

VILLAGE OF NORTH UTICA
801 South Clark Street
North Utica, IL 61373
Meeting of the Village Board of Trustees
And the Planning Commission
For a Joint Meeting
October 19, 2015
www.utica-il.gov

AGENDA

- I. 6:00 p.m. Call to Order
- II. Pledge of Allegiance
- III. Roll Call
 - 1.) Village Board of Trustees
 - 2.) Planning Commission
- IV. Public Community Open House Meeting for the discussion of updating the Comprehensive Plan
- V. Public Comment
- VI. Recommendations from the Planning Commission and Village Board
- VII. Adjournment

POSTED 10-16-15

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At 6:09 pm the meeting was called to Order by Village President Matt Jereb who then led the Pledge of Allegiance. Present at the meeting was Village Clerk Laurie Gbur and Trustees Dave Stewart, Ron Pawlak, Joe Bernardoni, John Pappas and Kevin Stewart. Trustee John Schweickert was absent.

Present for the Planning Commission was Chairman Tom Guttilla and Members Warren Munson, Roy Chapman and Matt Cetwinski. Members Doug Gift, Bill Fry and Dennis Hamilton were absent. NOTE: Member Doug Gift arrived at 6:20 pm and participated from the audience.

Mayor Jereb welcomed Mike Hoffman, Teska and Associates, back to the Village. Mr. Hoffman then introduced Terri White and Bill Geist from Zeitgeist. They spend 36 hours in the Village performing a destination assessment. They were joined by another associate; Justin.

Mr. Geist began by providing a brief overview of criteria looked for in a destination assessment. Overnight stays, people dining out, and what types of experiences and shopping are available to a tourist. They spent time in the community observing and talking to people and getting a real feel for what Utica has to offer.

Tourism promotion and marketing is the key to a community like Utica. The target demographic is women due to the fact that they are making 80% of the household decisions and will talk about the message and experience after they visit. Word of mouth and advertising on social media is a large part of any marketing strategy.

The group performed their assessment as 'tourists'. Bill, an older active gentleman; Terri, a mother of three; and Justin, a younger active millennial. They looked at Utica through the eyes of a first time visitor.

Thoughts:

- 1.) The Way-finding Signage is spectacular. The signage is direct and not confusing and there is only one sign that seems a bit 'hidden' from view by a tree in the streetscape.
- 2.) The Banners located throughout the community are welcoming and inviting.
- 3.) The Stone signage is wonderful, but could use some back-lighting at night.

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- 4.) The Public Ambiance looks great; trees, stone and bushes are all inviting.
- 5.) The retail signage in the downtown Mill St. area looks great.

Destination Assets:

- 1.) LaSalle County Historical Society - Great Museum but could be a bit more interactive with the story being told and shown to the visitor.
- 2.) I & M Canal – underutilized area that could potentially work for learning to kayak or other light outdoor recreation.
- 3.) Independent retail and restaurants is extremely important in a tourist friendly community.
- 4.) Outside dining was a wonderful addition to the downtown.
- 5.) Guide services, located at Cajun Bait and Tackle, was a nice surprise and is a great resource to the community.
- 6.) Culture and art; Mix's Trading Post and Stonehead's has a wonderful selection of biker gear and clothing. Boutique shops are wonderful little places to find something special to make the trip memorable.
- 7.) Wineries are wonderful in Utica.
- 8.) Path along the I & M Canal is great but it doesn't provide a challenge. Could be better utilized if it were a loop.

Member Doug Gift asked about bike racks being used as 'art' along the towpath. Mr. Geist said that this is done in many outdoor friendly communities. A friendly and beautiful path brings people out and encourages the biking community to utilize a smaller trail because there is something of interest.

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Destination Heritage:

- 1.) The Tornado Memorial is a great focal piece downtown. Missing is the story. Maybe there is a way that the Village can focus on the good and not on the devastation.

Member Gift stated that the tornado was a devastating event but it really brought people together. People from Utica along with people from all over the local areas and even farther away, joined together to help. We should focus on 'Utica United'. Mr. Geist agreed.

- 2.) The Blacksmith Shop was such an interesting looking place however they weren't open so that experience was lost. Maybe they need to have more regular hours?

Trustee Pappas stated that the gentleman that works at the Blacksmith's Shop is a volunteer so being open all the time is not easy. Mr. Geist agreed and stated that volunteers are wonderful because they want to be there to share the experience.

Destination Challenges:

- 1.) Heritage Center- it is a great information center but it provides information for the entire area. When you ask about Utica, they are very knowledgeable and helpful but they aren't just promoting Utica. The building is a bit rundown and the signage isn't great. It's at the main intersection coming into the community so that should be a focal point.

- 2.) Traffic- in and out of town the traffic was steady and congested.

Mayor Jereb noted that this was fall colors weekend which was particularly busy.

- 3.) Parking- there is parking available downtown, but there isn't a lot of signage stating where that is or whether it's free parking.

- 4.) Business hours- retail business hours and days are not consistent. Tourists want that experience and expect when they arrive that there is always something to do and somewhere of interest.

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Recommendations:

- 1.) Need a better calendar of events on the Municipal Website plus a visible link to a social media page. Multiple platforms to get people interested.
- 2.) A more 'walkable' community with better crosswalks. It's a great size community but due to the busy Rt. 178 running in the middle it makes it challenging to cross the street to access other areas.
- 3.) Retail shops that are unique and more tourism related need to be located on the main levels. More Entertainment, Art and Music.
- 4.) An outfitters retail location and additional guide and recreation services would be great.
- 5.) Additional parking needs to be identified with signage. It's hard to tell if it is a public parking area or private property.
- 6.) More heritage in the community. Tell Utica's story. More experience and interaction in the Museum and at the Blacksmith's Shop.
- 7.) A better visitors' center with information only about Utica.
- 8.) A stop light is needed at the intersection of Rt. 6 & Rt. 178.
- 9.) Additional outdoor recreation. Is split rock an option? I & M Canal biking loop or fishing and kayaking? Utica is at the gateway to a natural resource that can be expanded upon.

Following the presentation, a general Discussion was held.

Chairman Guttilla – music is finished by 5 pm. It would be nice if someplace would have music until 7 pm so people could enjoy after dinner.

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Mayor Jereb- How is Utica doing with regard to events? We have a lot of different parades and festivals. How does this compare to other tourism based communities. Are we doing enough to bring people in?

Bill answered that events and festivals are great but the correct marketing needs to bring people in during times when there aren't any festivals. People need to have an experience that they can't necessarily have somewhere else. Unique shopping and dining and the addition of outdoor recreation to go along with Starved Rock would produce a constant flow of tourism on a regular basis.

Lisle Elsbury, Duffy's - There are laws in place that require a license to have entertainment and music. The license would cost over \$1,500 so people don't generally advertise the entertainment very well. He then mentioned the newly constructed kiosk. It is nearing completion and will contain maps with a list of business and information about upcoming events.

Jennifer Stoneking, Utica Hair Co.- What can the Village do about the signage on Rt. 80 that promotes other communities?

Bill answered that if that is on private land there isn't much the Village can do about another communities' signage. That is why the Village should embark on a more detailed and aggressive marketing plan.

Bill then stated that sometimes regional cooperation can help. Most communities don't have everything they need to be a complete destination. Something is always lacking.

Norb Dudek, Utica Twp.- There are many beautiful and historical places in the Village. It would be great to have a tour that a person could take to visit the areas, and then have their dining and shuttle and overnight stay all included.

Chairman Guttilla- What about additional hotels. Why aren't they looking at Utica?

Bill answered that he is confused about that as well. Even though the community is small, the volume of traffic is actually quite large.

Trustee Pawlak stated that Matthiesson State Park is a beautiful park.

Bill answered that Utica is actually very lucky to be so near to so many beautiful natural resources.

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Member Gift stated that kayaking would be great. If the I & M Canal were to be cleaned, how long of a loop or bike trail would you need?

Bill answered about 3-4 miles. Even if it isn't too challenging, it could be for beginners and it could just outline the beauty of the surrounding community.

The Board informed Bill that there will potentially be a new bike path along Dee Bennett Rd. and along the new IL. River Bridge.

Mayor Jereb thanked the group for attending the meeting and presenting their information. A draft of the Comprehensive Plan will be presented to the Board and Planning Commission for review in November.

With no additional discussion or comments, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Board motion made by Trustee D. Stewart and seconded by Trustee Pappas.

All in favor

Motion Carried

Planning Commission motion made by Member Munson, seconded by Member Cetwinski.

All in favor

Motion Carried

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie A. Gbur
Village Clerk
Village of North Utica

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