

Fluvanna County

Tourism Strategic Plan

Adopted 2018 – Revised 2023



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Officially Adopted by:
Fluvanna County Board of Supervisors
December 6, 2023

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Executive Summary

Tourism revenue supports goods, services, facilities and transportation that benefit Fluvanna residents and the surrounding region. Tourism promotion and the quality of life improvements that tourism spending supports, also attract many other types of business development to Fluvanna County.

Fluvanna has distinctive assets and has great potential for growth in tourism and recreation. Fluvanna County recognizes the importance of tourism and the economic development components that enhance the quality of life for its residents. The goal of this strategic plan is to communicate the tourism mission, vision, goals and objectives of the County. This strategic plan will be used to guide the actions and activities of the Community Development and Economic Development departments, Pleasant Grove House Museum and Welcome Center staff, and stakeholders and partners in Fluvanna County.

Tourism Mission & Vision

Mission Statement

Fluvanna County Tourism will facilitate economic benefits through capitalizing on the natural, historic, and recreational resources that draw visitors and enhance their experiences.

Vision Statement

Fluvanna County will be recognized as a travel and retreat destination that welcomes tourists through scenic gateways to a place that maintains its small town charm, unique heritage, rich history, and natural beauty.

Stakeholders, Supporters and Staff

The following revised and updated plan is the result of the involvement of the members of the EDTAC (Economic Development and Tourism Advisory Council) representatives to encourage county government, business owners, organization leaders, and other area stakeholders to act upon an interest in the future of tourism in Fluvanna County. The following individuals participated in the research and development of this plan in 2018:

Economic Development and Tourism Advisory Committee

Linda Bernick	Palmyra District Citizen Rep
Andy Sorrell	Columbia District Citizen Rep
Rudy Garcia	Global View Capital Advisors
Pamela Dempsey	Fluvanna County Chamber of Commerce
Wendy Edwards	Cunningham District Citizen Rep
Michael Feazel	Rivanna District Citizen Rep
Tricia Johnson	Fluvanna County Historical Society
Curtis Putnam	Fluvanna County Economic Development Authority
Dave Sagarin	Fork Union District Citizen Rep

Fluvanna County Staff

Jason Smith	Director of Economic and Community Development
Aaron Spitzer	Director of Parks and Recreation
Patricia Eager	Board of Supervisors

The following individuals participated in updating and revising the plan in spring 2023:

Economic Development and Tourism Advisory Committee

Ben Shaw	At-Large Representative
Kathleen Kilpatrick	At-Large Representative
Catherine Tatro	At-Large Representative
Suzy Morris	At-Large Representative
Peggy Shanklin	At-Large Representative
George Goin	Farm Bureau Representative
Nina Monroe	Business Representative
Tricia Johnson	Fluvanna County Historical Society Representative
Jeffrey Potter	Economic Development Authority Representative

Fluvanna County Staff

Jennifer Schmack	Director of Economic Development
Aaron Spitzer	Director of Parks and Recreation
Patricia Eager	Board of Supervisors

Situational Analysis

Planning participants devised an updated Situational Analysis of tourism to help determine the goals and objectives of this plan. The process identified current tourism assets, target customers, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, as well as an analysis of tourism infrastructure, tourism policy, and marketing strategies.

GAP Analysis: The following are gaps identified with the Fluvanna tourism product that reflect the categories of Dining, Lodging, Retail, Special Events and Attractions.

Gaps in Dining & Restaurants:

- Businesses that stay open on Mondays
- Coffee shops, bakery, brewery, winery in the Palmyra Village area
- Night Life

Gaps in Lodging:

- Not enough bed and breakfasts, and no hotel or conference center

Gaps in Retail:

- Specialty shops
- Hardware stores and outfitters for fishing, hunting, rafting and boating
- Boutique-style businesses aligned with key business clusters which are attractive to visitors (i.e. recreation, artisan, apparel, nature) that are successfully operating with consistent business hours
- Hidden Artisan community

Gaps in Special Events & Attractions:

- Summer and Winter events
- Palmyra Village tours and special events, including Holiday events
- Aquatic Center
- Sports complex with soccer, baseball and softball fields with adequate parking, lighting, and entrance/exit logistics
- Historic venue programming and marketing
- Established businesses offering drop-in classes and other learning opportunities (i.e. pottery, painting, crafting, cooking, hands on experiences)
- Self-guided drives and walking tours and trails
- Coordinated programming and marketing

Situational Analysis – Premier Tourism Assets

The following is a list of the determined premier assets for Fluvanna County, which are the resources that are most likely to be featured in advertising and promotion. A complete inventory of all tourism assets has been completed and is included as Attachment A.

Within the County:

- Central location within Virginia
- Access to major transportation routes
- Historic sites (e.g. Old Stone Jail, Pleasant Grove House Museum, Historic Courthouse)
- Agritourism (e.g. Two Wineries, Fruit Hill Orchard, Layz S Ranch, Sacred Acres)
- Events: County Fair
- Water recreation: three rivers along with 2 lakes
- Trails (Hike, bike & equestrian)
- Carysbrook Performing Arts Center
- US Bike 76
- Scenic Beauty
- Historic properties visible from public roads
- Artistic Community
- Black History
- Bremono Community

Within close proximity:

- Charlottesville
- World heritage sites (Monticello and UVa)
- Civil war sites (Richmond battlefields, Appomattox - Museum)
- Virginia State Capital

Related Regional Assets:

- Monticello
- Montpelier
- James Monroe's Highland
- Monticello Wine Trail
- Shenandoah National Park
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Appalachian trail
- US Bike 76
- James River

Situational Analysis - Target Market

Defining a target market for Fluvanna County tourism information and promotions has two primary motives. It will drive the tone and scope of materials, and it will drive the selection of media and markets for distribution.

The following target customers were identified by the stakeholders as individuals or groups that may have an interest in visiting Fluvanna County based on the review of the area assets/tourism sites:

Target Audience

- **By age:**

- Silent Generation – Born 1925 - 1945
- Baby Boomers - Born 1946 - 1964
- Generation X - Born 1965 - 1980
- Millennials - Born 1981 - 1996 (Particularly age 21 and over - legal age to visit wineries)
- Generation Z Born 1997 - 2013
- Young Families

- **By location:**

- Virginia
- North Carolina
- Maryland
- West Virginia
- Washington, D.C.

- **Outdoor Recreation Enthusiasts**

- Equestrian enthusiasts
- Canoes/kayakers/tubers
- Hikers
- Birders
- Photographers
- Mountain Bikers
- Golfers
- Fishermen
- Hunters

- **By Groups:**

- Monticello Visitors
- Girlfriend Getaways
- Day Trippers
- History and Heritage Enthusiasts
- Family reunions, weddings, graduations

- **By Travel Route/ Scenic Drives:**

- Monticello Visitors
- Blue Ridge Parkway Riders
- Interstate 64 Travelers
- US Bike 76
- Carters Mountain Visitors
- Route 15, 6 & 53, Union Mills.

- **By Niche/Interest**

- History and Heritage Enthusiasts (Pleasant Grove House Museum & Farm Museum, Courthouse, Village)
- Education Sector (students, alumni, parents)
- Visitors drawn by music
- Black history and heritage interest
- Genealogical researchers
- Agritourism (wineries, breweries, farmers market, etc.)
- Green or eco-travelers
- Architects, architectural students and architectural enthusiasts (Old Stone Jail, Old Courthouse, Bremon, etc.)

Situational Analysis - SWOT

The discussion and identification of SWOT - S (Strengths) W (Weaknesses) O (Opportunities) and T (Threats) - was used as a key method in developing a tourism plan for Fluvanna County. Goals, Objectives, Targets, Measures, and Initiatives were all determined later, after careful consideration of the SWOT analysis developed by EDTAC members:

Strengths

- Pleasant Grove House Museum and Welcome Center
- Scenic entrance corridors and open land
- Unique, friendly, talented citizens
- Public Water access points: (3 along James, 1 along Hardware, 2 along Rivanna)
- Pleasant Grove Park - Athletic fields, 21 miles of multiuse biking, hiking, equestrian trails, Wildlife management area, 18 hole Disc Golf course, Picnic shelters and performance stage
- Central location, near Charlottesville, Monticello, Highland, Montpelier, etc.
- Proximity to Interstate 64, US 15, US 250, VA 6 and VA 53
- Growing winery industry (Currently have 2 with 2 more being established by 2021.)
- US Bike Route 76
- Central Virginia Sporting Clays
- Strong base of Black historic and cultural sites: Rosenwald Schools, Slave Chapel, cemeteries, churches, etc.
- Strong and diverse community leadership
- History and Heritage - Old Courthouse and Old Stone Jail, just 50 yards apart in the Village of Palmyra
- Camp Friendship
- Fork Union Military Academy
- Carysbrook Performing Arts Center
- Natural Assets - Scenic views, beauty, clean, natural green setting, foliage, peaceful, quiet, country, small town feel, wildlife, camping, hiking
- No Meals tax
- Lake Monticello's championship golf course'
- Dog Park, pet friendly place
- Historic sites visible from road

Weaknesses

- Not enough hotels or Bed and Breakfasts to promote overnight stays
- Lack of consistent communication with industry partners
- Limited budgets
- Cultural resistance to change
- No Meals and Lodging tax (Can facilitate tourism funding and accurate record keeping)
- Need consistent wayfinding (Signage)

- No permanent river outfitter in the County
- Limited available shopping/retail
- Volunteerism
- Poor cell phone reception in parts of the County
- Lack of cooperative advertising plan for small businesses
- Historic/tourism sites are fairly widely dispersed
- No measurable funding source for investments to drive tourism
- Historic sites that do exist are only open a few hours per week, are lightly staffed and are largely un-promoted
- The current museums in Fluvanna have only enough content for approximately 30-minute visits
- The feeling that some residents may be reluctant to encourage tourism, on the grounds that it might change the county, bring in new people or overwhelm local resources
- Nearest airport or passenger rail access is 45 minutes away
- Lack of cooperative product development

Opportunities

- Cooperative product development
- Utilize specific marketing avenues, both free and paid
- Partnerships to access grants and funding sources - Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC)
- Work closer with regional tourism groups to market and promote County
- Land is available for hotels and Bed and Breakfasts
- Collaboration with Monticello Wine Trail and many others
- Public/private partnership to maximize Pleasant Grove Park, e.g. sports tourism, equestrian events, etc.
- Farm Heritage Museum
- Work with local farmers to create a “petting zoo”/working farm, incorporating a pick-your-own/farm-to-table operation and other agritourist opportunities
- Virginia Century Farms, there are 13 in Fluvanna
- Support Fluvanna Artisan Trail
- Pleasant Grove Park’s outdoor stage, e.g. music concerts, regional festivals or regular series of weekly or monthly events using the stage or other facilities
- Create app-based self-driving tour of county historic sites and attractions
- Bremo Plantation, Bemo Bluff and the Slave Chapel as historic sites.
- Strong active descendant communities associated with Bremo and other large plantations and their remarkable leadership.
- Highlight the County sites associated with African American education including Rosenwald Schools (i.e. Dunbar, Hollywood, etc.), New Fork, Abrams, and others as identified.

- Architectural character of the Old Courthouse, Old Stone Jail, Bremon Slave Chapel and other locations that attract tourists and attention from architecture students, professors and other interested groups
- Proximity to Monticello
- Improve public access to the Rivanna and Hardware Rivers
- Cross-country US bicycle route 76 that passes through Fluvanna
- Expansion of existing trails into longer, more-friendly trail system for walking, horseback and/or bicycles, e.g. Virginia Capital Trail
- County has space and opportunities for additional niche restaurants and other businesses that offer activities such as kayaking, fly-fishing, paintball, etc.
- Creation of a specific tour guide and driving tour to the African American historic and cultural sites
- Dunbar Rosenwald School refurbished for touring, and Hollywood and other schools visible from the Right of Way
- Village of Palmyra has an opportunity to become more pedestrian friendly, while having all historic facilities open, augmented by antique and other touristy shops, cafes, etc. Possibly host horse-drawn carriage rides. (similar to a later-era Williamsburg)
- Restoration of Courthouse
- Tourism planning

Threats

- Weather conditions
- Economy
- Fuel Prices
- Lack of tourism industry
- Funding for tourism development, marketing and staff
- Local resistance to opportunity/change
- Continuing competition from nearby counties
- Insufficient Tourism Infrastructure (Zoning, lodging, taxes, etc.)
- Loss of scenic entrance corridors to insensitive planning

Strategic Path Forward

The following goals, objectives, targets and measures for the future were determined by careful review of the previous situational analysis:

Goal 1 – Build upon successful tourism marketing strategies and branding, e.g., tourism logo, rack card, and video.

- 1) Enhance the county's brand as an accessible adventure and event destination. Leverage the County's considerable outdoor recreational assets. Focus specifically on the Rivanna & James River experiences for visitors and residents.
- 2) Identify and secure funding for materials and programs above to be used in specific marketing and outreach, e.g. rack cards, website and social media.

Goal 2 – Evaluate needs of tourism infrastructure opportunities by focus areas: Outdoor Recreation, Arts, History, Black History and Culture, and Agribusiness.

- 1) Design consistent signage at county gateways (and crossways) denoting tourism opportunities. (e.g., Rivanna River Kayaking Trips, Rosenwald Schools, etc.) Seek grant (and/or sponsorship) funding to pay costs.
- 2) Research B&Bs ordinance updates, and pursue changes if needed. Provide listings.
- 3) Complete broadband in County. Firefly currently at approx. 80% completion. Will be complete by 2025, dependent on Dominion. Funding secured.
- 4) Update county website with tourism dedicated webpage.

Goal 3 – Increase the capacity of businesses and tourism activities in Fluvanna County

- 1) Conduct an organizational review to include comparisons of similar organizations.
- 2) Perform an analysis of staff time, personnel costs, advertising and overhead expense to recommend if more staff are needed, e.g. PT Coordinator, Partnership with Chamber, etc.
- 3) Earmark portion of meals and/or lodging tax collected to offset funds for tourism staff to implement tourism strategies.
- 4) Research grant opportunities through Rural Development, Virginia Tourism Corporation, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, etc. for product development and thematic programming.
- 5) Leverage local and regional community and governmental partnerships with, but not limited to: Chamber, Rotary, Historical Society, Rivanna Conservation Alliance, Master Naturalist, and local Scout groups.

Goal 4 – Create increased opportunities for current and potential tourism small businesses in the county through more effective and broader communication and awareness campaigns.

- 1) Provide training for businesses to learn how to master social media, website and other marketing techniques. Find communication specialist to do workshops to enhance business owners' skillset for effective marketing and increased sales.

- 2) Encourage use of a community calendar, e.g., "FindFluvanna.org", as a county-wide resource to promote the activities and events of tourism focused businesses, including hospitality and retail. Encourage residents to use the calendar as a first look to find things to do across the county.
- 3) Create tourism newsletter to highlight and promote tourism focused businesses and activities in Fluvanna County. Continue outreach to residents by promoting the newsletter in, and encourage sign ups to FAN mail (**Fluvanna Area News**), a weekly email featuring local events.
- 4) Provide assistance to coordinate marketing/advertising within cross themed programming among entities in the county and facilitate tours and events when possible.

Monitoring Progress

It is imperative that the plan be referenced consistently as related discussions and decisions are made. The Economic Development and Tourism Advisory Committee (EDTAC), business representatives, stakeholders, and other partners from both private and public sectors must take a leadership role in overseeing the execution of this plan. However, the Fluvanna Community and Economic Development Department is ultimately responsible for administering this program.

The initiatives of this plan were determined after careful consideration during the planning process and will serve as reference when gauging plan implementation performance. Fluvanna County staff shall develop an annual work plan that will ensure that all initiatives are reached. To encourage progress toward the established targets, this plan should be reviewed by County leadership and the EDTAC on a consistent basis. Upon review, any adjustments that need to be made to this plan will be considered. Once a majority of the targets have been met or three years has passed, a new/updated plan will be developed.

Summary

Using this plan as guidance, Fluvanna County is expected to make significant progress toward the development of tourism activity. Local Government support and stakeholder participation are required for this plan to be successful. Future assistance and contributions from various members of the tourism organizations, businesses, civic groups, and other interested partners will also be vital for continued success.

Appendix

Terms & Definitions

Cultural heritage tourism: A type of tourism in which visitors travel to a place to experience the stories and people of the past and present. This can include historic, cultural, and natural resources.

Goals: Broad statements of measurable outcomes to be achieved on behalf of customers.

Initiatives/Tasks: Specific programs, strategies and activities that will help you meet your performance targets.

Measures: Meaningful indicators that assess progress towards accomplishment of goals and objectives.

Mission Statement: Statement of purpose; fundamental reason for an organization's/tourism effort existence.

Objective: Statements of what you must do well or barriers that you must overcome to achieve a specific goal.

Opportunities: Factors or situations that exist beyond your organization that may have a favorable effect on it.

Strengths: Resources or capabilities that can be used to accomplish your mission.

Target: The numerical value of the performance measure you hope to achieve

Target Customers/Tourists: Any person, group or organization receiving that will utilize your tourism related product(s) and/or service(s).

Threats: Factors or situations that exist beyond your organization that can negatively affect it

Tourism Assets: Any tourism related product, attraction, site, or promotional effort that is of interest to target customers/tourists.

Vision Statement: A word picture of the future that the organization/tourism effort intends ultimately to become or to influence.

Weaknesses: Deficiencies in resources or capabilities that hinder your ability to be successful.