



City of Toccoa

Tourism Product Development Resource Team Report

Georgia Department of Economic Development



City of Toccoa

Tourism Product Development Resource Team Report



Table of Contents

- I. Resource Team Overview – *Page 3*
- II. Tourism Product Development Overview – *Page 6*
- III. Current State of Tourism of Tourism in Stephens County – *Page 12*
- IV. Comprehensive Brand, Identity and Organization – *Page 17*
- V. Visitor Center & Services – *Page 20*
- VI. Planning & Infrastructure – *Page 26*
- VII. Nature Based Tourism & Recreation – *Page 32*
- VIII. Agritourism – *Page 44*
- IX. Arts and Tourism – *Page 49*
- X. Existing and New Attraction Development – *Page 60*
- XI. Train Tourism – *Page 77*
- XII. Toccoa: Lodging – *Page 80*
- XIII. Overview: Destination Downtown Development – *Page 84*
- XIV. Overview: Historic Preservation – *Page 92*
- XV. Resources – *Page 96*

Resource Team Overview



Resource Team Overview



Evaluation Date: March 7-8, 2017

Report Date: August 2017

OVERVIEW:

The Office of Product Development assists counties, cities and individual tourism partners in giving new life to existing resources and in fostering new tourism products within communities. Communities receive technical assistance and financial resources in hopes of creating new opportunities/markets for Georgia tourism products through strategic partnerships, packaging and marketing.

In October 2009, the Tourism Product Development Office created a new initiative to focus technical assistance in the form of a reconnaissance and strategy visit to a local community interested in developing its tourism potential. The Tourism Product Development (TPD) Resource Team works to evaluate a community's past, present and potential for tourism growth and development in the future through innovative, unique local experiences. Selected participants host a team of experts in tourism and community development for an in-depth analysis of the community resulting in a full report of recommendations for existing product enhancements and ideas for future product development.

TEAM STRATEGY:

The TPD Resource Team program has resulted in millions of dollars of tourism development throughout Georgia. Completed projects recommended through the program have ranged from small business ideas to large infrastructure development.

Support from the TPD Team does not end with the community presentation of recommendations. The team will continue to work with your community on product development projects and your Regional Tourism Project Manager will remain on the ground with you as a guide through the tourism development process.

Resource Team Overview: Team Members

**Cindy Eidson**

Director

Office of Tourism Product Development, GDEcD

Janet Cochran

Manager, Regional Tourism Project Managers

Office of Tourism Product Development, GDEcD

Chris Cannon

Former Assistant Director

Office of Tourism Product Development, GDEcD

Cheryl Smith

Regional Tourism Project Manager

NE Georgia Mountains, GDEcD

Sarah Cook

Project Manager

Center of Innovation in Agribusiness, GDEcD

Tina Lilly

Grants Director

Georgia Council for the Arts

Corinne Thornton

Director, Office of Regional Services

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Rebecca McWilliam

Executive Director

Dublin Convention & Visitors Bureau

Ann Arnold , Downtown

Development Consultant

Special Guest:

Pat Wilson

Commissioner

Georgia Department of Economic Development



Tourism Product Development Overview



Tourism as Economic Development



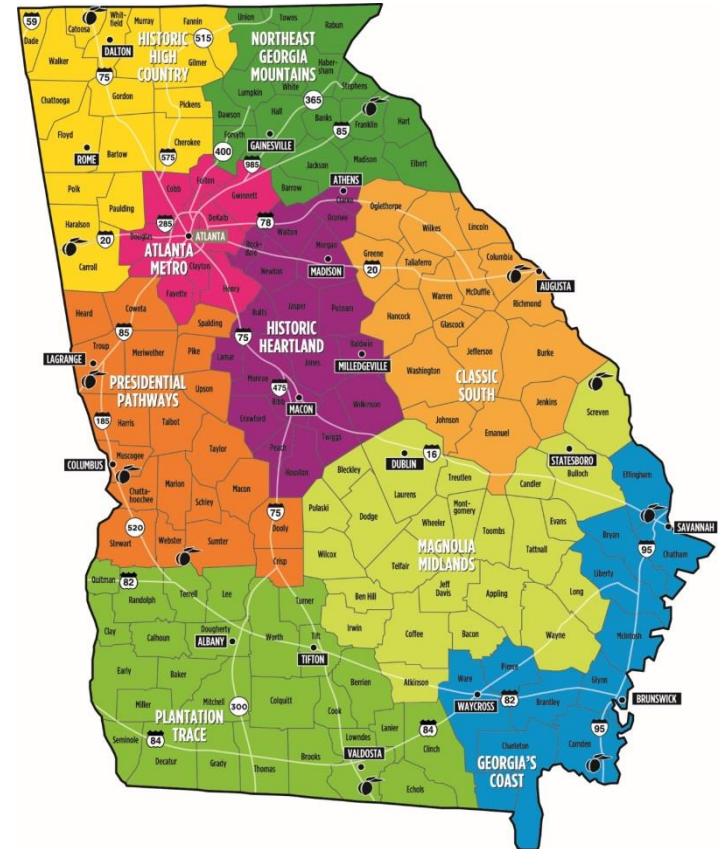
Tourism is one of the world's largest industries and is essential to a community's economic vitality, sustainability, and profitability. In Georgia, tourism is one of the state's most important industries accounting for over \$59 billion in annual economic impact.

Increasingly, tourism is often the preferred economic development strategy within a community, and it plays a significant role in most communities across the state. When included as a focus in a comprehensive economic development plan, tourism can play a major role in a local economy by infusing new money into the economy that generates jobs and spurs economic growth.

Special interest tourism like nature based tourism and heritage tourism create opportunity for communities to identify, package and market their existing assets.

Communities throughout the state have substantial assets that need to be identified and incorporated into their overall economic development efforts. Increased tourism product can translate into local job creation and additional revenue in the form of property tax, bed tax and sales tax. The state ultimately benefits as well from additional revenues.

Limited resources means collaboration among various local groups and agencies is essential to enhancing and developing local tourism product. Additionally, when multiple state agencies work as Team Georgia collaboratively on tourism product development, Georgia wins and the visitor goes away with a unique experience.



Tourism Product Development: Overview



Which comes first: the place, the visitor or the experience?

In a marketing textbook you would start with the market you want to attract; then develop product and experiences and create the most effective communications to reach your target market. In reality, destinations already have product, experiences and existing visitors.

Tourism product development is a complex intertwined process that involves research, information, planning, training and implementation, bringing all of these together. The planning and organizing of tourism products involves:

1. Knowing what you have as a starting point and being able to identify what may be missing;
2. Securing community understanding and engagement to be inclusive in planning and impact;
3. Learning about tourist/visitor interests, behavior and needs to better serve and inform;
4. Developing a comprehensive approach to planning, developing, training and stewardship
5. to guiding development and maintenance;
6. Collaborating across multiple sites and communities for larger impact to build destination and to conduct joint marketing;
7. Identifying what success will look like and developing methods and measures to assess your success and continually improve visitors' tourism experience.

Products in tourism are the places and experiences that you identify, create, and market to visitors. Accompanying services and support systems are another element critical to implementing your vision and planning for attracting visitors. This includes product development, marketing, becoming a hospitable and welcoming community, and developing and sustaining the resources and capacities needed to keep your efforts going and successful.

Adapted from Michigan State University Museum's Product Development Guide

Tourism Product Development: Visitor-Minded Planning

In tourism, failing to understand the consumer and see the destination from their perspective creates two major problems.

The first problem is that many destinations don't see the unique tourism experience they have to offer. Many examples of this problem manifest themselves in heritage tourism. For instance, residents in some rural areas cannot see how special their destination is because it is so familiar. It is hard to look at what is around you as if you had never seen it before. Planning requires looking at the product through someone else's eyes!

The flip side of the same coin and the second problem is when tourism managers are so focused on the product that they forget the consumer. This is common with folks associated with new facilities. They focus on every attribute of the building or operation and forget to consider what really creates value for the consumer.

The challenge for the tourism product developer is to be completely aware of the many product options available within the destination area. With this knowledge, sites and experiences can be organized and presented to the visitor in a way that creates value for the consumer and maximizes benefits for the destination.

*Adapted from Michigan State University Museum's
Product Development Guide*

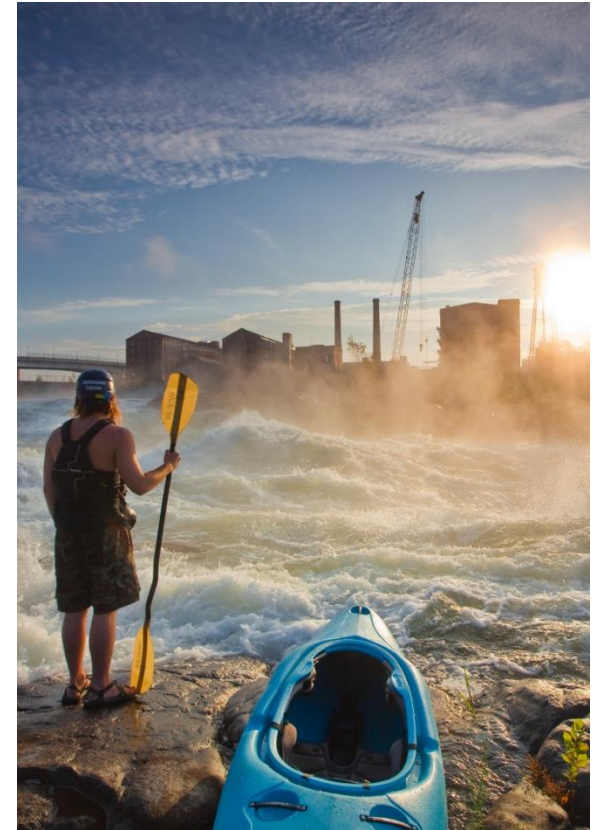


Tourism Product Development: Types of Products

To understand the product options, it is worthwhile to consider the nature of tourism attractions and products. Attractions can take many forms. They can be a single product such as Disneyland or a series of products loosely “tied” together. For example, new trails, opening across your region, are great examples of products coming together to attract visitors. Attractions can be commercial or cultural or natural (or all three). They can be “hard”, such as historic sites – or “soft”, such as listening to a particular type of music or learning an almost forgotten craft. They can be deliberate –such as a purpose built monument–or incidental–the architecture of your downtown that brings back memories of a simpler time – or is built from area field stones -- and is still functional; these reflect the uniqueness of your area.

Not all attractions are created equal. Attractions have different amounts of “pull.” Some will attract people from across the state; others will attract people from across the world. And not every attraction has universal appeal. Knowing about and understanding who is attracted and why they are important will drive your marketing efforts. Your attraction may have special appeal to a certain audience that will travel across the world to see it and general appeal to everyday folks who may include it in their Sunday drive. As tourism planners, understanding the appeal or “pull” of any attraction will be extremely useful in developing marketing.

*Adapted from Michigan State University Museum’s
Product Development Guide*



Tourism Product Development: Pointers

- Focus on your strengths - base your product on what natural and cultural resources you have that others don't have.
- Plan all stages of the project in detail before commencing, including marketing, product evaluation and redevelopment. Plan for and monitor budgets tightly.
- Be very clear about what you want to achieve - profit, local employment, community pride and involvement, and conservation of the resource.
- Consult and involve the local community.
- Take the time to do the project well. Do not rush the stages of consultation and product development. Innovation does not happen overnight.
- Know your target audience. Plan and tailor the product from the consumer's needs and perspectives. Undertake market research.
- Interpretation should be fun, encourage involvement, stimulate the senses, and pose a challenge. Plan all activities to reflect a strong theme.
- Choose methods that involve and engage the senses. Face to face interpretation is the most effective.
- Be cautious with technology. Can you afford it and do you need it?
- Collaborate with experts. Expertise may be found within your local community.
- Train your team to ensure consistency of product and messages.

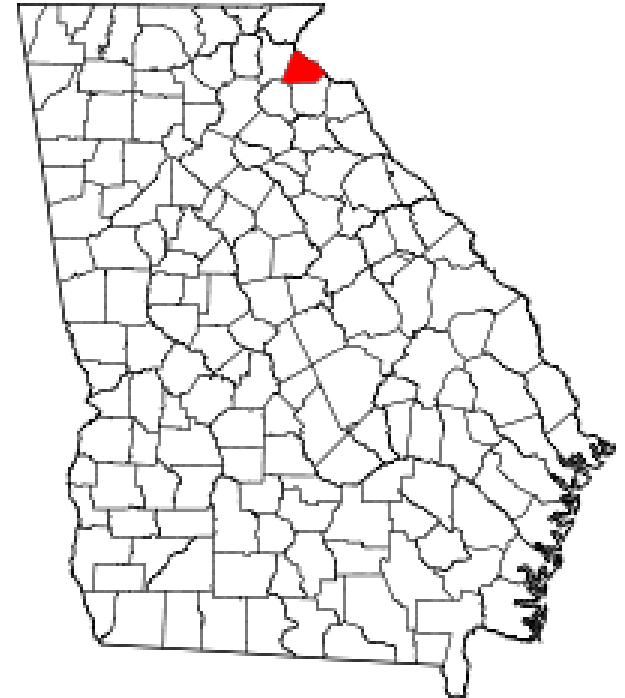


Current State of Tourism in Stephens County



2015 Tourism Economic Impact – Stephens County

- **\$30.91** million in direct tourism expenditures
- **\$1.2** million in State Tax
- **\$850** thousand in Local Tax
- **287** jobs
- **\$5.61** million in payroll



Numbers represent calendar year 2015

Source: U.S. Travel Association: 2015 Travel Economic Impact on Georgia State, Counties and Regions

5 Year Trend – Tourism in Stephens County

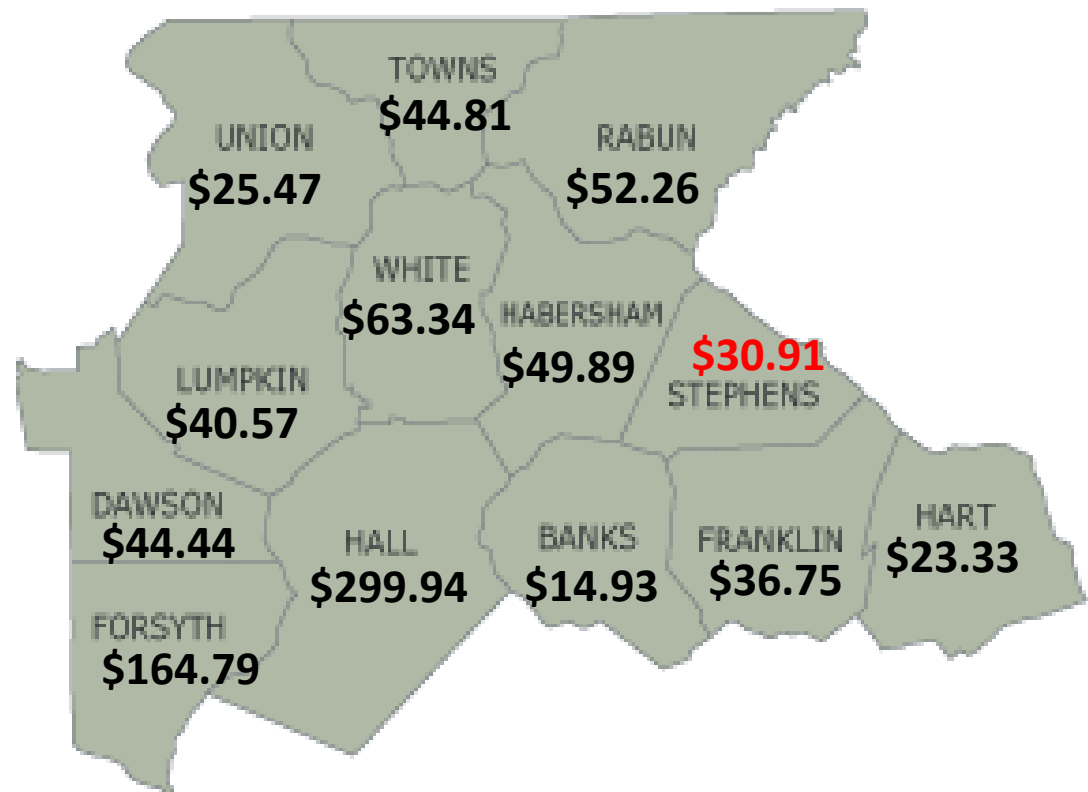
- **2010**
 - **\$26.48** million in direct tourism expenditures
 - **284** jobs
- **2015**
 - **\$30.91** million in direct tourism expenditures
 - **287** jobs

16.73% increase over 5 years

Numbers represent calendar years 2010 - 2015

*Source: U.S. Travel Association: 2015 Travel Economic Impact on Georgia State, Counties and Regions;
Travel Industry Association of America Economic Impact of Travel on Georgia 2010 Profile*

Regional Comparison: Tourism Economic Impact in Georgia Region 2

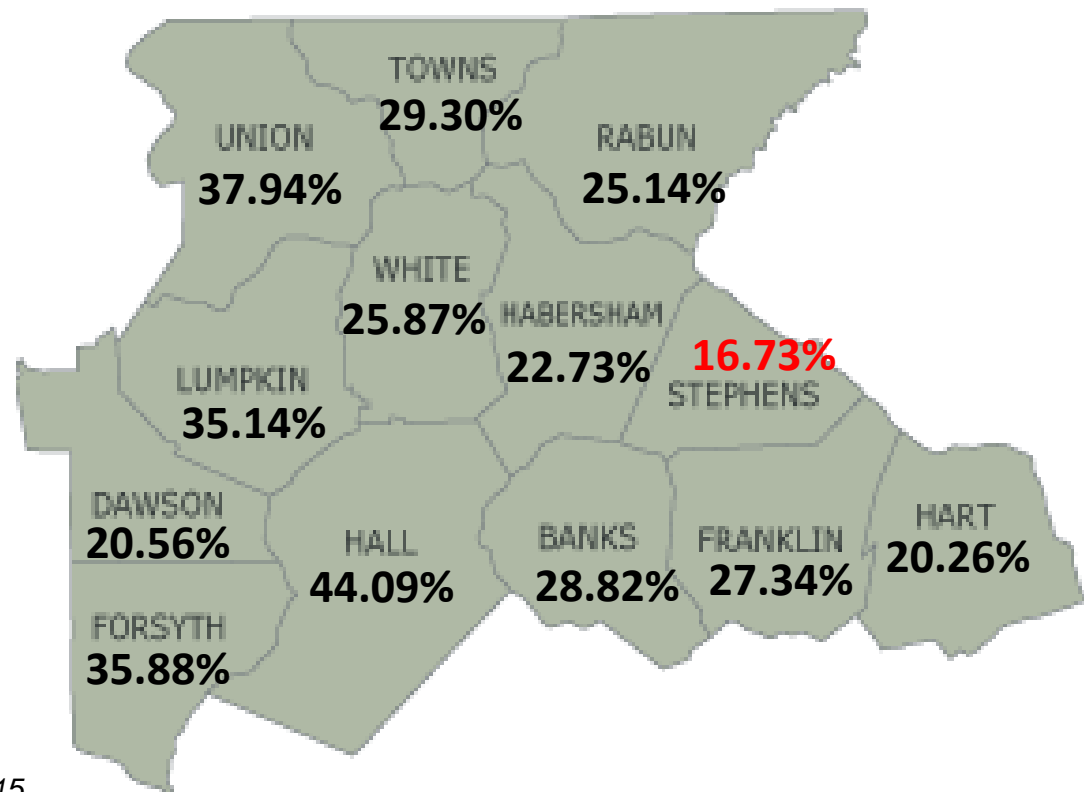


**Figures in millions*

Numbers represent calendar year 2015

Source: U.S. Travel Association: 2015 Travel Economic Impact on Georgia State, Counties and Regions

Regional Comparison: Ten Year Tourism Progression in Georgia Region 2



**Figures adjusted for inflation*

Numbers represent calendar years 2010 - 2015

*Source: U.S. Travel Association: 2015 Travel Economic
Impact on Georgia State, Counties and Regions*

Comprehensive Brand, Identity and Organization



Comprehensive Brand, Identity and Organizations

Overview:

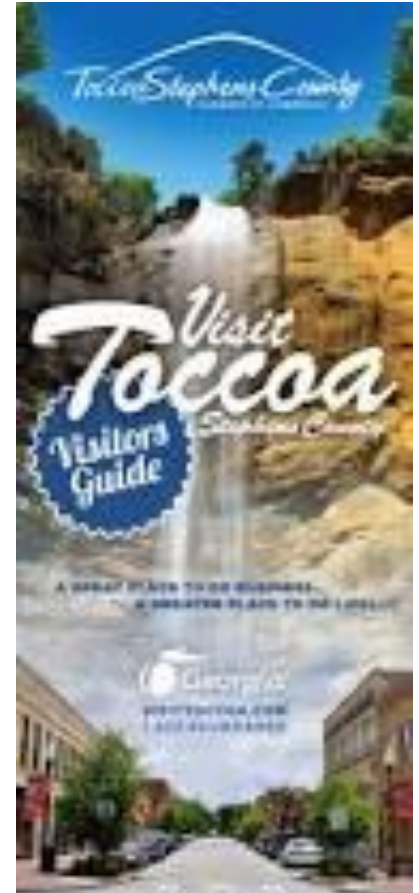
While Stephens County Chamber of Commerce is the designated DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) for Toccoa-Stephens County, the City of Toccoa also promotes visitation to the city as noted by its website content. This cross-promotion is positive and shows that the entities are cohesive in their mission to encourage visitation. However, a challenge that both the Chamber and City face is that their target audience is more than just visitors. An example of this is the Chamber's website. To find lodging, attractions, and dining, one must first click on Members, then Business Directory, then search various categories. This type of promotion also has the potential for leaving out key attractions that may not be chamber members or have no organization to join the chamber such as outdoor trails and rivers.

Recommendation Chamber Website:

- Create a "visitor" microsite or visitor pages within the larger chamber website, accessed by a clearly stated "Visitor Information" link on the chamber's home page.
- Direct the chamber's visitor URL 'VisitToccoa.com' to land directly on the home page of the visitor info micro-site; utilized the Visit Toccoa logo as noted on the Facebook page.
- Promote all attractions and activities in Toccoa-Stephens County, giving highlight to chamber members. Visitors are looking for activity and are less concerned with who is a member or not.

Recommendation City Website:

- Create a central link to the Visit Toccoa micro-site so all attractions are promoted in the same location with links back to the City's website for bookings, tee times, etc.
- All visitor inquiries should be directed to the Chamber/Welcome Center. Currently, visitors to the City's website don't have a link for further inquiry or to request visitor information.



Comprehensive Brand, Identity and Organizations



Recommendation: Regional Partnerships - Think Beyond City and County Lines

Partnering with neighboring cities, counties and attractions can be mutually beneficial. It gives the visitor additional reasons to visit a certain area while also encouraging them to stay longer.

Successful Marketing Partnership Examples:

- Gone with the Wind Trail - www.gwtwtrail.com
- Georgia's Antebellum Trail
- Alpharetta & Roswell CVB Holiday Marketing Partnership
- Georgia Grown Trail: 41

Potential Partners:

- Habersham County
- White County
- Hall County

Recommendations:

The City of Toccoa and Stephens County should forge strong relationships with neighboring communities; learn and understand their goals and dreams for future tourism – when your goals overlap, find a way to work together to promote and develop a unified, regional trail. For example, the vast outdoor recreation of the North Georgia Mountains ties all communities together. Consider the potential of a “**Great North Georgia Fitness Challenge Trail**” and tie together Currahee Mountain, kayaking at the Olympic Center in Gainesville and other extreme outdoor challenges across the region! Package and promote as a new product created from existing products!

**GONE
WITH THE
WIND
TRAIL**

Georgia's Official State
Designated Trail

Visitor Center & Services



Visitor Center & Services

Overview: Stephens County Chamber of Commerce and Welcome Center

The Toccoa-Stephens County Chamber of Commerce and Welcome Center are located in the renovated train depot on Alexander Street in downtown Toccoa. The location is shared with the Historical Society and the County and Military Museum.

The Chamber is most often the first stop for visitors to Stephens County as well as potential investors and businesses. The Chamber provides information on the county's rich history, manufacturing, retail and service industries, award winning public schools, state of the art medical facilities, superior public utilities, outstanding community amenities, tourist attractions, unsurpassed natural beauty and outdoor recreation including Lake Hartwell ... the Great Lake of the South.

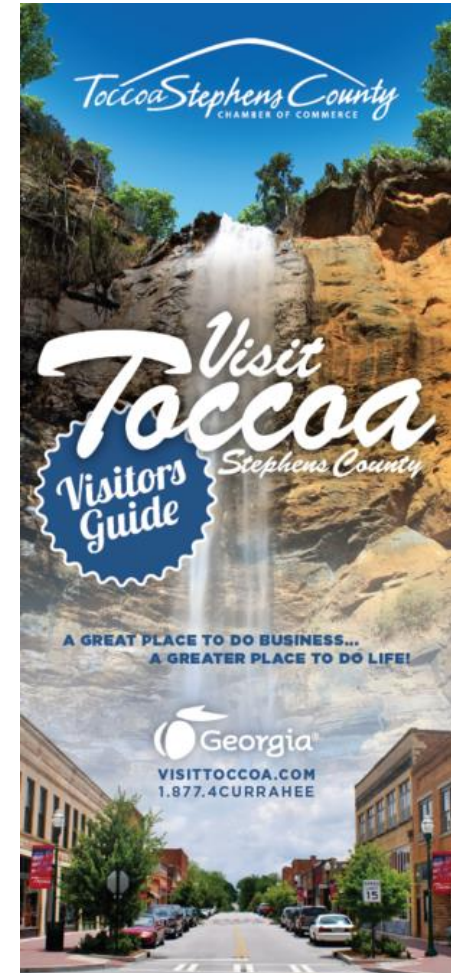
The Chamber is a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering the interests of its 400-plus valued Members who represent our community including business, educational, professional, civic, recreational, industrial and political arenas. Members identify opportunities to solve challenges and shape the future of business and the community. The Chamber staff provides leadership, coordinates interested parties and initiates action.

Chamber of Commerce Hours:

Mon - Fri | 8:30am – 5:00pm | Sat - Sun | Closed

Welcome Center Hours:

Mon - Fri | 8:30am - 5:00pm | Sat - Sun | 1:00pm - 4:00pm



Visitor Center & Services

Recommendation: Separate Chamber Info from Visitor Info

The welcome center staff should be the first contact for visitors entering the Welcome Center/Chamber of Commerce. They should act as hosts, receptionists and most important, Information Specialists. They will direct visitors to their proper destination for Chamber information and all visitor services that they require. There should be a distinct physical separation between welcome center services and Chamber of Commerce. All who enter are your guests!

New brochure racks are needed to separate tourist information and business brochures. The brochure racks should be at eye level beginning about hip high so your visitors do not have bend down to reach a brochure. Organized in a way that is easy to navigate and have a moderate amount of brochures for each rack.

Recommendation: Establish Satellite Visitor Centers

Because Stephens County has several different entry points for visitors, satellite visitor centers should be considered. These can be housed in the different restaurants, antique shops, bed and breakfast, and attractions throughout the county. Busy restaurants or shops are perfect locations to have a small brochure racks to promote the entire county.

Signage should be placed where visitors can distinctly recognize the places where they can receive information no matter where they are in the county. Include your brand and unique image on this signage. All visitor centers and kiosks should have strong visual signage and directional signage on the gateway entrances to each community.



Visitor Center & Services

Recommendation: Build Interactive Exhibits

Highlight the best of Stephens County's history, attractions, and events with small revolving exhibits within the visitor center. Install signage for each display piece to interpret the exhibit and provide information to drive visitors to a site or business. Make the displays interactive to create an attraction out of your visitor center itself!

Think about families traveling and what they would enjoy doing together in your center; for example:

- Create a children's corner that will allow parents the opportunity to gather information wanted, while allowing you the time to sell your community.
- Develop photo stand in scenes or face-hole cutouts for kids and adults alike to interact with potential attractions.
- Partner within your county and find businesses or chamber members to offer daily samples to visitors. Pick a partner of the week or month you can highlight and steer visitors to.



Columbus, GA Visitor Center



Abingdon, VA Visitor Center

Visitor Center & Services



Recommendation: Foster a Spirit of Cross-Marketing and Encourage the Front Line of Stephens County to Work Together to Build Tourism

While the visitor center may be a physical space, the most successful tourism destinations build tourism by transforming every business and individual throughout the community into an individual visitor center. If a visitor walks into any business throughout Stephens County, they should be able to ask a plethora of questions about your community and get all the answers they need!

Training and communication is key to successfully building a spirit of cooperation among county and regional partners. Host FAM (familiarization) tours for all restaurant employees, shop owners and others on the front line with visitors and work with the same counterparts in the surrounding counties. Encourage your regional partners to host FAMs for guest service providers from your area. Working together as a region and knowing all points of interest and attractions will keep your visitors occupied and produce longer stays.

Have you ever heard there is nothing to do here? Stephens County residents are some of the warmest and most welcoming people around, but most residents don't realize that they are in the tourism business. When visitors are traveling, they come in contact with a wide range of businesses and frontline employees. Making visitors feel truly welcomed and answering any travel questions that might come up will help the visitor form an opinion on the area and whether or not they might extend their visit or even recommend the area to others. Front line employees - whether it is the waitress at the BBQ restaurant or the owner of the antique store - need to be knowledgeable about all that there is to see and do in the community and the surrounding areas. For example, the restaurants should be quick to recommend the hotels, and the hotels should be quick to recommend the restaurants.

Visitor Center & Services

Recommendation: Utilize State Visitor Information Centers for Promotion

The #1 best FREE marketing opportunity for Georgia communities is building strong relationships with the 11 Georgia Visitor Information Centers (VICs). The two most vital state visitor centers for Stephens County are the I-85 North / West Point Visitor Center and the I-85 South / Lavonia Visitor Center.

Recommendations:

- The staff of your two primary VICs should be invited for an extensive FAM trip of Stephens County attractions for experience training. A strong relationship with the front line personnel of the Georgia VICs will have a strong return on investment by directing visitors directly to your community.
- Participate in the 11 Georgia on My Mind Days - this free show is scheduled between April - October at each of the Georgia Visitor Centers. Participating in these will give you a chance to be in front of the traveling public and a chance to network with other communities just like yours.
- Install a fun interactive display in the Georgia Visitor Center in Lavonia and West Point or a mobile display that can travel from center to center.
- Participate in the advertising opportunities at each VIC or the Featured Partner Program (have your attractions join in).



Interactive displays by Visit Savannah in the Savannah Visitor Information Center

Planning & Infrastructure



Gateway Signage

Recommendation: Develop Gateway Signage Along Major Entrances to the County

Stephens County has several major and minor highway entrances. To create a unique sense of place and introduction to the area, the county should welcome visitors with arms wide open through vibrant, bright signage, especially along gateways from major entrances.

The CVB and Chamber should work with the County, multiple Cities, and DOT to create a master plan for gateway and welcome signage on all major entrances to the county. The masterplan should include all major and minor highway entrances to the county.

Examples:

- Dahlonega: <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/6d/63/12/6d631230cc96b1af78660394a8503010.jpg>
- Carrollton: <http://rdcnewscdn.realtor.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/slider-sign.jpg>
- Decatur: <http://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/wp-content/uploads/photo-01-300x200.jpg>

Primary Contact:

GDOT District 1 Engineer -Brent Cook
770-531-5723 | bcook@dot.ga.gov



Dahlonega entrance signage



Albany entrance signage

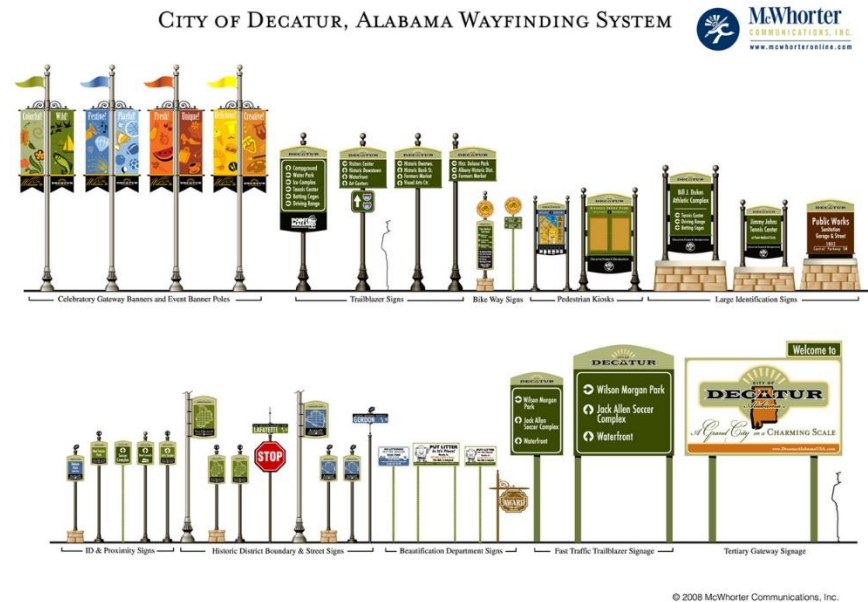
Wayfinding Signage

Recommendation: Establish a unified wayfinding signage system

Stephens County has already identified the need to improve signage to improve tourism and recreation opportunities. The county should work with area planning agencies including the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission to create a new master plan for future signage.

The following outline is a guide of a wayfinding study and master plan:

1. Inventory of existing signage
2. Traffic count report and analysis
3. Report of condition of existing signage
4. Proposition of new signage
5. Prioritization of existing and future signage
6. Design guidelines for signage



Sample Signage Program

Wayfinding Signage

Recommendation: Establish a Unified Wayfinding Signage System

Directional signage should be an integral part of success for destinations. In areas that gain a significant amount of revenue from out-of-town visitors, implementing creative signage design can be a good way to make sure tourists can find the attractions they're looking for.

Many travelers don't research the geography/layout of a place before they take a trip. They hope instead to rely on their sense of direction (aided by landscape cues and signage when it's present). Many people don't explore an area until they've found their target destination to ensure they have the time to wander (although they may make note of what they pass in case they have time to go back).

Sometimes our destination is not part of a larger wayfinding directional system, but we have learned from experience that it can reliably be found near other familiar and signed destinations. For example, most people will first assume that government offices are downtown unless otherwise notified. If your government offices are located where people expect to find them, namely downtown, those offices may only need to appear on wayfinding signs on the edge or within downtown (saving space on signs for other attractions).

Once visitors begin to follow signs directing them to a specific attraction, they expect the signs to take them all the way to or past that attraction. Without instructions to turn, people will assume they should continue straight. They will be frustrated if that guess was wrong. Return trips can be even more challenging from a wayfinding perspective, so help visitors find their way home too. Sometimes the return route requires travelers to use different roads. As much as we may not want them to leave, getting lost on the way home will leave visitors with a negative last impression.



Sample Signage

Wayfinding Signage

Recommendation: Establish a Unified Wayfinding Signage System

Study gateways/entrances to the downtown core: It is important to acknowledge that gateways and entrances exist wherever and however people enter downtown. We can't sign them all, which is a case in point for the importance of landscape cues. However, we can identify primary entrances.

Map public attractions: Identify public attractions. Which attractions are most important to include on wayfinding signs largely depends on the location of each sign within the system. Each major decision point needs a sign, and each sign should provide a directional arrow toward the attractions reached from that location (up to a maximum of five).

Propose wayfinding sign locations and content: Gateways, vehicular decision points, and pedestrian decision points all require different styles of signs. A rule of thumb is to locate wayfinding signs at least at every major intersection, and at any other major decision point throughout the downtown and community. Each sign should also incorporate a logo consistent with all other downtown or community branding.

Propose design improvements to enhance wayfinding: The biggest wayfinding weaknesses are often uncontrolled signage and lack of visual design cues. Collective sign clutter lessens the effectiveness of each sign. You can improve your signage system by first maintaining those signs that are necessary and second by removing unnecessary signs—addition by subtraction. When it is unlikely that visitors will impulsively change their route because they see a particular sign, then it may be more effective to try other ways of marketing an attraction. For example, attractions could cooperatively produce a brochure (to influence/assist people before a trip) rather than pepper the landscape with competing signs.



Sample Signage

Walkability within Toccoa

Recommendation: Map and Encourage Future Development of Sidewalks within Downtown Cores

Sidewalks separated from the roadway are the preferred accommodation for pedestrians, especially visitors who prefer to walk from destination to destination and truly experience a city. Sidewalks provide many benefits including safety, mobility, and healthier communities. According to the Federal Highway Administration, providing walkways for pedestrians dramatically increases how well visitors perceive their needs are being met within a community.

Within the core downtown district, there are key areas of pedestrian walking paths that are missing or incomplete, therefore offering a sub-par experience to visitors in town for weekend, special events or just lunch.

Recommendations:

- Encourage city leaders to walk from City Hall to different areas of the city to personally evaluate the pedestrian system currently in place. Often, residents and leaders of a community do not ever see their own pedestrian system because we rely on auto transportation the majority of time within our own community.
- Working with the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, develop a master plan for sidewalk development and management in Stephens County communities.



Sample Sidewalk Plan

Nature Based Tourism & Recreation



Water Trails

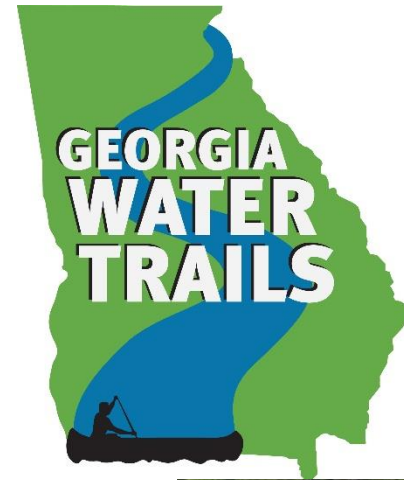
Overview: Water Trails

Water Trails are recreational corridors and routes on rivers and lakes that provide a unique experience for canoeists and kayakers and provide adequate access points that can be used for planning your trips at various lengths and difficulty.

A water trail may also provide access to riverside campgrounds, primitive campsites, amenities such as shelters and restrooms in city, county or state parks. A water trail will have a detailed map showing access points and river mileage and may even provide information on history and area culture, wildlife viewing opportunities and more.

They can help reconnect locals and visitors to the history, heritage, geology and wildlife of an area. A water trail promotes an ethic of caring that makes us more aware of our surroundings and environment and can be thought of as educational venues.

Whether they are used for relaxation, health and fitness, education or just for spending time with family, water trails provide in-state destinations for recreational river users that can even help boost local economies.



Water Trails

Overview: Water Trails

Research proves that investment in developing and marketing water trails is a quality return on investment:

In Georgia:

- Recreationists spend \$11.3 billion annually on canoeing, kayaking, and rafting.
- Approximately 1 million paddlers participate in the sport.

Nationwide, the outdoor recreation industry provides:

- 7.6 million American jobs. (up from 6.1 million in 2012)
- \$887 billion in spending each year. (2012 was \$646 billion)
- \$65.3 billion in federal tax revenue. (2012 was 39.9 billion)
- \$59.2 billion in state/local tax revenue. (2012 was 39.7 billion)

Nationwide, the outdoor recreation participants:

- Spend \$139 billion annually on water sports¹ (kayaking, stand-up paddling, rafting, canoeing, and motorized boating) which is up from \$86 billion in 2012.
- Water Sports is the third highest revenue stream, followed by camping at \$166 billion, with trail sports in the lead at \$201 billion.
- Water sports directly support more than 1,000,000 jobs annually.
- From 2012 to 2017, annual spending on water sports has increased by \$53 billion. Additionally over these past five years, the increasing revenue stream of water sports has increased job opportunities from 800,000 to over 1,000,000.



Recommendation: Develop a Water Trail in Stephens County

Rural communities interested in water trail development should be aware of impacts on local culture, the environment and businesses. Negative impacts can be mitigated if the community is supportive of water trail development and there is dedicated management. The following recommendations should help project leaders plan, organize and create facilities for water trails while minimizing impacts on rural communities. Georgia River Network works with communities to develop river trails in Georgia.

Planning and Organizational Needs

- A shared vision for a water trail is a goal that community members believe in and are willing to work towards. Dedicated local support for a goal-oriented project will sustain local water trail benefits. A dedicated group of volunteers is key to water trail success. A water trail must be advocated and maintained locally if the community will reap economic and social benefits.
- Address landowner and citizen concerns through outreach to the community early in the project. A designated contact person should respond quickly and accurately to suggestions, concerns and other comments. A pre-opening/pre-construction trail paddle will allow community members to see the proposed water trail for themselves.
- Solidify funding, planning and overall water trail management with clear leadership and goals. These factors should be considered before marketing a water trail.
- Investigate local goals, norms and land use patterns that are inconsistent with the water trail vision or threaten the integrity of a paddling experience should be evaluated. Tourism development in rural areas will have social implications including increased land values.
- Explore partnership opportunities and apply for grants and offers of assistance. Local officials, government agencies, businesses and the community should commit to water trail project goals. Successful water trails are the result of a cooperative effort between an active citizen group, a responsive public agency, and a supportive community all of whom share a vision for the trail. Partner with lodging, eating and drinking,

Recommendation: Develop a Water Trail in Stephens County

- Retail sales, and recreational services businesses.
- Host events to advertise the trail, build support and draw new volunteers.
- Noteworthy events such as water trail grand openings and annual paddling festivals provide excellent opportunity to make contact with the community, present accurate information and generate positive media attention.

Infrastructure Needs

- Designate and clearly sign legal access points and public land at reasonable intervals to minimize landowner concerns.
- Promote 'leave no trace' ethics or provide adequately maintained facilities to mitigate for environmental impacts from improperly disposed human waste, large groups and littering.
- Improve access to parking at river put-ins. Information and access are two big issues to improve trail system usage.
- Manage a river experience, the quality of the natural environment and uncrowded river conditions are important to paddlers. These aspects of the river experience are vital for all management actions.
- Explore the history of the waterway and interpret these stories to paddlers in creative ways. Trail users often have an interest in the history and environment of the community, and can help to support museums, nature centers and other cultural assets. The interpretation of history and linkages with the past is a marketable concept.
- Offer a variety of accessible activities. Paddlers are often interested in easy access to downtown, restaurants, campgrounds and bed and breakfasts, in other outdoor recreation experiences and learning about local history and culture. Successful paddle destinations offer diverse activities with a wide variety of opportunities. Overnight trips are key.

Tugaloo Bend River Trail

With its proximity to the river, Tugaloo Bend is a perfect location to rent canoes and kayaks, which they have begun doing. Development of a river trail will enhance rentals of canoes & kayaks.

Recommendation:

Work with UGA, local resources and Georgia River Network to develop river trail route with information on local flora, fauna and historical interests along proposed trail.

Marketing & Promotion--Utilize the following to promote the trail to potential visitors:

- ExploreGeorgia.org
- Tugaloo Bend's webpage
- Network with other river trails
- Toccoa – Stephens County Chamber website
- Other sites that list paddling trails



The Links at Lake Toccoa

Recommendation: Develop a Marketing Plan for The Links

While the city has done an incredible job of renovating and improving the course and facilities at The Links at Lake Toccoa, not many visitors currently know about these improvements. A full marketing plan for the property must be developed to attract visitors to the improved facilities.

Make Improvements to the website:

- Reflections – Add people to the photo
- Ping's Grill – Intro should describe how it got its name
- Post Summer Hours – include months for winter/summer
- Dead space – add another photo, possibly of the patio/lake
- Add info on trails
- Use FB Icon rather than the word Facebook
- Each page should say...The Links at Lake Toccoa
- The Ping's Grill FB page should indicate The Links at Lake Toccoa
- Consider adding activities such as lawn bowling in unused areas
- Create golf packages with lodging in area



Ping's Grill

Ping's Grill is Toccoa's premier bar and grill. Located at the luxurious Links at Lake Toccoa, a 9-hole municipal golf course, Ping's Grill is open to the public and features the best burger in town, a diverse menu, and a large selection of beer and wine.

Ping's Grill is open to the public and has plenty of parking. We also accommodate all of your special occasions, i.e. private parties, weddings, receptions, etc. Ping's Grill may be closed in the event of one of these scenarios, so please call for availability. Come enjoy Ping's Grill today!

Feel free to call us: 706.898.6117

Check out our [menu!](#)

Our Facebook may be found [HERE](#).

Address:
201 Black Mountain Road
Toccoa, GA 30977

Directions:
From Downtown Toccoa: Turn right onto Broad Street, then left onto Falls Road. Follow Falls Road until Black Mountain Road. If you pass Lake Toccoa on your right, you've gone too far. Once on Black Mountain Road, turn left soon after into the clubhouse parking lot. Follow the signs. Ping's Grill is located in the restored clubhouse building.



Winter Hours:

- Sunday: 11:30 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.
- Monday: Closed
- Tuesday: 11:30 A.M. - 8:00 P.M.
- Wednesday: 11:30 A.M. - 8:00 P.M.
- Thursday: 11:30 A.M. - 8:00 P.M.
- Friday: 11:30 A.M. - 8:00 P.M.
- Saturday: 11:30 A.M. - 8:00 P.M.

Reflections at Lake Toccoa

This premier event center for Toccoa is an asset for bringing visitors to the community. At a capacity of 200 people, the center is a good size for hosting events such as weddings, receptions, business meetings and family reunions which have the potential for generating overnight business. In researching other golf courses with meeting/conference centers, Reflections at Lake Toccoa seems to be in line with regard to fees. Efforts need to be directed at two areas: Marketing & Special Events.

Recommendation:

- Create events such as Masterpiece Mixers (create your own) Art classes and wine tastings, Yoga and Tee Offs, Teas and Tees, etc.
- Take advantage of the GTD resources including group leads to market to reunions, group tours, student athlete groups, etc. Network with other meeting facilities in Toccoa and Stephens County to refer meetings, conferences, weddings.
- Create listing on www.ExploreGeorgia.org for Reflections.
- Revamp and update webpage to be more informative and more tourist friendly. Include pictures with people in them having fun.
- Create packages that include overnight lodging; market to wedding parties and family reunion groups.
- Consider restructuring rental rates to reflect a premium for most requested days such as Friday and Saturday, and a reduced rate to encourage rental on slower days; this would allow for maximum revenue advantage. The Depot in Ringgold, GA is an example of this type of rate structure.
- Create all-inclusive themed rental packages for group types such as business meetings, reunions, weddings and receptions.
- Consider a City-sponsored open house event each year in early spring to showcase the facility to the local community and surrounding counties with vendors for wedding planning, family reunions, local caterers, etc. Added workshops such as how to plan a family reunion, wedding planning, tips, etc., can help attract attendees and encourage facility bookings.



Lodging at Lake Toccoa

Recommendation: Provide Lodging at Lake Toccoa

Lake Toccoa provides such a wonderful place for visitors to soak up the nature around them. Adding a new lodging opportunity, such as Yurts around the edge of Lake Toccoa would provide a unique lodging experience for your visitor.



Toccoa Falls

Recommendation: Establish a Rosalynn Carter Butterfly Garden at Toccoa Falls

On November 6, 1977, the Toccoa Falls Dam in Georgia gave way and 39 people die in the resulting flood.

Ninety miles north of Atlanta, the Toccoa (Cherokee for “beautiful”) Falls Dam was constructed of earth across a canyon in 1887, creating a 55-acre lake 180 feet above the Toccoa Creek. In 1911, R.A. Forrest established the Christian and Missionary Alliance College along the creek below the dam. According to legend, he bought the land for the campus from a banker with the only \$10 dollars he had to his name, offering God’s word that he would pay the remaining \$24,990 of the purchase price later.

Sixty-six years later on November 5, a volunteer fireman inspected the dam and found everything in order. However, just hours afterward, in the early morning of November 6, the dam suddenly gave way. Water thundered down the canyon and creek, approaching speeds of 120 miles per hour.

Although there was a tremendous roar when the dam broke, the residents of the college had no time to evacuate. Within minutes, the entire community was slammed by a wave of water. One woman managed to hang onto a roof torn from a building and ride the wave of water for thousands of feet. Her three daughters, however, were not so fortunate: They were among the 39 people who lost their lives in the flood.

First lady Rosalynn Carter visited the college to offer her support in the wake of the tragedy. She later wrote, “Instead, I was enveloped by hope and courage and love.”



1977 Dam Break

Toccoa Falls

Recommendation: Establish a Rosalynn Carter Butterfly Garden at Toccoa Falls

Butterfly Trail:

Rosalynn Carter wanted to establish a butterfly garden at her home in Plains, Georgia to encourage the conservation of butterflies and their habitats. In April 2013, The Rosalynn Carter Butterfly Trail was established by Annette Wise with the Georgia Department of Education. The trail resulted from Mrs. Carter's desire to bring public awareness to the declining monarch butterfly population. The state's science and social studies curricula were reviewed and links identified for various grade levels. A plan was established to promote public, private, and school gardens.

Information: <https://jimmycarter.info/butterfly-trail/overview/>

In honor of First Lady Carter's visit to Toccoa Falls and the memory of the victims of the accident, the community can plant a butterfly garden at Toccoa Falls. An area outside of the visitor center is prime for a garden and can include interpretation on the plants and types of butterflies attracted.

Join the Butterfly Trail (free!) and cooperatively market the trail with the other gardens throughout Georgia.



Rosalynn Carter Butterfly Trail



Butterfly Trail

Broken Bridge

Recommendation: Create a Walking Trail System at Broken Bridge

Overview:

Broken Bridge is one of the most iconic destinations in Stephens County. Visitors are regularly coming to this site to take photos, picnic and walk. However, there is not a large amount of walking trails for visitors to currently take advantage of.

Currently, visitors has forged their own paths through the woods along the lake to view the bridge from different angles. There are primitive paths all along the shore line where visitors are already venturing – there is a clear demand and need for additional viewing points and walking trails that are safe and publically maintained. There should also be points of interpretation throughout the trail that tells the story of the bridge, the lake and the eco—system of Stephens County.

Work with the US Army Corps of Engineers and local Representatives to encourage development of a small trail system with viewing points. If the corps is not interested in additional development, the county should consider developing a land-use or lease agreement with the US Corps for development. This asset and attraction is incredibly important to Stephens County and the community should do everything within their abilities to develop the property to its best condition. Presently, the bridge needs general maintenance regarding basic safety concerns and general clean-up.



Broken Bridge



Sample Lakeside overlook with interpretation

Agritourism



Overall Marketing of County Agritourism

Recommendation: Think Outside of the Box and Start Small

Agritourism locations do not have to be year-round operations.

Seasonal activities can include:

- Roadside markets
- Equine related activities
- Corn mazes
- Tree farms (Christmas trees)
- Festivals (harvest, grape festival, etc.)
- Pumpkin patches
- Industry trade shows/events: gardening



706-343-1855

Christmas Hours:
9:00 am - 5:30 pm, 7 days/week
November 19 - December 17

Here comes Santa Claus!
Santa will be visiting Grandma's Christmas Shop!
November 25-27, December 3-4 & 10-11
Skip the lines at the mall and take your picture with Santa at Jack's Creek!
**Please call to confirm Santa's daily schedule*

TREES FOR TROOPS
www.treesfortroops.org
Jack's Creek Farm has pledged 15 trees to send to U.S. Troops all over the world - visit the Christmas Trees page to learn how you can help or call us to order!



Click here to follow us on Facebook for updates & specials!



Wineries

Recommendation: Develop Wineries into Regional Tourism Products

There are easily 20-30 wineries within a 50 mile radius of Toccoa. Partnering with those wineries to develop a trail of stops would be feasible. Capitalizing on Currahee Vineyard's existing business and growing from that point would be beneficial. By group marketing the region, there would be a larger pool of attractions that could draw visitors to the area.

Suggest partnering with Boutier Winery, Chateau Elan Winery & Resort and Sweet Acre Farms to create the Georgia Foothills Wine Trail.

If customers that go to special events at the Vineyard could be directed toward downtown (and also suitable lodging options), it would not be difficult to convert day trips to weekend trips. Restaurant partnerships would be helpful. Offer a reciprocal discount for visitors that purchase both wine/tastings and meals downtown.



Wineries

Recommendation: Establish an Environment Favorable for Breweries and Distilleries to Compliment Wineries

Craft breweries and distilleries are also the State's fastest trend in alcohol production. There is some favorable legislation that has recently been passed that makes it legal for brewers and distillers to sell a small amount of their own product on site. This is huge and could make even more growth in this area possible. I recommend actively recruiting these entrepreneurs as well as food entrepreneurs to your downtown. This law will go into effect on September 1 (<http://savannahnow.com/politics/news/2017-03-13/georgia-house-passes-long-awaited-brewery-distillery-bill>)



Farmers Market

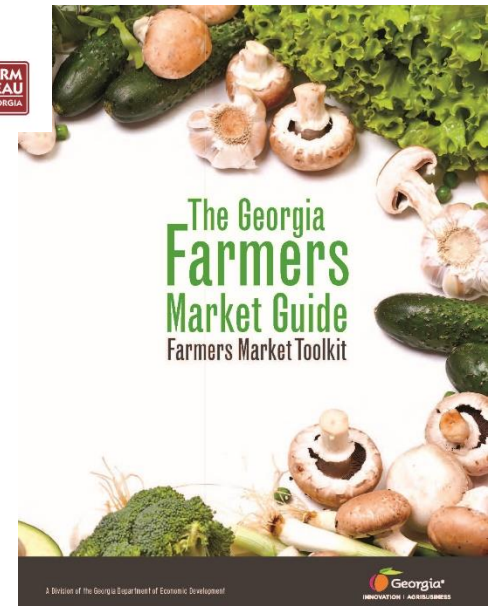
Recommendation: Keep Farmers Market in Current Location

It is recommended that the farmers market remains downtown. That would be most beneficial for both the farmers and the downtown merchants.

Saturday Market Days, Weeknight Markets, etc. will increase downtown foot traffic, prove beneficial for farmers, artisans, merchants, and residents.

Utilize the Center of Innovation for Agribusiness's Farmers Market Toolkit

http://www.georgia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Farmers-Market-Toolkit_Final_web-version.pdf



Arts & Tourism



Arts & Tourism

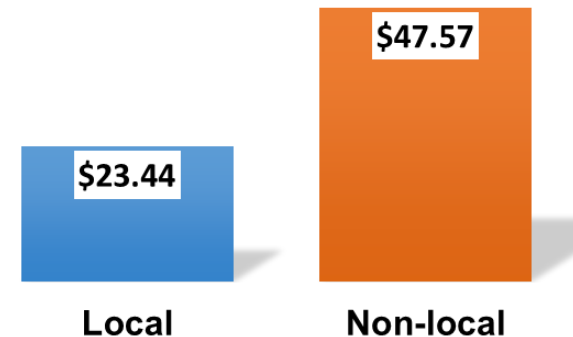
Why are the arts important to tourism?

Why are the arts important to tourism?

- Art can be a problem solver
- Art can bring people in a community together
- Art attracts cultural heritage tourists, who spend more money than other tourists
- Art can help interpret local stories and history through painting, murals, theatre, music, storytelling, etc.
- Art can help brand your town with a look, a logo, a sound, an image that is unique
- Art can help make a community vibrant and alive, a place where people want to live and visit



Arts Event Spending Not Including Ticket Sales
Local vs. Non-Local Audiences



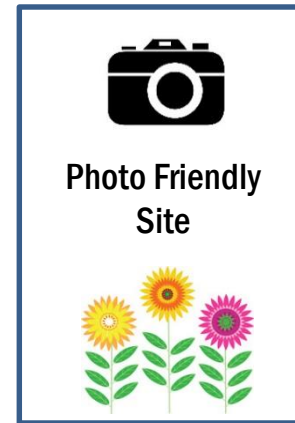
Americans for the Arts

Arts & Tourism

Recommendation: Establish Photo Friendly Sites

Tourists coming to Toccoa/Stephens County are looking for breathtaking views and unspoiled nature. It makes sense to show visitors where they can find those beautiful spots and where they can get the best view and take the best photos.

Establish Photo Friendly Sites in the county. These would be sites that are open to the public, are easily accessible, and would offer photographers a beautiful, scenic shot that is not cluttered with telephone poles, electric wires, signs, etc. Members of the community that are skilled photographers could recommend the sites. The sites could be mapped online and in hard copy. Depending on the number of sites, they could be divided into categories, such as sunsets, flowers, water, etc. The sites could be designated with a sign that would be visible but would not get in the way of the photographers. These sites could also be the location for photography workshops during the year, such as a class on how to take the perfect sunset shot.

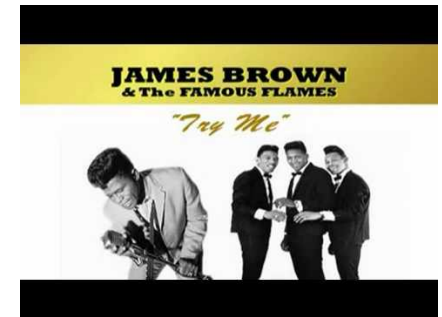


Arts & Tourism: James Brown

The fact that James Brown has such a strong connection to Toccoa is probably surprising to many people, and visitors will want to know more.

Recommendation: Create a James Brown walking tour

Put together a James Brown walking/driving tour which highlights the locations that are significant in his rise to fame. These could include places where he lived or worked, his schools, Camp Toccoa, places where he performed, etc.

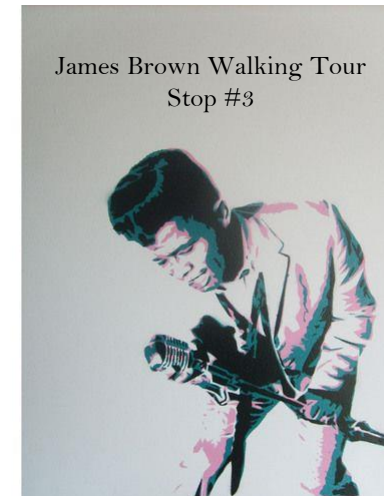


Recommendation: Add audio/video

Add audio/video to the history museum exhibit so that visitors can listen to/watch very early James Brown when he lived in Toccoa.

Recommendation: Sell James Brown merchandise

Find James Brown merchandise to sell that shows him during his early days in Toccoa, or develop your own merchandise with a unique image that tourists can only acquire in Toccoa. Any merchandise should include a prominent reference to Toccoa to encourage people to visit.



Arts & Tourism: Ritz Theatre

Recommendation: Market to Ritz audiences

Take advantage of the crowds that The Ritz will draw to encourage visitors to come back for other events and activities. While visitors are waiting on a production to start, run a slide show that highlights upcoming events and activities in the community. This could be combined with a curtain speech from someone in the community, and the new video on the Toccoa area.

Recommendation: Put together programs for young adults

Put together a junior board consisting of teens and college-aged students to program events and activities that will appeal to this age group.

Recommendation: Brand Ritz-produced programs

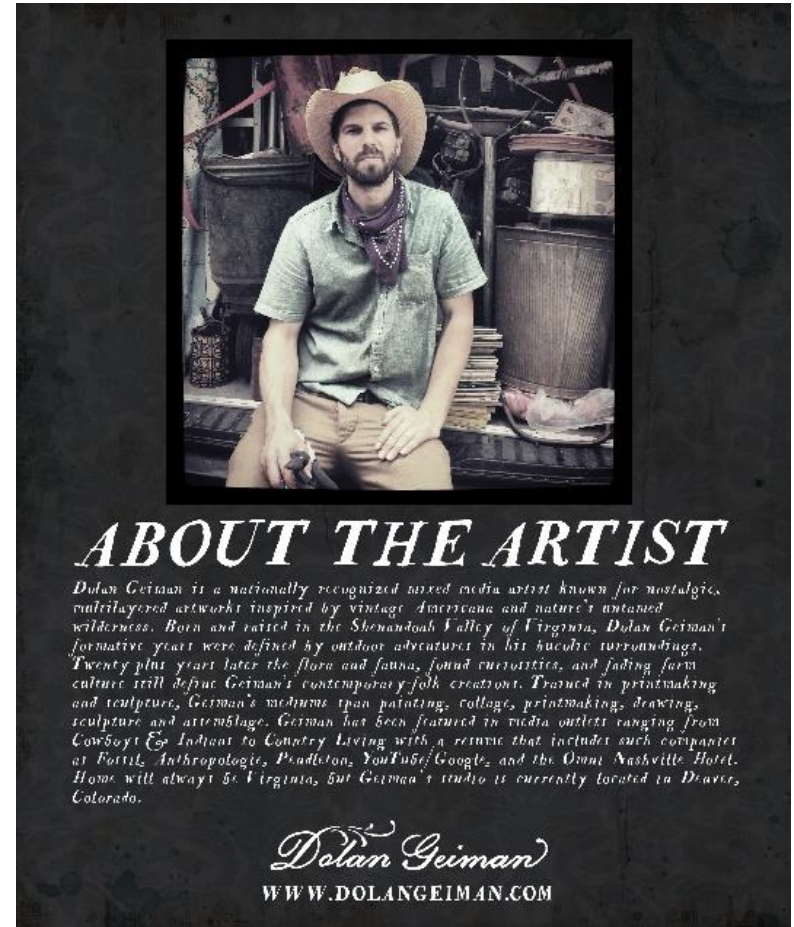
Differentiate between Ritz-produced events and rental events on your website and in the schedule. If organizations renting the facility present poor quality productions, attendees may assume that the event was produced by the Ritz and not want to return.



Arts & Tourism: All Things Currahee

Recommendation: Tell the Artists' Stories

The All Things Currahee store is a wonderful way to present work from local artists. While the items in the shop are wonderful, there is so much more meaning to them once you know the story of the artist behind the object. The Team recommends that labels/signs be added which contain photos and stories about the artists behind each product. Each artist could create his/her own sign, or you could develop a template and unify the design.



Arts & Tourism: Locally-Made

Recommendation: Brand Locally-Made Products

Tourists want to buy products that are unique to a certain area and that cannot be found any other place. Develop a logo for goods made in the area. This could be Made in Toccoa, Made in Stephens County, Currahee Made, etc. Artists, craftspeople, wine makers, mill operators, coffee roasters, or any person who creates a locally-made product could brand their business and/or their work. Businesses that sell these branded items could display signs letting people know that this is where they can buy local products. If there are enough businesses offering these products, a map could be designed to give to tourists looking for local crafts and goods.

Tourists who bring branded products back home are helping to market Toccoa to their friends.



Arts & Tourism

Recommendation: Bring the Train Stop to Life

The train brings quite a few people to Toccoa every year, but most of them will stay on the train and end up in Washington DC, Atlanta or New Orleans. How can Toccoa get the attention of frequent train travelers and coax them to plan a stop in Toccoa on their next trip?

Recommendation: Lure Train Passengers to Toccoa

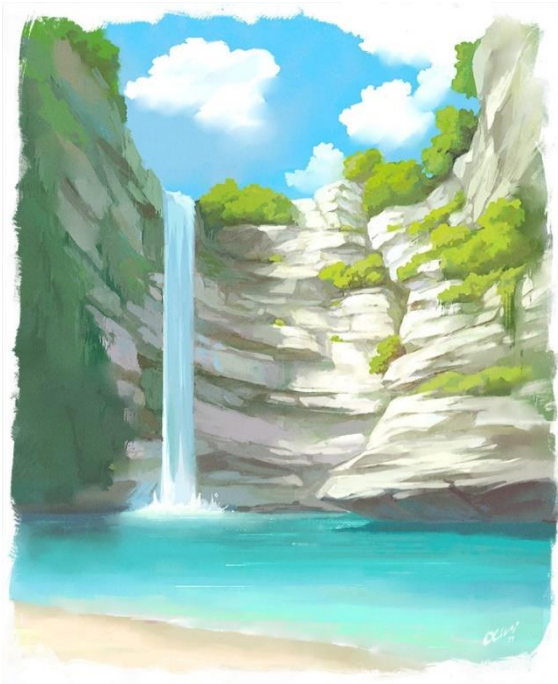
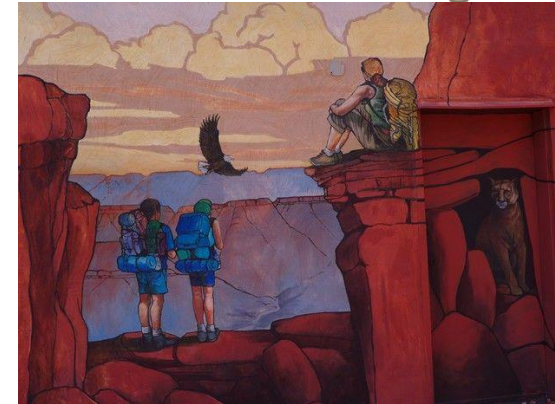
Paint a mural that can be seen by train travelers depicting the highlights of Toccoa. The mural could either be on the back of the depot, or on a sign along the grassy stretch by the tracks. The headline of the mural could be, “Look what you’re missing in Toccoa” along with a website address for more information. This could also serve as a great photo backdrop for visitors.



Arts & Tourism

Recommendation: Bring the Train Stop to Life

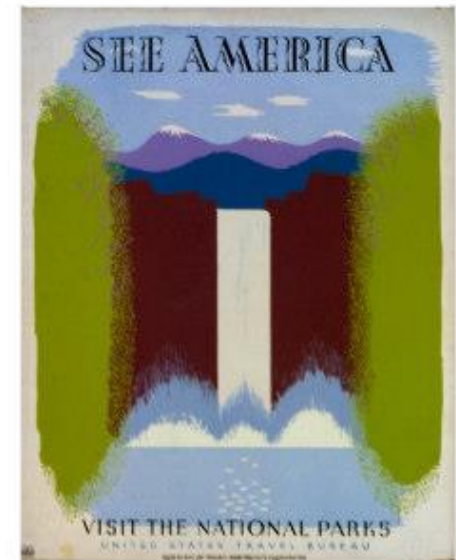
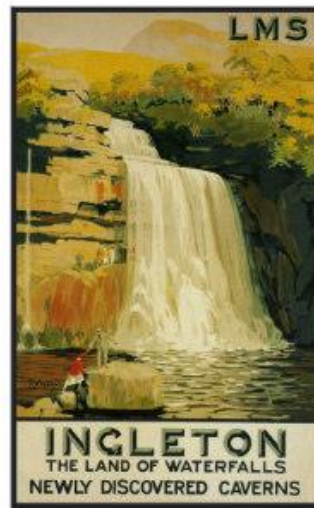
There are many different ways to illustrate the great sites in Toccoa. You want to focus on images that show people active and having a good time.



Arts & Tourism: Toccoa Falls

Recommendation: Put Up Signs Picturing Toccoa Falls

Toccoa Falls is one of the top tourism destinations in the area, yet there is little signage letting those driving by know about the attraction. The Team recommends adding signage that pictures the falls along with a tagline, such as “Taller than Niagara.” Identify key locations for the signage on busy highways in the area. The signs can also serve as directional signage.



Arts & Tourism: Toccoa Underpass

Recommendation: Create a Comprehensive Plan for the Underpass Entrance

The idea to put artistic lighting in the underpass is a creative one which will make a dark area more inviting and lively; however, in order for this lighting to truly have an impact, the plan should include updates for the street on both sides of the underpass. This would include landscaping, lighting, sidewalks, etc. so that the inviting space is not just the underpass itself, but the whole area.

Recommendation: Research Designs

Research different types of designs/lighting to find the best option for Toccoa. Also, consider adding Welcome to Toccoa above the entrance to the underpass.

Recommendation: Use the Underpass for Events

Think about the possibility of a unique event that takes place at night in the underpass.

Birmingham recently installed underpass lighting:

http://www.al.com/business/index.ssf/2013/06/birmingham_lights_down_town_via.html

<http://www.thisiscoolossal.com/2013/08/bill-fitzgibbons-lightrails/>



Existing & New Attraction Development



Stephens County Museum & Currahee Military Museum



Recommendation: Edit the Exhibits

The museums have great artifacts and volunteers have done a great job organizing the items in a small space. Sometimes, though, there are too many items on display, which makes it difficult for visitors to take in and comprehend the story you are trying to tell and the meaning of each item. Take a look at each exhibit and think about whether there are objects that would be removed that would enhance the overall exhibit.

Tips for Exhibit Design:

<http://blogs.aaslh.org/smallmuseums/>

<http://www.teamdesignshop.com/blog/2014-01-23-10-tips-museum-exhibit-design-success>

Recommendation: Create New Labels

The labels in the museum varied from object to object. Unifying the labels will help to give the museum a more professional appearance. Make sure that ALL labels are the same in terms of the size, font, the organization of information, etc. This would be a great project for students or a Scout Troop. Also, make sure that the labels can be read by all visitors, including those in wheel chairs.

<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/pdfs/hp/2014conference/Make-Professional-Labels.pdf>

<https://www.si.edu/Accessibility/SGAED>



Stephens County Museum & Currahee Military Museum



Recommendation: Create a Space for Temporary Exhibits

The idea to involve the community in temporary exhibits is a great one, and the Resource Team recommends that you carve out more space to dedicate to temporary exhibits. Because some people may think that there is no reason to visit the museum again as they have already seen it, temporary exhibits provide the needed bait to get people to return. The temporary exhibits could be composed of items borrowed from community members, artifacts that are currently being stored, or exhibits borrowed/rented from other museums. Make sure that the exhibits support the mission of the museum.

These sites offer traveling exhibits. Some of the Smithsonian exhibits are free of charge. While they may or may not currently have any that relate to the museum's mission, they are always adding new offerings.

Traveling Exhibits:

- Smithsonian- <http://www.sites.si.edu/>
- Exhibits USA- <http://eusa.org/>
- Georgia Humanities- <https://www.georgiahumanities.org/programs/museum-on-main-street/> They feature Smithsonian Museum on Main Street exhibits. They also offer grants to support history exhibits.

Attention Creative Women Veterans!
Expression and Healing Through Art

MEDVAMC is looking for local women Veteran artists to submit their art, poetry, or prose to be displayed in a special Women's History Month Art Exhibition at the end of March.

All art must be submitted by March 23, 2017 to be included in the exhibit.

For more information, please call Dr. India Gray-Schmiedlin at 713-794-8314 or by email at India.Gray-Schmiedlin@va.gov.

Women Veterans:
Her Story
is Our History

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH | VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Women Veterans Call center 1-877-949-6666

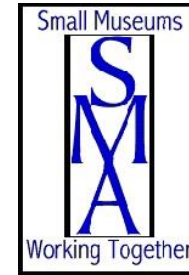
The poster is a red rectangular graphic. At the top, it has the title "Attention Creative Women Veterans!" in white, with the subtitle "Expression and Healing Through Art" in a smaller, italicized font. Below this, it states that MEDVAMC is looking for local women veteran artists to submit their art, poetry, or prose for a special Women's History Month Art Exhibition at the end of March. It specifies that all art must be submitted by March 23, 2017. Contact information for Dr. India Gray-Schmiedlin is provided, including a phone number and an email address. The central part of the poster features a map of the United States where each state is represented by a collage of photos of women veterans in various roles and settings. To the right of the map, the text "Women Veterans: Her Story is Our History" is written, followed by several circular logos. At the bottom, it says "WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH" followed by the VA logo and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs logo. On the far right, it provides a phone number for a Women Veterans Call center.

Stephens County Museum & Currahee Military Museum



Resources for Small Museums:

- Small Museum Association- <http://www.smallmuseum.org/smaresources>
- American Association for State and Local History (AASLH)- <http://community.aaslh.org/smallmuseums>
- Sustaining Places- <https://sustainingplaces.com/>
- Georgia Alliance of Museums and Galleries- <http://www.gamg.org/>
- Georgia Center for Nonprofits- <http://www.gcn.org>
- The Foundation Center Atlanta- <http://foundationcenter.org/ask-us/atlanta>



GAMG



Camp Toccoa

Recommendation: Connect Downtown to Camp Toccoa

With the strong connection between Toccoa and Camp Toccoa, there is little to no visual connection between the two sites remaining. One of the greatest historical connections between the two sites was the unloading of Army men at the Toccoa Train Depot and walking the multi-mile journey to their new temporary home and camp.

Recommendation:

The community should explore ways to visualize this journey and make an important physical connection for visitors by marking the journey on the road. This can be done through road pavement paint using a footprint or army boot stamp. These painted foot or boot prints will also play an important directional role in guiding visitors from the Downtown Visitor Center and Military Museum to the camp site. Interpretation can also be planned and spaced throughout the drive at significant points.

A careful evaluation should be completed to see if the route is feasible for pedestrians or bicycles. If currently unsafe, the route should be clearly marked and promoted as a driving tour. Transportation planners within the county should work diligently to develop a pedestrian plan for the route as it has the potential to become a significant heritage and outdoor recreation attraction by allowing visitors to retrace the footsteps of their forefathers.



Sample Footprints

Camp Toccoa

Recommendation: Develop WWII-style Destination Fitness Boot Camps

Background: Fitness tests for combat were initiated during WWII. The Army first introduced a formal fitness test to the troops in 1942. Millions of men were being called up to fight in World War II, and not all of them were prepared for the rigors of combat. To get the men in fighting shape, the Army implemented a systematic physical development program as part of the Combat Basic Training course. And the Army Ground Forces Test was designed to assess whether the program was having its desired effect. The test included squat jumps, sit-ups, pull-ups, push-ups, and a 300 yard run. The emphasis was on functional fitness and giving American GI's the strength, mobility, and endurance they would need to tackle real tasks on the battlefield.

By adding the following suggestions to the museum in the short term and eventually adding them to Camp Toccoa, Toccoa has the opportunity to add a totally immersive and hand-on experience for visitors:

Add a military style "hump" from a central location downtown where the WWII soldiers were dropped to Camp Toccoa. Provide knapsacks, sleeping bags, MREs (Meals Ready to Eat), canteens, flint, tents, and other essentials to participants for a fee. Have them hump as active duty military do today to the camp, complete with a drill sergeant. Participants will set up camp, cook their meals, and perform drills including obstacle courses and a run up the Currahee Mountain Summit using the original Currahee Mountain Trail. Bring in felled trees visitors can carve their initials in when they've completed the hump. Promote as a fundraiser to further develop Camp Toccoa. Sell tee shirts, caps, and "medals" at the museum. Partner with Ft. Benning, Campbell, and Braggs to possibly offer real drill sergeants.



Camp Toccoa

Recommendation: Develop WWII-style destination fitness boot camps

If local laws allow, a long-term goal could be the development of a shooting instruction class offered in concert with the hump. International tourists would be especially interested.

As funds allow, erect barracks at Camp Toccoa that can serve as lodging for visitors.

Install interpretative signage at Camp Toccoa

At the museum, create a collection of replica military garb guests could try on and be photographed in for a fee.

Offer paid photo opportunities at the museum with WWII veterans during Camp Toccoa events.

Establish an audio tour mobile app for the museum that incorporates the stories of Camp Toccoa soldiers and brings them to life. A small fee could be charged to download the app.

Offer showings of Band of Brothers as a Movie Under the Stars family option with camping and reenactments.

Create a walking trail highlighting key military figures who trained at Camp Toccoa.



Camp Toccoa

Recommendation: Collect Oral Histories

It is vitally important to collect the stories of those who people associated with Camp Toccoa. These could be the men that trained there as well as their family members, people who lived in Toccoa at the time, etc.

Oral history weekend: During the local military weekend, have a station set up so that anyone with stories of the camp can be recorded.

Research: Contact anyone that trained at the Camp

Unexpected visitors: Because of the ties so many people have to the Camp, there is always the chance that someone will come into town unexpectedly.

What do you do with the oral histories?:



- Write a play that takes place on the grounds of Camp Toccoa
- Do a reading of stories from oral histories, diaries, letters, etc. as a fundraiser
- Use the stories in interpretive signs
- Preserve the unique stories associated with the Camp



**Looking for WWII Veterans
to Interview this Summer!**

Students from Washington College are searching
for Kent Co. WWII Veterans to interview for the June 2014
StoryQuest: Summer Oral History Project

Recording one-of-a-kind, personal recollections of WWII veterans
is an essential method for preserving our nation's legacy.



World War II: 1939-1945

If you have a lead for us, please contact the
C.V. Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience,
Michael Buckley, Project Director, at 410-810-7156,
or by email at: mbuckley3@washcoll.edu

Thanks for your help!

Modelled on the Veterans History Project
American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

Sample Programs

Camp Toccoa

Recommendation: Collect Oral Histories

Oral History Project Resources

Potential Partners:

- GPB- <http://www.gpb.org/wwii>
- Oral History Association- <http://www.oralhistory.org/>
- Atlanta History Center-
<http://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/research/veterans-history-project>
- Toccoa Falls College History Department

Guidelines for Oral History Projects:

- <http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/oral-history-guidelines.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/>

Potential Funders:

- Georgia Humanities
- National Endowment for the Humanities



Camp Toccoa

Recommendation: Put Up Interpretive Signage Outside of the Gate

Because the Camp is not yet open on a regular basis, there is a need for interpretational signage outside of the gate. This way, there is a way for tourists to learn about the history of the Camp if they come by when no one is there. The signage could be new, or it could be placed on the announcement board that already exists.

Recommendation: Develop Lesson Plans for Teachers

Work with local teachers to develop curriculum-based lesson plans for students. These could include activities in the classroom as well as at Camp Toccoa. Make these plans available to teachers within a targeted region. The plan should include not only a tour, but experiential activities for the students, such as trying to carry a backpack that was the same weight at the ones worn by training soldiers, or trying to do some of the actual training exercises. You can also link to lesson plans that already exist online for Band of Brothers. Putting together lesson plans will bring more students to the site, which hopefully helps to build a commitment in the next generation for the site.



Camp Toccoa

Recommendation: Start a Planned Giving Program

Camp Toccoa and the Military Museum should each start a Planned Giving program. According to DonorSearch, a planned gift is a contribution that is arranged in the present and allocated at a future date, most often when the donor passes away. Camp Toccoa and the Museum can start to remind supporters that they should keep these entities in mind when doing estate planning to ensure that the history and stories will be preserved for future generations.

Gifts could take the form of cash, property, stocks, etc. and it could be given to fund a particular program, or as general operating support. An attorney will ultimately be the one to help a potential donor make the proper arrangements, but those involved with both organizations should have a basic knowledge of what planned giving is and remind supporters to keep Camp Toccoa and the Military Museum in mind when making estate plans.

General Information about Planned Giving:

<http://www.thefundraisingauthority.com/planned-giving/launch-planned-giving/>



Camp Toccoa

Recommendation: Expand Camp Activities into Agritourism

- Boy Scout Partnership- Reach out to local Boy Scout Packs as well as the Eagle Scouts. Eagle Scouts must help with community service projects. I have attached guidelines for cooperating with an Eagle Scout and examples of appropriate projects. They cannot do typical manual labor such as yard work or gardening, but they can assist with building shelters, tables, etc. that have significant impact on long-term use.
- Community Garden – Cherokee County Example Community gardens might be a good fit to show how the food was grown during the actual operation of Camp Currahee as well as provide potential revenue sources. There are two ways of doing this. Cherokee County (Example hyperlinked at the start of this piece) charges \$20 per year for each of the raised beds it offers. The second option would be to have volunteer groups plant and maintain crops for farm to table dinners.
- Farm to table dinners- The location and ambiance of the barn (PLEASE DON'T PAINT IT WHITE! Leave it wood.) lends itself to a perfect location for hosting farm to table dinners as fundraisers. Working with local chefs to utilize the items grown in a community garden will reduce the cost of the inputs as well as build community ties to the Camp.



Lodging

Recommendation: Develop Group Lodging at Camp Toccoa

Camping with a large group of friends can be a great experience, but something that almost always disrupts the rhythm of the night is when people start splitting up to go to bed. Most tents have a hard time fitting a family of five, so if you're planning to go with any more than that, prepare to construct yourself a small compound of water resistant nylon.

Camp Toccoa would be the perfect place for group camps, especially specialized ones like the scouts and other youth groups. Something similar to the Lodge Tent that fits up to twelve people in their own bunk cot, so you won't have friends splitting off into splinter groups when it comes time for bed.

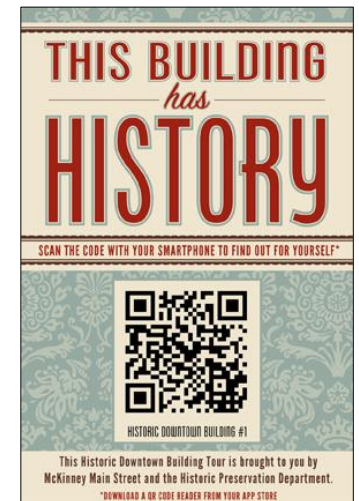
Barebones makes a tent where the roof is rated for up to 1000 pounds of snow and properly staked, the tent can withstand 90-mph winds, putting all weather camping back on the table. There's even a port for a wood burning stove, making us think this is more like a portable cabin (or maybe, a lodge?) than a traditional tent.



Traveler's Rest

Recommendation: Develop an Outside Walking Tour

Because the site is only open on a limited basis, the Team recommends that a walking tour of the outside of the buildings be developed so that tourists can still enjoy Traveler's Rest even when the site is not open. Interpretation of each location can be done through a printed map/brochure, a sign at each location, or online information that visitors can access/download. Add signage at the entrance of the site that clearly lets visitors know that they are welcome to tour even though the site is closed, and gives them clear directions to how to access the interpretive information.



Traveler's Rest

Recommendation: Develop Activities for Children

Develop activities for children and families. This could include a scavenger hunt, or questions geared to their level. There could even be a small prize for completing the task.

Recommendation: Create Lesson Plans

Work with local teachers to develop lesson plans that tie to required curriculum. Make these available to teachers in the region to encourage them to visit Traveler's Rest.

Recommendation: Refresh Exhibits

Spruce up exhibits that have not been updated in many years. This can include replacing labels that are aging, removing tissue from cases that is yellowing, repairing clothing that has been damaged from years on display, etc.

Recommendation: Update Video Equipment

The video about Traveler's Rest is wonderful and informative, but the older television and projector make it feel very dated. Solicit a donation of an updated television and projector to better show off your film.



theHoustonMuseumofnaturalscience

HALL OF ANCIENT EGYPT
PHOTO SCAVENGER HUNT

Each of the images below are close-ups of items found in the Hall of Ancient Egypt. Can you find all 36?



Traveler's Rest – The Unicoi Turnpike

Traveler's Rest is a unique and attractive historic site telling the story of the early days of life and travel in Appalachia. It sits along what was known as the Unicoi Turnpike, a Cherokee trade route connecting Georgia to North Carolina and Tennessee. While parts of the Turnpike are either paved over or no longer in existence as a travel route, its story remains part of Toccoa's Heritage.

Recommendation: Add Historic Marker

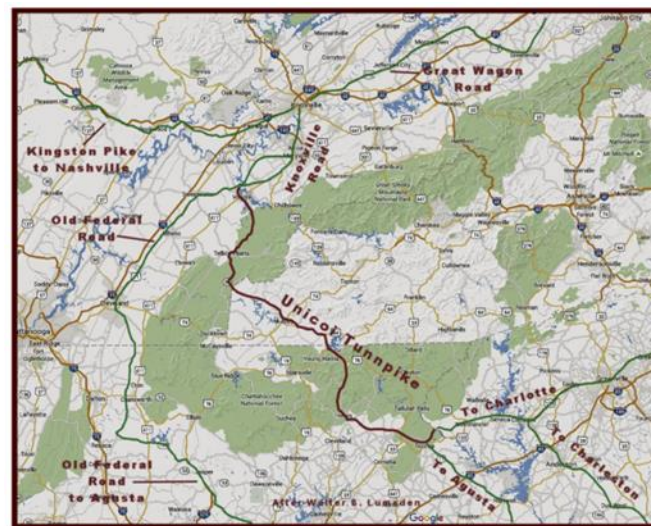
Pursue placement of a historic marker at Travelers Rest to note the Unicoi Turnpike connection.



Recommendation: Develop Walking and Hiking Trails

Determine possible existing unpaved Turnpike sections to develop as walking/hiking trails such as County Road 950 near Toccoa Falls as noted at

<http://trailofthetrail.blogspot.com/2010/07/Unicoi-turnpike-in-georgia.html>



“Strongest Man in the World” - Paul Anderson

Paul Anderson was the “Strongest Man in the World” and he was from the City of Toccoa. In the 1956 Olympics, he won the super-heavyweight weightlifting gold medal. A year later, he lifted a total of 6,270 pounds earning him the “Strongest Man in the World” title. In 2008, the City of Toccoa erected a park to honor him.

Recommendation:

- Add an audio box at the park, so visitors could not only see the statue of Paul Anderson, but hear the stories of Toccoa’s strong man.
- Hold annual “Strong Man” competition.



Train Tourism



Train Tourism

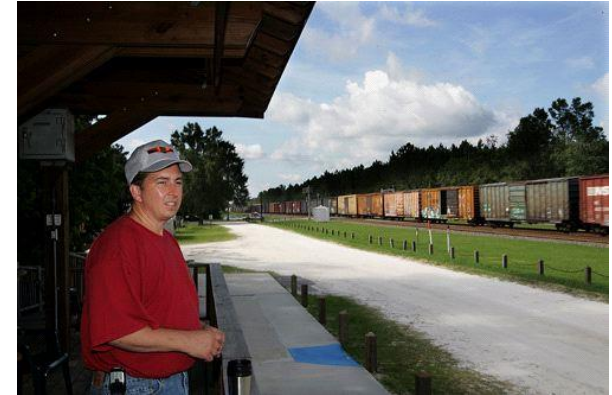
Overview: Rail Tourism

According to *Railway Heritage and Tourism: Global Perspectives*, a railfan is someone who has an overall interest in trains and who enjoys watching the day-to-day operations of trains during their leisure time or while on vacation.

According to a 2009 survey, railfans are predominately male (98%), mostly over the age of 50 (47%) and had an average income of between \$41,000 and \$80,000. They spend a great deal of time on the activity, traveling to different locations an average of 22 per month to watch and photograph trains. Regardless of the primary purpose, railfans will incorporate the activity a high percentage of the time they travel. Over 93% are willing to travel over three hours to reach a railfan destination and over 54% will travel over six hours for a single railfan destination. While this is a highly specialized group of travelers, they are likely to travel great distances and spend large amounts of money to experience a premium rail destination and Stephens County can be their next destination.

Major Georgia Railfan Destinations:

- Folkston Funnel Railfan Park: <http://railfanlocations.tripod.com/folkston-ga.html>
- Manchester, Georgia Train Platform: <http://railfanlocations.weebly.com/manchester-ga.html>
- Locust Grove Platform: <http://railfanlocations.weebly.com/locust-grove-ga.html>



Folkston Funnel



Folkston Funnel

Train Tourism

Recommendation: Establish the North Broad Trestle as a Railfan Point

"Wells Viaduct" which later became known as "North Broad Trestle" was constructed from 1915 to 1919 and was named for the chief engineer of the project W H Wells. It was constructed across a valley of the North Broad river, two miles west of Toccoa and one half mile west of what was known as the "North Broad Curve", due to a straitening and double tracking project. "North Broad Curve" was located at a point where the single track crossed North Broad river as it turned south, on what is now known as Rock Quarry Circle, towards Currahee Mountain.

The new double tracks reconnected to the original route near Ayersville. The original railroad was constructed between 1871 and 1873 and was known as "Airline-Railway". "North Broad Trestle" spans 1500 feet and is 202 feet above North Broad river. It is the highest trestle on the line between Washington, DC and New Orleans, La. At the time of its construction, it was the first trestle using "The Hollow Core Concrete Pier" method. Six water barrels were located along each side of the trestle beside the double tracks. These were placed there to hold water to be used to extinguish fires caused by hot coals falling, from the steam engines, onto the wood crossties.

The trestle can now be safely viewed from a public viewing area located off GA Hwy 365 in "The Trestle Falls" development.

Recommendation:

Establish this rail fan point and market it to potential visitors interested in trains.



North Broad Trestle



North Broad Trestle

Toccoa: Lodging



Lodging

Recommendation: Develop Unique Lodging

The 21st Century Traveler is looking for an unique experience with every element of a vacation or trip, including the overnight accommodations. Visitors seek out interesting or themed lodging that offer more than the traditional hotel room.

Explore development of new lodging that celebrates the unique elements of the county's culture and environment:

- Farm Stays
- Renovated Historic Homes
- Downtown Loft Lodging

Additionally, each of these specialty spaces for individuals could also be developed for group housing. Student groups can be attracted to fun, innovative lodging options.

One opportunity with regard to unique or unusual lodging development is Tiny Homes.

Kocoon Homes is located in Toccoa and they build Tiny Homes. There is a tremendous movement and people are curious about Tiny Homes. All over the country, there are Tiny Home rentals for people who want to see if it is something for them. Kocoon could work with a developer to create designs and options for rental and for those looking to buy, they have a built in market.



Downtown Savannah Loft Rental



Kacoon Homes

Lodging

Recommendation: Boutique Hotel or Bed & Breakfast

Bed and Breakfast

A larger bed and breakfast / lodge / or Inn is a flexible option for a variety of travelers across different markets and generations. With several historic properties available for purchase across the county, a historic home can create a unique experience enough of itself.

Boutique Hotel

Several historic downtown properties are prime for boutique lodging and feasible for historic preservation tax credits. Investors could develop a 10-15 room boutique property with meeting space to attract multiple markets.

Examples:

- Motorcourt Renovation: Merry Acres Inn, Albany
<http://merryacres.com/>
- Boutique Hotel: Plains Inn, Plains
http://www.plainsgeorgia.com/Plains_Inn.htm
- Hawthorn Suites: Downtown Rome
<http://www.hawthorn.com/hotels/georgia/rome/hawthorn-suites-by-wyndham-rome/hotel-overview>



Merry Acres Inn, Albany GA



Plains Inn, Plains GA

Lodging

Recommendation: Develop Downtown Lodging Properties

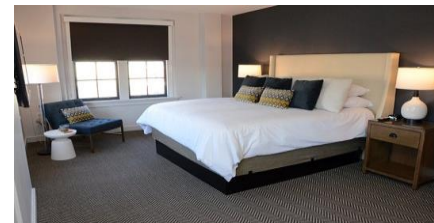
Hotels can be an extremely valuable addition to a downtown area. They bring leisure visitors and business people to the heart of a community. They can fill a compelling market need by accommodating visitors to area businesses and institutions. Hotels can generate sales for nearby retail and service businesses and capture tourism dollars in the community. Hotels also generate significant tax revenues while creating many new jobs for local residents.

Consider the following in the process:

- The market and financial prospects for the hotel industry are still good.
- In many cases the greatest challenges will not be identifying and assessing the opportunities, but rather in identifying and attracting the development interest.
- That development interest must demonstrate the capability to finance the project from both a debt and equity perspective.

Recommendations:

- Seek to develop the old Abemarle Hotel – similar to the Samuel Elbert Hotel in Elberton
- It has a history with the Toccoa
- It would make a nice boutique hotel
- It would add to the overall ambiance of downtown



Overview: Destination Downtown Development



Downtown Development



Why is downtown development important to tourism?

The heart and soul of every community is its downtown. The health of a community can instantly be portrayed by the vitality of its downtown. The number one activity of visitors throughout the world is shopping, dining and entertainment in a pedestrian friendly setting. It's typically not the reason we go to a destination, but it is the top diversionary activity of visitors once they're there.

Secondary activities are where 80% of all visitor spending takes place. It's ok to be a "diversionary" activity. When we're out fishing or hiking or biking, we are not spending money. When we are competing in a sports game, we are not spending money. But when we're done, guess what? We're off looking for the nearest watering hole, great shops, restaurants, and entertainment. Why did Disney build Downtown Disney outside of Disney World? To capture that other 80% of visitor spending. Smart move.

Curb appeal can account for 70% of visitor sales at restaurants, golf courses, wineries, retail shops, and lodging facilities. Many merchants have no idea how to pull customers in the door by presenting a beautiful, welcoming entry with planters, benches, attractive signage and window displays.

If local residents do not hang out in your downtown, neither will visitors. Visitors are not looking for "best kept secrets" or "solitude" when downtown. They are looking for places where other people go. They want to be in a lively, thriving environment. If downtown has the activities and attractions to draw residents, visitors will want to go there too. The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and relatives. When they visit you, where do you take them? That's what I thought.

Adapted from Roger Brooks International Consulting

Downtown Development

Recommendation: Identify and Develop the Unique Sense of Place within Downtown

As the heart and soul of any community, downtown must have an authentic identity and a true sense of place to be a vibrant city center and an economic engine for the area. A strong identity builds off the factors that created and grew the community, and forms the framework for enhancing the user's experiences and connections. By creating a sense of place, locals and visitors alike make a connection that is distinct from other communities. Connections can be made through design, history, and experiences.

Toccoa's identity starts with the name itself; Toccoa, the Cherokee word for beautiful. The natural beauty of the foothills, waterfall, lakes, and trails can be reflected in the city center atmosphere. The tree canopy of Doyle Street is inviting and should be expanded, seasonal flowers added and opportunities that enhance the curb appeal. Protection and preservation of historic resources is a strong indicator of a healthy environment, a strong identity and character as well.

Recommendations:

- Expand streetscape throughout the downtown district
- Sidewalks, crosswalks, streetscape, directional signage and amenities must meet walkability needs
- Implement a strong maintenance and clean-up program



Downtown Development

Recommendation: Integrate Amtrak and Railroad Culture into the Downtown Environment

The city was established as a railroad town in 1874 and is one of three stops on the Southern Crescent Amtrak line in Georgia. This history, current active and existence of the depot are contributors of a true sense of place for downtown and worthy of recognition. Building a bond between people and places is the primary goal.

Recommendations:

- Survey rail fans to determine interest and opportunities
- Create experiences that invite rail fans to downtown for train watching and photography
- Develop and expand railroad exhibits in depot and museum
- Provide railroad memorabilia in gift shop
- Install sidewalk lighting at the train depot from State Street to the underpass
- Install a combination of benches and public art outside the depot for seating while waiting on the train. The art provides a welcoming and interesting ambiance



Downtown Development

Recommendation: Evaluate and Create a Balanced Business Mix

The economic vitality or lack of also contributes to the sense of place. Occupied buildings, attractive store fronts, and feet in the street indicate that downtown is full of life; a critical mass that invites participation. The goods and services available to locals and visitors must meet their needs to establish the bond of people and places.

Recommendations:

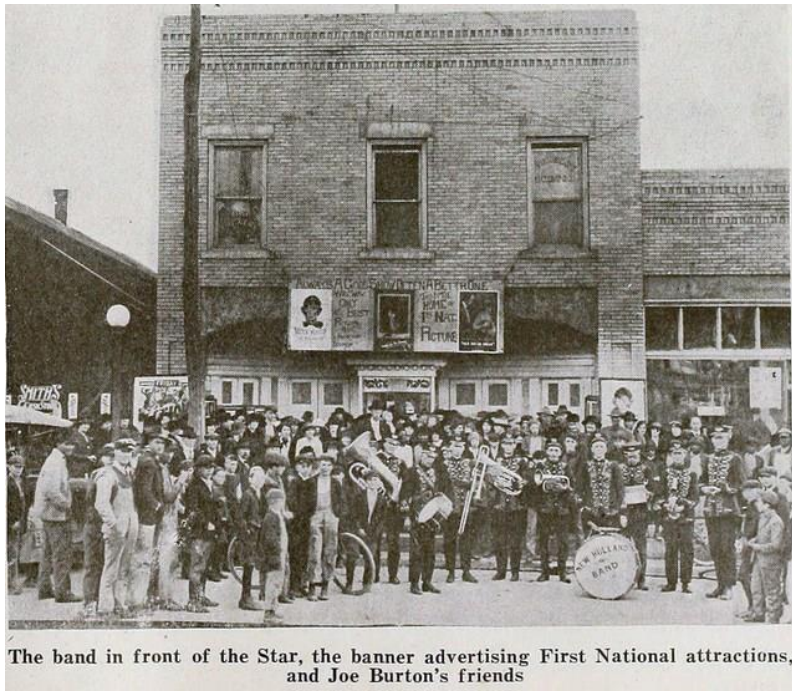
- Evaluate business mix, look for gaps, consider engaging in a Market Study
- Survey existing business hours and engage retail businesses in extended hours. Thursday and Friday evening till 7pm are a good starting point. 70% of all consumer spending is now done after 6pm.
- Retailers near restaurant are also a good place to start, especially if the restaurant has a waiting time
- Residential expansion is essential to the development of a night life for the district
- Excellent customer service and a simple hello and welcome can go a long way in creating a bond



Downtown Development: Downtown Event Venues Packaging & Branding

Recommendation

Launch a campaign to market downtown event venues such as the restored theater buildings and any other spaces that may provide event space; create packages that include lodging options to encourage overnight stays.



Downtown Development

Recommendation: Create a Alleyway Visitor Center and Art Gallery

The downtown restrooms provided in a former building shell on Doyle Street are an excellent asset for visitors and residents alike. However, there is much wasted space within the remainder of the space.

Recommendations:

- Because this space is covered, this is a prime area to utilize as an outdoor visitor center. While the chamber visitor center has normal business hours, this plaza area can serve as a 24/7 visitor center with information, brochures and specials to drive new business to downtown and community businesses.
- With the vast amount of artists throughout Stephens County, this space is prime for displaying the artwork of the region. Create a juried exhibition space where artists can apply to have either their outdoor artwork or reproductions of their artwork displayed in the public space. This will bring the space to life and create a destination out of space that is currently only used for restrooms.



Outdoor Visitor Center



Outdoor Art Exhibit

Downtown Development - Interpretation

Recommendation: Tell the Stories of Toccoa's Downtown Buildings

Recommendation:

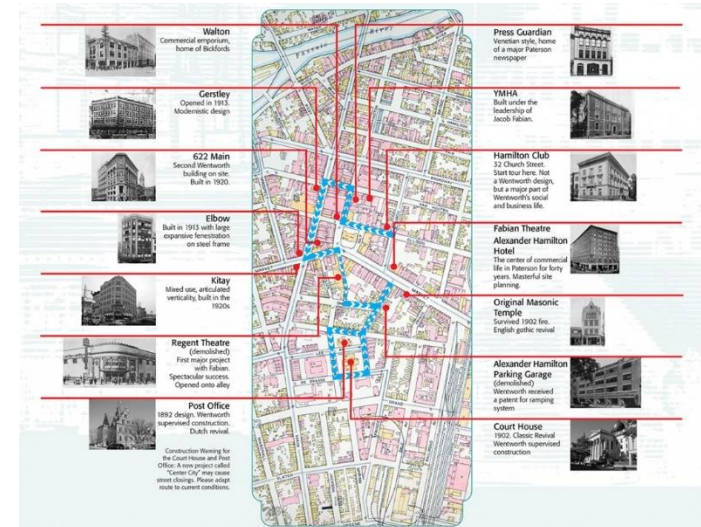
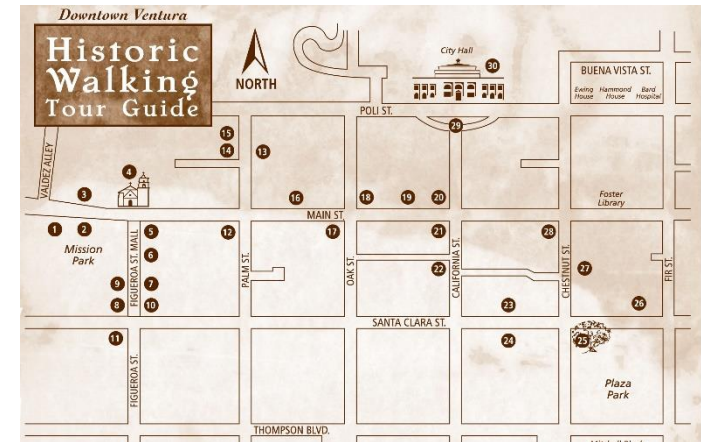
Each historic downtown building holds a unique story of the people, businesses and life of your city. Each city could tell these stories through simple interpretive signs on each building accompanied by a walking brochure and map. Downtown tours could be combined with walking tours throughout the county to create a packaged driving tour of Toccoa / Stephens County.

Example: Dahlonega Stories Tour:

<http://dahlonega.org/historic-downtown-4/dahlonega-stories-tour>

Example: Americus Historic Walking Tour:

<http://cdn.gadataengine.milesmedia.com/gadataengine/appmedia/brochures/0/973/DowntownWalkingTour.pdf>



Overview: Historic Preservation



Why is Historic Preservation Important to Tourism?

Why is historic preservation important to tourism?

Heritage tourism helps make historic preservation economically viable by using historic structures and landscapes to attract and serve travelers. Heritage tourism can be an attractive economic revitalization strategy, especially as studies have consistently shown that heritage travelers stay longer and spend more money than other kinds of travelers. As an added bonus, a good heritage tourism program improves the quality of life for residents as well as serving visitors.

By promoting a healthy environment of historic preservation in your community, historic properties can find new life in this millennium that allows visitors to continue to connect with their significant past. Historic downtown buildings can become unique lodging for visitors, old farm buildings transformed into boutique art shops, and former cotton warehouses into breweries or meeting space.

By saving a historic structure and creating a new use for it, local communities benefit by reviving a dead structure on their tax rolls and spurring new development in blighted areas. Many state and federal programs also exist to make projects in historically significant structures more feasible and financially beneficial to investors.



Historic Photo of Downtown Rome, Ga



Historic building in Downtown Rome, Ga
readapted as a hotel

National Register Properties

National Register of Historic Places: Stephens County

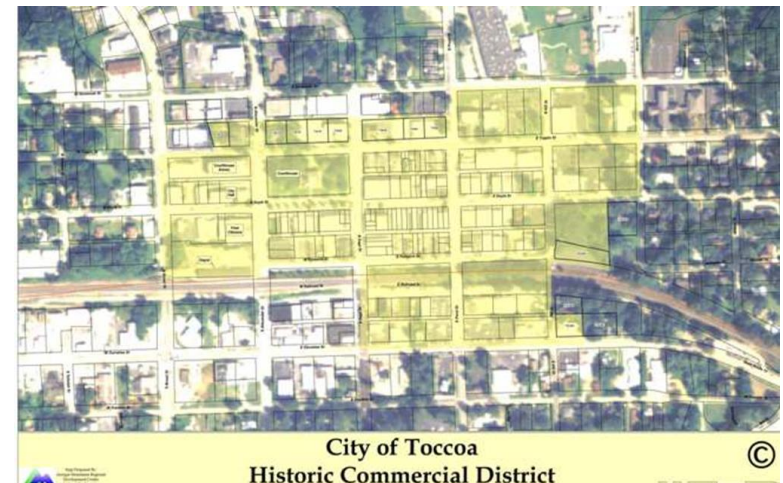
The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) is the Federal government's official list of districts, sites, buildings, and structures deemed worthy of preservation. The properties and properties within districts listed on the NRHP may qualify for tax incentives for preserving the property.

Current Listings:

- Jarrett-Hayes House (Toccoa)
- Riverside (Toccoa)
- Schaefer-Marks House (Toccoa)
- James B. Simmons House (Toccoa)
- Walters-Davis House (Toccoa)
- Toccoa Downtown Historic District
- Stephens County Courthouse
- Traveler's Rest (National Landmark Designation)
- Eastanollee Auditorium
- Martin Historic District

Recommendation:

Continue to add significant structures 50 years and older on to the National Register. The Tourism Product Team visited several historic sites on this visit which could be valuable historic resources for Stephens County's tourism product portfolio. Many of these sites could benefit from the services of the Regional Commission's historic preservation planner who can assist with design services and financial resources for building restorations and repairs.



Historic Preservation – Stephens County Courthouse

Recommendation: Renovation of Historic Courthouse

The Stephens County Courthouse serves as the centerpiece of Toccoa's vital historic downtown business district. Renovating the Stephens County Courthouse should be considered as a priority for the County.

Once the courthouse has been restored, its maintenance becomes manageable and the community will see an impact in the form of increased tourism, accessibility, safety, energy efficiency, and much more.

Before the county begins this process, visit several communities that have gone through a courthouse renovation project to learn best practices from those communities. For example, Coweta County did an excellent job renovating their courthouse. The citizens approved a SPLOST (1-cent sales tax) project to support the cost of the renovations as well as establishing a Friends group for further fundraising efforts. Total renovation cost was \$7.5 million. Today, the Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Probate Court Offices are located on the first floor. The Probate Court is held in the main courthouse room located on the 2nd Floor.



Coweta County Courthouse

Resources



Resources: Agritourism



The following resources offer support, funding and programming support for both public and private development in the agritourism market:

- **Georgia Agritourism Association:** <http://georgia-agritourism.org/>
Provides advocacy, education and support to agritourism operations.
- **Georgia Department of Agriculture:** http://agr.georgia.gov/agri-tourism_in_georgia.aspx
Provides development support for new agriculture and tourism businesses. Manages the Georgia Agritourism Signage program.
- **Georgia Grown:** <https://www.georgiagrown.com/>
Marketing program for producers, retailers and marketers of Georgia grown and created products.



Resources: Arts



Funding for potential arts projects:

- **Georgia Council for the Arts-** www.gaarts.org State arts council that provides multiple grant programs for arts projects
- **South Arts-** www.southarts.org Regional arts organization that provides grants to present theatre, music, dance or guest writers
- **Georgia Humanities-** www.georgiahumanities.org State humanities council that provides grants for humanities-based cultural and education programs such as history exhibits, lectures, walking tours, oral history projects, etc.
- **Fox Theatre Institute-** <http://foxtheatre.org/the-fox-theatre-institute/> FTI provides grants for the restoration of historic theatres
- **ArtPlace-** www.artplaceamerica.org National funder awarding large grants in creative placemaking projects where the arts play a central role in a community's planning and development strategies.
- **National Endowment for the Arts-** www.nea.gov National funder with multiple grant programs for arts projects. Rural communities should note two programs: Challenge America (\$10,000 to reach underserved audiences) and Our Town (up to \$200,000 for creative placemaking projects that are partnerships between arts organizations and local government)
- **National Endowment for the Humanities-** www.neh.gov National funder with multiple grant programs for humanities projects
- **Citizen's Institute on Rural Design-** <http://rural-design.org/> An annual competitive opportunity to host an intensive, two-and-a-half day community workshop for rural communities with design challenges
- **USDA-** www.usda.gov USDA Rural Development forges partnerships with rural communities, funding projects that bring housing, community facilities, business guarantees, utilities and other services to rural America.

Resources: Downtown Development



For more information relating to financial incentives for downtown businesses, review the Economic Development Finance Program Packet at:

<http://www.dca.ga.gov/economic/TaxCredits/programs/downloads/EDFD.pdf>

Available Programs:

- Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund (DDRLF)
- Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund Program
- Façade Rehabilitation Funds
- Opportunity Zones
- Transportation Enhancement Act Funds (TEA)
- Business Improvement District (BID) (O.C.G.A. 36-43-1 et seq)
- Low Interest Loan Pool
- Community Improvement District (CID) (Georgia Constitution Article IX, Section 7)
- Tax Allocations Districts / Urban Redevelopment Powers Act (O.C.G.A. 36-44-1 et seq)
- Bond Allocation Program
- Employment Incentive Program (E.I.P.)
- OneGeorgia Edge Fund Program
- OneGeorgia Equity Fund Program
- Tourism Product Development Grant
- Tourism Development Act Sales Tax Incentive

Both National Register listing and Certified Local Government (CLG) designation can open the door for many preservation tools such as grants and preservation tax incentives administered through the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Eligible properties have to be 50 years or older to qualify.

- State Historic Preservation Tax Incentive (<http://georgiashpo.org/incentives/grants>)
- Historic Preservation Federal Investment Tax Credit (<http://georgiashpo.org/incentives/grants>)

Resources: Historic Preservation



State and Federal Preservation Resources

The Historic Preservation Division (HPD) is Georgia's state historic preservation office, or SHPO. Every state has a SHPO, established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, often referred to simply as the NHPA. The Historic Preservation Division's mission is to promote the preservation and use of historic places for a better Georgia.

Programs and Services

- Environmental Review & Preservation Planning
- National Register of Historic Places
- State Historic Resources Survey
- Local, State and Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Incentives
- Outreach Programs, Education, Grants and African American Programs
- Office of the State Archaeologist and State Archaeology Program

Regional Preservation Planning

Georgia has 12 Regional Commissions (RCs) that provide comprehensive assistance to local governments, individuals, and organizations and 11 RCs employ historic preservation planners who provide preservation planning services.

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission

Joe Rothwell

jrothwell@gmrc.ga.gov

770-538-2619



Resources: Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Fund Grants

The Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) Grant program is appropriated annually from Congress through the National Park Service to the states. HPD reserves 10% of each appropriation for grants to Certified Local Governments (CLGs). These 60/40 matching grants enable cities, towns and rural areas to undertake projects that aid in the preservation of historic properties.

Eligible projects include surveys, National Register nominations, design guidelines, brochures, website development, heritage education materials, and workshops/conferences, etc. Eligible predevelopment projects include historic structure reports, preservation plans, or architectural drawings and specifications.

Resource: <https://www.nps.gov/clg/>



Resources: Historic Preservation

Federal and State Rehabilitation Tax Credit Projects

State and federal government tax incentives are available for owners of a historic property who carry out a substantial rehabilitation. All properties must be listed in, or eligible for, the National/Georgia Register of Historic Places, either individually or as part of a National /Georgia Register Historic District. Project work must meet the Secretary of the Interior's/Department of Natural Resources Standards for Rehabilitation.

Federal Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit (RITC)

A federal income tax credit equal to 20% of rehabilitation expenses. Available ONLY for income-producing properties. The application is first reviewed by the Historic Preservation Division (HPD), then forwarded to the National Park Service for final decision.

State Preferential Property Tax Assessment for Rehabilitated Historic Property

Freezes the county property tax assessment for over 8 years. Available for personal residences as well as income-producing properties and the owner must increase the fair market value of the building by 50 and 100%, depending on its new use.

State Income Tax Credit for Rehabilitated Historic Property

A state income tax credit of 25% of rehabilitation expenses. The credit is capped at \$100,000 for personal residences and \$300,000 for income-producing properties.



Resources: Lodging



Tax Credits and Funding

The following funding options could be used for lodging projects:

1. Federal Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit:
<http://georgiashpo.org/incentives/tax>
2. State Preferential Property Tax Assessment for Rehabilitated Historic Properties:
<http://georgiashpo.org/incentives/tax>
3. State Income Tax Credit for Rehabilitated Historic Property:
<http://georgiashpo.org/incentives/tax>
4. Department of Community Affairs' Downtown Development Revolving Loan Program:
<http://www.dca.state.ga.us/economic/financing/programs/ddrlf.asp>
5. GA Cities Foundation Downtown Development Revolving Loan Program:
<http://www.georgiacitiesfoundation.org/LoanFund.aspx>
6. Complete financial incentives packet for businesses in Georgia:
<http://www.dca.ga.gov/economic/TaxCredits/programs/downloads/EDFD.pdf>
7. Tourism Product Development Resource Team Community Funding Request:
<http://www.marketgeorgia.org/article/new-for-2016-tourism-product-development-resource-team-community-funding>

Resources: Lodging



Georgia Hotel Lodging Association

GHLA is the state's non-partisan trade association representing the lodging industry. Originally founded in 1907, its mission is to promote, protect and educate the lodging industry around the state and to ensure positive business growth for its members. The Georgia Hotel & Lodging Association is the voice of the lodging industry in Georgia. GHLA is the official state affiliate of the American Hotel & Lodging Association. Its membership includes the Atlanta Hotel Council, Buckhead Hotel Council, Perimeter Hotel Council, among others.

GHLA Member Benefits Include:

- Government & Legislative Representation
- Training & Education Resources
- Communication on the Latest Industry Trends
- Newsletter and Bulletins
- Partner Discount Programs
- Membership Meetings & Annual Convention
- National Affiliation with AHLA

For more information:

<http://www.ghla.net/>





**Georgia Department of Economic Development
Office of Tourism Product Development**

Cindy Eidson, Director

ceidson@Georgia.org | 404.962.4844

Cheryl Smith, Project Manager – Northeast Georgia

csmith@Georgia.org | 770.535.5757

Janet Cochran, Manager

jcochran@Georgia.org | 404.276.9142

www.Georgia.org | www.MarketGeorgia.org | www.ExploreGeorgia.org

