

Chapter 16

Tourism

A. OVERVIEW

Tourism was a \$3 billion industry for the State of West Virginia in 2002. West Virginia enjoyed an 8.5% increase in visitors in 2002 making it among the largest growth market in tourism east of the Mississippi. The City of Fairmont has many of the necessary assets available to make the most of a growing tourism industry. The Marion County Convention and Visitors Bureau is the vanguard tourism organization for the City of Fairmont and Marion County. The CVB aggressively markets our attractions and activities through many channels, and provides information for visitors and residents on a variety of leisure, and recreational events and activities. However, more can be accomplished to promote tourism in Fairmont through a systematic planning of tourism strategies and a concerted marshalling of resources to set the strategies in motion. While tourism encompasses many varied issues and activities, this plan will focus on the following components of tourism in Fairmont.

- Attractions, Accommodations and Activities
- Reception Services
- Tourist related facilities and services

A thorough examination of these components as they relate to the City of Fairmont will aid in our attempt to tap into this growth industry.

B. GOALS AND ACTIONS

Goals and actions relative to Tourism must strengthen Fairmont's position as a destination for tourism.

Goal:

Promote travel and tourism throughout the Fairmont region, so that the economic benefit from tourism will enhance the quality of life in Fairmont

Actions:

- Discover, develop, and promote Fairmont's attractions, and events as a tourist destination, and promote Fairmont as a quality residential community.
- Increase public awareness that tourism makes a major contribution to the local economy and the social well being of the area.
- Provide recreational opportunities for visitors and residents.
- Adopt strategies to promote tourism as a means of expanding Fairmont's tax base.
- Coordinate efforts of the City government, local business, and tourism organizations to accomplish our listed actions.
- Recognize the value of heritage tourism, and its role in growing our local tourism industry.

C. EXISTING CONDITIONS

While the city has some a good foundation to grow its tourism industry, two conspicuous shortfalls to Fairmont’s tourism infrastructure are the lack of a large-scale hotel / conference center, and the lack of recreational boating facilities.

Tourism Market

A Travel Information Survey conducted by The Convention and Visitors Bureau of Marion County Inc. in March 2004 will provide data to the Convention and Visitors Bureau to be used to evaluate target markets. This data was collected via mail survey from persons who requested visitor information form April 1, 2003 through August 31, 2003 in response to ads placed in two publications: Great Vacations Get-A-Way and West Virginia Wild and Wonderful. Questionnaires were also sent to individuals requesting information via the CVB’s website.

There were no follow up letters to prompt additional responses, and a summary of the survey data is listed below.

Those visiting our area were from:

1	MD	1	Medina	OH	
1	Baltimore	MD	1	Pickerington	OH
1	Columbia	MD	1	Quaker City	OH
1	Franklin	NC	1		PA
1	Emerson	NJ	1	Bethel Park	PA
1	Lumberton	NJ	1	Duncansville	PA
1	Middletown	NJ	1	Elizabethtown	PA
1	Morganville	NJ	1	Erie	PA
1	Clarence	NY	1	Lititz	PA
1	Center	NY	1	Newtown	PA
1	Flushing	NY	1	Philadelphia	PA
2		OH	3	Pittsburgh	PA
1	Belleville	OH	1	Royersford	PA
1	Cleveland	OH	1		TX
2	Columbus	OH	1	Katy	TX
1	East Canton	OH	1	New Boston	TX
1	Elyria	OH	1	Fredericksburg	VA
1	Fairfield	OH	1	Front Royal	VA
			1	Luray	VA

SURVEYS



Tourism

Mailed	1125		48		294		1467	
Returned	113	10%	9	19%	42	14%	164	11%
VISITED								
Yes	22	19%	5	56%	14	33%	41	25%
No	91	81%	4	44%	28	67%	123	75%
VISITED								
Spring	4	17%	0	0%	2	12%	6	13%
Summer	8	35%	3	50%	10	59%	21	46%
Fall	10	43%	3	50%	5	29%	18	39%
Winter	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%
NO. IN PARTY								
Adults	43	81%	10	77%	41	84%	94	82%
Children	10	19%	3	23%	8	16%	21	18%
TRANSPORTATION								
Car	21	95%	5	100%	12	75%	38	88%
Bus	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Plane	0	0%	0	0%	2	13%	2	5%
Other	1	5%	0	0%	2	13%	3	7%
NIGHTS STAYED								
1	7	35%	1	25%	2	15%	10	27%
2-3	10	50%	2	50%	6	46%	18	49%
4-5	2	10%	1	25%	4	31%	7	19%
6+	1	5%	0	0%	1	8%	2	5%
MONEY SPENT PER DAY								
Food								
\$20-30	6	29%	1	25%	9	64%	16	41%
\$31-50	9	43%	1	25%	2	14%	12	31%
\$51-100	4	19%	1	25%	1	7%	6	15%
\$101-150	2	10%	1	25%	1	7%	4	10%
\$150+	0	0%	0	0%	1	7%	1	3%
Lodging								
\$20-30	0	0%	0	0%	3	25%	3	9%
\$31-50	3	17%	1	33%	2	17%	6	18%
\$51-100	10	56%	1	33%	5	42%	16	48%
\$101-150	5	28%	0	0%	0	0%	5	15%
\$150+	0	0%	1	33%	2	17%	3	9%

Entertainment/Recreation



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\$20-30	6	38%	1	33%	2	25%	9	33%
\$31-50	7	44%	0	0%	3	38%	10	37%
\$51-100	3	19%	1	33%	1	13%	5	19%
\$101-150	0	0%	1	33%	1	13%	2	7%
\$150+	0	0%	0	0%	1	13%	1	4%
Shopping								
\$20-30	10	56%	3	75%	4	57%	17	59%
\$31-50	2	11%	1	25%	1	14%	4	14%
\$51-100	3	17%	0	0%	2	29%	5	17%
\$101-150	3	17%	0	0%	0	0%	3	10%
\$150+	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Historic Sites								
\$20-30	5	50%	1	100%	5	71%	11	61%
\$31-50	3	30%	0	0%	2	29%	5	28%
\$51-100	2	20%	0	0%	0	0%	2	11%
\$101-150	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
\$150+	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Other								
\$20-30	4	50%	1	100%	0	0%	5	50%
\$31-50	2	25%	0	0%	0	0%	2	20%
\$51-100	1	13%	0	0%	1	100%	2	20%
\$101-150	1	13%	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%
\$150+	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
OVERALL EXPERIENCE								
Excellent	14	64%	1	20%	8	57%	23	56%
Good	7	32%	4	80%	6	43%	17	41%
Fair	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2%
Bad	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

This survey did not indicate what attractions and / activities were visited. It did show however that 44% of the survey sample were between the ages 51-65, the next largest segment of the sample were between the ages of 36-50 with 30% of the survey sample. The survey also showed that 41% of the survey sample earned above \$55,000 per year.

The survey information indicates that most visitors to Fairmont travel from neighboring states primarily from the North and North East. There are indications of some travelers from as far South as Texas, with some visitors from Virginia and North Carolina. However, the survey indicates that the majority tourism market lies within geographic areas one to six hours of driving distance. Additionally, with I-79 in such close proximity and serving as a route south to the Carolinas and Florida, efforts are being pursued to develop a Canadian market.

Marketing and Tourism Development Organizations



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Tourism development and marketing within this geographic area has been primarily the responsibility of the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Marion County, Inc. (CVB). The CVB is a non-profit marketing and sales organization whose sole purpose is to take the leadership role in developing the area's tourism industry and advancing the image of Marion County. CVB works closely with, and co-ops advertising with, other CVBs in the region. . The CVBs include those in Greater Morgantown, Bridgeport /Clarksburg, and Lewis County. The Marion County CVB also works closely with the West Virginia Division of Tourism, the Department of Natural Resources, and other State CVB Directors in a joint effort to promote West Virginia and Marion County.

Attractions, Accommodations and Activities

I. Attractions

Fairmont State University

This is a four-year undergraduate, and post graduate institution of nearly 7,000 students offering more than one hundred diverse academic programs. Its eighty acre campus is located in the City of Fairmont and includes seventeen buildings and a one-room Schoolhouse-Museum, which is open April through October. The University is located on Locust Avenue in Fairmont and is currently implementing a substantial capital improvements plan, which includes a new Parking Garage, a modern 400 unit dormitory, and a state of the art indoor recreation facility. FSU is classified as a NCAA Division 2 School for athletics and is home to the Fairmont Community Orchestra, the Town and Gown Players community theatre, the James David Brooks Memorial Gallery, and the West Virginia Folklife Center.

The Father's Day Church (Central United Methodist Church)

This was the descendent church of William Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church where the first observance of Father's Day was held on 5 July 1908. It is located at 301 Fairmont Avenue.

High Gate Carriage House

The High Gate Carriage House (architectural style is Tudor Revival) including the elegant grounds, has been restored by Friends of High Gate, Inc. The galleries can be utilized as a community educational resource.

Marion County Museum

This museum is the home of the Marion County Historical Society. It is located beside the Courthouse on Adams Street in Fairmont. Tours and scheduled programs are offered on preserving Marion County's heritage.

Prickett's Fort State Park

This historic fort was originally built in 1774 as a refuge fort on the frontier of Virginia. It was reconstructed in 1976. Costumed interpreters recreate the eighteenth century lifestyle



through the demonstration of colonial crafts. The MCPARC Trail terminates at the Park. This will be the connecting node for the Rail Trail through Fairmont and the Mon River Trail System.

East Marion Park Complex and Wave Tek Pool/Water Slide

The thirty-two acre park offers tennis, jogging trails, pavilions, playgrounds, bocce courts, horseshoe courts, picnicking, miniature golf, sand volleyball, the famous Wave Tek Pool, water slide, and a new handicapped accessible playground. On the park grounds near the entrance will be the location for the New CVB Office and Visitor's Center upon completion of the Gateway Connector.

Women's Club of Fairmont (Thomas W. Fleming Home)

This beautiful structure was built in 1901. It contains much of the original furniture and features of the period. The facility is available for private dinners and receptions. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is located at 300 First Street in Fairmont.

The Robert H. Mollohan/Jefferson Street Bridge

This structure was built in the early 1900s. The bridge has been completely restored. The restored bridge is a structure unlike any other in the State.

Mary Lou Retton Youth Park

This park was named after the 1984 Olympic Gold Medallist from Marion County. It has twenty-five rolling acres, four baseball fields, one tee ball field, one football field, one pavilion, playground, picnic area, tennis courts, basketball courts, and West Virginia Miner's Memorial.

West Fork River Trail

This 16 mile pedestrian/bicycle/equestrian trail extends from Shinnston to Fairmont via the abandoned Monongahela Rail Line. The trail features rural and natural surroundings with views of the West Fork River. There are also many remnants of the coal industry that was prevalent in the region.

MCPARC Trail

Starting from a newly developed trail head on Winfield Street, the MCPARC Trail is a 2 ½ mile pedestrian/bicycle trail that passes through the Meredith Tunnel en route to Pricketts Fort following the abandoned B&O rail line.

East West Stadium Complex

Built by the WPA during "the great depression" this facility serves as the home field for Fairmont Senior and East Fairmont High's football and soccer teams. It is also the location of the 12th street pool.

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I-79 Technology Park

The I-79 High Technology Park is a technology based office park located along Interstate-79 and situated on over 500 acres property. It is anchored by the Alan B. Mollohan Innovation Center, and the other tenants include: NASA, Lockheed Martin, the Internet Fraud Complaint Center and ISR.

II. Accommodations

Avenue Motel

This motel is located at 816 Fairmont Avenue.

Country Club Motor Lodge

This lodge offers thirty-six units. It is located near Fairmont State College at 1499 Locust Avenue.

Travel Lodge

This lodge offers forty-nine guest rooms, one meeting room, pool, picnic tables, BBQ restaurant and lounge. It is conveniently located near Fairmont State University, Fairmont General Hospital, restaurants and shopping. Its address is 1117 Fairmont Avenue.

III. Activities

Three Rivers Festival

This annual festival is held for four day period in May and recently celebrated it's 25th anniversary. The festival features a pageant, parade, and carnival.

Fourth of July Celebration

A growing annual event held on Independence Day in Palatine Park. Spearheaded by Mainstreet Fairmont, and the City of Fairmont the event features live music, food and fireworks.

Johnnie Johnson Blues and Jazz Festival

This weekend long music festival is named for Fairmont native Johnnie Johnson, whose musical collaboration with lyricist / guitarist Chuck Berry is credited with defining the American music style of Rock n Roll. Many internationally renown Blues and Jazz artists perform at this festival, which features Johnnie and his band.

Relay for Life



The annual charity event benefiting cancer research draws thousands of people from the area for a night of entertainment, fellowship and one of the best fireworks shows in the area.

D. BASIC ISSUES

The opportunities for tourism to grow in Fairmont are many and varied. Many of these opportunities will rely on the successful implementation of actions of this comprehensive plan. There are also some issues that are related to the tourism component of this plan but are better served as action items in other components of this comp plan.

The lack of defined gateways that indicate when tourists have arrived or left the city. This item will be addressed in the Community Design component.

The lack of a clearly defined pedestrian oriented transportation network. This is clearly a Transportation action.

The need to recruit retail and other tourism related businesses to downtown. This will be addressed in the Renewal Redevelopment component.

Tourism involves close contact between residents and visitors. The socio-economic impacts of tourism on existing residents should be positive. This is a function of social sensitivity to tourism development and offers guidance during the drafting of tourism policy. In this regard, guidelines for tourism development should be followed which ensure socially sensitive tourism development. There are nine guidelines which are customarily followed, and should be adhered to, as Fairmont and Marion County pursue their tourism development objectives:

1. Fairmont residents must be shown the socio-economic significance of the tourism industry through promotional campaigns;
2. A tourism plan should be developed, based on overall development goals and priorities identified by residents of Fairmont.
3. The promotion of local attractions should be subject to endorsement by Fairmont residents;
4. Coordinated public and private efforts are needed to maintain the integrity and quality of local opportunities for recreation and relaxation;
5. Fairmont's local residents should have greater involvement in the development of local tourism so that their quality of life is respected;
6. Local capital, entrepreneurial ability, and labor should be invested in local tourism development;
7. Opportunities should be provided to obtain broad-based community participation in tourist events and activities;
8. Destination areas in Fairmont and the 1-79 Corridor should adopt or refine themes and

events that reflect their history, lifestyles, and geographic setting; and

9. Local growth problems should be mitigated before proceeding with any further increases in tourism activity.

These guidelines seek to balance the aspirations of Fairmont residents with the type and pace of tourism development undertaken. Furthermore, by considering the social impacts of various tourism development proposals in terms of a community's social sensitivity to change and development, it should be possible to make resident and tourism industry objectives more compatible.

The conservation of the historical and cultural heritage of the area should be a priority as the City evolves. These features comprise major attractions for tourists. In this regard, two cultural factors require planning consideration. These factors are the authenticity of the cultural experience on the part of the visitor, and the long-term cultural viability of the destination area in the face of tourism. The two involve the presentation and preservation of a destination's cultural heritage. Furthermore, the role tourism plays in these two factors depends, to a large extent, on the local sensitivity and attitudes regarding the local cultural heritage. While tourism is an agent of change, and probably the most visible, it is not always the prime cause of change. Most of the country is gradually being assimilated into a consumer goods economy linked together by a growing communications and transport network. The general result has been increased acculturation where the traditional historical and cultural heritage has been absorbed or has borrowed facets of homogenized world.

Whenever possible, infrastructure (roads, water and sewer, parks, and community buildings) should be multipurpose, serving general community needs as well as tourism needs. In an industry with a great reliance on public attractions and amenities, in addition to a dependence on the goodwill of local residents, the distribution of benefits needs to be more widespread and public than in the case of a traditional industry. The whole community should be viewed as shareholders and should participate in the dividends of public infrastructure investments and the use of public goods.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

Short Range (2005-2008)

- The Convention and Visitors Bureau of Marion County should continue to work closely with, the Convention and Visitors Bureaus in the Morgantown area, Bridgeport/Clarksburg area, and Lewis County to promote the Fairmont area both locally and regionally.
- Fairmont should continue its efforts to complete the West Fairmont Trail from the terminus of the West Fork River Trail to Downtown Fairmont near Mid City Parking Lot.
- Millions of dollars were invested on the Robert H. Mollohan/ Jefferson Street Bridge. The City should promote the bridge and build upon the success the restoration project.
- The City of Fairmont, along with the Tourism Development Organizations, should instill a sense of pride in the community among residents and business owners.

- Fairmont should bolster its identity and sense of place with entrance markers in neighborhoods. Signs should be improved to help direct outsiders as well as residents. These signs should be well landscaped and tastefully designed to reflect the architectural character of the community.
- A clean-up program should be developed for each of the gateway neighborhoods of Fairmont.

Medium Range (2008-2011)

- Fairmont is a relatively small town and has a lot to offer in terms of cultural events, hospitable people, beautiful scenery, and four distinct seasons. All these positive attributes should be exploited, packaged, and promoted regionally.
- The Rail Trail should be extended across the Monongahela River to the East Side of Fairmont at Palatine Park. This will add to the overall usefulness of the trail and provide an additional link to the trail through Fairmont that will connect the West Fork River Trail to the MCPARC Trail.
- A theme should be developed to promote the City. There should be a promotional effort by the City to promote the Fairmont region to consumers, residents, businesses, and visitors. A coordinated campaign should be undertaken to promote the area. Main Street's theme could be carried further, to be captured on all marketing tools, such as a walking tour maps and brochures.
- To attract new residents and inform existing ones, the Convention and Visitors Bureau should prepare a promotional pamphlet that includes a demographic profile of the Fairmont area to include information that is not covered by the Chamber Member Directory. This material should be distributed to residents, prospective homeowners, and realtors working in the area.
- A basic tourism planning principle is the establishment of one or more gateways (major access points) through which tourists enter and leave the City of Fairmont. Areas near the gateways should be staging areas that include tourist facilities. These facilities serve as distribution centers for tourists traveling to other areas in Marion County or the region. A facility should be developed at the proposed CVB office as part of the Gateway Connector Project.
- The City should cluster attractions and develop secondary attractions when possible near major ones to encourage tourists to extend their stay in the area.

Long Range (2011-2015)

- The Fairmont Riverfront should be developed as a mixed-use site to provide ample opportunity for tourism related businesses and recreational amenities that will create a unique destination location that fully utilizes the natural assets of the location.

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- The Rail Trail should be extended through the East Side of Fairmont to create the link from the West Fork River Trail to the MCPARC Trail, which will continue on to the Mon River Trail.
- With the recent influx of high tech businesses in the Fairmont area, increased attention should be paid to Fairmont's Downtown Historic District and the Merchant Street shopping area to make it attractive for tourists. The downtown has indicated positive economic growth in bringing back both retail and back-office businesses. The supporting service industry should be developed to cater to those who work in downtown and tourists.