportation networks and the goods and services they provide globally. The art show would need to move to another venue (perhaps the Johnston-Rohde House, which could provide studio and gallery space year round).

Play space. Create a theme-related indoor or outdoor family-centered play facility that provides opportunities for child-driven (non-parametric) creative play. This is the type of amenity that parents and kids are likely to visit repeatedly. Shorter loop trails could be created in Boston that would be suitable for younger children, seniors, and people with disabilities.

With changing exhibits, family-friendly activities, the art show moved to a new venue nearby, new outdoor activities, and the Trail Mix to provide snacks, the Boston Visitor Orientation Center becomes a richer park experience for casual and family visitors. Zielenski Court provides first-time visitors with an orientation to park and canalway themes, as well as a customized agenda for getting out into the park and interacting with its resources.

TARGET AUDIENCES SERVED:

- Recreational
- School-based (possibly)
- Families with children
- From outside the region
- Local repeat visitors

THEMES INTERPRETED:

- All CVNP themes
- All Canalway themes
- Additional focus on Evolution of Transportation

ISSUES ADDRESSED:

- More value for visitor centers
- Interpret park themes
- Deepen experience
- Serve families better
- After-hours access to interpretive media (possibly)

Canal. The Impact of the Canal theme is centered here. Visitors arriving at this visitor center should get the impression that they are stepping back in time. The “Canal History Center” would recreate the active, bustling center that the lock would have been at the height of the canal era through living history and other programming, including costumed first-person interpreters (including female storekeepers, families living on canal boats, canal boat operators – the “rough and tumble” element, etc.), lock demonstrations, musicians (e.g., banjo player singing canal boat songs), mule statues, and period games and contests. Food typical of the period should be available, especially on summer weekends. The area should be noisy and full of life; fortunately the Canal area includes a large outdoor space that is available for interpretive purposes. Perhaps a canal boat could be constructed, either full scale outdoors, that people can climb on and go into, or perhaps just a cozy cabin interior inside the building. Dynamic, compelling exhibits on the canal story round out the interpretive program.

Perhaps some part of the center could be converted into an old-fashioned canal-side store, like the building once was, with, at the very least, store clerks in period costume. Create a “time travel” atmosphere with first-person interpretation, mules statues, music, period games and contests, lock demonstrations, full-scale canal boat and period food.

Fourth grade school groups studying Ohio history are a natural audience at Canal, but many visitors will arrive via Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, as well. Design should recognize these groups arrive at once as large audiences.

The Canal Center building was originally intended to be approached from the canal side. The building, being an historic store that once served the canal, is oriented towards the canal, with its back to most segments of the approaching audience, whether they come by car via the parking lot, or from the train station across the bridge in back. Only visitors who arrive via the towpath (mainly cyclists and hikers) approach the visitor center close to the way it was once meant to be approached. Visitors who arrive by rail and car see the building’s rather uninteresting backside. A better sense of arrival could be created with upgrades to the parking lot, bridge walkway to the train, and back of the building, perhaps featuring the tenets of sustainable landscaping.

Orientation will be limited, but available. The basement space should be reprogrammed toward a multipurpose use.

TARGET AUDIENCES SERVED:

- Recreational
- School-based (esp. 4th grade Ohio history curriculum)
- Families with children
- From outside the region
- Local repeat visitors

THEMES INTERPRETED:

- Park as Classroom
- Impact of the Canal
- Evolution of Transportation
- Cultural/Natural Interplay
- Watershed Connections (possibly)

ISSUES ADDRESSED:

- More value for visitor centers
- Interpret park themes
- Deepen experience
- Serve recreational audience
- Serve families better
- Day education programs
- After-hours access to interpretive media

Hunt Farm Visitor Information Center. Create a (renamed) activity center at what is now called Hunt Farm that allows for a series of changing activities throughout the recreation season, as an attraction to repeat local visitors and recreational visitors. These activities could be demonstrations of art, crafts, farming, “meet the farmer,” animals; art shows; or changing exhibits; these could take place in the building, in the barn or on the center’s big front lawn seasonally. The activity center building could be made available for visitor-contributed interpretive content. Sales of arts and crafts could be conducted as entrepreneurial activities through commercial use authorizations. An artists-in-residence program could be created to tie in with these activities. Recreational visitors would use the conveniently-located activity center as a place to congregate. The center’s orientation function would be limited.

TARGET AUDIENCES SERVED:

- Recreational
- Families with children
- Local repeat visitors

THEMES INTERPRETED:

- All themes, but especially
- Parks to the People
- Park as Classroom

ISSUES ADDRESSED:

- More value for visitor centers
- Interpret park themes
- Deepen experience
- Serve recreational audience
- Serve families better

Partnership to interpret Cultural and Natural Interplay and Watershed Connections themes. Partner with Countryside Conservancy, Hale Farm & Village, CVNP farms, and CVNPA farm school (to come) to emphasize sustainable land use; interpret CVNP farms without the many challenges of farm visits. Hale Farm & Village, an in-holding site owned by the Western Reserve Historical Society, presents living history programs about historical farming practices in the area, making them a valuable partner as CVNP tells its farming story. The focus of the joint programs might be where food comes from, and why it matters, but these themes also touch on a wide range of “deeper” issues, including sustainable land use, energy independence, nutrition, etc.

Recreational visitors are potential consumers of this program. Countryside Conservancy themes concerning local food and sustainable agriculture may find a ready audience in individuals who use the park recreationally to achieve higher levels of fitness (i.e., they would presumably be interested in nutrition, organic foods, etc.). Therefore, fitness buffs might constitute a potential affinity group for the park.

TARGET AUDIENCES SERVED:

- Recreational
- School-based
- From outside the region
- Local repeat visitors

THEMES INTERPRETED:

- Park as Classroom
- Cultural/Natural Interplay
- Watershed Connections
- Evolution of Transportation
- Impact of the Canal

ISSUES ADDRESSED:

- Deepen experience
- Interpret park themes
- Deepen experience
- Day educational programs

Wilson’s Mill. There are two schools of thought on the desired future role of Wilson’s Mill in the park’s interpretation program. The mill is a working, family-owned business with a history at this location extending back about 100 years. It is a significant landmark in the area, with a regional customer base. The family’s lease with the NPS will expire in 2013. The NPS is considering buying their leasehold interest. The family wants to stay.

The final role of Wilson’s Mill in CVNP interpretive programs is far from certain; a great deal of research and debate must take place before that can be decided. A suggested scenario is as follows:

1. Conduct studies (perhaps a Historic Structure Report or Historic Furnishings Study?) to determine the preservation status of the mill. Can it be preserved? Can it be restored? What would be involved? Can it become a working historic mill again?
2. Stabilize the building. This could likely take place with support from the NPS whether or not the Wilson family continued to hold the lease.
3. Over the short term (at least until present lease expires), work with the family to provide interpretation on site and via the park's website. Interpretive media could include waysides or a kiosk in the mill parking lot, and elements featuring oral histories of the Wilsons, as well as historic photographs.
4. For the longer term, explore the possibility of recreating a working mill. If this proves unrealistic, consider an appropriate adaptive reuse that would allow the physical structure to retain integrity.

TARGET AUDIENCES SERVED: to be determined

THEMES INTERPRETED:

Cultural/Natural Interplay
Watershed Connections
Impact of the Canal

ISSUES ADDRESSED: to be determined

Szalay House. This is an attractive venue, one of the few in the park with access to the towpath and a lock. It has no remaining historical integrity, so would be available for adaptive reuse. In addition, the town of Everett has no interpretive venues.

However, the Szalay House was found to present too many obstacles to make it viable for public use. Access is difficult; traffic and lack of sidewalks makes walking uncomfortable. There is no immediately adjacent parking available, and minimal grounds or available outside space. The bathroom is on the second floor, creating accessibility issues.

The Szalay House will not serve a public function. It does have good possibilities for administrative use, perhaps as an artist's residence/studio, intern housing, or office space.

Kendall Lake. Because CVNP has no dedicated nature center, the Kendall Lake facility was considered as a base for interpretation of the Natural Diversity theme. It presents a number of challenges in that regard: educational programming might conflict with the successful winter sports equipment rental program; there are problems of scale, rainy weather, bathroom access, other users, and the mess left by geese.

Certainly the nature trails in the vicinity could be enhanced through the use of waysides, cell phone tours, podcasts, or brochures, creating self-guiding trails. But the planning group concluded that the Natural Diversity theme is best introduced in the main

visitor orientation center, from which people would be directed to outstanding natural resources in the park.

The best continuing use of the Kendall Lake facility is to continue equipment rental in the winter, and make it available for rent and programs the rest of the year

To make sure that the natural diversity theme is addressed in the area, CVNP interpretive personnel will work with and support Cleveland Metroparks as the Brecksville Nature Center is being redesigned.

Stanford Hostel. The Stanford Hostel is not one of the project's six targeted visitor centers. However, the planning group included it in its deliberations because of its possible tie-in with other plans.

As the canal towpath continues to be extended, it is likely that more people will plan to bike the entire length of it. These through-bikers will need accommodations along the path. Primitive campsites are already being planned for an area near the hostel to serve these users, and it is thought that *rooms in the hostel might also be rented* to cyclists, or to vacationing families, under the same management as the campsites.

During the off-season, the hostel would be available for program purposes under CVNPA management, broadening the Association's entrepreneurial opportunities. It might become a satellite of the Environmental Education program, an Elderhostel venue, a venue for day programs or overnight interpretive programs, or even a center for weekend or overnight "family experience packages" tied to specific themes and activities in the park.

The site is ideal for natural history interpretation for day programs, and the impressive barn could become available (for seasonal use only) for programs or as a rain shelter with improvements. Additional bathrooms and parking on the grounds would need to be added, and the site is designated as culturally sensitive, so any new construction must be undertaken with care. In addition, there are some concession law and lease issues that must be resolved before operations at the Stanford Hostel under CVNPA auspices can be finalized.

The nearby Vernon Boodey and Nina Stanford houses will not be needed to support interpretation, and are released from interpretive use. They may have future administrative uses.

Enhanced interactive kiosks. The park currently features three sets of kiosks: CVNP, Canalway and Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad units.

The CVNP has nine 3-sided static kiosks at prominent trailheads, all of which are identical (except for "You are here" marked on each map). Each has a CVNP welcome panel, a bulletin board, and an interpretive panel about the towpath that addresses the impact of the canal. Other trailheads do not feature kiosks, but they do offer bulletin

boards with a park map and visitor information. A major informational kiosk is in process for Happy Days Lodge because so many people stop there for information. The bulletin board element of each of these installations is kept neat and current thanks to Operations.

The Canalway kiosks are smaller, free-standing kiosks featuring one panel that introduces the Canalway concept and a second panel that thematically links the particular site to the Canalway. Exhibit panels and a bulletin board at each of the seven train stations within the park offer information and interpretation. All three kinds of kiosks are intended to orient recreational visitors, but do not help people plan their visits.

The planning group concluded that the present kiosks are effective and useful. There is *no compelling need to update them* with new technologies at this time. The interpretation staff will monitor the development of emerging technology, with the idea of possibly introducing cell phone elements to enhance interpretation on wayside signage, or creating downloadable content for personal media devices sometime in the future. This decision recognizes that portable devices with internet access will become more and more common in the near future.

Research needed

Some research will be required to determine visitor and other user needs before these plans are set in stone. For example, to determine needed services for specialized affinity groups with an interest in or connection to the park, focus groups would likely provide sufficient information. Examples of these affinity groups include recreational users, parents of small children, birdwatchers, etc. Topics for changing exhibits could be determined by a voluntary survey of visitors that asks for their preferences. Formative evaluation should be conducted both with visitors to the park, and a sample of persons who live near the park but have not visited. The evaluation should be based on ideas and recommendations generated as part of the project; there is no need for additional research in advance of the project.

Summary of themes available to target audiences

Audience → Themes ↓	Recrea- tional	School- based	Under- served	Families/ children	From out of region	Local repeat visitors
Parks to the People	Boston Hunt Farm *Partnership	Boston	Boston Hunt Farm	Boston Hunt Farm	Boston	Boston Hunt Farm
Park as Classroom	*Partnership	Boston Canal *Partnership	Boston	Boston Canal	Boston	Boston Hunt Farm *Partnership
Cultural/ Natural Interplay	Boston	Boston *Partnership	Boston	Boston	Boston	Boston *Partnership
Watershed Connections	Boston	Boston *Partnership	Boston	Boston	Boston	Boston *Partnership
Natural Diversity	Boston	Boston	Boston	Boston	Boston	Boston
Evolution of Transportation	Boston	Boston Canal	Boston	Boston	Boston Canal	Boston Canal
Impact of Canal	Boston Canal	Boston Canal	Boston Canal	Boston Canal	Boston Canal	Boston Canal

*Refers to a CVNP, Countryside Conservancy, Hale Farm & Village & CVNPA partnership to interpret a broad set of sustainable land use themes (may or may not be based at Hale Farm).

Issues addressed

The steps suggested in this document address the issues that were identified in the following ways:

Visitor centers do not provide optimum value.

- One main visitor center will provide orientation. The other “visitor hubs” will focus on specific themes or activities.
- The visitor hubs will engage visitors through dynamic interpretation and a variety of activities.

Visitor centers should contribute significantly to presenting all the park’s themes.

- Boston’s visitor orientation center will introduce all the park’s themes.
- The orientation center will help visitors create itineraries that will direct them to park resources that interpret Cultural/Natural Interplay, Watershed Connections, and Natural Diversity themes. These may be enhanced in the park with the use of wayside signage, brochures, podcasts, and cell phone tours.
- The activity center at Hunt Farm will promote the Parks to the People theme by offering a wide range of exhibits, demonstrations, and performances.

- The Evolution of Transportation theme will be highlighted in Boston.
- Impact of the Canal interpretation will be centered at Canal.

There is a need for more depth to the park experience: deeper immersion into the natural and cultural resources in addition to the recreational resources.

- The main visitor orientation center will focus on helping visitors plan customized visits and build itineraries that will get them out into the park to experience its resources.
- Dynamic first-person immersive interpretation of the canal period lends more depth to the experience.
- CVNP/Countryside Conservancy/Hale Farm & Village/CVNPA partnership interprets Cultural/Natural Interplay and Watershed Connections in the context of sustainable land use issues, with a focus on sustainable agriculture and its broad implications.

There is a need for more support for recreational visitors.

- Basic comfort amenities and snacks will be provided at each main visitor hub.
- The “Third Space” concept will be explored for Boston.
- All facilities along the Towpath (Canal, Boston, Hunt) will have more interpretive opportunities designed to fit with a recreational visit.

There is a need for more interpretive media/facilities targeted specifically to families.

- Family-friendly interpretive media will be created at all main visitor hubs: Boston, Canal, and Hunt Farm. These will include indoor and outdoor opportunities and include a focus on non-parametric play.
- Snacks will be made available at each visitor hub.

Park needs to reinvigorateday programs for school groups.

- Schools will continue to be served by the Environmental Education center’s residential programs.
- Canal “history center” will focus on support for 4th grade Ohio history curriculum
- The barn at Stanford Hostel can be improved to provide shelter in support of nature-based day programs.
-

There is a need for better after-hours access to information and interpretation.

- Outdoor interpretive media to be added at all main visitor hubs: Boston, Canal and Hunt Farm

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The following criteria were used to evaluate the ideas generated during the workshop. Criteria were developed in four categories: themes, audience, experience, and operations.

Theme-related criteria

1. Would this option have good potential for increasing visitor understanding and appreciation of the resource?
2. Would it provide new or improved opportunities to present one or more of the park's primary interpretive themes, especially those that are currently underrepresented?
3. Would this option increase the park's ability to interpret multiple points of view?

Audience-related criteria

4. Would this option broaden opportunities for members of one or more of CVNP's target audiences to connect with the resource? Would it improve the park experience for a range of audiences, or mainly a single audience?
5. To what degree would this option make interpretive services more accessible to all age groups? Would it improve the park's ability to accommodate different learning styles and preferences?
6. Would this option improve the park's ability to relate to audiences from a range of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds?
7. Would this option offer universal accessibility?
8. How many visitors would this choice reach, compared to other options?
9. Would this option help support a day education program?
10. Does this option offer something for repeat visitors?
11. Does it provide comfort needs to target audiences?

Experience-related criteria

12. How complex or easy would it be for visitors to access this option, compared with others?
13. Does this option offer a quality experience? Is it fun, engaging, innovative? Does it actively engage the visitor?
14. Does it help to extend, enrich, and deepen the experience of the park?

Budget and operations-related criteria

15. How much would this option cost initially to implement? How much for ongoing maintenance, including staffing considerations? Would specialized skills on the part of staff members be necessary to make this option work?
16. Would this option capitalize on locations within the park that are rich in tangible resources? Would there be an adverse impact on those resources?

17. Would this option attract visitors to under-utilized park locations, enabling overused locations to recover from use fatigue?
18. Would this option provide the opportunity for entrepreneurial strategies that involve park partners?

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