

Friends of Schell Bridge

In 2003 Schell Memorial Bridge was named by PreservatiON Mass as one of the ten most endangered historical landmarks in Massachusetts. Galvanized by this honor, Friends of Schell Bridge in 2004 formally incorporated as a non-profit organization to save the bridge and to generate interest in rehabilitating the bridge for pedestrian and bicycle paths. Friends of Schell Bridge (FSB) contacted the Picker Engineering Program at Smith College for an independent assessment of the condition of the bridge. A senior student design team, working with two professional structural engineers from New York City evaluated and tested components of the bridge. Their detailed report in 2005 emphasized that the bridge structure, while some components needed to be replaced, was structurally sound and a good candidate for rehabilitation.

In 2006, FSB spent significant energy in building community support. A petition circulated gathered 1400 supporters, including 700 in the small town of Northfield. In 2007, FSB successfully rallied voters to reverse a Select Board decision so that the Schell Bridge, eligible since 1982, will finally be nominated for the National Register of Historic Places.

Following an informational meeting with the Massachusetts Highway Department in September 2006, FSB decided to develop a strategic plan to save the bridge as an historic treasure by highlighting the recreational, economic and environmental values of Schell Bridge for the twenty-first century. FSB has contacted Connecticut River conservation groups and has participated in meetings in the region to share information and to enlist assistance and support.

This strategic plan represents an effort to share this vision with Northfield citizens, town officials, regional organizations, state and federal elected representatives, and national organizations who might want to become involved.

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Sources

Schell Memorial Bridge
HAER #MA-111
memory.loc.gov/ammem/

Core Habitats of Northfield
BioMap and Living Waters:
Guiding Land Conservation for
Biodiversity in
Massachusetts.
Massachusetts Division of
Fisheries and Wildlife © 2004.

Schell Bridge,
Historic Bridges of Michigan &
Elsewhere
www.historicbridges.org

Carl Compton, "Story of the Northfield Chateau," © 1963 and other resources at Dickinson Memorial Library, Northfield, Massachusetts.

Friends of Schell Bridge, Inc

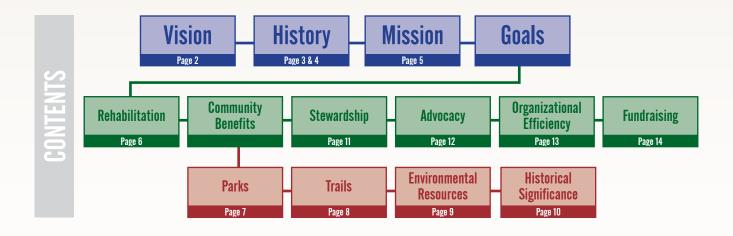
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Vision

A beautifully-restored historic bridge across the Connecticut River that serves both as a premier recreational link for a network of hiking and biking trails in the tri-state region and as a centerpiece for a series of linked riverfront parks for Northfield and area residents.

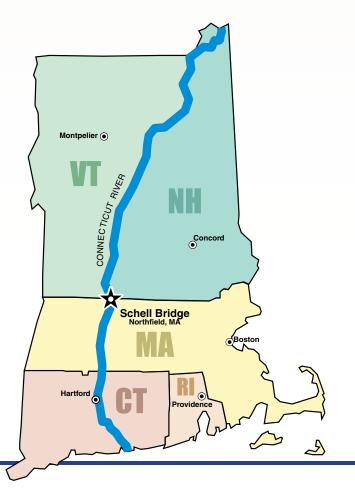


A rehabilitated bridge will open the bridge, riverbank, and river views to Northfield residents and people from the tri-state region and beyond.

Its unique construction and significance in Northfield's history will inspire a renewed interest in Northfield's unusual past when evangelistic conferences founded by Dwight L. Moody attracted thousands of people over many decades; where the American Youth Hostel movement was founded; and where vacationers, year after year, stayed at the famed Northfield Inn to enjoy the mountains, rivers, and rural beauty.

Walkers, bicyclists, and historians will enjoy the network of trails and parks that connect to the nearby Mill Brook and Schell Pond nature trails and open up paths to West Northfield's Satan's Kingdom Wildlife Management Area and to the highlands in East Northfield.

Bicyclists from the surrounding area will be able to connect to the current and expanding bike path network in the Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire tri-state region.



"Make no small plans. They have no magic to stir humanity's blood and probably themselves will not be realized.

Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that noble, logical plan once recorded will never die, butlongafterwearegone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency Think big."

- Daniel Burnham

US Architect, 19th Century who along with John Root planned the World's Columbian

"The Schell Bridge is historically significant because of its association with Francis Schell and the Moody schools, and is a very interesting and unique artifact of Northfield's social history." — (HAER, 1990)

Schell Bridge Past O Present

Tchell Memorial Bridge is a significant monument to a colorful and active era in the history of Northfield, Massachusetts, a Connecticut River town known for its nearly two miles of colonial and neo-classical homes fronting on Main Street. Schell Bridge was built in 1903 to connect east and west Northfield, providing a means for railroad travellers arriving from all over the world to reach their destinations in East Northfield. From the beginning, it was also a way for Northfield townspeople to walk to school, go to the store, and drive to visit friends.

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, thousands of travellers journeyed to Northfield to attend the religious conferences started by the noted evangelist Dwight L. Moody. In less than a decade beginning in 1879, Moody had founded Northfield Seminary where the conferences were held, Mount Hermon School, and also the Northfield Hotel, which attracted scores of visitors. Later in 1934, young people also came to visit the first Youth Hostel in America, opened on Highland Avenue by the newly-formed American Youth Hostel. Northfield became internationally known as a destination for spiritual renewal and recreation.



At the height of the era, up to forty trains a day stopped at the "East Northfield" train station, which was actually

in West Northfield. Visitors wishing to visit the seminary, the hotel, a guest house or a summer cottage crossed the Connecticut River via a roadway constructed under the old railroad bridge. One such visitor and avid follower of Dwight L. Moody was Francis Schell, a wealthy capitalist from New York, who began to visit Northfield in 1890. Schell built a "grand" Chateau in 1901 to supply suitable lodging for his wealthy visitors as he lavishly entertained his friends.

In 1901, to provide a way for Northfield visitors to cross the Connecticut River in grander style than riding beneath a smoking train, Francis Schell donated \$60,000 to the town for a bridge that would connect the banks of east and west Northfield.

Schell chose a location for the bridge, not in the center of Northfield, but in the northern end of town. This provided a grand and scenic entrance to the areas of Northfield that had been developed by Dwight L. Moody and the Schools. From

the bridge entrance on the west side, the visitor could gaze upon the hillside at the architecturally impressive buildings of the Northfield Seminary. In addition to the seminary buildings in view, the elegance of the bridge heralded the large and architecturally homes, significant especially Mr. Schell's "Chateau". Schell also donated an extra \$6000 and requested that two Gothic Revival plaques, memorials to his father, be fastened to the decorative concrete end posts at the eastern end of the bridge.



Northfield Mount Hermon Archives

KEY DATES

1879 Moody founds Northfield Seminary

1881 ····· Moody founds

Mount Hermon School

1887 Northfield Hotel opens

1890 ····· Francis Schell arrived in Northfield

1901 ····· Schell builds the "Chateau"

1901 ····· Schell agrees to pay for the bridge

1903 Schell Memorial Bridge Opens

1928 ····· Francis Schell dies

1932 ····· Bridge decking is repaired

1936 ····· Schell Bridge survives the great flood

1977 ····· Engineering study recommends a

maintenance program

1987 ···· Bridge formally closed

1990 ····· HAER documents Schell

 $\textbf{2003} \ \cdots \cdots \ \ \mathsf{PreservatiON} \ \mathsf{MASS} \ \mathsf{names} \ \mathsf{bridge}$

one of 10 most endangered

2003 ····· Founding of a group to

save the bridge

2004 ····· Friends of Schell incorporates

2005 Smith College Picker Engineering report encourages rehabilitation

2006 Petition signed by 1400

to save the bridge

2007 ····· Town Meeting votes to nominate bridge for the National Register of

Historic Places

Construction

Designed by noted engineer Edward S. Shaw, the Schell Memorial Bridge is a magnificent example of an "elegant" cantilever steel truss bridge. It is the third oldest of five known Pennsylvania truss bridges and represents a unique variation of a Pennsylvania truss. Although Mr. Shaw first designed the bridge as a simple truss bridge, once Mr. Schell decided to make it a memorial bridge, the plans were revised to make it more architecturally pleasing.

In 1990 the Historic American Building Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) selected the Schell Bridge for documentation. Historic records and photographs of the bridge and its construction are included in the digital American Memory of the Library of Congress.

The 515 foot long bridge has a span that gracefully curves with a distinctly light and airy appearance, described by one newspaper as "a single ground arch leaping from one bank of the river to its opposite 400 feet away." (HAER) Its gothic revival elements suggest the union between nature and the spiritual. The same newspaper article described it as "highly artistic in effect and beautiful in all its details." (HAER) Its organic compatibility with the landscape suggests sustainability—or perhaps for Mr. Schell, immortality.

Modern Era

When federal interstate highway travel replaced the railroad, Schell Bridge took on a new function. For Northfield residents the bridge continued as a means to get around town or travel into Vermont. For boaters, canoeists and kayakers, the bridge was a landmark as they journeyed south along the Connecticut River. And to many adults' dismay, many a teenager couldn't resist the thrill of jumping off the bridge. For the town of Northfield, the bridge not only became a potential scene for jumping accidents, but also a financial liability. In the absence of funds to maintain and rehabilitate the bridge, the Northfield Town Meeting (1987) decided to close the bridge and seek demolition.

Contrary to predictions of its imminent collapse, the bridge still stands in 2007, twenty years since the decision to close. In 2003, it was named by PreservatiON Mass as one of the ten most endangered historical landmarks in Massachusetts. The bridge remains on the Massachusetts Highway Department's demolition list, but most agree that the beautiful Schell Bridge is so much a part of the Northfield historic landscape that it would be tragic to see it destroyed. Northfield has lost both the "Chateau"

and the Northfield Hotel to demolition and the once vibrant Seminary campus sits empty upon the hillside since 2004 when Northfield Mount Hermon Schools consolidated at Mount Hermon. The Schell Bridge is no longer the grand entrance to the Town of Northfield for railroad travelers, but it has a new purpose for the 21st century. The grand vision is to restore it as a hiking and biking bridge: the hub of a development plan to revive Northfield.



Mission & Goals

To ensure the rehabilitation of Schell Memorial Bridge through adequate funding, proper maintenance, public support, and active promotion of its place in Northfield's history and to encourage citizen enjoyment of the footpaths, bikeways, and parks that connect to the bridge. These goals will be realized through partnerships with local, state and federal government, local and regional organizations and through the development of a conservancy organization dedicated to the stewardship of the bridge and parks. The following are the goals:

Rehabilitation

Repair and rehabilitate the Schell Bridge as a walking and biking bridge.

Community Benefits

Provide a range of historical, environmental, recreational, and service projects and activities to highlight the value of preserving the Schell Bridge and protecting adjacent land.

Stewardship

Act as a catalyst for the formation of a non-profit Northfield conservancy that will serve as a steward for the Schell Bridge, parks, and nearby trails.

Advocacy

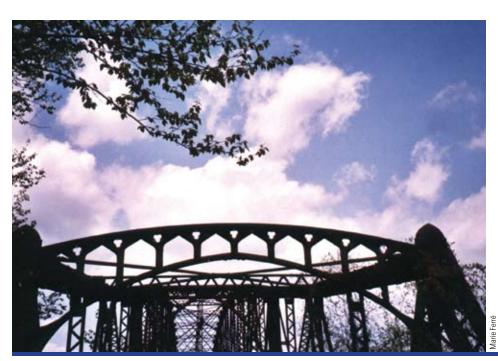
Be an active and public voice for the preservation of the Schell Bridge and in the formation of a Northfield conservancy.

Organizational Efficiency

Develop the leadership and membership to support the goals of this plan.

Fundraising

Act as a catalyst for additional public and private resources to flow to the preservation of the Schell Bridge.



Friends of Schell Bridge has developed a mission that is both essential and practical. This mission builds on the concept of developing cooperative partnerships with local, regional, and national groups who share the vision of the importance of history, recreation, and the Connecticut River in the future of the Town of Northfield and neighboring states.

It emphasizes the necessity of developing a responsive, sustaining organization to oversee the stewardship of the bridge and parks. The structure of this stewardship organization is not yet defined; the final form may well incorporate stewardship for other town conservation areas.

The mission statement also recognizes that active promotion of the recreational and environmental benefits of a restored Schell Bridge will lead to the enhancement of tourism-related businesses.

Rehabilitation

Repair and rehabilitate the Schell Bridge as a walking and bicycling bridge to serve the tri-state area and to preserve its historic structure.



Research

Research and evaluate various options for ownership of the bridge.

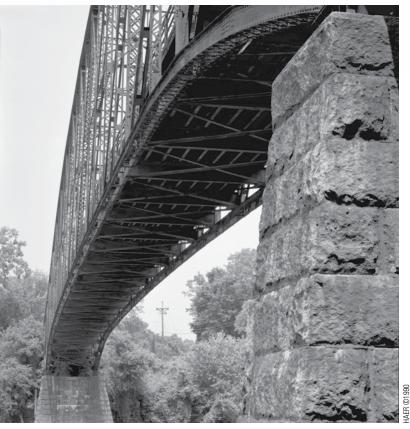
Secure an engineering design which will identify the scope of the rehabilitation project and associated costs.

Maintain communication with bridge engineering consultants from VHB, Picker Engineering Program at Smith College and area bridge engineering firms.

Design

Gather public design input by holding a public forum led by professional planners.

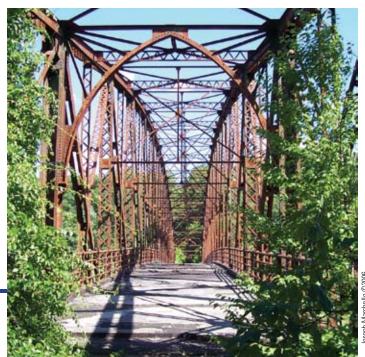
Share the results of the engineering design with the Town of Northfield, Friends of Schell Bridge and all other interested parties.



"The bridge is barricaded with metal plates across the portal ends, and weeds are growing up around it, yet it has the same type of air about it that one might ascribe to a grand palace left to ruin—of the long-ago aspirations of great men." -(HAER, 1990)

"Visually, this is a striking bridge. Cantilever style bridges usually appear over larger bodies of water. This is a pleasing change from the usual to find such a bridge on a river the size of the Connecticut River in this area. Perhaps the most noteworthy visual asset is the stunning gothic portal bracing design, which is unlike any designs found on other truss bridges. The beauty of the bridge is also enhanced by extensive lattice and v-lacing on the various members, chords, and bracing on the bridge. Tall stone piers and abutments complete the image, creating a scene of beauty that should be a crime to destroy."

—Historic Bridges (Website)



Parks

Provide a range of historical, environmental, recreational and service projects and activities to highlight the value of preserving the Schell Bridge and protecting adjacent land.

Working with professional landscape consultants, develop a plan for small parks at both ends of the bridge that reflect the historical heritage of the bridge and provide information about the environmental and recreational opportunities.

Landscape

Research original landscaping of the bridge area; identify trees to save during reconstruction.

Restore original plantings from early 1900's.

Implementation

Develop a park plan that includes benches, picnic tables and informational kiosks.

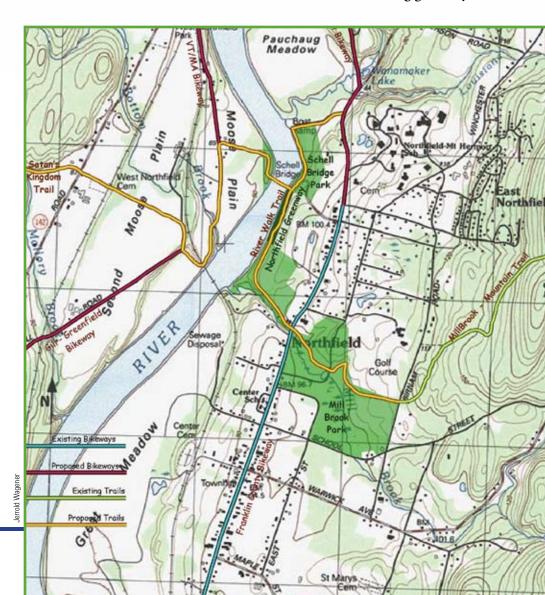
Stewardship

Establish a volunteer stewardship committee to beautify and maintain the bridge area.

Recruit volunteer community groups to maintain the connecting greenway.

Public Parks and Picnic Areas Nearby:

Pauchaug State Boat Ramp, Northfield, MA
Governor Hunt Recreation Area, Vernon, VT
Northfield Riverfront Picnic Area, Northfield, MA
Barton Cove Picnic and Camping Area, Gill, MA
Unity Park, Turners Falls, MA
Pisgah State Park, Cheshire County, NH
Laurel Lake Recreation Area, Erving, MA
Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls, MA
French King Gorge, Erving and Gill, MA
Erving State Forest, Erving, MA
Mount Grace State Forest, Warwick, MA



Trails

Provide a range of historical, environmental, recreational and service projects and activities to highlight the value of preserving the Schell Bridge and protecting adjacent land.

From the Schell Bridge, create hiking and cycling connections within Northfield; highlight the bridge as both a gateway to the Pioneer Valley and a gateway to hiking and cycling in Vermont and New Hampshire.

Bicycling Trails

Working with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments and Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition, develop connections to the Franklin County Bikeway, the Norwottuck Rail Trail and the Mass Central Rail Trail.

Working with Windham County Planning officials in southeastern Vermont, support existing plans for a connection from the west end of Schell Bridge to the West River Bikeway via Brattleboro.

Working with bikeway planners in Cheshire County, develop a connection from the Schell Bridge to the Ashuelot Rail-Trail in southwestern New Hampshire.

Establish bikeway connections to the Visitor Center at Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Facility, Barton Cove Campground and the Great Falls Discovery Center at the Silvio Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in Turners Falls.

Work with Mass Executive Office of Transportation bikeway planners.

Hiking Trails

On the east side of the Connecticut River, create a shoreline trail from the Mill Brook area to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation Pauchaug Brook Boat Ramp. Connect the shoreline trail to skiing and hiking trails in Northfield's forested highlands and the Northfield State, eventually creating a connection to the future Metacomet Monadnock Mattabesett Trail System National Scenic Trail.

On the west side of the Connecticut River, create trails along the shoreline of Moose Plain, connecting trails to Satan's Kingdom Wildlife Management Area owned by Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and to the Northfield State Forest in West Northfield.

Snowmobiling

Working with the Northfield Snowmobile Club and the Snowmobile Association of Massachusetts, develop connections to the snowmobile trail network.

"In the 1930's, what a picture it was throughout the summer, to see HUNDREDS of cyclists disembark from the East Northfield Train Station, retrieve their bikes from the train and proceed across Schell Bridge to their American Youth Hostel housing at the Chateau (now gone) and a large Youth Hostel building on Main Street (now gone). The American Youth

Hostel movement
was founded here
in Northfield by
Monroe and Isabel
Smith."
—Alexander

—Alexander Stewart



Environmental Resources

Provide a range of historical, environmental, recreational and service projects and activities to highlight the value of preserving the Schell Bridge and protecting adjacent land.

Increase public awareness of environmental resources, issues and opportunities on the river, tributaries, trails and land in the vicinity of the bridge.

Research

Work with University of Massachusetts divers to document geological and historical factors in the river, including significant floods, log-drives, the dinosaur days, periods of glaciation, and Lake Hitchcock.

Survey the shoreline and adjoining lands for significant natural resources.

Carlo Kanton

Resources

Working with conservation groups and land trusts, identify conservation possibilities and priorities.

Enlist local birders to identify Significant Bird Habitat.

Produce professional maps for public materials and for grant applications.

Education

Produce printed information about the endangered cobra clubtail *gomphus* dragonfly.

Highlight Schell Bridge's location spanning the Connecticut, which was designated one of ten National Heritage Rivers in 1998.

Working with educators at Northfield Elementary School, Pioneer Valley Regional School, Northfield Mount Hermon School and Linden Hill School, develop ways to include students in environmental planning.

Provide information kiosks on both banks that highlight natural resources and trail connections.

"This Core Habitat [BM231], located along the state's northern section of the Connecticut River, contains a variety of unusual natural communities that together support a diversity of plants and animals. This Core Habitat is notable for the rare Cobra Clubtail dragonfly that is not known from anywhere else in the state. It also provides perching and foraging habitat for Bald Eagles, and upland habitats for two rare salamanders. Several rare plant species are

ipland habitats for two rare salamanders. Several rare plant species are found here, many of which are associated with calcareous cliff communities."

—Core Habitats of Northfield



Historical Significance

Provide a range of historical, environmental, recreational and service projects and activities to highlight the value of preserving the Schell Bridge and protecting adjacent land.

Increase public awareness of the historical significance of the Schell Bridge, the Connecticut River and surrounding meadows and streams.

Research & Education

Working with librarians at Dickinson Memorial Library in Northfield, librarians at Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Library Association Library in Deerfield and with members of the Northfield Historical Society, and the Northfield Historic Commission, research the history of the Schell Bridge, the Connecticut River and the use of nearby streams and fields.

Working with educators at Northfield Elementary School, Pioneer Valley Regional School, Northfield Mount Hermon School and Linden Hill School, develop educational material using the historical information.

Communicate with town residents about the history of Schell Bridge and surrounding lands.

Sharing Our History

Develop displays for the library and other public buildings.

Working with the Northfield Historical Society, mount an exhibit about the Schell Bridge at the Northfield Historical Society Museum.

Work with the Northfield Historic Commission to create an historic pamphlet.

Develop a pamphlet and display highlighting the unique construction of the bridge.

Construct a model of the bridge including parks and trails.

Update historic markers and add trail signs and guides.

Research

Research the history of the Indian settlement and King Philip's War in the Mill Brook/Schell Bridge/Moose Plain areas.

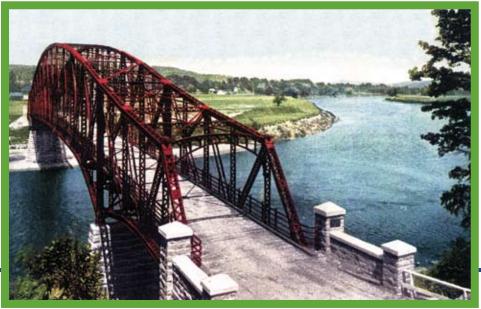
Research the role of the Connecticut River in the lives of early settlers moving throughout New England.

Research the history of the role played by the Schell Bridge in the founding of the American Youth Hostel in Northfield, the first in the country.

Historic Register

Add the Schell Bridge to the Northfield sites on the National Register of Historic Places:

- King Philip's Hill, 1981
- Main St. Historic District, 1982
- Alexander, Simeon Jr. House, 1991
- Pine St. School, 2002
- Northfield Center Cemetery, 2004



Stewardship

Act as a catalyst for the development of a non-profit Northfield conservancy that will serve as a steward for the Schell Bridge, parks, and nearby trails.

Organization

Create consensus about development of a Northfield conservancy and be an effective communicator and educator about the potential for such an organization.

Research other communities and organizations who have created conservancies which are responsible for the stewardship of land.

Implementation

Identify and map the area that might become part of the conservancy.

Develop a structure that provides for financial needs of the conservancy.

Identify future management needs of the conservancy.



"The Schell is unique because it functions as a continuous truss under a live load; under dead load it works as simple truss span with cantilevered ends. Freight car springs placed under the abutment ends of the bridge counter upward movement of the ends when the bridge had a live load in the center. The upper chord is a polygonal curve outlined against the sky. Both upper and lower chords are connected by a series of verticals, diagonals, sub-struts and sub-ties. The decking is composed of steel stringers, which replaced original wooden stringers, and is overlaid with cross-cut wood blocks which are now covered with asphalt."



Advocacy

Be an active and public voice for the preservation of the Schell Bridge and in the development of a Northfield conservancy for future maintenance of Schell Bridge and as a stewardship option for town parks.



Brad Peters © 2006

"Of course, any initiative for a bike path to be built in Northfield and subsequent use of the Schell Bridge must begin at the local level...if the town desires to move in this direction, I would enthusiastically support the endeavor."

> —Denis E. Guyer, State Representative, Second Berkshire District.

Partnerships

Seek assistance from, and partnerships with, Northfield town committees, Northfield service organizations, Northfield emergency services, Northfield Mount Hermon School and regional public and private agencies.

Maintain a collaborative partnership with the Northfield Select Board.

Publicity

Maintain active communication with state and federal elected officials and agencies.

Publicize the opportunities that will open for the Town of Northfield when the Schell Bridge is rehabilitated.

"Communities across the state and the region have successfully rehabilitated historic bridges for both a return to vehicular traffic and for recreational use. Based on its engineering and social significance, and for its structural integrity according to the 2004 engineering study, it appears that the Schell Bridge in Northfield would make an ideal candidate for rehabilitation and reopening...I encourage the town of Northfield to treat the Schell Memorial Bridge as the treasure it is, and allow for its restoration and reuse."

—Rebecca A. Williams, Field Representative, National Trust for Historic

Preservation, Northeast Office

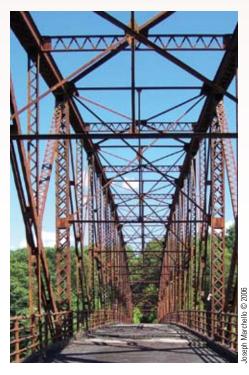


"As a rare example of 1890's engineering, the Schell Bridge should be preserved for future generations, like its near contemporary, Boston's Northern Avenue Bridge. Make a restored Schell Bridge a river attraction. Make it the centerpiece of a pocket park. Make it a reason for the well-heeled visitor to leave the interstate, and spend time and money in Northfield."

—Steve Lindsey, Keene, NH

Organizational Efficiency

Develop the leadership and broaden the membership to support the goals of this plan, increasing opportunities for membership involvement.



Leadership

Review bylaws and practices of the Friends of the Schell Bridge board of directors to match the goals and objectives of this plan.

Create a board of advisors.

Establish a communication plan to maintain contact with all who are involved with the project and to reach out to new constituencies.

Membership

Increase the Friends of Schell Bridge membership locally as well as in the tristate region and beyond.

Leverage the experience and talents of the Friends of the Schell Bridge members to secure full participation in the planning process.

"The most important element in the successful, long-term preservation of historic bridges is strong local support. Because most laws and regulations relating to bridge preservation issues concern federally-funded or authorized activities, local support should be sufficiently visible to impress local, state, and federal officials. Public understanding of the importance of historic bridges, as well as familiarity with federal programs to encourage preservation, is key to the successful rehabilitation and reuse of historic bridges."

—John W. Snyder, Historic Bridges



Fundraising

Act as a catalyst for additional public and private resources to flow to the preservation of the Schell Bridge and to the development and care of adjoining parks.

Partners

Explore with public officials the potential for government support.

Create a coalition of partners who are able to commit time and funding to the bridge.

Explore a corporate sponsorship program that gives businesses visibility in return for their support of activities.

Campaign

Ensure that sufficient resources are available to achieve the mission.

Establish an endowment fund for the perpetual maintenance of the Schell Bridge.

Establish a goal and launch a capital campaign for the rehabilitation of the bridge using the cost estimate provided by engineers.

Sources

Expand the pool of foundation grants by searching for recreational, historical and environmental sources.

Meet fund-raising objectives and widen the pool of members and donors by using fund-raising events strategically.

"As long as the bridge is standing, it can be saved."

—Anthony Jewell, Shelburne Falls, MA

