

In January 2020 as the New York State Canal System was embarking on its third century of operation, Governor Cuomo announced a \$300 million plan to reimagine the storied Erie Canal by creating new recreational activities to boost tourism, mitigate flooding, improve irrigation, enhance recreational fishing, and restore wetlands. This plan was the result of the *Reimagine the Canals* Task Force that was convened in May 2019 to determine how this historic infrastructure asset could be utilized anew to promote the health and well-being of upstate New York's communities, economies, and ecosystems.

Several of the Task Force's system-wide recommendations recognize opportunities to expand and improve existing recreational uses while introducing new ones to stimulate activity in canalside towns. A range of specific new economic development opportunities were identified for near-term investment:

- Novel forms of water recreation, including paddle boarding, rafting, surfing, and ice-skating, can strengthen tourism and build on existing recreational boating activity as well as tap into ecotourism trends.
- "Iconic Infrastructure" destinations can be identified to create year-round tourist attractions and a backdrop for community celebrations.
- Improvements in overnight accommodations can support forecasted growth in tourism and recreation, enabling visitors to stay longer and spend more in canal towns.
- Redevelopment of industrial property held by the Canal Corporation can be pursued at scale, activating downtown waterfronts.
- New connections to the Empire State Trail can be made, providing better access to the trail from towns, cultural and educational institutions, and hospitality destinations.

Together, these and other findings laid out by the *Reimagine the Canals* Task Force offer a road map for transformation – not simply from an industrial to a recreational waterway, but also to a 21st century tool for communities to meet and overcome unprecedented economic and environmental challenges.

These recommendations are beginning to be realized as projects, including artistic lighting at iconic canal structures and the construction of a pedestrian bridge to provide access for SUNY Brockport and downtown Brockport to the Erie Canalway Trail. The New York Power Authority (NYPA) and Canal Corporation is interested in connecting with the design and engineering community to foster interest in and awareness of these projects, and to encourage creative proposals that provide maximum value for the public they serve.