CHAPTER 9:
Immediate Next Steps

The Onondaga Creek Conceptual Revitalization Plan (OCRP) presents to the public and government decision-makers a conceptual plan for reinvigorating the creek and its corridor into an attractive asset. The case for revitalization is strong. The character of the creek has changed dramatically over the past two centuries. The symptoms of historic transformation, including urban development and rural land use changes, continue to compromise the ecological health of the creek and restrict access for use and enjoyment. The result is a waterway in need of flexible and innovative solutions for revitalization. Revitalization will be a long-term process, accomplished step-by-step, based on shared community goals for the waterway.

The benefits of revitalization are apparent; these few listed echo the goals of watershed stakeholders. Tangible benefits for the creek corridor include rehabilitating and protecting the natural environment, catalyzing renewal in surrounding neighborhoods, and creating recreation and education opportunities. Intangible benefits include forming new cooperative ways of managing Onondaga Creek as a treasured resource, reintegrating the creek as a natural oasis into the urban landscape, guiding creative renewal, linking communities, and fostering local pride.

To realize benefits, the OCRP must move towards implementation. Key next steps in the OCRP process are: 1) continuance of the Onondaga Creek Working Groups role as a community voice guiding revitalization, thereby serving as a conduit for ongoing public discussion and two-way communication, and 2) implementation of pilot projects, to begin to show the public tangible results. Key next steps are elaborated in sections of this chapter, Process Steps and Pilot Projects.

Prior to discussion of the next steps, OCRP findings are summarized. Primarily, a comprehensive community vision for the future of Onondaga Creek is a key finding of the OCRP. Watershed goals and concerns gathered from stakeholders underpin the conceptual plan components and will guide creek revitalization into the future. Results from the Onondaga Creek Community Forums and Stakeholder Organization Meetings were sorted into most frequent themes. Recreation in a clean, natural waterway and fishing opportunities from a healthy fishery were top goal themes for the future of Onondaga Creek. Concerns were framed as issues or obstacles that needed to be solved to achieve goals. Top themes expressed were lack of funding, government apathy or inability to achieve the goals desired, sewage and sewage treatment, and garbage/pollution.

Building on the community vision, the Onondaga Creek Working Group's results are the heart of the OCRP. The Working Group developed revitalization maps and watershed goals, based on technical information and community goals and concerns. Watershed goals are grouped under five categories, called drivers, identified by the Working Group. The five drivers are water quality; human health and safety; ecological health and habitat; access, recreation and use; and education. The drivers function as the primary motivators, the watershed goals and revitalization maps function as a guiding image for revitalization.

A strategy to evaluate ongoing projects was developed for the OCRP. Many projects are currently underway in the creek corridor. It is unrealistic to assume that every component of each project will readily match the goals of the revitalization plan. Yet a careful review of similar goals and potential synergies between projects and the OCRP promotes collaboration among decision makers and stakeholders. In turn, this may increase project acceptance by the public and strengthen long-term viability of the creek corridor.

In addition to coordinating with ongoing projects in the creek corridor, many factors will need to be addressed to move forward with implementation. Factors include flood management, safety issues, and rural and urban development. The OCRP identified constraints and data gaps that will affect Onondaga Creek revitalization. Constraints restrict the ability to act. In the Onondaga Creek watershed, constraints include fragmented government and community, current funding priorities, water quality and channelization. The challenge of revitalization is to turn existing constraints into opportunities. Understanding both the natural system and the local social and governmental dynamic are critical to developing effective strategies for the future. Data gaps in the watershed are significant; however, identification of constraints and data gaps leads to opportunities and solutions for revitalization.

Cohesive strategies for implementation will leverage funding and meet as many stakeholder goals as possible. Four types of strategies are identified and examined in the OCRP: finding revitalization opportunities in existing land use patterns; establishing design, sustainability and ecological standards to guide future projects; exploring intermunicipal agreements as a multi-jurisdictional watershed policy approach; and seeking sources of funding. Within each, options are suggested that communities can adopt to achieve the goals of the OCRP; many require cooperation with urban and rural private landowners.

The OCRP serves as a foundation for implementing meaningful change for Onondaga Creek. By setting and striving for goals, the community accepts both the challenge and opportunities possible through revitalization. To move forward with the OCRP, key next steps are described in the following sections, Process Steps and Pilot Projects.

Process Steps

Based on experience of other communities, creek revitalization is rarely a quick or linear process. The OCRP emphasizes that revitalization will be long-term, accomplished in incremental steps in multiple arenas. Projects build momentum from other successful projects, which encourages others to lend support and resources. For this to happen, implementation requires multiple processes to occur simultaneously and inform each other as illustrated in Figure 9.1. Key next steps in process are described in the following paragraphs.

The OCRP Project Team recommends continuing the Onondaga Creek Working Group. The Working Group is the cornerstone of implementation. The Working Group can act as the community voice for the watershed, initiating and coordinating projects through a transparent, accessible process. The Working Group functions as an inclusive partnership; fostering communications, and community dialogue. This is not easy to do; debates over priorities and methods of revitalization are inevitable. Uncertainties and delays typically occur when groups with diverse values work together. Yet ideally, resulting efforts enhance both the health of

the creek and the attachment of watershed residents to their creek. (Platt 2006)

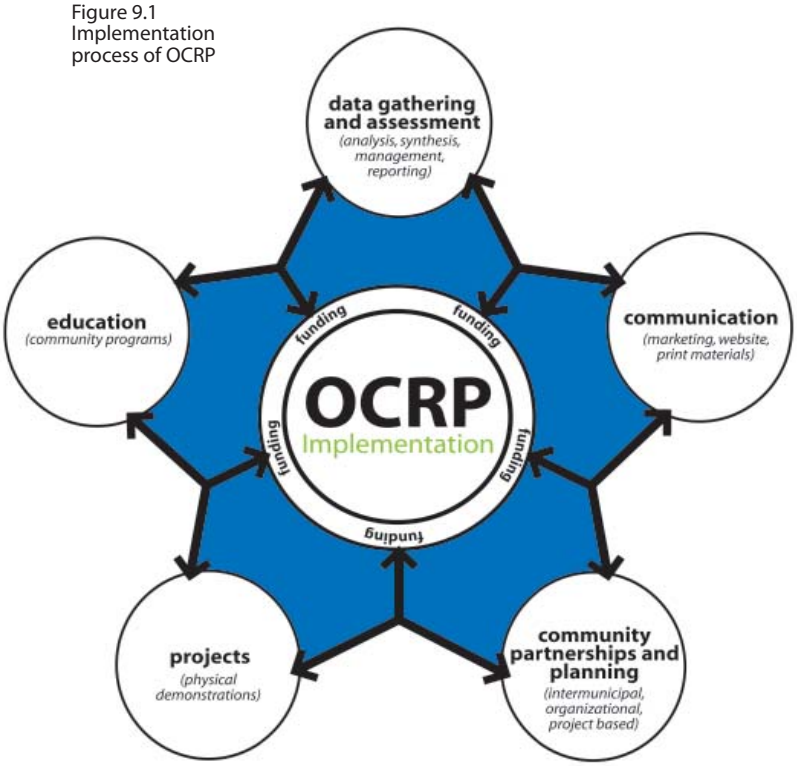
To move into the implementation phase, Working Group members will have to make a number of decisions, including:
1. Determining what kind of model is appropriate for the next phase of the Working Group, including the introduction of new members and decision making processes.
2. Define funding mechanism or how to maintain sustainability of effort over the long-term.
3. Ascertain ways to gain government backing and support.
Many of the following process steps can be initiated and coordinated at the Working Group table.

A primary step in the implementation process is to develop, expand, and initiate the action items listed under the watershed goals. The Working Group has a role in determining where to begin. They are well equipped to frame priorities in a long-term strategy for restoring ecological structure and function and continuing community input. Implementing action items is intended as an iterative process; the Working Group should serve as the entity to return to the community soliciting input on project plans and designs.

Coordination of ongoing projects that affect Onondaga Creek is part of the process of revitalization. These projects are varied: rural nonpoint source pollution management, green infrastructure, neighborhood revitalization, creek walk, and local university initiatives. With an eye focused on creek revitalization, oversight by the Working Group, with day-to-day assistance from the OCRP Project Team, can contribute to grounding project plans and designs with public input and technical considerations. Without a creek advocate, many projects that could potentially provide benefit might otherwise not consider Onondaga Creek and the goals of the OCRP.

Communication of OCRP goals builds community support for creek revitalization. The role of the Working Group and Project Team is to share plan components and communicate the correlation of OCRP goals with the community vision. The public's concerns are addressed as part of the implementation process. To address concerns, the public needs a venue to share their input during revitalization steps; the Working Group provides a forum for two-way communication. The public can identify actions seen as counterproductive to the OCRP, discuss concerns, learn

Figure 9.1
Implementation process of OCRP



about the creek, and stay engaged in the long-term process of revitalization. Communication and building support for the OCRP occurs in many ways, some individuals will express support for revitalization by participating in community projects rather than attend meetings or read the OCRP document. Recognizing and tapping into different levels of engagement will be part of the creative process of implementation.

Continuing to gather data and characterize the Onondaga Creek watershed is a critical step in the implementation process. The OCRP identified both ecological and revitalization design data gaps, presented as tables in Appendix M. Ecological data gaps require continued monitoring and study of the watershed; nonprofits, the State of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF), and government agencies, particularly Onondaga County, have ongoing monitoring programs in the watershed. For design data gaps, data can be transferred from other river systems, based on solutions found to similar concerns regarding safety, liability, and best management practices. The Working Group can function as an education forum for the broader community as data gaps are filled.

An outreach program to the many municipalities in the Onondaga Creek watershed is an important step in the implementation process. The OCRP identified intermunicipal agreements as a potential strategy to confront difficult problems

like nonpoint source pollution and stormwater management. With direction from the Working Group, the Project Team can engage local governments to educate about and advocate for revitalization projects and intermunicipal cooperation and agreements.

A strategy for funding is needed; an acute need exists for a coordinating entity capable of long-range thinking. As stated, revitalizing Onondaga Creek will be a long-term process, achieved incrementally. Financial resources need to be leveraged to meet as many stakeholder goals as possible. More will be needed than just funding for specific projects. The Working Group has an invaluable role to play in the next phases of the OCRP, but support is needed to facilitate the group over the long-term. Fundraising and coordinating public/private partnerships are another important aspect of leveraging funds for revitalization.

Lastly, implementation of demonstration, or pilot-projects, is a critical next step in the revitalization process. Demonstration projects fill data gaps, mobilize community activity, and show tangible results. Pilot demonstration projects are described in the next section.

Pilot Projects

The OCRP Project Team developed a pilot projects list during the process of drafting the OCRP. Pilot projects were based on watershed action items and the Working Group's revitalization maps (both are found in Chapter 5). The Project Team worked for a balance between urban and rural projects and easy and difficult projects. The Working Group reviewed and vetted the pilot projects. Their resulting assessment emphasized "low hanging fruit" (easy projects that can be quickly implemented); incorporation of public input; projects with good visibility (so that the public sees tangible benefits); and creating synergy between projects.

Pilot Projects are listed in Table 9.1. Projects are arranged from easier to implement (#1) to more difficult to implement (#11). A brief description follows the name of the project. Reference sources for the suggested projects follow, whether originating from the revitalization maps or the action items. Map letters identify corresponding revitalization maps. Corresponding drivers are listed numerically in the next column. It was noted during Working Group review that most pilot projects might serve an education purpose, thus corresponding to the education driver in the OCRP. In the last three columns, shading signifies project applicability to sections of Onondaga Creek. These columns correspond to the sections used for the revitalization maps: urban, rural and transitional (the section of Onondaga Creek that transitions between rural and urban). In addition to the revitalization maps and action items, the Case Studies Guide (Appendix C) provides examples of projects from other river revitalizations around the United States. Table 9.1 demonstrates that pilot projects can meet multiple drivers. A necessary step of implementation will be consideration of each pilot project's ability to impact multiple goals of the OCRP. As stated, the Working Group is an appropriate forum to plan projects and leverage resources so that projects meet as many goals as possible.

Conclusion

In moving towards implementation, whether OCRP process steps or implementation of pilot projects, requires the interest and motivation of watershed stakeholders. Sustained action is needed, particularly community input, landowner interest and cooperation, and building a coalition between watershed citizens and government agencies at the local, state, and federal level. As noted in Chapter 1, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2001) defines stakeholders as those who have a share or an interest in an issue. The creek flows past homes, farms, schools, and businesses on its way to Onondaga Lake. Revitalization of Onondaga Creek will impact many lives in the watershed.

The OCRP demonstrates that the community vision for Onondaga Creek includes recreation in a clean, natural waterway and fishing opportunities from a healthy fishery. Striving for these goals requires a robust, long-term strategy. The OCRP functions as a guiding image to achieve this long-term strategy. The OCRP is a conceptual plan, but also an invitation to watershed stakeholders for continued involvement and action.

Table 9.1 Recommended Pilot Projects

	Recommended Pilot Projects	Description	Action Items	Revitalization Maps, By Letter	Corresponding Drivers*	Urban	Transitional	Rural
1	Living fence demonstration project	Create a natural barrier with shrubs, trees, or other vegetation next to the creek, to act as a barrier instead of fencing.		E, F2	2,5			
2	Alter the bankside mowing regime	Allow plant growth near the edge of the creek, to benefit fish and wildlife habitat, instead of frequent mowing.		E	3,5			
3	Shade tree planting pilot project	Plant shade trees in the riparian areas of Onondaga Creek to provide habitat and moderate water temperature.		A, C, E, F2, G/H, K, L	1,3,5			
4	Green infrastructure demonstration site	Manage stormwater runoff by integrating soils and vegetation into the landscape.		E, F, L	1,3,5			
5	Comprehensive littering education pilot program	Develop and present litter prevention education to both school children and watershed residents.			1,2,3,5			
6	Non-native species control, native plants restoration at hot spots	Remove non-native plants and replace with native plants, in areas where non-native species have become well established.		A, E, F, G/H, I, L	3,5			
7	Rural/agricultural BMP demonstration site	Install and practice innovative rural best management practices to manage runoff; site should be accessible for local landowners to assess function.		A, C, G/H, I, J, K, M	1,2,3			
8	Trail creation/ connection demonstration site	Create new and/or connect existing recreation trails where desired in a visible, accessible place, near Onondaga Creek.		E, F2, L	4			
9	Conservation easement/access demonstration site	Institute a conservation easement/ access site with a willing private landowner; site should be accessible for local landowners to assess function.		E, C, G/H, L	3,4			
10	Flood and stormwater retention demonstration site	Install a basin that retains stormwater for infiltration, pollution reduction and downstream water quality improvements.		E, F2	1,2,3			
11	Channel modification demonstration site	Returning a stream channel section to as natural a condition as possible, given current constraints, while creating a safer, stable, non-erosive channel.		E, F	2,3			

*Drivers: 1) water quality, 2) human health and safety, 3) ecological health and habitat, 4) access, recreation and use, and 5) education