

RCSI ACTION PLAN FOR
AN IRONDEQUOIT BAY CONSERVATION ZONE AND NATURE TRAIL

by

Anthony J. Adams, Jr., Esq.*

SUMMARY

In a five point Action Plan, the Rochester Committee for Scientific Information (RCSI) proposes that Monroe County and the Towns of Irondequoit, Penfield, and Webster take an aggressive approach to 1) conserve fragile and rare ecological areas of Irondequoit Bay and 2) ensure passive public recreational access to these lands.

BACKGROUND

In the early 1970's public efforts to revive water quality in Irondequoit Bay and to remove the bridge at the mouth of the Bay caused public officials to anticipate a great increase in development pressures around Irondequoit Bay. As a result, the Monroe County Planning Department, in conjunction with the Irondequoit Bay Policy Committee (1), developed a master plan to guide development in a manner which would "preserve the natural features of the Bay", while at the same time "encouraging broad public accessibility". The result was the "Irondequoit Bay Plan" (2).

A technical "Implementation Committee" (called for in the Plan) proposed development "Guidelines and Performance Criteria" for the preservation of steep slopes, wetlands, and other sensitive Bay features (3). Implementation of the "Guidelines" was sporadic, though, until in 1984 the County, the three Bay towns, and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) signed an intermunicipal

*Mr. Adams is a partner in the Rochester, N.Y., law firm of Davidson, Fink, Cook, and Gates and is President of the Rochester Committee for Scientific Information.

agreement, which led to the creation of an Irondequoit Bay Coordinating Committee (IBCC) to review and make recommendations concerning all future Bay-area development proposals (4, 5).

THE ISSUE

The 1974 Bay Plan, endorsed by the Monroe County Departments of Planning and Parks, the DEC, and the towns surrounding Irondequoit Bay (Irondequoit, Penfield, and Webster), is said to form the foundation for all current development reviews and planning strategies for the Bay. By helping to create and maintain the IBCC, the County has signalled its willingness to try to limit, in a reactive way, land use proposals so that new private developments will at least approximate the blueprint for development suggested in the Bay Plan.

Achievement of the Plan's goals requires, by its own terms, a proactive government role as well. In particular, the Plan identifies several areas in and around the Bay which, because of fragile and valuable ecological features, cannot be expected to support development without damage to the features themselves and to the Bay. These areas, principally steep, wooded slopes and emergent wetlands, are targeted for "conservation" use in the Plan (see Fig. 1). The Plan itself recommends an aggressive program of public acquisition of these lands or placement of conservation easements over them. These measures would assure that the lands remain protected in their natural state without encroachment from development. Importantly, the Plan further envisions a public effort to assure use of these conservation lands for passive recreational opportunities. Specifically, the general public would be afforded the opportunity to enjoy the Bay and its unique geological and biological features and engage in activities, such as hiking, birding, and photography, without impacting its ecological features.

The public purchases recommended by the Plan have not occurred. Meanwhile, residential construction activities continue to encroach upon the sensitive areas that the Bay Plan proposes as conservation districts.

THE ACTION PLAN

It is not too late for Monroe County to assume a leadership role in preserving the sensitive areas identified in the Bay Plan and creating public access to these lands for passive recreational activities. RCSI proposes the following five point Action Plan for attainment of these goals:

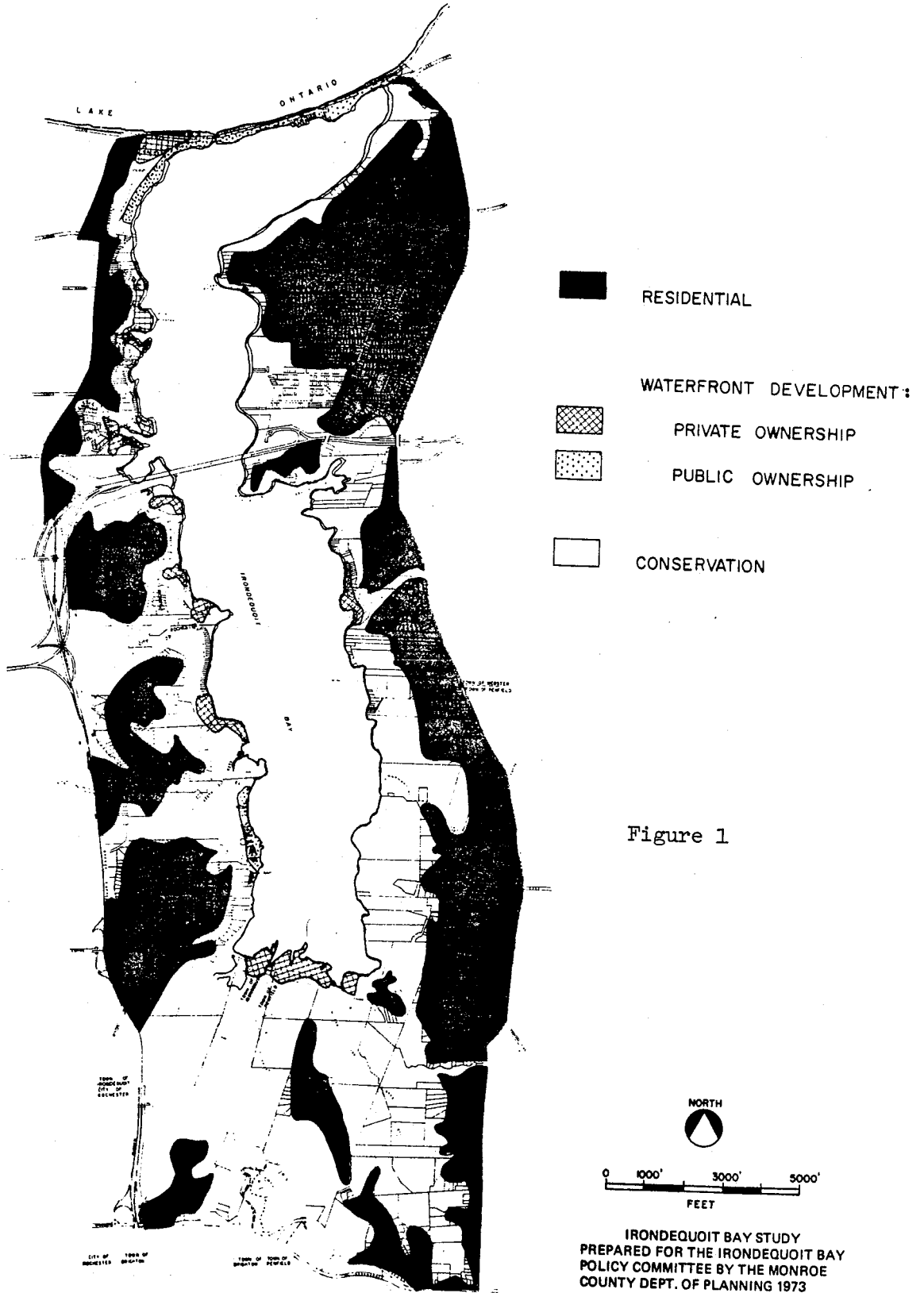


Figure 1

1. Using the Bay Plan as a guide, Monroe County should re-inventory the steep slope and wetland areas previously targeted for conservation use in the Plan.

2. With the Towns of Irondequoit, Penfield, and Webster, the County should plan a bay-side hiking trail, commencing from the south in Ellison Park and proceeding northward around the east and west banks of the Bay through sensitive areas as identified above. One such trailway has already been laid out by RCSI (see fig. 2) and is available for discussion.

3. The most sensitive and/or unique bay-side features should be purchased in whole or in part for public use. A prime candidate would be the emergent wetlands and associated slope and transition areas at Devils Cove.

4. The County and towns, through the IBCC, along with the DEC, should actively seek conservation easements and hiking easements over privately held steep slopes and wetlands, whenever the owners of those lands seek development permits for adjacent property.

5. Citizen support should be galvanized through RCSI and other citizen groups that have shown intense interest in Bay development.

REFERENCES

1. The Irondequoit Bay Policy Committee was comprised of representatives from the Towns of Brighton, Irondequoit, Penfield, and Webster and various agencies with an interest in the Bay--the Monroe County Department of Parks, Sea Grant Advisory Service, the Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Board, and the Monroe County Soil and Water Conservation District.

2. Irondequoit Bay Policy Committee and Monroe County Department of Planning, Irondequoit Bay Plan, September 1974.

3. Irondequoit Bay Implementation Committee, Guidelines and Performance Criteria, 1985.

4. Johnson, Paul, Monroe County Deputy Director of Planning, personal communication, Jan. 16, 1990.

5. Specifically, the IBCC is comprised of the Director of the Monroe County Department of Planning, the Supervisors of the Towns of Irondequoit, Penfield, and Webster, the Coordinator of the Monroe County Environmental Management Council, and the Director of the New York DEC, Region 8.

BAY-SIDE TRAILWAY AS PROPOSED BY RCSI

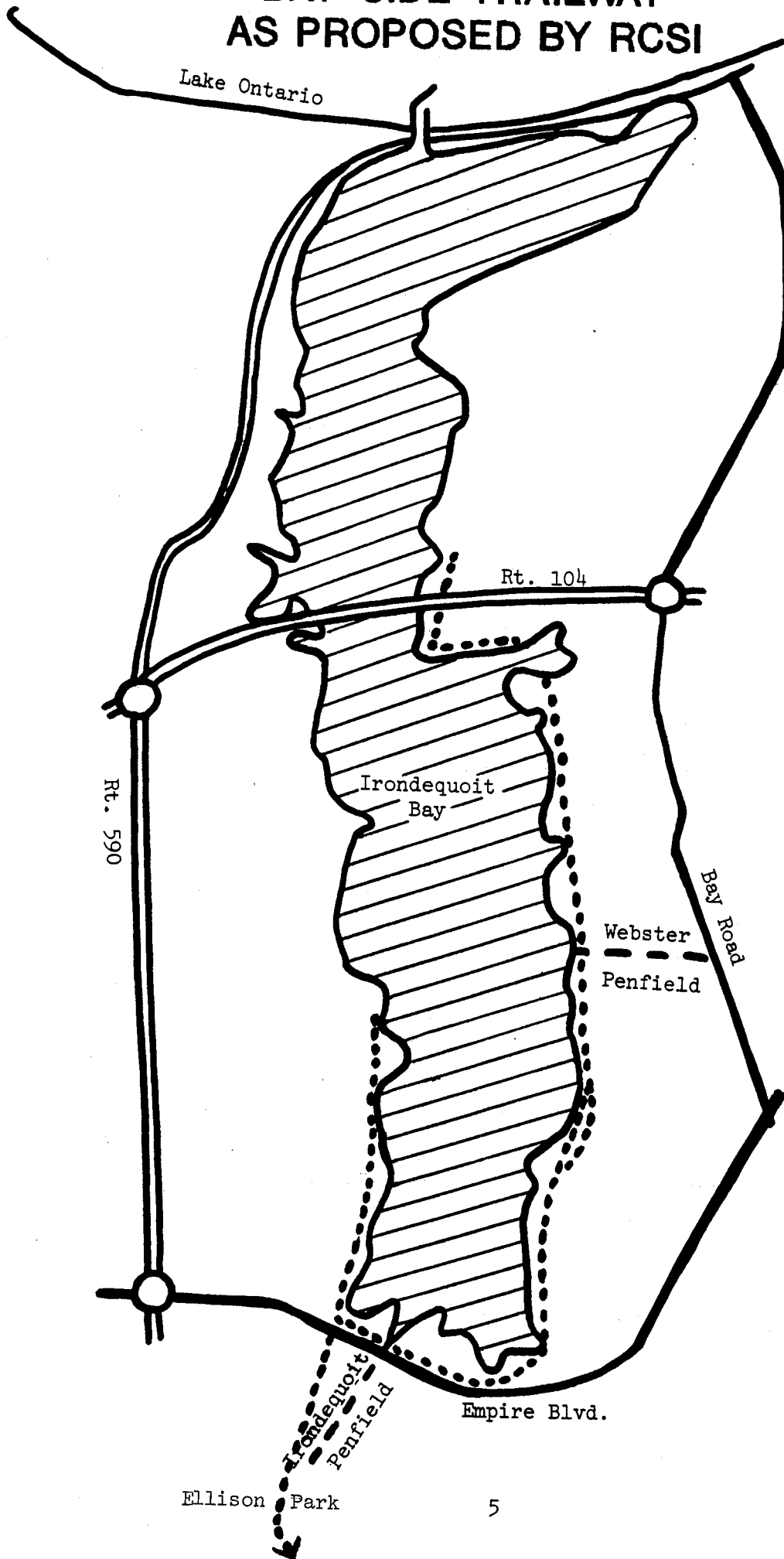


Figure 2

