

Summary of the Heritage Tourism Potential of Lansing Iowa prepared by Heritage Consulting Inc.  
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Brief View of Conclusion:

Seven Tasks to Tackle

1. Need a website NOW
2. Inventory current lodging, build more
3. You need money to promote Lansing
4. Aggressively market what you have
5. New tourism-related business opportunities
6. Committee help to reorient their work plans
7. Start collecting tourism statistics, learn about the cultural and heritage traveler

Goals: Prioritize tasks: Short term, medium term, longer term

**Report Summary:**

**Background Information about the Location & Current Situation**

Issue: disparate elements however, need to be “knit together” as a highly valued packaged and promoted to visitors.

Solution: Lansing needs a “one stop shop” both virtually and physically, and in an office, to learn about lodging, events, recreational attractions, and the downtown retail to turn the greater Lansing area into a destination.

**Advice is to combine all the attractions--lodging, shopping, and recreational amenities- into a destination to be promoted.**

**Overview of MSL Committees**

**Tourism based work plans- The Committees**

*The Design Committee-*

- Current: focuses on maintaining and sprucing up the physical environment of downtown.

- Recommendation: Plan event for recognition of National Historic District Designation NOW.

#### ***Promotion Committee***

- Current: hosts events that cater to both residents and visitors. This committee has the largest number of work plans, and all are well developed.
- Recommendation: reassess whether some events, especially the two Open Houses, are really meeting your needs.

#### ***The Organization Committee***

- Current: only one work plan for the committee, and appears to have the smallest number of volunteers.
- Recommendation: critical to success of tourism.
  - some fundraising tasks- add more events to generate funds
  - communication- critical to success (website immediately, Facebook, e-newsletter; expand email list)
  - volunteer recruitment.
  - expand heritage visitors
  - Building this committee is essential to the success of the heritage tourism efforts in the future.

#### ***The Business Opportunities (Biz Ops) Committee-***

- Current: has some work plan items but needs more information about the economics of downtown.

Appendix I- ERSI information (economic resources?)

*Recommendations* invite Jim Thompson discuss the ERSI material. There are several vacancies in town, and these stores could be filled with tourist-oriented retail. (restaurants, outfitter, etc.)

***NEEDS of the town in order to succeed:***

***Need: Everyone working together***

### *Observations*

Working together to create a visitor designation in Lansing is both a short and long term priority.

### *Recommendation:*

1. focus on organizing the lodging community first as this is the most critical goal. .
2. The Main Street Lansing Board -meet with City Council to explain the results of this Tech Visit and ask for their support to increase the Hotel/Motel tax next year from the current two percent (2%) to the maximum of seven percent (7%).
3. The MSL Board should learn about the referendum process and participate actively. Learn more from your County and Regional Tourism partners.

### ***Need: Tourism needs to be someone's job.***

*Observation-* plenty to promote in the Lansing area. However, all the components of a destination-- lodging, attractions, retail, events, and restaurants-- must work together.

### *Recommendations-*

1. *Tourism needs to be someone's job.* Hire part time Heritage Tourism Coordinator to manage the larger effort to promote the greater Lansing area as a heritage tourism destination.
  - Funding is an issue.
    - Expanding the Hotel/Motel tax to seven percent (7%) could fund part of this person's salary if the City would agree.
    - Fees could be generated from memberships in the Main Street organization from a broader segment of the tourism community (especially lodging and attractions).
    - Modest fees could be charged to link to lodging or attractions to their websites.
    - Sponsorship opportunities could be created for parts of the MSL website dedicated to tourism.
    - New special events could be developed specifically for visitors and sponsorships solicited from tourism partners.
    - Job is far beyond the scope of the Main Street manager.

- Board should discuss funding this position during the next three months and come up with a work plan for funding the position by the time that MSI returns to conduct your annual program review in late October, 2014.
- 2. Rename/rebrand the existing Main Street Lansing office as the Greater Lansing Visitor Center, and add way finding signage if the office is on a side street.
- 3. Add more traditional brochure racks for visitor brochures in the front part of the office

***Need: Change needs to happen to retain businesses.***

*Observations*-discomfort about the pace of change in Lansing. Many like it the way it is. Many resent tourists. But, change can be managed in Lansing.

*Recommendations*

1. protect that charm and quality
  - Retain and restore historic buildings
  - Respect the wildlife habitats and water quality
  - Keep Outdoor recreation vital
  - Change should be incremental
  - Implement a handful of small activities in the next three or six months. Build on successes.
2. Investigate drafting a local preservation ordinance this year. Work with Main Street Iowa staff to understand the implication of enacting such an ordinance.
3. Promote restoration and the availability of the Federal and State Investment Tax Credits for Rehabilitation,
4. Work with conservation and recreation site partners to understand their concerns about maintaining a healthy balance between recreational use and conservation needs.

***Need: To make Lansing well known; not a secret.***

*Observation*

Many residents view tourists as a negative and refer to them as such. *Recommendations:*

1. Local attitudes towards tourists must change.
  - a. We know that the 999 residents of Lansing could not support the grocery store, the many restaurants, and retail shops through resident spending alone.
  - b. The local economy is already tied to tourist dollars. Therefore, local attitudes about tourists needs an update.
2. Try a fun way to put an end to this unpleasant slang expression in town. We recommend that this effort begin with MSL. Fine anyone \$5.00 if this negative term or attitude is spoken out loud in any meeting, collect this money and use it for a tourism related activity.

***Need: More seasonal events throughout the year***

*Observation:* many complaints about how downtown is dead when the Mississippi River is dead. High season in Lansing will always be the precious summer months when the river explodes with fishing, boating, and other recreational pursuits

*Recommendation*

1. Beef up the spring and fall seasons with events.
2. Concentrate marketing on these shoulder seasons to spread out the economic benefit to the local businesses and become a bit less dependent on summer time.
3. Start winter promotions in concert with some of the winter recreational areas as a way to fill some lodging units that are open year-round. Get advice about seasonal marketing from your County and Regional Tourism Partners
4. Create a seasonal marketing strategy for Lansing.

***Need: Put heritage in heritage tourism***

*Observations*

The listing of the downtown on the National Register of Historic Places is in the works. The tax incentives available at the Federal and State levels will help make rehabilitation a more economically viable choice for property owners who are seeking to restore their buildings.

### *Recommendations*

1. Downtown needs to be interpreted to the public by telling the town's story through the buildings
2. Main Street Iowa's Design consultants have files of clever ideas for towns who wish to make their stories come alive for visitors.
3. Create a work plan for one or more activities and implement these for the coming summer season.

### ***Need for Action: Time for implementation is NOW***

#### *Observations*

Main Street Lansing is quite adept at planning, but is weak on implementing its plans. : an incomplete website, three years after it was initiated; no one seems to know exactly how many lodging rooms are available or where they are located; Lansing tourism brochure produced more than a year ago has not been updated or reprinted, and is not circulated to all the lodging businesses. And like countless other Main Street towns, a handful of downtown retailers continue to have inconsistent hours or are not open at all.

*Recommendations:* seven key tasks to tackle in the next year.

### **Seven Tasks to Tackle**

#### **1. Need a website NOW-A website is critical**

- must serve both the organization and the visitor.
- must be able to be managed by the organization staff/volunteers
- must be responsive, meaning it should be readable on all kinds of devices: smart phones, tablets, and laptops.
- the lists of attractions, retail, restaurants, and lodging have links to existing websites.
- MSL create a simple, one page website for any businesses that do not have a website.

- Business page should have contact information, telephone numbers, and a few high quality photos of the business and email addresses. We suggest that a small fee be charged for this service.
- The web designer should also provide advice about key words for Lansing so that the website's Search Engine Optimization (SEO) will cause the website to come up first on common search engines.
- Numerous websites come up for a Lansing IA search. Try to get each to link to MSL tourism website
- Buy a domain name/ website URL
- Update tourist guide and reformat as a PDF document
- Someone needs to answer calls/emails promptly and do fulfillment of requests for information
- Include a visitor inquiry form to gather all the information needed

## **2. Inventory current lodging, build more**

- Current situation:
  - 132 beds in the greater Lansing area but some cabins can sleep up to 10 people and only represent 1 unit. No one listing of all the lodging in area exists.
  - They don't know about others so that limits referrals if they are booked.
  - Few lodging partners use the State (free), County (fee) or Regional (fee) tourism websites to generate bookings.
  - Not all lodging facilities have websites.
  - Some use online reservation services, but not all.
  - Some have sophisticated websites or 360 degree videos of their facilities, others not.
- Lodging owners need to get to know each other better so that they can organize to market and expand their businesses.

### **3. You need money to promote Lansing**

- Need money to organize, market, and promote the variety of resources here. The current Main Street Lansing budget cannot afford to take on all tourism activities.
- Hotel/motel tax should be increased from the current two percent (2%) to the maximum of seven percent (7%). Work to understand the process for passing a referendum if City Council agrees.
- Grant writing is an important skill that will be needed for the Heritage Tourism Coordinator.

### **4. Aggressively market what you have**

- Need long term effort to bring together all the component parts of a destination—the attractions, retail, restaurants, and lodging.
- The MSL Facebook page already is an excellent venue for promoting downtown to residents, seasonal or year round. Grow this base.
- Consistently add to your email lists to capture more names
- The visitor kiosk at the corner of Main Street and the Great River Road, near the public restrooms, is almost invisible to an area visitor
- Add another kiosk, perhaps smaller or of a traditional design, be placed in the Farmer's Market area in the middle of Main Street.
- Learn tourism industry and network with state, region, and county tourism entities..
- When listed on the National Register of Historic Places, obtain the brown Highway Signs from Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT). Discuss if there are opportunities to place the traditional Blue tourist oriented “directional signs” at major gateways into town.
- Work closely with Driftless Scenic Byway and IA Great River Road to maximize Lansing's relationship to these organizations and promotion of the town on their websites.
- Consider adding directional signage for pedestrians

- Finally, two businesses in town actively market their business on regional radio and especially television. Everyone benefits from Horsfalls Variety Store and the Lansing Furniture Store's aggressive advertising. Thank them for marketing Lansing for you.

#### **5. New tourism related business opportunities**

- two restaurant vacancies should be the focus of the Biz Ops Committee.
- The Main Street Iowa program has a sizable Challenge Grant program available that might be useful for an entrepreneur who wants to build an additional boat launch in the downtown.
- encourage businesses to offer and post regular open hours.
- Ask Jim to discuss ERSI with committee

#### **6. Committee help to reorient their work plans**

- the committees must review their work plans and add more tourist-oriented activities.
- refashion some existing events to become more tourist-oriented.
- At least one more retail event should be organized for the height of the visitor season.
- The National Register Nomination is a critical tool to use to interpret downtown Lansing for ordinary visitors.

#### **7. Start collecting tourism statistics, learn about the cultural and heritage traveler.**

- Track economic impact of tourism to chart your progress and prove to others that the increase in spending in the community is real and measurable.
- Work with the County and Regional Tourism Partners to understand how they track economic impact of visitation and set up a simple local model to use in the coming years.
- Virtually all of the recreational partners said they collect information. Ask for copies of these visitor stats so you can learn what numbers get collected, and understand the cumulative impact of visitor spending in the region.

- Both Carrie Koelker and Shawna suggested towns to visit to get insights about how these communities developed their visitor attractions into a destination:: Guttenberg, Decorah and West Branch IA, a Main Street Iowa communities.
- cultural heritage travelers are a lucrative market. These visitors spend more than other visitors. The cultural and heritage traveler market is important to Lansing and to other historic sites and communities along the Driftless Scenic Byway. 78% of all US leisure travelers participate in cultural and/or heritage activities while traveling, translating into 118.3 million adults each year.
- In 2013 this visitor segment was studied. That study confirms that the cultural and heritage traveler generates over 90 percent of the economic benefit of all U.S. leisure travelers.” In the 2013 study the total trip spending by cultural and heritage travelers was \$1,319 versus \$994 in 2009.
- The 2013 study found that cultural and heritage travelers are more likely to participate in culinary activities, such as sampling artisan food and wines, attending food and wine festivals, visiting farmers’ markets, shopping for gourmet foods, and enjoying unique dining experiences as well as fine dining.
- Other cultural and heritage activities identified by travelers include visiting historic sites (66%); attending historical re-enactments (64%); visiting art museums/galleries (54%); attending an art/craft fair or festival (45%); attending a professional dance performance (44%); visiting state/national parks (41%); shopping in museum stores (32%); and exploring urban neighborhoods (30%).
- The vast majority of these travelers (65%) say that they seek travel experiences where the “destination, its buildings and surroundings have retained their historic character.”
- Cultural and heritage travelers as a whole are more frequent travelers, reporting an average of 5.01 leisure trips in the past 12 months versus non-cultural/heritage travelers with 3.98 trips.

- More than half of cultural/heritage travelers agree that they prefer their leisure travel to be educational and nearly half said they spend more money on cultural and heritage activities.
- They are also likely to travel farther to get the experiences they seek: about half of most recent overnight leisure trips were 500 miles or more from home. More than a third say they traveled between 100 and 300 miles for a day trip.
- For Lansing to thrive, more effort must be made to create tourism products—tours, events ,brochures --with plenty of content about the history of the community and your historic architecture. Yes you need a “one stop shop” on your web site and at the repurposed Main Street Lansing office as your visitor

#### Priority tasks

#### Short term: Complete by October 28, 2014 (listed in order of importance)

- Hire and train a new part time Main Street Lansing Program Director
- Finish MSL website and launch.
- Investigate increasing the current hotel/motel tax to seven (7%) percent with City Council members.
- Create a work plan for how you are going to raise funds for a part time Heritage Tourism Coordinator.
- Have Carrie Koelker come back to meet with all committees about inserting more tourism related activities into new or existing work plans.
- Host a meeting with all lodging establishments. Encourage the lodging businesses to list their lodging facility on the State website and plan a FAM (familiarization) tour so they see each other’s venue to facilitate referrals. Consider creating a task force for lodging businesses to encourage this group to organize and undertake tasks they need, such as coop marketing/advertising.

#### Medium term: Complete by January 2015 (in no order of importance)

- Update and redesign the MSL tourism brochure. Reformat it as a PDF document so that it can be printed from the new website.

- Contact Iowa Department of Transportation and begin discussions about placing brown historic district signs at all the entrances to town. Also discuss any blue directional signs needed or any additional brown signs needed in town. Start the work to implement this.
- Rebrand the Main Street office as the Lansing Visitor Center. You will need a new sign on the storefront glass, more tourism brochures and racks. The visitor center should be staffed with volunteers in the spring/summer/fall seasons, 7 days a week.
- Plan and host a celebration about designation of downtown Lansing as a National Register Historic District.
- Identify interpretive opportunities for next summer about downtown's architecture, implement this work plan.
- Update the GIS asset map with popups about all the historic buildings listed on the National Register. Include photos and information from the National Register nomination as the popup.
- Have new or revised work plans in place for every committee to include visitors as a priority.
- Meet all the tourism representatives at State, Regional, and County levels, to discuss Lansing's needs, and get their advice.
- Have Katelyn Rutledge, the MSI Design specialist come to Lansing to talk about the implications of establishing a local preservation ordinance in Lansing, and projects others have used to interpret their downtowns to visitors.
- Have Jim Thompson come to discuss the latest ERSI figures and how to recruit to fill the vacant spaces in town for visitor centered businesses.
- Create a work plan for one more special event for visitors in June or early July.
- Consider offering one new retail event during summer 2015, develop a work plan in the next six months, implement in June or July.
- Review the events calendar, and determine whether some events, especially the Open Houses should be rethought or eliminated.

- Collect all of the economic impact and visitor studies from all of the partners who attended the Focus group meetings, and from the State, Region, and County tourism offices. Digest this information and make a report on the potential economic impact of tourism on the greater Lansing Region.
- Identify at least one more fun fundraising event to undertake during summer 2015, develop a work plan.

**Long term: Complete by August 1, 2015 (in no order of importance)**

- Institute a 7% Hotel/Motel Tax, dedicate the maximum amount of those funds for marketing Lansing as a four season destination and for hiring the Heritage Tourism Coordinator.
- Host a fun fundraising event to raise at least \$2500 net.
- Attend State and Regional tourism conferences, network actively at them.
- Fund and hire a part-time Heritage Tourism Coordinator.
- Have a fully functioning Visitor Center in the front of the Main Street office, staffed by volunteers in spring, summer, and fall, 7 days a week.
- Secure a tourism grant to print the tourism brochure and hire a distribution company to make sure that the brochure is placed in all the visitor centers in the region and at all the lodging facilities in the greater Lansing Area.

**Appendices are rich with statistics and information that will be helpful.**