



National Park Service
Lowell National Historical Park



Future Directions

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Introduction

Since joining you all at Lowell National Historical Park in February, I have read my share of plans, reports, organizational charts, business plans and financial outlays, newspaper and magazine clippings, correspondence, etc. I have had the opportunity to listen to people's thoughts on the operations of the park, the dynamics of the City and our partners, and opportunities for the future. I have also made a conscience choice to get out of the Kirk Street office on a regular basis and tour different aspects of the park and community. I have enjoyed touring on the canal boat and trolley, special ranger led tours, the music and dancing at Folk Festival and Summer Concert Series, being treated like Royalty at the Angkor Dance Troupe performance, and the hands activities at the Tsongas Center.

The future success of Lowell National Historical Park is dependent upon our ability to continue to reach for excellence in our preservation and interpretive mission. When I took this position I was asked to consider not only the sustainability of previous successes, but Lowell's position in the future. I put forth this paper as a way of communicating my thoughts, observations and recommendations for moving forward and encouraging further dialogue.

To put some of my thoughts in perspective, I share with you some insights from our newly appointed regional director, Mary Bomar. Director Bomar brings great optimism and leadership to the Service and the Northeast Region. She has outlined four key elements (which directly align themselves with Lowell's interest) that the Service's ability to have adequate resources to achieve our mission will be dependent upon:

- ❖ Continuing sound **business practices** to ensure not just fiscal responsibility, but fiscal survival.
- ❖ **Refining our interpretive programs** to stay abreast of current trends in scientific and historical thought.
- ❖ **Communicating with our public** the role of the Park Service in caring for our nation's special places, and why our planning horizon is not measured in years, but in generations.
- ❖ Building better **partnerships** that benefit everyone concerned.

PARK TRENDS

Park Operations: It is clear that we are in a transitional phase of the park – both in terms of operations as well as development. From 1998 to 2004 our operational budget has been somewhat static and our buying power has been significantly reduced. As a result, we have lost our ability to maintain FTE levels (i.e., a loss of 16 FTE). There does not seem to be any substantial increases on the horizon, thus we will need to act more strategically and look more closely at the core of what this park is all about and how we do it. *Forward thinking will be required.*

Visitation: When the park was established it projected a visitor count of 1 million people per year. In more recent years, the park has seen increases in certain program areas (special events and educational groups) but a leveling off or decline to our museums and interpretive tours. This seems to be a trend nationwide and certainly within the City of Lowell. Also, funding for marketing and promotion of the park by the City has been refocused to selling the city as a place to live - more toward “residential marketing” versus previous campaigns that marketed the City for its cultural attractions. The park as a whole has not supported any major marketing campaigns in recent years, with the exception of the Folk Festival and Summer Concert Series. *Better marketing the park, our programs, and Lowell is essential.*

A Maturing Park: The Park is now 27 years old and has made incredible progress. With the establishment of a new park there is always a sense of excitement, a lot of energy put into building things, a desire to be innovative and unique, and a need to show progress. As we look to 2006 we are in a very different environment, and to some extent our organization and priorities have changed, but *our desires to be innovative and achieve excellence should be no different.*

Observations & Recommendations

The following headings represent the various issues that I have found to be the most pressing to address at this time. They are derived from my own observations, discussions with NPS/Lowell employees and partners, and the Transition Management Assessment Plan.

LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION

“Tending to Lowell First”: Many people have commented that the Superintendent needs to tend to matters locally and dedicate significant time to

serving the park first before committing to initiatives that involve a lot of time away from the park.

Recommendation:

I have made the regional and deputy director aware of this issue with previous superintendents and the need to be committed to the park first and balance all other responsibilities with this goal in mind. I will try to remain true to this commitment but recognize the need to sometimes serve in a greater NPS capacity when requested. For instance, I have agreed to chair the Granite Subcluster, which I believe will have a benefit to Lowell.

Alignment on Park Mission and Priorities: Although I get the sense that most of the staff has a good sense of the park's mission, I think that there is a need to reinforce clarity on how we meet our objectives and how priorities are set and reinforced. I do not get the sense that we have cohesiveness and coordination throughout the operation. There are many talented people within their functional disciplines but there does not seem to be a consistent focus on priorities or strategic planning.

Recommendation:

The first step in articulating my expectations and a process for carrying out park objectives is the presentation of this report to all staff and the regional director. This report will be shared at an all employees meeting which should begin an open process of dialogue and cross pollination of ideas.

The budget planning exercise for 2006 will include the management team actively engaged in a discussion about parkwide priorities and consensus as to organizational structures and funding needs. In addition, we will be planning a series of focus group discussions with staff and partners (date to be determined).

The superintendent and division chiefs should define critical issues relating to our ability to maintain resources and programs to a high standard. Issues relating to the canal, special events, leased properties, etc. need to be debated and resolved. A system for evaluating priorities on a regular basis should be put in place.

Expectations of Managers: Lowell is fortunate to have some very seasoned and talented managers. My expectation for managers is to create an environment that encourages a positive work ethic, creativity, fairness, and commitment to the ideals of the National Park Service. I also believe, and will encourage, all managers to:

1. Have the ability to look at a problem or their division/organization from a broad conceptualizing perspective as well as the day- to- day realities.
2. Be committed to stewardship of the resources and programs that we are entrusted, as well as each employee.
3. Be “actively engaged” in ongoing discussions regarding all aspects of the health of Lowell National Historical Park.,
4. Embrace the partnership framework outlined in the park’s legislation as a means to best tell the story of Lowell and preserve the historic context that we work within.
5. Be accountable for fiscal responsibilities and upholding the annual work program.

Expectations of All Employees: This Park was built on creativity and focused opportunism at all levels in the park. These opportunities still exist and are encouraged. I also believe, and will encourage, all employees to:

1. Demonstrate professionalism in all that you do (people in this community consistently remark to me of the significance of the NPS presence and your professionalism).
2. Be respectful of your park and partner colleagues and open/flexible in discussing and adopting new ideas and strategies.
3. Consider your stewardship role in broad terms and ways that you can personally contribute to our mission.
4. Be actively engaged in ongoing discussions regarding all aspects of the health of Lowell National Historical Park.

Mentoring: The park could benefit from a formal mentoring program that would aid new employees, seasonals or those that may shift job assignments. The program would be aimed at creating a positive environment and creating a greater understanding of the Service and park, and in career development.

Recommendation:

Mentors should be selected based upon demonstrated sustained excellence within the NPS/park and should make a commitment to their responsibilities for successfully mentoring employees.

COMMUNICATIONS AND CONTROLS

We need to further develop an external communications strategy for promoting park programs and opportunities for advocacy, volunteerism and funding support. Internal communications are shared through regular management team meetings as well as division meetings and the quarterly parkwide staff meetings. The effectiveness of these meetings should be evaluated as well as additional

opportunities and means to communicate activities, useful information and needs.

Recommendations:

Regularly scheduled management team meetings are designed to share information, coordinate activities, and identify deadlines. In addition, minutes from management team meetings will be distributed to all staff.

In the future, an annual report that presents the activities that have been undertaken throughout the year should be distributed to staff, partners and NPS interests.

Our means for communicating to the public needs to be customer oriented and integrated, including: phone messaging, reservations, web site, radio transmitted message from highway signs, printed materials, etc.

Correspondence/Record Keeping: For a park with extensive IT networks and professionals to assist, Lowell seems like it is not fully utilizing its capabilities. Procedures do not seem to be uniformly implemented and much of the park's correspondence, research information and administrative work are kept on personal computers versus utilizing the G drive whereby there is universal access and greater capacity for storage.

Recommendation:

Administration should set up a "universal system" whereby all divisions/individuals can use for data storage and sharing.

Official correspondence representing park and/or NPS views should be directed through the Superintendents office.

EFFICIENCIES AND REALIGNMENT

As we have seen this park expand, shrink and stabilize we need to now assess the optimal organizational design to serve our core mission and continue to deliver quality services. *I need to emphasize that it is a new day at Lowell and that there is a real need to shift the paradigm for how this park carries out its business.*

We will be developing a life cycle calendar for the park that will indicate the types of activities that we undertake during the year. We hope that this calendar, matched with an analysis of our core operational needs, will help us to better understand the ebb and flow of activities and programs as a means to become more strategic in our planning and program development.

Recommendation:

Bring in an outside party to conduct a core operations analysis, matched with a life cycle calendar that should indicate levels of activities and staffing.

An optimal organizational design should be developed and used in decision making related to budget, priority setting and succession planning.

Undertake a space needs study to look at the current utilization of our spaces and determine if there are practical and functional changes that should occur. Three areas that rise to the top for evaluation include the Mogan Center, Old City Hall and the Boott/Tsongas Center.

SPECIFIC PROGRAM AREAS:

Superintendent's Office

Deputy Superintendent: With the retirement of Cindy Kryston, we have decided not to fill the "Deputy" position. The deputy's responsibilities will be distributed among the assistant superintendent, other division chiefs and staff as well as a newly established position created within the Superintendents office.

Recommendation:

Establish a Chief of Staff position, a non-supervisory position responsible for accountability, effective communication and efficiencies and provide the following functions:

- ❖ *Coordination and movement of issues and tasks within the park*
- ❖ *Accountability - Tracking*
- ❖ *Facilitate effective communications throughout all levels of the organization, the political landscape and to the public*
- ❖ *Strategic Planning and Facilitator for the management team*
- ❖ *Core Operations Analysis and Functional Life Cycle of the Park*

Assistant Superintendent: The current "Development" Division overseen by the Assistant Superintendent will be expanded to better reflect both the development as well as the preservation functions that the Division now serves. The Division will assume the new title of, "Division of Heritage Development and Preservation." The Division will maintain its current functions and staff but will be expanded to include an Outreach and Marketing arm, Special Events, and the Mogan Cultural Center.

Recommendation:

Look internally to establish a secretary position to support this expanded Division.

Establish a team approach to Special Events whereby all major events would be planned, coordinated, marketed and supported by this team. The events team could draw from parkwide resources based on priority and availability of staff and is expected to ebb and flow depending on activity levels.

Patrick Mogan envisioned a “living laboratory” to explore the social, economic and cultural life of the city. I believe that the Mogan Cultural Center provides the park with a great opportunity to expand our outreach to the community and preserve and present the heritage of Lowell through partnership programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, field work, live performance, exhibition, publication, and apprenticeships. I see the Mogan Center having potential to be the parks community platform that provides for civic engagement on important historical and contemporary issues. This past year we held a workshop with the National Center for the Traditional Arts (NCTA) and the state folklorists from New England to consider undertaking field work that would contribute to the Folk Festival. We applied for a foundation grant but we also began a discussion about Lowell becoming a hub for New England traditional artisans. Further exploration of these concepts should be explored by park staff and partners.

The community planning position has been a critical position in obtaining grants, providing project management, and coordinating planning initiatives. We should evaluate the need to pursue an update to the General Management Plan. This position could also play a critical role in developing a plan for park sustainability.

Establish a Marketing, Outreach and Tourism team that would be responsible for promoting the park through various media and public relations strategies. Actively participate in community/regional/state tourism activities and programs that encourage visits to the park and our various programs. Establish an integrated system/program for marketing the parks/partners offerings – web, television, radio, publications, tourism pieces, fam tours, etc.

Administration

Strategic Business Management: A repeating theme of mine has been the need to organize in manner to provide a more business like approach in the areas of revenue enhancement, cost recovery, program integration and forecasting.

Recommendation:

Administration needs to identify ways that strategically links all park business management functions and provide assistance to the management team, and directly to the division chiefs, in developing their fiscal plans. The division should include functions such as budget program integration and crosswalk, lands, leasing, asset management, special use permits, fees, etc.

There is a need to identify a coordinator to handle all aspects of property management, with an emphasis on administering leases.

Continue to participate in the Granite Subcluster resource sharing planning and provide support and leadership in functional areas identified in the plan.

Visitor Protection

There is a need to define the visitor protection program at Lowell and to set in place clear objectives for the Division and park.

Recommendation:

The vacant LE position should be filled as soon as possible to meet our No Net Loss mandate established by WASO.

An analysis of the role and function for the Division should be developed and presented to the Superintendent. Consensus on the visitor protection program should then be clearly articulated to park staff.

Interpretation and Education

With the Chief of Interpretation and Education departing, the decision has been made to not immediately fill this position but to instead to flatten out the structure into three divisions: Interpretation, Education and Curatorial Services. I have challenged this collective to develop a close working relationship willing to think of ways for better integration, resource sharing and creative programming.

Recommendation:

As suggested within other divisions, we should explore the potential for integrating staff currently engaged in interpretation, education, research, special events and Mogan Center activities.

Adopt a more flexible organizational structure that places resources where and when they are needed the most.

The volunteer program needs to be a “parkwide” program whereby all divisions think of their needs and skill sets required. The VIP program should be coordinated with the Human Resource Specialist to develop recruitment strategies, position descriptions and development opportunities.

With the assistance of the IT staff, explore opportunities for automating the Reservations System, including web- based reservations.

The curatorial program should provide research, collections management, and exhibit needs - content and care. In addition, the program should be engaged in the review of park content and offer opportunities for the park to enter into debate and dialogue on issues and approaches to interpretation. This could be expanded to community engagement in the form of public forums, public use of collections, technical assistance on exhibit development, curation and preservation.

Maintenance and Facility Management

There is great complexity in managing “our” (sometimes others) collection of historic buildings, canals, trains and landscapes. Over the years we have seen the demise of the Preservation Commission and the collapse of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’s heritage investments. We have “carried on” where others have “moved on.” Although it is admirable that the NPS upholds its stewardship responsibility for these resources, the challenges we face need to be addressed. New development or land/property acquisition, as well as our assumed role from the state and others, needs to be assessed and factored into park sustainability and staff capacity. NPS programs such as FMMS and PMIS will become vital to the park’s ability to be competitive for funding sources. Staff will need to be proficient in all these of programs.

Recommendation:

Dedicate a staff person to ensure that the division is strategically positioned to compete for various fund accounts and ensure that FMMS and PMIS is accurate and up- to- date. An additional secretarial staff person should provide service to the division.

As suggested within other divisions, we should explore the potential for integrating staff assignments and adopt a more flexible organizational structure that places resources where and when they are needed the most.

Assess the current responsibilities assumed by the park, both NPS owned properties as well as other properties that we maintain and reassess the scope and reach of the park. Superintendent should approach owners of significant properties to discuss issues related to maintenance and preservation needs.