

Chill Inn Lanesboro “The Next Big Thing”

Capstone Presentation
Dec. 20, 2023



Purpose of this Capstone

- ★ To educate
- ★ Provide transparency
- ★ To allow the public to weigh in on final thoughts and/or assist with winter itineraries



Humble Beginnings - Chill-Inn Lanesboro

- Elaine, Michele, Michael, Alison, Lori, Cathy, Kara, & Joe
- ★ **January 2022:** Local meetings began between the Lanesboro Businesses Promotion Group, the City of Lanesboro, and the Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce
- ★ **April 2022:** LACF grant applied and received for \$500 - video and webpage work
- ★ **Spring 2022:** Elaine Edwards, with the Lanesboro EDA, submitted an idea brief to the Blandin Foundation and then we were invited to submit a full grant application, written by Alison Leathers and submitted by the EDA
- ★ **Fall 2022:** Chill Inn Lanesboro was awarded a \$50,000 Blandin Foundation Rural Boost Grant with the City of Lanesboro serving as fiscal agent
- ★ **Fall 2022-Fall 2023:** work on the project continued

“This Chill-Inn Lanesboro group started in early 2022, after local businesses noticed a need from visitors and residents to better communicate what we had to offer in the winter, even if it is limited as compared to our warmer months. This need evolved into thinking about investigating more opportunities for winter tourism, and we are thrilled the Blandin Foundation Rural Leadership Boost Grant will allow us to work together to thoroughly explore the feasibility and ideas around winter tourism in Lanesboro,” said Alison Leathers, chair of the Lanesboro Businesses Promotion Group and local innkeeper.

Funding Sources

- ★ Lanesboro Area Community Foundation
- ★ Blandin Foundation
- ★ City of Lanesboro EDA
 - The EDA board helped to oversee the transparency of funding through public meetings
- ★ Local in-kind time and talents

'Travel and Leisure' declares Lanesboro a top winter destination



How Did We....

- ★ Organize
 - Identified project administrator
 - City as fiscal agent
 - EDA board as oversight
- ★ Plan
 - Core-team meetings
 - Educated main groups through emails, meetings, etc.
 - Identified steps to accomplish each main goal
- ★ Oversee Economic Tools
 - Education and training
 - Marketing initiatives
 - Data gathering



Project Goals - Why?

- ★ **Main Goal:** enable Lanesboro to thoroughly investigate and make plans for potential winter tourism, for visitors and residents alike.
- ★ **Feasibility Study:** gather community data and create a winter tourism model and evaluation tool (tourism assessment).
 - **Community Data Gathering:** surveys, meetings, and online feedback.
- ★ **Marketing:** Accurately and effectively communicate the expectations of a winter visit to Lanesboro and Whalan.
- ★ **Capacity Building:**
 - **Training:** provide training opportunities for local leaders
 - **Investigate** the opportunity to create a local investment cooperative for potential capital investments into winter tourism.



[Bundle Up and Slide into Lanesboro for Winter Fun! | Minnesota Monthly](#)

Tourism Assessment Data Collection

- ★ Business Survey: 47 responses
 - 11% = average business annual revenue in winter months (Nov-April)
 - 78% believe that winter tourism promotion is in the best interest of their business
 - Most businesses believe that tourism benefits their business, and they are interested in seeing and supporting efforts to boost tourism in the community.
- ★ Community Survey: n=134 Responses
 - Vision for winter tourism
 - Strong local businesses
 - Year-round activities
 - Expanded recreational opportunities
 - Concerns for winter tourism
 - Environmental impacts
 - Higher taxes
 - Increased housing costs



Tourism Impact of Tourism

Most business owners believe that tourism is important for business, including 69 percent that believe it is very important to business. On average, business owners reported that 11 percent of their gross sales revenue comes from winter tourism. One business reported winter tourism made up 35 percent of their annual revenue, while six businesses (13 percent) reported zero sales from winter tourism. Most businesses (78 percent) believe that winter tourism promotion is in the best interest of their business. Half the responding businesses are willing to participate financially in local or regional winter tourism promotion (Fig. 5).

Tourism Assessment Data Collection

- SOAR Activity - April 7, 2023



Strengths
Opportunities
Aspirations
Results



SOAR

Activity -

April 7, 2023

Results

Participants identified meaningful ways to measure their results. They fell into five themes highlighting the desired experience of Lanesboro for locals and visitors, as well as quantitative measures related to business revenue and marketing analytics – Figure 5.

Theme	Selected Quotes (*indicates two or more people agreed with this statement)
Community Vitality	• <i>Resilient community</i> • <i>*Returning guests</i> • <i>Progression: visitor to an investor to a resident (choosing this place, Lanesboro dream)</i> • <i>Population growth in school and community</i>
Economic Vitality	• <i>*Lodging tax increased in winter-year-round cash flow</i> • <i>Fewer months per year that businesses aren't operating in a deficit (profitable season more spread out)</i> • <i>Financial lift less of a strain in winter</i> • <i>*No empty storefronts</i> • <i>More cars on Main Street, more people in stores</i>
Enrichment & Variety	• <i>*New winter events and activities for residents and visitors of all ages</i> • <i>Event attendance</i> • <i>Reputation for year-round fun</i> • <i>Seeing hustle and bustle downtown</i>
Dining & Lodging	• <i>Inns are full.</i> • <i>When restaurants are open, happy, and content, visitors and locals are spending.</i> • <i>Locally roasted coffee</i>
Communication	• <i>Website analytics</i> • <i>Communication: increased tourism as visitors know places are open, increased places open as businesses expect tourists</i> • <i>Good reviews</i>

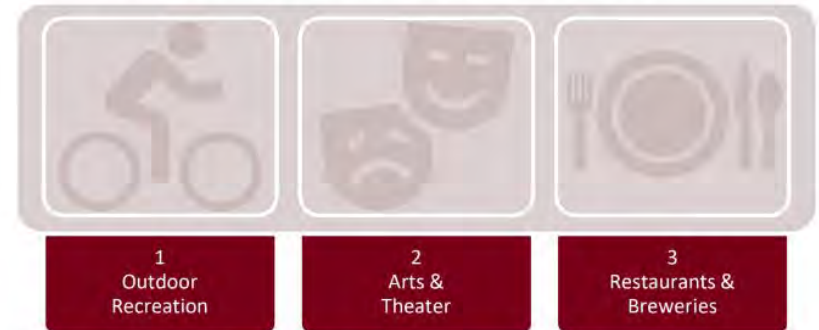
Figure 5: Themes and comments from the Results exercise

Tourism Assessment Data Collection

● Secret Shoppers

- ★ Overall, visitors had many ideas and great enthusiasm for winter tourism in Lanesboro.
- ★ Art and theatre are huge assets in the community, and there may be opportunities to keep embedding and even expanding that into tourism.
- ★ Business hours were a challenge this time of year, especially with dining and some tourist attractions.
- ★ Indoor and outdoor experiences are sought after, and Lanesboro already has tourism assets that can draw visitors to both type of experiences.

Top Tourism Assets



Action Steps from Winter Tourism Assessment

FOUR TOUCHSTONES FOR GROWING WINTER TOURISM IN LANESBORO



Market to Small Groups



Increase Dining Options



Leverage Indoor Spaces



Winterize Brand

Action Steps from Winter Tourism Assessment

Conclusion --- Take some first steps that put Lanesboro's creative spirit to work.

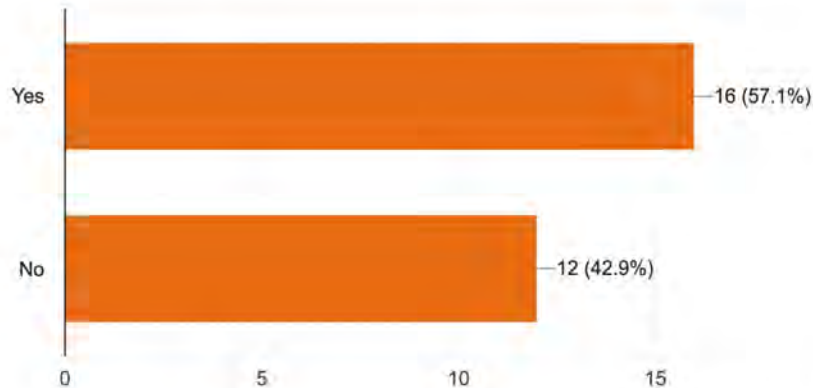
Getting started does not require perfection, just an entrepreneurial spirit and a willingness to have some fun as a community. Start by identifying achievable changes that community members can get excited about. Even a moderate increase in visitor stays can make a meaningful economic impact, and a few new activities can provide some new vibrancy for residents in the winter months. So, try some new things and build on them over time. Here are some ideas for getting started.

- ⇒ Have community-level conversations to discover what businesses, outfitters, residents, and others are excited about. Lean into those ideas this winter.
- ⇒ Identify target market groups businesses are already connected to and re-develop marketing materials to meet the needs of group organizers. List existing customer relationships that could be spun into group tourism experiences this winter. Use these relationships to get feedback about ideas that you are developing.
- ⇒ Recruit a team that can use initial discussions to generate a three-day itinerary for group organizers and other visitors to consider. Collaborate with the Visitors' Bureau and Chambers to use their calendars and other outreach materials.
- ⇒ Put out a call to local lodging businesses to inventory indoor "common spaces." Start with low-hanging fruit for willing lodgers with space and create a first draft of marketing materials that pitches those common spaces to groups.
- ⇒ Find easy wins regarding photography, marketing, and media relationships that expand shoppers' views of Lanesboro's appearance in all seasons.
- ⇒ Empower your local talent to create new ideas for Lanesboro experiences. Consider a small grants program to encourage local talent to create winter experiences for groups through dining, indoor gatherings, and outdoor adventures.
- ⇒ Partner with economic development entities that are focused on entrepreneurship. Use those resources to nurture local ideas that the community is excited about.
- ⇒ Tap locals or professional photographers to take pictures of Lanesboro this winter.
- ⇒ Leverage your media relationships to create fun stories as new ideas are implemented.

Goal 1: Data Gathering - Sidewalk Survey of Visitors and More...

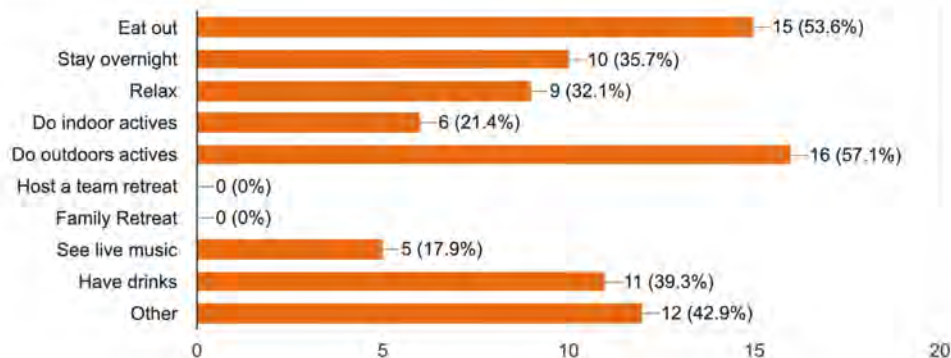
Have you been to Lanesboro in the winter?

28 responses



If yes, when you visited Lanesboro in the winter, did you like to.....?

28 responses



Question 3: Which winter activities would you like to participate in when visiting Lanesboro? (n=28)

1. Cross-country skiing: 15
2. Snowshoeing: 14
3. Theatre: 5
4. Cooking class, art class, etc.: 5
5. Dining/pre-fixe meal/guest chef: 4
6. Hiking: 4
7. Ice skating: 3
8. Stay/cozy cottage: 3
9. History/culture/etc. lectures: 3
10. Other: yoga, live music, wine tasting, mystery dinner

Goal 2: Hiring a Marketing Team

● Marketing Plan RFP

- ★ Create a live marketing plan to be used in 2023 and beyond
 - Use past data gathering, tourism assessment, etc.
 - A realistic plan that can be affordable to a small community
- ★ Expand on our winter tourism “Chill-Inn in Lanesboro” brand to better off-season economy and set visitor expectations
 - Logo creation / color scheme
 - Rack card creation
 - Winter itinerary creation
 - Google SEM work
- ★ Build capacity to add off-season capacity
- ★ Identify convention sources and tourism bases that are looking for off season active adventure experiences



City of Lanesboro Winter Tourism

Goal 2: Setting Expectations through Marketing

- ★ Chill Inn Lanesboro [video](#) = Michael Seiler
- ★ Chill Inn Lanesboro [webpage](#) and local winter itineraries
- ★ [Marketing plan](#) created
- ★ Marketing plan execution
- ★ Chill Inn Logo and merchandise/swag
- ★ [Winter Tourism Assessment](#) from the U of MN Extension
- ★ Various press releases and [media coverage](#)



[UMN conducts winter tourism study with Lanesboro – The Minnesota Daily \(mndaily.com\)](#)

[Community meetings explore winter tourism in Lanesboro | Community | winonapost.com](#)

[Lanesboro city leaders push for more winter tourism \(kttc.com\)](#)

[Lanesboro looking to enhance its winter tourism with the help of the University of Minnesota | News | kimt.com](#)

Goal 2: Setting Expectations Through the Use of Winter Itineraries



Winter Angling



Arts Experience

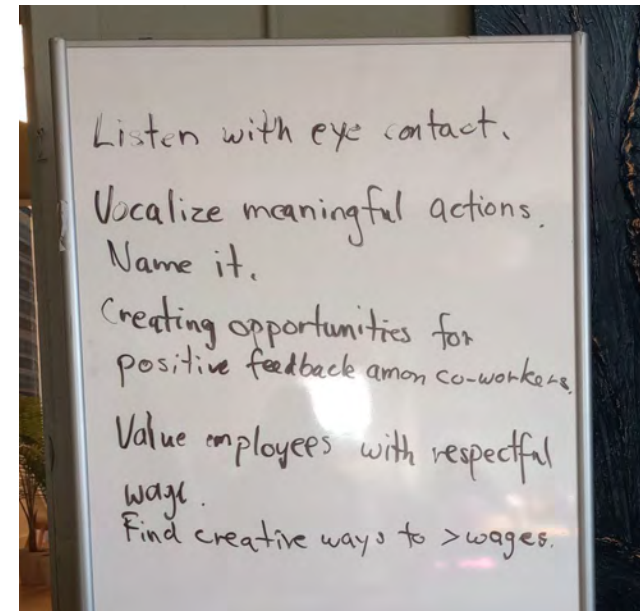


Girls' Getaway

Goal 3: Capacity Building

Educating Entrepreneurs and Area Leaders

- ★ Training and Education Goal Accomplished Through:
 - WOW Women of Wellness training by Winona State - (Kara Maloney, Lori Rakosnik, Cathy Enerson & Annie McCabe)
 - E Navigator Training - (Cathy Enerson & Michael Seiler)
 - U of MN Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities (Allie Palmer)
 - SMIF Entrepreneurial Bridge (Allie & Ryan Palmer, Lori Bakke, & Cathy Enerson)
 - Mindfulness is a Superpower! - facilitated by Winona State on 11/6/23 - open to the public
- ★ Community Investment Co-op investigated Coop such as NE Mpls Cooperative
 - Worked with Kevin Edberg: kedberg@cdsus.coop
- ★ New equipment for meetings



What's to Come?

★ We hope to see a change in 5 - 10 years

- Winter visitors and residents come to town feeling prepared and informed
 - Chill Inn Lanesboro video, brochures, and merchandise are utilized
 - Chill Inn webpage updated and itineraries marketed and updated
 - Local employees are educated and informed
- Business Growth
 - Business revenue increases in excess of 11 percent during off season
 - Businesses expand or pivot
 - New businesses created
- New winter event = Examples: Frozen Rhubarb Fest, Fat Tire Bicycle Ride
- Additional tourism opportunities and itineraries
- Implementation of new ideas from the tourism assessment and the marketing plan
- Continued collaboration between core groups
- Updated data gathering to see if business revenue increased, etc.

Key Takeaways

★ **This was a collaborative effort to provide solutions and ideas for setting visitors' expectations in the winter**

★ **Data**

- Tourism assessment
- Sidewalk survey

★ **Increased Communication**

- Created tools to better communicate and share winter information and marketing

★ **Capacity Built**

- Trainings provided and equipment secured
- Evergreen marketing materials created

★ **Work Left to Do**

- Build out and update itineraries
- Implement new photography
- Utilize marketing plan suggestions and tourism assessment recommendations
- Continue to meet quarterly
- Gather data to see what changes occur in 5-10 years

