

Thanks for allowing us the time to share our Tourism Committee Strategic Plan with you. Deb Carter - Chair of the Strategic Plan Committee was going to make this presentation but was unable to be here today. So I will be presenting this in her absence.

The Committee did a great job! Plan discussions started at our January meeting and it was completed in October. The Plan includes:

Introduction

Info about our destination

Mission Statement

Committee Structure

Visitor Profile

Marketing

Tourism "Product"

Partnerships

Statistics

Tourism Office

Strengths & Challenges

Short Term Goals

Long Term Goals

Short Term Goals include recommendations in the following areas:

Marketing

Funding

Destination Advancement

Partnership

Advocacy & Education

And one primary goal

Primary Goal:

The primary goal is for Tourism to become a County Commissioner priority, in an effort to foster a stronger local economy.

A Strategy:

Tourism to become a department

The committee has discussed this many times in the past and believes now is the time to raise the profile of tourism in Cecil County. We

believe making tourism a department will allow it to be more effective than its current framework as part of economic development.

When you have multiple focus areas in one department, one can naturally end up being the priority, and the others can often be overshadowed. Economic Development focuses on recruitment and retention of business....as they should! But with that focus, tourism can often end up an after-thought.

That's not said as a complaint. It's totally understandable. Economic Development SHOULD focus its effort on its top priority, without having to worry about anything else. But that can be unfortunate for tourism which is also an economic engine for the county. Tourism is a "good news" industry even in the midst of a tough economy. But we need to raise the profile and awareness. Being one of your focus areas, as a department, will help raise the profile, without increasing the size of local government.

Economic Development and tourism efforts often go in opposite directions. While Economic Development focuses on people who live and work in Cecil County, Tourism focuses on attracting people who do not live and work in Cecil County (though local citizens do absolutely benefit from tourism jobs, local tax revenues, and our wonderful quality of life which visitors support).

The Economic Development department slogan "Live Work & Play" is counter intuitive to the tourism effort. We can't use that slogan, because our primary target audience doesn't live or work in the county. Our target audience is the visitor who comes to the county and brings money with them. We want them to spend lots and then leave. We don't have to provide them with expensive county resident services, or educate their children. This is the great news about tourists. We make money from non Cecil County tax payers.

The background and skill set of Econ Dev directors is also very different than the skill set of a tourism director. We believe an economic development person should oversee economic development, and a tourism director should oversee tourism.

I want to stress however, that this request for tourism to be a department is NOT about people. It's not about me/the tourism coordinator!! It's not about past econ dev directors. It's not about whoever the new economic development director will be. It's only about what's best for tourism, and how it can be most effective for the county.

In the state of MD there isn't one tourism structure that works best for all. Of the tourism offices that are part of county government, more are their own department. 5 are part of economic development, and 8 are their own department, including one that oversees economic development.

Changing into 2 departments should be fairly easy to accomplish since both offices currently operate independently. Tourism becoming a department would not increase the size of local government because tourism wouldn't need additional staff or equipment. And it should not be difficult to separate monies committed to tourism from the department's budget.

We believe this is the time for this request. We're already in the midst of a transition in Economic Development so believe this is the right time for this discussion and decision. During the interview process for an Econ Dev director, candidates should be given a true picture of what their office structure will look like if they get the job. Since tourism was never mentioned in the job description, there should be no expectation at this point of tourism being part of their office, but they should certainly know one way or the other.

If tourism becomes a department, the new Econ Dev director can immediately jump in and fully focus on recruitment and retention of businesses.

In closing, Econ Dev and tourism are both economic engines. When you have 2 engines on the same train, only one can be in the lead. The other is pulled along and put into action when needed. The engines could certainly be more productive if each were put at the head of their own train. A lot more could get accomplished. Tourism & Econ Dev should

ALWAYS work together closely. They should always be partners. But we believe that being two departments and equal partners can set each up for greater success.