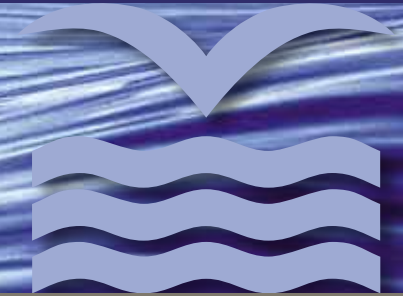


CONNECTICUT RIVER MUSEUM

STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2026



Setting Our Course to
Fifty and Beyond



FOREWORD

“A river cuts through rock, not because of its power, but because of its persistence.”

JIM WATKINS, ENVIRONMENTALIST

These words seem apt here, at the Connecticut River Museum, as we plan for our future. Persistence is required if we are to succeed in implementing the new 2022-2026 Strategic Plan that the CRM Staff and Board have worked so hard to create over the past many months.

Our course is clear:

- » To broaden and deepen understanding of the Connecticut River’s history to inspire generations to treasure the River as the spine that has run through our community for millennia and to act as stewards going forward.
- » To introduce visitors of every age from near and far to the stories and importance of the Connecticut River via exhibits, lectures, artifacts, and educational endeavors.
- » To offer hands-on engagement with the River’s wondrous beauty, fragility, and significance both from the River’s banks and on the water via our re-creation of the 17th Century Dutch ship *Onrust* and the contemporary motor vessel *RiverQuest*.
- » To be a good neighbor to the local community and to the wider world of our country’s many rivers. Our histories are entwined and our cause inter-dependent. By acting in conscience and, when possible, in concert, we cannot change the course of our rivers, but we can vouchsafe their futures.

The challenges that face us in implementing the Connecticut River Museum’s Strategic Plan are considerable. In the near term, we must find ways to cope effectively with the on-going global COVID pandemic and its resultant economic stress and social, political, and cultural disruptions. We also face the perils of rising sea and river levels that may impact our waterfront buildings and grounds. And we must plan to make way for new technologies that can improve administrative efficiency, make for more effective marketing, and help us create vivid and engaging exhibits.

We face these challenges with resolve. When you paint a boat, you learn that the preparation is usually more difficult and time-consuming than the actual painting, and that the quality of that preparation directly impacts the excellence of the final product.

The plan presented here is a living document—a blueprint for action and the result of concerted effort by the Strategic Plan Committee’s co-chairs, Tom Wilcox and Verena Harfst; our Board; our Staff; our consulting facilitator, Olivia White; Jennifer Carlson, our Executive Director at the time of the planning process, who provided critical guidance and insight for our planning process while skillfully leading the Museum’s day-to-day operations; and Dean McChesney, Joan Motyka and Janet Roach, who lent their design, editing and writing skills to create this finished product. I thank them for their devotion to this work and I thank all the community Members, Donors, Volunteers, and Visitors who made significant contributions to this effort.

I also extend my deepest appreciation to all who helped forge the Museum’s success over its first 50 years. In the coming years we will continue to ask challenging questions of ourselves and to listen to all stakeholders as we stride with hope and determination into the future.

Sincerely,

Peter Coombs
Chair of the Board of Trustees

OUR STORY

“We must begin thinking like a river if we are to leave a legacy of beauty and life for future generations.”

DAVID BROWER, ENVIRONMENTALIST

It all started over a bowl of clam chowder at the Griswold Inn. It was 1972, and Tom Stevens—historian, former director of the Mystic Seaport and Deep River resident—was enjoying his usual Friday bowl of chowder when Innkeeper Bill Winterer stopped at Stevens' table to chat. Winterer and his wife Victoria had recently bought the old warehouse at the foot of Main Street known as Steamboat Dock. Winterer described his plans for re-purposing it to a waterfront restaurant with apartments on the upper floors. Stevens shook his head. “That is the most historic property on the Connecticut River,” Stevens said. “It deserves something better than yet another commercialization.”

Winterer mentioned the idea to Vicky, whose field is historic preservation, and got an immediate enthusiastic response.

Thus, the idea of preserving the property and the rich history surrounding it, though still but a wisp, became both a hope and an aspiration. It emerged, too, as a considerable challenge.

In 1814, the wharf was the site of a British raid. The warehouse was built in 1878 and over time held a restaurant, a chandlery, and a marina. In later incarnations, it morphed into a bar, a boat dealership. In the years preceding the Winterers' purchase, it had become virtually derelict.

Happily, the idea of preserving the property coincided with the

American Bicentennial. Bob Wilkerson, the chair of the Essex Bicentennial Committee, agreed that acquiring the property and starting a museum would be a great Bicentennial project. Even now, Vicky Winterer says, “it wouldn't have happened without the Bicentennial.”

Community support was strong. The hope became an intent in 1974 when Bill Winterer convened a group of active citizens at the Gris for a lunch of Connecticut River shad. Soon thereafter, the Connecticut River Foundation came into being. Builder Herb Clark was an early supporter. Bankers Jim Preble and Bob Herbst helped with financing; a Founders' Society of Donors was enlisted; a Board of Trustees began meeting to refine all the ideas that were floating around. The institution-to-be was named The Connecticut River Museum.

In the years that followed, a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities funded the hiring of architects and museum consultants. Other grants were applied for. Ella Grasso, Connecticut's first woman governor, became the Museum's first member and a reliable champion. The Wadsworth Atheneum made a long-term loan of marine objects, models, navigation tools and other artifacts from the Connecticut River Valley. Tom Stevens donated his library of maritime books, documents, and objects. Brenda Milkofsky, who'd been a volunteer force from the beginning, took on the role of director.

Now, in the nearly 50 years since opening we have evolved into a private not-for-profit educational institution that is fully accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, a member of the Council of American Maritime Museums and the only institution committed to telling the story of the Connecticut River and its people.

The Connecticut River is one of only 14 rivers in the United States to be designated by the Environmental Protection Agency a National Heritage River, entitled to special attention to further three objectives: natural resource and environmental protection, economic revitalization, and historic and cultural preservation.

Our mission fits right in: to deepen appreciation of the River's history and to inspire its stewardship by providing unique educational and recreational experiences to diverse audiences.

By deepening appreciation of the River's history and inspiring its stewardship, the Connecticut River Museum encourages appreciation of the treasure that is the River now and its thoughtful stewardship by future generations.

From its beginning, the Museum has played an important role in collecting and protecting manuscripts, books, art, and artifacts of regional significance. Among them, they reflect the stories of Connecticut River life—from the indigenous peoples who have lived along the River for thousands of years to the array of present-day inhabitants. Exhibits invite Visitors to learn about our riverine culture of shipbuilding and boatbuilding, fishing, commerce, naval history, and recreation.

The Museum's historic buildings on Steamboat Dock provide a spectacular waterfront venue for Museum functions. Some 25,000 people from all 50 states and many different countries tour the Museum each year; over 850 households are active members.

In 2012, the Museum purchased the historic Samuel Lay House property, which adjoins our waterfront campus. Shortly after, a successful capital campaign allowed us to convert the carriage house on the Lay property to a climate-controlled collections storage facility; to replace the dilapidated bulkhead along the Museum's waterfront; and to purchase a 24-foot aluminum boat that enabled on-the-river educational programs.

For several years now, *Onrust*, a re-creation of the vessel under the command of Dutch explorer Adriaen Block when he sailed into the Connecticut River in 1614, has launched from our docks on a regular schedule of River tours. Now too *RiverQuest*, an eco-tour cruiser that allows expansion of educational experiences directly on the River, will be available from our docks. Both vessels are exceptional resources.

In addition, from its small beginnings, the Connecticut River Museum today:

- » Presents a wide range of exhibits, educational programs, publications, and special events that attract, engage, and inform visitors of all ages;
- » Operates a museum and library to recognized professional standards;
- » Preserves and maintains public access to its landmark buildings, wharf, and park;
- » Collects, preserves, and provides public access to significant historical artifacts pertaining to the River, its history, and people;
- » Collaborates with and supports other regional organizations and communities with like interests and missions.

With numerous solid accomplishments already on the record, the Connecticut River Museum now faces a future filled with opportunity. Strong community support, generous Donors and Volunteers, a dedicated professional Staff and a committed Board are in place. This puts us in position to deepen and strengthen our service to a broad spectrum of Visitors, using our five-year Strategic Plan as a blueprint for these efforts.

The Covid 19 pandemic along with social and racial justice issues have shined new light on how institutions such as ours understand and share history. As we move forward, the Connecticut River Museum will ensure that diversity and inclusion are high on our list of priorities.

In 2024, we will mark the 50th Anniversary of the fateful lunch that launched us into being. We look forward to celebrating our past and embracing our future. Indeed, we enter the next phase of our existence eager to share with our many constituencies—tourists, students, scholars, and others—an ever deeper understanding of the rich and multi-faceted history of the Connecticut River and its people.

OUR PLANNING PROCESS

CRM's strategic planning process was a thorough and inclusive examination of our Museum's current operations and future needs.

A pair of Trustees chaired a strategic planning committee of the Board to provide leadership over the course of the planning process, which spanned several months. We surveyed, and in some instances personally interviewed, selected Donors, Visitors, and Stakeholders. Staff members were engaged every step of the way and they, and the full Board of Trustees, were fully involved in evaluating findings, drawing conclusions, re-setting our mission, vision, and values, and developing strategic goals and implementation plans. We engaged an outside consultant to facilitate a series of retreats with the Board and Staff to ensure objectivity and full participation. As a team we thoughtfully considered the Museum's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities we might capitalize on, threats to our success, and external economic, social, industry and demographic trends that will affect the Museum going forward. The Staff has developed a detailed implementation plan that will guide our operations over the next three-to-five years and ensure that our goals are realized.

Although this report represents our best thinking now and a significant investment of time and attention, we assert that this is a living document; our goals, strategies and tactics are subject to adjustment as experience and internal and external factors demand in the future. Whatever the future holds we will continue to operate in the same spirits of creativity, candor, inclusion, and innovation in which this plan was developed.



OUR MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

“The river has great wisdom and whispers its secrets to the hearts of men.”

MARK TWAIN, AUTHOR

MISSION

To deepen appreciation of the River’s history and to inspire its stewardship by providing unique educational and recreational experiences to diverse audiences.

VISION

Generations of stewards will appreciate and care for our rivers.

VALUES

Across our operations, the Connecticut River Museum is committed to:

Excellence

Openness and innovation

Sustainable development

Diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion

Respect, integrity, honesty

Being a good neighbor

To access our extended Values Statement please visit ctrivermuseum.org



OUR PLAN

Our Board and Staff have developed the following five goals and strategies corresponding with and addressing our five strategic priorities to guide our overall operations over the next three-to-five years.

1 PROGRAMS, EXHIBITIONS AND COLLECTIONS

The Museum's programs, exhibitions and collections lie at the very heart of our organization; they are the basis of our standing as a highly respected institution. We are committed to superior curatorial care for our resources and to telling the story of the River from Source to Sound through thought-provoking, innovative, attractive, and accessible activities on site, online and on the water.

Our efforts will focus on:

- Reflecting the experiences and cultural diversity of all those, past and present, who have lived on and around the River.
- Attracting visitors from the widest possible variety of communities along the River and beyond.
- Encouraging repeat, year-round visits to our facilities, exhibits and activities.
- Engendering deep and caring involvement with the River and its history, and an understanding of the challenges we face in creating a sustainable future for it.
- Making optimal use of our campus and physical assets in support of our mission.

GOAL 1

CELEBRATE RIVER HISTORY AND INSPIRE STEWARDSHIP.

STRATEGIES

- Offer high-quality, engaging exhibits that illuminate the River's cultural and environmental history.
- Expand programs for teachers and school groups to further our engagement with diverse and underserved students through on-site, off-campus and hybrid educational models.
- Create user-friendly interactive learning experiences using up-to-date innovative technology.
- Deepen partnerships with like-minded academic, cultural, and environmental institutions and organizations along the River and beyond its banks.
- Build on our record for sound management of the Museum's archives and collections as a means of advancing our status to that of a "must-visit" place for research about the River.
- Develop new programs and exhibits to reflect the great diversity of historical perspectives on, near and beyond the banks of the River; engage external advisors, experts, and collaborators to further those efforts.
- Offer unique educational and recreational experiences that foster in visitors a sense of devotion to and delight in the Museum and the River.
- Provide memorable on-water visitor experiences aboard *Onrust* and *RiverQuest*.

2 CAMPUS AND WORKING WATERCRAFT

Our location on the River at the foot of Essex's Main Street is a singular strength that makes the Museum a premier destination for leisure, learning, and community gatherings. While maintaining significant physical assets including four buildings, watercraft and docks, the Museum is climate conscious and will strive to minimize our environmental footprint and maximize efficiency. As good stewards of our physical assets, we want to protect and improve our campus for public enjoyment for generations to come.

GOAL 2

STRENGTHEN OUR POSITION AS A DESIRABLE DESTINATION AND WELCOMING VENUE FOR LEARNING, ENJOYMENT, AND COMMUNITY GATHERINGS.

STRATEGIES

- Create and implement a Campus Master Plan to optimize the use of Museum buildings and grounds and provide ample space to meet program needs.
- Review and revise the proposed plan for the Discovery Center considering current and future needs and resources.
- Maintain *Onrust*, *RiverQuest* and all Museum watercraft in sea-worthy condition.
- Maximize the appeal, safety and practical utility of our waterfront and docks.
- Ensure that our facilities are responsive to visitors' needs and desires by providing additional on-site amenities, including through partnerships.
- Elevate the Museum's profile by promoting the campus and Museum activities across various media platforms and through targeted public relations efforts.
- Make our campus available as a venue for social and community events, and assist the River community in times of need.

3 PEOPLE

The Museum is committed to people power. The success of our Strategic Plan and our service to the public depend on our Staff, Board, and Volunteers. We strive to nurture and expand these critical human resources, and together advance a climate of innovation, inclusion, excellence and equity, collaboration, and communications in service to our mission and vision.

GOAL 3

RECRUIT, HIRE, AND ASSIGN ENGAGED, QUALIFIED PEOPLE WHO SHARE OUR VISION AND VALUES AS CRM IMPLEMENTS NEW IDEAS, INITIATIVES, AND PROGRAMS.

STRATEGIES

- Ensure excellent governance and non-profit best practices by maintaining a strong, engaged, well-qualified and diverse Board of Trustees.
- Promulgate clear policies and procedures that reflect CRM's commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging. Provide Staff and Board training to ensure that CRM's policies and procedures are understood and endorsed by all.
- Build, lead and retain an excellent Staff by providing competitive compensation; supportive, well-managed, reliable, up-to-date technology; and clear lines of communication between our Board, Executive Director, and Staff.
- Complement CRM's Staff by recruiting skilled, well-managed, multi-talented Volunteers

4 PHILANTHROPY AND FINANCIAL STABILITY

CRM is grateful to our generous individual Donors and Grantors and takes seriously our responsibility to steward and grow our fiscal assets to support our mission. Every member of the Board and Staff will embrace their role in fundraising to fuel our operations and will appreciate that our Donors are vital to our success. This institution-wide commitment to philanthropy will serve us well as we engage the public and celebrate the River.

GOAL 4

ENHANCE AND ENCOURAGE THE CULTURE OF PHILANTHROPY THAT HAS LONG SUPPORTED CRM AND SUSTAIN CURRENT OPERATIONS AND FUTURE GROWTH THROUGH SKILLFUL STEWARDSHIP OF AVAILABLE ASSETS.

STRATEGIES

- Invest in development capacity.
- Maintain solid, appreciative, and fruitful relationships with past and current Donors, Grantmaking Organizations, and Members and attract new ones.
- Organize appealing fund-raising events that people want to be part of.
- Initiate a planned giving program.
- Demonstrate fiscal responsibility and maintain transparent financial policies.
- Secure and grow CRM's financial resources through astute investment.

5 PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

This document is all about our future. The strategic planning process has clarified our internal strengths and weaknesses; confirmed our need to be prepared to mitigate future external threats; and solidified our commitment to embracing opportunities to serve the public with excellence. As we mark our 50th anniversary in 2024, CRM will continue to build on our capacities in a spirit of community, openness, and innovation.

GOAL 5

FOSTER RESPONSIBLE INNOVATION THAT ENABLES CREATIVE AND EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO EVER-CHANGING CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES..

STRATEGIES

- Anticipate and keep up with CRM's technological needs and developing products that will best support our programs and operations.
- Put in place an updated "Disaster, Mitigation, and Recovery Plan" to respond with agility to the danger of storms and flooding; the effects of climate change; the aftermath of the current pandemic and the possibility of future ones; and potential cyber-attacks on our assets and digital information.
- Address important issues arising from CRM's environmental impact and join initiatives aimed at supporting the River's sustainable development.
- Be a good neighbor by fostering mutually advantageous relationships with local businesses, schools, and organizations.
- Design and implement a comprehensive plan to celebrate with joy CRM's 50th anniversary in 2024.

CRM exists to honor the Connecticut River, its history and the people who have lived on or near its banks for centuries. And it is people—our Board, Executive Director, Staff, Volunteers, and Visitors—who sustain us in our mission and together make the Museum. We hope to expand our reach over the coming years and hope too that all who encounter us in whatever fashion will want to become part of our community.

“The care of rivers is not a question of rivers
But of the human heart.”

SHŌZŌ TANAKA, CONSERVATIONIST



**CONNECTICUT RIVER MUSEUM
STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2026**



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