

Town of
Hillsville
Tourism
Strategic Plan

2013

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BACKGROUND

The roots of Historic Hillsville, Virginia are obvious from the area's rolling fields of cattle and crops. The area which is now the Town was once called Cranberry Plains. It was renamed Hillsville in the mid-1800s in honor of the Hill family but changed again in 1842 when the community became the County Seat of Carroll County and renamed Carrollton in honor of John Carroll, the state legislator who championed the creation of Carroll County. The residents of the area preferred Hillsville so it was changed back once more. The Town, as we know it today, was chartered in 1878.

Hillsville's history has a bit of a dark spot within it; the dark spot is known as the 1912 Courthouse Tragedy which was rivaled in the news only by the devastation known as the Titanic. On March 14, 1912 a gunfight broke out in the courthouse during the trial of Floyd Allen, he was being charged with interfering with deputies and assault and battery following an altercation he had with the law while trying to free his nephews who were being arrested for disrupting a religious service and fighting. The gunfight that took place in the courthouse that day left five people dead and seven wounded. Floyd and many of his family members who had come to his "aide" managed to escape. A massive manhunt led by the Baldwin Felts Detective Agency soon followed the tragedy. After his capture, Floyd Allen was sentenced to death via electrocution.

Just before the Hillsville Fire of 1931, the brand new Hillsville High School was destroyed in a series of fires in 1930. Then the fire that nearly devastated the town took place on January 28, 1931. A large portion of the Downtown Business District was destroyed in this fire including The Thorton Hotel (aka Texas House), a building owned by Dr. Tipton, The Childress Hotel, Guynn Building, Hillsville Hotel, Masonic Lodge Building, 2 barber shops, Walter G. Howlett furniture store, Busy Bee Restaurant, Nuckoll's Drug Company, Hillsville Hardware, and Dr. Glen Cox's office. The 1872 Courthouse, along with some other business suffered some damage, but was able to be saved. At the time Hillsville did not have a fire department of its own and crews from Galax, VA and Mt. Airy, NC responded to try to fight the fire that nearly took Hillsville with it. In August of the year that tragedy struck Hillsville in the form of a fiery blaze, the town established the Hillsville Volunteer Fire Department.

There are many people who have heard the story of Robert Childress, or at least read the book about his work, *The Man Who Moved A Mountain* by Richard C. Davids. Childress came across the people of Cook Community who had their church in a pine grove on benches under the trees. Childress helped to complete a total of 8 stone churches, Dinwiddie being one of those. This beautiful building was completed in 1953 and is still used as a church to this day

The Hillsville Diner was brought to Hillsville in 1946 from Mount Airy, NC. The classic streetcar-style diner is said to be the oldest diner in Virginia. The diner is a 1920s Jerry

O'Mahony model diner. Legend states that while the diner was residing in Mount Airy, NC that Andy Griffith frequently went there.

The original Gun Show of Hillsville, VA began out of necessity. The Grover King Post 1115, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post home had collapsed due to a heavy load of snow and ice from the winter before, funds were already short and the VFW needed a way to bring in some extra funds to cover monthly expenses and the construction of a new building. The first show was planned in 1967 and hosted approximately 4,000 visitors. The VFW Labor Day Show is the biggest event that is held in Carroll County. It sees nearly 500,000 people each year and the town of Hillsville practically comes to a halt due to the traffic, vendors, and tourists.

The Town is a charming, safe, progressive community nestled in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of southwestern Virginia and is easily accessible by car or by air. The town is served by two primary state highways, Routes 58 and 100, and Interstate highway 77. The residents are friendly and hardworking, extending open arms to business, industry, and visitors. The Town of Hillsville is a progressive community founded on its trading traditions and rich culture.



In 2013 Virginia Tourism Corporation contracted with Price Waterhouse Cooper to develop a statewide tourism plan for Virginia. Regional Plan was also developed to support the 8 tourism regions, including the Blue Ridge Highlands region in which Hillsville resides. This plan was based upon industry survey of 1,300 stakeholders in VA and provides measurable strategies and recommended actions items to improve the competitive edge of the tourism industry. The Hillsville Plan is based on stakeholder input and representing the tourism industry and service businesses from the Town of Hillsville. Much of this input matches or merges with the regional and state STP. The Drive Logo is an indicator of input that matches the regional STP.

VISION STATEMENT

Town of Hillsville envisions a community that collaborates with the Tourism Industry to utilize the Town as a central destination for tourists to experience the Town's rich musical and cultural history/heritage, the growing creative arts scene and natural assets that further develop outdoor recreation to increase tourism.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Town of Hillsville Tourism Program is to lead, develop, and promote a focused tourism program which attracts visitors to enjoy the diverse tourism opportunities throughout the Town.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Town of Hillsville has extraordinary assets, and great potential for growth in tourism and recreation. The Town leadership recognizes tourism as a key economic development component that enhances the quality of life for its citizens. The purpose of this plan is to communicate the tourism mission, vision, goals and objectives of the Town of Hillsville Tourism Program as well as the carefully determined measures and targets for the next three to five year period. This strategic plan will guide the actions and activities of the Tourism program, tourism staff, and other stakeholders and partners in Hillsville.

Town of Hillsville is working to set priorities to increase tourism attractions, businesses and services in the communities. The Town is working to connect the Town Center with outdoor recreational assets including the Blue Ridge Parkway, New River Trail, and Birding/Hiking Trails and nearby assets. Using this plan as guidance, the Tourism leadership of the Town of Hillsville and its partners is expected to continue making significant progress toward the development and promotion of tourism in a strategic and planned way. It is extremely important that the plan be referenced consistently as any new tourism related project/initiative discussions occur and as all applicable decisions are made. While new ideas and recommendations should be considered in the future, officials should reference this plan and determine if implementing any new ideas and recommendations is feasible and in accordance with this plan.

The Tourism Stakeholders, working with citizens and representatives from both the private and public sector of Town of Hillsville should take a leadership role in overseeing implementation of the Town of Hillsville's Tourism Plan. The initiatives of this plan were determined after careful consideration during the planning process and will serve as reference when gauging plan implementation performance. The Tourism Stakeholders should develop an annual work plan that will ensure that all initiatives are reached. To encourage progress toward the established targets, this plan should be reviewed by the tourism leadership, Town Council and tourism stakeholders on a consistent basis. Upon each review, any adjustments that need to be made to this plan should be considered. Once a majority of the targets have been met or three years has passed, a new/updated plan should be developed.

Becoming a successful tourism destination involves a sustained and consistent effort over time. The competition for tourists is great and the timeline of building demand is gradual and long. Effective tourism marketing strategies require sustained investments of financial and human resources. Town of Hillsville leadership, area businesses and citizens recognize the significance of tourism. The commitment and progress made to date serves as demonstration of that recognition. This tourism strategic plan for the Town of Hillsville is intended to build upon those past successes, but also provide guidance as tourism grows as a key economic development and quality of life efforts.

The landscape, parks, trails, and well-known assets such as the Blue Ridge Parkway offer adventure and challenge for outdoor enthusiasts in addition to soft recreation for families and those seeking relaxing outdoor getaways. Concentration and connectivity of these outdoor opportunities will help to enhance competitiveness. Moreover, it is the authentic music, Hillsville's small town character, arts, creative economy, culinary and agriculture experiences that define the town and add significant depth of the visitor experience, and greater connectivity of these elements will add to destination appeal. It is the authentic music of Hillsville, as a stand-out asset of the Crooked Road, which differentiates Hillsville from any other destination.

Goal 1 Partnerships: Unify the Tourism Industry to make Hillsville a destination

Goal 2 – Policies: Implement the Tourism Zone program for the Town limits to create incentives for brick and mortar projects within the Town of Hillsville for product development to increase the amount of tourism businesses, attractions and other businesses.

Goal 3: Product: Solidify Hillsville as a Downtown Tourism Destination through product development.

Goal 4: Pillars: Improve Visitor Wayfinding, interstate signage and gateway entrances.

Goal 5: Promotions: Implement an overall marketing program for both internal and external communications in partnership with the town, county and tourism staff

SITUATION ANALYSIS

A situation analysis is the foundation of the strategic planning process for your marketing plan. It includes an examination of both the internal factors (to identify strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (to identify opportunities and threats). The plan also looks at the existing tourism industry assets and identifies Gaps within your tourism product. The Situation Analysis aids you in creating strategies for your product development and for creating an effective marketing program. The Situation Analysis looks at where the community is now. The tourism leadership looks at current existing tourism sites, events and services to evaluate the status of tourism in the community. Successful events, recruitment

of new businesses and entrepreneurial activity often stimulate and motivate new growth in the tourism industry. Lures are those activities that attract tourists to the community. The lures provide a strong foundation from which to spring board into new activities.

Tourism spending supports goods, services, facilities and transportation that benefits residents of Town of Hillsville and the surrounding region. Tourism promotion, and the quality of life improvements that tourism supports, also helps attract other types of business development to community.

Meals Tax – Town of Hillsville

FY 2013 - \$560,000 (estimated)

FY 2012 - \$597,745

FY 2011 - \$460,030

FY 2010 - \$489,912

FY 2009 - \$479,826

Transient Occupancy Tax – Town of Hillsville

FY 2013 - \$144,000 (estimate)

FY 2012 - \$188,078 (Hillsville annexed 7/1/11, rate increased from 4% to 5%)

FY 2011 - \$118,011

FY 2010 - \$161,549

FY 2009 - \$146,503

The Blue Ridge Highlands, in which Hillsville resides, accounted for nearly \$733 million in travel and tourism expenditures in 2011 (approximately four percent of the state's overall travel and tourism expenditures), which is an increase of 11.6 percent since 2007.

HILLSVILLE LURES

According to the Stakeholders, below is a list of lures that bring visitors to Hillsville. These are major attractions, events, or assets that create reasons for visitors to travel to the Town of Hillsville or surrounding area.

Music Heritage: Hillsville sits on the designated Crooked Road and is the home of old time, bluegrass, beach and gospel music. Hillsville is located between Floyd and Galax, both main venues on The Crooked Road. Hillsville is located close to the Blue Ridge Music Center on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Scenic Beauty and Outdoor Recreation: Located on the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Hillsville's scenic beauty and cool weather draws visitors from North and South Carolina. Many second home residents own property in the area. Many retirees are locating to the mountain areas around Hillsville. Outdoor recreation in the area includes hiking at the Devil Den Nature Preserve, tubing, canoeing, kayaking and fishing in New River and biking/hiking/horseback riding on New River Trail State Park. Fishing is a popular pastime in the area. Kanawha Valley Arena is a destination for horseback riding and wagon riding. The Town of Hillsville is the trail head for the Beaver Dam Trail offering hiking through green areas from the town center. Golf Courses close to Hillsville attract many tourists to the area during the warm weather months.

National Assets: The Blue Ridge Parkway National Park is a major national attraction that draws millions of visitors to the area. The Fancy Gap is the second most used access point on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

State Parks: The New River Trail State Park is in close proximity to Hillsville.

Events & Festivals: The Labor Day Flea Market attracts over 400,000 visitors to Hillsville each year. The Town hosts a Beach Music Concert, each month from May to September that provides entertainment for Beach Music Lovers along with a Downtown Celebration and Cruise-In. Other nearby festivals include the Fiddle and the Plow, and the Lamsburg Community Festival.

Interstate Connectivity: Town limits connect with Interstate 77 at Exit 14. There are five major highways that intersect with Hillsville.



Blue Ridge Highlands Highlights of Regional Lures/Strengths:

- Scenic Beauty and Outdoor Recreation Opportunities
- National Assets: Appalachian Trail, Blue Ridge Parkway, George Wash. & Jeff. National Forest, Mount Rogers National Recreation Area
- State Parks: 6
- Crooked Road, Music, and Musical Heritage
- Events & Festivals: Bristol Rhythm & Roots Reunion Festival, Floyd Fest, Old Fiddlers' Convention
- Visual and Performing Arts: Barter Theatre
- National Main Streets: Abingdon, Bristol, Marion, Radford, Rocky Mount
- Notable Cities & Towns: Wytheville, Damascus, Floyd, Galax
- Interstate Connectivity
- Virginia Tech
- Appalachian Culture and Heritage
- Camping and Campground

Notable Town: Hillsville is famous for the Courthouse Tragedy and has participated in the Downtown Revitalization program. Hillsville could act as a destination hub for travelers who are passing through on I-77 or staying over several days in the many camping facilities.

Appalachian Culture and Heritage: Hillsville is the home of the Court House Shooting Tragedy and provides a museum tour for visitors. The Carter Home has been recently acquired and plans to create a visitor experience are in the works. Located in close proximity are several agri-tourism sites including the Blacksnake Meadery and Foggy Ridge Cider, two Alpaca Farms, Christmas Tree Farms and several pick your own orchards for cherries, peaches and pumpkins. Carroll County is the largest pumpkin producer in Virginia. The SWVA Farmers Marketing is located at Exit 14 on Interstate 77. The Rock Churches located along the Blue Ridge Parkway and parts of Carroll County preserve the religious movement in the Appalachian Mountains. Musicians and artisan/crafters provide cultural and heritage while preserving the mountain traditions of the Blue Ridge. Country Stores in the area provide an old time feeling for visitors.

Camping and Campgrounds: Campgrounds surrounding Hillsville report high occupancy for the warm weather months. Lake Ridge RV Resort and Matthews Campgrounds and Fancy Gap KOA are extremely popular. The Air Stream RV Rally attracts many outdoor enthusiasts each year. There are several rental cabins and B&B Inns available in the area surrounding the Town of Hillsville.

Celebrating Successes

- **Courthouse Tragedy Drama sold 1,100 tickets last year. The Museum is growing!**
- **Downtown Revitalization provides a “Home Town Feel” for Hillsville**
- **Carter Home is now ready for renovation**
- **Successful downtown festivals annually draw visitors to Hillsville**
- **Hillsville is uncongested and friendly**
- **Beaver Dam Trail repairs completed**
- **Community is Civic Minded**
- **Bus Tours visiting Crooked Road are increasing**
- **Downtown Historic District is signed**
- **4 Visitor Centers surrounding Hillsville**
- **Over 70 Artisans are displayed at the Visitor Center at Exit 14**

Gap Analysis:

After reviewing the tourism assets existing in Hillsville, the stakeholders participated in a Gap Analysis discussion. Gaps are those tourism opportunities that if filled would create a robust visitor experience. Gaps can be services, businesses, or marketing material that would enhance to tourism destination. Below is a list of the Gaps that were discussed:

Gap 1: Communication and stronger partnerships between the attractions, visitor centers and tourism service providers would help guide tourists to events and attractions. Many times museum staff is unaware of festivals or events that could be cross promoted.

Gap 2: Educational workshops to increase industry knowledge of posting information in the internet and to learn/network with tourism partners and to support the visitor center staff (4 visitor centers are located around Hillsville)

Gap 3: Wayfinding signs to Hillsville Historic District and billboards on the interstate to increase overnight stays for transient visitors on the interstate and increase visitation to the downtown area from Exit 14, by the new Bypass and into Town.

Gap 4: Restaurants are needed for family style meals that provide breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Gap 5: A Community Center is needed for indoor activities and events for winter months and to provide meeting facilities year round.

Gap 6: Need an indoor/outdoor Theater in the round for the Allen Tragedy Drama and other performances. Connection the Rock Churches with the Allen Tragedy story is a missed opportunity.



...the distinct music of the Blue Ridge Highlands region serves as a distinguishing feature in combination with its other tourism lures, including its outdoor opportunities, main street communities and charming towns, arts, cultural heritage, agriculture, and others.

P 3 Blue Ridge Highlands Regional STP

SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. An important tool for determining your Situation Analysis is performing a SWOT Analysis. The SWOT analysis is an extremely useful tool for understanding and decision-making for all sorts of situations in business and organizations. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Strengths:

- **Nationally known for the Allen Tragedy at the Court House**
- **Rural Environment**
- **Interstate and Highway**
- **4 Visitor Centers surrounding Hillsville**
- **Pick Your Own and Christmas Tree Farms, two Alpaca Farms**
- **Largest Pumpkin Growing County in Virginia**
- **Wineries, Cider, Mead**
- **Kanawha Valley Arena**
- **New River Trail State Park and River**
- **Outdoor Recreation**
- **Top Trout Fishing Streams**
- **Primland and Old Mill Golf Courses**
- **Several RV and Camping Facilities**
- **Music and arts**
- **Labor Day Flea Market**

Weaknesses

- **By Pass draws traffic away from businesses**
- **Lack of cooperation and partnerships with Government and Tourism Industry**
- **Need training to increase knowledge of tourism assets**
- **Need indoor venues for winter months**
- **Lack of a major “hook” to attract visitors to the downtown area**
- **Lack of “big name” chain restaurant**
- **Limited public restrooms facilities in downtown**
- **Limited revenue and investment to attract tourism businesses**
- **Lack of marketing and promotions**
- **Need ADA Accessibility for historical sites**
- **Need to communicate with local teachers to increase visitation of students**
- **Lack of billboards on the interstate and Wayfinding to direct traffic to historical district**

Opportunities

- **Hillsville is centrally located from one day’s drive of several metropolitan cities.**
- **Increase partnerships with county, Friends of Hillsville and Tourism Partners**
- **Create a development plan to attract more business investments**
- **Capitalize on the rural scenic beauty**

- **More retirees are buying homes in the area**
- **Snowbirds to and from Canada and Florida sustain room sales and could increase spending**
- **Create a sense of place by placing street lights from the interstate and installing gateway signs, flags and decorations to lead travelers into Hillsville**
- **Retail shops with local, unique merchandise that remains open during evening hours and on weekends.**
- **Adopt a theme and brand for Hillsville and begin an aggressive marketing campaign to promote the town as a destination.**

Threats

- **The new 58 Bypass is causing a decrease in traffic and spending**
- **Gas/Fuel Prices**
- **Isolation**
- **Lack of interest among younger generation that is 20-45 years old**
- **Lack of Grant Funding for investment in infrastructure and new businesses**
- **No interstate signage**
- **Blight or abandoned vehicles, litter, overall visual appearance of street, businesses and homes.**

Market and Promotion Analysis:

TARGET MARKET

Stakeholders held a discussion on the top reasons tourists visit Hillsville now. Hillsville is certainly a draw for a diverse group of travelers because of the Town's location on I-77. The interstate provides one night transient visitors who fill up the hotel rooms at Exit 14 and look for evening activities. The interstate travelers are generally from Florida, Canada, Ohio, North Carolina, South Carolina and Michigan. They often request information on local eateries and evening activities. The second visitor is those who are camping and participate in outdoor recreational activities. Tourists generally come from a 70 mile radius which includes Greensboro, Charlotte, Raleigh, and Durham area.

TARGET AUDIENCE RESEARCH

The Hotels in Hillsville reported that business travelers are staying overnight Sunday –Thursday and are 30-40 years old. Families with teens are prevalent Thursday – Sunday and the adults are from 30 – up in age. Campground visitors are generally families that have teens and small children and are the age of 30 and up. The RV Air Stream Rally is generally travelers that are 65+ in age. The museum visitor is reported to be 60+ in age. Motorcycle Clubs that frequent the town are estimated at 65 and up.

STRATEGIC PATH FORWARD

The Strategic Plan is a five year guideline to provide a pathway forward for the Tourism Director and the Tourism Stakeholders. These goals are flexible and may be edited to reflect changes within the town as new ideas and opportunities develop. The framework of the Goals is woven with the Virginia Strategic Tourism Plan developed for the State and the Blue Ridge Travel Region. The template for the STP includes improvements through Product, Promotion, Pillars, Policies, and Partnerships. The following goals, objectives, action items and timelines for the future were determined by careful review of the situational analysis:

Goal 1 Partnerships: Unify the Tourism Industry to make Hillsville a destination

Objective 1: Create Partnerships with local groups to enhance the tourism program.

Action Items:

- Increase communication, planning, and coordination among government entities
- Develop and enhance communication and partnering among Virginia tourism industry stakeholders
- Create strong partnerships with Local Governments, Chamber of Commerce, Friends of Hillsville, and Virginia Tourism Corporation, regional tourism organizations, Clubs, Churches, Schools and colleges.

Responsibility: Leadership of the Town of Hillsville and Carroll County.

Timeline: 2 year project

Measurement: within two years the town will strengthen its product to support visitation and will work in partnership with the county tourism staff, and tourism industry management to market the town and entire region to increase tourism.

Goal 2 – Policies: Implement the Tourism Zone program for the Town limits to create incentives for brick and mortar projects within the Town of Hillsville for product development to increase the amount of tourism businesses, attractions and other businesses.

Objective: 1. Work with Hillsville Town Council to address policies and programs, including the creation of Tourism Zones to support brick and mortar tourism projects.

Action Items

- Continue to explore alternative creative funding solutions to achieve community solutions and work with local governments, where appropriate, to secure dedicated funding that could be reinvested for tourism marketing and development purposes.
- For tourism development, the formation of a tourism development fund at the local level should be explored.

- Explore the development of tourism business assistance programs, such as incubators, through local governments, small business administrations, and economic development departments, as appropriate, to seek support and assistance for tourism businesses.
- Continue to evaluate business policies, ordinances, codes, etc. at the local level that may impact visitation and tourism business growth.
- Continue to engage in preservation and sustainability efforts at the local level, regarding historical, cultural, and environmental assets such as the historic County Court House and the Allen Tragedy.

Responsibility: The Town Manager, Town Council, County Administrator and County Board of Supervisors working with the EDA and Planners are responsible for developing funding programs to incentivize investors.

Time Line: A Hillsville Town Council should work to create code for the Tourism Zone program.

Measurement: Funding, investment, development plans and Tourism Zone codes should be available to developers by 2014, or sooner if possible.

Goal 3: Product: Solidify Hillsville as a Downtown Tourism Destination through product development.

Objective 1: Work to make infrastructure improvements to increase tourism visitation and spending through product investment and incentives for new businesses.

Action Items:

- Designate a Tourism Zone and provide guidelines for new recruitment of tourism investment.
- Work to create a recruitment plan to attract unique and family style restaurants.
- Work to recruit a “General Store” concept and/or art galleries, winery shops, and evening dining for the Town Center.
- Work to create an outdoor stage venue for music performance and stage performances, and a farmer’s market area to draw more people to the downtown area. Include public restrooms for groups and festival goers.
- Create incentives and recruitment plans to attract unique or specialty retail shops
- Work to repurpose the Carter Home to create an exciting new tourism attraction

- Develop a work plan with the Historical Society to further create activities, events and exhibits for the Allen Tragedy to initiate a larger presence of the story and history of the event.
- Work with attractions and shops to have evening and weekend hours that serve visitors.

Responsibility: The Town of Hillsville Town Manager and Town Council will work to prioritize activities to improve or develop product within the town limits.

Timeline: 5+ year project.

Measurement: Successful recruitment of new tourism businesses, increase of exhibits, play and events surrounding the Allen Tragedy.

Goal 4: Pillars: Improve Visitor Wayfinding, interstate signage and gateway entrances.

Objective 1: Wayfinding and Directional Signage: Create a sign system that will lead travelers to Hillsville and to tourism businesses.

Action Items:

- Create an inner town directional sign system to direct visitors to lodging, food and attractions.
- Work to find billboards or a sign system on I-77 to direct traffic to Hillsville.
- Work to correct Google Maps, Mobile Apps and Map Quest to keep traffic directed into Hillsville.
- Explore the possibility of a Trolley from the Exit 14 lodging establishments to the Hillsville Historic District to visit opened attractions and shops.

Responsibilities: The leadership will work with the Town Planners and VDOT to create a Wayfinding system for tourism industry. The Town Manager and County Administrator will investigate Billboard signs on I-77 and at Exit 14 to direct travelers toward Hillsville.

Timeline: Next 2 years

Measurement: Installation of new interstate billboards, Wayfinding systems and gateway signs that designate a sense of place and provide directions into the Historic District.

Objective 2: Provide Training and Education for the Tourism Businesses and Partners

Action Items:

- Encourage Town businesses to join the County Tourism Ambassador Program provided by the tourism staff, and provide front line customer service training to improve knowledge of the tourism assets available in the Hillsville area and the surrounding County assets.

- Provide updates on events, activities and itinerary tours to inform front line employees of new tourism assets. Utilize the Tourism Visitor Center to communicate events to tourists.
- Gather visitor information from the local visitor centers, hotels, restaurants, events and attractions to measure the return on investment.

Responsibility: The Town of Hillsville and Carroll County, should partner to support the activities of the visitor center staff.

Timeline: 1-2 years, then annually once implemented

Measurement: Every front line employee should become a certified ambassador. Annual training will become part of the overall tourism plan. Research information will provide a return on investment and will help determine marketing and promotional spending in the future.



BLUE RIDGE HIGHLANDS

Regional STP

Promotions p.18

Continue package and itinerary development based on key visitor themes for the region, including nature/outdoors, cultural heritage, town/city centers, music, arts, agri-tourism, and others. Leverage border locations of North Carolina, West Virginia and Tennessee for promotions in addition to other high-value target markets

Goal 5: Promotions: Implement an overall marketing program for both internal and external communications in partnership with the town, county and tourism staff.

Objective 1: Provide internal communication and updates to local tourism industry, stakeholders and officials.

Action Items:

- Build a stronger relationship with the hotels to cross promote and provide information on things to do in the evenings and on weekends.
- Develop communication plans for government officials, tourism stakeholders, businesses, and residents and continue to educate and inform officials on tourism benefits (qualitative and quantitative based on research) as well as ongoing initiatives for economic development through various means
- Communicate and inform tourism industry stakeholders, including partners, the business community, and residents on tourism initiatives and benefits
- Enhance promotion of Virginia to potential tourism investors, businesses, and developers to generate economic development.

Responsibility: The Town of Hillsville and Carroll County officials should partner to prepare and present frequent updates to the government leaders and tourism stakeholders. Press releases and public service announcement will provide economic impact information to the tourism stakeholders and businesses owners.

Timeline: A communication system such as an industry newsletter should be developed immediately to keep the tourism industry informed of data, events, attractions and festivals.

Measurement: By the end of 2013 an internal e-newsletter will be sent to a database of government officials, tourism industry partners and downtown merchants.

Objective 2: Promotion to the external market to increase visitation and tourism spending is a partnership with the tourism office, the county and the town.

Action Items

- Enhance and create visitor itineraries and packages that will be present on the web site, social media and placed in print ads when possible.
- Continue niche theme promotions to music genres, artisan fans, outdoor recreation, festivals, agri-tourism and other and key visitor segments. Target those segments with appropriate promotions, events and suggested tours.

- There already exists an excellent web site and brochure through the tourism office and visitor center located at Exit 14. The Hillsville tourism assets are included in these marketing tools and should continue to partner with the County Tourism Staff to build further marketing programs.
- Interstate Marketing and Promotion can be enhanced through a stronger partnership with the Virginia State Welcome Centers located at Lamsburg and Rocky Gap. Interstate Bill Board signs would also provide more visibility for Hillsville as a stopover location.
- Create a tourism campaign to AAA Offices in Ohio, Toronto, North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida to increase drive traffic to stay in Hillsville.
- Work with regional organizations to recruit group tours to visit the area. Work with attractions to provide entertainment to group tours.
- Create strong partnerships and communication with the four visitor centers located in Carroll County and visitor centers located in neighboring counties on the interstate, Blue Ridge Parkway and connecting highways.
- Partner with the tourism staff to create a marketing campaign and apply for the VTC Marketing Leverage Grant to increase tourism. Develop a performance measurement system to collect data from visitors through surveys and data collected from the tourism industry.

Responsibility –The Town of Hillsville and Carroll County will partner to support and create a marketing campaign and applying for a VTC Marketing Leverage Grant. The Carroll County Tourism Staff is the lead party for applying for marketing grants. A stronger partnership with the Town of Hillsville would increase the area’s competitive edge and bring more awareness of Hillsville’s attractions.

Time Line: The MLP grants are offered in the spring and fall of each year.

Measurements: A good marketing plan can be prepared for the spring MLP application process, and implemented by summer.

Appendix A:

Definitions:

Goal: Broad statement of measurable outcomes to be achieved on behalf of customers

Initiatives/Tasks: Specific programs, strategies, and activities that will help you meet your performance targets

Measure: Meaningful indicator that assess progress towards accomplishment of the goal and objectives

Mission Statement: Statement of purpose; fundamental reason for the tourism effort existence

Objective: Statements of what you must do well or barriers that you must overcome to achieve a specific goal

Opportunities: Factors or situations that exist beyond your organization that may have a favorable effect on it

Strengths: Resources or capabilities that can be used to accomplish your mission

Target: The numerical value of the performance measure you hope to achieve

Target Market: Any person, group, or organization that is believed to have an interest in utilizing your tourism related product(s) and/or service(s)

Threats: Factors or situations that exist beyond your organization that can negatively affect it

Tourism Assets: Any tourism related product, attraction, site, or event that is of interest to target customers/tourists

Vision Statement: A word picture of the future that the organization/tourism effort intends ultimately to become or to influence

Weaknesses: Deficiencies in resources or capabilities that hinder your ability to be a robust tourism destination.

Nature & Outdoor Recreation: Relaxing and active experiences to enjoy Virginia's scenic natural environment and outdoors, including but not limited to driving tours, hiking, biking, paddling, boating, fishing, hunting, observing wildlife, and others.

Arts & Music: Visual, performance, and craft arts experiences and music of various genres and musical heritage

History & Heritage: Experiences, structures, and sites that show Virginia and U.S. history and heritage

Town/City Centers: Refers to the central area of a destination, generally a downtown or main street area

Events: May include festivals, fairs, concerts, performances, tournaments/races (running, biking, swimming, kayaking, rowing, boating/sailing, fishing, etc.), and other events. These events serve to further enhance other product themes.

Culinary: Includes wineries, breweries, distilleries, foodie/dining, and agri/aqua-tourism

Meetings: Refers primarily to facilities that serve the meetings market such as conventions, conferences, corporate meetings, trade shows, exhibitions, trainings/seminars, and other group events

Sports: Refers primarily to facilities that host sports events and tournaments, including youth, amateur, college, professional, minor league, and motorsports

Commercial Attractions: Refers to tourism attractions designed for user entertainment and enjoyment and may not necessarily rely heavily upon inherent destination features. For Blue Ridge, this specifically refers to the higher-end/luxury attractions and family-oriented attractions (e.g. theme park). Higher-end/luxury attractions may include spas, resorts, golf courses, and other experiences with upscale elements targeted to an affluent market.

In addition, it should be noted that cultural heritage refers to the cultural and social characteristics of a region that are fundamental to evaluating a tourism destination. Culture consists of the beliefs, behaviors, objects, and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. From a tourism perspective, visitors want to experience the local culture of a destination. This includes many components, such as art and music of the region, history, local crafts, traditions, style and types of local food, architecture, religion, and distinctive leisure activities. These are what make the cultural heritage of Virginia “authentic.” By its very nature, culture is interpreted by visitors in many ways. Each region will have the opportunity to further define the regional “cultural” lures, based on information in this plan.

Research Data:

Visitor Center Data:

Year	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2007							617	856	939	962	613	321	4308
2008	530	642	616	664	856	1071	1155	1052	775	1245	578	354	9538
2009	431	517	628	832	1048	1114	1273	1263	914	1264	623	215	10122
2010	308	254	636	893	894	1218	1559	1275	990	1328	658	157	10170
2011	297	362	495	846	846	988	1290	1233	852	1259	687	623	9778
2012	556	491	799	864	904	1246	1411	1060	760	1148	507	279	10025
2013	268	316	492	763	904	1632	1228						5603

Blue Ridge Parkway Traffic County

TRAFFIC COUNT AT MP 199.4 (U.S. 52 LEFT) Fancy Gap

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2013	1,408	3,419	4,188	7,307								
2012	2,039	5,741	4,583	5,847	10,161	9,114	7,714	11,713	11,656	12,120	8,564	4,717
2011	1,739	5,053	6,056	6,589	8,661	9,982	13,184	9,657	10,047	12,746	10,247	6,406
2010	447	1,127	2,229	8,492	8,168	14,287	10,150	12,021	11,861	16,601	8,467	3,460
2009	4,217	5,598	5,580	7,905	11,511	11,966	14,408	11,370	12,134	13,960	13,240	5,325

Virginia - Plateau District for the Blue Ridge Parkway

Traffic Count By Connecting Roads

	This Year To Date	Last Year To Date	Fiscal YTD
VA 24	57,873	112,301	152,250
Mill Mountain (estimated)	15,876	21,192	37,220
US 220	96,918	134,699	207,693
US 221 (estimated)	15,225	18,095	32,557
VA 8 (estimated)	11,801	12,556	27,830
US 58 (estimated)	25,550	27,553	59,088
US 52 (estimated)	33,209	37,130	87,603
VA 89 (estimated)	10,028	10,663	25,932
Total	266,479	374,189	630,173

Acknowledgements:

The following people were invited:

Elizabeth Huff, President, Hale-Wilkinson-Carter Home Foundation

Shelby Inscore-Puckett – past president Carroll County Historical Society

Ed Stanley, President, Carroll County Historical Society

Amanda Bourne, Carroll County Office of Tourism

C. J. Patel – Comfort Inn

Danny C. Cockerham, President, Milo C. Cockerham, Inc. (owner of Hampton Inn, Countryside

Restaurant, Pizza Inn/TCBY, Gulf and BP Stations at interstate)

Brian Spencer – Shoney's

Wayne Jenkins – Commander, VFW Post 1115

Angelique Phipps – Nuckoll's Drug

Jessica Talley – interested citizen

Lacy Bowman – Bowman's Flea Market

Greg Yonce – Yonce Real Estate & Appraisal and Councilman

Greg Crowder – Race In and Mayor

Michael Howlett – The Carroll News reporter

Chris Brooke – The Gazette reporter