

INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING NOTICE

COMMITTEE/BOARD: Intergovernmental Tourism Collaboration

DATE OF MEETING: June 26, 2015 (Friday)

PLACE OF MEETING: 415 Main St., Onalaska (Room 112)

TIME OF MEETING: 12:00 P.M. (noon)

1. Call to Order/Roll Call
2. Public Input (Limited to 3 minutes per individual)
3. Approval of minutes from the previous meeting

Consideration and possible action on the following items:

4. Presentation of The White Paper Document
5. Discussion on next steps

Adjournment

PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE that members of the Common Council of the City of Onalaska who do not serve on the committee may attend this meeting to gather information about a subject over which they have decision making responsibility.

Therefore, further notice is hereby given that the above meeting may constitute a meeting of the Common Council and is hereby noticed as such, even though it is not contemplated that the Common Council will take any formal action at this meeting.

NOTICES MAILED TO:

** Mayor Joe Chilsen
Ald. Jim Binash
Ald. Jim Olson
Ald. Jim Bialecki
Ald. Bob Muth
Ald. Harvey Bertrand
Ald. Barry Blomquist
City Attorney Dept Heads
La Crosse Tribune Charter Com.
Onalaska Holmen Community Life Fox News
WIZM WKTY WLXR WKBH
WLSU WKBT WXOW

*Committee Members
**Liaison Representatives

**Mayor Tim Kabat
**Dave Clements
Peter Hughes
*Brent Johnston
**Amy Gabay, Marketing and Sales
Coordinator
Onalaska Public Library

*Chris Roderique
*Pat Stephans (Vice-Chair)
*Teri Pinter
*Shawn McAlister
*Susan Safronoff (Secretary)
*Nancy Proctor
*Steve Plenge
*Dan Kapanke
*Erik Sjolander - Chair

Date Notices Mailed & Posted: 06-24-15

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the City of Onalaska will provide reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with a disability to ensure equal access to public meetings provided notification is given to the City Clerk within seventy-two (72) hours prior to the public meeting and that the requested accommodation does not create an undue hardship for the City.

Regional Tourism Steering Committee 2015

Town of Campbell, Village of Holmen, City of La Crosse, City of Onalaska, Village of West Salem

“White Paper on Regional Tourism Transformation”



**A Report from the La Crosse County Steering Committee on
Regional Tourism**

June 26, 2015

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I. Defining the Situation

Impetus for Regional Tourism Transformation

Tourism management and marketing for “La Crosse County” is currently diffused across several municipalities or entities resulting in the same or similar audiences being targeted; sub-optimizing the regions ability to take advantage of a more unified approach which provides for not only enhanced economies of scale, but unity of message and coordination of resources in order to promote the region as a signature tourism destination in the Upper Midwest and the Nation.



II. Executive Summary

Background

In late 2013 the Mayors of Onalaska and La Crosse put forth the opportunity for the examination of creating a Regional Tourism organization. This question had a history in La Crosse County, having been discussed several times in the preceding thirty years, with no tangible results. However, the question continued to be raised by all area constituents (e.g. business and community leaders, area tourism organizations, and the community-at-large). At issue was whether or not the model of having multiple tourism organizations within one geographic region, "La Crosse County", was the most efficient and effective approach

to having maximum impact on the areas tourism industry? Specific issues have centered on duplication of effort and resources, marginal operational and strategic marketing budgets, lean staffing, and fragmentation of both effort and the share of the tourism dollars available from area businesses, governmental entities (budgets) and grant programs.

All of the aforementioned issues lead to the central question as to whether or not the current business model delivered the maximum impact to “La Crosse County”. Could another business model based on a "collective approach" yield greater impact?



Overview of the Process and Participants

Dialogue

The first step in taking this process forward was the call to convene key stakeholders to hold a facilitated dialogue for the purpose of examining whether or not this opportunity had true potential and whether or not there was common ground to be found.

In January, 2014 tourism stakeholders from “La Crosse County” participated in a half day retreat to discuss the formation of a Regional Tourism organization and the aforementioned issues. Mayor Tim Kabat of La Crosse and Mayor Joe Chilsen of Onalaska served as champions and conveners of this process. In organizing their approach, they created a

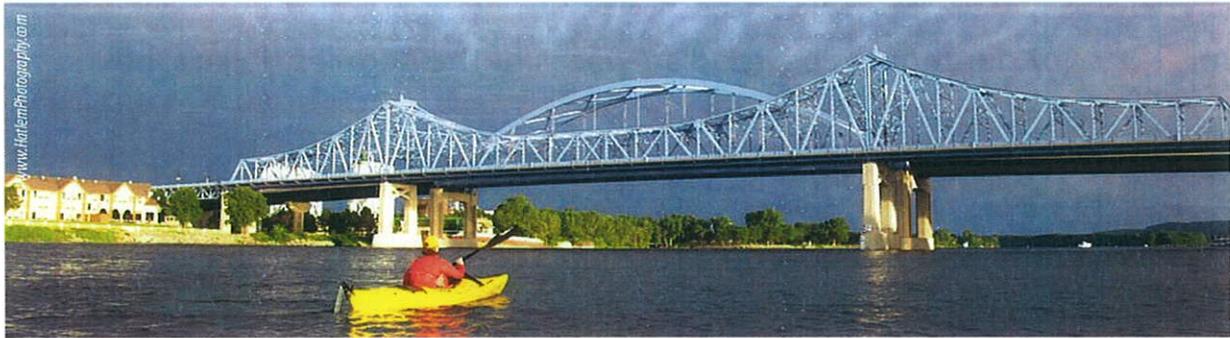
voluntary position of facilitator/consultant (Peter Hughes) to insure facilitated dialogue and a structured process would be in place should the process continue to go forward.

Participants (see Appendix _) included representatives from the Town of Campbell, Village of Holmen, City of La Crosse, City of Onalaska, and Village of West Salem. In addition representatives from the respective area tourism agencies (both professional staff and Board of Directors), and the hotel and restaurant industry were invited to participate. In all approximately 30 individuals participated.

Retreat participants discussed the current situation and their thoughts for the future as well as examining the specific vision/missions of the La Crosse Area Convention and Tourism Bureau and the Onalaska Tourism Department which lead to the identification of both issues and opportunities (See appendix __ for a report on the Regional Tourism Retreat Conclusions).

Collaboration: Scope of Partnership

At the conclusion of the retreat, having discussed and reflected on the central question, the participants unanimously agreed that the formation of a Regional Tourism organization should be further explored through the formation of a Steering Committee, sponsored by the two Mayor's, and chaired by Erik Sjolander (at that time a member of the Onalaska City Council) with representation from all key stakeholder groups to oversee a process to further develop this concept.



III. The Charge

The Steering Committee was charged with developing a "White Paper" with recommendation's regarding the creation of a Regional Tourism organization, to be delivered to the five municipalities and the sponsoring Mayors of La Crosse and Onalaska.

The Committee was convened in March, 2014 and subsequently met monthly through the remainder of 2014 to present. The first steps taken by the Steering Committee was to formulate it's "Guiding Principles" for conducting its work, confirmation of the deliverables delineated in the Steering Committee charter (see Appendix ___) and the formulation of a "10 Year Future State Vision."

Guiding Principles

- Dispensing of information
 - Single point of contact to be the chairperson
- Transparency of work
- Respect for all ideas
- Have a positive attitude and approach to the work
- Make best decisions for our communities, not personal decisions
- About promoting the region and individual communities:
 - Corollary-Establish our specific communities/boundaries

Who We Are

- Not our money, be good stewards of the peoples dollars, be effective and respectful

Deliverables

- White paper report on a regional tourism organization with Recommendations
 - Governance, structure of organization, facility and location(s) of facility, marketing/ branding, budget, funding mechanisms
 - Leadership, staffing, infrastructure, name of organization, regional geography, functions
 - Timeline
- Communication Plan (Phase I & II)
- Future State Vision

10 Year Future State Vision

- La Crosse County will be in top 5 counties in Wisconsin for tourism economic impact: (#12 in 2014)
- Create significant efficiencies
- More dollars for marketing, less of administration and less duplication
- Substantial job growth
 - Whole greater than sum of parts
- Our brand identity rivals the Dell's and Door County
- Stronger "Whole Community" feeling



Six key areas of work were identified by the Steering Committee that is essential to successfully forming a regional tourism organization:

- a. Governance Structure
- b. Budgeting and Funding Mechanisms
- c. Staffing
- d. Facilities/Location
- e. Branding and Marketing
- f. Plan to Operationalize (TBD)

Teams were created to develop recommendations for each of these areas. Each work team was chaired by a member of the Steering Committee, with other Steering Committee members distributed across the five teams. Content experts from the community were invited by invitation of the Mayor's to participate on a specific work team. A process and deliverables were developed, with timelines for the delivery of their work to the Steering Committee.

The work team recommendations were completed in the late fall of 2014 and reviewed and discussed by the Steering Committee. Based on these discussions and specific feedback, teams were asked to conclude their

revisions and submit final recommendations to the Steering Committee in January, 2015. A writing team was selected to create a draft of the white paper on Regional Tourism Transformation.



IV. Recommendations

Rationale for a Transformation: "Collective Impact"

After much dialogue and reflection the Regional Tourism Steering Committee believes that in order to have the maxim economic impact for "La Crosse County" that the formation of a regional tourism organization offers the greatest opportunity through "collective impact".

This approach will address several long standing issues facing each of the individual municipality's efforts in tourism:

1. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
 - a. Collectively, we will have greater impact on the economy of "La Crosse County" through a future unified approach vs. the fragmentation of the past.
 - b. Having the needed depth and breadth to not just incrementally improve our efforts, but to create breakthrough impact i.e. "quantum movement of the bar". La Crosse County is currently ranked 12th in the State of Wisconsin in tourism. Our Steering Committee vision is to be a "Top 5" tourism county.
2. Merging resources will provide for greater impact through efficiencies and effectiveness, with respect to budget, staffing, tools, processes, depth of expertise (tacit knowledge) ,
 - a. Takes advantage of existing tourism initiatives and gives them a broader platform and depth of resources e.g. Sports Authority

3. Having core mass offers “La Crosse County” the potential to be a multi-state driver of economic impact and to have a more powerful voice and presence where it is needed. We can elevate our impact; nationally, in the Upper Midwest, and in Wisconsin as it relates to regional economic impact through tourism.
4. Aligns with forces in “La Crosse County” to work more collaboratively to have greater Impact on the growth of business and the economy of this region. Specifically, this initiative lines up strongly with the "Synergy" work being done by La Crosse Area Development Corporation (LADCO), La Crosse Area Convention and Visitor Bureau, (LACVB), La Crosse Region Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Mainstreet, Inc. (DMI) and the 7 Rivers Alliance.
5. Take advantage of the natural resources present in “La Crosse County” and the surrounding region, and to leverage this in smart ways to positively drive the economy i.e. the Mississippi River, Bluffs, biking trails, seasonal sports, silent sports, boating and others....





Recommendations

The Town of Campbell, Village of Holmen, City of La Crosse, City of Onalaska, and Village of West Salem seek to develop a Regional Tourism Agency which will provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach to attracting visitors to “La Crosse County”.

- A. Governance Structure
- B. Budgeting and Funding Mechanisms
- C. Staffing
- D. Facilities/Location
- E. Branding and Marketing
- F. Plan to Operationalize (TBD)

A. Governance and Structure

The Governance Work Group evaluated several options with regard to the overall governance of a new Regional Tourism organization (see Appendix ___)

Recommendation 1:

Utilize and operate under a 501 (c) (6) in adherence with all State of Wisconsin statutes. This is the model being used by LACVB and other tourism organizations and was strongly recommended as the appropriate not-for-profit structure best suited to meeting the needs of the new regional tourism organization.

Rationale:

The work group recommended starting a brand new organization:

- a. A new entity should be formed when changing bylaws, structure, governance, etc.
- b. All stakeholders can embrace a new neutral organization as opposed to utilizing an existing one.
- c. Easy to set up.
- d. Proposed that additional 501 (c) (3) entities be set up as marketing/fundraising arms of the main organization.

Recommendation 2:

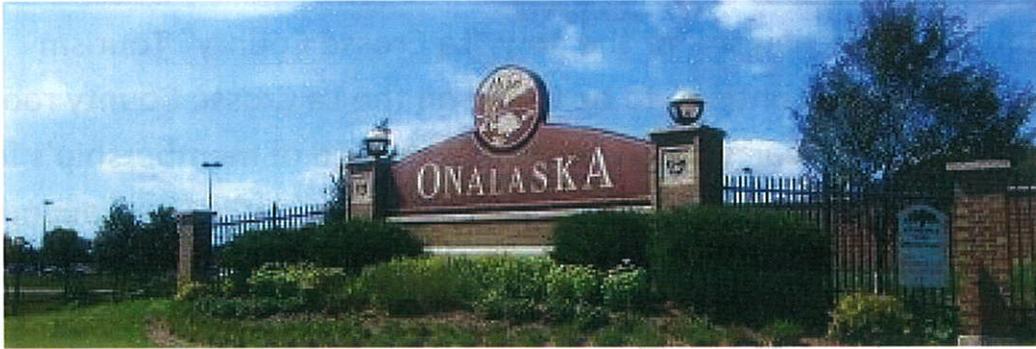
The work group recommends that Mayors/Village Presidents utilize an interim Regional Tourism Executive Director to assist with the transition and implementation of the new organization. It is recommended that the interim Executive Directors tenure have a clearly defined period of time and clear expectations of deliverables. The use of an interim executive is a common approach, especially during a period of organizational transition and renewal and when previous leadership positions have been vacated. Most recently this approach was utilized when the former La Crosse Chamber of Commerce Executive Director's position was vacated. We would expect the interim executive director to assist with reviewing the work that has been done, and make recommendations aligned with the White Paper report. As the final white paper revision comes forward, the interim executive could assist in the process of obtaining approvals from the five municipalities. Once approved, the new organization could be legally formed and begin operations. Existing boards (LACVB &

Recommendation 3: Key Operational Steps

- a. Onalaska Tourism would need to dissolve themselves and follow established bylaw requirements at time of dissolution.
- b. All existing contract/obligations would be settled and dissolved from both existing entities. New contracts can be formed with new entity as needed.
- c. Interim, temporary office to be located in current LACVB building in Riverside Park with the understanding this is a temporary, interim location. Only 1 office location to be utilized until a business need identify the need for additional spaces.
- d. The Interim Executive, with the assistance of Mayors & Village Presidents, to identify the first executive board & board of directors as described in the new organization's by-laws.
- e. Preferably made up of high level executives in the Coulee Region.

- f. An interim time line to be established with the Interim Executive. When appropriate a committee made up of the executive board members will initiate the search process for the next CEO/President.
- g. Time-line recommended:
- Mayors/Village Presidents to meet and be advised of this interim leadership and the current organizations steps to take for changes/dissolution, and group recommendations.
 - June 26th- meeting to address white paper draft
 - Group to make recommendations/change
 - Recommendations/changes to large group within 1 week
 - Interim Executive search initiated and lead by Mayors Chilsen & Kabat.
 - Go over white paper. Recommendations with interim executive.
 - Establish talking points for community listening sessions
 - Establish a timeline.
 - Community listening sessions to be held
 - Recommendations for changes to steering committee.
 - Changes agreed on and made designing a final white paper.
 - Council Approvals. Steering committee members to attend in support. Press releases showing support/giving information to public.
 - Pending council approvals, new organization formed and led by interim executive.
 - Staffing considerations for new organization.
 - Existing organizations dissolutions.
 - New leadership groups formed planning & meeting.
 - Existing organizations operationally detailed for interim executive.
 - Interim New organization operation.

- Select group of exec board members conduct search for next CEO/President.



B. Budgeting and Funding Mechanisms

Recommendation 1:

The funding mechanism for the new “La Crosse County” Tourism organization will continue to be based on the La Crosse County room tax methodology currently in place, and the use of membership’s fees (e.g. The La Crosse Convention and Tourism Bureau). See Appendix

Recommendation 2:

The organization will create one operations budget. This budget will be aligned with and support the strategic goals of the organization.



C. Staffing

The overall staffing plan for the proposed Regional Tourism organization will be determined upon approval of the “White Paper Proposal” by the partner municipalities. One of the key guiding principles in determining staffing is to achieve economies of scale through the consolidation of multiple tourism organizations or departments. In addition, the overall operating budget will be a key consideration in determining the final number of positions that the organization can afford.

The Staffing work group did conduct an audit of current positions at each of the five partner municipalities and has identified what they feel are key positions that will be necessary for the organization to have both the expertise and the depth and breadth to be optimally effective. Specific positions/job descriptions and salary ranges will be included in the staffing plan.



D. Facilities/Location

Recommendation 1:

The facility work group recommends that one location and facility be established as the home of the new Regional Tourism organization.

Recommendation 1a:

An interim plan will need to be put in place until a new location is identified.

Recommendation 2:

The facility should be located at the junction of Rt. 35 and I-90, on the border of the City of La Crosse and City of Onalaska (and as close to the Exit 3 as possible).

Rationale:

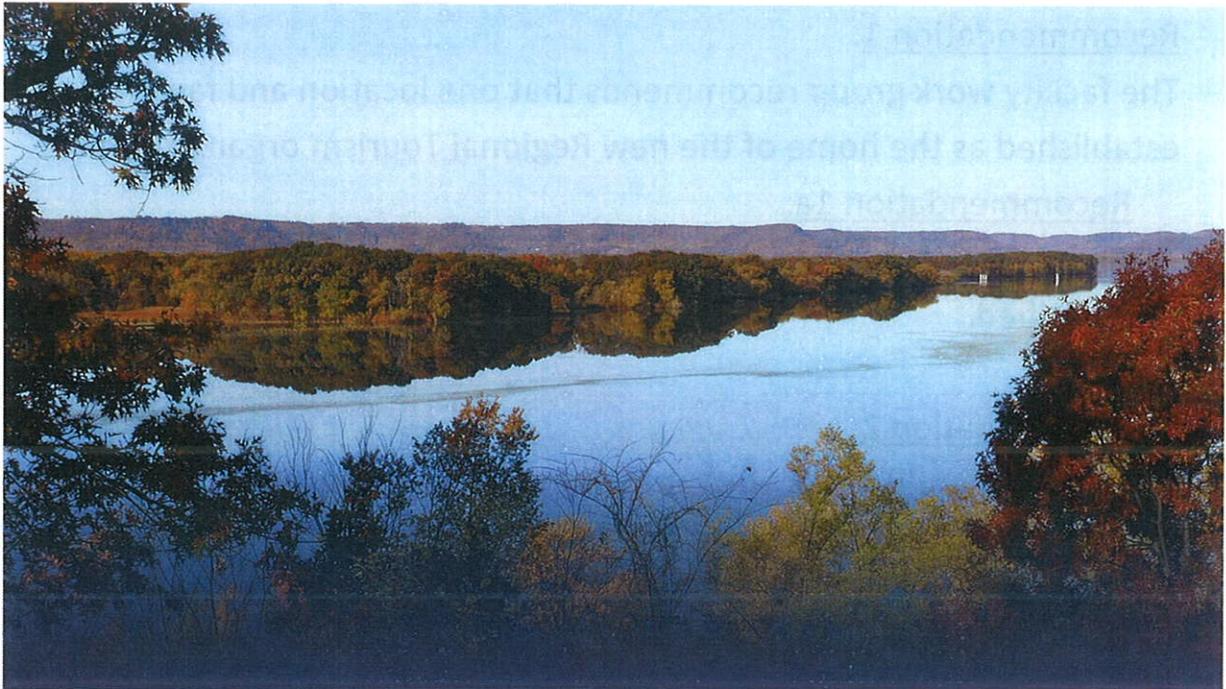
This location is ideal for serving the needs of all 5 communities as it not only well situated between the two largest municipalities; it is ideally located in approximation to the Town of Campbell, Village of Holmen and Village of West Salem.

Recommendation 3:

The new Regional Tourism entity would continue to utilize the State Visitor Center located on I-90 East in the Town of Campbell and near the French Island East exit.

Recommendation 4:

Utilize mobile Tourism Center concept (vans) to provide overall flexibility and presence at major special events within the Seven Rivers Region (e.g. State Track meet, State Ski meet, Bass Fishing tournament, NCAA Division III Track and Field Championships, etc.) and to conduct mobile marketing efforts throughout the Upper Midwest.



E. Branding and Marketing

After a detailed investigation and thorough review of real data and case studies related to these topics the sub-group has three primary recommendations related to each of the above underlined topics. Further explanation, data, and specific supporting case studies have been included in this document to support these recommendations.

Recommendation #1: Unify both tourism agencies' limited resources to promote a single brand and message around the key benefits that are relevant to the entire region. This will allow for broader market exposure, clarity of message, and brand awareness in an increasingly competitive destination tourism industry.

Recommendation #2: The word "La Crosse" must be the primary locator/identifier for all branding and marketing efforts of a unified tourism agency.

Recommendation #3: Ensure maximized operational effectiveness and efficiency by implementing a detailed audit of both organizations' branding and marketing efforts to best coordinate and align staff's skill sets and other non-human capital resources.

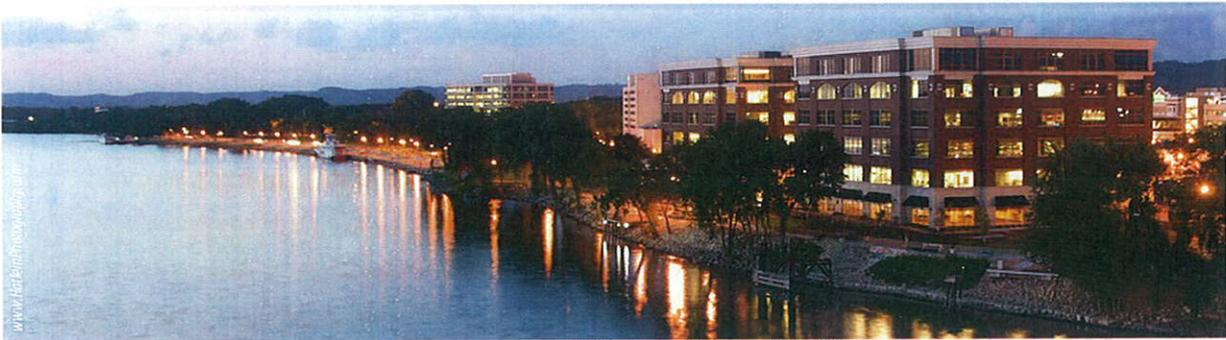
Recommendation #4: The use of the "Convention and Visitor Bureau" identifier is not necessary as part of the organizations new name. This is based on national research results on this topic. A key component of naming will include the use of an "action verb" or phrase to create more dynamic impact with audiences and enhanced recall. For example, "Pure Michigan".

The tentative working name for the new organization is,
"ExploreLaCrosseCounty."



F. Plan to Operationalize

Once the overall White Paper recommendations on the creation of a Regional Tourism organization receive approval by the respective municipalities a team will put together a detailed plan to operationalize the new Regional Tourism organization.



Of key Importance will be to deploy this plan in coherence with the Town of Campbell, Village of Holmen, City of La Crosse, City of Onalaska, Village of West Salem long range plans and priorities. This work will depend on a high level of communication and coordination amongst the partner communities, the new “ExploreLaCrosseCounty” regional tourism organization and other community partners.

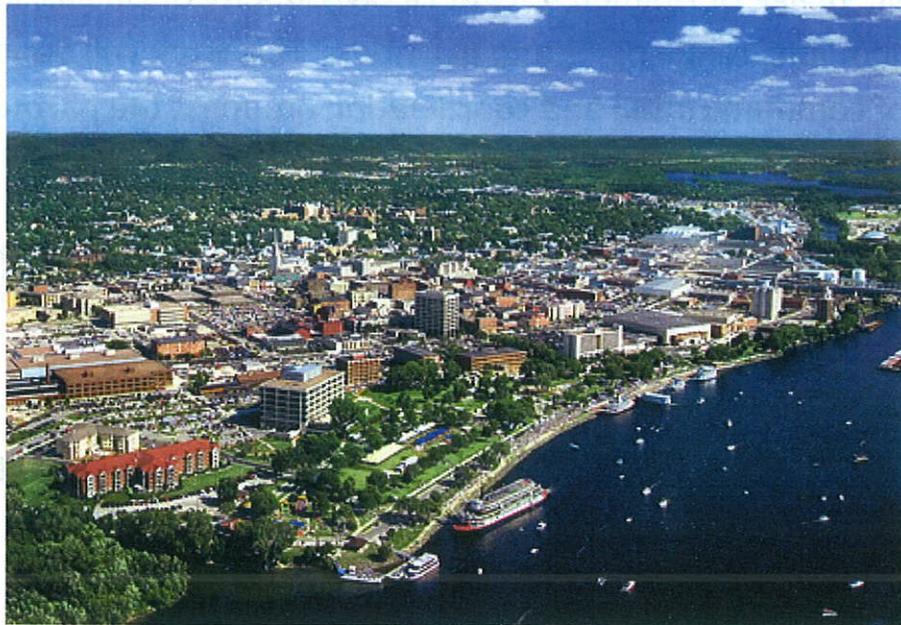
V. Next Steps

Approval Process

1. Community Input sessions: July, 2015
2. Submitted to the governance bodies of the five municipalities for discussion and approval: September, 2015

Implementation

1. Communication Plan to key community stakeholders including the community-at-large
2. Implementation Steps
 - a. 5 key areas
3. Monitoring and Evaluation Process
 - a. Performance against plan



VI. Appendices



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Appendix 1: Sub-Committee Reports to the Steering Committee

- a. Governance Structure
- b. Budgeting and Funding Mechanisms
- c. Staffing
- d. Facilities/Location
- e. Branding and Marketing
- f. Plan to Operationalize

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Appendix 2: Steering Committee Charter

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Appendix 3: Notes from Planning Retreat January, 2014

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Appendix 4: Steering Committee Membership

Sub-Committee Work Groups members

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Appendix 5:

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Appendix 6:

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