UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

TOURISM CENTER

Growing Winter Tourism

Four touchstones for growing revenue in winter months

Presented by DeeDee LeMier

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October 23, 2023

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Table of contents

Background 5
Lanesboro Tourism through the lens of Sustainable Tourism Development 6
Elements of Sustainable Tourism Development 6
About the Tourism Assessment Program and this report 8
Observations and Findings 10
Touchstone #1: Market to Small Groups 11
Group Marketing Opportunities 13
Group Traveler Assets & Resources 15
Touchstone #2: Increase Dining Options 16
Touchstone #3: Leverage Indoor Spaces 19
Touchstone #4: Winterize Brand 21
Conclusion --- Take some first steps that put Lanesboro's creative spirit to work. 23
References 24
Appendix A: Tourism in the Economy - Lanesboro 25
Appendix B: Community Survey Findings 30
Appendix C: Community Meeting Themes 36
Appendix D: Business Survey Findings 42
Appendix E: First Impression Visitor Findings 49
Appendix F: Mobile Data Analysis 68

Background

Lanesboro, Minnesota, is a picturesque small town (population 723) tucked along the banks of the Root River in Southeast Minnesota. During the past decades, Lanesboro has developed a strong regional and national reputation as a tourism community—known for plentiful bed and breakfasts and other lodging options for guests to enjoy weekend activities, especially outdoor recreation and arts. Lanesboro is a competitive tourism community, having achieved numerous places on "Top 10" lists such as:

- Smithsonian, Best Small Town to Visit
- America's Prettiest Town, 2010 (Forbes)
- MSN Travel List, Most Stunning Small Town in Minnesota, 2022
- Travel & Leisure, 20 Most Beautiful Winter Towns, 2023

There is a strong desire to keep the town "awake" during the winter and decrease the seasonal lull. Tourism was commonly cited to help businesses stay open more often. (54% of community members surveyed)

Between April and October, the community brims with visitors attracted to outdoor recreation such as biking, kayaking, and fishing and indoor experiences such as the Commonweal Theatre and the art gallery. After the beauty of the autumn leaves fades, so does the volume of visitors to the community. An examination of mobile data (Appendix F) illustrates this sharp drop from November through March/April. The dates selected correspond to the study time frame and include the most recent winter season (Figure 1).

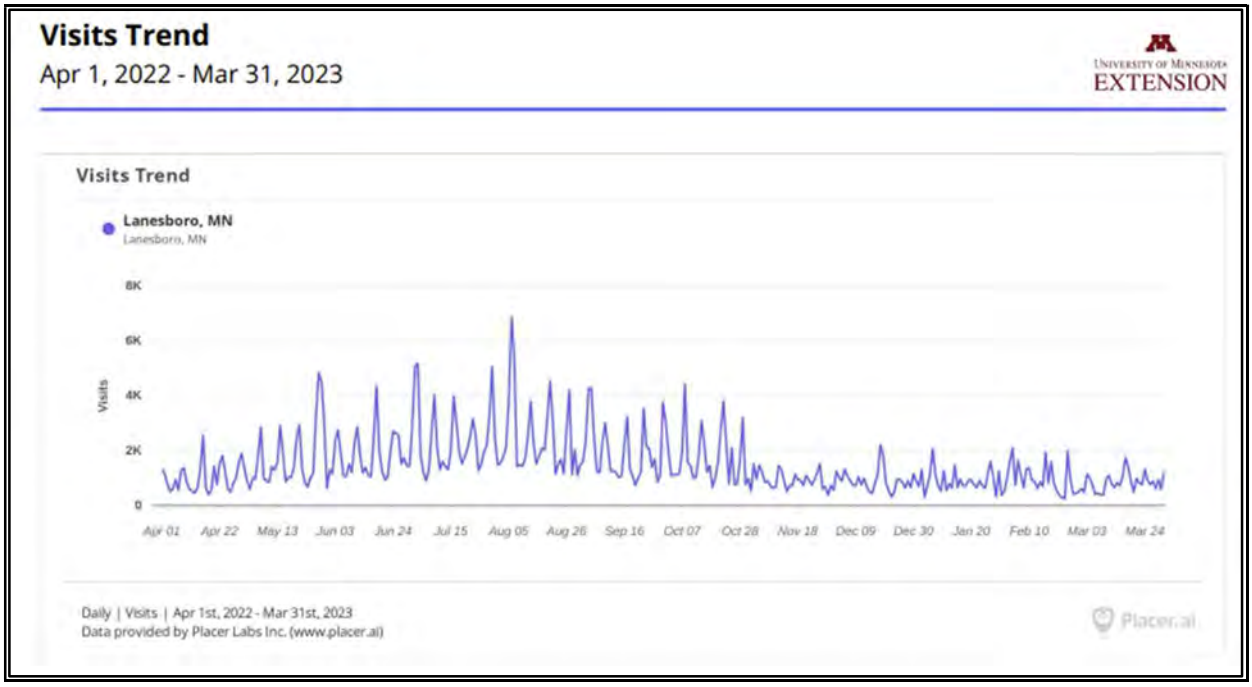

Figure 1: Mobile data visit trends April 1, 2022 - March 31, 2022. (Appendix F)

The absence of visitors brings a change of pace for local businesses and residents who work long hours during the intense peak seasons. Employment decreases as well, as Lanesboro employs seasonal workers who do heavy lifting in the peak season but leave the area in the winter.

The local economy suffers when tourism is depleted. Some are forced to dip into reserves to cover expenses in the winter months. Residents are also affected, as grocery and dining options are limited during the winter season. Instead of being able to use free time to enjoy what Lanesboro has to offer, residents may opt to spend money on leisure activities and necessities outside Lanesboro.

Lanesboro has identified winter tourism to improve the experience of area residents and support businesses in the community. Seeing the potential of carefully selected tourism development for the winter months, in late 2022, the city of Lanesboro identified the need to gather data and community input to move forward. The community invited the University of Minnesota Extension's Tourism Center to help them assess the possibilities through its Tourism Assessment Program.

Lanesboro Tourism through the lens of Sustainable Tourism Development

The University of Minnesota Extension's Tourism Assessment Program examines the interests of communities, businesses, and tourists not just from the perspective of economic opportunity but also through the values of sustainable Tourism Development (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2023). These values recognize that tourism depends on the various resources it seeks to use. Therefore, sustainability should be a fundamental consideration in tourism development (Messer, 2017).

Sustainable tourism development
meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting
and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to
management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic
needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity,
essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems.

The values of sustainable tourism development are summarized in the table below, with considerations for all that apply to Lanesboro's tourism development goals.

Elements of Sustainable Tourism Development	
Key Values	**Lanesboro Application**
Assess true benefits and costs Accurate assessment of tourism's benefits and costs (social, economic, and environmental) can help the community avoid problems and maintain support for growth.	Business owners and the community appreciate having a respite from the pace of summer tourism. Large-scale events may not align with volunteer or staff availability, winter weather conditions, or community connection.
Diversification A community's ability to weather hard times is enhanced when there are several sources of economic activity.	Expanding winter tourism will add increased diversification to Lanesboro's economy. Maintaining diversification of activities within the tourism industry is essential to sustainability.

Quality Tourism development must be balanced to sustain the quality of the experience over time while also conserving resources. Overuse can deteriorate the tourism product and result in a loss of visitors.	In Lanesboro, businesses must pay attention to their owners' and employees' morale and energy in the winter months. Area parks and trails are vulnerable to over-tourism and rely on snow and weather conditions.
Shared benefits and control Communities can encourage local control through business development and expansion programs and active involvement in tourism planning.	In Lanesboro, coordinated efforts can ensure visitors know what is available (and when), despite a lower volume of products in the winter. Coordinated efforts and thoughtful communication with visitors will get visitors what they need while businesses get the rest they need.
Authenticity Authenticity is the lifestyle of a community that emerges in response to its physical and social nature. Authentic attractions reflect the basic fabric of the community and focus on attributes that make a community unique.	Lanesboro residents identified attributes they value in the town in winter months—renewal, peace, beauty, rest, and more. These can be added to the authentic brand the community already holds concerning outdoor recreation, its rural setting, and the local arts scene.

By carefully shaping winter tourism opportunities, the City of Lanesboro can increase the number of visitors, improve businesses' financial stability, and maintain the community's peaceful respite between November and March.

About the Tourism Assessment Program and this report

In 2022, the community organized to investigate growing its winter tourism market, aiming to extend the economic benefit of its tourism reputation. Leaders in Lanesboro determined that an adaptation of the University of Minnesota Tourism Center's Tourism Assessment Program could help them investigate options that would generate revenue while addressing community concerns. The effort, called *Chill-Inn Lanesboro,* received a $50,000 grant from The Blandin Foundation to assess strengths and opportunities from the perspective of community members, visitors, and data sources.

The project is a collaborative effort of the City of Lanesboro, Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce, Lanesboro EDA, Lanesboro Businesses Promotion Group, and other community groups. Extension educators adapted the Tourism Assessment Program (TAP), which typically looks at year-round opportunities to meet Lanesboro's needs. The adapted program was conducted from January of 2023 to April of 2023.

The findings from each of these efforts are delineated in the appendices of this report (see links below), and Extension has used these findings to present its recommendations in this report. The appendices of this report share additional resources that provide Lanesboro's decision-makers with all study findings and analysis.

Program Component	Description	Findings
Tourism in the Economy: An Economic Overview	This summary report was developed by Brigid Tuck, senior economic specialist, to summarize the impact of tourism on jobs and economic output.	Appendix A (Tourism in the Economy - Lanesboro)
Community Survey: Lanesboro Winter Tourism Inventory and Resident Attitudes Survey	The community survey was modified to include winter tourism questions. The Chill Inn Lanesboro team distributed the survey through community emails and social media.	Appendix B (Community Survey Findings)
Community Meeting and Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results Activity	Two community meetings were held on April 4, 2023. Attendees participated in a SOAR activity. Additionally, a graphic recorder captured the conversation visually.	Appendix C (Community Meeting Themes)
Survey of Lanesboro Businesses	Businesses in the area were invited to share their perspectives on winter tourism through a survey distributed via e-mail by the Lanesboro	Appendix D (Business Survey Findings)

	Chamber of Commerce and the Chill Inn Lanesboro team.	
First Impressions Visitor Surveys	Visitors traveled to Lanesboro in March of 2023 to experience the community and share their perspectives. Visitors are from a wide range of tourism backgrounds.	Appendix E (First Impressions Visitor Findings)
Mobile Data Analysis	Extension utilized Mobile Data Analysis to explore the journeys of Lanesboro visitors as they migrated to and from visitor experiences.	Appendix F (Mobile Data Analysis)

Observations and Findings

This report outlines four recommendations to increase Lanesboro's winter tourism. Each touchstone is described herein, with a rationale provided for each touchstone and a list of suggested activities that the community might take on in support of each touchstone. Extension believes these "touchstones" can move the community in the same direction even if businesses, groups, and individuals engage in very different activities to suit their unique perspectives. Winter tourism development activities in Lanesboro will likely change over time while remaining grounded in touchstone goals. Lanesboro will undoubtedly see that these touchstones connect and create a robust visitor experience. This report will describe why recommendations are supported by research and the study findings and build upon the community's past tourism success.

Figure 2: Four touchstones for growing winter tourism in Lanesboro. Photos provided by First Impression Visitors.

Touchstone #1: Market to Small Groups

Lanesboro can be marketed as a winter destination that connects visitors with shared interests to stay for more than just a day or two.

Sustainable rural tourism can be built from the needs and interests of residents willing to invite visitors to join in the fun! Residents of Lanesboro shared their appreciation of the slower season, hobbies, and events that occur during the winter season. These local interests can be leveraged, thus addressing these community priorities to ensure long-term participation from organizers, volunteers, and participants.

Why this recommendation?

⇒ **Group travel is trending:** *"After the pandemic, many rediscovered the value and importance of family, and are opting to travel together in groups. Tour companies are seeing a rise in millennials and GenZ traveling in groups. Whether it's the need for connection and bonding or the availability of large home rentals, people are looking to travel in ways that forge larger group connections, and not just satisfying individual needs."* (Bach, n.d.).

In Minnesota, recent surveys indicate that group travel is a dominant desire for winter trips (Explore Minnesota, 2022).

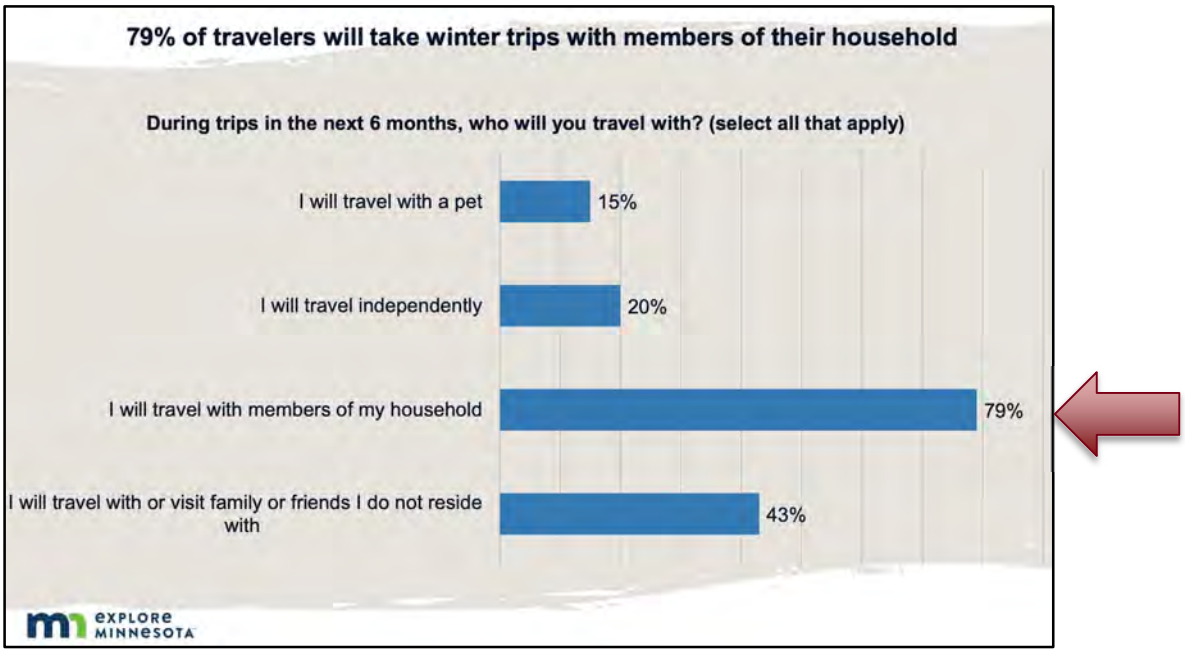

Figure 3: Explore Minnesota findings show that 79% of travelers will take winter trips with members of their household. (Explore Minnesota, 2022)

⇒ **Lanesboro has a track record of success** hosting groups during the off-season. The annual Ibsen Festival brought Henrik Ibsen's work to life at the Commonweal Theatre Company for

20 years (Jones, 2017). The Turkey Bowling Event offered family fun to raise funds for local causes, and the community hosts holiday-oriented events (Taylor, 2022). A new event, Gamesboro, gives Lanesboro's gamers a chance to come together in winter while inviting visitors to join them (Gamesboro, n.d.). Each of these examples builds upon the existing interests of residents interested in inviting others.

⇒ **Unused rooms and public spaces in bed and breakfasts are an asset** to be deployed for groups. While lodging options in other parts of the state are heavily populated with conferences, Lanesboro offers affordable and available space. Dining space and public lounges in lodging facilities can be used by groups staying for their programming content.

⇒ Reports on tourism trends indicate that **average lengths of stay are increasing** (Lomanno, 2023). By curating a multi-day winter experience, Lanesboro can encourage longer stays that appeal to individuals and groups looking for flexible spaces for quiet, reflective activities

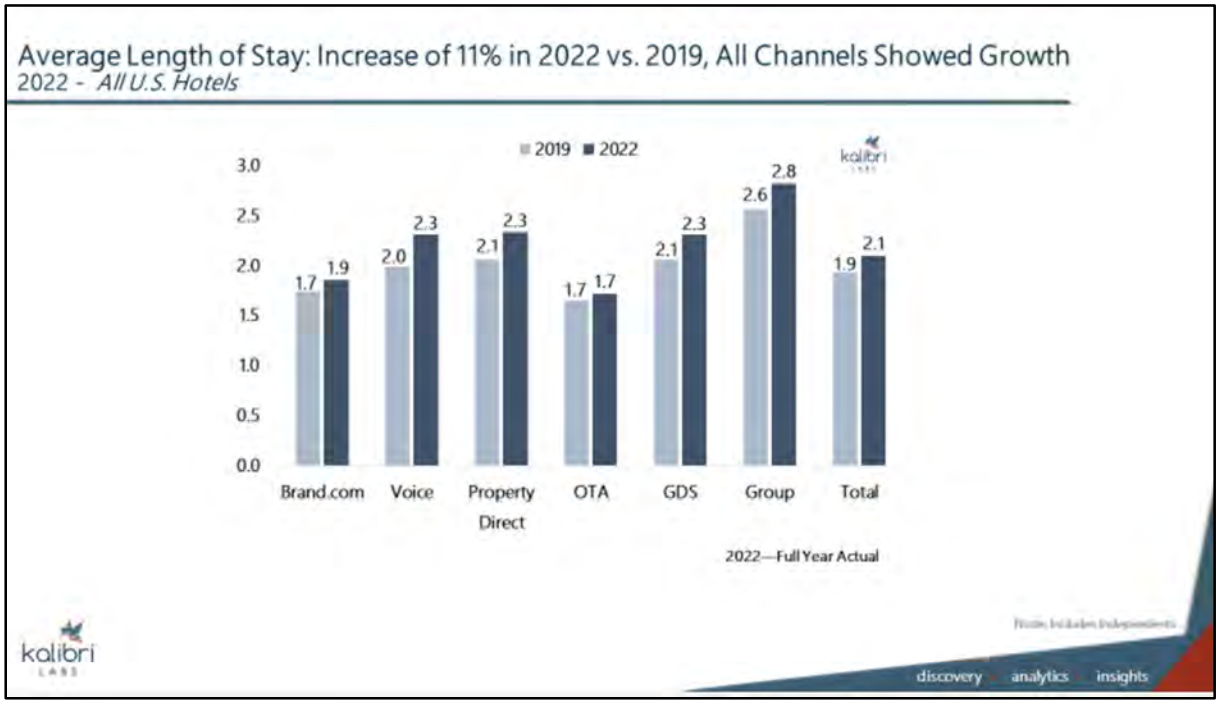

Figure 4: Average Length of Stay: Increase of 11% in 2022 vs. 2019, All Channels Showed Growth. (Lomanno, 2023)

and larger gatherings. The goal should be to recruit visitors who are a great fit for winter offerings while knowing there may be fewer visitors than in the summer. Connecting those visitors with activities that meet their travel needs will increase each visitor's economic impact on the community. One room reserved for three nights is less labor to support than turning the room over three times for separate visitors. Activities can be offered by businesses and organizations or individuals, expanding the impact of dollars travelers spend.

⇒ **Groups love the arts.** There is a convergence of opinion from visitors and residents that the arts and theater scene can differentiate this location from others. Suggested audiences for marketing efforts include interest groups focused on arts and culture (e.g., writing, reading) who are already drawn to Lanesboro as an artists' destination.

Ideas for marketing to groups:

⇒ **Re-establish target markets.** Businesses and community efforts can establish target group markets and design experiences that the market might be interested in. In selecting markets, Lanesboro should determine its interests and current assets, customer base, and the extent to which the audience will most likely be self-directed.

> Group travel breathes life into our economies. When there's an entire group traveling together, the financial stimulus multiplies dramatically. In addition to a larger amount of spending at one time, group travel can often provide more efficiencies for the places they visit. Undoubtedly, the prevalence of more group tours contributes significantly to this surge in numbers. Truly, the more the merrier!
>
> **Breaktheicemedia.com** (Rhonda, 2023)

A short-term activity could be simply drawing together sample agendas for how targeted groups might spend two, three, and four days in Lanesboro, blending indoor and outdoor activities and considering what new products and services could be developed. (See touchstones 2 – 4.). In the chart below, we identified some potential group markets and considered what activities they might enjoy.

Group Marketing Opportunities

Audience	Self-directed uses	Niche group uses	Facilitated events
	requiring least local labor	⟷	*requiring most local labor*
Writers and readers	Writers on deadline National Novel Writing Month, known as NaNoWriMo (NaNoWriMo, 1999)	Book clubs Writing group retreats	Play-in-a-week experience with a local theater company. Parlor stories, plays, literary salons, readings, etc. Connections to local artists and enthusiasts who can create classes or experiences (e.g., cooking, arts master classes) Wedding coordination Cocktail and beer tastings after hours Fly-tying and local outdoor skills Winter Folk School Local artist events
Remote workers	Remote work in a new setting	Teams of workers who need to collaborate	
Professional teams	Planning retreats	Yoga and meditation retreats	
Gaming groups	Meeting spaces in existing venues such as BnB public spaces	Bars and restaurants that offer board games	
Families	Holiday gatherings Cross-country trails	Family language camps	
Retirees	Group reunions Hobbyists Flexible travel schedules	Road Scholar Pickleball and other active pursuits Yoga and meditation retreats	

⇒ **Redesign web and print materials.** Consider web and print materials from the perspective of individuals choosing a site and activities for their group. Organizers reviewing Lanesboro's marketing materials should be able to answer the question, "Where can my group of (5, 10, 15) people stay, and what can we do?"

⇒ **Describe Lanesboro using words that express the authentic mood of locals who love Lanesboro in winter.** At the SOAR meeting in April 2023, community members generated a beneficial list of adjectives describing a place where individuals, groups, and teams can connect and rejuvenate (Appendix C). Below, we have paraphrased the group input from the SOAR gathering. Writers can draw from this summary as they rewrite materials for winter travel.

Lanesboro is a …

…beautiful, cozy, quiet, peaceful, slow, restful, low-key…

…place where groups and teams can catch up, get grounded, enjoy the view, take a breath, focus on growth, get some me-time, rejuvenate, create, and contemplate.

⇒ **Design new offerings that serve niche groups,** where they bring their experts, programs, etc. Targeted markets may be informal groups or clubs with similar interests or work teams (corporate or non-profit) bringing their expertise and programming. Local knowledge and skillsets can help create memorable experiences while maximizing these visitors' economic impact on Lanesboro.

⇒ **Add resources to Lanesboro's website that coordinate resources for groups.** A review of existing web resources about Lanesboro does not assist group organizers in planning. An inventory of artists, cooks, and others willing to facilitate events for groups can increase the offerings and the likelihood that group organizers will choose Lanesboro.

⇒ **Consider how various services and interests in Lanesboro's tourism sector can change to market Lanesboro to groups.** Some suggestions are in the table below.

Group Traveler Assets & Resources		
Sector	**Asset in place that will appeal to groups**	**Resources and changes that could be developed**
Communication and marketing	Reputation as an arts community Reputation as a place to Bike, Hike, Paddle & Stay (Root River Trail Towns, 2023)	Online curation of indoor and outdoor activities available to groups that visit Lanesboro Online curation of information on meeting spaces and gathering places in Lanesboro Online curation of information on lodging that can accommodate groups in winter
Attractions	Gamesboro Theater productions Brewery	Strengthen connections between Eagle Bluff resources and downtown businesses
Services	Empty winter rooms—entire B & Bs can be rented to a group; multi-bedroom lodges and homes can be tapped	Group discounts and discounts for extended stays or larger groups
Transportation	Amish bus tours	Multi-city brewery tour
Environmental & Social	The SOAR gathering generated a list of adjectives that perfectly illustrate the assets Lanesboro enjoys that groups can tap to rejuvenate and connect—beauty, coziness, respite, quiet, opportunities to grow, time to catch up, peace, slow pace, and more.	New images and verbiage online help groups see Lanesboro as a destination place

Touchstone #2: Increase Dining Options

Expand seasonal dining options and access to groceries.

Uncertainty about dining and grocery availability impacts where visitors are directed to shop, influences local travel patterns, and creates tension about who the community exists to serve. Basic amenities such as groceries and dining options must be available year-round to support community connections. Addressing the needs of residents is vital to maintaining a positive relationship between residents and tourists long term.

Why this recommendation?

⇒ **Solving the problem of dining and food access in winter is essential to connecting positively to visitors while providing opportunities for local revenue** when restaurants are not open full-time. We will propose ideas for meeting the dining needs of individual travelers and groups that do not involve full-time restaurant operations. Regarding food access, we encourage Lanesboro to think "outside the big box grocery."

⇒ **Community members and visitors agree that consistent and convenient access to groceries and seasonal dining experiences is a challenge in Lanesboro.**

- Forty-three percent of community respondents were concerned that visitors would be disappointed by the lack of shopping, dining, and lodging options (Appendix B).
- When asked about their tourism preferences, First Impressions visitors shared a preference for dining that is well aligned with Lanesboro's established offerings (Appendix E).

Dining	• *Food, wine, and beer* • *Local food/excellent or unique restaurants (especially vegetarian and/or vegetable-centric dishes)* • *Breweries/cocktails that showcase local flavors* • *Local food/farmers markets/cocktails/breweries* • *Unique dining opportunities*

Figure 5: First Impression Visitors shared their dining preferences when traveling. (Appendix E)

⇒ **Keeping travelers in Lanesboro to find food will increase the money each visitor spends.** Data captured from mobile phones revealed that visitors to Lanesboro from further than 50 miles away were significantly more likely than local travelers to visit dining, grocery, bar, or pubs within the city during their visit. Mobile data also revealed that theatergoers typically visit a restaurant or bar before and/or after a theater event (Appendix F).

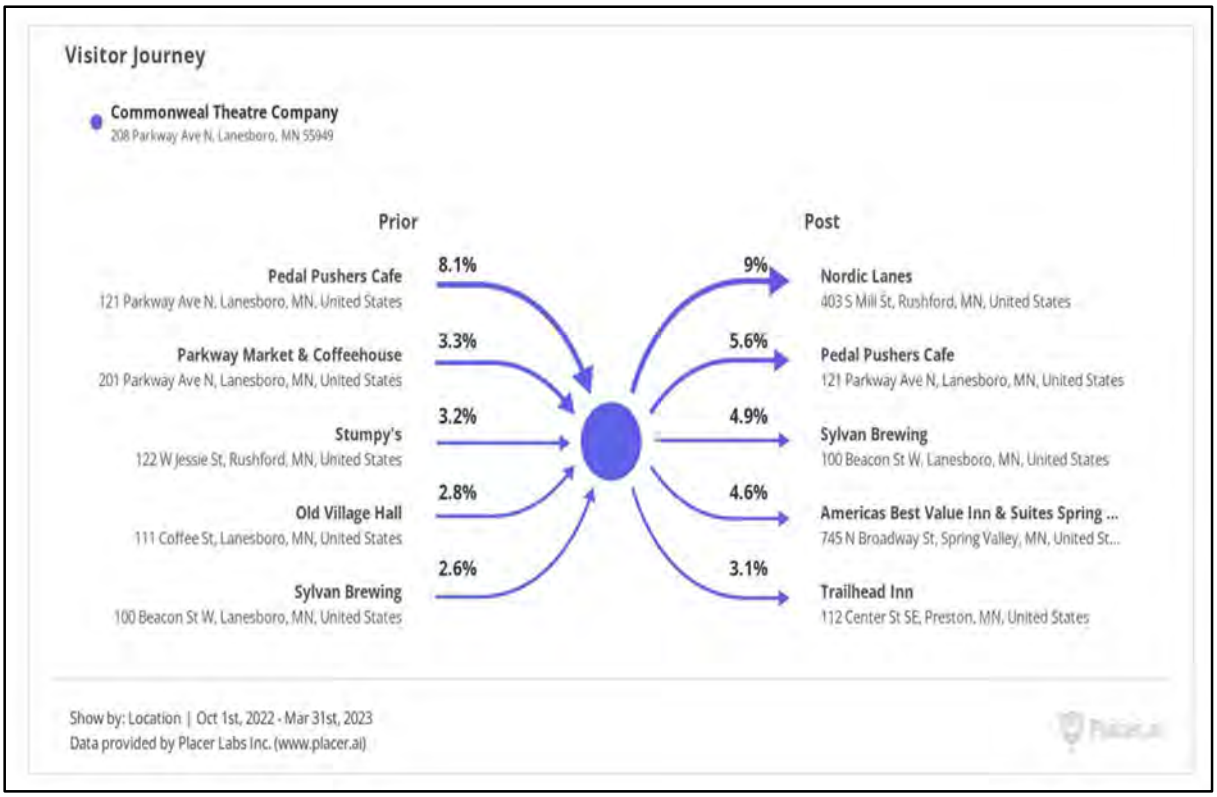

Figure 6: Example of Off-Season Visitor Journey mobile data report. (Appendix F)

Ideas for expanding food access:

Lanesboro is not alone in seeking solutions to food access for residents and visitors. Some towns have imagined successful, new solutions. Below are some innovative food solutions:

- ⇒ **Offer high-value, low-density dining options for off-season visitors.** Example: Restaurants like La Ferme in Alexandria, Minnesota, combine evening fine dining with quick-service lunch offerings (La Ferme, n.d.). They also offer private events that could be marketed to small groups of visitors. These smaller offerings could create winter revenue without high investments in labor or food stocks in winter months. Moreover, such high-end experiences might be pre-ordered by groups when they register for lodging.
- ⇒ **Coordinate pre-scheduled, pre-ordered meals, and take-out of "comfort food."** As Lanesboro re-shapes marketing for group experiences, options for food might be pre-scheduled and pre-ordered. Groups can be made aware of which days restaurant dining is available and can be presented with other options—from catered meals to employing local cooks to make meals or conduct cooking classes. Pastas and soups are good winter options for pre-ordered meals in the winter.
- ⇒ **Curate unique seasonal dining options.** Example: In the off-season, restaurants in the rural Cotswolds of Great Britain significantly decrease their business hours. However, they take registrations for high-value holiday meal events for visitors and residents alike. The meals have themes, and they may collaborate with local inns to create unique holiday stays for

small groups, families, or couples. Visit Christmas offerings from Frogmill to see an example (Brakspear, 2022).

⇒ **Let restaurant diners purchase food.** Example: Dorset General Store in Park Rapids, MN, makes room for a small convenience store that offers the same ingredients the restaurant needs to serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner (Dorset General Store, n.d.). A small area of square footage is needed, and visitors can purchase food for breakfast, lunch, or hikes the next day.

⇒ **Create self-service food markets.** Example: Main Street Market in Evansville, MN, allows members to access the store 24 hours daily using a key fob or telephone app (Main Street Market, n.d.). Because the market has low labor costs, prices are competitive. Members greatly appreciate having access to food after hours and "just-in-time." This KARE11 news story features Main Street Market (Erdahl, 2022).

⇒ **Create dining experiences that are simple and creative.**

Beyond basic needs, there is also a significant opportunity to have fun with dining options. Lanesboro already has a Turkey Bowling event, so why not find more winter-focused entertainment around the table? Here are a few ideas:

Have fun with local traditions by re-imaging rhubarb. Given their long-running rhubarb festival in May, Lanesboro is already synonymous with rhubarb. Common rural preservation practices, such as freezing chopped rhubarb and "rhubarb shrubs," create opportunities for reimagining rhubarb for the winter months. Local restaurants and bars could join in the fun through featured desserts or cocktails spanning the winter months.

Fireside fun is a long-standing pleasure of raclette cheese gatherings. Originating in the Swiss Alps, raclette cheese is melted fireside before being poured over prepared bread and vegetables. Popular at ski resorts in the United States, raclette cheese events could be brought to Lanesboro with a Norwegian touch using Jarlsberg cheese or even something local to the region (Deer Valley Resort, 2023).

Touchstone #3: Leverage Indoor Spaces

Identify, coordinate, and curate indoor winter events.

Lanesboro's unique downtown buildings and lodging options are outstanding resources for developing indoor winter events that cater to visitors across life stages and interests. Coordinating ongoing indoor offerings can support groups and travelers looking for cozy winter experiences.

Why this recommendation?

⇒ **Winter travelers need indoor experiences.** A survey indicates that 25% of travelers in winter do not look for outdoor activities (Explore Minnesota, 2022). Additionally, many outdoor pursuits also require spaces to warm up, shelter from inclement weather, and prepare for adventures.

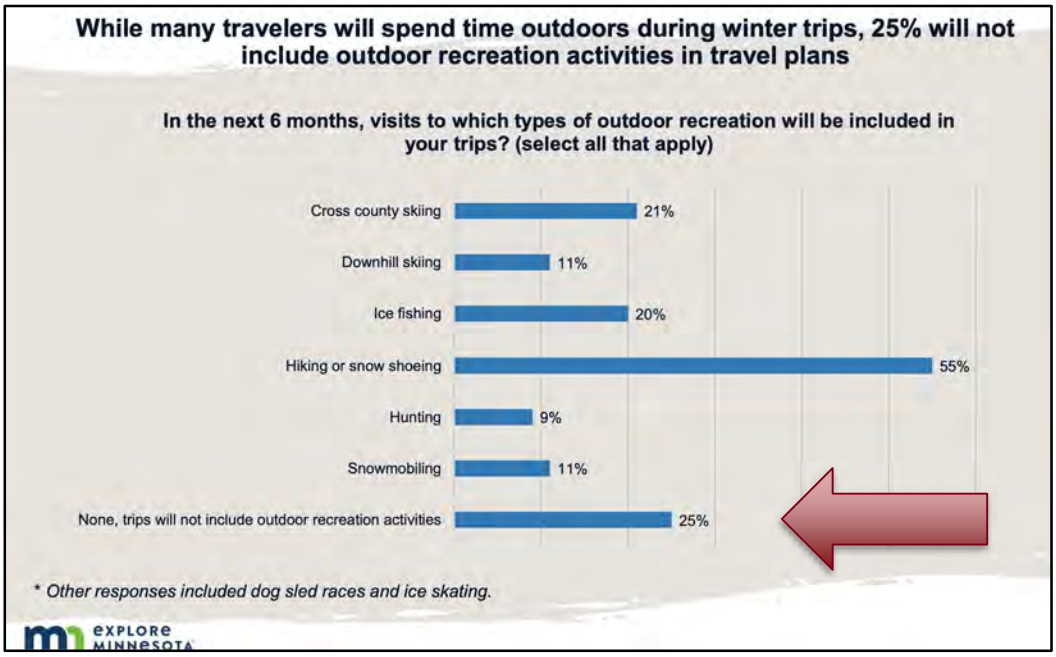

Figure 7: Explore Minnesota findings show that 25% of winter travelers will not include outdoor recreation in their travel plans. (Explore Minnesota, 2022)

⇒ **Lanesboro has delightful spaces for small group activities.** While Lanesboro does not have large conference facilities, it enjoys several beautiful indoor spaces (common areas) where people can gather and enjoy indoor events—or the solitude of work or reflection. These spaces may be underutilized in the winter because available indoor events are not well-coordinated.

⇒ **Local artists and artisans are an essential asset for the community.** To the extent that local artists and artisans are willing to create classes, events, or experiences in the winter months, they can provide authentic experiences for small groups of travelers. For those who are

organizing group experiences and retreats, access to these experiences will be a selling point.

Ideas for curating indoor activities:

- ⇒ **Re-think Lanesboro's lodging and entertainment rooms as "common spaces" in winter.** A quick inventory of bed and breakfasts, lodges, and other spaces can help Lanesboro's marketers quantify how many common spaces are available for small group activities. Assess the extent B & B owners, lodges, restaurants, and other business owners are willing to open small spaces to indoor activities is needed.
- ⇒ As part of that inventory, consider whether those facilities would be "winter-cozy." Guests may be particularly comfortable in rooms with fireplaces, cozy couches, warm blankets, and winter views.
- ⇒ Connect lodging and dining spaces with group dining options. Pre-ordered meals need space where people can gather.
- ⇒ Consider using sports-related venues such as indoor pickleball, basketball courts, and workout facilities.
- ⇒ **Invite artists, artisans, and others to create winter experiences.** Small group classes, clinics, and experiences could be an income stream for artists who are underemployed in the winter. Artists can choose their willingness to provide these experiences based on their availability and winter energy.
- ⇒ **Generate an online menu of indoor group spaces and activities to help groups reimagine how they can use their stay in Lanesboro.** Find online images of the spaces with winter décor and outdoor vistas. Include both experiences available and spaces available. Help group organizers see the advantages of Lanesboro regarding the variety of activities available for the group.

Touchstone #4: Winterize Brand

Leverage Lanesboro's excellent reputation as an outdoor destination by helping visitors envision a winter experience.

Lanesboro has beautiful outdoor spaces and inviting outdoor recreation facilities year-round. A next step is to differentiate the Lanesboro outdoor experience from other areas, tapping the assets of the Root River, local creativity, and equipment rental expertise. Winterize the outdoor experience through expanded equipment access and visual materials representing the year-round amenities.

Why this recommendation?

- ⇒ **The Lanesboro visitor brochure includes limited winter photos.** The 2022 Lanesboro Area Visitor Guide features beautiful photos of summer activities but only three images of winter landscapes or activities (Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce, 2022). Visitors would benefit from seeing the beautiful winter landscapes as they are considering travel plans in the area.
- ⇒ **Winter outdoor recreation requires gear.** First Impressions Visitors noted the challenge of accessing bikes during their visit *and* that it was the highlight of their trip.
- ⇒ **Skiing, hiking and biking are a strong, but not particularly unique, asset.** To differentiate Lanesboro's winter experience, consider a few additional outdoor activities that attract people to adventure in the outdoors.
- ⇒ **Snow is not a reliable asset.** A variety of images and activities can embrace shoulder seasons and snowless seasons. Moreover, this gives Lanesboro a chance to deploy its creativity beyond the cliches of winter, focusing on elements that are delightful to find.

Ideas for winterizing outdoor activities:

Lanesboro has core outdoor activities, such as cross-country skiing, amply available. However, promoting only these typical outdoor activities will not distinguish Lanesboro as an outdoor experience.

- ⇒ **Imagine new ways to use the outdoors in the winter—and make those new ways easily accessible to visitors.** A small amount of "repackaging" can offer winter experiences that are distinctly Lanesboro's. Utilize the Root River branding to highlight year-round ways to "bike, hike, paddle and stay" (Root River Trail Towns, 2023). Paddling equipment, such as gloves, outerwear, and drysuits may also be popular additions, allowing for paddling in the cold.

⇒ **Make equipment and outdoor gear available for various activities that are "outside the box."** Bikes and tubes used during the summer can be made available on a smaller scale for winter travelers. Tubes can be used for sledding or for deep winter river slides.

⇒ **Birding backpack rentals invite visitors to venture out** for winter hikes. Birding backpacks might include local birding guides, binoculars, and maps that guide visitors to see birds and other wildlife.

Example: The Cable Natural History Museum has created outdoor experiences for travelers and families with children. They rent out birding backbacks and other outdoor equipment to visitors to encourage connecting with nature, while reducing barriers to access (Cable Natural History Musum, 2022).

⇒ **Consider warm product offerings such as hoodies**, locally-made hats and gloves, sweatshirts, scarves, hiking boots, and more. These can expand retail offerings in lodging facilities as well as open retail.

⇒ **Create a variety of off-season visuals in marketing materials that appreciate the loveliness of Southeast Minnesota year-round.** Match visuals with access to equipment and rentals so visitors can easily engage in the activities promised in materials and online, e.g., winter river paddling, winter tubing, and adventure hikes.

⇒ The typical images of winter photography should not override the beauty of other times of the year. Shoulder seasons can be lovely, and given climate changes, Lanesboro will need to be nimble in its outdoor activities, noting a distinction between "deep winter" activities and shoulder season activities when there is no snow. Taking seasons of activities available in all seasons will help visitors imagine new reasons to get away to Southeast Minnesota.

⇒ In marketing materials, consider pictures of fall mushrooms, spring wildflowers, shallow snowfalls, seasonal birds, and other wildlife.

⇒ **Provide visitors/groups with images and examples of the Lanesboro winter experience rather than leaving it up to individual travelers or businesses to create that experience.** Concern about access to amenities was expressed by businesses and the community and is hinted at in marketing materials categorizing seasonal/year-round restaurants. Instead of burying the lead, incorporate messaging and storytelling highlighting Lanesboro's relaxed winter setting. As noted earlier, create example itineraries that feature what is available and how it can be enjoyed.

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.

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Appendix A: Tourism in the Economy - Lanesboro

Prepared by: Brigid Tuck, January 2023

Introduction

As part of University of Minnesota's Extension Tourism Assessment Program, the Lanesboro community will be viewing its tourism industry through many lenses. Community members will come together to discuss their knowledge of tourism. Visitors will explore the community and share their experiences as tourists. A final way to view tourism is to dive into data—what are the current tourism strengths and where are opportunities for tourism development? This report provides basic data on the role of tourism in Lanesboro's economy and how it compares to Southeast Minnesota and to the state of Minnesota.

Before diving into the data, it is important to understand that in the world of economic data, there is no singular definition of tourism. Tourism is ingrained into other industry definitions. Cute boutique shops on Main Street, for example, are categorized as retail shops, the same as Target and Best Buy. Restaurants serve both local residents and tourists. For the purposes of this report, Extension pulled out data that appears most aligned with tourism (see page 5 for complete list). Further, Extension used the zip code 55949 as the definition of Lanesboro.

Tourism-Related Industries in Lanesboro

In 2022, restaurants were the largest tourism-related employers in Lanesboro (Figure 1). Other sectors with employment include accommodations, clothing and accessory stores, museums and historical sites, and miscellaneous stores. There were 135 tourism-related jobs in the city in 2022, which represents 26 percent of all jobs. In other words, tourism provides one in every four jobs.

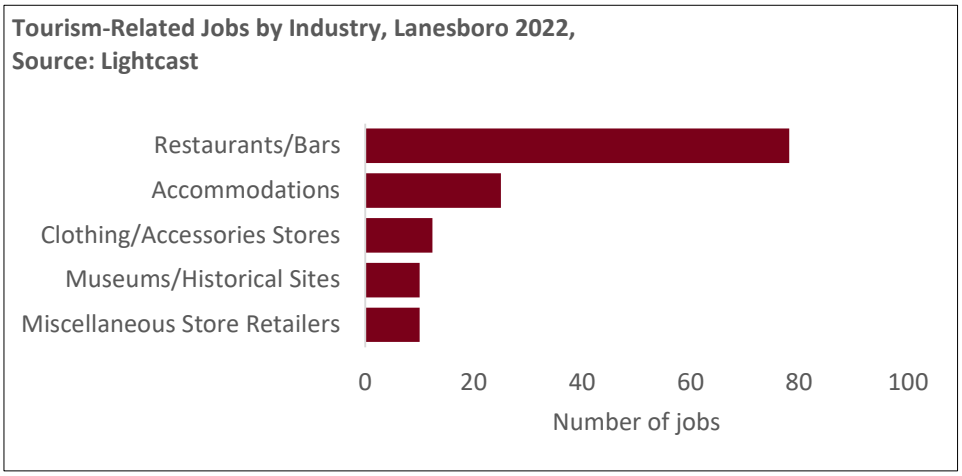


FIG. 1: Tourism-related jobs by industry

Another way to understand an industry is to look at its concentration. A location quotient shows how concentrated an industry is in one place. Figure 2 compares employment by tourism sector in Lanesboro to national employment. Accommodations, for example, have a location quotient of 5.1—which means Lanesboro has five times the number of lodging workers, as compared to the United States. This indicates accommodations are a strength. All of Lanesboro's tourism-related sectors have a location quotient of greater than two, indicating tourism's importance in the economy.

FIG. 2: Tourism-related employment location quotients

Tourism-related businesses create economic activity in Lanesboro. Input-output models trace the flow of goods and services in an economy. Once that flow is known, it can be used to estimate the impact of a change in one area of the economy (say tourism) on other areas of the economy.

Extension uses the input-output model IMPLAN. Given there were 135 people employed in tourism-related businesses, the model estimates those businesses had $7.9 million in sales. This is the direct effect.

Indirect and induced effects are the economic activity generated at businesses that support the tourism sector. For example, restaurants need to buy food from their suppliers, creating activity on the supply company. Indirect effects stem from spending within the supply chain. Induced effects stem from spending by employees of the tourism-related businesses.

In total, estimates indicate tourism-related businesses created $10.3 million of economic activity in Lanesboro in 2022, including $2.8 million of income for local residents. Those businesses also supported 151 jobs (Figure 3).

Economic Contribution of Tourism-Related Businesses in Lanesboro, 2022
Source: IMPLAN

	Output	Employment	Labor Income
Direct	$7,884,380	135	$2,250,620
Indirect	$1,716,880	11	$376,550
Induced	$742,280	5	$161,100
Total	$10,343,540	151	$2,788,270

FIG. 3: Economic contribution of tourism-related businesses in Lanesboro

One item to note here: this analysis includes all employment in the industries considered tourism-related. Of course, not all employment at restaurants comes from visitors or tourists, as local residents dine there too. This is, however, the best measure we can make with the available data and gives insight into the size and scope of the industry.

Tourism-Related Industries in the Southeast Region and Minnesota

Figure 4 shows tourism-related employment for the Southeast region and Minnesota. Like Lanesboro, restaurants lead the region and state in employment. Unlike Lanesboro, amusement, gambling, and recreation businesses are the second highest source of tourism-related employment. Lanesboro's 135 jobs account for less than 1 percent of all tourism-related jobs in the region.

Top Ten Tourism-Related Industries and Related Employment, 2022
Source: Lightcast

	Southeast Region	Minnesota
Restaurants	15,504	173,577
Amusement, gambling, and recreation	2,170	28,698
Gasoline stations	4,056	26,351
Accommodations	2,419	20,996
Clothing and accessories stores	810	15,808
Miscellaneous store retailers	1,044	14,879
Performing arts, spectator sports, and related	381	14,638
Sporting goods, hobby, music, and book stores	1,032	11,477
Breweries, wineries, and distilleries	202	3,667
Museums and historical sites	170	2,332
Scenic and sightseeing transportation	10	194
Total Tourism-Related Employment	**27,798**	**312,617**

FIG. 4: Top ten tourism-related industries and related employment

Tourism Trends in the United States

Tourism was one of industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the stay-at-home orders that limited the ability to travel, consumers made significant changes to their spending patterns. As Lanesboro considers the future of tourism in its community, understanding these changes may be helpful.

One of the most notable changes was the shift in consumer spending away from tourism and recreation experiences toward spending for recreational goods and vehicles. In general, prior the pandemic, spending on these two items increased by less than 5 percent per year (Figure 5).

The pandemic led to a 44 percent decrease in consumer spending for services in the first quarter of 2020 and then a rebound of 33 percent by the third quarter. Spending remained higher through 2021, but appeared to be tapering off slightly by the first quarter 2022.

Spending on recreation-related goods and vehicles (like bicycles and boats) saw steady increases during the pandemic. This also appears to be tapering off.

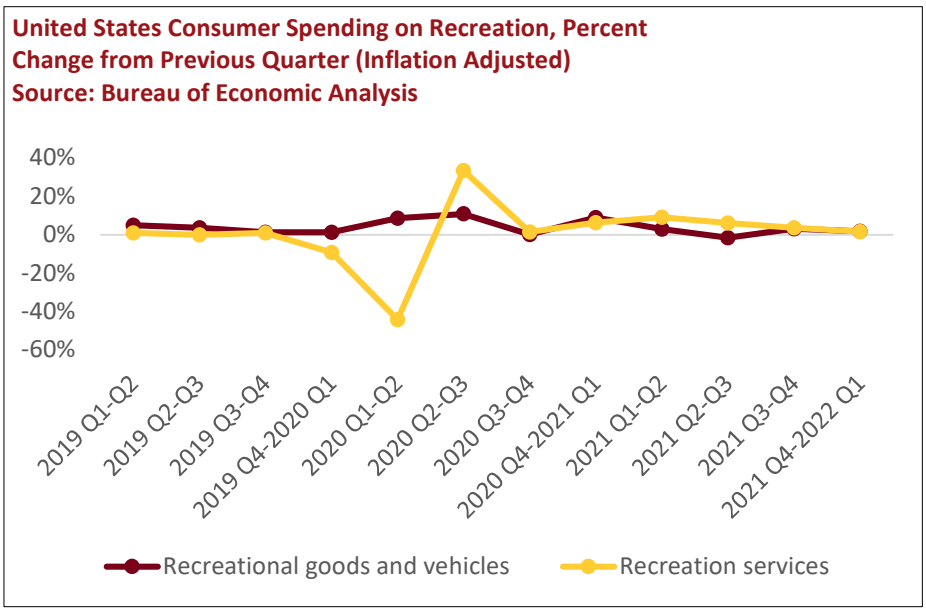


FIG. 5: U.S. consumer spending on recreation

So, what does this mean for Lanesboro? First, businesses that provide services to tourists may still be struggling to recover from the massive shift in consumer spending. They may continue to need support as the economy stabilizes. Second, many Americans now own recreational vehicles and may be looking for places to visit with them. As a destination for people who wish to use their new recreation goods (e.g., bicycles), Lanesboro may be especially well-positioned to capitalize on this tourism market.

Since restaurants are a major component of Lanesboro's tourism-related industry, it is also valuable to explore consumer trends in that industry. Like spending on services, consumer spending on meals at restaurants dropped in the first four months of 2020, although take-out did help curb some of the decline. Spending rebounded in summer. Spending continued to increase during the first half of 2021, but slowed in the second half of 2021 and into the first quarter of 2022 (Figure 6).

These figures are adjusted for inflation, so the percentage changes do not account for rising food costs. The slowdown in consumer spending on dining out, however, may be a result of increased meal prices. If inflation continues, we may see Americans choosing to dine out less frequently.

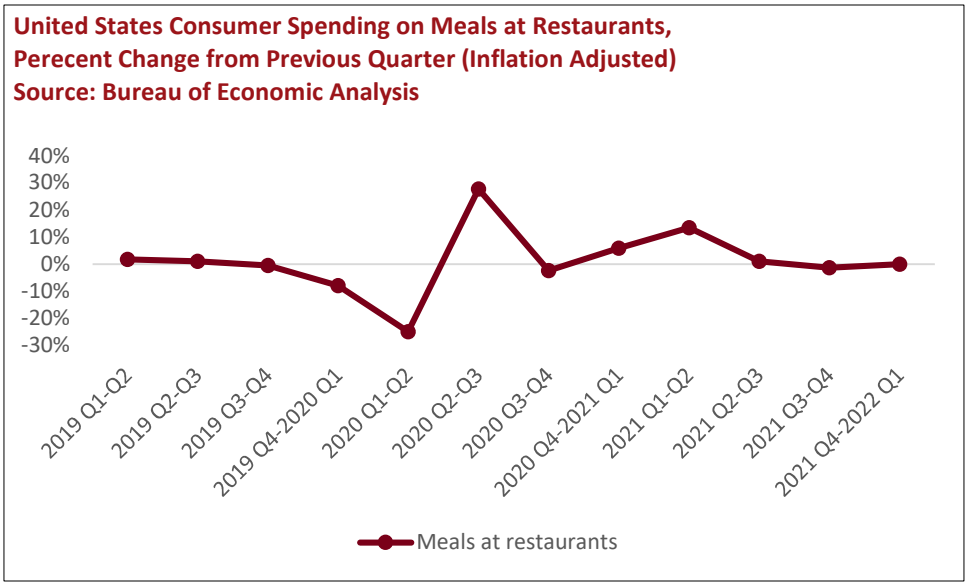


FIG. 6: U.S. consumer spending on meals at restaurants

End Note: Tourism Industries

For the purposes of this report, Extension categorized the following sectors as tourism related.

- Breweries; wineries; distilleries
- Clothing and clothing accessories stores
- Sporting goods, hobby, musical instrument and book stores
- Miscellaneous store retailers
- Air transportation
- Scenic and sightseeing transportation and support activities for transportation
- Motion picture and video industries
- Travel arrangement and reservation services
- Performing arts companies
- Spectator sports
- Racing and track operation
- Independent artists, writers, and performers
- Promoters of performing arts and sports and agents for public figures
- Museums, historical sites, zoos, and parks
- Amusement parks and arcades
- Gambling industries
- Other amusement and recreation industries
- Fitness and recreational sports centers
- Bowling centers
- Hotels and motels; other accommodations
- Restaurants
- All other food and drinking places

Appendix B: Community Survey Findings

Introduction

Lanesboro area residents were invited to participate in a community survey about winter tourism. This survey was implemented to better understand how community members view tourism and their ideas for developing winter tourism.

Surveys were distributed electronically via email and social media channels by the Chill Inn Leadership Team. The quantity and quality of responses are noteworthy for the size of community surveyed. While no survey will reach all community residents, the research team noted a meaningful range of priorities and interests expressed by respondents.

Respondent Demographics

One hundred thirty-four community members responded to the survey. Most respondents resided in Lanesboro (63 percent), while just over one-fourth (26%) resided in the neighboring areas outside Lanesboro and Whalan (Fig. 1).

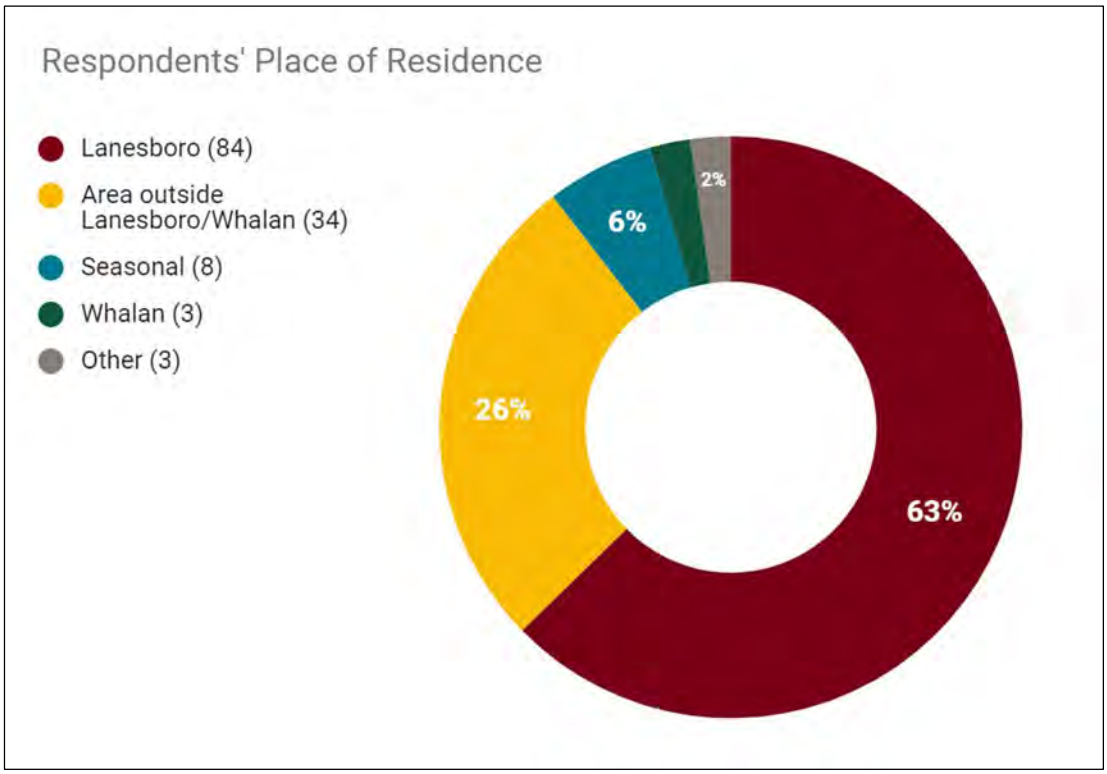


FIG. 1: Chart showing where respondents reside.

Respondents shared details about their place of work. Thirty-six percent work in Lanesboro, 29 percent are retired or not employed, 23 percent work in a neighboring area, 1 percent work in Whalan, and 11 percent selected "other" for their work location.

Tourism Goals and Concerns

Survey participants were asked to rank their top tourism goals and major concerns. In addition to ranking, they had the opportunity to share their perspectives by responding to open-ended questions (Fig. 2).

Tourism Goals

Respondents indicated that a vital local economy is the most shared goal for tourism. Forty-two percent of respondents rated it as their 1st priority. In their open-ended responses, community members described this as a strong economy with open businesses, jobs, and activity throughout the year. Other goals that ranked highly were preserved natural areas and improved quality of life.

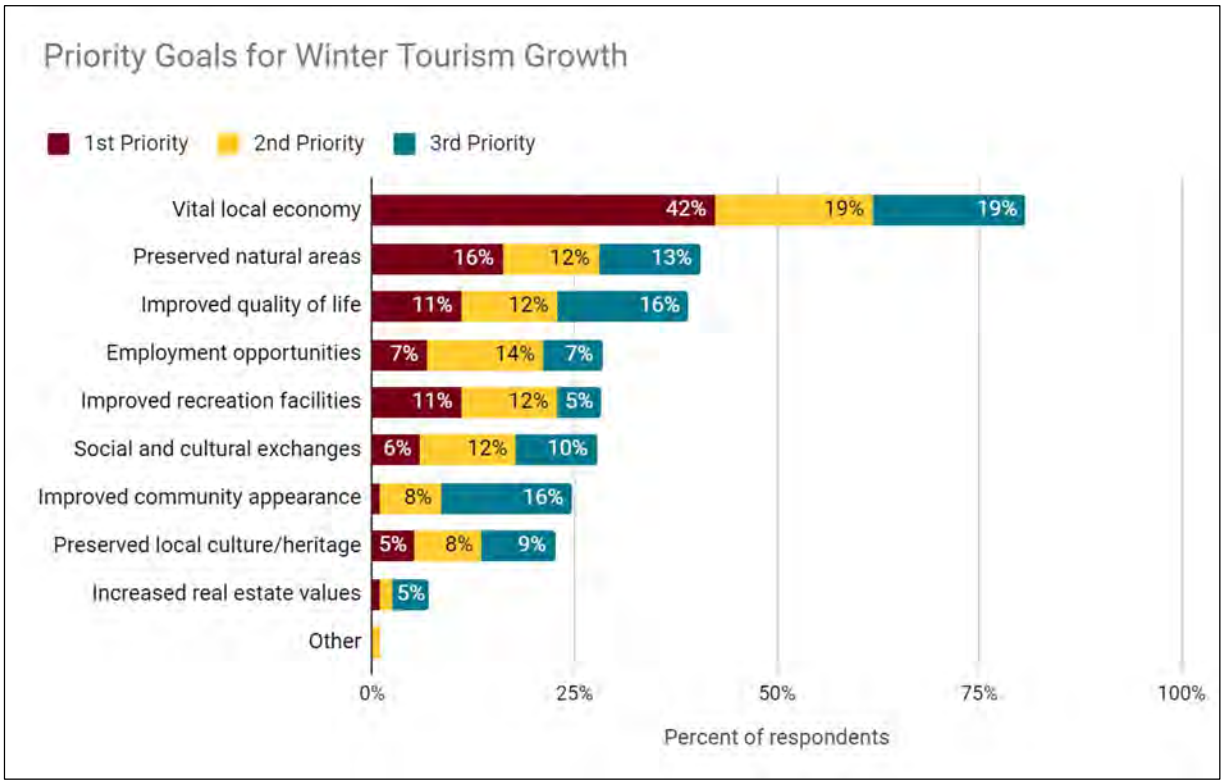


FIG. 2: Respondents' top three priority goals for winter tourism growth in Lanesboro and Whalan

In the open-ended questions, respondents described their vision for the community's future and what role winter tourism should have. Several themes emerged from the responses (n=69).

1) **Strong local businesses** (mentioned by 55 percent of respondents): Tourism allows businesses to stay open year-round and attracts new businesses to open in the community. Tourism would support an overall stronger economy and increased employment opportunities.

2) **Year-round activities** (mentioned by 54 percent of respondents): There is a strong desire to keep the town "awake" during the winter and decrease the seasonal "lull." Tourism was commonly cited as a way to help businesses expand operating hours.

3) **Expanded recreational activities** (mentioned by 32 percent of respondents): The local arts and theater scene is a differentiator. It is also possible to showcase the natural scenery. There were suggestions to develop winter outdoor activities, such as skiing, hiking,

snowshoeing, and fishing through improved trail grooming and new events like races or tours.

4) **Vibrant community for residents** (mentioned by 32 percent of respondents): Nine respondents specifically used the word "vibrant" while others used descriptors like "thriving" and "awake."

5) **Preserved rural charm** (mentioned by 12 percent of respondents): Several respondents mentioned the importance of maintaining Lanesboro's agricultural background and identity when planning for tourism. Some descriptors used to describe rural charm included "quaint," "small-town feel," and "uniqueness."

Tourism Concerns

Overall, there is more variety among concerns for tourism compared to goals (Fig. 3). Environmental impacts, higher taxes, and increased housing costs are the most shared concerns. While more respondents cited environmental impacts as a top concern, higher taxes was ranked as a greater priority overall.[1]

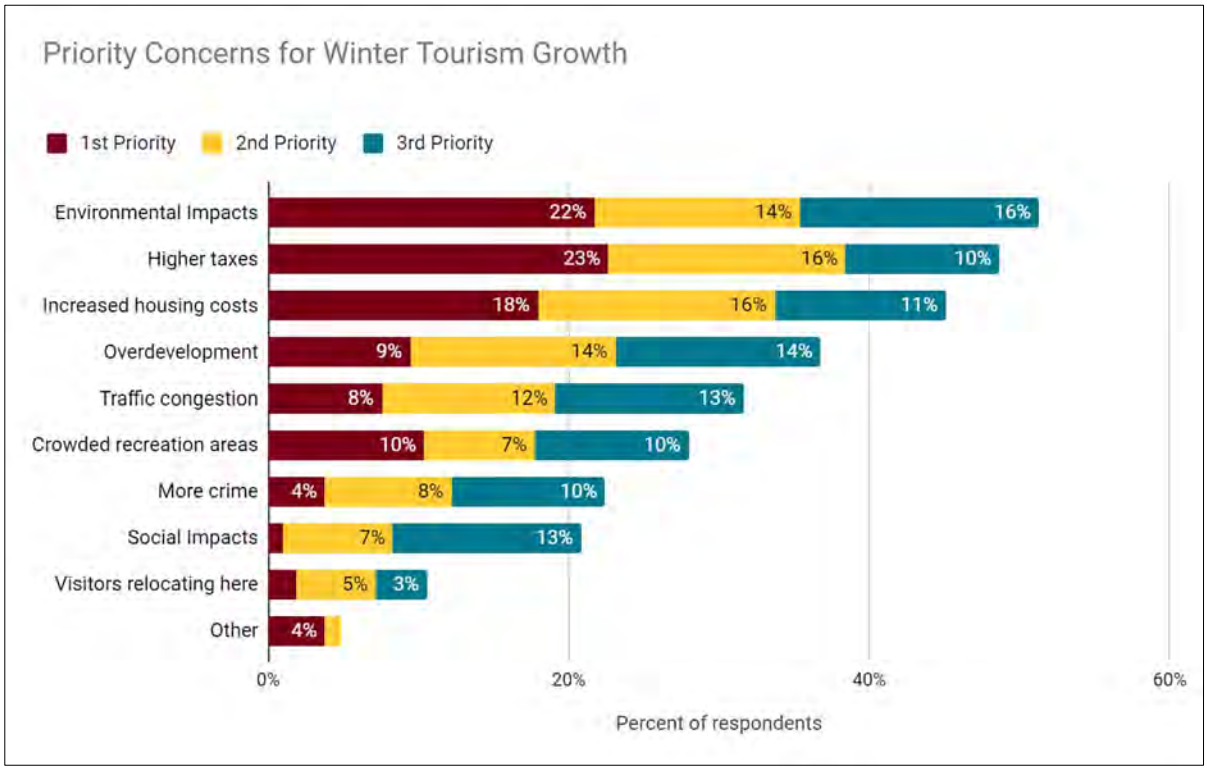


FIG. 3: Respondents' top three priority concerns for winter tourism growth in Lanesboro and Whalan

In the open-ended questions, respondents could describe concerns about winter tourism. In these answers (n=35), several themes emerged.

1) **Closed businesses** (mentioned by 43 percent of respondents): Respondents were concerned that visitors would be disappointed by the lack of shopping, dining, and lodging options.

[1] During the Community meetings, attendees expressed surprise that taxes ranked so highly. Further conversation revealed that the timing of the survey corresponded with homeowners receiving tax assessments for road improvements in the City of Lanesboro.

2) **Light and noise pollution** (mentioned by 17 percent of respondents): While a general shared concern, there were specific mentions about light and noise pollution from snowmobile activity.

3) **Unpredictable weather** (mentioned by 14 percent of respondents): Inconsistent snow and cold weather may make winter tourism marketing and planning for events difficult.

4) **Burnt-out businesses** (mentioned by 9 percent of respondents): Too many visitors may overwhelm businesses, causing owners and employees to become burnt out.

Tourism Assets and Strategies

Respondents had the opportunity to share what already existed regarding tourism in Lanesboro—current assets. They also had the chance to share their ideas to increase winter tourism.

Figure 4 shows an inventory of the current tourism assets in the community, according to survey respondents. Each asset is assigned a category and then described in reference to availability, ownership, audience drawing power, authenticity, and quality. The inventory shows a breadth of existing tourism assets that each play a role drawing tourists to the community. A notable deviation from the general high quality and high authenticity of tourism assets is winter sports, which was rated low authenticity and low quality.

Inventory of the Community's Tourism Assets

Asset Category	Description	Availability	Ownership	Drawing power	Authenticity 1 = Not authentic 4 = Authentic	Quality 1 = Poor 4 = Superior
Outdoor Tourism Assets						
Natural or scenic	Eagle Bluff	All year	Private	Regional	●●●●	●●●●
Natural or scenic	Root River and surrounding bluffs	All year	Public	National/ international	●●●●	●●●●
Recreational	Family activities	All year	Public	Local	●●●●	●●●●
Recreational	Outdoor exploration	All year	Public	State/ multi-state	●●●●	●●●○
Recreational	Outdoor activities	All year	Public	State/ multi-state	●●●●	●●●○
Recreational	Bike trails	Apr-Oct	Public	State/ multi-state	●○○○	●●●○
Recreational	Cross country ski trails	Dec-Mar	Public	Regional	●●●●	●●●○
Recreational	Year-round open fishing	All year	Public	State/ multi-state	●●●●	●●●●
Recreational	Rock climbing	All year	Public	Regional	●●●○	●●●●
Recreational	Winter sports	Nov-Mar	Private	State/ multi-state	●○○○	●○○○
Indoor Tourism Assets						
Cultural	Art gallery	All year	Public	Regional	●●●●	●●●○
Cultural	Performing arts	All year	Public	Regional	●●●●	●●●○
Cultural	Sons of Norway music	Nov-Apr	Public	Regional	●●●○	●●●●
Cultural/Historic	Lanesboro Museum	All year	Public	Local	●●●●	●●●●
Historic	Historic buildings	All year	Private	National/ international	●●●●	●●●●
Recreational	Pickleball	All year	Public	State/ multi-state	●●●●	●●●●
Recreational	Sauna	Nov-Mar	Private	Regional	●●●●	●●●○
Special event	Creative events	All year	Public	Regional	●●●●	●●●○
Special event	Gamesboro	Feb	Private	State/ multi-state	●●●●	●●●○
Special event	Live concerts at the community center	Feb-Mar	Private	State/ multi-state	●●●●	●●●○
Special event	Specialty nights at the local bars	All year	Private	Local	●●●●	●●●○

FIG. 4: Inventory of Lanesboro's tourism assets

Strategies to Grow Tourism

In an open-ended question, respondents could describe ideas they had to increase winter tourism in Lanesboro. Several themes emerged in the responses (n=77).

1) **Create new events and activities:** Ideas revolved around seasonal events, such as winter festivals, open markets, Christmas lights, and candlelight hikes or skis. Additionally, winter activity ideas included curling and ice skating on the pond (highly desired), sports tournaments, cross-country skiing races, sledding, and pickleball.
2) **Grow what already exists:** Many respondents thought to highlight arts and theater as a differentiator—perhaps increasing theater showings or holding a film festival. Some suggestions included expanding ski and snowshoe trails and supplementing them with equipment rental and lessons. Others mentioned increasing specialty and game nights at businesses and encouraging collaboration among businesses for special events and themed weekends.
3) **Address existing barriers:** Limited business hours were cited as a concern that could use attention. Additionally, respondents suggested improving information pathways for visitors, ensuring they can access information on available activities and how to participate. Also, visitors should have clear expectations about what the community is like in the winter—e.g., quiet with a slower tempo.

Conclusion

Overall, community members had enthusiasm for the potential of winter tourism to support a vital local economy. Based on these survey responses, some key takeaways include:

- Priority tourism goals included a vital local economy, preserved natural areas, and improved quality of life.
- Priority concerns around winter tourism included environmental impacts, higher taxes, and increased housing costs.
- Many tourism assets exist in Lanesboro, and there is an opportunity to grow what already exists (e.g., arts, theater, and outdoor recreation) and add new opportunities (e.g., events and winter activities).

Appendix C: Community Meeting Themes

Introduction

Two community meetings were held in Lanesboro in April 2023. Community members gathered to hear the preliminary findings of tourism surveys from residents and businesses and to participate in a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) activity to share their perspectives on winter tourism (Stavros & Hinricks, 2021). The SOAR approach was selected as the engagement strategy for the community meetings, as it supports engagement in groups where members do not have direct decision-making authority.

Previous Tourism Assessment Programs (TAP) used a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, but approach was not a good fit approach was not a good fit for the way community members think of their relationships and each other. The goal of the activity was to activate community interest and ideas around winter tourism. There were 26 participants in the morning session and 19 in the evening session. This report highlights key takeaways from these community meetings.

SOAR Activity

Using the SOAR model, questions were posed to participants in small groups. Groups shared their perspectives via cards that were collected and displayed for review. The morning and evening sessions added sticker dots to cards that resonated with them, and the evening group added dots to their session and the morning session cards.

After the meetings were complete, all comments from the cards were compiled and documented in a spreadsheet. These comments were then organized into themes—categories that emerged naturally by grouping similar comments together. Each activity part (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) had emerging themes and some overlap between activity parts. A map of the themes and how they relate to the activity parts was developed to illustrate the many interconnections among the findings (Figure 1).

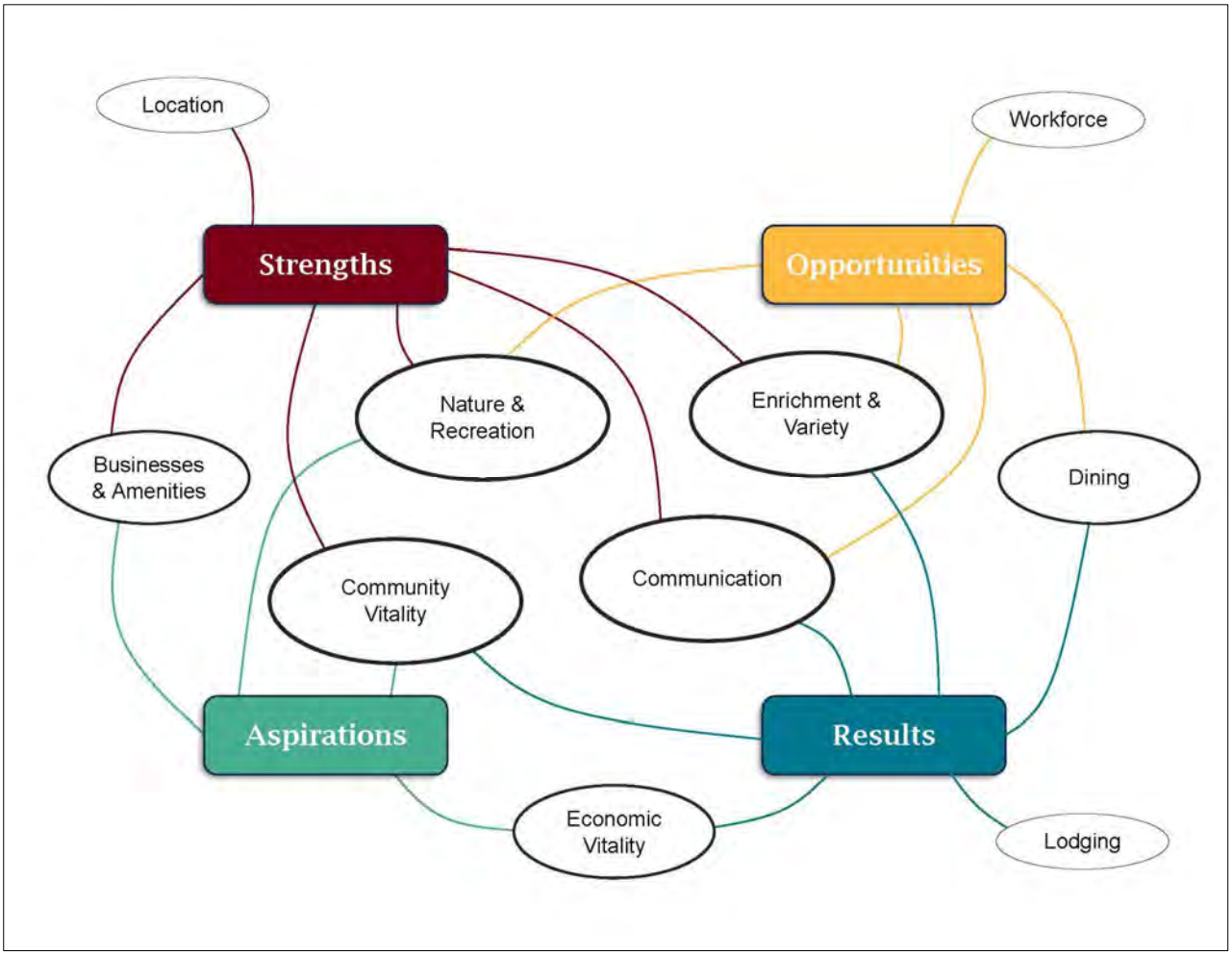


Figure 8: Comment themes that emerged from the SOAR activity.

Strengths

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on the current strengths of winter tourism in Lanesboro. A question to prompt conversation was, "What can we build on?" The themes and selected comments are highlighted in Figure 2.

Theme	Selected Quotes *(*indicates two or more people agreed with this statement)*
Enrichment & Variety	• **Health and wellness, activity* • **Arts and Creativity* • *Specific winter activities mentioned include: *winter variety show, *light parade, *Norwegian Fest, *beer tasting, *sweater event, Candlelight on the Trail, Cabin Fever Weekend, Festivals*
Community Vitality	• *Friendly and active* • *Reputation of work ethic and strong community* • *Established childcare: viable opportunity to raise our children* • *Local school*

Businesses & Amenities	• **Quality of food* • *Quantity of rooms/number of accommodations* • *Strong convention and visitor's bureau* • *Public bathrooms* • *Strong city amenities* • *Historic preservation system, history charm*
Nature & Recreation	• **State land close to Lanesboro for outdoor recreation* • **Strong interest in recreation* • **Natural beauty of the region (river, bluffs, trails)* • *Eagle Bluff facilities and staff* • *Root River Trail for walking (even if there is no snow)* • *Agriculture sales barn*
Communication	• **Share our stories* • *The brand of Lanesboro is recognizable.* • *Communication and collaboration between city, council, and businesses* • *Leveraging newsletters* • *High-speed internet, can work remotely*
Location	• **Within two hours of many larger cities, within 45 minutes of several (Rochester/Mayo, La Crosse, Winona, Decorah)* • *Walkability* • *Seasonal differences--warmer than the Cities can warm up, colder and more of a winter experience for Iowans coming north*

Figure 9: Themes and comments from the Strengths exercise

Opportunities

Dining options and communication were significant themes identified by participants. The variety of dining and food-related opportunities were especially of note, as they highlighted the needs of visitors and residents - Figure 3.

Theme	Selected Quotes *(*indicates two or more people agreed with this statement)*
Enrichment & Variety	• **Enrich life through experience, activities, educational events, and lifelong learning* • *Fun stuff to do--indoor and outdoor* • **Activity options for residents and visitors* • *Specific activity ideas included: *dance hall, bands, trivia, spelling bee, music, community potlucks, family evening events, adult social events, workshops (e.g., writer's workshop), recreation, shopping opportunities, etc.*
Dining	• **Restaurants opened more consistently* • *Food options* • *Food truck weekend* • *Taste of the Trail* • *Increase revenue to be open*
Nature & Recreation	• *Natural beauty* • *Fat tire biking on snow and ice; e-bikes* • *Engage the Filthy 50 riders in town*
Communication	• **Business-to-business communication to coordinate hours and opening times in winter* • *Communicating needs and possible solutions in a more complete way* • *Return to basics, simplicity*

Workforce	• **Uncovering new labor force*

Figure 3: Themes and comments from the Opportunities exercise

Aspirations

Community members expressed a strong desire to develop tourism opportunities through collaboration. This may be biased by the attendees participating in a community activity that requires collaboration – Figure 4.

Theme	Selected Quotes *(*indicates two or more people agreed with this statement)*
Community Vitality	• **Deep sense of community (collaboration, respect, safety, friendliness, care)* • **Create a sense of community and belonging, even for visitors* • *Maintaining unity while preserving differing goals* • *Family, tradition, heritage* • *Mixed age community, opportunities for both youth and seniors* • *Schools and the future of the community* • *Local quality of life* • *Maintaining an idyllic sense of wellbeing*
Economic Vitality	• *Economic sustainability, entrepreneurial support* • *Prosperity and sustainability* • *Support local businesses (family-owned, no franchises)*
Nature & Recreation	• **Environmental resources and natural assets (trails, rivers, etc.)* • **Expanding outdoor recreation and healthy communities (ice climbing, biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, ice skating, curling, hiking, skijoring, etc.)* • *Preserving the dark sky (stargazing)*
Businesses & Amenities	• *Arts and theater (gallery, local artists)* • **Telling the story of our history (preservation, promotion, stories)* • *Good food that celebrates and supports local growers.* • *Bed and breakfast capital (lodging, beds for tourists)* • *Beautification and mobility through town*

Figure 4: Themes and comments from the Aspirations exercise

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	• *Resilient community* • **Returning guests* • *Progression: visitor to an investor to a resident (choosing this place, Lanesboro dream)* • *Population growth in school and community*
Economic Vitality	• **Lodging tax increased in winter--year-round cash flow* • *Fewer months per year that businesses aren't operating in a deficit (profitable season more spread out)* • *Financial lift less of a strain in winter* • **No empty storefronts* • *More cars on Main Street, more people in stores*

Enrichment & Variety	• *New winter events and activities for residents and visitors of all ages • Event attendance • Reputation for year-round fun • Seeing hustle and bustle downtown
Dining & Lodging	• Inns are full. • When restaurants are open, happy, and content, visitors and locals are spending. • Locally roasted coffee
Communication	• Website analytics • Communication: increased tourism as visitors know places are open, increased places open as businesses expect tourists • Good reviews

Figure 5: Themes and comments from the Results exercise

Graphic Recorder

The research team recommended hiring a graphic recorder for the sessions to ensure community members could connect to the conversations during the program, regardless of which session was attended. The graphic recorder captured the comments of participants in a visual way. Beginning with the first session, the recorder tracked comments and contributions throughout each session (Figure 6). A second poster was created to capture the comments during the SOAR exercise (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Visual representation of the tourism discussion, as drawn by a graphic recorder

Figure 7: Visual representation of the SOAR activity, as drawn by a graphic recorder

Conclusion

The SOAR model was a practical engagement approach for the Tourism Assessment Program. It allowed for meaningful contributions from participants. Community members responded positively to the interactive design of the engagement and the visuals created by the graphic recorder. From the contributions shared during the program, the following findings are especially relevant for the winter tourism study:

- When asked what they like best about winter in tourism, participants responded with statements like cozy, peaceful, low-key, and more adjectives describing their appreciation for the change of pace (Figure 6).
- Participants shared creative and attainable ideas for marketing to new groups and niche activities (Figure 3).
- Results identified are realistic and actionable ways to monitor the success of the Chill Inn Lanesboro initiative.

Appendix D: Business Survey Findings

Introduction

Lanesboro business owners were invited to participate in a survey in February 2023 about winter tourism in the Lanesboro area. Surveys were distributed to 121 Lanesboro Chamber of Commerce members through email distribution of an electronic survey. Respondents represented a wide range of business entities from the region.

Early in the survey process, the business survey did not receive as strong a response rate as the community survey. Accordingly, the Chill Inn team identified that there may have been some confusion for owner-operated businesses that had completed the community survey. Given the differences between the two survey tools, an additional effort was made to encourage the completion of both the business survey and the community survey, resulting in additional completed submissions.

Respondent Business Demographics

There were a variety of businesses that responded, with the largest belonging to the accommodation, retail sales, and service industries. In total, 47 businesses responded to the survey, representing 39 percent of organizations directly invited to participate (Fig. 1).

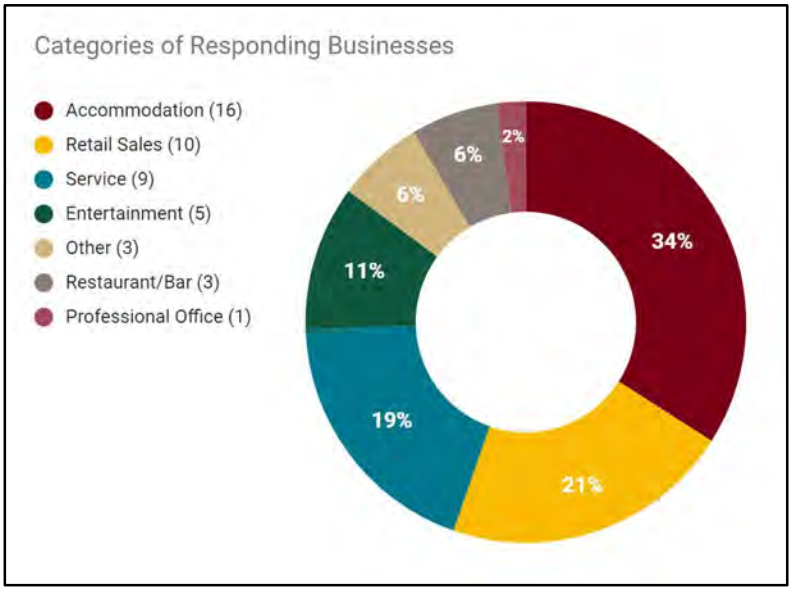


FIG. 1: Survey respondent business categories.

Business Outlook

Businesses were asked to compare the business level this year with last year. Almost half of respondents indicated that business was the same as last year. One in three felt that business was better than last year, and some (15 percent) felt that business was worse than last year. When asked about future business, overwhelmingly, 91 percent felt optimistic about future business (Fig. 2).

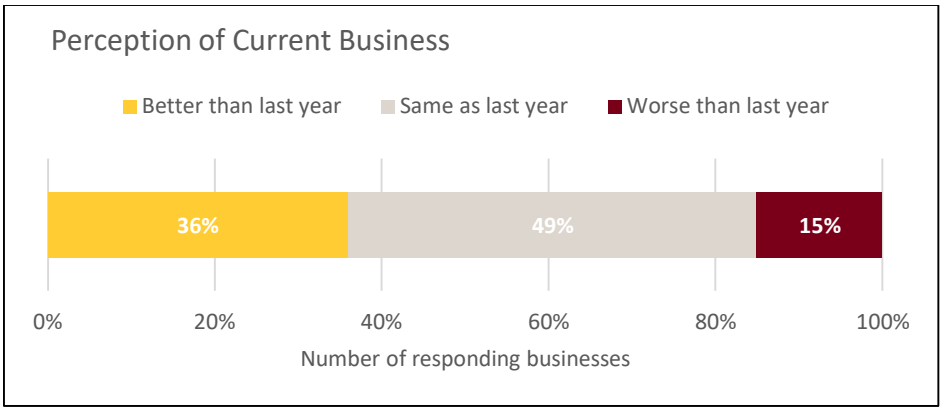


FIG. 2: Perception of current business compared to last year.

Businesses were asked about the most influential factor—positive or negative—affecting their business's development. Responses (Fig. 3) were mixed, with many factors being cited evenly between positive and negative. Location was determined as the most influential factor, with a few more indicating it is a positive influence rather than a negative. Although only four businesses identified labor availability as the most influential factor affecting business development, they all viewed it as a negative factor. In the "other" category, positive factors in the comment response included quality of performance and digital marketing, while negative factors included winter conditions, seasonal variance, and lack of indoor activities.

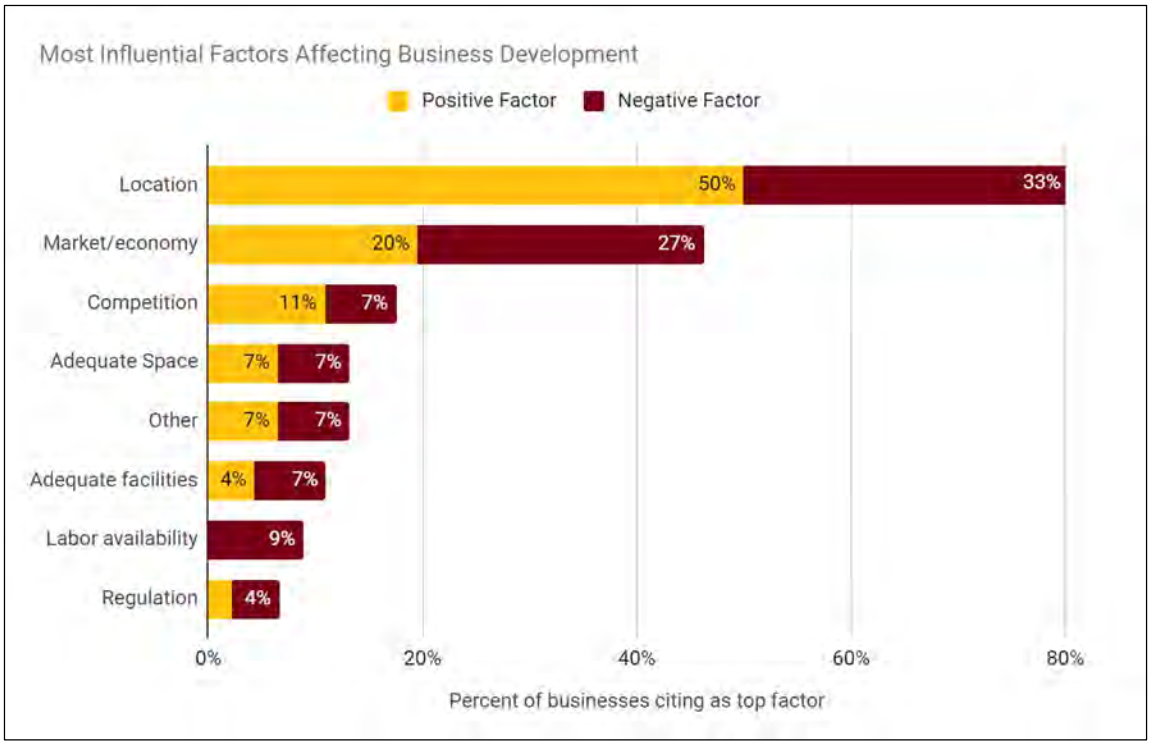


FIG. 3: Factors cited by business owners as most influential in affecting business development.

Advertising

Most businesses (91 percent) use the internet for advertising, including social media, booking sites, and Google ads. Advertising in a tourism guidebook was also popular (70 percent). Direct mail, trade shows, and Yellow Pages were the least popular advertising strategies. “Other” advertising strategies mentioned by businesses included Chamber of Commerce marketing, event sponsorships, and activity-specific websites (Fig. 4).

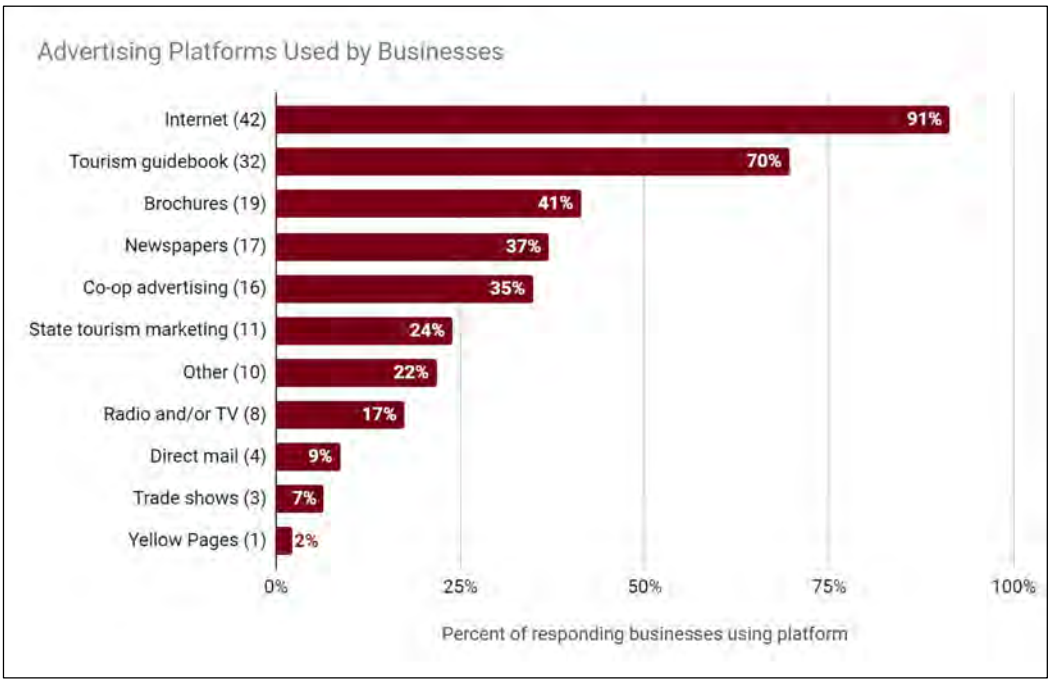


FIG. 4: Advertising platforms the businesses use.

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).

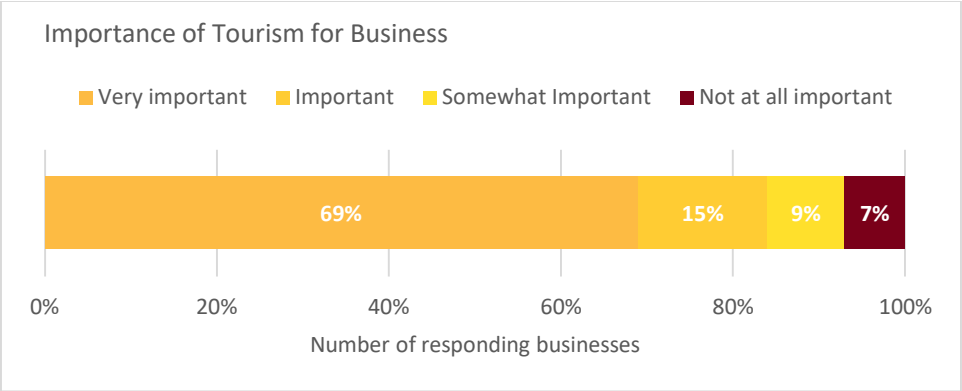


FIG. 5: Business owners rated how important tourism is to their business.

Beliefs on Tourism

Most businesses benefit from tourism and want to encourage more of it. Businesses also feel that tourism positively impacts the entire community by increasing the quality of life and providing access to activities and services that would not otherwise exist. Concerns for tourism are relatively low for businesses. Half the respondents believe tourism lowers the tax bill by contributing to local tax revenues. Sixty-four percent believe environmental impacts from tourism are relatively minor. The main concern of business owners is regarding real estate and housing. Forty-eight percent of businesses think tourism makes it more expensive to live here, and 37 percent think tourism development unfairly increases real estate values.

The table below (Fig. 6) highlights how business owners feel in reference to multiple aspects of tourism, including its impact on future business growth, the economy, the community, and the environment.

	Percent of responding business owners				
Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The overall benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts.	2%	2%	4%	25%	**67%**
Future growth					
We should control and restrict tourism development.	**36%**	34%	21%	7%	2%
We should encourage more tourists to come to our area.	2%	0%	5%	27%	**66%**
Tourism would help our community grow in the "right" direction.	2%	2%	9%	32%	**55%**
We should promote our history and culture to attract more tourists.	0%	7%	9%	35%	**49%**
I feel I have input in the community's plan for tourism growth.	13%	11%	16%	27%	**33%**
A good way to manage growth is through land-use zoning.	11%	5%	32%	**45%**	7%

Statement	Percent of responding business owners				
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Tourists should pay more than locals to visit area parks/attractions.	27%	18%	**22%**	18%	15%
Economic impact					
Tourism encourages investment in our local economy.	0%	2%	2%	21%	**75%**
Tourism helps balance the economy in our areas.	0%	11%	9%	33%	**47%**
Tourism provides the kinds of jobs our area needs.	9%	9%	15%	27%	**40%**
Tourism contributes to local tax revenues, lowering our tax bill.	16%	9%	20%	24%	**31%**
Most businesses involved in tourism are small.	0%	8%	7%	38%	**47%**
Tourism only helps businesses that sell directly to tourists.	**39%**	25%	9%	18%	9%
Tourism makes it more expensive to live here.	14%	4%	23%	**48%**	11%
Tourism development unfairly increases real estate values.	11%	9%	**42%**	24%	13%
Community impact					
Tourism has increased the quality of life in this area.	4%	2%	7%	22%	**64%**
My household's standard of living is higher because of money tourists spend here.	2%	7%	22%	18%	**51%**
Tourism provides services/activities we wouldn't otherwise have.	2%	0%	2%	30%	**66%**
Tourist attractions/facilities improve the community's appearance.	2%	7%	11%	24%	**56%**
Tourism increases civic pride.	5%	5%	14%	27%	**50%**
Visitors and residents have a hospitable attitude toward each other.	7%	11%	11%	**43%**	27%
Other community services receive less attention because of tourism.	24%	27%	**33%**	16%	0%
Environmental impact					
Environmental impacts resulting from tourism are relatively minor.	7%	13%	16%	31%	**33%**

Statement	Percent of responding business owners				
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Enough is being done to protect our environment.	18%	20%	18%	20%	**23%**
Tourism increases litter in our community.	20%	23%	**30%**	20%	7%
Tourism increases the number of crime problems in the area.	**42%**	16%	31%	7%	4%
Tourism makes the area more crowded.	2%	14%	16%	**45%**	23%
Tourism has reduced the quality of outdoor recreation opportunities due to overuse.	**40%**	**40%**	7%	11%	2%
Tourism has increased the number of crime problems in the area.	**42%**	16%	31%	7%	4%

FIG. 6: Table highlighting the beliefs of business owners regarding tourism.

Tourism Development

Two-thirds of businesses believe recreation and trails should be further developed (Fig. 7). In open-ended questions, many business owners feel there should be more advertising to promote winter outdoor activities (e.g., skiing and snowshoeing). Respondents also commonly recommended developing new recreational activities, such as ice skating. Similarly, festivals or seasonal events were recommended to attract visitors and increase business collaboration.

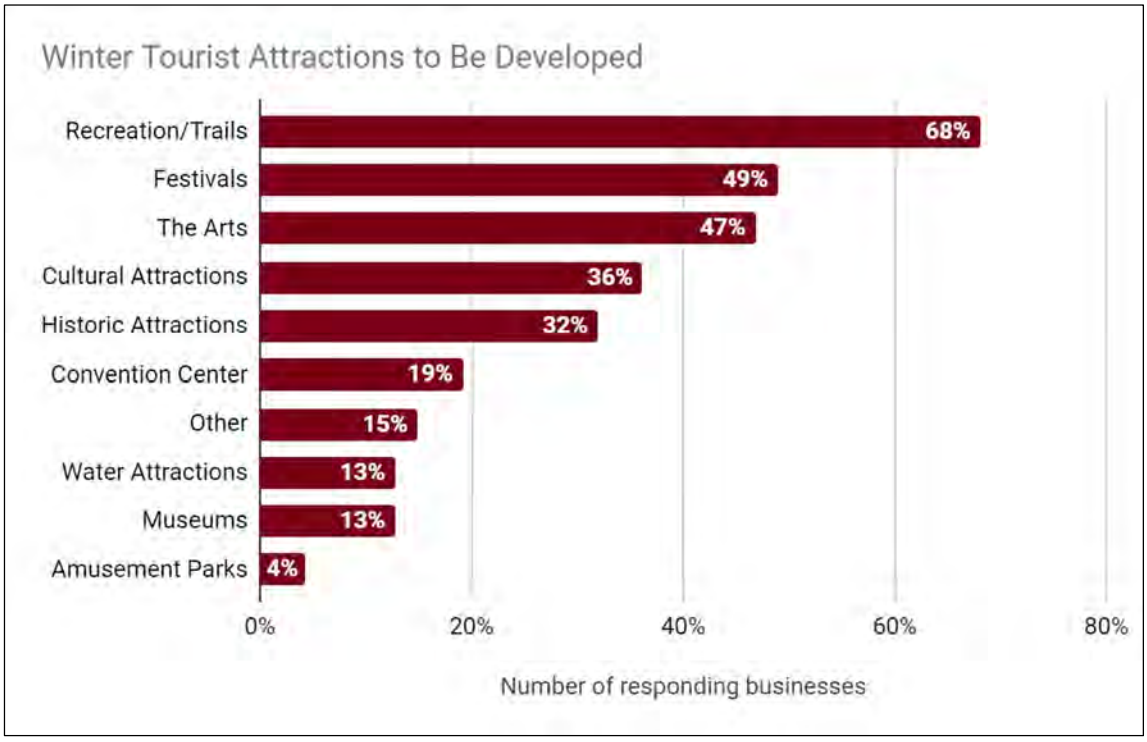


FIG. 7: Business owners list winter tourist attractions they are interested in seeing developed

Conclusion

Overall, business owners generally believe that tourism is important for their business. Based on these survey responses, some key takeaways include:

- Most business owners said that business was the same as or better than last year. Overwhelmingly, they were optimistic about future business.
- Businesses use various advertising strategies, with the internet and tourism guidebook being the most popular.
- Most businesses believe that tourism benefits their business, and they are interested in seeing and supporting efforts to boost tourism in the community.

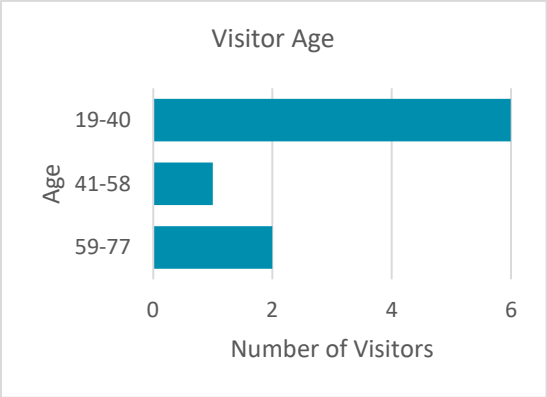
Appendix E: First Impression Visitor Findings

Introduction

Ten people conducted secret visits to Lanesboro in March and April of 2023 to experience Lanesboro's tourism firsthand. The visits ranged from one to two days. Folks stayed overnight at different lodging establishments, dined at various restaurants, and participated in recreation, shopping, and cultural activities. After their stay, the visitors were asked to fill out a survey to share their impressions, observations, opinions, ideas, and comments. The results from this survey are summarized below.

Visitor Demographics

Most of the 10 visitors were between the ages of 19-40, and most did not have children living at home. More than half of the visitors were female.



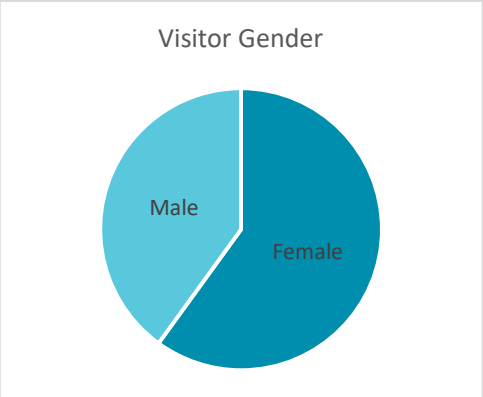


FIG. 1: Age breakdown of visitors; **FIG. 2**: Gender breakdown of visitors

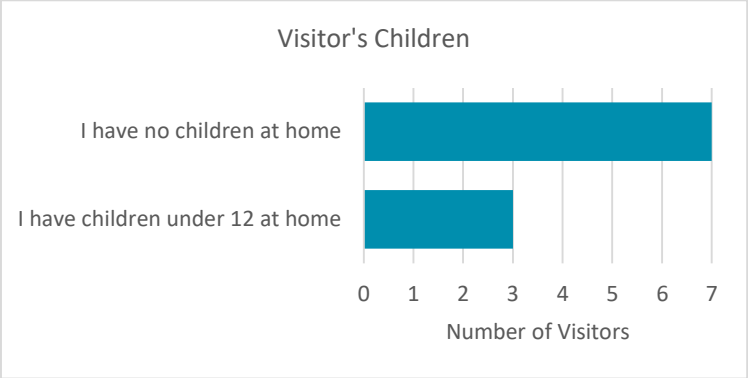


FIG. 3: Children of visitors

Visitor Preferences

This section explores what activities and lodging respondents generally preferred when traveling. Visitors were asked, "When I travel for leisure, I look for or engage in the following activities…" Figure 4 organizes selected quotes by theme.

Theme	Selected Quotes
Outdoors	• *Outdoor adventuring and anything related to nature* • *Outdoor activities like biking, sledding, snowshoeing, skiing, water sports, or most importantly, hiking* • *Walking around the town/general walkability*
Indoors	• *Arts and cultural activities and events, live music* • *Local businesses* • *Relaxing with friends/family* • *Arts activities (galleries, craft shows, theater, etc.)*
Dining	• *Food, wine, and beer* • *Local food/excellent or unique restaurants (especially vegetarian and/or vegetable-centric dishes)* • *Breweries/cocktails that showcase local flavors* • *Local food/farmers markets/cocktails/breweries* • *Unique dining opportunities*
Culture	• *Local culture - things that make the place unique* • *Historical sites* • *Visiting cultural/historical resources like libraries or museums*

FIG. 4: Preferred activities of respondents while they are traveling

Visitors were asked what type of lodging they prefer when traveling. Responses encompassed a myriad of preferences for accommodation options.

Selected Quotes
• *Unique places that are also affordable: Campsites, Airbnb, bed and breakfasts or hotels with character* • *Lodging that has quiet, private rooms with knowledgeable concierges and good staff service* • *VRBO and inns as long as clean, comfortable, and convenient to attractions* • *Sleeping on the ground (camping)* • *Traditional hotel, but one with character and/or updated amenities* • *Lodge room or cabin* • *Walkable lodging location*

FIG. 5: Preferred lodging of respondents while they are traveling

Community Impressions

This section highlights what visitors knew and felt about the community before visiting and after they first arrived, highlighting their reactions to signage and tourist information.

Perceptions of the Community Before Visiting

Visitors shared what they thought about and knew of Lanesboro before visiting. They formed these perceptions through word of mouth, research, and what they already knew about the community.

Theme	Selected Quotes
Outdoors	• *Scenic beauty and quiet charm* • *Wonderful trails and the Root River paddling and tubing opportunities* • *Favorite overnight or weekend destination for middle to high-income bikers* • *A very outdoorsy, cute small town* • *Biking is definitely a big drive for tourism in the town*
Indoors	• *The B&B capital of the world*
Dining	• *Heard friends and colleagues talk glowingly about the local restaurants*
Gather / Culture	• *A heavy emphasis on Amish Culture* • *Small town vibes* • *Root River bike trails, followed by B&B's, art, river bluffs, restaurants, theater (in that order)* • *The community values its history due to the prevalence of historical B&B's, inns, and refurbished old buildings on the main street* • *Draws a huge baby boomer tourist clientele* • *A strong arts presence, with an art gallery and theater*

FIG. 6: Visitor perceptions of the community before visiting

First Impressions Upon Arrival

Visitors' first impressions of Lanesboro mostly revolved around its architecture, scenic beauty, and the relaxed tempo.

Theme	Selected Quotes
Infrastructure & Scenery	• *The town was quaint, and the landscape made it more striking, tucked between the bluffs and the Root River.* • *Crisp air, quiet, beautiful architecture.* • *The buildings were in great condition despite how old they must have been. It felt like we were walking onto an outdoor set to a movie.* • *How scenic the route into town was, driving down into the valley and seeing the church steeples, the river, and downtown come into view. I felt happy to be coming into a little town nestled in such a scenic spot.* • *The landscape and old architecture of the main street inns/stops were impressive.*
Slow Tempo / Quiet	• *Heard people talking and laughing on the main street. No loud automotive traffic speeding through town.* • *Very quiet. No other cars or people around.* • *Noone was on the street, and it was hard to see if businesses were open.* • *How quiet and empty it was.* • *Not that big, so really couldn't get lost.*

FIG. 7: Visitors' comments on first impressions upon arrival

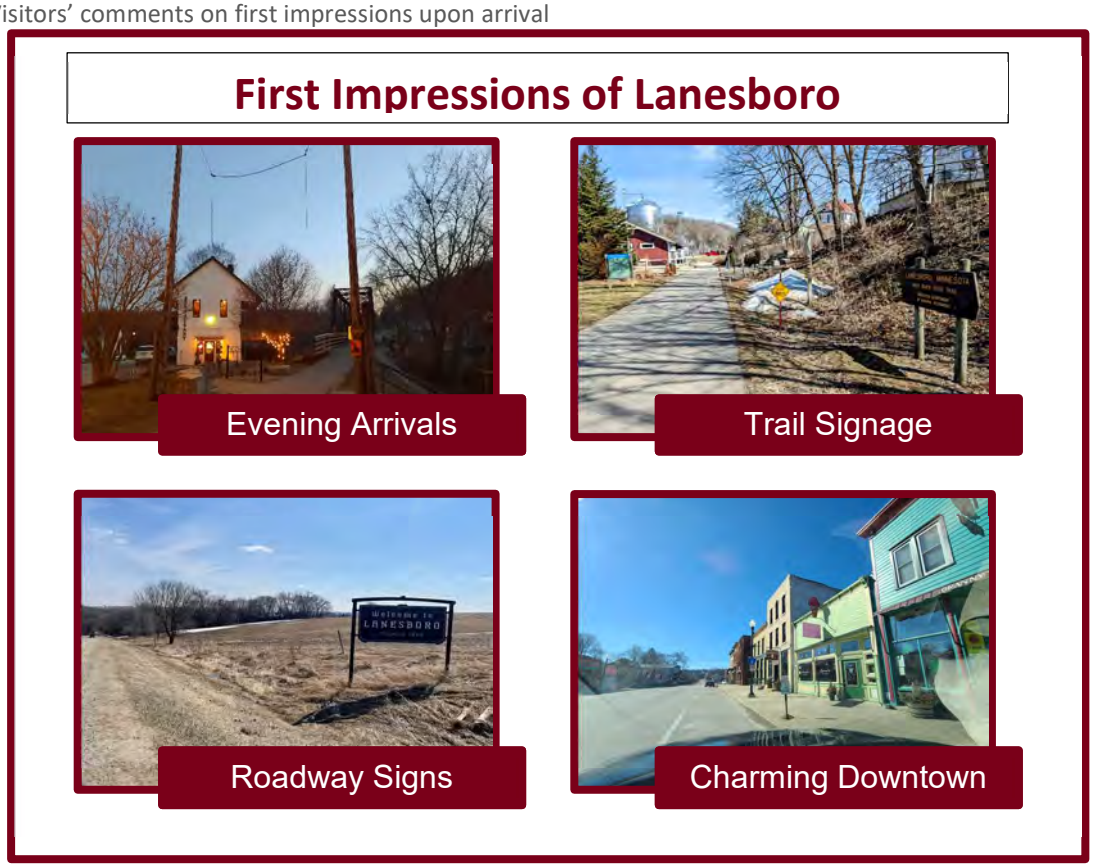


FIG. 8: Photos illustrating first impressions upon arrival

Signage

Visitors shared feedback about the signage around the community, including ratings and comments. Visitors generally agreed that signs were clear and well located.

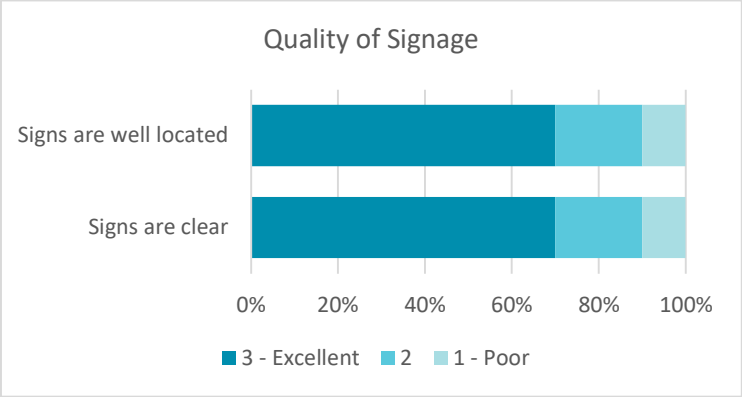


FIG. 9: Visitors' ratings of signage quality

Theme	Selected Quotes
Welcoming & Ample	• *We ended up entering/leaving town from all three directions and noticed the welcome signs on every route.* • *My 8-year-old daughter even asked me, "Why does everything say "Lanesboro? Lanesboro this, Lanesboro that!" From my perspective, it's a great way to show visitors they've arrived.*
Neutral	• *I honestly didn't notice the signage too much, but since it's such a small town, I wasn't worried about navigating my way around or finding my way to Lanesboro.*
Opportunity for Improvement	• *There were a few blocks of travel before we saw anything that pointed us in the right direction (toward downtown).* • *I think the signs could be a little bigger / have the population listed.* • *As a visitor driving through, I would not have been persuaded to check out downtown as there was only the "business district" signage from the main scenic highway.*

FIG. 10: Visitors' comments about signage

Tourist Information

Visitors obtained information from various sources, including the visitor center, brochures, kiosks, maps, newspapers, bulletin boards, websites, and social media. No information source was cited significantly more often than the other sources. There was positive consensus, however, about the visitor center, including the following comment: *"We stopped at the Lanesboro Visitor Center right away and were surprised to see how many hours they are actually open!"*

The visitor center hours were well received, but some expressed a desire to talk to staff or volunteers to have a live interaction about the community's happenings. However, one visitor note, "*Being open and un-manned is more important than being closed due to staffing shortages.*"

Some commented that flyers, signs, maps, and brochures were readily available around town and at local businesses. One visitor said, *"I thought the availability of such information, and the general quality of it, was impressive."*

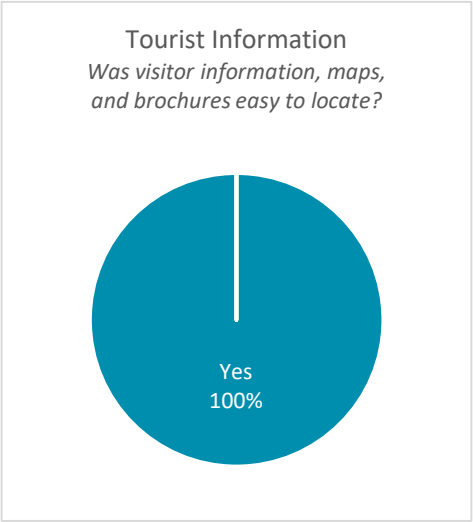


***FIG. 11**: Availability of tourist information*

FIG. 12: Images showing where visitor information was available

Tourism Assets

Participating visitors shared their perspectives on what they understood about tourism in the community, including what the area had to offer, unique draws, and future opportunities.

Destination Offerings

There was strong agreement that the community had many natural resources, experiences, and lodging options to offer. At the same time, there was also disagreement about the variety of dining options and events available.

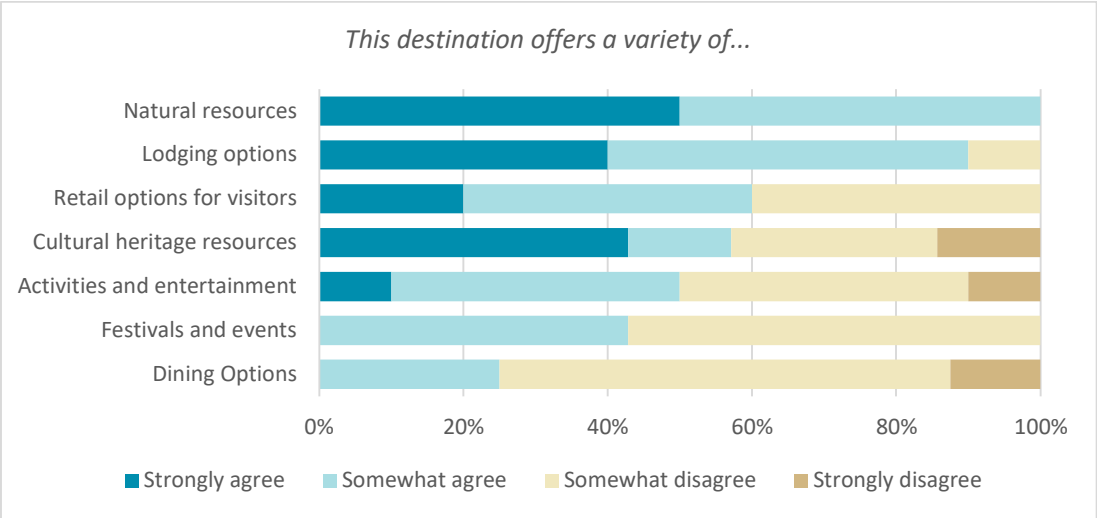


FIG. 13: Visitors share their perspectives about tourism offerings in the community

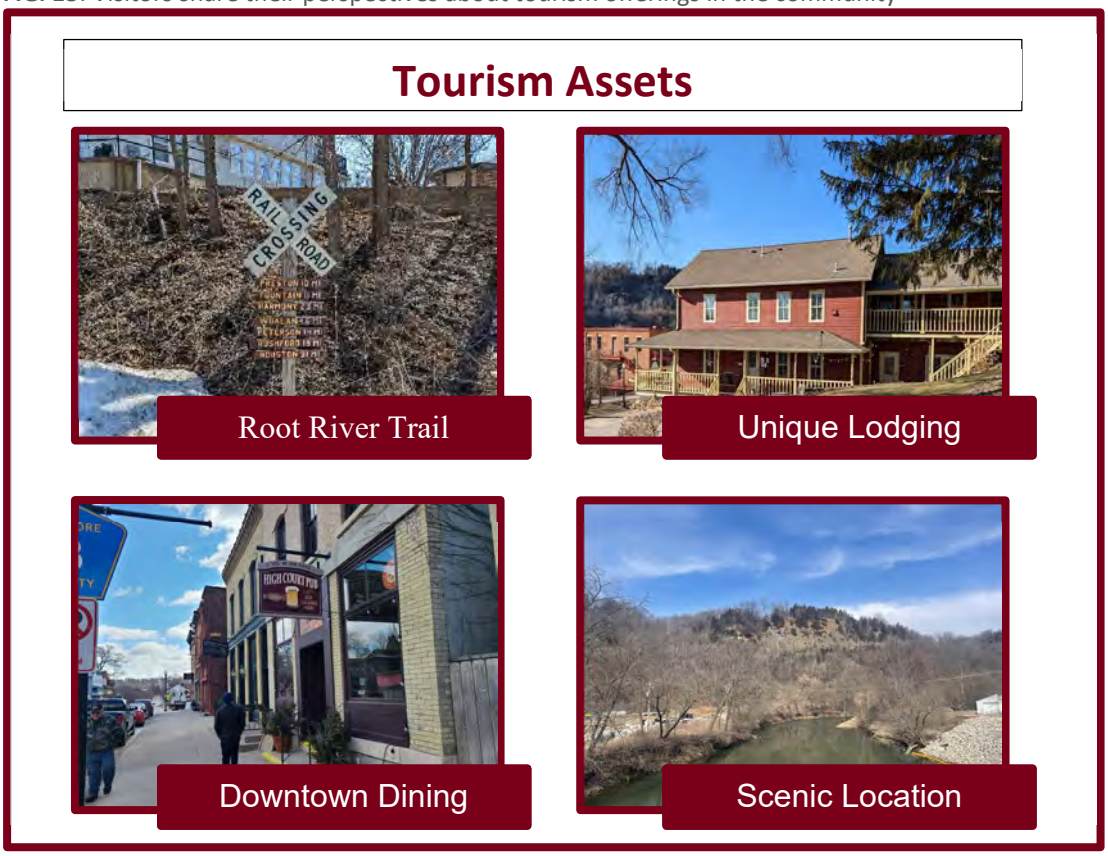


FIG. 14: Photos highlighting tourism assets of Lanesboro

Unique and Extraordinary Assets

In their comments, visitors shared many highlights of Lanesboro, from outdoor recreation and lodging to the arts and the landscape.

Theme	Selected Quotes
Outdoors	• *Good walking trail/path and certainly bicycling trail with connections to other small towns.* • *Lanesboro has beautiful scenery and easy access to hiking/biking trails.* • *The downtown area is quaint and walkable.* • *Exceptionally walkable with trails and wide sidewalks.* • *Loved that the outdoor recreation options like the parks, trails, and river were all easily accessible and convenient to reach with lots of options for storing bikes.* • *The landscape/bluffs that are a part of the downtown / Main Street.* • *The access to outdoor recreation and the prevalence of art and history really stood out to me.* • *The architecture and the way it's nestled in the landscape—it's not hard for Lanesboro to look romantic and like a lovely getaway.*
Indoors	• *Numerous bed & breakfast properties were impressive* • *Variety of B&Bs* • *Hotel/inn owners were very welcoming*
Dining	• *Three breweries in a 15-mile or so radius is a huge draw* • *Number of restaurants*
Arts	• *The theater and arts scene! Holy cow! What a treasure!* • *Vibrant arts scene* • *Free art/craft station*
Gather / Culture	• *A phone booth that was repurposed to tell stories of residents in the town.* • *For such a small town, the number of restaurants, lodging and entertainment options are extraordinary.* • *Overall perception of being a visitor-friendly town.*

FIG. 15: Unique and extraordinary assets as seen by the visitors

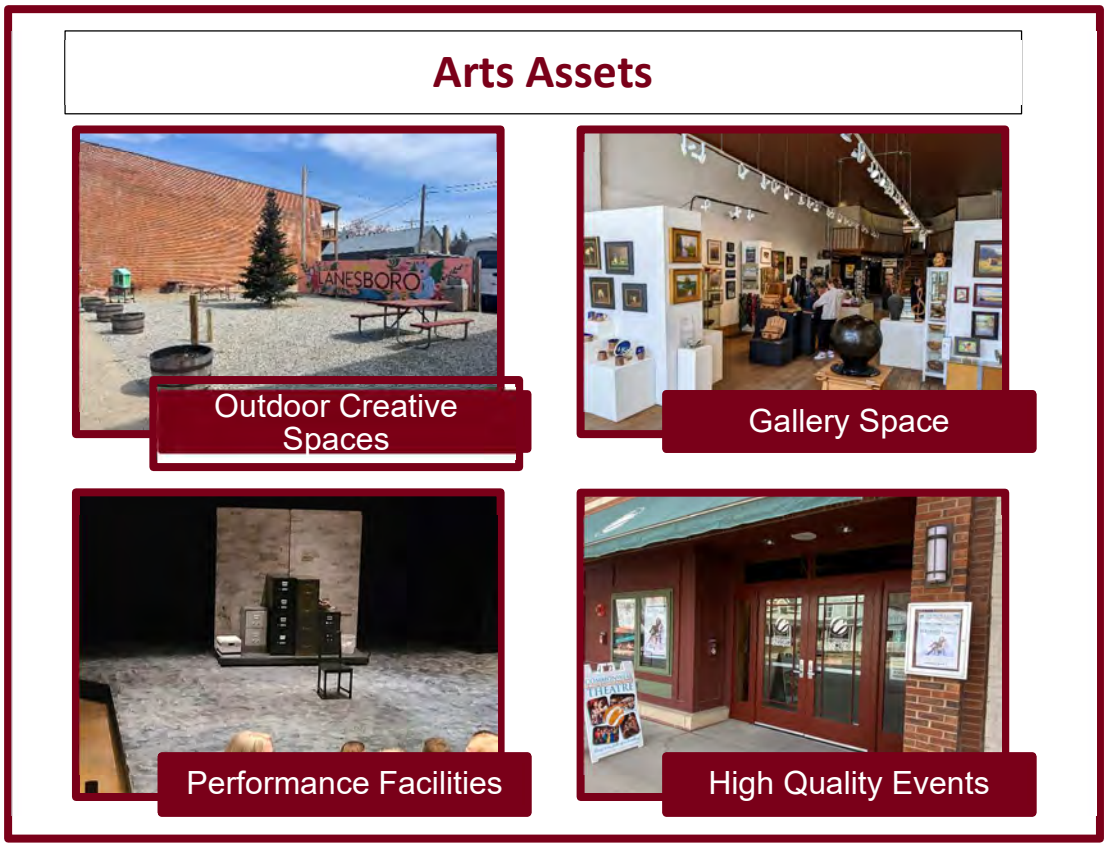


FIG. 16: Photos highlighting extraordinary arts assets

Primary Tourism Products

Selected quotes in response to the question "What are the community's primary tourism products?" are shared below. Most comments revolved around outdoor recreation and nature.

Theme	Selected Quotes
Outdoors	• *Biking was probably one of the main promotional campaigns we saw.* • *Walking/bicycling path* • *Fishing* • *100% of the tourism is based around the Root River access in the summer months* • *SUMMER outdoor recreation and shopping opportunities* • *Biking; river sports* • *Outdoor recreation to see the natural beauty and calm of the river and trails.* • *When in season, outdoor recreation (outfitting available for canoeing, kayaking, biking or fishing)*
Indoors	• *B&B stays*
Dining	• *Ice cream* • *Beer*
Arts	• *The artisan community seemed prevalent.* • *The arts (theater in particular, though visual art is a close second)* • *Arts and theater* • *History*

FIG. 17: Visitors sharing what they believe Lanesboro's primary tourism products are

Potential or Underutilized Tourism Opportunities

Given visitors' perceptions and experiences, they shared some potential tourism opportunities for the community.

Theme	Selected Quotes
Outdoors	• *Hiking or outdoor winter adventuring opportunities in and around Lanesboro* • *Nature play area is a highlight* • *The Lanesboro mural and open courtyard was so beautiful and lovely piled in snow. Great "Instagram potential."* • *Ice sculpture, snow fort competitions* • *Better use of local trails for fat bikes, snowshoeing, or maybe even cross-country skiing*
Indoors	• *Cabin fever weekend* • *Quirky activities like indoor game day* • *The sidewalks could be used to make clearer what businesses are and are not open. Colorful sandwich-boards or other features would help draw folks in.* • *Bookstore*
Dining	• *More restaurants and retailers need to be open on a winter weekend.* • *Opportunities for better dining..."fine" or "upscale" options* • *Options for breakfast* • *Vegetarian and vegetable-forward meals*
Arts	• *More emphasis on local art events to draw people in* • *More space for showing art besides the one gallery*
General	• *Any shoulder season activity and additional operating hours of many businesses* • *Public bathrooms* • *Lanesboro.com website…being drawn in by clear winter-related images and text*

FIG. 18: Ideas visitors had about potential tourism opportunities

Availability and Quality

Visitors shared insight about their perception of the availability and quality of tourism experiences in the community.

Availability of Recreational Activities and Services

Visitors shared how widely available recreational activities were in the community. Many were rated highly: the playground, city or county park, bike, and walking trails, river with public access, and art center. Items rated on the low end included a public pool, movie theater, and a bike or skateboard park.

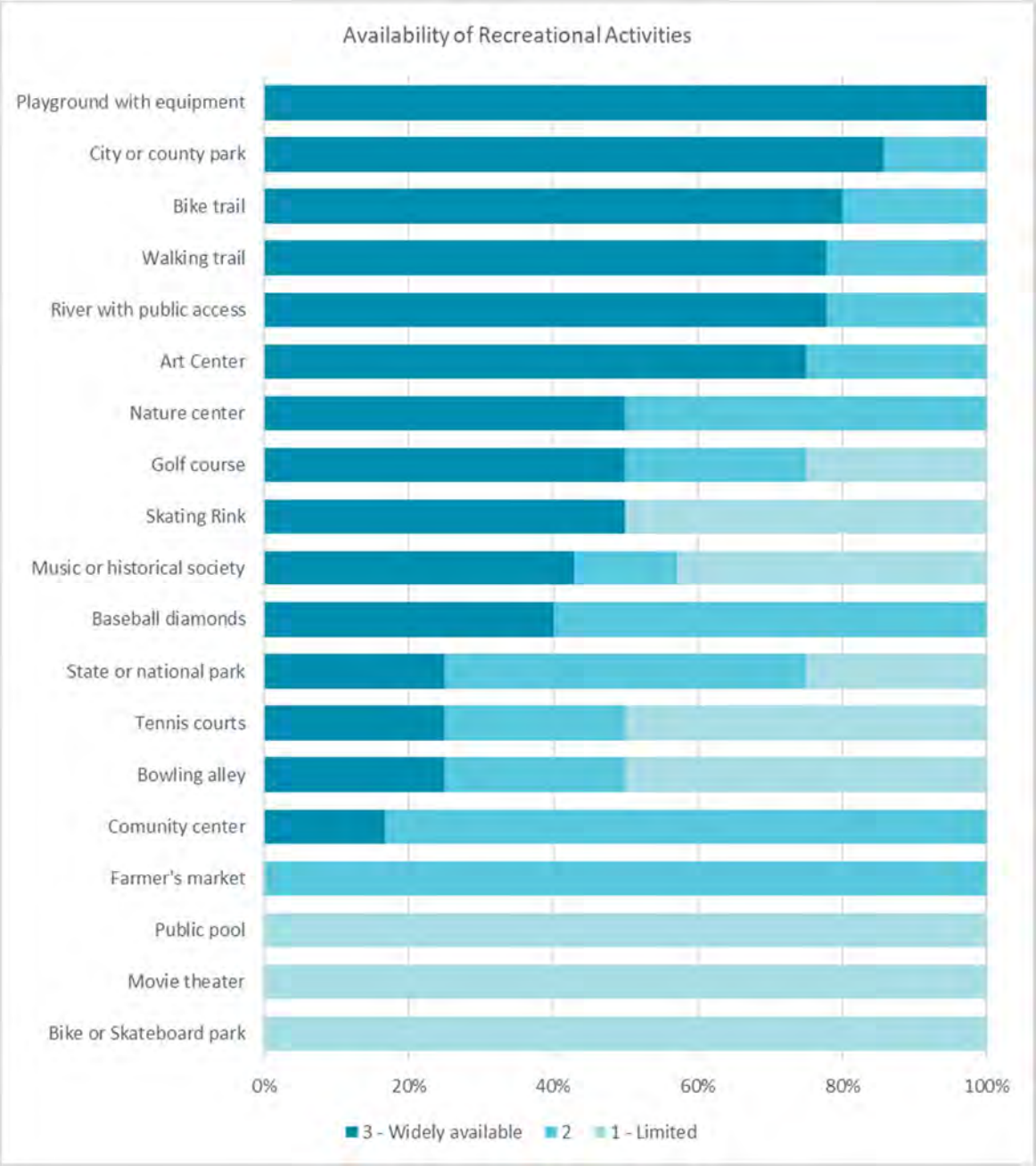


FIG. 19: Visitors rate availability of recreational activities

FIG. 20: Photos highlighting notable outdoor recreation facilities

In addition to outdoor recreation opportunities, visitors shared how widely available services were in the community. Fire stations, seating, post office, and public toilets were rated highly, while taxi services and public transportation were rated with limited availability.

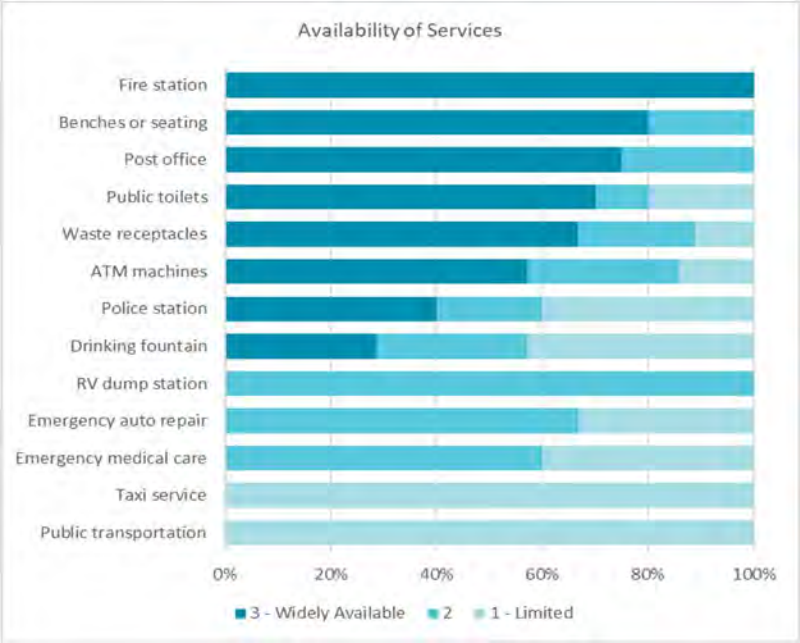


FIG. 21: Visitors rated the availability of services in the community

Quality of Appearance and Services

Visitors rated and commented on the quality of certain services and features in the community. There was agreement about the high quality of public spaces being well maintained, lighting, overall ambiance, and cleanliness. Billboards and banners were the lowest-rated features.

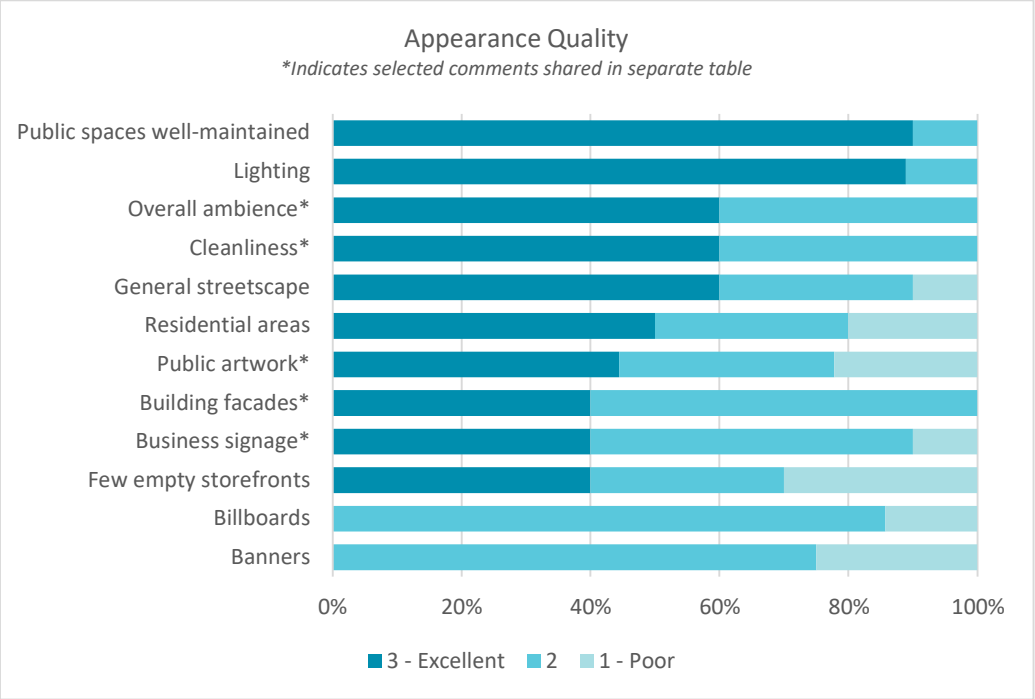


FIG. 22: Visitors rate the quality of appearance for various features

*Appearance	Selected Quotes
Overall ambiance	• *True successes in terms of appearance were the mural, the theater with its music playing under the marquee all day, the evening illuminated theater lights and sidewalks (they looked beautiful in the snow), a beautiful residential neighborhood where it was stunning to see the Victorian architecture all snow-covered and surrounded by bluffs, and a true highlight was the little free library for crafts.*
Cleanliness	• *Visitor Center was clean.*
Public artwork	• *The public art was very nice and widespread on building facades and street signs.*
Building facades	• *Some building facades are well maintained.* • *Building facades were variable; some were very cute and others rundown or empty.*
Business signage	• *I wish there had been more obvious outdoor "bling" for open restaurants and storefronts (e.g., lights? colorful chalk or window-dressings?).* • *I think there also was a missed opportunity related to advertising the cabin fever weekend. It was hard to see where things were going on and how they were connected. I didn't see any specific indicators of participating businesses.*

FIG. 23: Comments associated with the quality of appearance ratings

Quality of Services

Participating visitors rated and provided comments on the quality of services in the community. Features rated highly included walking path/trail, internet/WIFI, and accurate GPS directions. Features rated poorly included handicap accessibility and public transportation.

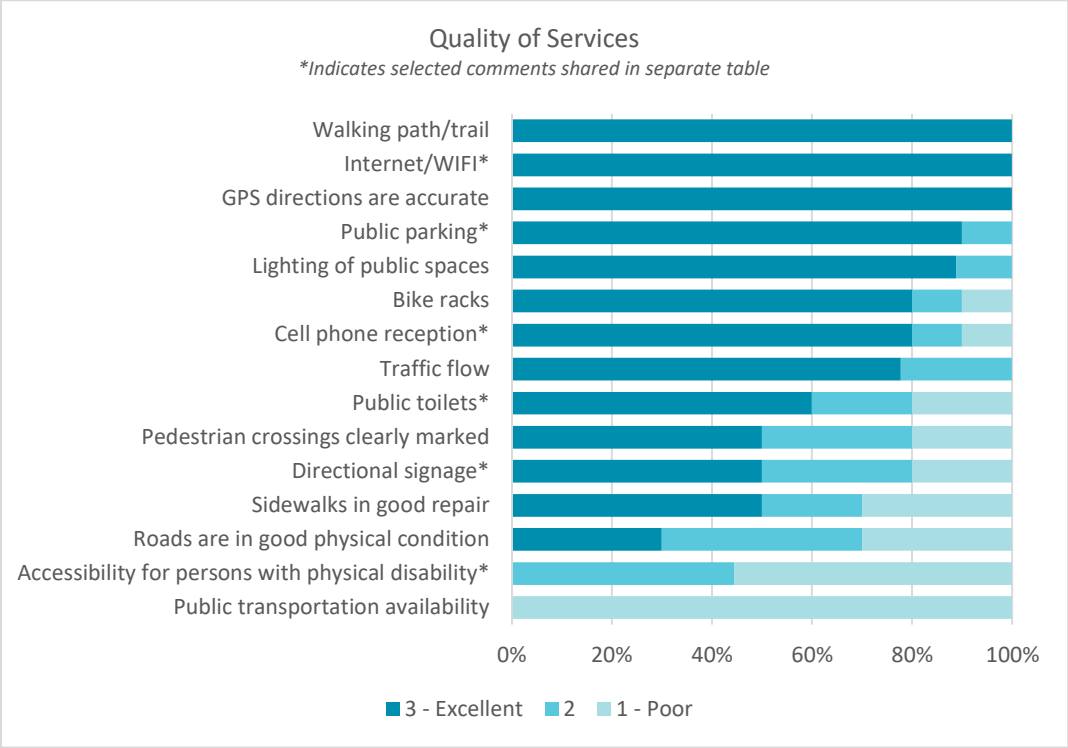


FIG. 24: Visitors rating the quality of services in the community

*Appearance	Selected Quotes
Internet / Cell	• *Cell reception and Wi-Fi wasn't a problem.*
Public parking	• *Parking was easy and excellent.*
Public toilets	• *I appreciate the public bathrooms! Clean, well-maintained, and rare in winter in smaller areas.*
Directional signage	• *Signage pointing where to go was clear and well placed; there were lots of maps to see where to go.*
Accessibility	• *One noticeable area to develop is ADA challenges. There were steps everywhere. Very limited access for a person in a wheelchair.* • *Most storefronts had at least one step to take to enter, so I would not consider the downtown to be very handicap accessible.*

FIG. 25: Comments associated with ratings of quality of services available

Hospitality

Visitors shared their feelings about different aspects of hospitality in the community. Overall, there was agreement about being treated with respect, feeling safe and secure, and having needs met. The lowest-rated aspect was about the business hours accommodating visitors.

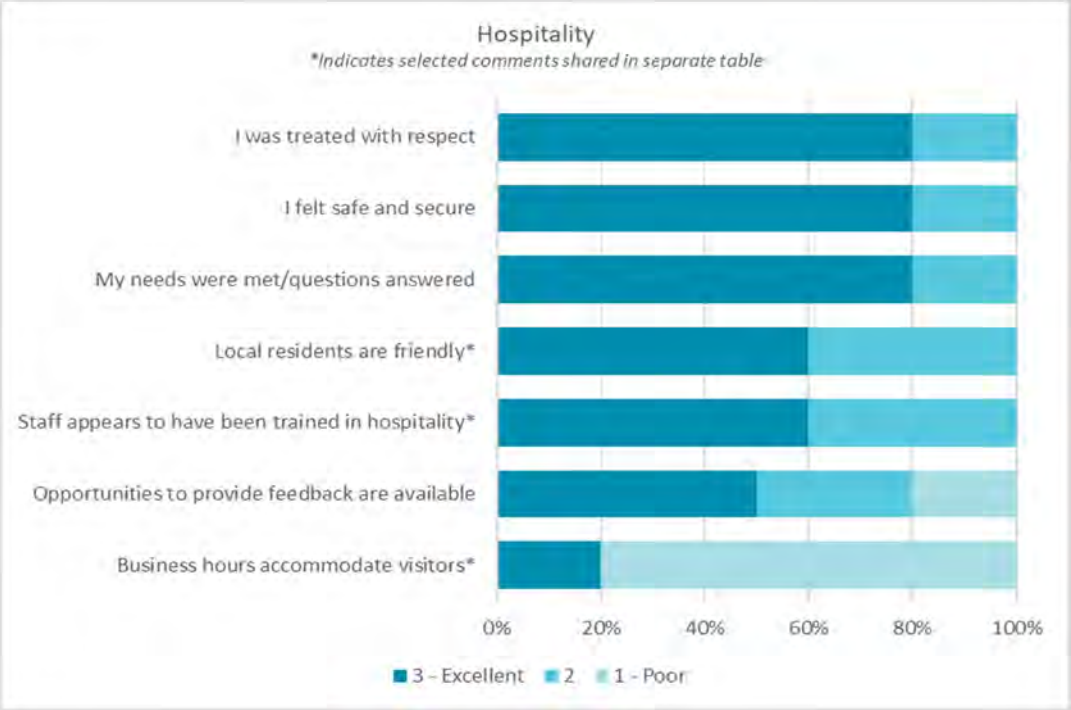


FIG. 26: Visitors rated various components of hospitality

*Appearance	Selected Quotes
Friendliness	• *The artists were friendly and so generous with their time and attention.*
Staff	• *The staff was very professional and answered lots of my questions.* • *The staff gave me a ton of knowledge about the town and very kind and open to conversation.* • *The staff at that establishment was very welcoming and well trained. We were able to ask them many questions about the city.* • *The staff was very friendly and helpful.*
Business hours	• *Business hours were limited.*

FIG. 27: Comments associated with hospitality ratings

Marketing

Target Markets and Audiences

Visitors were asked to respond to two prompts regarding target markets—who do you think the current target market or audiences are for this destination and what potential markets might the community pursue? While a lot of overlap existed between the responses, some potential market ideas were revealed.

Current Markets	Potential Markets

FIG. 28: Word clouds highlighting current and potential markets

Top Tourism Assets

Visitors were asked to rank their top five positive observations about tourism in the community. Listed below are the items that were most consistently ranked in the top five.

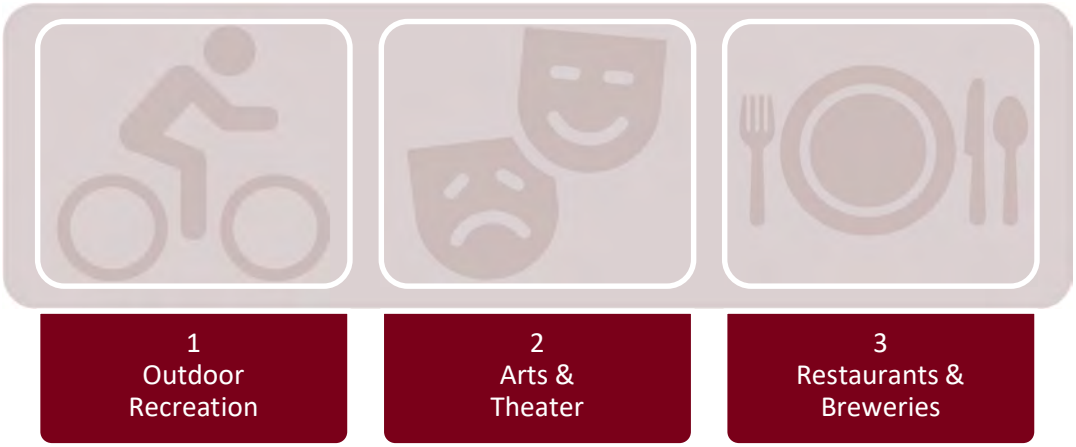


FIG. 29: Top three tourism assets

In addition to the top three, other frequently mentioned assets were:

- Lodging/B&Bs
- Visitor Center
- Hospitality
- Walkability

Tourism Development Suggestions and Ideas

At the end of the survey, respondents shared their thoughts and ideas about how Lanesboro might develop tourism. Many responses reiterated comments already made in previous portions of the survey, but some additional suggestions were offered.

Theme	Selected Quotes
Outdoors	• *Offer more bike repair points on the trail, as well as trail pickup services* • *Fat bike rentals*
Indoors	• *Show how much there is to do even when you're snowed in* • *I wonder, too, if some of the bed and breakfasts could be marketed for families to come—say, advertising tea parties with stuffies, dress-up weekends, or something?*
Dining	• *Additional dining options* • *List correct winter hours on Google for restaurants and shopping options* • *I know it's difficult and challenging to keep places open when business is lacking in the winter, but perhaps places could take turns opening different nights*
Arts	• *I think the "arts" are one of their main assets and that could be built at a greater value along with their outdoor experiences.* • *Have artsy events with live music, live painting, classes, yoga, or live competitions of some kind* • *A bookstore and an additional art gallery space would be nice for browsing* • *More winter theater or art shows* • *Package theater visits with other opportunities* • *Creating a focus as an "artist" community may drive more to move to this location*
Gather / Culture	• *Having more elements of the museum across the community could have enhanced our walks around Lanesboro* • *More offerings about Lanesboro's history* • *Live music options year-round* • *Indoor/outdoor combos such as climbing walls, mini-golf, museums, interactive art exhibits, bowling, etc.*
Marketing	• *More comprehensively packaging opportunities outside of Lanesboro with those in Lanesboro itself. Is there a "Driftless trail" or a way to understand natural and cultural assets within a 20-mile drive as still within and related to Lanesboro proper?* • *Marketing winter opportunities in the same engaging way that you market summer opportunities. This may require hiring (or using your local!) photographers and more continuous website updates.*

FIG. 30: Visitors shared ideas and suggestions for tourism development in Lanesboro

Conclusion

Overall, visitors had many ideas and great enthusiasm for winter tourism in Lanesboro. Based on survey responses, some key takeaways include:

- 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.

Appendix F: Mobile Data Analysis

Introduction

Selected mobile data reports have been curated in the following pages to highlight elements that are meaningful to understanding the experience of visitors to Lanesboro during the winter season months. Mobile data is an emergent tool used by many real estate and retail development companies. The platform used for this report is one example of a mobile data tool available and was accessed using a paid subscription. The data provided by the vendor is a compilation of location data and other identifying information gathered from location-enabled devices and apps. Visitor counts should be considered informed estimates and not as a one-to-one count.

Annual Visits Trend

The purpose of undertaking a winter tourism study was to identify opportunities for tourism development during the winter season. Using mobile data, a visit trend report illustrates the sharp changes in visitor traffic between peak-season months and winter-season months. Weekend traffic is especially busy throughout the year. Starting in October, traffic slows considerably during the week, with reduced weekend traffic corresponding to the end of fall color tours at the end of October (Figure 1).

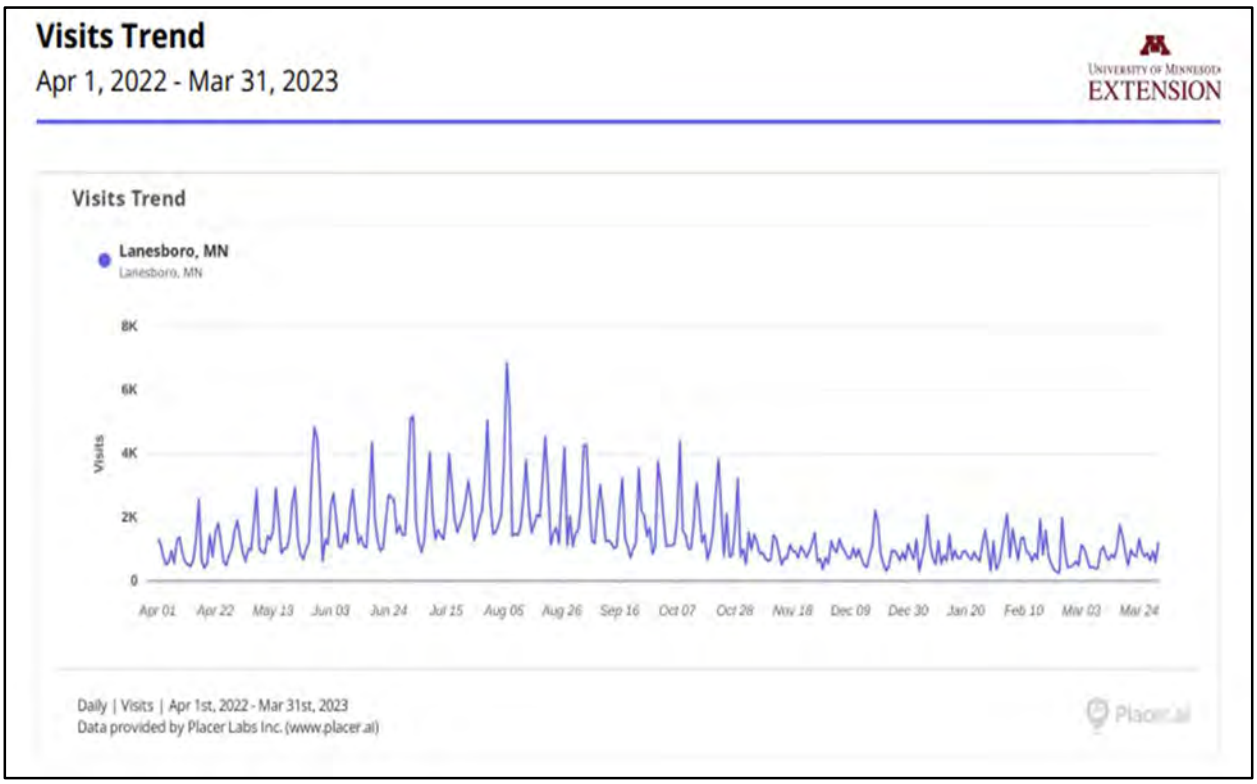


Figure 10: Visits to Lanesboro from April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023.

Winter Season Visitor Journeys

Nearby Visitors (from <50 miles)

The diagram below (Figure 2) illustrates common categories of locations visited before or after traveling to the city limits of Lanesboro. Data is from visitors with mobile devices typically found within 50 miles of Lanesboro during the overnight hours. Employee and resident data from within the Lanesboro study area was not intentionally included, though there may be overlap within this data set.

Noteworthy within this group is that the primary visit category was home, either before (68.6 percent) or after (74.7 percent) visiting the City of Lanesboro. A modest portion of visitors (13.2 percent) visited after work, with only a small portion traveling to work (5.7 percent) after visiting Lanesboro. Additionally, groceries (1.7 percent) were present as a category, though lower on the list of commonly visited locations.

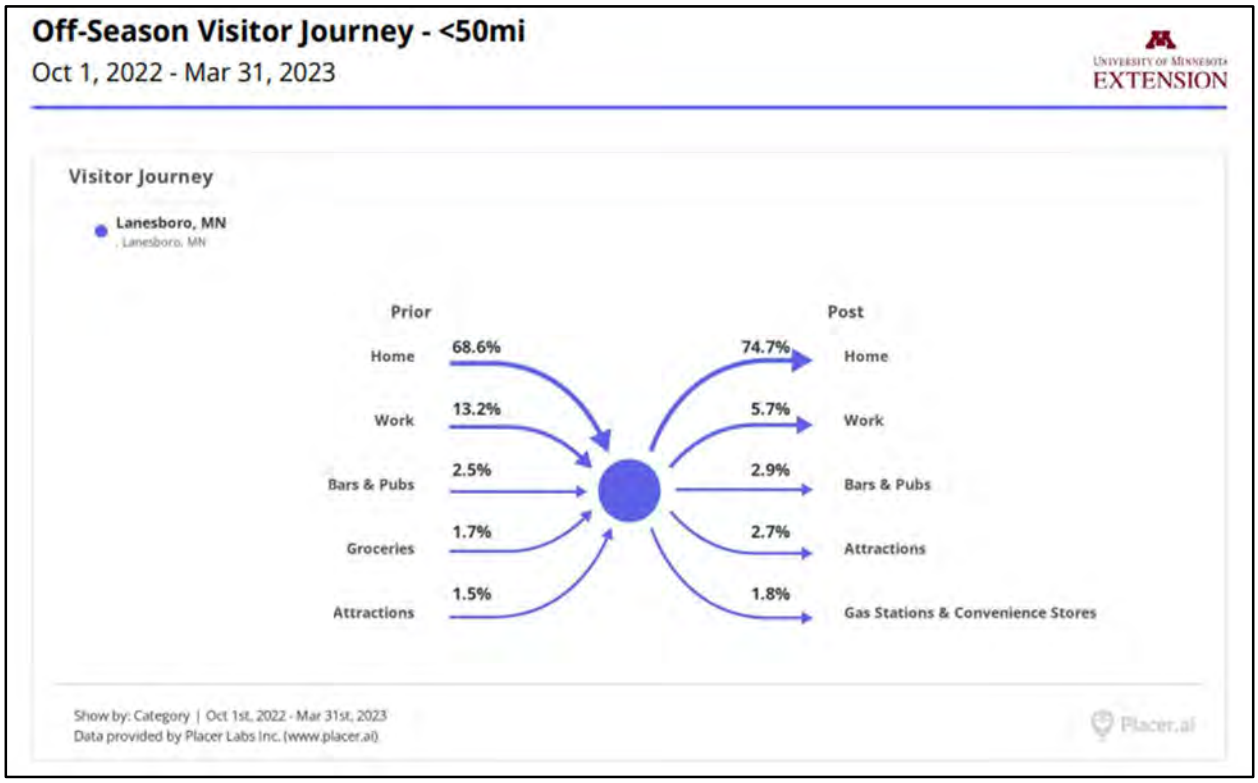


Figure 11: Journey of winter season visitors from <50mi before and after visiting Lanesboro.

Far Away Visitors (from >50 miles)

Traveling from further away impacts visitors' needs and is apparent in the visitor journey diagram findings (Figure 3). A much smaller number of visitors are coming from home (25 percent) or traveling back home (31 percent) after being in Lanesboro. Additionally, work does not appear as a location before or after. Instead, hotels and casinos, bars and pubs, and gas stations are more prevalent.

This diagram illustrates common categories of locations visited before or after traveling to the city limits of Lanesboro. Data is from visitors with mobile devices typically found further than 50 miles from Lanesboro during overnight hours. Some seasonal residents may be included in this data if they spend much of their time outside the community during the study timeframe.

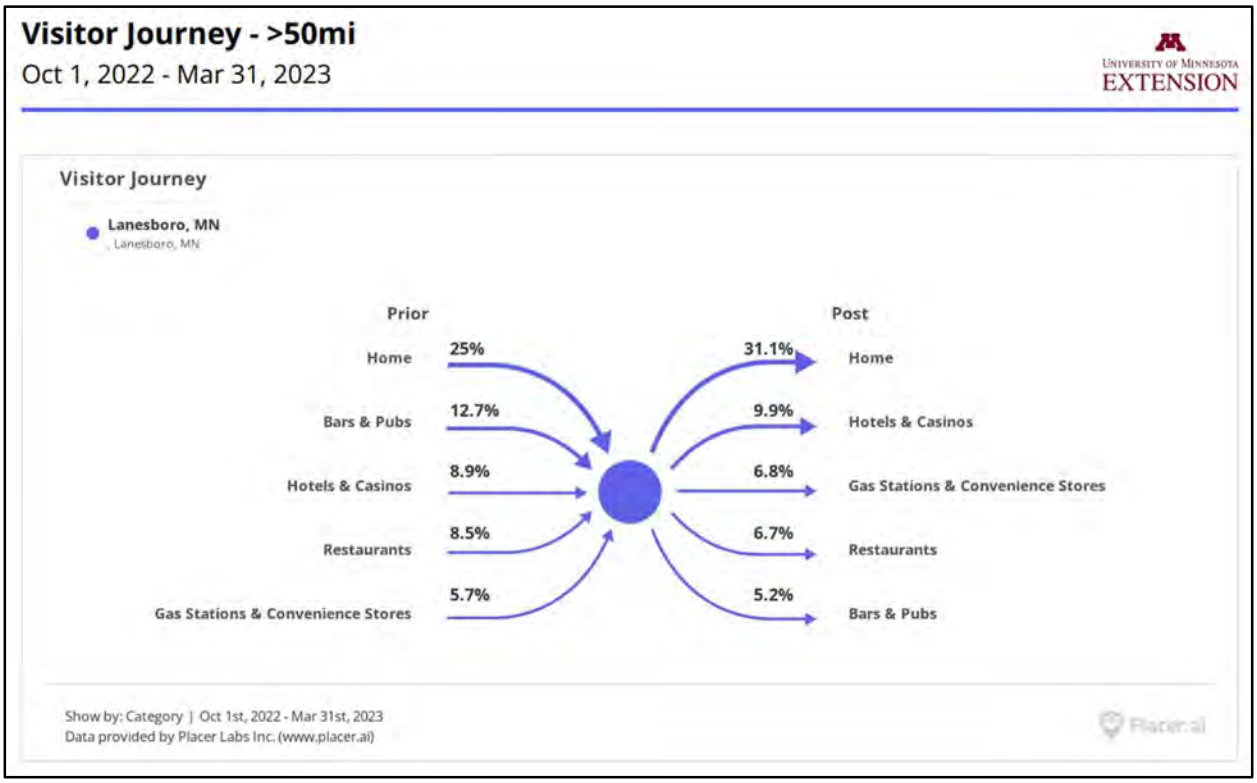


Figure 3: Visitors' journey from >50 miles before and after visiting Lanesboro.

Grocery and Dining Destinations

Given the significant interest in dining and grocery options for the community, a mobile data report was generated to look at common locations within the dining, bars and pubs, and grocery categories (Figures 4 & 5).

Common Pre- and Post-Visit Destinations of Nearby Visitors

Of nearby visitors, only two common locations within the report categories are within the community of Lanesboro: Root River Saloon and High Court Pub. Grocery stores were in the communities of Rushford, Preston, and Harmony. While traveling to Lanesboro, visitors do not appear to be visiting dining, grocery, or bars and pubs in town. The data indicates a wide range of locations visited, with low foot-traffic counts at each location. The wide traffic dispersal is not surprising, given the significant geographic range represented within the locations noted.

Prior / Post Compare - VIsitors <50mi

Oct 1, 2022 - Mar 31, 2023

University of Minnesota EXTENSION

Prior / Post Compare

Lanesboro, MN / Lanesboro, MN

Prior			Post		
Rank	*Name*	*Foot-Traffic*	*Rank*	*Name*	*Foot-Traffic*
1	**Preston Liquor Store** / US-52, Preston, MN	0.7%	1	**Karst Brewing** / 1st Street, Fountain, MN	0.8%
2	**Beaver Bottoms Saloon** / Main Street, Fountai...	<0.5%	2	**Branding Iron Supper Club** / Circle Heights Dr, ...	<0.5%
3	**Karst Brewing** / 1st Street, Fountain, MN	<0.5%	3	**Preston Foods IGA** / Fillmore St W, Preston, MN	<0.5%
4	**Root River Saloon** / Coffee St, Lanesboro, MN	<0.5%	4	**Jac's Bar & Grill** / Main St S, Chatfield, MN	<0.5%
5	**Brewskie's Bar and Grill** / E Main St, Utica, MN	<0.5%	5	**Brewskie's Bar and Grill** / E Main St, Utica, MN	<0.5%
6	**Branding Iron Supper Club** / Circle Heights Dr, ...	<0.5%	6	**Beaver Bottoms Saloon** / Main Street, Fountai...	<0.5%
7	**Village Square** / Main St, Fountain, MN	<0.5%	7	**ZaZa's Pub and Pizzeria** / Huff St, Winona, MN	<0.5%
8	**Preston Foods IGA** / Fillmore St W, Preston, MN	<0.5%	8	**ZZ TAP** / N Main St, Canton, MN	<0.5%
9	**Stumpy's** / W Jessie St, Rushford, MN	<0.5%	9	**Harmony Foods IGA** / Center St W, Harmony, ...	<0.5%
10	**High Court Pub** / Parkway Ave North, Lanesbor...	<0.5%	10	**The Club - Bar and Veteran's Organization** / Sa...	<0.5%

Oct 1st, 2022 - Mar 31st, 2023
Data provided by Placer Labs Inc. (www.placer.ai)

Placer.ai

Figure 4: Common pre- and post-visit sites of visitors from <50 miles.

Common Pre- and Post-Visit Destinations of Far-Away Visitors

Visitors to Lanesboro from further than 50 miles away were significantly more likely to visit a dining, grocery, bar, or pub within the city during their visit than more local travelers (Figure 5). Of the top 19 locations within the sample categories, 50 percent of visits before or after were in Lanesboro. Only one grocery location was included in this sample and outside the community.

Prior / Post Compare - Visitors >50mi

Oct 1, 2022 - Mar 31, 2023

University of Minnesota EXTENSION

Prior / Post Compare

Lanesboro, MN / Lanesboro, MN

Prior			Post		
Rank	*Name*	*Foot-Traffic*	*Rank*	*Name*	*Foot-Traffic*
1	**Sylvan Brewing** / Beacon St W, Lanesboro, MN	4.8%	1	**Karst Brewing** / 1st Street, Fountain, MN	1.9%
2	**High Court Pub** / Parkway Ave North, Lanesbor...	2%	2	**Aroma Pie Shoppe** / Main St, Whalan, MN	1.4%
3	**Pedal Pushers Cafe** / Parkway Ave N, Lanesbor...	1.9%	3	**Lanesboro Pastry Shoppe** / Parkway Ave N, La...	1.3%
4	**Root River Saloon** / Coffee St, Lanesboro, MN	1.5%	4	**Branding Iron Supper Club** / Circle Heights Dr, ...	1%
5	**Karst Brewing** / 1st Street, Fountain, MN	1.4%	5	**Preston Foods IGA** / Fillmore St W, Preston, MN	0.9%
6	**Aroma Pie Shoppe** / Main St, Whalan, MN	1.3%	6	**Home Sweet Home** / Parkway Ave N, Lanesbor...	0.7%
7	**Juniper's Restaurant** / Parkway Ave S, Lanesbo...	1.2%	7	**Pedal Pushers Cafe** / Parkway Ave N, Lanesbor...	0.6%
8	**Estelle's Eatery & Bar** / Main Ave N, Harmony, ...	0.9%	8	**Granny's Liquor** / Parkway Ave N, Lanesboro, ...	0.6%
9	**Preston Foods IGA** / Fillmore St W, Preston, MN	0.8%	9	**Sylvan Brewing** / Beacon St W, Lanesboro, MN	0.6%
10	**Branding Iron Supper Club** / Circle Heights Dr, ...	0.7%	10	**Hot Chip Burger Bar** / 16th St SW, Rochester, ...	0.5%

Oct 1st, 2022 - Mar 31st, 2023
Data provided by Placer Labs Inc. (www.placer.ai)

Placer.ai

Figure 5: Common pre- and post-visit sites of visitors from >50 miles.

Example Winter Season Visitor Journeys

While mobile data has many limitations, it can be a valuable tool for understanding how people move through a community. To better understand visitors to different activities in Lanesboro, three sample locations were identified to illustrate different winter season visitor experiences in the area.

Commonweal Theatre Visitor Journey

The first example is the Commonweal Theatre Company in downtown Lanesboro (Figure 6). It is close to many dining and lodging establishments in the community. The visitor journey report suggests that it is common for visitors to the theatre to visit a restaurant or bar before attending the event. Following their visit, lodging and food options are popular stops.

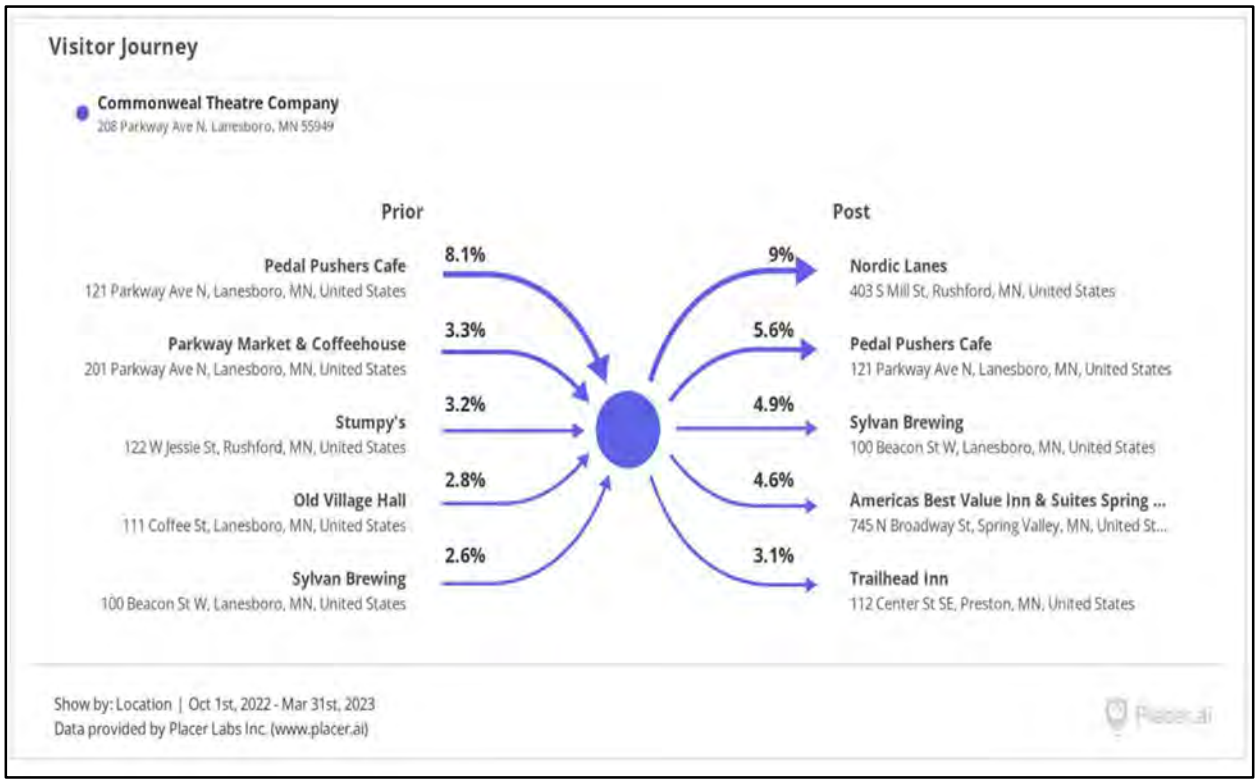


Figure 6: Common visitor journeys before and after winter season visits to Commonweal Theatre.

The visitor journey reflects the top 5 last locations visited before and after visiting the Commonweal Theatre Company. That means if a visitors from an Inn to a restaurant, then the Theatre, only the restaurant would be included. The same is true afterward as well: visitors who head to a bar for a cocktail before their lodging would only be shown as visiting the bar. This feature of the data source may explain why Lanesboro Inns didn't show up in the top 5 post-visit locations list.

Additionally, the data tracks the locations that were most commonly visited but have no way to know *why* they visited a location. Chill-Inn Lanesboro leaders highlighted that the Old Village Hall wasn't open in the spring, raising several possibilities. One was that the number of visitors in fall 2022 was strong enough that they continued to be on the list. Another would be if visitors to the Theatre commonly use a parking lot at the restaurant

Given the questions from the community leaders, two additional reports were created to tease out connections between visitors to the Commonweal Theatre and Lanesboro businesses. One of the reports (Figure 7) highlights dining establishments visited before or after the Commonweal Theatre. By digging deeper into the category, four additional restaurants were identified in the data.

Prior / Post Compare

Commonweal Theatre Company / Parkway Ave N, Lanesboro, MN

Prior			Post		
Rank	*Name*	*Foot-Traffic*	*Rank*	*Name*	*Foot-Traffic*
1	**Pedal Pushers Cafe** / Parkway Ave N, Lanesbor...	8.1%	1	**Pedal Pushers Cafe** / Parkway Ave N, Lanesbor...	5.8%
2	**Parkway Market & Coffeehouse** / Parkway Ave ...	3.3%	2	**Branding Iron Supper Club** / Circle Heights Dr, ...	1.8%
3	**Old Village Hall** / Coffee St, Lanesboro, MN	2.8%	3	**Juniper's Restaurant** / Parkway Ave S, Lanesbo...	1.1%
4	**Estelle's Eatery & Bar** / Main Ave N, Harmony, ...	1.4%	4	**T-Bock's** / W Water St, Decorah, IA	0.6%
5	**Village Square** / Main St, Fountain, MN	1.1%			
6	**Juniper's Restaurant** / Parkway Ave S, Lanesbo...	1%			
7	**Lanesboro Pastry Shoppe** / Parkway Ave N, La...	0.9%			
8	**Branding Iron Supper Club** / Circle Heights Dr, ...	<0.5%			

Oct 1st, 2022 - Mar 31st, 2023
Data provided by Placer Labs Inc. (www.placer.ai)

Placer.ai

Figure 712: Prior/Post Compare Report of dining establishments visited before or after the Commonweal Theatre.

Another specific request from the community was to identify lodging locations visited before and after the Commonweal Theatre. In the initial data, one lodging location was identified, located outside of the community. Running a lodging-focused report highlighted eight additional lodging businesses visited by theatre patrons (Figure 8).

Prior / Post Compare

Commonweal Theatre Company / Parkway Ave N, Lanesboro, MN

Prior			Post		
Rank	*Name*	*Foot-Traffic*	*Rank*	*Name*	*Foot-Traffic*
1	**Stone Mill Hotel and Suites** / Beacon St E, Lan...	2.5%	1	**Americas Best Value Inn** / N Broadway St, Spri...	4.7%
2	**Americas Best Value Inn** / N Broadway St, Spri...	1.5%	2	**Trailhead Inn** / Center St SE, Preston, MN	3.2%
3	**Iron Horse Outfitters and Inn** / Coffee St, Lane...	1.2%	3	**Scandinavian Inn** / Kenilworth Ave S, Lanesbor...	1.1%
4	**Scandinavian Inn** / Kenilworth Ave S, Lanesbor...	1.1%	4	**Hotel Winneshiek** / E Water St, Decorah, IA	1%
5	**Grandma's** / Elmwood St E, Lanesboro, MN	1%	5	**Anna V's B & B** / Fillmore Ave S, Lanesboro, MN	0.6%
6	**Trailhead Inn** / Center St SE, Preston, MN	1%			
7	**Cozy Quilt Cottage** / Holly Rd, Lanesboro, MN	<0.5%			

Oct 1st, 2022 - Mar 31st, 2023
Data provided by Placer Labs Inc. (www.placer.ai)

Placer.ai

Figure 8: Prior/Post Compare Report of lodging establishments visited before or after the Commonweal Theatre.

Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center Visitor Journey

Another common visitor attraction noted by community members is the Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center. Located on a large wilderness site outside the City of Lanesboro, it has expansive facilities to host large groups for overnight experiences and bus tours.

Given the location and range of visitor ages and transportation options, this report significantly differs from the other sample sites (Figure 9). Instead of individual restaurants or bars in Lanesboro, a location downtown (204 Parkway Ave N) is noted as a familiar location, which may correspond to a bus parking location or the Root River Trail nearby.

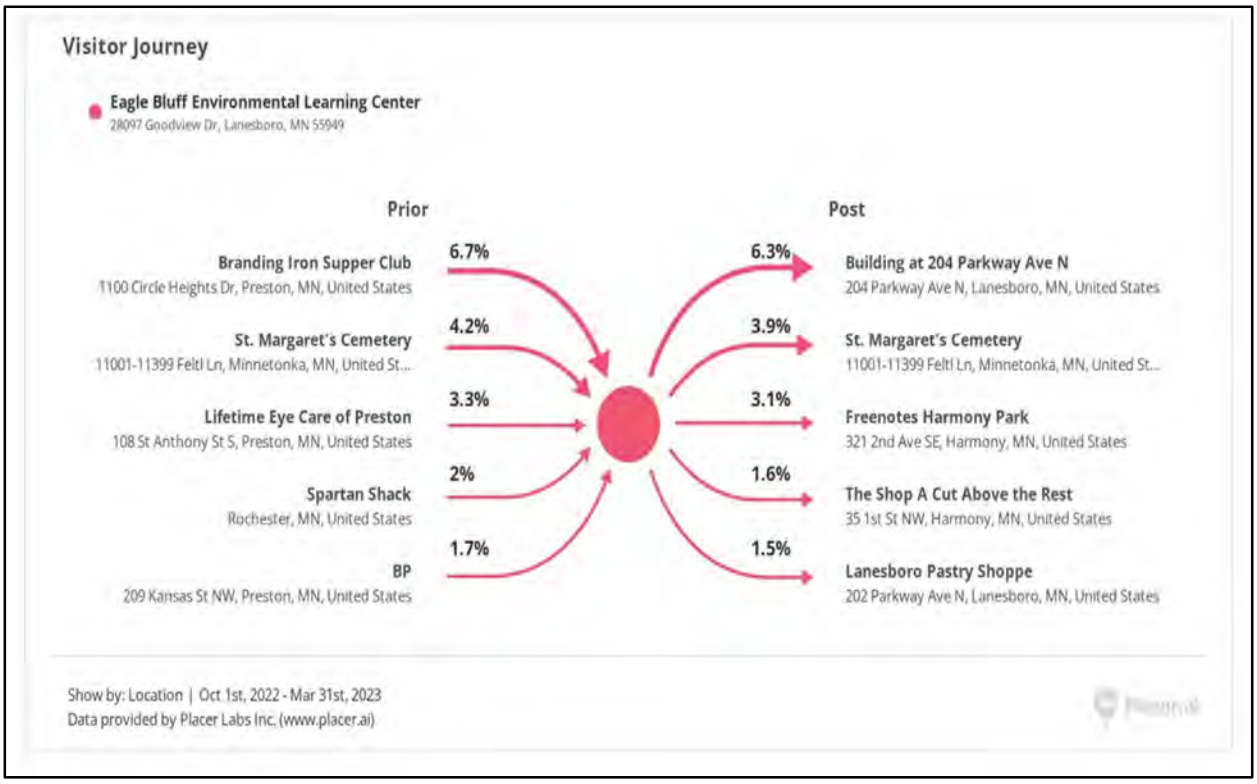


Figure 9: Common visitor journeys before and after winter season visits to Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center.

Sylvan Brewing Visitor Journey

The final sample site selected for exploration was the local brewery in Lanesboro. During the mobile data analytics process, it became apparent that Sylvan Brewing is uniquely connected to a neighboring brewery (Figure 8).

Of the visitors to Sylvan Brewing, 3.6 percent visited Karst Brewing before their visit, and 8.6 percent traveled to Karst Brewing following their visit to Lanesboro. All other noted visits before and after the brewery in town were to other Lanesboro establishments. This suggests a strong relationship between local breweries that may support foot traffic at surrounding businesses.

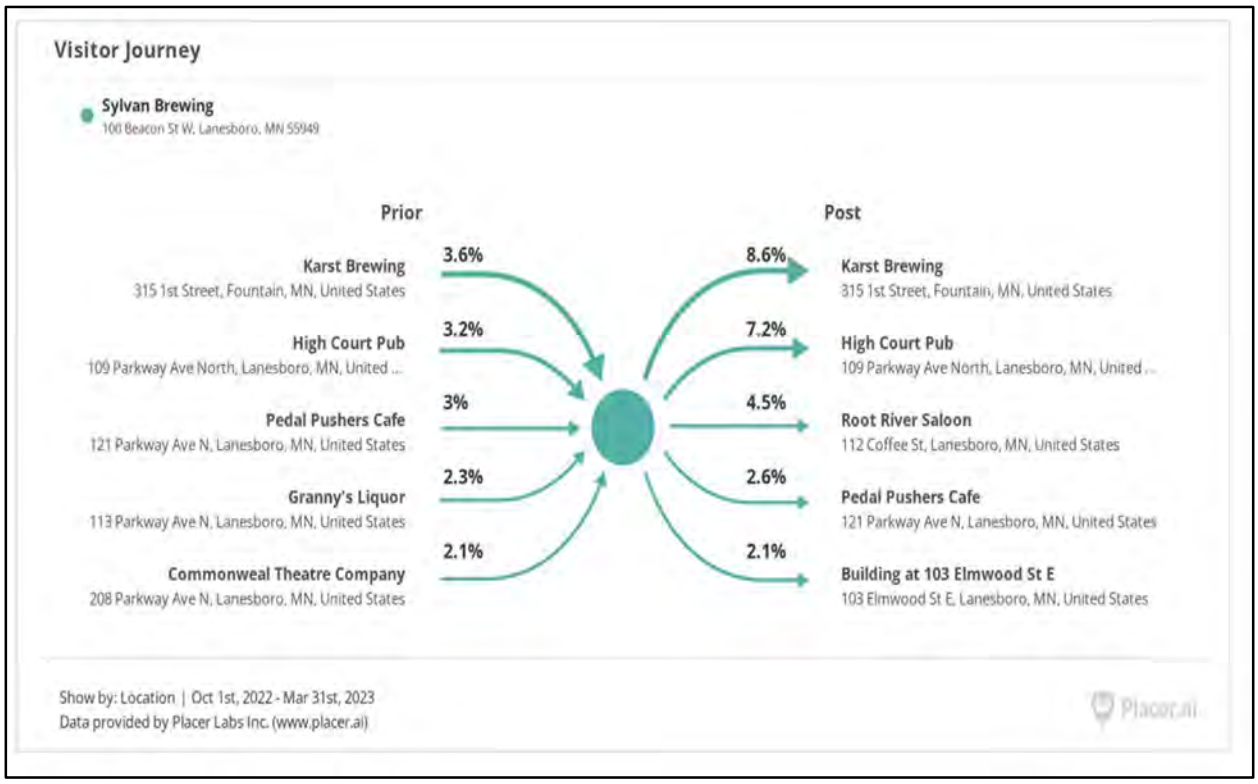


Figure 10: Common visitor journeys before and after winter season visits to Sylvan Brewing.

Conclusion

Overall, visitors from nearby and farther away have different journeys before, during, and after their visits to Lanesboro. Based on the mobile data analysis, some key takeaways include:

- Generally, visits to Lanesboro are much lower in volume in the winter than in the summer months. Visits are more common on weekends.
- Visitor journeys before and after visiting prominent attractions in Lanesboro can show unique insights, including that visitors to Sylvan Brewing also tend to visit Karst Brewing and local dining establishments and that Eagle Bluff visitors have significantly different visit patterns.
- Common grocery locations in mobile data are outside the Lanesboro community.
- Community members may have additional insight that informs the analysis of this report and additional insight is welcomed as the work is applied to real community contexts.