

## **Tourism Addendum**

The Board of County Supervisors has expressed its interest in growing tourism opportunities in Prince William County. In order to do that, we need to develop a strategy that will improve our image as a tourist destination, attract visitors, increase spending by tourists and maximize our partnerships. Additionally, we need to build on our strengths and address our challenges. There are opportunities that need to be considered to improve Prince William County as a destination and there that we need face head on.

Tourism opportunities include both facilities and events. Each of these requires product development and product marketing. This is where partnerships are critical. Some excellent examples of partnerships for product development include the National Museum of the Marine Corps and the Performing Arts Center. Neither of these could have been accomplished without the solid public-private partnerships that brought them to fruition. Product marketing benefits from partnerships, too. Events and destinations usually do their own marketing and share their information with the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). The CVB develops collateral material that includes information about hotels, events, and locations in the County and the City of Manassas.

Currently, the transient occupancy tax is the major sources of funding for tourism in the County. This shared revenue is used to fund the CVB, support the County's historic preservation program and to supplement other tourist destinations and events. In order to increase development and marketing of our product, we may need to seek new sources of funding through an admissions tax or meals tax. Such additional revenue could be used to attract new venues or to cultivate large scale events. Additionally, it would provide funds to expand the marketing of Prince William County as a tourist destination.

Recent trends in the County's tourism industry have presented challenges that require some agility on the part of the County government and its partners. We are seeing a larger number of business travelers. The needs of the business traveler are different than the leisure traveler and it requires a different marketing strategy. We continue to struggle with the government per diem issue which has inhibited both upscale hotel development and increased hotel revenue. We are competing with our neighbors in Fairfax and Fredericksburg who have chosen to invest more money in tourism. Without a large-scale hotel and conference center, we lack the tools to compete and grow.

In order to take tourism to a higher level, we need to have a formal master plan. This is the direction that tourism has been missing for quite some time. For the best chance of success for any plan, we should take a multi-agency approach. By having all the right people working toward a unified goal, we become a stronger team.

Also to take Tourism promotion to the next level, we need to take advantage of the synergy that exists in the County government, providing information about what makes Prince William County a great place to live. Those same messages are also what make our county a great place to visit.

The County government has multiple agencies that work together to provide information about programs and services. This information is presented in many different ways to different audiences. The Department of Economic Development provides information to potential clients regarding our community and all the reasons they should locate here. They put considerable energy into letting prospects know that the County is a business-friendly community. The Finance Department provides in depth information to the bond rating agencies to help them realize that Prince William County is a prosperous financially well-managed government. The Park Authority and Historic Properties use many methods to message to residents and visitors that there are many ways to spend their time whether they live here or are just visiting.

In addition, the County's communication staff works with all departments to get information to the community. The staff of public information and cable television professionals work with local and national media and produce award-winning television programming. This staff should also be used to enhance our tourism program. The challenge is to bring all of the messages and talent together organizationally and to develop a master plan that will increase tourism.

Finally, the Board has raised concerns regarding the organizational placement of the CVB. In considering this, we have benchmarked the surrounding jurisdictions to determine the organizational placement of their tourism programs, how they are governed, how they are financed and what their budgets are. Additionally, we considered options for the placement of the CVB in the County. We have presented three options. The first is to leave it where it is, second would be to bring it under County Executive management, and third would be a combination of the two. Under the combination structure, the CVB would become part of County management, but would have a advisory board much the same as Community Services Board.

Should the Board choose to change the organizational placement of the CVB, certain actions will need to be taken. If the CVB is to remain as is, no action is necessary, however, the Board may amend its Memorandum of Understanding to change the make up of the CVB Board of Directors. This action would allow the Board to require a tourism-related background for the CVB Board of Directors. If the Board were to choose to bring tourism under County Executive Management, they would need to dissolve the 501 (c) 6 corporation. A combination would require guiding documents and a Board resolution to implement the structure.

Following are tables that show the benchmarking comparisons and the regional tourism structure.