Matton Shipyard Preservation & Adaptive Reuse Planning & Feasibility Study

Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor

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FISHER ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Site History

The Matton Shipyard was a boat building and marine towing business that operated for seven decades from 1916 to 1983 on Van Schaick Island in the City of Cohoes, NY along the west bank of the Hudson River. John E. Matton founded his shipbuilding business on the Champlain Canal north of Waterford in 1910, but moved to Van Schaick Island in 1916, compelled by the construction of the Barge Canal (1905-1918). John E. Matton and his son, Ralph, operated the Matton Shipyard until 1964. The business was sold to Bart Turecamo (Turecamo Harbor & Towing Company of Oyster Bay, NY) who continued the Matton Shipyard operations until his death in 1983. The site housed a sand blasting operation for a short period until it was purchased by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYS OPRHP) in 1989 and incorporated into the Peebles Island State Park.

The NYS OPRHP has maintained the buildings and site since its acquisition and in 2008, collaborated with the NYS Office of General Services to complete a survey and inventory of the buildings and site features. This documentation along with a prior historic research study (Gibbons 1991) identified Matton as a rare surviving example of a civilian-owned shipyard of local, state and national significance and led to the designation of the shipyard on both the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Since 1989, the site and buildings have received minimal stewardship due to limited financial and staffing resources. After receiving listing on the National Register in 2010, the real call to action came after the floods associated with hurricane Irene (2011) and heavy snowfalls (2015) which destroyed the eastern addition to the office/stores building, the sheet metal shop and garage, all contributing structures.

The Study

The Erie Canalway Heritage Fund, Inc. (ECHF) (non-profit partner of the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor) secured a grant from the NYS OPRHP to prepare a study to assess existing conditions, determine the feasibility of preservation strategies and conceive sustainable adaptive reuse alternatives for the buildings, property and site features at Matton Shipyard.

The ECHF has been the lead agency to guide this study with assistance from Fisher Associates and its team of experts in historic preservation, archaeology, hydrology, structural engineering and interpretation.

Study Objectives

Through this study, ECHF intends to prepare a blueprint for the long term preservation and redevelopment of Matton Shipyard as a vibrant waterfront gateway to the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor. From this objective, four goals were defined to provide guidance to the planning process, including:

1. Preservation of existing historic structures and authentic industrial character of the site;
2. Promote the shipyard as a center of educational, recreational and cultural activities;

3. Provide public access to the waterfront for local residents, the surrounding communities and visitors and;
4. Address the long term challenges of resiliency and sustainability.

The Process

The study included a thorough inventory of historic documentation, a topographic survey to map all surface features, and detailed inventory of buildings, transportation and utility infrastructure, natural systems and regulatory controls.

Representatives from ECHF, the National Park Service and NYS Museum identified sources of historic documentation and collections. Buildings were investigated and measured documenting materials, finishes, structural integrity and all character defining features. A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) was performed to identify any recognized environmental conditions associated with materials used in the construction of the buildings and in production of the vessels. In addition to the ESA, a Phase I Archaeological Investigation was conducted which included review of prior documentation of Native American occupation of Van Schaick Island and Peebles Island. This investigation included both an expanded literature search and testing to determine the presence of artifacts and define the limits of archaeological sensitivity.

Because Matton Shipyard was located at the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers (and gateway to the New York State Barge Canal) the strategic economic advantage for Matton Shipyard was strong throughout the life of the business. However, the impacts from periodic flooding has been severe to the shipyard and surrounding communities. A hydrology study was performed as part of this project to determine the Base Flood Elevations (100-year flood event) including a review of the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Administration) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) policies.

The study included assembling relevant land use planning studies for the City of Cohoes and Peebles Island State Park and reviewing recommendations specific to Matton Shipyard. The review of regulatory controls included the City of Cohoes zoning ordinance and state building code for permitted uses and design requirements for potential changes in use.

Knowing that flooding will influence design and programming recommendations, the study included a review of resiliency practices specific to historic sites and buildings. Best practices have advanced in the past decade after climatic events including Hurricanes Katrina and Irene and Super Storm Sandy. Resiliency measures investigated included earthen berms, deployable barriers, mechanical and hydraulic barriers, amphibious foundations and pass-through design.

The Matton Shipyard had a significant impact of the communities of Cohoes, Troy (Lansingburgh) and Waterford. Boat building included canal boats, barges, scows, tugs, submarine chasers and patrol boats. Matton had a floating dry dock dating to 1916 to offer salvage and repair services as well as a towing operation across the reach of the Barge Canal. The number of employees reached 400 during World War II and the manufacturing trade skills practiced were numerous. Telling the story of the people, vessels and operations will be important to future generations and a critical component of the adaptive reuse plan included in this study. The study presents historical accounts from the archives and collections. In a companion project, the ECHF led an oral histories project which documented firsthand accounts of people who worked at Matton.

A critical and significant component of this study was the public participation process. ECHF and the consultant team conducted stakeholder interviews, held two public

workshop meetings and distributed project information on social media. There was significant turnout for the public workshops which included residents of Cohoes, Troy and Waterford, and former Matton employees along with agency staff and elected officials. Residents shared their memories and stories of the shipyard and what they remembered the most (i.e., launch events, sounds of the fog horn) The overwhelming take away from the interviews and workshops was the significance of Matton to the community and the unanimous desire to open the site and preserve the remaining structures and history. The themes of comments expressed by the stakeholders and public attendees included:

- Provide access to the water (shoreline trail and car top boat launch)
- Preserve and restore the existing structures
- Preserve and enhance the wildlife habitat
- Respect and interpret the Native American history
- Offer educational programs
- Integrate historic vessels (e.g., the Day Peckinpaugh and Tug Urger).
- Provide limited commercial and retail development including seasonal rental of recreational equipment (bikes, canoes, kayaks)
- Offer a multi-generational experience including the use of technology
- Maintain authentic industrial character

The Results

The period of significance established in the National Register of Historic Places nomination (NR) is from 1916 to 1959, the years when the shipyard was owned and operated by the Matton family. Bart Turecamo continued the Matton name on the business, constructed similar vessels, using the same buildings, equipment and manufacturing techniques. However, there was nothing unique added by Turecamo to justify extending the period of significance beyond 1959.

The transportation network (vehicular, bicycle, pedestrian) is adequate, including access from the Hudson River. The northern peninsula of Van Schaick Island (and Peebles Island) is a rich wildlife habitat. The Matton site offers an open grassland meadow edge condition adjacent to early successional woodlands. Habitat would benefit (free movement and foraging) from removal of the chain link fence. Public and private utilities exist along Delaware Avenue and are available to serve site redevelopment. Environmental issues include disposal of remaining paint and solvent containers, lead based paint on building surfaces and construction materials containing asbestos. An underground storage tank will require excavation and disposal and further soil samples will be required where boats were built and the ground may contain contaminants. This section of the Hudson River is identified as part of the General Electric Superfund Site, however no remedial dredging activities have been identified for the section of the sediment adjacent to Matton Shipyard.

Two significant issues identified in the study are the hydrology (flooding) and cultural resource sensitivity. The Base Flood Elevation (BFE) or, in the case of Matton, 100-year floodplain is 33.1 feet. The site topography ranges from 14-28 feet with an average site elevation of 23-25 feet. The NYS Building Code requires a building to be flood proofed (dry) 24 inches above the BFE or 35.1 feet, 8-10 feet above the average grade of the site. The archaeological investigation identified two distinct areas where ‘pre-contact loci’ (Native American deposits) were encountered; the northeast and southwest portions of the site.

There is low probability of any private development on the site that would rely on debt and/or equity financing due to the BFE and construction methods required to comply with the NYS Building Code. Due to the potential impacts to flood storage capacity, site

character, access to the water and archaeological resources, the techniques of allowing flood water to pass-through structures combined with minor elevation increases (piers) was deemed the most practical form of resiliency.

Based on the site analysis findings, themes from public participation and review of available financial resources, a project program was prepared to guide the adaptive reuse plan for buildings, site and features.

The primary program elements will include:

- Stabilize then restoring the Office/Stores Building, Watchman's Building and Carpenters' Shop
- Stabilize and maintain site features
- Salvage and store character defining features from structures to be demolished
- Remove the chain link fence to enhance wildlife habitat
- Clean-up and stabilize the Hudson River shoreline
- Provide waterfront access (trail, boat launch, transient vessel docking)
- Improve mooring for historic vessels (example, the Day Peckinpaugh and Tug Urger)
- Develop and launch educational programs
- Provide utility infrastructure, parking and public services
- Reconstruct the documented contributing structures to express Mattons' industrial character
- Reintroduce lost site features
- Program buildings with recreational and skills training (boat building, fabrication) activities.

Two concept alternative plans were presented at the public workshop meeting held in May 2017. Based on public input, the final plan includes mooring the Day Peckinpaugh south of Matton along the former Canal Corporation Barge Canal Terminal Wharf wall. Transient docking will extend parallel with the shoreline north of the pier. Reconstruction of historic buildings will be executed as uses, operators and funding sources are identified. The supporting utility infrastructure will be designed and installed incrementally.

Feasibility

This study defines a program for the long-term preservation and operations of the Matton Shipyard. The recommendations for improvements and reuse strategies have been prepared in collaboration with key stakeholders, the public and Native American representatives. Is the proposed preservation and adaptive reuse of Matton Shipyard feasible? It stands to reason that the proposed program, master plan design and implementation strategies are the most, if not only practical alternative for the NR site with attributes that include:

- Preserves a State and National Register site
- Restores and reconstructs buildings on the original foundations
- Minimizes impact to critical archaeological resources
- Addresses flood resiliency
- Enhances natural systems and wildlife habitat
- Maintains the flood storage capacity of the site
- Offers public waterfront access
- Incorporates historic vessels (such as the Day Peckinpaugh and Tug Urger) into educational programming

The proposed master plan for Matton Shipyard will require sustained efforts in fundraising, educational programs, securing activity operators and property stewardship. However, the approach preserves a significant example of our industrial maritime and Native American heritage, enhances wildlife habitat and provides a unique user experience to and from the water.

Implementation

The study details the short, mid and long term implementation strategies. The short-term (1-5 year) tasks include:

- Building stabilization, demolition, environmental remediation
- Site clean-up and shoreline stabilization
- Terminal wall improvements, waterfront access, watercraft storage facility and parking
- Additional archaeological, structural and environmental investigations
- Continued historic research
- Establish program partnerships, and
- Develop interpretive features incorporating historic vessels (such as the Day Peckinpaugh and Tug Urger)

The mid-term (5-10 year) projects include:

- Architectural and structural renovations of the three buildings for program uses,
- Design and construct site and utility infrastructure
- Reconstruct crane tracks, and
- Reconstruct documented contributing (NR listed) buildings

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The long-term (10-20 years) projects include:

- Design, engineering and installation of the transient marina
- Expand education and boat building/fabrication operations into reconstructed historic structures
- Construct replica historic buildings, and
- Design and install additional interpretive displays (technology based)