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Tourism Center

Hastings Tourism Assessment

RIPPLE EFFECTS MAPPING REPORT



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Authored by:

Ella Weber, Graduate Research Assistant,

Scott Chazdon, Evaluation and Research Specialist, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality,

Cynthia Messer, Director, University of Minnesota Tourism Center,

Jennifer Hawkins, Extension Educator-Community Economics, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality

With thanks to the community residents of Hastings.

The Tourism Assessment Program was conducted in 2016-17.

Expert Team Members:

Cynthia C. Messer, Director and Extension Professor, University of Minnesota Tourism Center

Tammy Koerte, Extension Educator-Tourism, University of Minnesota Tourism Center

Bruce W. Schwartau, Community Economics Program Leader, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality

Jennifer Hawkins, Extension Educator-Community Economics, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality

Liz Templin, Extension Educator-Community Economics, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality

Brigid Tuck, Senior Economic Analyst, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality

Virajita Singh, Ph.D., Senior Research Fellow, Center for Sustainable Building Research, University of Minnesota

Carrie Hatler, Tourism Marketing Intern, University of Minnesota Tourism Center

Lori E. Peterson, Metro Regional Manager, Explore Minnesota Tourism

Jane Beattie, Consultant

Community Leadership Team:

Kristy Barse, Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce

Pam Thorsen, Thorwood R & R Properties

Mecca Manz Page, Breakaway Cafe

Barb Hollenbeck, Second Childhood Toys

Lacy Vreeland, Eye Candy

Mark Vetvick, Hastings Country Inn

Amy Reents, Midwest Ski Areas Association

Chris Jenkins, Parks and Recreation Department, City of Hastings

Lee Stoffel, Communications, City of Hastings

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BACKGROUND

In late 2016, the Hastings Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau partnered with the University of Minnesota Tourism Center to assist its tourism development efforts. The 12-month Tourism Assessment Program, led by Tourism Center educators engaged the community, tourism experts, and visitors to understand the current tourism climate and identify opportunities for the community to enhance or expand tourism. Data collection and research was conducted in concert with diverse stakeholders - including tourism experts, Explore Minnesota Tourism, private industry representatives, and community members.

This work revealed the most pressing need was for Hastings to create a compelling, shared vision for tourism that is supported by the community's local organizations, local government leaders and residents. A primary goal identified was shifting community perceptions of tourism to embrace Hastings as a destination showcased through targeted marketing tactics.

In June 2019, the University of Minnesota Tourism Center re-engaged Hastings' tourism stakeholders and community members in an evaluation process of the program and its outcomes. A modified Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) process collected information on the impacts of the tourism development initiative to date, as well as challenges facing the community moving forward. This report outlines the process and findings from this activity.

RIPPLE EFFECTS MAPPING PROCESS

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is an evaluation method that engages program stakeholders to reflect upon and visually map the intended and unintended changes produced by the program. The REM process combines elements of Appreciative Inquiry, mind mapping, group interviewing, and qualitative data analysis. More information about the process is found at www.z.umn.edu/rembook.

Normally the REM process is a face-to-face group session in which participants interview each other using Appreciative Inquiry questions and report their interview findings. The facilitator then creates a visual mind map with their findings. In Hastings, the face-to-face group session was conducted with tourism leaders involved in the project; but to gather broader community input, an online survey was also developed and distributed by the Hastings Area Chamber and city social media platforms. Questions used in both the face-to-face group session and online survey were:

- What highlights, achievements, or successes have you experienced or observed with tourism development in Hastings during the past 18-24 months?
- What unexpected things have happened as a result of tourism development work in the past 18-24 months?
- What connections with others (new and/or deepened) have you made as a result of the work happening in tourism development in Hastings in the last 18-24 months?

Eight representatives from the Chamber, City government, downtown businesses and lodging establishments participated in the face-to-face group session, and 120 participants responded to the online survey. The in-person session occurred first. Participants' responses in the in-person session created the initial map, and mapped responses were organized into themes. Textual data from the online surveys was added the existing mind map.

THEMES

Six themes about the impacts of the project emerged from the Ripple Effects Mapping process:

- Growing new leadership.
- Enhancing assets and increasing engagement.
- Changing perceptions of tourism.
- Increasing investment.
- Increasing collaboration.
- Strengthening marketing.

A seventh thematic focus was on “Challenges moving forward.”

Growing new leadership

Stakeholders reported the emergence of new leaders in town and a shift toward collaborative leadership. Participants credited the tourism development program for encouraging grassroots stewardship, increased participation in event committees, building the confidence of newer tourism leaders and identifying talented residents as tourism assets. **Additionally, an overall shift from events being primarily led by the Chamber of Commerce to a more partnership-driven model was highlighted.**

- Tap report gave Christy a chance to grow her confidence as a leader to grow tourism.
 - Have a roadmap to make decisions and lead us and I think it's been really good.
- New event - The Hootenanny - is a big litmus test to prove the impacts. Using it as a gauge to show people interested in getting out of pajamas and downtown. More people are aware and coming out where they wouldn't have.
- Chamber recognized they don't need to own all the events. Now they're not running the new events but partnering with other leadership and promoting their work.
- Rotary put on a big music event that drew many people to town.
 - There are new businesses and new leaders in town.
- Allowed them to compile a list of residents who are real assets, which has been helpful.
 - I've figured out who has hidden talents that we can leverage. I've really zoned in on them and they're willing to partner.
 - The tourism development work started some grassroots ownership and stewardship.
- Has grown my appreciation for a lot of the great things in Hastings and makes me want to spread the word.
 - I've started working on committees to help with events.

Growing new leadership

Enhancing assets and increasing engagement

Many respondents noted that the tourism development initiative resulted in enhancements to existing assets and places. They reported increased engagement by both visitors and local residents. Respondents especially stressed positive enhancements to downtown including improved nightlife, the opening of Spiral Brewery, and an increase in small local businesses. The Riverfront Revitalization resulted in more recreational opportunities like biking, picnicking, and dog-walking, as well as community events like the Summer Kick-Off Party and outdoor movie nights. **These enhancements contributed to a sense that Hastings is a destination again, instilling a sense of pride in residents and business owners.**

<p>In my work at a bar downtown, I could see things showing up. I was able to tell people about all the things that were happening in town. For a while, the main thing was Rivertown Days.</p>	<p>As soon as Christi came in things started happening. A lot had gotten stale, and people might not realize all the ground work that had to be laid to get to this point. You could feel the excitement.</p>
<p>Able to use some of the existing promos to highlight opportunities for visiting friends and relatives, and create specific itineraries.</p>	<p>Friends and relatives market was a new thing that came from the report. Helpful to have a better understanding of that market and we can promote internally.</p>
<p>It seems like there are more people visiting or using the new spaces, whether they're from town or outside town.</p>	<p>Spiral Brewery opened and is thriving, the downtown seems busier, the riverfront renaissance draws more people, and there are a lot more summer events.</p>

Enhancing assets and increasing engagement

Changing perceptions of tourism:

Changes in perceptions of tourism were identified in both residents and visitors. Community members recognize that investments in tourism also benefit residents, and noted more people taking advantage of events like Rivertown Days. Several respondents expressed improved understanding of how tourism benefits Hastings economically. **Several respondents also reported changes in visitors' perceptions, stating that more people are interested in moving to Hastings due to increased engagement opportunities. In particular, they noted that young families are taking an interest.**

. As a bartender I can't believe the number of 30 year old families that have moved to Hastings. How often does that happen to communities? It's like wow....you came from Montana to Hastings. Family just drove around and found Hastings and loved it.

Visitors' perceptions are changing and attracting new residents.

We just moved here three years ago and now our children moved here a year ago after experiencing Halloween downtown and the car shows and all the wonderful shops and places to eat. They wouldn't be here without those positive experiences.

My friends who live out of town said they're hearing more about Hastings and how great it is. It's a message we want to keep getting out there so people move here and start businesses here.

Renewed interest from residents. Have worked cohesively to make things better and they appreciate it and can tell other people/friends/families. They are seeing a spark and renewed interest in the town.

When I moved here 30+ years ago, my wife read a letter to the editor rejecting newcomers. Over the years, it's changed for the better. While residents used to leave during Rivertown Days, now visitors and residents are drawn together.

There has been more emphasis on tourism at the city level. Finding out the importance of communication, working with different groups, and discussing funding opportunities.

Being involved really changed my outlook that tourism is an important piece and how we need to be hospitable to our guests. TAP expanded my view of how we need to work together to attract people and use this as an economic driver.

There have been lots of positive reviews relating to the shift in focus of Rivertown Days toward visitors and downtown. While the change was maybe for visitors, local residents appreciated the changes too. Now that it's right downtown, more families have an opportunity to stay longer. It's easy to rest by going to a restaurant or bar. I think people are staying longer and having more fun.

The community is being forced to grow in a different direction. There is a strong movement started by the creation of the art center, art space, and eventually the equity and inclusion meetings in town.

As a community, we are trying to make tourism a priority which is a good thing.

Changing perceptions of tourism

Increasing investment:

Many respondents cited tangible increases in investment associated with the tourism development initiative. These include increased partnerships with other businesses, expanding advertising, the Hastings tourism website, and improving wayfinding signs. Residents identified a direct payoff between city investments and improved outcomes. **Other respondents reported direct financial outcomes, including a \$7000 increase in lodging tax revenues from 2017 to 2018. One business also reported an \$18-\$20000 increase in monthly revenue.**

As someone new to tourism, he's had a lot of really good ideas that have helped tourism by keeping people in town. He recently took over the hotel and took out new ads, shared visitors guides with guests to let them know what's going on and what else there is to do, and has made connections with other businesses in town like the funeral home.

Helped tourism by keeping people in town.

More people are coming to town because of the advertising I and the chamber are doing. I've increased revenue 18-20k per month.

The city has been more willing to invest in wayfinding signs for the bike trails. That was an important piece that signaled a renewed increase in support from staff and council. It showed they are seeing tourism as a driver here.

There has been a 7k increase in lodging tax revenues 2017-18.

We've invested two years building the foundation - creating the website, getting the guide in place, and hiring new staff. It might not be apparent from the outside, but this allowed us to really take off now.

Created a pretty massive change by acknowledging two audiences - chamber members and tourists. We were able to stay under one umbrella but create two separate brands, even though it's a big undertaking for a small staff.

Spending money on infrastructure and our community to make it a place that people want to come will always pay off. The Riverwalk is a good example of this.

People are building more connections with small and local businesses and spending their money to keep them going instead of going to the large businesses outside Hastings.

Increasing investment

Increasing collaboration:

A large number of responses mentioned increases in collaboration within and between organizations. Increased collaboration between new and existing businesses was associated with improved marketing campaigns, multi-stakeholder projects, growing new leadership, and a shift toward cooperation over competition. Respondents also reported a stronger relationship between the Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Business Association. **Perhaps most notably, one respondent credited increased collaboration with creating an overall shift in mindset toward embracing new ideas and opportunities with the knowledge that others will help work to make them succeed.**

There has been more cohesion among committee members which has improved the group and made them more aligned.

Although he wasn't part of the initial TAP report, he could feel the change. He could especially tell with downtown that the DBA is starting to collaborate more together and there is more to do.

Historic preservation society has used the report and built a stronger relationship with chamber

Has led to tangible changes such as saving a building and partnering to use an app promoting historic walking tours.

They're excited by a much stronger sense of collaboration between downtown, the city, chamber, rotary, churches, etc. New projects have happened that likely wouldn't have been successful without new collaborations. More people are stepping up instead of expecting others to do everything.

Has resulted in a shift in mindset - that you can come with your idea and people will work to make it happen. They have faith that people want these changes and are willing to help. This has resulted in successful projects like blocking off downtown for the Halloween Candy Crawl.

Connecting businesses has been a positive outcome. It's really encouraged businesses to work together.

Enhanced the relationship with Explore MN tourism, not just for the chamber but also for individual businesses.

He's learning to understand the actions of the Chamber and CVB. He's been trying to get his hotel involved in things, work with different businesses in town to collaborate. It's been working out well.

He's a member of the Chamber of Commerce although not actively involved. He sees it as an asset even though he hasn't used it extensively, and thinks it's been beneficial.

There is a stronger relationship between the DBA and chamber. Led to an increased understanding of what the chamber is doing to promote downtown as part of Hastings' tourism story. The relationship between the city and the chamber seems stronger too - there was never a strong disconnect but now they promote each other, recognize weakness, and fill in gaps.

There have been deliberate changes, including for Rivertown Days and starting and ending the trail in downtown.

Downtown has been impacted by new businesses and leaders improving their marketing and working on projects together.

There's a sense of a stronger connection amongst downtown businesses. They seem to be partners instead of competition.

Even as only a customer, I've made connections with business owners downtown, gotten to know several personally, and would consider them friends.

Through the brewery, we have worked to communicate, build community, and promote Hastings as much as we can. We live in one of the best cities in Minnesota and it's time people know about it!

Increasing Collaboration

Strengthening marketing

Respondents credited the tourism development program for strengthened marketing campaigns that led to increased visitation and awareness of Hastings as a tourist destination. They noted increased digital marketing through websites and social media, as well as partnerships with advertisers. Enhanced community visibility in local/regional media (such as Hastings Cable TV, the Take a Hike Mike show, KARE11, and local photographers) was specifically cited. **One respondent reported a 65% increase in requests for visitor guides over the past year.**

We've had a lot of outside interest based on the number of requests for visitors guide. The increase in inquiries and leads from last year is over 65%, not just from the Twin Cities but from all over the country.

I see more people downtown from the metro area. I believe more people are aware of Hastings due to city investment and increased communication.

Enhanced relationships with advertisers - like MN Biking guide. They've provided over an above paid advertising, it gives provides a story to tell and posts to tag in social media.

Increased media attention has led to more people recognizing Hastings is on the map and it's a close drive. Used to have to beg for media to come, or they'd only come for something bad, but now they are coming for good things.

They've enhanced relationships with local media. Photographers in town have played a huge role. Hastings Cable TV has turned a corner. Take a Hike Mike show visits different events. School systems and teachers in town are being highlighted.

Concrete examples include KARE11 recognizing Hastings as a top road trip destination as a direct result of their relationship with Explore MN. PBS visited and did a story on the impact of local breweries. St. Paul Pioneer press did a story on the bike trail.

Stronger marketing

Had to build a separate section in their website database for tourism-related activities because there was such a huge increase in hits to the new website.

Seeing a lot more people downtown from places like Apple Valley, Eagan, and Rosemount who haven't been here before. It means the marketing and the website are working and were worth the investment. They have day visitors that are the pudding on top - adds an extra layer of sweetness.

Out of towners are discovering that the riverfront has been revitalized and visiting the downtown area too.

There have been increasing numbers of visitors for events such as Hootenany, Music at the Onion Grille, Gobble Gait, Black Dirt Theatre, music at the levee, and car shows.

Social media presence has been much stronger. Hiring a professional was a good move! They've been working to get some exposure on bigger social media platforms and list that the regional and state level that have been a big deal. Sharing social media posts and events from businesses in town helps.

Because of the tourism social media efforts, we are more connected to local events - live music, open house opportunities, ladies nights, tours, and so on.

Challenges moving forward

Stakeholders who attended the face-to-face group session identified several key challenges, including: maintaining momentum, providing resources for smaller events, attracting more diverse visitors for longer periods of time, and continuing to improve residents' perceptions of tourism. They noted that despite the success of recent large events, funding and resources are limited and frequent smaller events may be more advisable. Other concerns are that events do not draw overnight visitors, nor are they drawing teenagers and young adults. Pushback from some community members was attributed primarily to lack of understanding about local tourism initiatives, or a hesitancy to welcoming non-residents.

Some of the challenge comes from being under the Chamber umbrella but part of separate accounts.	Coordinating and dealing with resources has been unexpectedly difficult.	Challenges moving forward
	There are challenges for tourism because while the excitement is there, it also creates pressure.	
	It's challenging to communicate that things take time to build and moving the ball doesn't happen overnight. It can be challenging to make it clear that they're working on it, things take time, and they have a limited budget.	
	I didn't expect that it would be as challenging as it is to move the ball forward. It is a big effort that requires time, thought, funding, resources, all that.	
	* Challenge to create itineraries that can keep people here for more than a day.	
	Challenge to get current lodging leaders involved in this. I struggled to put together a marketing plan that was bringing the right clients to the lodging because I didn't have their input.	
	There pressure to have another big event. Managing expectations is difficult. Need to change perceptions that it's not just one big event.... it's about drawing people to town generally.	
	We don't have the resources to do more big events.	
	Challenges with creating two brands under one roof. Positive outcomes include more social media engagement. We have had to invest to increase views on website	
	Not understanding how it would work from an SEO standpoint was challenging. People were visiting site but they were not seeing an increase in SEO. didn't understand if you have the same address and phone number, search sites don't know which is legitimate. Hastings chamber emerged as top in search due to longevity.	
Hired a professional to help them navigate this challenge.		
Someone who lived here their whole life had never heard of the Onion Grille. So there are opportunities internally to promote. They have to build pride and awareness, and help build the groundswell. For instance, they can post online and their networks can see things like the trail or the candy crawl.	Surprised at how little people know about their community. Some people have their blinders on.	
	How do we take that notion of a day trip and turn it into a story of staying for a day, two days, or a whole week?	
	Need to figure out how to attract younger visitors - 20-30 year olds.	
	Not everyone is even aware there is tourism development in Hastings.	
	Some people are complaining about the developments, and are adverse to diversity or even talking about it.	
	I wish there were more activities for older teenagers and young adults.	

DISCUSSION

Ripple Effects Mapping is useful for evaluating progress towards the community's stated goals and ideas identified in the 2017 Tourism Assessment Program Report. It also highlights unintended impacts of the tourism initiative. The primary goals and ideas outlined in the Tourism Assessment Program report are to:

1. Create a compelling, share vision for tourism that is supported by community organizations, government, and residents
2. Develop community recognition of Hastings as a tourism destination
3. Maintain and enhance attractions and services
4. Improve marketing
5. Invest in Hastings' built and natural assets
6. Build on existing efforts and increase social capital

The ripple mapping showed clear success in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth goals, with progress toward goals 1 and 2. Moving forward with tourism in Hastings it will be important to continue emphasizing resource sharing, asset investment, and dynamic marketing, while keeping focus on resident perception and attitude-change goals.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS

Send a message to:

Cynthia Messer, University of Minnesota Tourism Center Director (cmesser@umn.edu)

Scott Chazdon, Evaluation and Research Specialist, Extension Center for Community Vitality (schazdon@umn.edu)