



# MONTGOMERY COUNTY

## NORTH CAROLINA

### Marketing & Tourism Assessment Summary of Findings & Recommendations Presented February 18, 2020

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Presented by:

*Saturday*

Marketing & Tourism for Montgomery County

# **Project Summary & Goals**



# Project Overview

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Saturday was hired to assist Montgomery County and its towns with the development of a comprehensive, viable tourism plan.

The original focus of the plan was how to best leverage the area's top natural assets: the forest and the lakes.



# Marketing & Tourism: Phase 1A

For the first phase of our engagement, Saturday's work included:

- An assessment of the area's tourism assets, with a focus on natural amenities, but also including activities, events and destinations throughout the county.
- Recommendations around top assets, for marketing & tourism.
- Development of a marketing plan that outlines how to best promote the top tourism assets, target audiences recommendations, and strategic and tactical recommendations to connect assets to audiences.
- Design and development of a new tourism website that promotes the county and towns' best assets but also serves as a resource for anyone looking to visit the area.



# Marketing & Tourism: Overarching Goals

Key goals for the project and all future tourism work include:

- Increase awareness of all that the area and its towns have to offer
- Increase visitation to the area
- Improve the image of the area
- Create a strategic plan that leverages all of the county's best assets to promote the area and attract visitors
- Identify short term wins and longer-term strategies that will create sustainable, recurring tourism revenue opportunities



Marketing Assessment

# **Our Process**

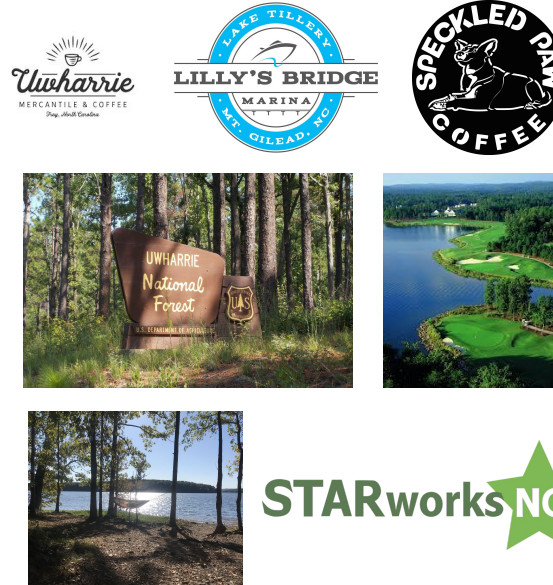
*Note: This is a snapshot of our efforts & does not reflect the full breadth of research. A complete list is available, if desired.*

# Our Process

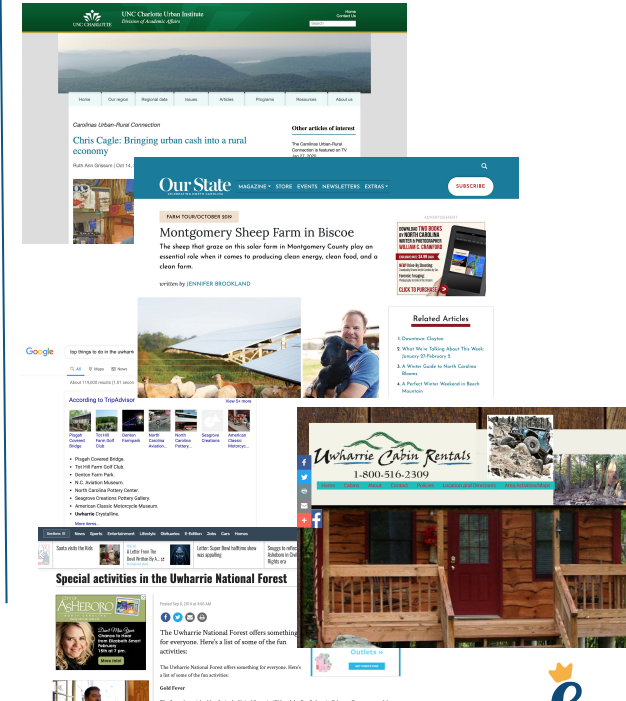
## 17+ Stakeholder Interviews



## Multiple Site Visits



## Secondary Research



Stakeholder Feedback

# SWOT Analysis



# SWOT Analysis

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Stakeholder interviews revealed several interesting opportunities, as well as some potential barriers to a comprehensive area tourism effort.

We combined stakeholder feedback with our own assessment of the area and its opportunities to develop a SWOT analysis for marketing Montgomery County.



# SWOT Analysis

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## STRENGTHS

Strengths are positive attributes of the area and represent the assets or advantages that we can and should build upon for marketing purposes. Typically strengths reveal competitive advantages and inform foundational strategies and messaging. They can also create new opportunities.

W

## WEAKNESSES

Weaknesses are negative factors that detract from your strengths. Many people view them more as “challenges” because they represent things that should be evaluated and possibly improved.

O

## OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities can be viewed two ways: either as external factors that could create opportunities for the county and towns, or potential opportunities within the county that warrant further exploration and consideration.

T

## THREATS

Threats are external factors that could become barriers or negatively impact the county and towns’ path forward. Saturday will do its best to account for these in all strategies and plans, but the county should consider ways to overcome or circumvent these threats, if and where possible.



# **SWOT Analysis: Strengths**

- Montgomery County has an abundance of incredibly beautiful natural areas that offer high quality outdoor experiences for both the outdoor sports enthusiast as well as the non-enthusiasts, or more casual visitor.
- Montgomery County's central location within the state puts it within 1-2 hours of most of the state's population. Being in the exact center of the state allows the area to promote itself to a wide range of visitors and creates opportunities to reinforce the ease of reaching and exploring the area.
- In particular, proximity to Charlotte, Greensboro and Raleigh makes the area particularly attractive to visitors looking for outdoor experiences that are closer and easier to access than other parts of the state.



# **SWOT Analysis: Strengths**

- The general landscape and topography offers “a feeling of being near the mountains without actually being in the mountains,” which is an advantage not just in terms of proximity for coastal visitors seeking mountain-like experiences, but also for the quality of experiences available. This includes a variety of terrains and elevations that are inclusive for a wide range of skill levels among mountain bikers, hikers and horseback riders, as well as a range of different water activities, and more.
- Montgomery County is home to the only public land in North Carolina that allows full-sized vehicles on OHV trails.
- It is one of the largest equestrian destinations on the eastern seaboard and one of the only places where people can ride Western under tree canopy/through forest—making hot weather riding more tolerable.



# **SWOT Analysis: Strengths**

- Lake Tillery and Badin Lake are family-friendly alternatives to the Charlotte-area lakes (Lake Wylie & Lake Norman). They are also “cleaner” lakes with demonstrably higher water quality than the Charlotte lakes.
- Many areas along the lake are protected and will never be developed, which will preserve much of what people love about the area (serenity, feeling of being surrounded by nature, sense of being away from the hustle & bustle, etc.).
- There are three golf courses within Montgomery County, including Old North State, which is host to the ACC Championship Tournament and brings notable business leaders and celebrities to the area with some of its events.





# SWOT Analysis: Strengths

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- STARworks is incredibly unique and has the ability to attract a diverse range of audiences. It's a destination in and of itself, while also hosting events, demonstrations and workshops that create additional opportunities to experience and discover something new.

The multifaceted nature of the business creates an incredible number of storytelling/content opportunities that the county can leverage to enhance its image and pull in new audiences.

And, their offering goes far beyond art (or coffee, or beer). With their clay manufacturing business, STARworks is closely aligned with the manufacturing roots and deep history of the area, making them a case study in modernization and economic development success. They tie Montgomery County (and Star) directly to the pottery community, not just for the artwork alone, but as the only source of potting clay specifically from this area. One could argue it's the most vital ingredient for defining North Carolina Pottery.



# **SWOT Analysis: Strengths**

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- Montgomery Community College has a strong reputation for unusual signature programs, including gunsmithing, forestry, knife making & bladesmithing, and engraving.

Additionally, they were one of the first in the state to train drone-use for law enforcement and have received statewide recognition for their apprenticeship programs.

This, along with some of their industry-related programming and willingness to work with corporations to create and train skilled workforces, could create economic development opportunities and enhance the total story Montgomery County can tell about itself.



# SWOT Analysis: Strengths

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- The county has demonstrated a commitment to quality schools by making a substantial and thoughtful investment in improving its school system, with the unification of the towns' high schools under one roof, and building connectivity to the community college. This should be a positive sign to residents and developers interested in coming to the area.
- The area still has some of what people consider “small town charm”—low crime/sense of safety, smaller schools, tight-knit communities, historic downtown areas, etc.



# **SWOT Analysis: Strengths**

- Several towns within the county have taken proactive steps to develop economic development assessments, implement strategic plans, and begin investing in their infrastructure. While there is an opportunity to better coordinate these efforts (and share knowledge and resources), it is still a positive step towards viability and future success.
- Many areas within the county are opportunity zones (including the entire town of Biscoe), which creates incentive opportunities.



# SWOT Analysis: Weaknesses

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- Despite the abundance of natural resources and available experiences, awareness of Montgomery County and all that it offers, remains low. Even within the county, residents seem unaware of all the assets and opportunities available to them.
- There are very limited options for overnight visitors. Lilly's Bridge manages three rental homes and there are a handful of other VRBO options on the lake, as well as Uwharrie Cabins and small B&Bs/motels, but no major, modern hotel options. The lack of hotels is often cited as the biggest weakness.
- Lack of code enforcements and lax ordinances have eroded some of the small town charm the area once had, and could detract visitors, or at least skew their perceptions of Montgomery County and its towns.





# **SWOT Analysis: Weaknesses**

- There is a lack of true traditional brick & mortar cultural destinations: no theater, very few museums open regular hours, few art galleries, etc. Some mentioned lack of large scale “attractions” like a water park.
- The lack of options for overnight visitors, combined with limited dining, retail, cultural and entertainment offerings means limited revenue opportunities for the county.
- Even for daytime visitors, outdoor amenities and activities are mostly free, and what revenue they generate often goes back to the Forest Service.
- The ranger station is closed Saturday & Sunday when so much visitor and day trip traffic occurs.



## **SWOT Analysis: Weaknesses**

- The lack of technical training and high-skilled workforce development programs were cited as a barrier for economic development and a hindrance to existing businesses that reportedly have open positions that locals are not qualified for.
- Other weaknesses possibly impacting residential growth and economic development, as well as the overall image for the county, include: lack of local healthcare facilities/options, a lack of affordable housing, no chamber of commerce, a lack of collaboration between towns, and declining populations/workforces.



# **SWOT Analysis: Opportunities**

- Montgomery County feels undiscovered which could be a positioning/messaging opportunity. Many feel the forest is full of discovery.
- Defining seasonality for all natural assets may reveal offseason opportunities to increase traffic in a strategic way that does not put strain on the assets.
- Many feel there are untapped audiences who might enjoy some of the counties offerings (e.g., road-motorcycle riders, ecotourism enthusiasts, military retirees.). This is something to explore as we define audiences for marketing.
- STARworks is a destination with the ability to appeal to local residents and visitors alike. In addition to being a tourist attraction, STARworks has multiple other enterprises that could provide cross promotion and programmatic opportunities for the county, should they choose to leverage or expand the relationship.



# **SWOT Analysis: Opportunities**

- There is opportunity to improve the curbside appeal of Montgomery County and a beautification panel is being formed to try and address issues with aging buildings, cluttered yards and roadside litter.
- Proximity to Pinehurst (only 12 miles) could create opportunities to capture golfers or other area visitors looking for a more charming or affordable option. There is also an opportunity to pull in visitors staying in Pinehurst for activities within the county.
- Marketing, and particularly content marketing, could be useful in closing the gap for those who want to go to the Uwharries but don't know what to do there, or where to go while they visit.
- Placemaking initiatives could expand cultural and arts experiences within the county and also unite residents around common interests and goals.



# **SWOT Analysis: Opportunities**

- Proximity to Seagrove creates opportunities to market to art and pottery lovers as well as programmatic opportunities with STARworks.
- There is opportunity to do more programming and placemaking around the natural assets of the county to make them more attractive to new audiences, and also create new revenue streams that most of the natural assets do not inherently (or currently) provide. (Just sending families to the forest will not generate revenue for the county or its towns.)
- Breadth of military training programs could create storytelling opportunities that attracts niche groups and endears the area to those with an affinity for military groups and/or topics. There is a perception that military retirees have fond opinions of the area based on their time spent here for training.





# **SWOT Analysis: Opportunities**

- The Forest Service shares concerns around capacity/usage and has identified potential areas for expansion, including spreading out equestrian usage, additional trailheads, parking, connectivity, etc.
- Many come to the area as part of a group and don't have awareness of the other activities they could be participating in. One example mentioned was spouses of OHV enthusiasts, who aren't necessarily going out on the trails, but don't go to town because they don't have a good understanding of other areas or places they could explore or spend time at (examples mentioned in interviews included: STARworks, downtown Troy, Crawford's, Tommy's BBQ, etc.). Marketing could be useful in helping these groups expand their experiences within the county.



# **SWOT Analysis: Opportunities**

- Uniting to market the area could ease the individual burden of the towns, reduce duplicity of messaging and create less confusion for potential visitors who right now have to look for information across multiple websites.
- There is an opportunity to better reinforce the Forest Service's message of preservation and cultural protection, which could enhance the overall story for Montgomery County and highlight/reinforce the commitment to maintaining the area's natural beauty.
- New bypass could increase traffic counts and volume to the area, creating natural economic development opportunities and strengthening the case for investment in dining, retail and hotels.



# **SWOT Analysis: Opportunities**

- Encouraging homeowners, particularly along Lake Tillery, to consider participating in a rental program like VBRO could be a short-term solution to the lodging issue that the county is facing.

Marketing could be useful in promoting this opportunity to homeowners and making them aware of the benefits, as well as offering guidance for renting their homes.

There is also an opportunity for the county to partner with a local real estate agent, or real estate group, to form a property management company that oversees the rentals and handles much of the logistics on behalf of the homeowners wishing to participate.



## **SWOT Analysis: Threats**

- Surrounding counties are all growing at faster rates than Montgomery County and could develop assets faster and capture tourism, economic development and even residential dollars that might otherwise go to Montgomery County.
- Several key natural areas are perceived to be “at capacity” during certain times of the year. (Meaning that heavy usage or crowding is harming the resource, or deterring from people having a positive experience.)

In the forest, this includes weekends at Badin Lake Recreation Area, the off-road vehicle trails, and the horse camps. There is also concern that the lakes are quickly becoming overpopulated in the summer as residential growth continues, and many fear tourism efforts will only further exacerbate this.



# SWOT Analysis: Threats

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- Despite the fact that Montgomery County is inherently tied to the Uwharries, several neighboring counties have incorporated (or still incorporate) the Uwharries into their positioning and messaging (for example, Stanly County has previously used “Gateway to the Uwharries”).
- A lack of affordable and quality residential housing makes it challenging for those employed in the county to live near their place of business. This not only impacts potential tax revenue for the county, but also negatively impacts the vibrancy of the community when employees leave each day and do not spend disposable income in Montgomery County, nor spend time enjoying or investing in the towns and community in which they work.



# SWOT Analysis: Threats

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- Declines in residential growth across the county is a potential barrier to Economic Development, especially because employers often perceive negative or slow residential growth as a signal that there may be a lack of qualified workforces or workforce development opportunities.
- Your brand is being negatively impacted by fragmentation and lack of clear ownership. Individual entities, are (understandably) leveraging the area on their own. Examples include LakeTillery.com (owned by Lilly's Bridge) and even the Welcome Center.



# SWOT Analysis: Threats

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- Lack of support from the National Forest System (no signage, limited or missing information online, etc) is a threat. Also the pace at which the forest system moves could be problematic as it could take 8-10 years before much-needed trail, parking, and recreation area expansions are approved and implemented, despite the fact that the area desperately needs this work done sooner.
- There is a pessimistic outlook about the county, even among private and public stakeholders.
- New bypass could negatively impact Troy by pulling traffic away from its downtown. Or, it could create “traveler-driven” business growth along major intersections/entry points off the bypass, but not sustained volume that justifies new hotels or other tourist-friendly amenities.



Marketing Assessment

# **Conclusions & Strategic Recommendations**



# Overall Conclusions

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We believe there are many opportunities to create a successful marketing and tourism program for Montgomery County and its towns.

However, such a program needs to be built on a holistic presentation of the area's core strengths, *not all of which are tied to specific natural assets*.

We must also acknowledge that while the area has *many, many* strengths, a lack of lodging and dining make it almost impossible to market overnight visitation right now (without disappointing visitors).



# Overall Conclusions

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With this in mind, Saturday recommends that the initial marketing & tourism **focus on short-term initiatives that will increase day-use of the county's assets.**

The primary goal, *right now*, should be to promote the county's top assets and encourage people to visit & explore Montgomery County and its towns, even if (in the short-term) they take advantage of lodging in nearby Stanly, Randolph or Davidson counties.



# Overall Conclusions

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Creating momentum for the area, even if in the form of day or weekend visitors, will create momentum that attracts more visitors and gives the county data it needs to build a more viable case for lodging and dining investment.

Marketing will highlight and expand awareness of the county and towns' current offerings, **positioning Montgomery County as a destination worth visiting and exploring** and helping to increase traffic counts.

Such efforts will also better position Montgomery County for a truly robust tourism effort in the future, and make the area more attractive for residential development and economic development opportunities.



# Overall Conclusions

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Ultimately we hope to **make more people fall in love with Montgomery County**, inspire the people who are already in love with MC to **invest in it**, then convince businesses and residential developers to **build in it**.



# Marketing Strategy #1:

**Prioritize the area's assets to help prioritize stories and content for tourism marketing.**

- There is no single asset, or “silver bullet” that will drive tourism and increase visitation to the county and its towns.
- Despite stakeholder perceptions that the forest is the only asset the area needs to market, its audiences are too limited, and simply will not drive enough visitation or revenue to sustain the county's entire tourism and marketing program.
- Likewise, the lakes, while beautiful, face capacity challenges and cannot be the sole foundation of any future marketing or tourism initiatives.



# Prioritizing Assets

To determine which assets will be most impactful right now, Saturday considered several things:

- Which assets have the potential to bring the most visitors to the area as-is, with minimal investment or enhancements?
- Which assets will help Montgomery County improve its image and attract interest/visitors?
- Which assets have “serial” potential—meaning they could potentially draw visitors now (either as-is or with slight enhancements), and create opportunities (via evolution or programming adjustments) to bring visitors back again and again?
- Which assets need investment or momentum but could be part of a future strategy?



## **Primary/Top Assets**

We believe these are Montgomery County's top assets *right now*.

These will be most heavily featured in the stories we tell about the area, because they have the potential to attract diverse, new audiences to the area.

**The Uwharrie National Forest**

**The Lakes**

**STARworks**

**Historic Downtowns**

**Lilly's Bridge/River Wild**

**TownStage**

**Peach Festival**

**Troy Fest**

**Mt. Gilead Fall Festival On Main**

**Old North State Club** (Charity & ACC Events)

# Secondary Assets

The following “secondary assets” will also be part of tourism & marketing assets but may not be featured as prominently

## **Natural & Recreational Assets**

### OHV trails, including:

- Dickey Bell
- Daniel
- Wolf Den
- Falls Dam

### Equestrian Trails

- Helen's Loop
- Big Rock Loop
- Uwharrie River
- Todd Trail
- Leslie Trail

### Motorized Boating (water sports, leisure boating)

- Lake Tillery
- Badin Lake Group Camp
- Cove Boat Ramp
- Uwharrie Public Access
- Swift Island
- Deep Water (boat put in area)
- Uwharrie River

### Fishing & Non-Motorized Boating (kayaking, paddleboarding)

- Low Water bridge
- Hwy 109
- Dennis Rd. (paddle up Lake Tillery)
- Falls Reservoir
- Uwharrie River (Section 2)
- Little River
- Yadkin Valley Blue Way

### Disc Golf

- Baldwin Lake Recreation Area

### Mountain Bike Trails

- Wood Run Road
- Keyauwee Trail
- Supertree Trail
- Hunting (entire forest is gamelands)
- West Morris Mountain Campground
- East Morris Mountain
- Wood Run

### Target Shooting

- Flintlock Valley Shooting Range

### Hiking

- Birkhead Mountains Wilderness
- Uwharrie Trail (will eventually connect with Birkhead and other trails)
- Dutchman's Creek Trail Loop
- Top of Daniel Mountain

### Gold Panning and Rockhounding

### Camping & Recreation Areas

- Kings Mountain Point (day use)
- Badin Lake Group Camp
- Badin Lake Campground
- Arrowhead Campground
- West Morris Mountain Campground
- Uwharrie Hunt Camp
- Yates Place Camp
- Art Lilley Campground
- Cane Brake Horse Camp
- Overflow Horse Camp - primitive

### Local Parks & Recreation Opportunities

- Baseball fields (Troy)
- Deaton Monroe Recreational Park





# Secondary Assets

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## Ecotourism

- Ecology: With beautiful savannah-like longleaf forests ecosystems, the forest is home to wetland bogs, unique plants, mountain species from the Smoky Mountains, all of which coexist beside coastal species—it's very rare to have both in one place.
- Birdwatching
- Stargazing
- Fall foliage tours

## Events

- Denton Annual Antiques Festival
- Uwharrie Two Day Trail Run Challenge
- Uwharrie 100 (even though taking a break in 2020)
- Overland Challenge, by Southern Expeditions
- Appalachian rendezvous Event (Uwharrie MTB trails)
- Haphazard Hikers come here (birdwatch and flowers)

## Events *continued*

- 10th Annual Save the Girls Walk/Jog 5K
- Firefest at STARworks Cafe and Taproom
- Glassfest at STARworks Center for Creative Enterprise
- Hot Glass Cold Beer (2nd Thursday of each month at STARworks Cafe and Taproom)
- Crappie Fishing Tournament (part of 10 Days of Uwharrie)
- 1st Annual Run with the Cops 5K
- Uwharrie Safari
- AVO Trail Ride Series at Uwharrie National Forest
- Biscoe's Halloween in the Park

## Arts & Culture

- Montgomery Sheep (and solar) Farm
- Pottery—Proximity to Seagrove pottery scene (Seagrove is Randolph county)
- History—There are multiple archeological resources that are historically significant, including petrified wood/prehistoric sites, revolutionary sites, underground railroad sites, civil war sites, a plank road section that comes through the forest.
- 2nd highest density of artifacts in Southeastern US—there are artifacts all through the forest

## Miscellaneous

- Montgomery Community College



## Strategic Recommendation #2

**Establish a credible tourism brand for the area using *Visit Montgomery County***

- Develop a unique logo and visual identity for *Visit Montgomery County* and use this in all tourism marketing
- This brand will complement the existing Montgomery County brand, which will continue to live on in support of government and business issues.
- It is the suggestion of Saturday to anchor the brand around the Uwharries, which is the county's most important asset (how this comes to life is to be determined).



## Strategic Recommendation #3

**Establish a compelling tourism story Montgomery County and bring this to life with a strong tourism website**

- Montgomery County needs to take ownership of its story—too many other entities are telling their version of its story, and there is no *single* place that tells a complete area story
- Develop key storylines for the area
- Build a standalone website that aggregates information on tourism opportunities, offers new perspective on things to do & experience in the area, and presents the many reasons to visit and discover all that Montgomery County has to offer.



# Website Considerations

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Below are some initial thoughts on what the website might include:

- Imagery and messaging that presents Montgomery County in the best possible light, as an attractive, easily-accessible destination
- Content that highlights the area's best assets and promotes them, but also explains how people can find & enjoy them
- An easily searchable catalogue of all assets and relevant info for visitation
- Content that offers people clear paths to discovery—including digital versions of the adventure cards available in Welcome Center, as well as suggested trip itineraries, maps, local suggestions, etc.
- Stories that spotlights hidden gems, and some of the more undiscovered or unknown aspects of the county and its towns



# Website Considerations

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- Visitor stories, sharing their adventures and discoveries in Montgomery County
- Business highlights and features
- Historical information on the Uwharries/Montgomery County, especially capturing some of the word of mouth curated history
- Content that makes up for shortcomings of other partners. For example—if National Forest websites are light on information, create content around parking, the trail system and various hiking, biking, ATV/OHV, horseback, kayaking tips/insider knowledge. Same for water levels, water releases, or other information impacting the lakes
- Upcoming & Annual events information
- A news section that features relevant content and updates



## Strategic Recommendation #4

**Centralize marketing efforts to ensure an organized and unified implementation of this, and any other future plans**

- While the new website will unify content *online*, the county and all five towns need to be unified in marketing *offline* as well.
- Use the Welcome Center as a “brick & mortar” hub of the county’s tourism efforts. This will ensure consistency between the website, marketing & the visitor experience.
- Develop and distribute brochures or other marketing materials to all towns and at other key areas throughout the county.



## Strategic Recommendation #5

**Instead of taking a shotgun approach to marketing, define audiences for each priority asset and then use a highly-targeted approach to reaching these groups.**

- We recommend taking a highly-targeted approach to audiences and marketing:
  - Define the highest-value audiences for each asset
  - Create content, programs and ads to appeal to each audience
  - Use highly-targeted digital advertising tactics like paid social, programmatic digital display and PPC to reach them
- As we define audiences for each priority asset, we will also look at opportunities to create new events or experiences that might appeal to these groups and make the asset even more attractive.



# Aligning Audiences & Assets

Defining audiences to align with the county's priority assets should ultimately be a collaborative process, where Saturday works closely with the county to better determine audiences and opportunities. However, here is what an audience matrix *might* look like using some of the priority assets.

ASSET	AUDIENCE	OPPORTUNITY	POSSIBLE ACTIONS
Uwharrie National Forest	Mountain Bike Enthusiasts in driveable cities like Charlotte, Winston-Salem and Greensboro	Raise awareness of trails and reinforce accessibility/proximity. Encourage weekend visitation and even afterwork trips.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Website content</li><li>-Paid advertising</li><li>-SEM/PPC</li><li>-Influencer partnerships</li><li>-Maps &amp; signage</li></ul>
Uwharrie National Forest	OHV Traffic - with an emphasis on spouses/non-riders	Create itineraries that highlight different things to do while rides are taking place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Website content</li><li>-Maps &amp; collateral for OHV businesses</li><li>-Partnerships</li><li>-Email marketing</li></ul>

EXAMPLE ONLY



# Aligning Audiences & Assets

(additional examples)

ASSET	AUDIENCE	OPPORTUNITY	POSSIBLE ACTIONS
Badin Lake	Kayakers & Paddleboarders within a 2 hour drive of Badin Lake	Position Badin Lake as a Kayaker's paradise and reinforce accessibility/proximity. Encourage weekend visitation and even afterwork trips for those within an hour's drive. Consider "hidden gem" messaging and stress the natural beauty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Website content</li><li>-Paid advertising</li><li>-SEM/PPC</li><li>-Strategic PR</li><li>-Programming - guided kayaking trips, kayaking meet-ups</li></ul>
Lake Tillery	Families in Charlotte	Position Lake Tillery as the alternative to the congested Charlotte-area lakes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Website content</li><li>-Paid media</li><li>-Geofencing</li><li>-SEM/PPC</li><li>-Email marketing</li></ul>
STARworks	Art Lovers in Charlotte, Winston & Greensboro	Promote STARworks as a destination and market the studio, tour opportunities and events to this group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Website content</li><li>-Paid media</li><li>-Sharing of STARworks posts and content</li><li>-SEM/PPC</li><li>-Email marketing</li><li>-Sponsorship</li></ul>

EXAMPLE ONLY

# Aligning Audiences & Assets

## (additional examples)

ASSET	AUDIENCE	OPPORTUNITY	POSSIBLE ACTIONS
STARworks	Causal Arts Enthusiasts and/or Foodies	Build "arts & culture" tours and content that are rooted in a visit to STARworks but also include Seagrove and any other relevant cultural or arts destinations nearby. Consider opportunities to incorporate food or culinary experiences that create additional opportunities to attract new audiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Website content</li> <li>-Maps and tour plans</li> <li>-Paid media</li> <li>-SEM/PPC</li> <li>-New programming that incorporates culinary experiences (i.e. guest chef series or culinary experiences that are inspired by area art)</li> </ul>
Mt. Gilead	Military Retirees	Promote Mt. Gilead as an important destination of military training and activity. Use that as a draw and then encourage exploration of the town's historic downtown and other nearby historic sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Website content</li> <li>-Paid media</li> <li>-SEM/PPC</li> <li>-Sponsorships/alignment with Military media</li> </ul>
Peach Festival	Culinary Enthusiasts and Foodies	Expand the festival to include more culinary experiences. From demonstrations with locally famous chefs, to ticketed dinner experiences with well-known national chefs, to new peach-inspired recipes to try, look for ways to expand this festival and make it more of a state-wide, or even regional draw.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Website content</li> <li>-Paid media</li> <li>-SEM/PPC</li> <li>-Programming</li> <li>-Email marketing</li> <li>-Strategic partnerships</li> <li>-PR outreach</li> </ul>

EXAMPLE ONLY

## Strategic Recommendation #6

**Don't overlook an incredibly important and easily accessible audience: current residents**

- Even if our primary focus is new visitors, it is also important to develop community pride and ensure local residents have an awareness of what is in their own backyards.
- Engage residents in the county's tourism and marketing initiatives and ask them to be champions for the area.
- Preview the campaign to them and celebrate the county's tourism program at a launch event
- Give resident exclusive or early access to key events and programs
- Ask them to share their stories for content



## Strategic Recommendation #7

### **Implement a data capture initiative to support marketing efforts**

- Building an email database is critical to future marketing success
- The county should encourage email address capturing of all visitors and especially repeat groups of visitors.
- Lead generation and email-capture ads, as well as email-capture forms on the website, could also be implemented to allow for automated data capture.
- Existing events also need to be better documented with photos, videos, etc. This will offset the need for paid photography and will ensure a more robust asset library for ads, public relations, website content and more.



## Strategic Recommendation #8

### Develop a placemaking initiative

- Utilize and invest in public spaces and events to support the needs of tourism
- For example, if the lack of cultural experiences is a true barrier, create an artist-in-residence program where artists are given free housing and studio space in downtown Troy in exchange for participating in gallery nights and/or “meet the artist” events
- Ask the community to re-imagine public spaces, painting sidewalks, walls or submit ideas for new community initiatives and events



## Strategic Recommendation #9

### **Leverage organic influencers as part of a larger content marketing strategy**

- The best way to attract people to Montgomery County is to show why and how other people love it.
- This modern version word-of-mouth can take advantage of existing allies, existing assets and strengthen relationships with local influencers and businesses.
- We would recommend starting with organic influencers to help you create content around Montgomery County and the Uwharries.



# Strategic Recommendation #10

## Layer on Economic Development marketing initiatives

- While Saturday's goal is to maximize attention and visitation to the county, tourism sets the stage for more specific economic development around lodging, retail and single family development.
- One immediate opportunity for economic development is to develop an economic development-specific website for the county, and then launch targeted advertising to VC/Investors, especially to those you know are already coming here, and have positive perceptions of the area.



Moving Forward

# Implementation & Measurement



# **Implementation - In Progress**

**Saturday is currently engaged and working on the following as part of Phase 1A:**

- Situation Assessment/Comprehensive Asset Review
- Marketing Strategy Development
- Media Plan Development
- Design & Development of a comprehensive Tourism Website

**Pending approval of this plan, Saturday will initiate Phase 1B, including:**

- Brand/Logo Development for *Visit Montgomery County*
- Photography & Videography to fulfill needs of the new website

*These items are already paid for/accounted for in the county's FY 2020 budget.*



# Implementation - Future Priorities

Once the branding work is complete and the website has been launched, we will be in a position to launch advertising programs and initiate paid media.

Strategic Initiative	Specific Actions	Timeframe
Align Audiences & Assets and Begin Marketing	Plan, develop & launch initial advertising campaign	July 2020 - Fall/Winter 2020
Community Engagement	Marketing & programs to engage residents & foster support	October 2020 - March 2021
Placemaking Initiatives	Prioritize programming & placemaking opportunities and implement	January 2021 - December 2021
Expand Advertising Programs	Launch new ads and expand paid media strategies to include new channels	January 2021 - December 2021

# Measuring Success

We will work with the county and key stakeholders to determine how to best measure success, based on resources available. Here are some measures we anticipate:

## Media/Marketing Opportunities

- Increases in website traffic
- Increases in social media “fans”
- Increases in social media engagement
- Media engagement:
  - Click through rates
  - Completed video views
  - Cost per click
  - Cost per acquisition
- Increases in email subscribers
- Increases in website “actions”

## Additional Opportunities

- Occupancy tax revenue increases
- Event attendance
- Weekend foot traffic counts at key locations (either reported anecdotally or formally reported via a research firm)
- Welcome Center visitors



# **Immediate Next Steps**

# Next Steps

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**Saturday is seeking approval/adoption of the assessment and recommendations, so that we may move forward with the work that remains to be completed for Phase 1 and future planning.**



**Thank You!**



# Feedback

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- Property management promotion with local homeowners—encourage property owners to renting their property on Lake Tillery and within the county.
  - But would require a property management group?
  - Or simply promote VBRO to existing homeowners? (Driver of tax revenue)
  - Bryson City property management group = example

