

Union County Tourism Master Plan

“Defining Union County’s Tourism Industry”

Developed for

Union County
Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs

Presented

December 2007



822 N. Taney Street
Philadelphia, PA 19130
(215) 232-1411
enrouteconsulting@comcast.net

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Methodology	4
Tourism Industry	5
Assumptions	8
Tourism Assets	9
Insights	13
Recommendations	15
Implementation	18

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Destinations around the globe have recognized tourism as a viable industry that can generate direct spending, indirect economic impact, tax revenues, and jobs, as well as an enhanced civic pride and quality of life. However, like any industry, a plan and investment is required to create the necessary infrastructure and ensure sustainable success.

Union County, New Jersey, has made a valuable investment in developing a plan to evaluate and guide tourism and its economic benefits. The County, through the Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, has commissioned this Tourism Master Plan to obtain an objective third-party review of tourism assets and opportunities.

In the beginning, I expected this project would review and analyze the County's tourism infrastructure and result in recommendations to enhance visitor experiences, product development, and marketing. What I found was a county taking its first serious look at tourism as an industry. Most of the stakeholders and officials that took part in this project shared an interest in tourism and its potential economic benefits, but did not fully grasp the tourism reality. They viewed tourism as an amenity for County residents – a quality of life consideration rather than an engine to generate jobs and spending. If nothing else, this project has opened eyes to the bigger possibilities of tourism and has initiated a conversation about tourism in Union County.

While I envisioned this master plan would outline how to make Union County tourism better, the end result is a plan that details what is needed to define and build a structured tourism industry in Union County. The plan outlined in the Recommendations and Implementation sections of this report are designed to be manageable and realistic. However, as in any industry, investment is needed to provide the resources and support to move to the next level.

True tourism assets already exist in Union County. Jersey Gardens is an established destination that attracts domestic and international visitors as well as tour groups. Liberty Hall contains a world class collection of American artifacts and a one-of-a-kind story to be told. The county park system is a remarkable example of Olmstead design as well as an epicenter of recreation and ecotourism opportunities. The goal is to connect these dots in a way to attract and guide visitors to generate economic impact.

The steps to reach this goal are not insurmountable. In order to increase economic impact from tourism, Union County needs to:

- Develop the infrastructure of a tourism industry;
- Integrate tourism into the economic development conversation;
- Develop marketing vehicles to inform and guide visitors, locals, and stakeholders; and,
- Connect the dots between high-potential tourism sites and enhance visitor experiences.

Nearly everyone interviewed in this project shared a positive view of tourism, excitement about the possibilities and opportunities, and interest in next steps. Creation of a tourism industry in Union County requires a plan and investment. The plan is complete. Based on the conversations held for this project, I am confident the will exists to make the necessary investment to keep the ball rolling.

Submitted by,

Bill Gehrman
President

METHODOLOGY

En Route Consulting interviewed various stakeholders to collect information and opinions about Union County's current tourism industry and opportunities for the future.

En Route first met with members of the Union County Tourism Committee to discuss the goals of the project, desired end results, and best methodology. It was determined that a mix of group discussions and one-on-one interviews would be needed to gain a full picture of the tourism landscape and the potential for growth and investment.

Two roundtable discussions were held: one for tourism stakeholders, and another for those involved in economic development. Fifteen individuals participated in these conversations. The participants reported that this was the first time they had met to discuss tourism in Union County.

En Route conducted one-on-one interviews with the following individuals:

- Betty Jane Kowalski, Freeholder Chairman
- Al Faella, Director, Department of Economic Development
- Angel Estrada, Freeholder Vice Chairman
- Mayor Christian Bollwage, Elizabeth
- Gordon Haas, Greater Elizabeth Chamber of Commerce
- Jim Coyle, Gateway Chamber of Commerce
- Crystal Stell, Jersey Gardens

En Route conducted site visits at the following organizations:

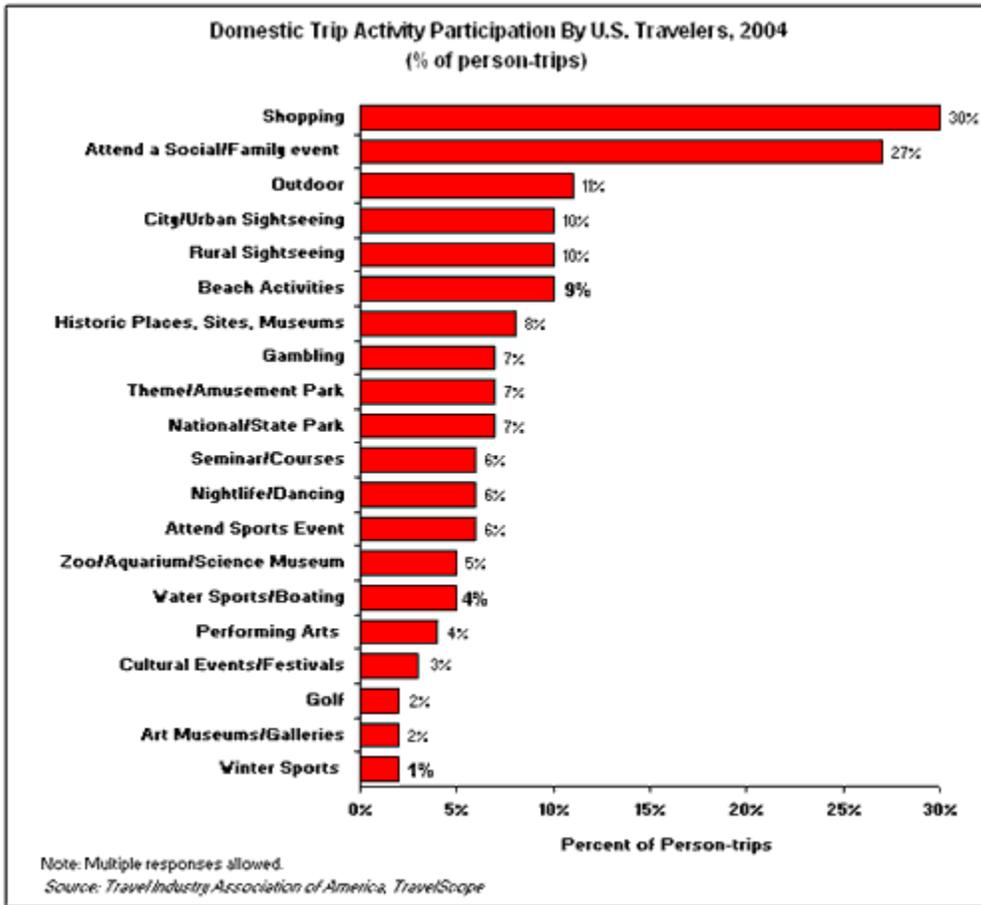
- Liberty Hall Museum
- Reeves-Reed Arboretum
- Union County Arts Center
- Rahway Arts District
- First Presbyterian Church
- Boxwood Hall
- Jersey Gardens
- Dr. Robinson Plantation
- Deserted Village
- Merchants and Drovers Tavern
- Downtown Elizabeth

En Route participated in the 2007 Four Centuries In A Weekend, October 20 and 21, experiencing the heritage festival as a visitor and talking with site organizers.

TOURISM INDUSTRY

U.S. Tourism Snapshot

Travel is part of the American psyche, a primary leisure activity, and a symbol of status and accomplishment. According to the Travel Industry of America, almost two billion domestic person trips (one person traveling more than 50 miles from home) were taken in 2005. Seventy-five percent of these person-trips were for leisure, and the remaining quarter for business. Eighty-five percent of these trips were made by automobile while nine percent were made by airplane. The top three activities for domestic travelers are dining, shopping, and entertainment, but travelers take in a wide variety of activities.



New Jersey Tourism Snapshot

According to a report by Global Insight at the 2007 New Jersey Governor's Conference on Tourism:

- 71.1 million visitors selected New Jersey in 2006
- Overnight visitors grew 4.2 percent in 2006 versus a 1.2 percent decline in day visitors.
- The total impact of travel and tourism (direct and indirect) was \$27 billion in 2006, representing 5.9 percent of the Gross State Product.
- Tourism generated \$7.5 billion in federal, state, and local taxes in New Jersey in 2006. Without tourism, each New Jersey household would pay an additional \$1,368 in taxes to maintain current tax receipts.
- Tourism generated 391,600 direct jobs (and 89,200 indirect jobs) in 2006.
- Tourism is the ninth-largest industry in New Jersey.

New Jersey and Destination Marketing Organizations

In the past, the New Jersey Office of Travel and Tourism (OTT) has divided the state into six tourism regions; Union County falls under the Gateway Region. Each region has been organized through a volunteer regional tourism council. The OTT has provided cooperative tourism marketing funds through these tourism councils. The level of organization for each tourism council has varied by region. The Skylands and Shore regions have been active through a volunteer council, while the Delaware River region has benefited from a professional non-profit destination marketing organization – the South Jersey Tourism Corporation. The Gateway Region's tourism council has been inactive for two years or more. During that time, both the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Meadowlands Chamber (both in the Gateway Region) have formed convention and visitors bureaus (CVBs) to help develop tourism. While these new CVBs service the counties to the north and south, neither encompasses Union County. A CVB is another name for a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO).

Beginning in 2008, the OTT will change the way it provides cooperative marketing funds. Instead of funding regional tourism councils, funding will be available to DMOs that meet criteria needed to apply for cooperative marketing grants. At this time, no organization has informed the Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs it will submit a grant application to serve Union County.

Union County Tourism Snapshot

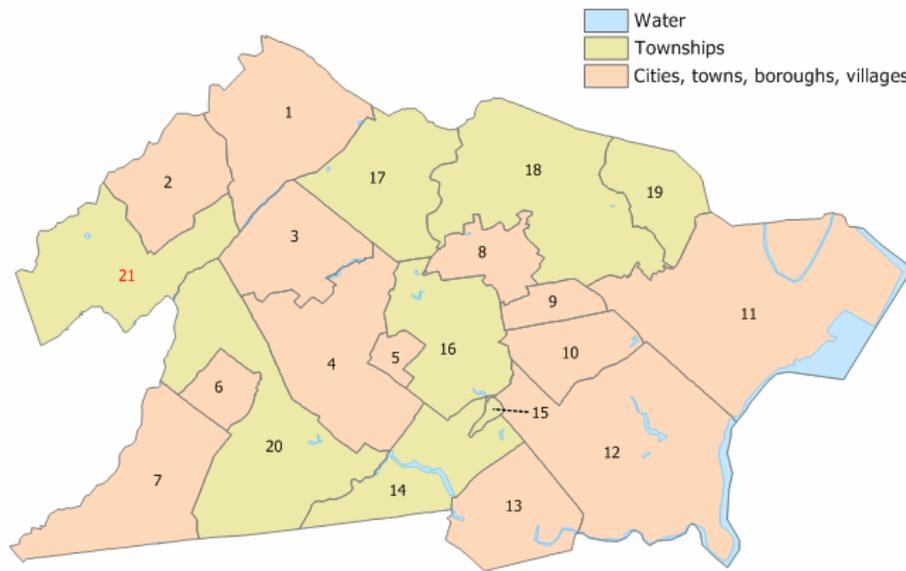
Located in the northeastern part of the state, Union County covers 21 municipalities: Berkeley Heights, Clark, Cranford, Elizabeth, Farwood, Garwood, Hillside, Kenilworth, Linden, Mountainside, New Providence, Plainfield, Rahway, Roselle, Roselle Park, Scotch Plains, Springfield, Summit, Union, Westfield and Winfield. The county is part of the New York City Metropolitan Area; the county seat of Elizabeth is less than 15 miles from Manhattan.

The county is incredibly accessible to visitors. Major highways that access the county include the New Jersey Turnpike, Garden State Parkway, Interstate 78, Interstate 278, and U.S. Routes 1, 9, and 22. Passenger rail service is provided by New Jersey Transit. The southern portion of Newark Liberty International Airport is located within Union County. The county has direct access to the populations of Staten Island and Long Island via the Goethals Bridge.

Union County contains a wealth of hotel inventory seemingly due in large part to Newark Liberty International Airport. The county's tourism assets include museums, significant historic sites,

outdoor recreation, an arboretum, house museums, historical societies, golf courses, visual and performing arts, shopping, and downtown/historic districts. The county’s central location and proximity to other New Jersey towns such as Newark, Secaucus and Hoboken provide tremendous potential to generate economic development as a hub and spoke destination.

While the county’s central location and access to transportation give it geographic leverage, it seems to exist in a tourism “no man’s land” between the region’s destination marketing organizations. The State of New Jersey’s Gateway Region (which encompasses the northeast part of the state from Passaic to Middlesex counties) is not active. Local chambers of commerce have recently established the Meadowlands Liberty Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Middlesex County Convention & Visitors Bureau, which serve the areas just south and north of Union County.



The Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs manages tourism-related efforts for Union County. According to the Office’s mission statement, it “creates, supports and encourages programs and services in the arts and history that...contribute to economic development. Cultural and Heritage Affairs coordinates the history-based “Four Centuries In A Weekend” festival, and other County offices, such as the Parks Department, run other events that have the potential of drawing visitors and tourism-related economic impact.

- 1 Summit
- 2 New Providence
- 3 Mountainside
- 4 Westfield
- 5 Garwood
- 6 Fanwood
- 7 Plainfield
- 8 Kenilworth
- 9 Roselle Park
- 10 Roselle
- 11 Elizabeth
- 12 Linden
- 13 Rahway
- 14 Clark
- 15 Winfield
- 16 Cranford
- 17 Springfield
- 18 Union
- 19 Hillside
- 20 Scotch Plains
- 21 Berkeley Heights

ASSUMPTIONS

En Route Consulting began development of this Tourism Master Plan using the following foundational assumptions.

- Tourism is an industry that, like any other, requires various forms of investment for growth and sustainability. Basic forms of investment include people (training/education), infrastructure, and marketing.
- Tourism can generate economic impact through direct spending (businesses/industries that “touch” the visitor), indirect spending (businesses/industries that supply those that touch the visitor), jobs, and tax revenues.
- Economic impact from tourism is significantly increased when visitors stay overnight in a destination. According to the Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI), overnight visitors generate approximately three times as much spending as day visitors.
- Visitors are defined as traveling at least 50 miles to their destination, excluding commuting. This definition is used by both the New Jersey Office of Travel and Tourism and the Travel Industry Association of America.
- **Attractions** are tourism assets (lodging, restaurants, shopping, cultural sites, historic sites, outdoor recreation, experiences, etc.) that visitors can enjoy when in a destination. **Attractors** are those distinctive attractions that have the drawing power to influence individuals to visit a specific destination.
- The basic elements required for a successful overnight leisure destination include lodging, attractors, and evening activities.
- A destination needs only one quality and distinctive attractor to draw visitors.
- Successful tourism destinations require collaboration among attractions and tourism suppliers working together to support the larger destination.

TOURISM ASSETS

The following list includes tourism assets identified by the Tourism Committee and En Route Consulting.

Battle of Short Hills Site (Scotch Plains)

The Battle of Short Hills was fought here on December 26, 1777. This unsuccessful attempt by the British to draw General Washington from the Watchung Mountains was one of the major battles fought by the militia. Recognized as an Essential Site in the Crossroads of the American Revolution Heritage Area.

Boxwood Hall State Historic Site (Elizabeth)

Home from 1772-1795 of Elias Boudinot, President of the Continental Congress from 1782-83. George Washington lunched with Boudinot here in 1779 en route to his inauguration. In 1795 the house was sold to Jonathan Dayton, signer of the Constitution, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and U.S. Senator.

Caldwell Parsonage (Union)

Site of the shooting of Hannah Caldwell, the rebuilt parsonage is a repository for archival materials and artifacts related to Union Township. Contains significant artifacts relating to the Revolutionary War in New Jersey.

Cannonball House (Springfield)

During the Battle of Springfield, a cannonball hit this house on June 12, 1780. It was only one of four to survive the battle. Recognized as an Essential Site in the Crossroads of the American Revolution Heritage Area.

Osborn Cannonball House (Scotch Plains)

Built in the 1700s, the house takes its name from the cannonball that struck it during a Revolutionary War skirmish. Inside, four furnished rooms are appointed with Colonial and early 19th-century furnishings.

Carter House (Summit)

This home of the Summit Historical Society includes a 1740-1820 kitchen, 1820-1860 dining room, and late Victorian library all interpreted with antique furnishings.

Abraham Clark House (Roselle)

Replica of the 1705 farmhouse of Abraham Clark, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Fragments of the original house are on display along with artifacts from the American Revolution and Civil War.

Connecticut Farms Presbyterian Church Cemetery (Union)

Eighteenth-century burial ground containing mass graves of Hessian and British soldiers from the 1780 Battle of Connecticut Farms, as well as graves of soldiers of the American Revolution.

Crane-Phillips Museum (Cranford)

This Victorian cottage museum is an outstanding example of Andrew Jackson Downing architecture and offers permanent and changing exhibitions.

Deserted Village of Feltsville-Glenside Park (Berkeley Heights)

The remnants of this 1845 town include 10 buildings and the archeological remains of a vibrant community.

Drake House Museum (Plainfield)

Once the headquarters of George Washington during the American Revolution, this 1746 farmhouse is undergoing a \$1.2 million restoration to showcase its late 19th-century Victorian architecture, paintings, folk art, period furniture, and decorative arts pieces.

Elizabeth Mid-Town District (Elizabeth)

Filled with historic sites and ethnic restaurants, Elizabeth is a transportation hub to New York City and other New Jersey points.

Evergreen Cemetery (Hillside)

The expansive park-like grounds of this rural burial ground doubles as a nature preserve. More than 10,000 monuments make Evergreen a virtual museum of funerary art and illustrate historical and social developments in American history.

First Presbyterian Church of Elizabeth (Elizabeth)

Restored 18th-century house of worship and meeting place plus historical burial ground with 2,350 grave sites spanning four centuries.

Golf Courses

There are 12 private golf courses in Union County, including Ash Brook, Galloping Hill, Oak Ridge, which are part of the County Parks System.

Deacon Andrew Hetfield House (Mountainside)

A 1760 Colonial farmhouse transformed into a center-hall Georgian residence to meet the needs of the Hetfield family during its 186-year residence.

IKEA (Elizabeth)

Shopping destination off NJ Turnpike exit 13A.

Jersey Gardens Mall (Elizabeth)

Massive shopping complex of 200 outlet/factory/discount stores with a proven track record for attracting domestic and international visitors. Reports tourism as 20 percent of business, including 2,400 motorcoach tour groups in 2007.

Kean Stage/Wilkins Theatre (Union)

Kean University's 950-seat theater featuring various performances.

Liberty Hall Museum at Kean University (Union)

William Livingston – the first Governor of New Jersey, an important Revolutionary War leader, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence – lived here, as did the Kean family for two centuries. Recognized as an Essential Site in the Crossroads of the American Revolution Heritage Area.

Littell-Lord Farmstead (Berkeley Heights)

This rural complex of a 19th-century Gothic cottage, stone springhouse, summer kitchen, and Littell-Lord house recall Union County's agricultural past.

Mercado (Elizabeth)

Hispanic restaurants and discos along Morris Avenue in downtown Elizabeth.

Merchants and Drovers Tavern (Rahway)

Magnificently restored tavern and stagecoach stop with period artifacts and quality interpretive displays.

Miller-Cory House Museum (Westfield)

Eighteenth-century outbuildings and herb and kitchen gardens create a Colonial atmosphere with interactive tours.

Oswald J. Nitschke House (Kenilworth)

One of Kenilworth's original clapboard, wood-frame farmhouses being restored into a living museum and cultural arts center.

Rahway Arts District (Rahway)

Perhaps spurred by the development of the Union County Arts Center, a number of arts-related businesses have opened along Irving Street. Additional relevant businesses are needed to fill in the fabric and create a visitor-friendly arts district. Upgrades to the train station and a new hotel (opening summer 2008) provide great opportunities.

Reeves-Reed Arboretum (Summit)

Thirteen acres of rolling lawns, gardens, and woodland feature seasonal displays of flowers and foliage, natural gardens, and extensive formal gardens.

Ritz Theater (Elizabeth)

Historic theater with 2,700 seats featuring diverse main stage entertainment.

Dr. William Robinson Plantation Museum (Clark)

A rare example of 17th-century architecture, this post-medieval English-style house depicts the history of one of the few physicians in East Jersey at the time. Recent structural improvements and exhibition work provide an enhanced visitor experience.

Roselle Park Museum (Roselle Park)

Photographs, documents, and memorabilia related to the history of Roselle Park.

Salt Box Museum (New Providence)

Unique house museum containing a collection of rare documents, maps, photographs, and oral history tapes.

Summit Playhouse (Summit)

Romanesque library featuring a 120 seat auditorium.

Trailside Nature and Science Center (Mountainside)

This newly renovated facility includes a visitors center and New Jersey's first natural history museum (1941) in the heart of the Watchung Reservation.

Twin Maples (Summit)

Beautiful Neoclassical house with a full-height porch supported by classic columns.

Union County Park System

Approximately 5,000 acres of Union County parkland are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Olmstead Brothers landscape architects planned and designed the park system, which is a highly successful connected greenway type system. The park system includes a variety of recreational assets and historic sites.



Union County Performing Arts Center (Rahway)

Opening spring 2008, this 1,300-seat theater will offer a variety of high-quality performances, including theater, music, dance, and films.

Watchung Reservation (Mountainside)

The pass between the first and second ridges of the Watchung Mountains served as the primary route from New York City through Morristown. Recognized as an Essential Site in the Crossroads of the American Revolution Heritage Area. Today Watchung Reservation is part of the county park system, an eco microcosm that contains with hiking and bridle trails, the Trailside Nature and Science Center, and Deserted Village of Felville.

Woodruff House/Eaton Store Museum (Hillside)

This site includes the original 1735 farmhouse, a reproduction post and beam barn, a 1900 neighborhood store, an archival center, and the Phil Rizzuto All Sports Museum.

INSIGHTS

Based on interviews, research, and site visits, En Route Consulting compiled the following observations in preparation for development of the Tourism Master Plan.

- An organized tourism industry does not exist in Union County. There is no year round dedicated focus on tourism, nor opportunities for tourism businesses to communicate or be educated.
- Union County has suffered from a tourism void left by the absence of a strong Gateway Regional Tourism Council.
- Many stakeholders view tourism as an amenity for Union County residents rather than an industry that can bring people to the County. Those stakeholders that do understand the tourism industry have a regional perspective rather than national or international.
- Hotel occupancy is high and additional hotel rooms are coming online. Weekday occupancy is generated by corporate business. Tourism can strengthen weekend business. Elizabeth is reported to have the second- or third- largest hotel room inventories behind Atlantic City and possibly Newark.
- Visitors are coming to Union County (hotels, airport, Jersey Gardens), but not experiencing all of the County assets. Many visits are one-dimensional (i.e. – shopping only).
- Tourism product exists in Union County – some high-quality sites are “ready for prime time,” and others can become high-quality with investment.
- Jersey Gardens is an existing attractor for the County. In addition to drive market visitors who make a trip specifically for the Gardens, domestic and international visitors experiencing the region include the mall on their itinerary. According to Jersey Gardens:
 - Tourism makes up approximately 20 percent of the mall’s business
 - 2,400 motorcoach groups are projected for 2007 (up 4 percent)
 - The property contracts a tourism consultant in Europe to generate visitation
- Jersey Gardens offers a shuttle to bring people from the airport and back. Visiting shoppers are generated by flight delays and cancellations.
- Approximately 40 percent of visitors to the Gardens are overnight visitors. According to Jersey Gardens, feeder markets include the Midwest and Canada. Packages exist between the mall and area hotels; these packages are driven by the hotels.
- Jersey Gardens is the site of an official New Jersey state visitors center.
- The City of Elizabeth and the Greater Elizabeth Chamber of Commerce have developed a “Shop Play and Stay at 13A” marketing campaign to promote tourism.
- Union County contains many sites of historical significance with a healthy inventory of American Revolution sites. Union County is included in the newly designated Crossroads of the American Revolution Heritage Area. Four of the CAR “essential sites for a viable Revolutionary War experience in New Jersey” are in Union County. Twenty-two National Register Sites in Union County relate to the Revolutionary War. (Source: Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area Feasibility Study)

- Liberty Hall is a well-known site within the New Jersey tourism and historical communities. The site contains an incredible collection of historical artifacts that is still being discovered and researched. Liberty Hall is a tourism gem “in the rough” with great potential.
- Liberty Hall was recently acquired by Kean University. The University’s resources and other tourism assets provide opportunities to increase tourism for Liberty Hall.
- Merchants and Drovers Tavern in Rahway provides an excellent example of quality interpretive displays. According to the Merchants and Drovers Tavern Museum Association, the second floor exhibits were funded through a grant from the New Jersey Department of Transportation.
- Historical sites are owned by various entities – including the state, county, municipalities and historical societies – and have various levels of funding, infrastructure, and interpretation. Collaboration and investment are needed to create a quality and consistent experience for visitors.
- Union County contains significant natural and outdoor assets, including the parks system, golf courses, and Reed-Reeves Arboretum.
- Stakeholders recognize the important and opportunities of the County Park System and are interested in using the system to connect the county for residents and visitors.
- Strong themes identified as potential tourism product include the following. Product does not exist for all of these themes.
 - American History
 - Arts & Culture
 - Industrial/Transportation History
 - Outdoors: Nature & Recreation
 - Ethnic Heritage
- While this project included looking at tourism product related to women’s history and Black history, existing inventory was not identified during meetings and interviews.
- Elizabeth has a strong and growing district of Hispanic restaurants and clubs. Mid-Town Elizabeth visitation is hurt by a perception of being unsafe and not clean. The Elizabeth Downtown Partnership is working on beautification programs.
- Cranford, Westfield, Plainfield, and Rahway are examples of growing “transit villages” with growing downtown districts surrounding their train station.
- Sites and experiences of interest to visitors are not connected through wayfinding or storytelling across the County.
- Stakeholder “wish lists” include increased signage and streetscaping, waterfront development, additional restaurants, and a major visitor draw.
- There is potential for development along the Elizabeth waterfront that can impact tourism, including a ferry connecting Manhattan.
- Experiences at tourism sites are inconsistent and often based on the experience and motivation of the staff/volunteers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to increase economic development from tourism, Union County needs to:

- Develop the infrastructure of a tourism industry.
- Integrate tourism into the economic development conversation.
- Develop basic marketing vehicles to inform and guide visitors, locals, and stakeholders.
- Connect the dots between high-potential tourism sites and enhance visitor experiences.

1) Establish a tourism point person for Union County within the Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs with the funding and tools needed to foster education, coordination, and communication.

Union County tourism needs a leader.

To participate successfully in any industry, Union County must dedicate a professional to understand and work with that industry. The need for a tourism point person is especially important at this time because a formal tourism industry is new for county government and the tourism assets. The current county hiring freeze prevents the Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs (CHA) from adding a dedicated tourism person to its staff. While not ideal, for the time being a current staff member can be assigned increased tourism responsibilities. To assist this tourism point person, the CHA can use contracted services to implement the tourism plan and/or rely on a destination marketing organization (DMO) (see page 6). This point person will be responsible for the implementation of this plan as outlined in the next section. The Tourism Committee formed to lead this Master Plan project should be continued and formalized to serve as an advisory board to the tourism point person.

2) Develop ongoing communication between tourism industry partners and stakeholders.

Union County tourism needs to be part of the conversation.

Thanks to this project, people have begun to talk about tourism. But tourism is not included in economic development meetings. In general, government leaders are not talking about tourism. Tourism assets and leaders are not talking to each other. The Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs and the Tourism Committee need to foster ongoing communication to strengthen the tourism community, and represent tourism in all levels of government. Stakeholders, business leaders, and residents need to discuss the potential impact tourism can have on Union County and its municipalities and decide where they want the tourism road to lead.

This discussion must reach beyond county lines to include regional destination marketing organizations, state-wide organizations, and the New Jersey Office of Travel and Tourism. A visit to the state's tourism Web site, www.visitnj.org, provides a list of featured destinations that does not include Union County (above). Union County needs to make sure the state and other partners are aware of the county's tourism assets so that visitors can be made aware.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://www.state.nj.us/travel/>. The page features a navigation menu on the left with categories like Attractions, Outdoor Activities, Arts & Culture, Historical Attractions, Shopping, Sports Venues, and 101 Fun Things to Do. The main content area has a header "Great destinations in any direction." followed by a paragraph about autumn in the Garden State. Below this is a "Featured Destinations:" section with a list of locations and their respective websites:

- Atlantic City - Atlanticcitynj.com
- Barneget Light - www.barnlight.com - [State Park](http://StatePark.com)
- Camden - camdenwaterfront.com - visitsouthjersey.com
- Cape May - discovercapemay.com - capemaytimes.com
- Morristown - Morristourism.org
- Oceanport - www.monmouthpark.com
- Pinelands - www.pineypower.com
- Princeton - visitprinceton.org
- Readington - www.hunterdonballooning.com
- Ringoes - www.unionvillevineyards.com
- Rutgers - newbrunswick.com - GoCentralJersey.com
- Spring Lake - www.springlake.org - www.nimns.com
- Sussex - Skylandstourism.org
- Vernon - crystalgolfresort.com

3) Develop basic tourism marketing tools to communicate with visitors and generate revenue.

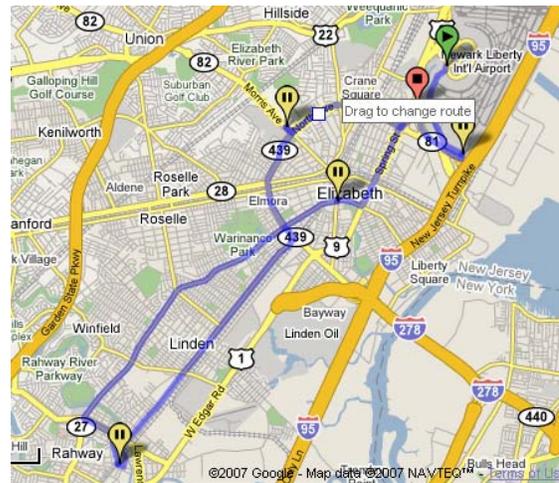
Union County tourism needs to tell its story.

If a visitor did hear about Union County, how would they know what is there to see and do? When a county resident has visiting family, or a business person is staying in a county hotel, where can they find information about the historic sites, parks, shopping districts, and cultural assets? Union County needs to develop a set of print and online vehicles that can lead people to places where they can spend their money. While development of a visitors guide and Web site may sound expensive, they can be cost-effective and possibly revenue generating. Many tourism offices and destination marketing organizations outsource the production of these vehicles to a third party who sells advertising to businesses that wish to reach potential visitors. Revenue sharing models often provide the tourism office with a share of the advertising revenues. The county already produces maps that can be transformed into visitor-friendly resources. And the Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs can create a dedicated phone line for visitor inquiries that can include a recorded message with basic information and provide Web site and visitors center details.

4) Capitalize on existing and high-potential attractors to draw and keep overnight visitors.

Union County tourism needs to connect the dots.

Union County has a number of high-traffic and high-value tourism assets that have significant drawing power and quality visitor experiences. These existing assets can help lay the foundation for the county's tourism industry. By connecting Jersey Gardens, Liberty Hall, Kean University, Mid-Town Elizabeth, the Union County Arts Center, and Downtown Rahway, visitors can experience history, arts, shopping, and dining within a 19-mile loop that encompasses Newark Liberty Airport and one of the largest concentrations of hotels in the state. This itinerary can be developed into hotel packages and familiarization tours, and be used as a model for future tourism product development.



With the established communication between tourism partners and stakeholders, and the new visitors guide and Web site, Union County has the tools to begin promotion of this itinerary and welcoming visitors. This model itinerary can also share lessons and best practices with tourism stakeholders across the county.

5) Develop a plan to transform Four Centuries in a Weekend (or similar weekend) into tourism product.

Union County tourism needs a tourism-generating event.

Four Centuries in a Weekend works – it is well planned and executed; has the support of various tourism stakeholders; and has a budget for marketing and promotion. For our purposes

however, this event is designed for county residents and is not visitor-friendly. The Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs should meet with its Four Centuries partners to determine if the weekend should become a visitor draw, or if the model can be duplicated at another time of year for visitors. To transform the weekend into a tourism product, the basic mindset must change from a “sampling” of Union County sites to a “showcase.” For example, during this year’s Four Centuries Weekend, a visit to Liberty Hall included limited access to the main house, no access to the fire museum, and limited visitor amenities. In short, the visitor experience was tightened since the weekend was admission free. Many of the smaller sites, some of which are not open on a regular basis, pulled out all the stops to create the highlight visitor experience of the year.

In addition to changing the focus and scope of the event, Four Centuries will require the addition of hotel packages and funds to market the event outside of the county. Funding can be generated from corporate/business sponsors, grants, or a participation fee from for-profit tourism assets participating in the event.

6) Develop tourism assets with an eye to the larger tourism picture.

Union County tourism needs to begin planning for the future.

Once tourism has a seat at the economic development table, and the infrastructure for a sustainable tourism industry is in place, the entire county must work together to keep the ball rolling. When the Elizabeth waterfront is developed, and a ferry brings visitors from Manhattan, what amenities will be in place to ensure a positive experience and maximum economic impact beyond Jersey Gardens? What are the missing pieces in the tourism experience that can be filled in over time? How can the expansive park system be used to connect tourism assets and experiences? While this Master Plan lays a beginning road map, continued planning will be needed to ensure growth and success.

IMPLEMENTATION

The following activities provide concrete steps toward achieving the aforementioned recommendations.

❑ Establish tourism point person for Union County with funding to educate, coordinate and communicate.

Develop job description for full-time tourism point person and budget to implement plan. During hiring freeze, identify point person within Office of Cultural and Heritage staff and assign or contract duties.

❑ Establish a permanent Union County Tourism Committee.

Create goals and expectations for Tourism Committee and job descriptions for committee members. Solicit committee members to represent all aspects of tourism industry and partners. Schedule monthly meetings. Identify opportunities for Committee members to interact with tourism stakeholders.

❑ Identify a destination marketing organization (DMO) to promote Union County.

In accordance with the New Jersey Office of Travel and Tourism's new DMO cooperative marketing grant structure, identify an existing DMO to work with Union County and represent the county's tourism assets through this state program. The tourism point person should become a board member of the DMO, and the Tourism Committee should be involved in DMO activities and programs.

❑ Actively participate in the Crossroads of the American Revolution

Contact Cate Litvack, Executive Director, Crossroads of the American Revolution (CAR), to establish a formal connection with Union County. A member of the Tourism Committee can be designated as the CAR liaison to represent and work with Union County CAR sites.

❑ Develop a master database of tourism stakeholders.

Create three separate databases for tourism assets/businesses, non-tourism stakeholders, and tourism partner organizations, including mailing and e-mail information. The tourism resource database should include a code to identify each record as a hotel/lodging, shopping, historic, dining, arts/culture, sports/recreation, entertainment, etc.

❑ Present a plan for Union County tourism to government and tourism stakeholders

Schedule presentations with various levels of stakeholders to educate them about the value of tourism, Union County tourism assets, and the County's tourism plan. Share the plan with statewide partners in tourism, including the New Jersey Historical Society and Heritage Tourism Task Force.

❑ Communicate with tourism stakeholders through electronic newsletters.

Develop monthly e-newsletters to communicate national, state, and regional tourism news; Union County tourism events and news; information about tourism assets; and education about the value of the tourism industry.

❑ Develop a partnership with Kean University to integrate tourism, university, and educational resources into the tourism industry.

As the administrator of Liberty Hall and Wilkins Theatre, it is important to have Kean University as an active partner in Union County's tourism industry. Kean's resources can play an important role in the development of tourism product, industry infrastructure, and marketing. Kean's educational assets can also provide valuable tools through internships and class projects, as well as student involvement in the tourism industry. Kean can find value for its students and resources for its educational mission through a partnership with tourism.

☐ Host a series of educational training programs for tourism stakeholders.

Plan three or four educational programs for tourism assets and stakeholders featuring speakers about: 1) Introduction to Tourism/Value of Tourism, 2) Marketing, 3) Group Tours, 4) Packaging and Product Development.

☐ Include a tourism report in economic development and related meetings.

Work with county officials to include tourism as part of appropriate economic development meetings and report.

☐ Communicate regularly with other destination marketing organizations.

Maintain an open dialogue with the New Jersey Office of Travel and Tourism, Meadowlands Liberty Convention and Visitors Bureau, Middlesex County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Morristown Visitors Center. Include these DMOs on Union County tourism mailing and e-mail lists, and attend their events. Co-sponsor programs when appropriate.

☐ Create a printed visitors guide and map with Union County tourism information.

Solicit input from DMOs and tourism offices about best practices to create a visitors guide. If appropriate, submit an RFP to third party vendors. Identify County resources to repurpose existing maps to create a visitor-friendly map that highlights major routes and sites of interest. Include Union County visitors guide information in any conversation with a partner DMO.

☐ Create a Web site with Union County tourism information.

Identify county or third party resources to create a new Web site or section of an existing site to host visitor information, including sites of interest and visitor services. Include Union County Web site information in any conversation with a partner DMO.

☐ Establish a visitor information phone number and e-mail for Union County.

Create a dedicated phone number for visitor inquiries. This number can be answered by Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs staff, or use a recorded message with basic visitor information, Web site and visitors center details, and instructions to request a visitors guide. Include a visitor information phone number in any conversation with a partner DMO.

☐ Educate front line staff

Develop a program to continually educate hotel front desk and sales staff, as well as front line staff at other tourism assets such as Jersey Gardens Mall and State visitors centers. Provide printed information about major sites of interest. Encourage fan trips for front line staff to visit sites of interest.

☐ Develop an easy-to-package Union County itinerary.

Create a one-night and two-night itinerary using Jersey Gardens, Liberty Hall, Kean University, Downtown Elizabeth, the Union County Arts Center, and Downtown Rahway and related tourism assets. Include information about this itinerary in all visitor information vehicles. Present the itinerary to hotels for packaging and promotion.

☐ Explore a visitor shuttle to connect airport, train, and Jersey Gardens to visitor sites.

Identify county and private-sector opportunities to develop a visitor shuttle to connect major points of interest and transportation hubs. Explore grants from the New Jersey Department of Transportation.

☐ Evaluate the Four Centuries in A Weekend model as a tourism generator.

Meet with county and partner organizations to discuss opportunities to expand Four Centuries into a tourism draw or to duplicate the model for a tourism-focused event.

□ Develop a plan to educate County residents about tourism assets.

Identify opportunities to communicate information about tourism assets to residents to encourage “back yard tourism.”

- Present tourism information to local media to generate stories about “things to do” with families, kids, and visiting friends and family.
- Organize a fam tour for local media and stakeholders.
- Share tourism information with major employers to communicate to current and potential employees.
- Communicate information to students at local universities.
- Provide opportunities for educators to integrate County assets into curriculum.



Union County
We're Connected to You!

**A Service of the
Board of
Chosen Freeholders**



Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders



Angel G. Estrada
Chairman



Alexander Mirabella
Vice-Chair



**Chester
Holmes**



**Bette Jane
Kowalski**



**Rick
Proctor**



**Deborah P.
Scanlon**



**Daniel P.
Sullivan**



**Rayland
Van Blake**



**Nancy
Ward**

George W. Devanney, County Manager

M. Elizabeth Genievich, C.M.C., M.P.A., Deputy County Manager
Director of Administrative Services

Nicole L. DiRado, R.M.C., M.P.A., Clerk of the Board

Alfred J. Faella, Director, Department of Parks and Community Renewal

Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs Staff

Barbara A. Fuller, *Administrator*
Kathy Kakalettris, *Tourism Coordinator*

Union County Office of Cultural & Heritage Affairs, Department of Parks & Community Renewal
633 Pearl Street, Elizabeth, NJ 07202 Phone: (908) 558-2550 Fax (908) 352-3513 NJ Relay Users: 711
website: www.ucnj.org/cultural email: kkakalettris@ucnj.org