

Town of Oriental – Tourism Board
Strategic Planning Special Meeting
February 28, 2017

A special meeting of the Town of Oriental, NC Tourism Board, for the purpose of updating the Tourism Board Strategic Plan, was held on February 28, 2017. The meeting was called to order at 3:09 PM by the Chair. Present at the meeting were Marsha Palpham (Chair), Carol Mabe, Paul Jordan, Suzanne Gwaltney, and Bill Wheeler. Beth Bucksot, Director of Economic Development for Pamlico County, was also present and participated in the discussion.

Carol Mabe facilitated the discussion of the 2014-2016 Tourism Strategic Plan, which was developed in 2014 and used to guide efforts over the last three years. Carol explained that our purpose today would be to review the overall plan and determine what aspects remain relevant, what parts need revision, what new elements should be added, and lastly, what should be removed from the plan.

The discussion opened with the question of the overall mission of the Tourism Board and whether or not the mission as defined in the previous plan is still accurate. By consensus, those present agreed that the overall mission as defined is still relevant.

Carol then asked Board members to brainstorm regarding the strengths and weaknesses of both the Town and the Tourism Board. The following lists are a summary of that discussion:

What are our strengths?

The Town – An ideal place to chill/disconnect. Sailing helps brand us. Very engaged community. No traffic, relaxed. Safe. Cultural activities. Neighborly. Water related activities: fishing, kayaking, all water sports. Working fishing harbor.

The Tourism Board – Diverse backgrounds and talents. Amount of time in Oriental. Sense of commitment to the improvement of the town. Helps drive prosperity for Oriental. Diverse skill sets. Compatibility. Harmonious group.

What are our weaknesses?

The Town - Having empty businesses or not enough businesses. Suzanne Gwaltney commented that businesses need to network more and work more closely together. Beth Bucksot gave an overview of the Pamlico County business round-table group, originally an idea from Carteret County, which were held around the county for sharing ideas on marketing. This series of meetings is being restarted. Suzanne added that our message needs to be about the whole county as well. Other weaknesses discussed were the differing perceptions shared by people living in the town, as opposed to those living out in the county. A comment was made that the area is not very multi-generational and has an aging population; a real concern for the future.

The Tourism Board – Board members are often overcommitted and spread very thin with many business, civic and personal obligations. The observation was made that the Board needs to do more with Social Media. Paul Jordan suggested that the Town begin a YouTube Channel.

Carol Mabe then posed the question: What are the Opportunities and Threats to the mission of the Tourism Board and the Town overall? The following lists are a summary of that discussion:

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Social media – Board members agreed that this was key to future promotional activities
- Possible use of Radio Advertising. Marsha provided a summary of the huge success radio has been for her local business.
- Focus on getting businesses involved with the Tourism Board.
- Paul Jordan suggested that the Town also set up a Twitter feed.

Beth Bucksot added that more interaction between the Town and County was needed. She reminded the Board that the new brand message for Pamlico County is “Work or Play. Visit or Stay”, and encouraged the Board to pursue the idea of cooperative marketing with other groups as a way to reduce cost and reach more prospective visitors.

THREATS:

- Other communities doing a better job.
- Perception that Oriental may be a dying town, due to the older demographic.
- Decline in sailboat racing
- Lack of a good/well trained workforce.

Beth Bucksot provided an overview of the Community Day events that are held for the Marines stationed at Cherry Point. This is an opportunity to bring in more local visitors and create new relationships.

Discussion was then directed toward the Key Objectives and Strategies portion of the existing Strategic Plan. What followed was a detailed discussion of each objective, including what should be added, modified, or dropped. The following is a summary of the findings of the Tourism Board with respect to the Key Objectives in the plan.

Agreed Actions to be Taken on Editing Key Objectives and Strategies:

(List of Key Objectives from 2014 Plan):

1. Aggressively pursue Public Relations as the most cost-effective and impactful method of building awareness of Oriental, and marketing her as an exciting and unique tourism destination.
 - a. *Board members agreed that this objective should be retained.*
2. Continue to build awareness of Oriental by using signage(billboards) to both help people find us – and to ensure a positive experience once here.
 - a. *Board members agreed that this objective should be dropped – expensive and limited.*
3. Create fresh, dramatic multi-purpose marketing materials to promote the town to potential visitors, provide valuable information for people while here and serve as effective “pass-along’s” to other potential visitors.

- a. This objective should be retained, with a focus on ensuring that materials are properly updated on a regular basis.*
4. Develop ways to encourage Oriental visitors to explore and enjoy the entire village.
 - a. Board members agreed that this should be retained, but needs reworking and more strategies added.*
5. Investigate paid media (advertising) as a potential marketing tool to augment PR efforts; raising awareness and potentially increasing tourism/traffic for the town.
 - a. This should be retained, with an emphasis on the following: Using radio as a new medium for ads and event coverage, On line ads with Our State, Co-op ads with business and county partners.*
6. Develop and implement means to qualitatively and quantitatively evaluate results of our tourism efforts.
 - a. Retain this element, but continue to find ways to measure objectively what we have accomplished beyond visitor surveys and occupancy tax revenues.*
7. Develop ways to engage local business owners in the work of the Tourism Board.
 - a. Retain this element and continue to engage local business owners in the work of tourism board.*

Additionally, Board members agreed that a new element was needed that focused on developing a social media strategy that includes partnering with local businesses. The following questions were raised by those present: How do we link to and work with local civic groups more effectively? How do we get more involved with local organizations and events? It was also agreed that we should focus on implementing the new "Visit Oriental" website and the opportunities that brings to us.

Following this there was a discussion about the County Chamber of Commerce and the role it plays with respect to Oriental. Following this discussion, Suzanne Gwaltney moved that the Oriental Tourism Board join the Pamlico County Chamber of Commerce. The motion was seconded by Carol Mabe and unanimously approved by the Board. Following this, Suzanne mentioned that the Chamber would be holding an event on March 8th that is focused on future business development.

Next step is for Carol to issue an updated Strategic Plan for 2017-2019 with Objectives, Strategies and Action Plans for review and input by Tourism Board members. New Strategic Plan to be completed by April 15th.

By unanimous agreement, this special meeting of the Board was adjourned at 5:05 pm.

--Draft minutes respectfully submitted by Paul Jordan, Tourism Board.