



HARDY COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

2023 ANNUAL REPORT & 2024 MARKETING PLAN





HARDY COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

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March 27, 2024

WV State Auditors' Office – lgs@wvsao.gov , Attn: Shellie Humphries
WV Joint Committee on Government & Finance –
https://www.wvlegislature.gov/Reports/Agency_Reports/AgencyReports.cfm
WVACVB – Jnuzum@bowlesrice.com
Hardy County Commission - hdycommi@court.state.wv.us
Town of Moorefield - rick.freeman@townofmoorefield.com
Town of Wardensville - betsy@wardensville.com

Dear WV State Auditor's Office, WV Joint Committee on Government & Finance, and WV Association of Convention & Visitor Bureaus,

As you are aware with the passing of Senate Bill 488 during the 2021 West Virginia Legislature's Regular Session several new requirements have been implemented on CVBs to qualify for distributions of Hotel Occupancy taxes by the county(s) and or the municipality(s) we serve.

In compliance with W.Va. Code §7-18-13a, CVBs are to now report to the WWSAO, the WV Joint Committee on Government & Finance, and the WVACVB 90 days following the end of the CVB's fiscal year the following:

- Balance sheet – annually,
- Income statement - annually, and
- Either an audit or a financial review – triennially W.Va. Code § 7-18-14.

In addition, CVBs are to be accredited by an accrediting body such as the WV Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (WVACVB) W.Va. Code §7-18-13a(b) which confirms compliance with the following industry standards as follows:

- Annual budget,
- Budget allocation within the industry standard of 40% - 40% - 20% (Marketing, Personnel, Administrative),
- Marketing plan targeting markets outside of 50 miles of their destination,
- Full time executive director,
- Physical office/ Visitor Center,
- Website, and
- Annual reporting to all the CVBs funding entities.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Hardy County Convention & Visitors Bureau, we respectfully submit the required information and confirm that Hardy County Convention & Visitors Bureau is in full compliance with all WV Code 7-18-13 requirements.

If you have any questions, please contact me at directorhccvb@gmail.com or (304) 897-8700 or Pete Sullivan, Board President at peterasullivan@yahoo.com or (304)389-6627.

Sincerely,

Michele Moure-Reeves, Executive Director

Peter Sullivan, HCCVB Board President

Attachments:

Income statement (Jan 1, 2023 – Dec 31, 2023), Balance sheet (Dec 31, 2023), Annual report (2023), and Annual audit (2023).



2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Pete Sullivan - President
- David Workman - Vice President
- Amanda West - Treasurer
- Mary Burgess
- Colby Caldwell
- Rick Daniele
- Marlene England
- Rick Freeman
- Jennifer Sampler
- Morgan See
- Hunter Williams
- Michele Mouré-Reeves - Ex Director

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION - CASH BASIS

(Jan 1, 2023 - Dec 31, 2023) Alexander Consulting Business Services, AC





Hardy County Convention & Visitors Bureau Statement of Financial Position

As of December 31, 2023

	Total
ASSETS	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	
CD-Summit Community Bank	1,001.05
Summit Community Bank - General	303,085.10
Summit Project Interest	13,772.25
Total Summit Community Bank - General	\$ 316,857.35
Total Bank Accounts	\$ 317,858.40
Total Current Assets	\$ 317,858.40
Fixed Assets	
Accumulated Depreciation	-3,281.48
Furniture/Fixtures	3,281.48
Total Fixed Assets	\$ 0.00
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 317,858.40
LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Credit Cards	
25000 Master Card	767.16
Total Credit Cards	\$ 767.16
Other Current Liabilities	
24000 Payroll Liabilities	1,183.84
Grant Funds Held as Agent	10,000.00
Total Other Current Liabilities	\$ 11,183.84
Total Current Liabilities	\$ 11,951.00
Long-Term Liabilities	
5001 EIDL Loan	20,510.00
Total Long-Term Liabilities	\$ 20,510.00
Total Liabilities	\$ 32,461.00
Fund Balances	
35000 Restricted Funds	\$ 61,295.73
Unrestricted Net Assets	139,551.12
Excess Revenue Over Expenses	84,550.55
Total Fund Balances	\$ 285,397.40
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FUND BALANCE	\$ 317,858.40

No Assurance Provided on these financial statements.

Substantially all disclosures ordinarily included in financial statements prepared on the tax-basis of accounting are not included.

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY - CASH BASIS

(Jan 1, 2023 - Dec 31, 2023) Alexander Consulting Business Services, AC





Hardy County Convention & Visitors Bureau
Statement of Activity
January - December 2023

Table with columns for Revenue, Expenditures, and Total. Revenue includes Income-Operating (4000, 4010, 4015, 4900) and Total Revenue (\$183,361.54). Expenditures include OPERATIONAL EXPENSES (1000 STAFF AND PAYROLL, 2020 Office Expense, 2025 Insurance, 2028 WV State Filing Fees, 2040 Board Expenses, 2050 Dues & Memberships, 2051 Subscriptions, 2060 Educational Expenses, 2080 Professional Services, 2090 Out of Budget/Contingencies) and 5000 MARKETING EXPENSES (5050 Community Outreach Committee, 5060 Marketing Products, 5072 Marketing Committee) with a Total of \$1,550.00.

No Assurance Provided on these financial statements.

Substantially all disclosures ordinarily included in financial statements prepared on the tax-basis of accounting are not included.



Hardy County Convention & Visitors Bureau
Statement of Activity
January - December 2023

Table with columns for categories and Total. Rows include Marketing Services & Contracts, ADVERTISING, OPERATIONAL EXPENSES, RESTRICTED Revenue, and RESTRICTED Expenses.

No Assurance Provided on these financial statements.

Substantially all disclosures ordinarily included in financial statements prepared on the tax-basis of accounting are not included.

VISIT HARDY 2024 ANNUAL & RESTRICTED BUDGETS

(Jan 1, 2024 - Dec 31, 2024)





2024 Annual Operating & Marketing Budget		
BALANCE SHEET		
	Estimated Total Carry over - 1/1/2024	\$ 316,857.00
	Restricted Funds (Carry over)	\$ (153,772.00)
	Funds to support Restricted Funds Budget	\$ (70,000.00)
9020	Balance of checking account cash carried over	\$ 93,085.00
INCOME		
	Account	
4000	Estimated Hotel/Motel Tax Income - 2024	\$ 180,000.00
5000	Miscellaneous Income	
	2024 Income Total	\$ 273,085.00
EXPENSES		
	Account	
10000	STAFF AND PAYROLL	
1010	Employee Salary	\$ 42,000.00
1020	Employer Payroll Taxes & Workers Comp	\$ 4,000.00
1028	Reimbursement for medical insurance premium	\$ 5,550.00
1030	Non-Marketing Support Staff (Contractual)	\$ 20,000.00
	Subtotal Staff & Payroll	\$ 71,550.00
20000	OPERATIONAL EXPENSES	
2080	Professional Services	
2084	Accounting	\$ 4,500.00
2085	Legal	\$ 200.00
2030	Facilities	
2031	Repairs and Maintenance	
2020	Office	
2010	Utilities	\$ 500.00
2012	Telephone/Internet	\$ 700.00
2023	Postage	\$ 750.00
2024	Office Supplies	\$ 500.00
2022	Software	\$ 2,000.00
2021	Equipment	\$ 2,000.00
2025	Insurance	
2026	Directors & Officers Liability	\$ 600.00
2027	General Liability	\$ 400.00
2040	Board Expenses	\$ 500.00
2028	WV State Filing Fees	\$ 300.00
2050	Dues/Membership	\$ 3,000.00
2051	Subscriptions	\$ 300.00
2060	Education Expenses:	
2071	Conferences/Education	\$ 1,500.00
2070	Travel & Lodging	\$ 3,000.00
2073	Travel (Mileage reimbursement)	\$ 2,500.00
9006	EIDL Loan Repayment	\$ 2,600.00
2090	Out of Budget/Contingencies	\$ 7,985.00
	Subtotal Operating Expenses	\$ 33,835.00



50000	MARKETING EXPENSES	
5010	Marketing Support Staff	\$ 10,000.00
5030	Marketing Services & Contracts	
5031	Website	\$ 10,000.00
5033	Marketing Development Services	\$ 4,000.00
5032	Graphic Design	\$ 3,000.00
5034	Photography	\$ 18,000.00
5035	Social Media	\$ 500.00
5036	Videography	\$ 5,000.00
5040	Tourism Promotion Grants	
5041	Tourism Advertising Program	\$ 5,000.00
5042	HCBQT Grants	\$ 2,000.00
5050	Community Outreach Committee	\$ 1,000.00
5054	Donations to Community	\$ 1,500.00
5052	Scholarship/Internship	\$ 1,500.00
5070	Special Projects Committee	\$ 1,500.00
5072	Marketing Committee	
5060	Marketing Products	
5062	Hardy County Visitors Guide	\$ 10,000.00
5063	Hills of Blue & Gray Map/Brochure	
5061	Ride the High 5	
5068	Other Printing/Production	\$ 2,000.00
5065	Civil War Trail Markers	\$ 1,200.00
	Subtotal Marketing	\$ 76,200.00
60000 ADVERTISING		
6020	General Advertising	
6040	WVTO Co-op Advertising	\$ 3,000.00
6029	Community Ads	
6028	Heritage Weekend	\$ 500.00
6022	Contracted Advertising	\$ 80,000.00
6023	Non-Contract Advertising	\$ 5,000.00
6044	Potomac Highlands Regional Advertising	\$ 3,000.00
6045	Ride the High 5 Advertising	
	Subtotal Advertising	\$ 91,500.00
	Total Non-Operating /Program Expenses	\$ 167,700.00
GRAND TOTALS		
61.41%	Total Marketing & Advertising Expenses	\$ 167,700.00
26.20%	Total Staff Expenses	\$ 71,550.00
12.39%	Total Operating Expenses	\$ 33,835.00
	Total 2024 Annual Budget Expenses	\$ 273,085.00
	Total 2024 Restricted Funds Budget	\$ 223,772.00
	Total 2024 Budget inc reserved & restricted funds	\$ 496,857.00



2024 Restricted Funds Budget		
INCOME OVERVIEW		
Restricted Funds carried over from 2023 - 1/1/2024		
HCCVB Higgins House		\$ 32,000.00
Town of Moorefield/ Higgins House Funds		\$ 50,000.00
Hardy County Commission/ Higgins House Funds		\$ 50,000.00
WV Humanities Council /Higgins House Funds		\$ 8,000.00
HCCVB T Fund Interest		\$ 13,772.00
	<i>subtotal 2023 income carryover</i>	\$ 153,772.00
New Restricted Income in 2024		
WV Humanities Council /Higgins House Funds		\$ 12,000.00
New Restricted Grant Funds		\$ 18,000.00
Unrestricted Funds from HCCVB Budget (<i>Committed matching funds</i>)		\$ 30,000.00
HCCVB T Fund Interest		\$ 10,000.00
	<i>subtotal new restricted income in 2024</i>	\$ 70,000.00
	TOTAL RESTRICTED INCOME 2024	\$ 223,772.00
RESTRICTED INCOME ITEMIZED DETAIL		
7000	Higgins House Museum Development Income	
7001	WV Humanities Council /Higgins House Funds	\$ 20,000.00
7002	HCCVB Higgins House - Matching Funds for WVHC Grant	\$ 15,000.00
7003	HCCVB Higgins House - for Americorp fees	\$ 6,000.00
	<i>subtotal Museum income</i>	\$ 41,000.00
	Higgins House Construction Income	
7100	Hardy County Commission/Higgins House Funds	\$ 50,000.00
7101	Town of Moorefield/Higgins House Funds	\$ 50,000.00
7102	Future grant funds	\$ 18,000.00
7103	HCCVB Higgins House	\$ 10,000.00
7104	T-fund Account Interest	\$ 23,772.00
	<i>subtotal Construction income</i>	\$ 151,772.00
7200	Hardy County Heritage Trail Income	
7201	Unrestricted Funds from HCCVB Budget/ Mountain Heritage Trails	\$ 12,000.00
7203	Unrestricted Funds from HCCVB Budget/Civil War Trails Trails	\$ 2,000.00
7204	Future grant funds - Civil War Trails Org	\$ 2,500.00
	<i>subtotal Heritage Trail income</i>	\$ 16,500.00
7300	Mountain Bike Trails Income	
7301	Unrestricted Funds from HCCVB Budget- Match to MTB Trail Grants	\$ 14,500.00
	<i>subtotal LR Mtn Bike Trail income</i>	\$ 14,500.00
	Total Itemized Income	\$ 223,772.00
EXPENSES		
80000	HIGGINS HOUSE	
8050	Museum Development Expenses	\$ 41,000.00
8051	Fixtures, equipment and supplies for museum	\$ 15,000.00
8052	Interpretive, display & educational material	\$ 20,000.00
8053	AmeriCorp Volunteer	\$ 6,000.00
8060	Architectural Services Expenses	\$ -
8075	Construction Expenses	\$ 151,772.00
8076	Hardy County Commission/Higgins House Funds	\$ 50,000.00
8077	Town of Moorefield/Higgins House Funds	\$ 50,000.00
8079	Other construction costs	
	<i>subtotal Higgins House expenses</i>	\$ 192,772.00
8100	Hardy County Heritage Trails Expenses	\$ 16,500.00
8101	Mountain Heritage Trail AFNHA AmeriCorps Volunteer	\$ 4,500.00
8102	Mountain Heritage Trail Grant Match	\$ 6,500.00
8103	Fairfax Line	\$ 1,000.00
8104	Future Heritage Project Development	\$ 4,500.00
8400	Mountain Bike Trails Expenses	\$ 14,500.00
	Total Restricted Funds Expenses	\$ 223,772.00

VISIT HARDY 2023 ANNUAL REPORT
AND 2024 MARKETING PLAN





Hardy County Convention & Visitors Bureau Visit Hardy 2023 Annual Report & 2024 Marketing Plan

*Developed and written by Michele Moure-Reeves, Executive Director
Marketing Plan reviewed by the Marketing Committee Chair*

Visit Hardy's mission is to strengthen and sustain Hardy County's tourism industry through education and collaboration and by promoting the awareness, visibility, and uniqueness of the County as a travel destination.

Visit Hardy's vision acknowledges that we exist to strengthen and promote Hardy County's tourism industry and to do that successfully, we must:

- Support community development efforts that diversify, strengthen and expand Hardy County's tourism industry thus economically sustaining the County;
- Develop and maintain local and regional partnerships engaging in regular and supportive discourse and collaborations;
- Support our community and local tourism partners through education, information sharing, and grants
- Recognize the social and environmental impacts of tourism, the need for inclusivity, and the imperative that the rural character of Hardy County is protected while Visit Hardy responsibly grows tourism.

2023 was a year of planning:

- The Hardy County Convention & Visitors Bureau began referring to ourselves in 2022 as Visit Hardy rather than our full business name, or HCCVB, which often leaves people wondering what we do. Though a small change, we feel Visit Hardy is easier to remember, understand, and reference.
- Utilizing information gathered from our 2022 surveys, Visit Hardy's strategic planning meetings (held in January and March 2023) were facilitated by Doug Arbogast, WVU Extension Service. Input from key tourism related businesses, municipal and county leaders, and project participants invited to the meetings provided the basis for the Visit Hardy Strategic Plan 2023-2024. Completed and approved by the Board in June 2023, the 18-month plan is considered by the Board to be a framework, a guide for moving the organization and our projects forward. The plan is attached.
- Visit Hardy changed accounting firms at the end of 2023 and the restructuring of our chart of accounts and budget organization changed significantly. This restructuring will make it much simpler to keep the restricted funds from getting mingled with the regular operating and marketing funds. In addition, we opened a separate bank account for the restricted funds.
- Consistent with the other changes taking place, the 2024 Marketing Plan is being approached differently this year as well. This is explained more fully in the Marketing Plan.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE BEST OF WEST VIRGINIA



2023 BEST IN HARDY COUNTY

BEST ARTIST

**Byron
Gaylord**



BEST NEW RESTAURANT

**Mack's
Bingo Kitchen**



2023 BEST IN THE POTOMAC HIGHLANDS

BAKERY

**Wardensville
Garden Market**



PLACE TO SHOP

WordPlay



CASUAL DINING

Mack's Bingo Kitchen



@visithardywv

VISITHARDYWV.COM



2024 Marketing Plan

While we have identified and contracted for specific print and digital advertising reaching our target markets (DC Metro Area, Virginia, Maryland, eastern Pennsylvania, western North Carolina, and within West Virginia) and keeping Hardy County visible while we undertake our marketing changes, Visit Hardy will focus on:

- Hiring a consultant to guide this effort and a part-time contract support staff.
 - Developing a new marketing campaign designed to provide us with metrics to guide our marketing practices into 2025 and beyond.
 - Updating our website.
 - Building our photography/video library.
 - Publishing a new travel guide.
-
- The Marketing Campaign for 2024 is being driven by the need to have metrics to guide our future marketing plans and practices into 2025 and beyond. Visit Hardy has never had enough income to “experiment” with our marketing efforts. Due to the increase in hotel/motel occupancy income (a result of capturing the taxes paid by the vacation rental market), Visit Hardy is able to work with a marketing consultant in developing a plan that not only links our various marketing efforts but also updates our branding.
 - The work of Visit Hardy has been the responsibility of its one staff person, the executive director, who, with the support of the board, has managed the administration, marketing, programs, and project development for the organization. This year, we will be contracting with a part-time marketing and administrative support person.
 - Updating our website is a critical step. We drive our advertising to our website, and aside from regular maintenance, it has not been significantly updated since 2017. We have contracted with our original website developer who will begin the process in late April.
 - Building our photography/video library is an absolute necessity. We have selected a production company and are currently in negotiation. We can update the website prior to getting new photos and plug them in when they are available. However, we cannot begin work on the travel guide until both the website and production work has been completed.
 - Publishing a new travel guide will be the final component of the marketing plan to be completed. It is estimated that this work will not begin until fall. We are not yet sure if we will do our own production or if we will hire the job out. Our previous travel literature has always been in the form of a brochure. For 2024, Visit Hardy will publish a more comprehensive guide.

Advertising

Our target audience will remain the same – Hardy County is two to three hours away from 8.5 million+ potential visitors from the DC/MD/VA Metro Area, central and western Virginia, eastern Pennsylvania, and the in-state markets. We have made a tentative reach into western North Carolina as well.

The advertising choices reflect a focus on outdoor recreation. The 2024 fairs and festivals are showing



an increase in activity and as they are confirmed, we will target relevant advertising for them as well. We are particularly interested in ads in publications that provide advertorial opportunities, digital offerings and/or editorial content about Hardy County. This gives us an opportunity to showcase specific sites and/or events and increases the amount of information we can disseminate.

There has been minimal success with our attempts to have event organizers partner with Visit Hardy on ads and/or to have them apply for the Visit Hardy Tourism Advertising Program grants. Advertising is expensive and most organizations are managing on meager budgets, and they do not seem to adequately plan for or set aside funds for marketing their events for the following year. We are also finding that, as with listings, more and more organizations have turned to social media for advertising, feeling that it is sufficient.

Visit Hardy's future advertising will be linked to the specific campaigns but, until that planning has taken place, the 2024 contracted advertising, for the most part, will reflect the above. Apart from a few special travel issues and a continued social media presence, Visit Hardy does minimal winter advertising as Hardy County is primarily a three-season vacation area. We maintain optimal placement in the winter WV Living 'Best of WV' issue and have focused our Facebook/Instagram efforts on increasing the voting for county businesses and improving their chances for recognition.

Travel Literature

The Potomac Highlands Regional Travel Guide was created in partnership with seven of the eight Highlands counties and with New South Media and WVDT. Originally intended to be inserted into the Washington Post in May of 2020, the printing and publication was postponed until summer 2021. It remains a viable piece of literature and we will continue to distribute the travel guide in 2024.

The Visit Hardy travel brochure was printed at the end of 2022 as a temporary solution to the need for an updated travel guide. As mentioned earlier, Visit Hardy is undergoing significant planning this year and the changes to our 2024 travel guide will reflect the marketing decisions that will arise from the new plan which will be ready later in the year. The new travel guide will be redesigned and printed by the fall of '24.

The Lost River Valley map was reprinted in early 2020 and we received it just in time for everything to be shut down and the distribution of travel literature was suspended. While there are a couple of lodging sites that have changed, it is still a valid piece for distribution. It will be reprinted in 2025 as will a similar brochure for the South Branch Valley.

The Civil War brochure (Hills of Blue and Grey) and the Ride the High 5 Motorcycle Map are multi-county projects, and neither are in our budget for this year. They both need updating and reprinting and we would hope to see that happen in 2025.

The Marketing Committee has recommended a "things to do" rack card listing activities visitors may find of interest while traveling in Hardy County. This rack card will be designed in conjunction with the new travel guide.



Website:

The Visit Hardy website remains a dynamic, viable, and significant resource for information about Hardy County for both residents and visitors. Lodging, restaurants, events, shopping, heritage sites, and recreational opportunities are listed on the site. Our advertising, editorials, signage, and Facebook/Instagram posts are intended to drive the viewer to our website, and the success of these efforts is reflected in the growing number of website visitors. However, aside from adding a page to the website for local stories, photos, and project reports/documents, no significant updating has happened. This is one of the main projects for 2024.

Internal Marketing:

The Community Engagement Committee, responsible for internal marketing, will make a concerted effort to encourage use of our Tourism Advertising Grant program, as well as the Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail grant. Eagerly anticipating the capacity of this committee to reach our tourism businesses, organizations, and community groups, we anticipate a boost in the number of applicants for our Tourism Advertising Grants. We are also expecting an increase in our visibility in the coming year through local newspaper articles, educational opportunities, and direct person-to-person outreach.

Board Members and the Executive Director will make themselves available to speak with groups about who we are, what we do, and the support that Visit Hardy can provide. And, to further our visibility, decals (cling films) with Visit Hardy's website and QR code were made available for local businesses to post on their doors or windows.

One of the most challenging communication issues that we face, however, is getting contact information for our local event planners. Many of our local volunteer organizations/community groups don't have websites or up-to-date Facebook pages, and often have different contact persons each year. This usually means that posting current information on our Facebook page and website requires a good bit of lead-chasing to confirm the information for that year. It is still difficult to get organizations to post their event listings on our website or other listing sites. Listings are a free opportunity to market events but the consistent changing of volunteers year to year causes that practice to slide away. This issue is not unique to Hardy County.

VISIT HARDY COMMITTEES, PROGRAMS, AND PROJECTS





Visit Hardy Committees, Programs, and Projects

Standing Committees

Each Visit Hardy board member volunteered or was assigned to a specific committee where the work of Visit Hardy is accomplished. The committee chairs schedule the meetings and present the committee reports to the full board for their approval. The board members have been participating fully in the planning process, a process that is integral to the success of Visit Hardy.

- The Community Engagement Committee will focus on internal marketing, increasing the visibility of Visit Hardy within Hardy County, management of our Tourism Advertising Grant program and the Hardy County Barn Quilt grants, the new scholarship venture, and the Donations to the Community program.
- The Marketing Committee will focus on our external marketing, reviewing the marketing plan, and advertising schedule, and working with our social media contractor to increase our online presence. As explained in the 2024 Marketing Plan, the role of the committee will include oversight of the significant work to be accomplished in 2024.
- The Special Projects Committee originally researched and initiated projects but the development of new projects is currently on hold. Presently there are several projects that are active or in early development, enough to keep us well occupied for a while.
 - The Hardy County Travel Information Center and Higgins House Museum
 - Hardy County Heritage Trails
 - Lost River State Park MTB Trail System
 - The Fairfax Line Documentation

Committee work on the Higgins House and travel information center is paramount for 2024 and the development of the Lost River State Park MTB Trail System, an important tourism asset for Hardy County, will be an ongoing and long-term project.

Projects & Programs

Successful grant applications from previous years (written by the executive director) have provided restricted funds enabling Visit Hardy to expand the county's tourism assets and to fully realize our mission. Community individuals that Visit Hardy has been working with have now developed nonprofit organizations (Mountain Heritage Trails and Lost River Trails Coalition), gained their IRS 501c3 status, and are building their organizational and volunteer capacity. They have taken full responsibility for their organizations/projects with Visit Hardy serving in a consultant/volunteer capacity when asked.

The various projects undertaken by Visit Hardy reflect our efforts to increase the number of assets available for the community and visitors to enjoy, to better understand our sense of place, and to provide activities to encourage visitors to stay longer. Our outdoor recreation –paddling, hiking, cycling, fishing, hunting, ice skating, horseback riding – keep our visitors very busy but there is a need for additional



assets and activities, especially for those who are not outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

In addition to marketing the tourism industry for Hardy County, a primary responsibility of Visit Hardy is to support existing and develop new tourism assets. To that end, Visit Hardy has advocated for and supported the following projects through grant writing, planning, and organizational development assistance:

- **Lost River State Park Mountain Bike Trail System:** Working with the park (LRSP) and Lost River Trails Coalition (LRTC), a community organization, Visit Hardy has written and been awarded several grants for the Coalition for their organizational development, trail activities, and creation of a fully accessible mountain bike trail system. In addition, Visit Hardy has attended trail related conferences both in person and virtually, and sought partners to assure the success of the project, served as a liaison between WVU Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative, LRSP and LRTC, and worked with LRTC to strengthen the organization (NPS RTC Assistance Program grant). LRTC announced receipt of a 2023 International Mountain Bicycling Association Trail Accelerator Grant, an important achievement for the organization. The resulting Concept Plan and Design Brief outlines the work to be accomplished within the first two zones located in the north of the park. Completing the first two zones of the trail system will be a \$1.4 to \$1.7 million dollar project and will be a major economic boon for the county.

LRTC has successfully raised the match necessary for the Recreational Trails Program Grant. The Hardy County Commission has agreed to be the support organization for the project (with IMBA's Trail Solutions), and we are awaiting notification of whether LRSP/LRTC will be awarded the grant.

In the interim, LRTC has continued to organize trail workdays in the park and to raise money through its Lost River Trail Run in May and Lost River Classic Gravel Race in August. In 2023, registered Race participants doubled providing extra funds to support the Hardy County's National Interscholastic Cycling Association youth team, the Cryptids. The Lost River Trails Coalition's website, still a work in progress, is <https://lostrivertrailscoalition.org>

- The **Hardy County Heritage Trails** program was managed by an AmeriCorps member. The first trail, Hardy County Historic Schoolhouse Trail (a driving tour posted on TheClio.org), is being expanded to include the collection community stories to post on StoryMaps. Regular feature articles about our historic schoolhouse trail were published in our local newspaper encouraging numerous responses from our community. Visit Hardy provided project support by writing a WVU Fulcrum Grant for the initial phase of the project, supervising the AmeriCorps member working on this project, and assisting in the development of the new organization to manage the program.
- That new organization, **Mountain Heritage Trails**, has received a grant from Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area for the *Restored Humanity: The African American Burial Grounds of Hardy County* project. Visit Hardy has provided some matching funds for this grant and serves on the research committee. The Mountain Heritage Trails website (currently in development) is: <https://mountainheritagetrails.org/trail-work/>



With the work being done by Mountain Heritage Trails, Visit Hardy has temporarily curtailed its active involvement with the Hardy County Heritage Trails program. Consideration of an agricultural heritage project is being discussed but the community group interested in the project must come together with a volunteer group first.

- The **Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail**, one of the first heritage tourism project Visit Hardy worked on has been managed for several years by the Lost River Educational Foundation. Recently, under new leadership, Visit Hardy has assisted the organization in updating applications and guidelines for the trail. Visit Hardy has also posted new grant applications on our website to assist residents who wish to have a barn quilt painted and to become a part of the trail system.



- For the **Robert Higgins House Museum and Hardy County Travel Information Center**, Visit Hardy has written four WV State Historic Preservation Office grants for the Higgins House restoration and has been awarded two WV Humanities Council grants, and a WVHUB grant for the Higgins House Museum; worked with four consultants to develop content for the museum and created a master plan for the project. In addition, we made application to the Hardy County Commission and the Town of Moorefield to support the construction of the Hardy County Visitors Center, worked with an architectural firm to finalize plans for the additions, and have developed the necessary scopes of work. The Higgins House will be the primary focus of the Executive Director in 2024.

Approval of the designs and for the construction of the additions has been received from the WV State Historic Preservation Office and from the Moorefield Historic Landmark Commission. It was anticipated that the museum work and construction of the additions would take place during the spring and summer of 2023 but a contractor who was to do the work never completed the bid process. A new contractor should have this work completed before fall of 2024. The exterior of the Higgins House is the last of the restoration work to be done and will follow the construction of the additions.

The Moorefield Town Hall is adjacent to the 18th century Robert Higgins House where Visit Hardy will open the travel information center and install and manage a museum. The Visit Hardy office and travel information center is located temporarily in the Town Hall while we complete the Higgins House construction. The Town Hall is next door in an historic building and is open daily (Monday-Friday) from 8:30-4:30. Our travel literature racks, labeled with Visit Hardy's contact information and QR Code, are set up in the front lobby for easy access. Upon completion, the new facility will be open to the public with regular hours including weekends and will have additional volunteer and staff to support those hours.

The QR Code is also printed on our exterior wayfinding sign (as is our telephone number and website) for access to information about restaurants, lodging, shopping, events, recreation, and



Visit Hardy stories. Travel literature with free display racks and QR Code door films are provided by Visit Hardy to local businesses and other tourism sites to create broader distribution of the tourism information.

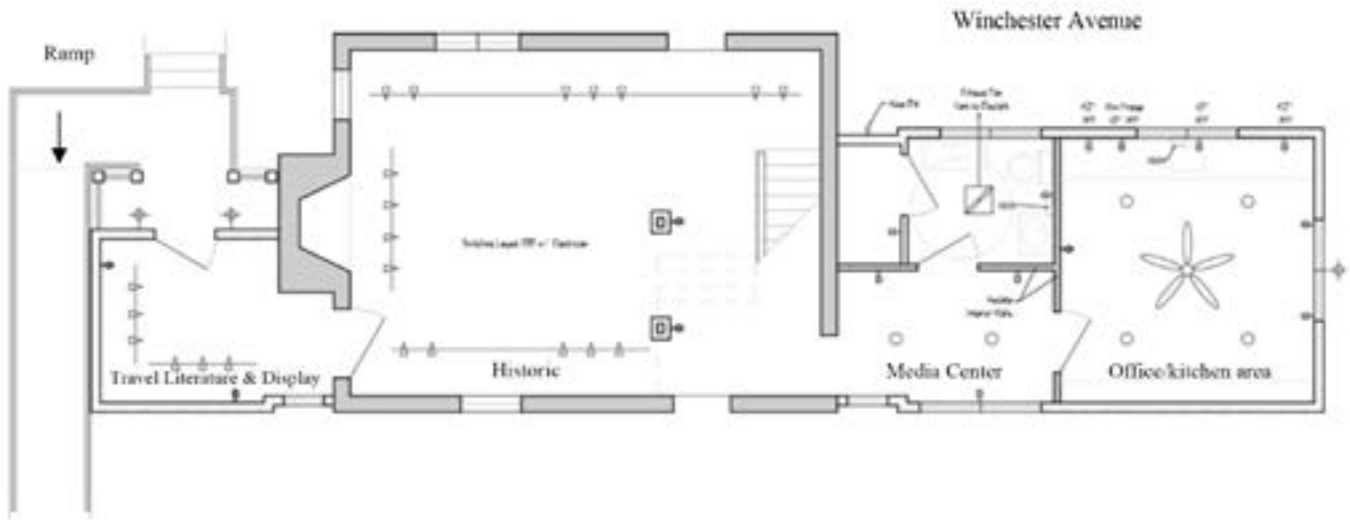
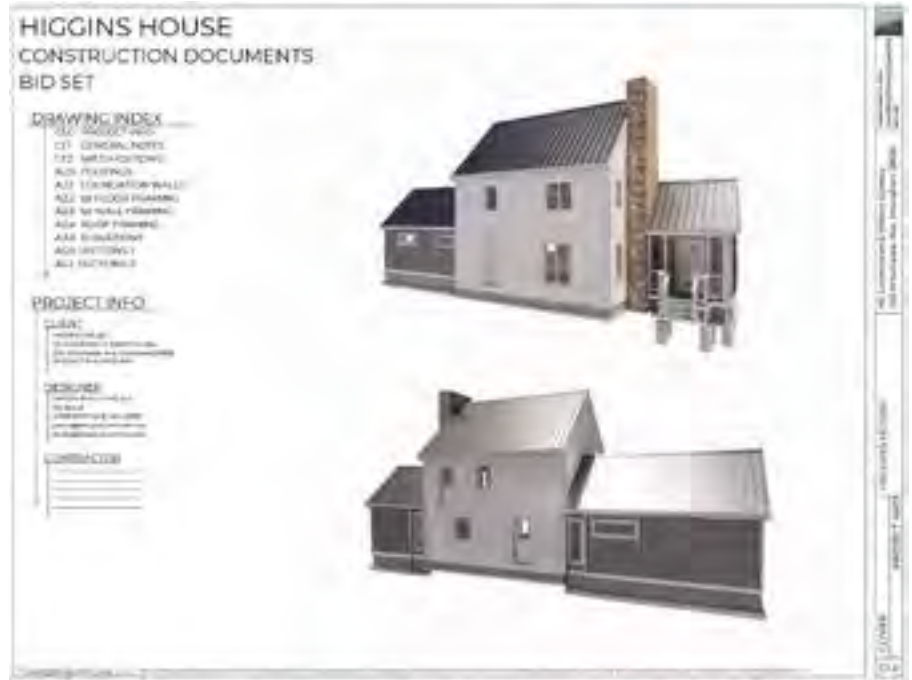
- Through the **Tourism Advertising Program** and **Hardy County Barn Quilt Grants** Visit Hardy provides reimbursable grants to the community to support local events and print literature, and funding for new barn quilts to be added to the Barn Quilt Trail. Use of the programs has fallen off since Covid however the Community Engagement Committee will be increasing the visibility of that program this year.
- The **Hospitality Scholarship Program** is new and has yet to be clearly defined. Working with the hospitality programs at the two local high schools and the community college, the parameters of that program will be defined this year. The **Donations to the Community** program will also be more clearly defined this year as well.

FULL PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS





**Robert Higgins House Museum
& Hardy County Visitors Center**
202 Winchester Avenue
Moorefield WV 26836



The Robert Higgins House is the oldest extant residential building in Moorefield and one of the few 18th century buildings in the County. After its founding, a year following the writing of the Declaration of Independence, the Town was surveyed, and lots were sold. Robert Higgins, having returned from his service as an 8th Virginia Regiment Captain, including three years as a prisoner of war, purchased the 10th lot, #33 on Winchester Avenue.

On its original foundation, the House has undergone notable changes since the logs were first laid. Research has shown that the house may have suffered a fire and was possibly rebuilt (c.1827) using some of the original logs (c.1790). The house was later subsumed into a large Queen Anne structure that wrapped around the corner onto Elm Street. Thanks to



community efforts, the Higgins House remained after the larger structure was razed in the late 1980's and is now owned by the Town. For more than three decades, it has stood empty, opening only once a year for the Heritage Weekend House Tour.

Together, the Town of Moorefield and Visit Hardy, entered a partnership to preserve the historic structure and create the Hardy County Travel Information Center. Recognizing the historical importance of the Higgins House and the value of the stories it had to tell, it was determined that the visitors center needed to be accommodated in new construction on the east and west of the historic structure. Visit Hardy has written four grants to WV State Historic Preservation Office and the Town has matched the awards to accomplish the building's restoration. Three additional grants, awarded by the WV Humanities Council and WV HUB to Visit Hardy, have funded architectural research, development of a master plan, and the initial development of the museum. The Hardy County Commission and the Town of Moorefield have awarded funds for the construction of the Visitors Center additions and Visit Hardy has also allocated funds toward its design and construction.



The Hardy County Visitors Center

Legislative action in 2021 (the Convention & Visitors Bureau Oversight Bill) set forth specific requirements for CVB's to qualify for receipt of the Hotel/Motel tax revenue. In addition to accreditation, all CVBs must have a visitors center open 40 hours per week. While Visit Hardy has had a temporary office and visitors center area in the Moorefield Town Hall, this has put additional pressure on Visit Hardy to complete the Higgins House additions and resolve staffing issues.

When completed, the Hardy County Travel Information Center will provide visitors with information about places to stay, eat, shop, and recreate while visiting our county and region. In addition to printed travel literature, a media center will feature videos about the county's history, recreation sites, and trails.

The Robert Higgins House Museum has two stories to tell. The primary story, the life of Robert Higgins, explores how the founding and evolution of our nation is embodied in the life of this man – a child living in rural western Virginia during the French & Indian War, a local farmer, a husband and father, a lieutenant in the local militia, an officer in the 8th Virginia Regiment of the Continental Army, and a prisoner of war for three years after capture at the Battle of Germantown, the builder of a log house, possibly a merchant, and the founder of a town in the Ohio frontier. The story will also speak of the rural western Virginia lands in which he lived, the Native Americans, challenged and displaced, and the enslavement of others.

The museum's other story will be about the Higgins House itself (the primary artifact of the museum). Fortunately, the





log interior of the House remains basically intact. Built, possibly rebuilt, renovated, subsumed, revealed, and restored, the House holds clues from the many stages of its existence and reveals a picture of what the 18th century structure looked like and what architectural decisions were made throughout its life to accommodate the needs and desires of its owners. Using research and science, the complexity of this architectural history will be explored and represented in small displays.

Unable to create physical access to the second floor, the entirety of the museum’s second story content will be recreated in a closed-captioned video and as a book that will be available on the first floor. The building itself and displays will meet and/or exceed ADA requirements assuring the facility will be accessible to all.



Lost River State Park Mountain Bike Trail System Lost River Trails Coalition

Lost River Trails Coalition (LRTC), a nonprofit 501c3 organization, was formed to promote the development of a grassroots, community-oriented, sustainable mountain bike trail system in Lost River State Park (LRSP). Creating a fully accessible, universally designed, and constructed trail system, the first construction phase of the project will be the Jay Moglia Beginner Trail.

Recently awarded a Trail Accelerator Grant by the International Mountain Bicycling Association, and with the support of WVU’s Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative and other partners, LRTC will continue working with Lost River State Park to bring mountain biking trails to Hardy County, trails that are accessible to all who wish to experience the exhilaration of the sport.

Importantly, this trail system will be the only purpose-built system designed to accommodate standard mountain bikes, hand-cycles, and e-bikes. The

proposed LRSP trail system fills what is currently a blank spot in the mountain biking landscape with a much-needed trail system in Hardy County. Lost River State Park sits at the heart of a network of legendary mountain bike trails with the Lost River Valley located just 2 hours outside of Washington DC and poised to become a central destination for riders exploring the region.

Goals and concerns for 2024:

- *Begin construction of Phase 1 of the Jay Moglia Beginner & Intermediate MTB Trail!!!!* The LRSP Concept Plan & Design Brief lays out the trail system developed by IMBA’s Trail Solutions for Zones 1 & 2 linking the Dove Hollow Trail Head with the top of Big Ridge.
- An initial goal of LRTC was to establish a youth cycling group with the intention of forming a local National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) team. Starting with just one rider in early summer of 2023, by fall there was a full team of 11 youth, and they expect further growth in 2024. Choosing the name “The Cryptids”, the team has embarked on a fundraising campaign and was recently awarded a small grant from



the Hardy County Community Foundation. Visit Hardy provides a community donation each year and the LRTC continues to support the youth team.

- LRTC hosted the 2023 Lost River Classic, a four-route gravel-ride fundraising event. 180 participants, double the number from 2022, were supported by volunteers who contributed their time, as well as numerous sponsors who contributed to the success of the event. LRTC volunteers have been repairing the existing MTB trails at the park and will be working to clear the trails of the winter and fire damage. The 2nd annual Lost River Trail Run in May and the 3rd annual Lost River Classic will be held in August.
- The uniqueness of this trail system has the potential to open small business development opportunities throughout Hardy County including lodging, bike rentals and maintenance, restaurants, etc. But most importantly, the very nature of the trail system should open opportunities for new and existing businesses and organizations to consider their facility and program designs in meeting the needs of visitors with a range of abilities. *Universal design should be incorporated into not only environments but also services and products, assuring access to all who wish to participate.*
- A GoFundMe account, the Jay Moglia Fund, was created in memory of the person who initiated the trail effort and who believed strongly that this project would greatly benefit the sport and Hardy County. The donations from the fund, and the grants from Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area, International Mountain Bicycling Association, and the Hardy County Commission, will go toward the completion of the Lost River State Park Mountain Bike Trail System. *Fundraising and grant writing will be absolute necessities for this project to be realized (design, engineering, building), for on-site training for youth and for riders of adaptive equipment, for ongoing trail maintenance, upgrades, etc.*
- The Visit Hardy executive director has written most of the grants for LRTC but has also been working with the Coalition to help them write their own grants and to strengthen their organization. Completing only the first two zones of the trail system will be a \$1.4 to \$1.7 million dollar project and will be a major economic boon for the county.



Hardy County Heritage Trails

When Visit Hardy first discussed creating the HC Heritage Trails (HCHT), we anticipated completing two or three trails a year. But once we began the process, it became very apparent how deep and open-ended the content could be for each trail. The Historic Schoolhouse Trail of Hardy County is the first trail in development and the work has made it very clear that each trail will be an ongoing project.

Once the data is collected, the tours will be posted immediately on both Clio and gradually on StoryMaps. TheClio.com is an open-source app created at Marshall University. It houses the interpretive information, related links, and serves as a GPS guide for the driving tours. Though very useful, there are limitations to Clio. StoryMaps becomes a stand-alone



resource integrating maps, legends, text, photos, and videos with functionality for the viewer to explore content across the Internet.

The trail system will consider numerous segments of Hardy County's heritage and physical environment including local stories, images, and factual material that will be woven into the fabric of the tours. Users can explore Hardy County's Heritage Trails from home on StoryMaps and Clio, both linked/embedded on the Visit Hardy website. They can then use the app when they visit for an in-person tour. The trails also

- Encourages community dialogue, interaction, then engagement
- Provides an interactive educational tool for public and home-schooled students.
- Becomes an economic driver, energizing the community and increasing the number of visitors to Hardy County
- Creates a platform for cultural, historical, and genealogical research.
- Develops an appreciation for the complexity of 'heritage' and connects our heritage to that of the world's.
- Offers a broader understanding of our heritage, what factors created it, ways it has been interpreted (or misinterpreted), and how it informs our future.

With the emergence of the new nonprofit, Mountain Heritage Trails, Visit Hardy will be doing less direct trail development but will support the work of MHT which has begun work on the African American burial sites project.

Historic Schoolhouses of Hardy County



When Cullers Run School (in the Mathias area) was restored by members of the community, several agreed to be interviewed to provide a history of the school that went beyond the structure and the artifacts. Shefa Benoit facilitated and edited the interviews. Her passion for the project was obvious and the work at Cullers Run serves as a model.

This project has become the sole responsibility of AmeriCorps member, Shefa Benoit. Employing her significant skills, she has designed a trail that has intrigued our community. Moorefield Examiner articles keep the project in front of the community and have encouraged their engagement with calls coming in from former students and their families.

Research for the schoolhouses was accomplished with the assistance of the graduate and undergraduate students from the Public History Program at WVU as part of the WVU Fulcrum Project grant. Historical information about education in WV, a snapshot of daily activities in the classroom, the community around the school, and the memories of former students/teachers/family members, will become part of the content. The trail of 21 schoolhouses was posted to TheClio.org in fall 2022 and is currently being developed for StoryMaps.



Future of Hardy County Heritage Trails

In collaboration with the WV Department of Highways and the WV Geological Survey in 2023, Visit Hardy's Board President has worked to have three interpretive kiosks installed on the Mountain Skyway (Route 48) to inform visitors and the community about our mountains and the formations that can be seen along the highway, formations made visible by the cuts created in the highway's construction.

Considerations for future endeavors include, among other options, Hardy County's agricultural heritage, a 'trail' on The-Clio.org about the Fairfax Line, an important 18th century demarcation of a 17th century land grant, and a multi-county Civil War Trail.



Visit Hardy Strategic Plan

2023 -2024



Introduction



West Virginia's scenic highways, mountain vistas and outdoor recreation have long provided tourism opportunities for the state. The pandemic, coupled with remote work options and a new national park, has elevated the interest from visitors and residents to the Mountain State. With that enhanced interest comes opportunities and the need for an increased emphasis in helping to ensure our communities are equipped with resources and knowledge to sustain those tourism opportunities in the long term. In addition, the tourism industry has been actively promoting a shift in the focus of destination organizations from a marketing to a management approach.

In rural areas especially, Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVB's) are the primary and often sole destination marketing and management organization (DMO). As such, they face considerable challenges as they attempt to promote economic prosperity through tourism, including limited funding for marketing and development, limited capacity, and perhaps most importantly balancing the competing objectives of increasing visitation while simultaneously managing growth and maintaining a sense of place (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). In recent years, issues such as over-tourism and destination stewardship have emerged as central topics for the tourism industry (Skift, 2020; Destination Analysts, 2019; Destination International, 2019), and have gained new urgency, in light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

To help destination organizations and other community leaders and partners better understand the principles of sustainable rural tourism and destination

management and to create a platform to discuss opportunities to apply these principles in West Virginia, West Virginia University Extension Service faculty developed a monthly webinar series to provide participants with knowledge and resources to incorporate sustainable tourism principles into their communities. The "Sustainable Rural Tourism" webinar series illustrates basic principles and demonstrates how community leaders can apply them collaboratively to further enhance the future of tourism in West Virginia. The sessions cover topics such as understanding destination management roles and engaging partners; leadership and capacity; participatory planning; developing a tourism master plan; using data to make informed decisions; funding tourism development, and more.

Visit Hardy's Executive Director, Michele Moure-Reeves, attended many of the sustainable tourism webinars in 2022. Through follow-up conversations with WVU Extension's Rural Tourism Specialist, Michele expressed her interests in addressing how to weigh the pros and cons of the changes in the county and continue to grow tourism assets while maintaining the unique sense of place, protecting the rural environment and culture, identifying who the local partners are in facing and managing this challenge, and promoting destination stewardship and sustainable destination management. After discussing the relevant issues, Visit Hardy agreed to collaborate to facilitate a strategic planning process for their board and local partners and to develop a strategic plan to guide the organization for the next year.

State of Hardy County Tourism



Visit Hardy, like all West Virginia CVBs, is supported by the occupancy tax collected from visitors who stay overnight. Due to the 2021 West Virginia legislation enforcing collection of local occupancy taxes, Hardy County's revenue has increased approximately 32% to \$169,000. For several years, Visit Hardy's tax revenue hovered around \$85,000 (+/- \$2K) until 2020. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and

concerns for public/personal safety, occupancy tax dropped to about \$63,000. Because of Hardy County's proximity to the DC Metro area, rural (isolated) environment, and outdoor recreation assets, the county became a likely site for urban residents to escape nearby congested metro regions. Hardy County's occupancy tax rose to \$116,000 in 2021. This was completely unexpected, resulting in a carry-over of funds to 2022.

The result of the impacts of COVID-19, in addition to other recent occurrences in 2021, have left Hardy County with some issues which require a proactive management strategy. Labor shortages across the state have impacted all industries but have been particularly difficult for the tourism industry. In Hardy County, some businesses have closed, others delayed opening, and some have changed their hours of operation due to the labor issues.

Changes in Housing Market

In the case of Hardy County, the greatest issue to impact our economy has been the changes in the housing market greatly affecting all facets of life in the county. In 2021, Hardy County had the 5th largest increase in second home mortgages *in the country* (Pacaso 2021). 37% of all homes in the county are second homes. According to Redfin, the median price of a home in Hardy County increased by 19% since 2021. (This has not been confirmed locally).

Second homeowners nationally tend to be high income, high asset, highly educated, middle age or older couples, with children nearing adulthood or children no longer living at home, according to a Colorado study from 2004. This quote from 2004 is consistent with information from a variety of sources through 2022.



What does this mean?

- Property values quickly accelerated, often resulting in bidding wars for properties.
- Increases in property values make it difficult for moderate income buyers to purchase property.
- Many second homes have been converted to vacation rental properties (data on this is difficult to find but the number of vacation properties available on market facilitator sites has increased to over 140 since 2021).
- Long term rental properties have become scarce and expensive.

And what could it mean?

- Decrease in number of school age children due to second home sales?
- Further reason for young families and recent graduates to leave the county?
- No rental housing available for service workers and seasonal/temporary employees (some rental apartments are being constructed in Moorefield by Pilgrim's Pride)?
- Change in the rural environment and culture?

And/or?

- New tax revenue generated by second homeowners and vacation rental visitors to support county services.
- Increased support of the trades primarily in the construction and service industries.
- Increased spending in local food and entertainment establishments.
- Support for development of new businesses and tourism assets.
- Opportunity to educate new residents about the value of good stewardship, respect for traditional culture, understanding of agricultural practices and traditions, importance of community and sense of place in a rural environment.

Visit Hardy's Response

What should the role of Visit Hardy be in supporting mechanisms to ensure appropriate tourism development? In addition to regular attendance at WVACVB meetings and tourism conferences to assure that Visit Hardy is aware of the State legislative changes and challenges, Visit Hardy's Executive Director attends County Commission and Planning Commission meetings and has reviewed and discussed segments of the comprehensive plan that impact tourism. The comprehensive plan is an important tool in determining the direction of our county's growth. Zoning ordinances are very much in need of updating but this cannot truly happen without the information and expressed need being set forth in the comprehensive plan.

The Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals regulate issuance of Conditional Use Permits based on existing ordinances. With the guidance of the County Planner, the Planning Commission, and the Health Department, the language of ordinances can be clarified for regulating growth, particularly of campsites and recreational subdivisions. Again, it is the comprehensive plan that will be critical to how zoning for vacation rentals of all forms will be regulated in the future protecting tourism assets, agricultural land, and residential subdivisions.

The comprehensive plan is a public document and, once written, the process takes more than two years to be completed. The writing of the comprehensive plan is directed

and required every 10 years by WV State Code (<https://www.wvlegislature.gov/wvcode/code.cfm?chap=8A&art=3>). Participation in the process is an important civic responsibility. A comprehensive plan aids the Planning Commission in designing and making recommendations to the County Commission that will ultimately result in protecting land use and "...preserving and enhancing the unique quality of life and culture in [our] community and in adapting to future changes of use of an economic, physical or social nature." The draft of the comprehensive plan currently being written is posted on the Hardy County website as are the results of the public surveys. (<https://hardyvwplanning.weebly.com/comprehensive-plan.html>).

The challenge is to balance the above and still develop tourism assets that enhance quality of life for county residents and draw visitors to the county. *Should there be a county-wide ad hoc committee to discuss and plan for the growth of tourism?* This is a question that needs consideration. Visit Hardy is proactively seeking to address how to weigh the pros and cons of the changes in the county, continue to grow tourism assets while maintaining a sense of place, protecting rural environment and culture, and promoting destination stewardship and sustainable destination management. These are community measures and are all best addressed in collaboration with our community partners.

Visit Hardy's role in support of Hardy County's Tourism Industry

In addition to Visit Hardy's local partnerships and collaborations within the county, Visit Hardy's role includes collaboration with other West Virginia counties, particularly those in the Potomac Highlands; with the regional tourism organization, Highlands Creative Economy; with the body that represents the CVBs interests before the legislature and provides accreditation certification, the WV Association of CVBs; and with the WV Department of Tourism which markets West Virginia nationally and internationally.

To support Visit Hardy's efforts to grow tourism in Hardy County, over \$250,000 in grants have been awarded to develop tourism assets, assets that also maintain and grow the quality of life for those who live here. This work has supported the development of the Hardy County Heritage Trails program, the beginnings of the Lost River State Park Mountain Bike Trail System, the Robert Higgins House Museum and Hardy County Travel Information Center (details below). Without grant funds, Visit Hardy would be unable to compete in the tourism arena attracting visitors to stay overnight in Hardy County and spend their money at local businesses. Visitors come to Hardy County (and return) when there are places to stay, a variety of things to do, and genuine hospitality offered by those of us who live here.

The intention, and as has been Visit Hardy's practice, is for all the assets

initiated by the CVB to be ultimately managed by individual community organizations. Visit Hardy works with these organizations, assisting in their development as they grow to take over the project. Lost River Educational Foundation (LREF) assumed the operation of the Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail. Lost River Trails Coalition (LRTC) is working with the National Park Service to strengthen their organizational and volunteer capacity while working on the mountain bike trails at Lost River State Park. Mountain Heritage Trails will assume the Heritage Trails program later this year and Visit Hardy will maintain operation and oversight of the Higgins House as it will also be home to our Travel Information Center.

To support our tourism related partners, Visit Hardy also offers Tourism Advertising Grants to encourage the produc-

tion and printing of travel literature and the marketing and advertising of local events. Visit Hardy also supports the Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail through grants to county residents and businesses for the barn quilts painted by LREF.

With the newly increased tax revenue, the funds available for marketing Hardy County have significantly increased. Required by the CVB Oversight legislation and the accreditation requirements, 40% of our tax revenue is to be spent on marketing, including building a library of images and videos, expanding the production, printing, and distribution of our travel literature, and updating our website, all current needs. In addition, the increased tax revenue permits the completion of our travel information center, as well as the hiring of AmeriCorps members and staff support.



Mission, Vision, and Structure:

The mission statement clearly articulates what Visit Hardy is meant to do while leaving room for growth and the vision expounds upon that mission. After much discussion there are only three changes suggested, two minor and the other to make our vision more inclusive:

Visit Hardy Mission:

The mission of Visit Hardy is to strengthen and sustain Hardy County's tourism industry through education and collaboration and by promoting the awareness, visibility, and uniqueness of the County as a travel destination.

Visit Hardy Vision:

The Vision of Visit Hardy is to acknowledge that we exist to strengthen and promote Hardy County's tourism industry and to do that successfully, we must:

- *Support community development efforts that diversify, strengthen, and expand Hardy County's tourism industry thus economically sustaining the county.*
- *Develop and maintain local and regional partnerships engaging in regular and supportive discourse and collaborations.*
- *Support our community and local tourism partners through education, information sharing, and grants.*
- *Recognize the social and environmental impacts of tourism, the need for inclusivity, and the imperative that the rural character of Hardy County is protected while Visit Hardy responsibly grows tourism.*

Visit Hardy Structure

Visit Hardy has one full-time employee, the Executive Director. Starting as a part-time employee in 2015, Michele Moure-Reeves was hired full-time in March 2016. Michele's first tasks that spring were to apply for accreditation (required every three years), work with the board and a consultant, Mikula-Harris, to develop branding for Visit Hardy, and lead a team of board members to develop a new website with MESH, a Charleston based website designer.

Significant changes have taken place since 2016 but Michele remains the only full-time employee. To assist in the asset-building projects, AmeriCorps Members have been engaged to focus on their design and management. The Hardy County Heritage Trail project, and specifically the Hardy County Historic Schoolhouse Trail, is managed by Shefa Benoit. Josh Taylor has recently been brought on to work with Lost River Trails Coalition and the Lost River State Park Mountain Bike Trail System.

Shefa leaves her AmeriCorps position this year and an application has been made to renew her position (with a new person). Josh's position will also be renewed, and he will return in the same position in September. A third position is being sought to work with other projects currently in development. While these AmeriCorps Members are critical to the on-going success of Visit Hardy's projects, full-time staff assistance will be necessary when the travel information center opens in late 2023.

Visit Hardy is governed by a volunteer board made up of 8 to 12 members of the community. They are representative of a range of interests, business sectors, and areas of the county. The 2023 board has three new members taking the total number to twelve. This is the highest number of board members Visit Hardy has had for several years which increases the minimum number who must be present for a quorum at board meetings.

The members understand that they have joined a working board and in so doing have made a commitment to attend the pre-scheduled board meetings (the second Thursday of February, April, June, August, October, and December). Each member volunteered or was assigned to a specific committee where the work of Visit Hardy is accomplished. The committee chairs schedule the meetings and present the committee reports to the full board for their approval. The board members have been participating fully in the planning process, a process that is integral to the success of Visit Hardy.

Visit Hardy Board Members as of January 2023

NAME	TERM BEGAN	PROFESSION	SECTOR	REGION/TOWN
Daniele, Rick*	1/1/23	Cliffside Falls	Lodging	South Fork
Caldwell, Colby	7/1/22	LRSP Park Superintendent	Lodging/Recreation	Lost River
England, Marlene	1/1/22	WordPlay & WordPlay Connects	Retail/Cultural Events	Wardensville
Flanagan, Jean	1/1/22	Writer/Artist/LREF (retired Moorefield Ex Editor)	Arts	Baker
Freeman, Rick	1/1/16	Moorefield Town Clerk	Moorefield/Finance	Moorefield
Harvey, Toni Mathias	1/1/18	Innkeeper/Gen Store & Café (retired)	Retail/Lodging	Wardensville
See, Morgan*	1/1/23	Hardy County Wellness Center/ Hardy County Chamber of Commerce	Non-profit/At-Large	Moorefield
Sullivan, Pete	1/1/22	Geologist (retired) Member at Large	President History /Heritage	South Fork
Tucker, Angela*	1/1/23	Our Roots - Retail	Retail	Moorefield
West, Amanda	1/1/22	Westhill Winery - Retail	Treasurer Agritourism	Fisher
Williams, Hunter	1/1/21	Misty Mtn Event Barn Farmer/Venue operator	Agritourism/Venue	Fisher
Workman, David	1/1/16	Hardy County Commissioner	Vice President Hardy County Commission Fairs & Festivals	Moorefield

* New members

Standing Committees

The committees remain the same this year but the roles of two have changed somewhat:

- The Community Outreach Committee is undergoing change this year. With its new Chair, Jean Flanagan, the committee will focus on internal marketing, increasing the visibility of Visit Hardy within Hardy County and on the possible revamping of our Tourism Advertising Grant program. The committee also manages the Hardy County Barn Quilt grants.
- The Marketing Committee will remain basically the same, focusing on our external marketing, reviewing the marketing plan, and advertising schedule, and working with our social media contractor to increase our online presence. The Marketing Committee is also responsible for our surveys which will increase in number this year. Toni Harvey is the Chair of the Marketing Committee.
- The Special Projects Committee has undergone the greatest change. The committee originally researched and initiated projects but the development of new projects is currently on hold. Presently there are several projects that are active or in early development, enough to keep us well occupied for a while. Each project will have a board or AmeriCorps member who will support the project. Michele will be the Chair of the committee which includes 5 projects.

Developing a Strategic Plan for Visit Hardy



Following participation in the West Virginia University Extension Service's Sustainable Rural Tourism Webinar Series, Visit Hardy's Executive Director requested the support of the Extension Service's Rural Tourism Specialist to facilitate a strategic planning process for Visit Hardy with the goal of engaging the board and local stakeholders in establishing short-term goals and objectives (12 months) for the organization as well as discussion of future longer-term goals.

Methodology: Surveys and Meetings

Surveys: Prior to engaging WVU Extension, a preliminary survey was emailed by Visit Hardy to local tourism stakeholders to gather initial feedback to guide the planning process. It was difficult to source contact information from various organizations so with a

low response rate (only 26 responses with 150+ surveys emailed), it was also difficult to envision the current state and perceive the future of our tourism industry without knowing the thoughts and opinions of local stakeholders.

Planning Meetings: To broaden our reach, local stakeholders were invited to two meetings convened and facilitated by Doug Arbogast, WVU's Extension Service Rural Tourism Specialist. The first meeting was held on January 19, 2023, and the second was held on March 9th, 2023. The meetings were structured to foster feedback from the participants and inform them about the projects and committee structure of Visit Hardy while gathering information that would guide the Visit Hardy planning process and aid in determining the goals and objectives.

Doug provided an overview of tourism trends in West Virginia and the evolution of destination marketing organizations (i.e., convention and visitor bureaus) to becoming destination management organizations and the roles and responsibilities of destination management organizations.

Michele provided an overview of the purpose and objectives of the meetings and the current structure, mission, and vision of Visit Hardy. Breakout group discussions were conducted at each meeting. Meeting participants and breakout group activities and outcomes are described on the following page.

Strategic Planning Meetings

January 19, 2023, Planning Meeting and Participants

Of the 27 individuals invited, fourteen stakeholders attended as well as the Visit Hardy Board Members and the two AmeriCorps Members. Some individuals who could not attend sent staff or group members in their stead (*). This group was comprised of public officials, educators, nonprofits, and business owners.

NAME	BUSINESS	EMAIL
Castillo, Jazmin*	GWNF, Lee Ranger District	Jazmin.Castillo@usda.gov
Greenwalt, Greg	Rural Development Authority & EWVCTC	ggreenwalt@hardynet.com
Kavanaugh, Kathy	Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail	kathrynkavanagh401@gmail.com
O'Neill, Mike	Restaurant, past Hardy County CVB Board	michael.oneill@aol.com
Orndorff-Sayres, Betsy	Mayor, Wardensville	betsy@wardensville.com
Sample, Jennifer	Firefly Inn (lodging)	jen@fireflyinnwv.com
Sherman, Tracy	Hardy County Chamber of Commerce	tracy.sherman@pilgrims.com
Fitzgerald, Eric* & Joy, Mike*	Lost River Trails Coalition	lostrivertrailscoalition@gmail.com
Burns, Robert*	EWV Community & Technical College	robert.burns@easternwv.edu
Markwood, Jessica*	Hardy County Schools	jessica.markwood@k12.wv.us
Williams, Robert	Hardy County Planning Commission	rwilliams@hardynet.com
Zuber, Carol	Mayor, Moorefield	mayor@townofmoorefield.com
Sullivan, Pete	Visit Hardy	See March list
Harvey, Toni Mathias	Visit Hardy	See March list
Freeman, Rick	Visit Hardy	See March list
England, Marlene	Visit Hardy	See March list
West, Amanda	Visit Hardy	See March list
Danieli, Rick	Visit Hardy	See March list
Williams, Hunter	Visit Hardy	See March list
Tucker, Angela	Visit Hardy	See March list
See, Morgan	Visit Hardy	See March list
Flanagan, Jean	Visit Hardy	See March list
Caldwell, Colby	Visit Hardy	See March list
Workman, David	Visit Hardy	See March list
Benoit, Shefa	AmeriCorps (Visit Hardy)	See March list
Taylor, Josh	AmeriCorps (Visit Hardy)	See March list

March 9, 2023, Planning Meeting and Participants

Focusing this list primarily on lodging owners, marketing specialists, and public officials, we sent out about 32 email invitations as well as numerous invitations to lodging owners through their third-party sites (i.e., Airbnb). As with the attempt to get email addresses for the survey and first session, we found it impossible to reach these lodging owners. One lodging owner attended in January and aside from board members representing the lodging industry, no others were in attendance.

NAME	BUSINESS	EMAIL
Leatherman, Miriam + 2 staff	Buena Vista Farm	bvfarm@hardynet.com
Strickler, Kristen	Hardy County Tour & Craft Assn	heritageweekend@hardynet.com
Helmick, Shayna	Hardy County Chamber	chamber@hardynet.com
Kirk, Anne	Farms Work Wonders	anne@farmsworkwonders.org
Sanford, Lindsey	Farms Work Wonders	lindsey@farmsworkwonders.org
Kneeland, Kelsey	Lost River Trading Post	Kelsey@lostrivertradingpost.com
Branson, Wendy	Hardy County Commission	hdycommi@court.state.wv.us
Moomau, Peggy	Hardy County Commission	secretary@hardycounty.com
Scott, Melissa	Hardy County Planning Commission	msscott.hardyplanner@gmail.com
Schetrom, Steven	Hardy County Commissioner	steven.schetrom@gmail.com
Workman, David	Hardy County Commissioner (Visit Hardy Vice President)	djworkman@mail.wvu.edu
England, Marlene	WordPlay - Visit Hardy	wordplaywv@gmail.com
Harvey, Toni Mathias	Visit Hardy	mathiasharvey@gmail.com
Danieli, Rick	Cliffside Falls - Visit Hardy	rick@cliffsidefalls.net
Flanagan, Jean	Visit Hardy	jflanagan@hardynet.com
Sullivan, Pete	Visit Hardy (President)	peterasullivan@yahoo.com
West, Amanda	Visit Hardy (Treasurer)	amandabwest10@gmail.com
Tucker, Angela	Visit Hardy	angelatucker@frontiernet.net
Williams, Hunter	Visit Hardy	mistymtfarm@hardynet.com
Benoit, Shefa	Visit Hardy/AmeriCorps/ Mountain Heritage Trails	hcheritagetrails@gmail.com
Taylor, Josh	Visit Hardy/AmeriCorps/LR Trails Coalition	josht2172@gmail.com

Meeting Activities and Outcomes

After the opening discussions, participants in each meeting were asked to join a breakout group. A board member was assigned to each group to help guide the conversation, assign someone to take notes, and to be responsible for reporting back to the larger group.

The January groups were organized according to the current list of Visit Hardy projects and the Community Outreach Committee. Participants were provided with a written summary of accomplishments and status for each project and encouraged to discuss the following questions within each group.

- In what way will the project impact the community?
- In what way will the project impact Hardy County's tourism industry?
- What are 3 key milestones for success in 2023?
- What are some barriers to success?
- Can you recommend other partners for these projects?

For the most part the questions were not answered directly but the responses helped to focus our efforts on the improvement of our committees and the advancement of our projects.

Participants at the March meeting were asked to discuss the following questions while examples of Visit Hardy advertising were streaming on the screen:

What are your favorite things to do in Hardy County?



What one word or short phrase captures the visit hardy experience?



Later, gathering into groups, the participants were also asked to answer the following two questions:

1. What can we do to help you?

Responses:

- WGM is an agritourism business; would like to be part of the conversation and has lots to offer to it.
- Tourism ads/partner with Visit Hardy.
- Brainstorm and strategy for heads in beds partnerships.
- Bridge gap within county and between towns.
- Support Events (Chamber is a good place to collaborate with).
- Support Advertisement.
- Assist with soliciting volunteers and patrons (with a focus on VA, DC, etc.).
- Countywide Calendar.
- Make connections between Visit Hardy & area groups (e.g., Ruritans, Poultry Association, etc.).

2. What can you do to help us?

Responses:

- Provide essential feedback including demands and opportunities from the market.
- Use Visit Hardy website to promote local events.
- Encourage folks to get to know Visit Hardy & Board Members.
- Create ways for businesses to connect and invest in events & activities.
- Cluster activities - network to maximize the variety of offerings for visitors who invest time to come to the location.
- Provide Visit Hardy with event information with adequate notice.

There was some very distinct overlap in the responses to the questions and in the discussion with the two groups as a whole. The responses, along with board input formed the basis of the following Visit Hardy Strategic Plan, which was reviewed, amended, and [will be] approved by the board.

Conclusion

Sustainable destination management begins with proactive destination leadership. Throughout this planning process the Visit Hardy staff and board have demonstrated their commitment to strategically weighing the pros and cons of the changes in their county; a deep commitment to continuing to grow their tourism assets while maintaining their unique sense of place and protecting the rural environment and culture; identifying and responding to local partners thoughts and concerns in facing and managing this challenge; and promoting destination stewardship and sustainable destination management.

This challenge is not unique to Hardy County as it faces the limited resources and capacity many rural destinations are strapped with. This document serves as a guide for the role of tourism as part of a sustainable economy for Hardy County. A commitment to the organization's mission and vision and to accomplishing the goals and objectives outlined in this plan can guide Hardy County on this journey.

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Lane, B., & Kastenholz, E. (2015). Rural tourism: the evolution of practice and research approaches—towards a new generation concept. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(8-9), 1133-1156.

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Visit Hardy Strategic Plan for 2023–2024:

Goals and Objectives for Committees and Projects

The time and effort that has gone into the last few months has been meaningful and has resulted in a plan that defines specific goals for the growth and success of Visit Hardy and of Hardy County's tourism industry. To accomplish this, the information provided by the Visit Hardy Board of Directors and our community of stakeholders*, individuals who generously gave of their time and ideas, was carefully considered leading to the development of an insightful plan, one that is inclusive, comprehensive, and, primarily, workable.

*From the 2022 survey and the two 2023 planning sessions

To assure that the plan was feasible it was necessary to determine what goals were achievable within the next year and what objectives were necessary to meet those goals. Rather than state that Visit Hardy should have X number of goals and to assure that achievability, the focus was on on the committee structure and projects, what the role of the board and staff will be in realizing the goals, and how this will be reflected in the accomplishment of the measurable objectives that have been integrated into the plan.

Finally, when we reach the end of this year (June 2024), we must be able to evaluate the soundness of our plan based on the level of that accomplishment. Ideally, the successes of this initial year will become the foundation of our next plan, hopefully one that is innovative, has deeper reach and possibly a longer range. Most importantly, however, is that going through this process will make Visit Hardy more effective, an adept organization realizing its mission to strengthen and sustain Hardy County's tourism industry.

Thank you to everyone who participated and who made this plan possible.



Pete Sullivan
President



Michele Moure-Reeves
Executive Director



Community Outreach Committee

Chair: Jean Flanagan

Board Members: Rick Danieli and Morgan See

Non-Board Members: Michele Moure-Reeves

GOAL FOR 2023-2024:

- Increase the visibility of Visit Hardy within the county and the understanding of our role.
- Develop new and strengthen existing community partnerships.
- Increase community participation in Tourism Advertising Grant program.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Distribute Visit Hardy travel literature, brochure racks, and signage to local businesses.
- Representing Visit Hardy, attend community events/meetings to introduce Visit Hardy projects and programs.
- Develop a county-wide ad hoc committee to discuss and plan for the growth of tourism in Hardy County and define Visit Hardy's role in the partnership.
- Increase listings on Visit Hardy website, and postings on Facebook page and Instagram.
- Review the Tourism Advertising Program and identify ways to increase participation.
- Working with Lost River Educational Foundation, review the Hardy County Barn Quilt grants.
- Update the business/event/tourism asset contact list (with emails!).

Marketing Committee

Chair: Toni Mathias Harvey

Board Members: Marlene England and Angela Tucker

Non-Board Members: Michele Moure-Reeves

GOALS FOR 2023-2024:

- Increase the number of Hardy County's overnight visitors.
- Plan strong and effective marketing strategies by evaluating Hardy County's travel trends utilizing Google Analytics, surveys, and other quantitative tools that monitor and track visitor behavioral patterns.
- Assist in the completion of the Hardy County Travel Information Center and Robert Higgins House Museum
- Maintain and elevate a positive Hardy County brand/product through print, social media, and other marketing efforts.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Publish 2023-24 travel guide.
- Research ways to "publish" the Ride the High 5 Motorcycle Map other than print.
- Expand photo library, videos, & reels (identify sites).
- Develop a "What to See in Hardy County" rack card.
- Increase our social media presence.
- Increase number of visitors to website.
- Publish surveys on regular basis and develop a better email list.
- Include Hardy County events in advertising/marketing.

Special Projects Committee

General Chair: Michele Moure-Reeves

Lost River State Park Mountain Bike Trail System

Chair: Josh Taylor (AmeriCorps Member)

Board Members: Colby Caldwell

Non-Board Members: Lost River Trails Coalition (LRTC), International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), and WVU Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative, West Virginia Interscholastic Cycling League, Wendy Branson, and Michele Moure-Reeves

GOALS FOR 2023-2024:

- Increase the visibility of the project within the community and region.
- Complete 50% of the building of the Jay Moglia Beginner's Trail and plan future trail development
- Working with West Virginia Interscholastic Cycling League, develop a National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) youth cycling program.
- Support LRTC's organizational development and capacity building process (working with National Park Service (NPS)).



SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Attend all LRTC meetings and events.
- Research and apply for grants/donations for trail design and construction.
- Work with LRTC and IMBA to develop a concept plan for the trail system.
- Work with LRTC and NPS to update bylaws, develop an annual budget, and create a development plan.
- Develop a trail at East Hardy High School for training youth group.
- Participate in National Interscholastic Cycling Association events (AmeriCorps).
- Include LRTC events in advertising/marketing.

Hardy County Heritage Trails

(Focusing on Historic Schoolhouse Trail, Potomac Waterways, African American Cemeteries, and Barn Quilt Trail)

Chair: Shefa Benoit

Board Members: Jean Flanagan, Amanda West

Non-Board Members: Michele Moure-Reeves, Mike Crites, Lost River Educational Foundation (Kathy Kavanagh), and AmeriCorps Members

GOALS FOR 2023-2024:

- Establish a long-range plan for each project including project transfer process.
- Complete the initial phase of posting of the Historic Schoolhouse Trail to Story Maps.
- Collaborate with community partners on African American Cemeteries Project

- Develop and meet the deliverables for the Potomac Waterways project (pending grant award).
- Increase volunteer capacity.
- Collaborate with Lost River Educational Foundation (LREF) on Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail's progress.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Apply for and secure two AmeriCorps Members with StoryMaps skills.
- Develop project timeline for each heritage project by September 2023.
- Continue collection of schoolhouse narratives and work on storyline development; post them on Story/Maps and TheClio.com by December 2023.
- Establish a plan for the African American Cemeteries Project.
- Submit a grant to the West Virginia Humanities Council by September 1, 2023, to fund African American cemeteries project.
- Continue development of associated educational literature and programs for each project in collaboration with Hardy County Schools.
- Award three or four Barn Quilt grants to LREF by December 2023.
- Post Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail on Visit Hardy website and on TheClio.org; train LREF representative on how to maintain content on TheClio.org.
- Continue working with other counties on Potomac Waterways Trail including database development, collection of narratives, and promotional campaign (Pending the receipt of the NPS Chesapeake Gateway

grant and securing an AmeriCorps Member – September 2023 to August 2024).

- Establish a plan by September 2023 for the transfer of the Heritage Trails program to community organization by June 2024.

Fairfax Line Documentation and Geology Trail

Chair: Pete Sullivan

Board Members: Rick Danieli

Non-Board Members: Josh Taylor and Michele Moure-Reeves

GOALS FOR 2023-2024

- Install geological interpretive kiosks on the Mountain Skyway
- Organize content and post Fairfax Line history on The Clio.org and then on StoryMaps.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Work with West Virginia Geological & Economic Survey to complete content for Mountain Skyway kiosks
- Work with West Virginia Dept of Highways on kiosk placement
- Plan a marketing campaign for both projects.
- Collaborate with Pete Sullivan and other partners to develop scope and content for the Fairfax Line Project.
- Work with Josh to post content of Fairfax Line history on TheClio.com with intention of expanding to StoryMaps by June 2024.



Higgins House and Hardy County Travel Information Center

Chair: Michele Moure-Reeves

Board Members: Rick Freeman, Amanda West, Toni Mathias Harvey

Non-Board Members: Mary Burgess, Mike Crites, Gabe Neville, Kathy Kavanagh, Abbie Chessler, and Gerald Milnes

GOALS FOR 2023-2024:

- Have 50% of Higgins House/Travel Information Center construction work completed by June 2024
- Meet West Virginia Humanities Council grant deadlines and requirements before October 30, 2023.
- Complete Higgins House museum displays by June 2024
- Open Robert Higgins House Museum and Travel Information Center by September 2024.
- Maintain hours required by CVB Oversight legislation (40-hour per week schedule).

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Post scope of work for completion of restoration work and building of additions
- Hire a construction contractor.
- Update project timeline including schedule of meetings with museum consultants by July 1, 2023.
- Schedule meetings with consultants to refine museum content, complete display design, and update budget for museum and information center interiors by October 1, 2023.

- Submit West Virginia Humanities Council interim report by October 30, 2023.
- Apply for USDA Community Facilities Grant to purchase media equipment, HVAC equipment, and lighting.
- Develop a Friends of the Higgins House group.
- Develop a policy and procedures manual for facility management, volunteers, and docents.
- Develop educational literature and programs in collaboration with Hardy County Schools.
- Hire staff and/or volunteers.

Agritourism

Chair: Amanda West

Board Members: Hunter Williams, David Workman

Non-Board Members: Miriam Leatherman, Wardensville Garden Market, WVU Extension Service (Alex Smith), and Michele Moure-Reeves

GOAL FOR 2023-2024:

- Provide tangible promotional support for agricultural tourism-based businesses in Hardy County.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE FOR 2023-2024:

- Identify and work with county-wide partners to assess needs for agritourism support and promotion

