

What is the DSP?

Given the ever increasing competition from other destinations, leaders in Wake County recognized that they cannot allow this destination to become stagnant.

With a goal of welcoming 21.7 million total visitors by 2028, the **Wake County Destination Strategic Plan: A 10-Year Tourism Plan** (DSP) identifies actions that destination partners can take to strengthen Wake County’s competitiveness as a tourist destination and measurably impact overnight visitation in the county.

The DSP is meant to serve as a blueprint for the region’s destination development and demonstrate how Wake County can directly increase overnight visitation and strengthen itself as a visitor destination. The Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau (GRCVB) is serving as a catalyst to bring together the County, municipalities, and destination partners around collective and individual roles. The process to build the DSP has been collaborative and iterative; the plan incorporates feedback from more than 1,800 stakeholders.

DSP Priorities

At the center of the DSP are eight priority areas around which the county’s destination partners can work to leverage strengths and “move the needle” to increase overnight visitation to the county. Some of these initiatives are already occurring and merely need minor tweaks to evolve the county from being a strong regional destination to one that is nationally renowned and top of mind when deciding on travel options. Others are game-changers that require Wake County, the GRCVB, the municipalities and destination partners to adopt new paradigms and consider substantial change to how the community can “sell” the destination.

DSP Priorities

Meetings & Conventions	Sports	Events	Key Attractors
Individual Leisure	Destination Development	Regional Demand Drivers	Quality of Place

Some of the recommendations offered in the DSP are highly prescriptive. Others are meant to be starting points for discussion, recognizing that the destination partners in the county are the experts in determining the best path. The recommendations are highly achievable because they were built within this spirit of collaboration.

The DSP and Town of Garner

In addition to the priorities, the DSP also offers individual plans for each municipality within Wake County to identify a path to participate in the future of tourism countywide and take steps individually to strengthen their own tourism assets. ***Without the active participation of all of Wake County’s municipalities, the implementation of the plan will not be as successful.***

Given its strong Quality of Place, retail amenities and being a crossroads of both small businesses and multinational corporations, Garner has the potential to draw overnight visitors to the area. JLL recommends that Garner highlight its many other Quality of Place assets and continue to support these local experiences.



Key Takeaway for Garner

- Leverage Quality of Place
- Connect marketing to highlight town’s unique branding
- Identify experiences to share through the People-First initiative

Key Assets

The Asset Inventory and Situational Analysis suggests that Garner’s key assets lie in its retail amenities and Quality of Place assets. Another asset includes Meadowbrook Park and plans to develop the park into a sports and recreation site which could become a demand generator for the community.

At the time of this report, one new hotel property is in the pipeline for Garner. As suggested in the Destination Development priority, as the community grows and opportunities for destination development arise, these hotel developments should be vetted by the Town and its economic development office, as well as by the GRCVB to support the case for new hotel development in Garner.

Town of Garner Priorities

To increase the flow of overnight visitors to the region that visit Garner, the Town could consider finding opportunities to support and grow the diversity of its local assets.

This can be done in marketing messaging shared with the GRCVB, as well as identifying local experiences within the People-First initiative.

Garner should also continue to work with the GRCVB marketing efforts to drive visitation to the county, utilize the existing calendar of events and website database tools available from the GRCVB. It could also work within the countywide materials to market its Quality of Place amenities separately to travelers.

To help attain the DSP visitation goals, Garner should strive to increase its share of the countywide tourism business—whether through increased leisure travel, sports tournaments, smaller meetings, or leveraging existing assets.

Town of Garner’s Interaction with Priorities

Below are destination assets identified in the Situational Analysis with the potential to drive overnight visitation in one or several of the priorities.

	M&C	Sports	Events	Key Attractors	Individual Leisure	Destination Development	Regional Demand Drivers	Quality of Place
Meadowbrook Park		X				X		X
Cabela’s and other retail amenities				X	X			X



Engagement with GRCVB

The DSP calls upon the GRCVB to take on the role of convener to drive action around the different priority areas, as well as to continue its role as the county’s destination marketing organization (DMO).

One of the key premises of the DSP is that Wake County will grow and be seen as a stronger destination if the County and the communities in the destination work together around a set of strategic priorities, while the municipalities, key drivers, and destination assets continue to work individually in pursuit of their specific tourism goals.

To this end, the checklist on pages 3-4 have been developed to guide Garner’s engagement with the GRCVB.

DSP Engagement Checklist

The DSP provides a blueprint for the County to attain its visitation goals and take collective action to measurably impact visitation along the priority areas. Below are ways in which the Town of Garner can engage help strengthen Wake County's tourism product and help extend its brand as a destination.

Importance of Destination Building

As noted above, the GRCVB will act as a convener to drive action around the different priority areas of the DSP, as well as to serve as a resource to help the individual partner s engage in activity. The GRCVB will continue to strengthen outreach efforts with the individual municipalities. As initiatives to support the DSP get underway, the GRCVB will also look to the municipalities to report progress and identify ways destination partners can work more closely together around the priorities.

- Build a tourism working group within the Town of Garner
- On a regular basis, brief the GRCVB on progress and alert them to areas where help is needed

Leveraging the Greater Raleigh, N.C. brand promise

All destinations struggle with distinguishing themselves to external audiences while also touting what makes their individual communities unique. As the DMO for Wake County, the GRCVB is entrusted with the job of branding Wake County as a place for visitors. Through the **Destination 2028** initiative, the GRCVB will continue marketing and other initiatives to keep Wake County at the forefront of travelers' minds.

- Utilize the priorities of the DSP to identify areas where Garner can elevate its destination profile
- Engage with the GRCVB to provide opportunities for promotion within Garner

Metrics

As the world becomes more data driven and questions over resource allocation arise, the ability to provide an objective and standardized way to quantify the return on investment of initiatives within **Destination 2028** will be critical. The DSP recommends using tourism industry certified metrics to measure the impact of the initiatives and communicate consistent results to stakeholders.

- Use the Destinations International Event Impact Calculator (EIC) (through the GRCVB) to forecast the impact of events, meetings and conventions and sports events
- Share visitor data, where possible, for targeted industry research and analysis

Website

With more than 2.48 million sessions annually, visitRaleigh.com was built to provide a one-stop place for potential travelers to Wake County to learn more about and decide to visit the area. The site is strong because of the timely, deep and accurate content displayed on it.

- Use the current platform to keep information about visitor-facing events in Garner fresh and current
- Use website visitor data from visitRaleigh.com to adjust content or messaging
- Enable links or patches, where possible, to enable easy transactions and movement between sites

Calendar

The DSP envisions creating one, inclusive centralized calendar for visitor-facing events in the county, so there is one place where the information can be found. The GRCVB will take the lead on implementing this. The countywide calendar will also be beneficial to encourage spacing between major events (if possible).

- Continue to send event information to the GRCVB to be entered into the calendar
- Encourage local partners to share information with the GRCVB
- Link to or share the centralized calendar on the Town and partner sites

Events

Events— either blockbuster or signature events unique or authentic to Wake County—are a cornerstone of the DSP. Such events will have the potential to attract increasing numbers of overnight visitors. The key to the successful implementation of this priority will be a standardized set of criteria to assess the probable impact on overnight visitation and a uniform way to measure impact.

- Continue to work with the GRCVB to review the events matrix and identify existing events with the potential to grow over time to have a more overnight visitor-facing profile
- Once events with the potential to draw overnight visitors are identified, work with the GRCVB to measure the potential impact of that event
- Submit event data to be included in the EIC (see metrics section)

People-First

People-First Tourism allows local experts and personalities to add to the experience of visiting Wake County and is a way for all communities to be engaged to attract more leisure tourists to the market. If built out properly, the initiative should scale to have a measurable impact on Wake County's overnight visitation.

- Consider engaging others in the community to help identify potential People-First opportunities
- Send ideas of People-First opportunities to explore to the GRCVB

Hotel Development

As is the case of fast growing communities, land-use planning becomes important to ensure that tracts of land are available to serve tourism destination development. To this end the GRCVB will be building a mechanism to engage with the local development community to keep potential destination developments at the forefront.

- Include planning for tourism product or destination development in individual town land-use planning

Countywide Sports Complex

To build on the County's brand as a prime venue for youth and amateur sports, the DSP suggests the creation of a countywide sports complex as part of **Destination 2028**. The complex will be a connected network of sports facilities and venues. The GRSA will take the lead on coordinating efforts to market and host events at the facilities and venues.

- Engage with GRSA to include all applicable facilities or venues within the countywide sports complex
- Consider expanding or making improvements to other facilities and venues so they meet the criteria for inclusion in the countywide sports complex model

Meetings and Conventions

A successful meetings and conventions strategy to attract overnight visitors depends on having a concentration of meeting space and lodging. The existing meeting districts in Wake County meet this requirement. As meeting facilities and hotels come online, additional concentrations for potential meeting districts will arise.

As Garner works to develop its hotel product and build the levels of supply needed to service the meetings and convention market, it can support the county's overall meeting and convention initiative by identifying potential meetings to recruit to meet in the area.

What's Next?

Engagement by all of the municipalities and destination partners around the priority areas will be crucial for the success of **Destination 2028** and Wake County's ability to reach its visitation goals.

There are two ways the Town of Garner should engage with the GRCVB and destination partners throughout Wake County to implement the DSP—individually to strengthen the Town's tourism product and better connect it to the area AND collaboratively around the leisure travel and other applicable priorities.

Garner should designate a tourism task force or committee of both public- and private-sector stakeholders and create an annual tourism plan. The Town plan should roll up into the DSP's priorities and map how the Town will be engaged in **Destination 2028**. Additionally, the plan will kick-start Garner's engagement in **Destination 2028** and will allow the Town to take ownership of its role in evolving Wake County as a destination.

As the Town grows, it should consider creating additional tourism assets that have or may have the potential to drive overnight visitors.

Action Steps

As a partner in tourism, below are potential action items that the Town of Garner should undertake on a regular basis.

- Hold quarterly or biannual meetings with GRCVB leadership beginning in January 2019
- Participate in and distribute stakeholder/industry partner surveys by the GRCVB (potentially annually)
- Participate in and distribute the countywide resident survey (potentially biannually)
- Participate in an annual business planning process with the GRCVB
- Create a tourism and visitor section in the municipal annual business plan and budget