



## Holmes Co/ Millersburg Comp Plan

### Tourism

11/17/21

Arnie Oliver opened meeting with introductions. Poggemeyer Design Group reviewed a power point on the Comprehensive Plan and specifically on tourism. Existing conditions in the county and visioning themes related to tourism from the visioning session were reviewed. Consultant reviewed findings from the Economic Impact of Tourism in Holmes County 2021. In 2019, there were 2.6 million tourists and \$500 million dollars spent. The Chamber believes this is a low estimate and doesn't include the volume of day visitors. Approximately 20% of the county's Gross Domestic Product is from tourism. Peak tourist season is from June-October. The chamber anticipates this year they will see a 40% increase in tourism dollars from 2019. Opportunities and challenges were also reviewed. Participants filled out visioning cards. In addition to participation by the group, comments that were emailed to the County regarding this workshop are included in the notes below.

The following existing conditions were added to those already listed in power point:

#### Lodging Industry

- Air B&B and VRBO numbers have gone up since report completed. Auditor/Finance Directors do searches and send contracts for filing to pay bed tax. There is an education process with the property owners. Need to check if best practices for this type of reporting from other tourism communities. The Ohio Association of CVB's is addressing this on behalf of the entire industry.

#### Arts, Entertainment, Recreation Industry

- Add the following events:
  - Jeep Jamboree- 50-100 jeeps
  - Hardwood Furniture Shows (2) for buyers, not big in number of people here (400 people), but spending hundreds of thousands of dollars
  - King of the Ridge Cattle Show with 800 head of cattle and estimate of about 3,200 people attending
  - Harvest fest in Berlin
  - Mt. Hope Draft Horse Auction
  - Livestock at Fairgrounds
  - Millersburg Antiques Festival
  - Classic in the Country
  - Ohio Swiss Festival
  - Holmes County Auction
  - Rails to Trails Activity
  - Fireworks
- Bidding on BMW Motorcycle owners' rally for 2023

#### Comparisons with Lancaster PA

- \$2.6 million figure here might have been low
- Lancaster has more access to east coast travelers
- Cost of living in Lancaster is higher
- Here spend \$190 per day and it triples with overnight stays

#### National Trends

- Chamber agrees with all of these and crafting marketing messages to all of these (digital technology, culinary tourism, virtual reality tourism, sustainable tourism)

Tourism is important because it plays a large role in the economy and attracts future residents, workforce, entrepreneurs, and investors to county. Participant mentioned real estate is doing well here, extremely expensive now. Realtors getting calls from people looking for 5 acres with house for \$400k, not really that cheap, but people are looking for deals. Furniture buyers are

purchasing property to stay in during shows and then using as an Air B&B when they are not here. A couple from VA just bought rental cabins here, investing in the area after vacationing here. They were surprised how easy it is to start business here.

#### Visioning Themes (in addition to those in the power point)

- A visitors' center, place can go, ask questions 7 days a week
  - Maybe man with volunteers?
  - Had an info center in Berlin, but didn't get enough traffic to be staffed
  - DT Millersburg is adding large map/brochure holders to parking lots so tourists can access maps/brochures 24 hours a day
  - Nice to have restroom/visitors center, Millersburg, and Berlin both have public restrooms
  - The chamber does have brochures/maps at every turn, McDonalds etc.
  - Walnut Creek and Killbuck do not have restrooms, use gas stations in Walnut Creek
- Killbuck is a hidden gem- has many natural resources, a museum, a square
- Need wayfinding from trail to Killbuck, Millersburg, Holmesville to get tourists off the trail and into communities. Riders are coming off trail and into Millersburg for food.
- Have selfie stations across the trail (Buggy, Bigfoot, and Train)
- Glenmont- has Fort Vandalia/ Fort Fizzle and history buffs are interested in this
- Nashville- has expanding restaurants
- Baltic- has amazing restaurant, winery, bucket list attractions (Roundhouse)
- Need to add campsites for people on the trail, visitors want campsites. Could do campsites at landfill park. Right now, bicyclists are camping near benches off the trail and do wander into the downtown. Kinetics offers a place to shower for campers at Old Airport Park. Campgrounds would be good addition for pedal/paddle traffic. Working to remove first logjam in January to assist with paddle traffic. Have different groups staying in the summer. Park district has talked about using old fairgrounds for camping, have 3 buildings on the site that are in pretty good condition. Maybe could serve as hostel.
- Hotels are always hearing that guests want an experience, like milking a cow, wanting to stay on an Amish farm and work.
- Good improvements have been made to bicycle traffic, but some participants felt that DT Millersburg is not conducive to bike traffic (too much truck traffic per some participants). In Millersburg, people know to use the regular roads, they have maps when they stop for lunch (just two blocks off the trail). Traffic is busy, but not fast. Participants thought could use more bike parking outside restaurants, right now about space for 10 bikes, maybe adding a corral area would work better.
- Need to re-educate people to use crosswalks in Berlin.
- Add vehicle charging stations (3 in county right now). Grants are available for communities to put in vehicle charging stations. Have e-bike charging stations at Walnut Creek and Keim Lumber.
- Some shuttling of visitors is happening when needed. Could examine more with hotels, non-profits, especially during specific events.
- Hotels direct visitors to Millersburg when other towns have restaurants that shut down early and do not have bar service.

Tourism is important to other planning elements. An important part of economic development is the economy ripple effect with new businesses to support tourism. Tourism lodging may be utilizing housing stock. As far as transportation and infrastructure, can both elements handle the influx of population during tourist season? Could expand natural resources to make it a draw for tourists (different, maybe younger tourists)? Could tourism be concentrated in downtowns?

#### Challenges (in addition to those in the power point)

- Authenticity of products being sold. Find balance between education of tourist and business owner. Advertising of Amish Country based on local products. Tourists do complain when not locally made and take to social media to point it out. Some felt best protection is for business owners to be authentic with their experiences and products. Not just a local issue, happening everywhere.
- Lack of wayfinding
- Clutter of existing signage, billboards
- No way to man tourism office over the weekend
- Lack of cell coverage, GPS availability, confusion with physical addresses and GPS directions

- Need to translate maps/brochures for hearing and visually impaired and for non-English speaking visitors to be more inclusive. Some hotels have done this in limited ways
- Volume of people calling looking for rooms and no way to determine what rooms are available. Have tried different ways, can't get business owners to keep it updated, not all online, not all using email. People ask if there is a gate fee to Amish Country
- Worker shortage, pay is lower in the service industry. Need to get into the schools, help kids see path in hospitality and how they can move up
- Need "Instagram worthy" posts (like DT Wooster), create "Facebook Envy" to get people to visit
  - Chamber is using social media marketing strategy- murals in Berlin, Walnut Creek, Millersburg Barn, Courthouse lawn

#### Opportunities (in addition to those in the power point)

- Turn dog breeding into more economic development and offer pet hotels/palaces, pet day cares, pet-friendly hotels, and restaurants. People are driving two hours to Columbus to board their pets. There are some limited pet-friendly hotels in Berlin. However, dog breeding will not be part of the outward marketing.
- Tourists want to be able to drink and Millersburg likes that they come here to drink. Difficult to do conventions without ability to serve alcohol.
- Holmes County Center for the Arts
- Christian-based Theater. People going to Wooster for shows, hits like Mamma Mia, Footloose, etc.
- Expansion of local artisan wares- Newtown Gallery, Berlin Gallery, Pottery. Need to showcase one-of-a-kind artists, museums, etc.
- Goat yoga. ATI did it and made \$12-14,000. People want an experience. Visitors ask to pet animals at a farm. Becomes an educational thing, need to respect Amish and Agricultural cultures
- Expansion of Uber (1 driver now) and Uber Eats/Door Dash. Helpful for tourists.

#### Planned Projects

- Chamber updating map and visitors guide in January 2022 with first downloadable map with pins to drop on coordinates for businesses and accurate store hours. Approximately 400 businesses.
- Chamber doubled marketing budget for next year
- Discussion of 7-day a week visitors center with potential adaption of Millersburg building with front that time lock opens/shuts. Model on what is working in Tuscarawas County.

#### Big Ideas (in addition to those in the power point)

- Wayfinding
- "Trails" or "Itineraries"- like culinary, greenhouse, agriculture, etc. with signage to different trails like in New Albany
- Historic Downtown Millersburg (HDM) is talking about travel, alcohol, retail trails
- Marketing to younger populations in addition to marketing to older populations too, keep them all engaged

#### Survey Discussion

Reviewed upcoming survey distribution. Participants suggested offering local gift cards as incentives to fill out surveys. Add fax number as way to return survey for Amish. Include phone number and email. Suggestion to put surveys at Book Mobile, Health Clinics, Walnut Creek Cheese, Keim Lumber, Mt. Hope Auction (Paul), and Hardwood Furniture Guild. The group felt the Amish would fill it out as part of their public service.