

Adam Baacke
Assistant City Manager and Director of Planning and Development
City of Lowell, Massachusetts

Testimony in Support of H.R. 2240, the Lowell National Historical Park Land Exchange Act of 2011
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Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the City of Lowell, Massachusetts in support of H.R. 2240, the Lowell National Historical Park Land Exchange Act of 2011. Among other purposes, this legislation will grant the Lowell National Historical Park (LNHP) authority to execute mutually beneficial land exchanges with the City of Lowell and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The Lowell National Historical Park (LNHP) was created and empowered by Congress “to preserve and interpret the nationally significant historical and cultural sites, structures, and districts in Lowell, Massachusetts.” It was also granted a then unique mission to help facilitate the economic and cultural revitalization of the city of Lowell. Due in part to the tremendous record of success that the LNHP has enjoyed in this, several similar parks have been established in the decades since. This legislation will further the mission, intent, and purpose of the LNHP in two important ways.

First, it will allow the LNHP to continue its active and supportive participation in the Hamilton Canal District, the City’s signature economic development project. Planned as a mixed-use redevelopment of more than 15 acres of underutilized and vacant publicly-owned land, upon completion the Hamilton Canal District will generate nearly 2 million square feet of private real estate development, create as many as 1600 new permanent jobs, and serve as a testament to the success of the nation’s first urban national park. This project has already rehabilitated one of the most visible and nationally significant mill complexes within the boundaries of the LNHP, which represented an investment of \$65 million and the creation of over 200 well-paid construction jobs during the depths of the recent recession. The project is also notable as a model for expediting local and state environmental and land use permitting; the entire development is currently positioned to proceed “by right” without any further discretionary local or state review.

With the active participation and consent of officials from the Lowell National Historical Park, the Hamilton Canal District site includes the redevelopment of land currently owned by the park and utilized only for surface parking. The plan envisions redeveloping this parking lot in a manner consistent with the mission, vision, and General Management Plans for the park with new commercial buildings which will house research and development as well as general office space. In exchanging land presently owned by the LNHP, the Federal Government will be in a position to not only support the Hamilton Canal District project at no cost but also obtain interest in real property and/or structured parking spaces that are more consistent with the Park Service's immediate and long-term needs.

This legislation is required in order for such a land exchange to occur because the Lowell National Historical Park is currently prohibited from executing this type of real estate transaction with the City of Lowell or any political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Second, it will extend the term of an existing revolving loan program that has played a key role in facilitating the redevelopment and restoration of over 5 million square feet of formerly vacant mill buildings to productive reuse and leveraged nearly \$175 for every federal dollar originally invested. The requested extension will merely allow existing loans to continue to revolve within the fund to support the rehabilitation and preservation of additional privately-owned historic buildings that contribute to the park. Importantly, it will require no new appropriation of funds.

The City of Lowell remains tremendously grateful for the contributions that the Federal Government and U.S. Congress have made to the renaissance of our city through the National Park Service. Were it not for the wisdom and past commitments of Congress and the National Park Service, Lowell would not enjoy our reputation as a model for the revitalization and redevelopment of smaller post-industrial cities. This legislation will allow this highly successful partnership to continue and expand at no cost to the Federal Treasury.

In closing, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on this legislation and strongly encourage you to join me in supporting it. I am happy to address any questions you may have.