

Rowan County Tourism: Completion & Connection Update

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VISIT
ROWAN COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA
Be an original.®

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STRATEGY GROUP



Rowan County Completion and Connection Update

- Guiding Principles
- What Does Success Look Like?
- What's Changed?
- Objectives
- Strategic Imperatives
- Rowan Tourism Functions
- Budgeting Principles
- Measuring Success
- Next Steps



Completion & Connection: Original Principles

- Product first, then marketing.
- Enable a holistic approach to growth of the visitor economy.
- Focus is on both short-term (room nights) and long-term (benefit to the destination) objectives.
- *“How does the investment build the visitor economy?”*



Completion & Connection Update: Guiding Principles

- Build upon destination strengths.
- Preserve community character.
- Be strategic about investments.
- Support the brand.
- Drive overnight stays.
- Serve visitor needs.
- Provide transparency.
- Assess the impact.
- Don't do more than you can take on—partner as needed.
- Allocate resources: Staff and Funding

Build Upon Destination Strengths



**This Current
Rowan County
Destination
Asset**



PLUS



**Would Make Us
A Better Place
To Live And
Visit**

What's Changed in the Environment Since the Initial Launch of Completion & Connection in 2013?

1. Consolidation of the Rowan County and Salisbury Tourism Authorities
2. Development of the community brand: Be an original
3. Growth in Rowan County's lodging supply
4. Continued strong growth of the Charlotte and Raleigh/Durham metropolitan areas
5. Completion of the widening of I-85
6. Substantial increases in construction costs related to labor and material
7. Increase in the popularity of outdoor recreation assets and related activities
8. The rise of smartphones, digital apps, and integration of social media into daily life
9. Uncertainty about the long-term growth of business travel post-pandemic
10. The surge in remote work, and a subsequent national community emphasis upon talent attraction and quality of life



Objectives

- Build upon 10-year success of Completion and Connection plan.
- Develop products that support and enhance destination strengths.
- Incorporate elements that reflect a changing and evolving external environment.
- Create new products that will drive destination awareness organically and motivate incremental visitation.
- Identify and execute quick wins that build momentum.
- Focus the investment of resources (staff and funding).

What Does Success Look Like?

- Greater awareness and appeal of Rowan County as a destination.
- More visitors spending the night than ever before.
- Visitor satisfaction with the destination is higher.
- Visitor spending increases, and helps grow small businesses, employ more residents, and invigorates the tax base.

Roles of the DMO in Product Development

Advisor: Offer research, destination knowledge, audience insight

Influencer: Demonstrate market demand and community benefit

Instigator: Lead, build support, identify partners and funding

Supporter: Lend marketing and sales assistance

Funder: Provide direct or indirect construction or operational funding

Partner: Has an active stake (financial or other) in the project

Operator: Actively manages or operates the project



Plan Guardrails

- Try not to take on more than Rowan Tourism can handle.
- This plan represents an evolution that will favor partnerships.
- Funding of enterprise-type opportunities will be limited to operations already in place or those that are not operationally-intensive.
- It's okay to say no—it's part of Rowan Tourism's fiduciary duty.
- Staffing allocation

Completion and Connection Update: Strategic Imperatives



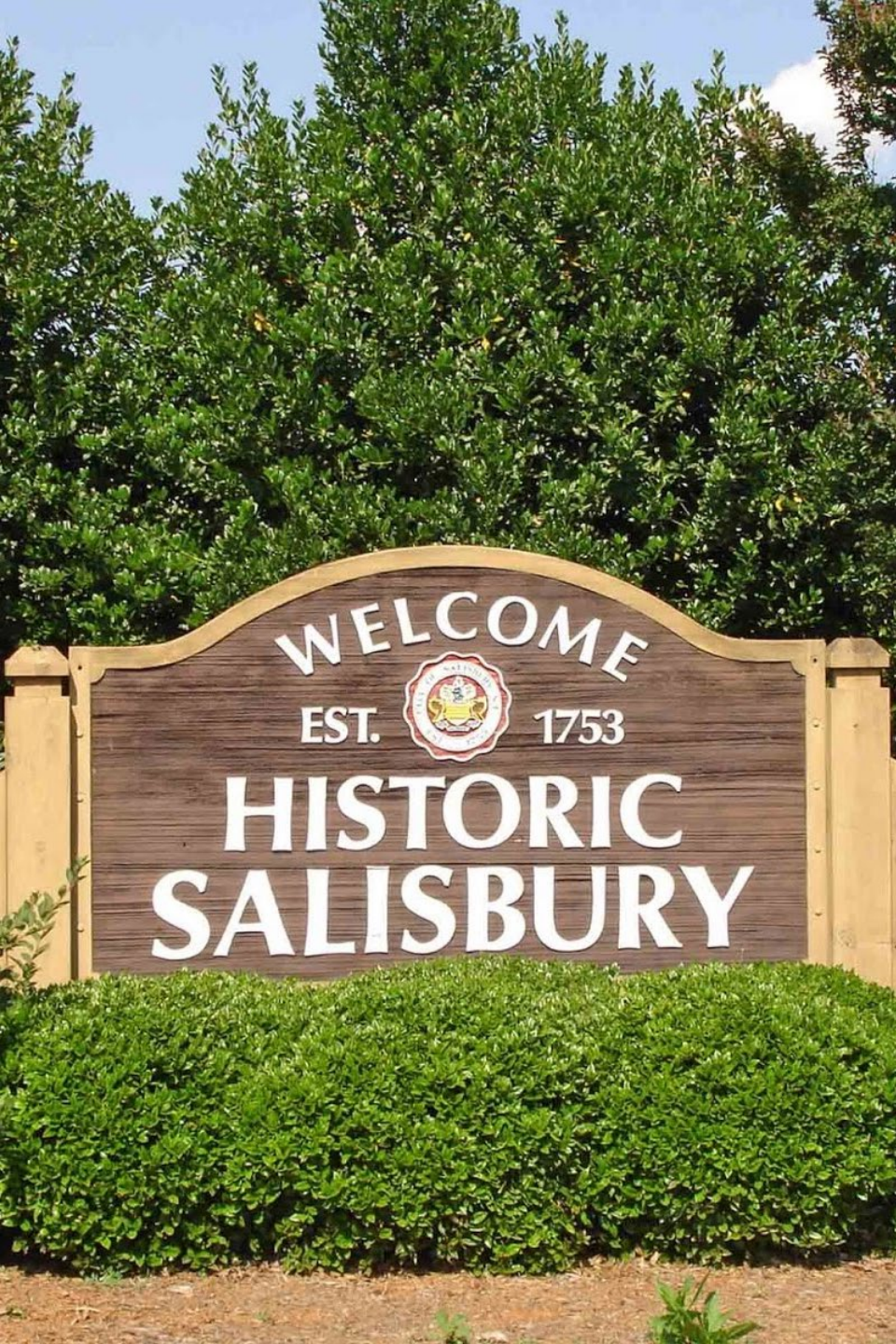
Facilitate visitor engagement



Enhance and expand the destination experience



Grow destination awareness organically



Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Facilitate Visitor Engagement

Situation Analysis:

- *“Completing the connection”*— Additional investment needed to better connect visitors to Rowan County tourism assets and to ensure a more seamless experience.
- There are opportunities for enhancement of the sense of arrival in each of Rowan County’s unique communities, especially as a means of supporting the destination brand.
- DMOs continue to assess the role that visitor “centers” have in the destination experience as technology and consumer behavior evolves.



CONSUMER’S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Completion & Connection Update: Short-Term Direction (FY23 & FY24)



- Complete the countywide destination wayfinding system (already underway)
- Build capital funds reserve and plan for additional staffing resources for future Completion & Connection projects due to:
 - Size and scope of projects
 - Importance for future growth in tourism
 - Continuing global supply chain issues
 - Inflationary impacts upon labor and material
 - Economic uncertainty
 - Allow for greater visibility on revenue projections and if they continue to rise it will support greater contributions of Tourism revenue
 - Determine appropriate sequencing of projects

Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Facilitate Visitor Engagement

*Complete the countywide wayfinding system
(already underway in FY23):*

- Provide visitors and residents with safety, comfort, and understanding while driving the County brand.
- An essential in-destination marketing platform for communicating depth and breadth of the visit experience.
- Provide a sense of place and arrival in each of Rowan County's communities.

Current Funding Model:

- Tourism funding for design and project management
- ARPA funding for fabrication and installation



Completion & Connection Update: Longer-Term Direction (FY24 and beyond)



Focus upon:

- Creation of new assets to support future travel demand while simultaneously leveraging social media and digital marketing through new tourism product and development.
- Development of new assets to attract visitation, increase length of stay, and enhance the visitor economy: Keep the destination growing...
- Enhancement of existing destination assets
- Partnerships with complementary organizations and private tourism-related business.



Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Grow Destination Awareness Organically

Situation Analysis:

- For destinations and attractions, organic social media reach has become one of the most cost-efficient and largest marketing medium. It represents the ultimate combination of word-of-mouth referral, imagery, and promotion.
- How can Rowan County leverage its in-market visitors and social media fans & followers to get them to sell the destination for you and attract new visitors?
- Providing more spots for word-of-mouth referrals through visitor generated content such as posts, selfies, reels, and videos to enhance visitation to partners and creates opportunities for local artists.

Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Grow Destination Awareness Organically

Develop a plan for purposeful investment in projects that inspire sharing of Rowan County visitor experiences on social media. Projects should:

- Build upon existing destination assets, experiences, and stories.
- Encourage social media sharing and viral moments.
- Complement and support the community brand.
- Be located across the county in places that are easily accessible and photographed, and which help draw visitation to those places.
- Use local talent for production wherever possible.

Proposed funding model: Rowan Tourism funding, possibly grants and partnerships





**Completion & Connection Update:
Imperative: Grow Destination
Awareness Organically**

Potential examples include:

- Trail of giant homegrown beverage bottles
- Sculpture and agriculture
- “Greetings from” murals for every Rowan County community

Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Facilitate Visitor Engagement



Improve connectivity to outdoor assets such as agritourism sites, parks, trails, Yadkin River, and Uwharrie National Forest through partnerships with the public and private sectors.

- Identify gaps in connectivity and visitor expectations around outdoor accessibility, quality of the experience, and seamlessness of the delivery.
- Work with partners to ensure outdoor amenities are built and maintained with residents and visitors in mind.
- Explore creating adventure and new experience-based tourism activities at sites.

Proposed funding model: Rowan Tourism + local, state, and federal funding + non-profit grants



Completion & Connection Update: Imperative 1: Facilitate Visitor Engagement

Potential examples include:

- Enhanced connectivity to the Carolina Thread Trail
- New River Trail trailhead into downtown Galax, VA connected to farmer's market
- Microgrants for suppliers (Damascus, VA)



Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Enhance and Expand the Destination Experience

Situation Analysis:

- Rowan County already possesses several strong attraction assets that are drivers of overnight visitation. Those motivators can be further enhanced as drivers and expanded through new investment.
- The original Completion & Connection plan established a foundation of visitor economy assets for investment and re-investment.
- Continued investment in new assets is critical to the health of the destination, competitiveness, and quality of visit.

Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Enhance and Expand the Destination Experience

Explore the development of a Cheerwine destination beverage and retail experience through a partnership with Carolina Beverage Corporation.

- Celebrate the legacy and brand of Cheerwine while building upon existing assets like the Cheerwine Festival.
- Leverage the cult status of the drink and its fans, and the general popularity (and PR opportunities) of unique food and beverage experiences.
- Learn from other examples of brand immersion experiences.

Proposed funding model: Rowan Tourism grant + private sector investment





Completion & Connection Update: Imperative 2: Enhance and Expand the Destination Experience

Potential examples include:

- J.M. Smucker store
- Goo Goo Cluster experience
- Bush's Beans visitor center

Rowan County TDA Completion & Connection Update: Enhance and Expand the Destination Experience: Cheerwine Concept

Tasks	FY2023					FY2024					FY2025					FY2026					FY2027																																							
	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J												
Build cash reserves	[Active]																																																											
Execute staffing structure	[Active]															[Inactive]																																												
Board approves planning phase	[Inactive]																																																											
Begin discussions with partner	[Inactive]															[Active]										[Inactive]																																		
Concept development	[Inactive]																														[Active]										[Inactive]																			
Concept and budget approval	[Inactive]																																																											
Construction	[Inactive]																														[Active]										[Inactive]																			
Completion	[Inactive]																																																											



Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Enhance and Expand the Destination Experience

Continue the development of the Railwalk as a dynamic attractor of visitors and maximize its utilization as an activity hub.

- Determine the strategic role of the Railwalk Pavilion beyond the Farmers Market to avoid cannibalization of other outdoor gathering places such as Bell Tower Green.
- Look at examples of similar developments in other communities to identify potential additions and programming.
- Identify desired components and invest accordingly as funding permits.

Proposed funding model: Rowan Tourism funding + local government + other sources of grant dollars



Rowan County TDA Completion & Connection Update: Enhance and Expand the Destination Experience: Railwalk Evolution

Tasks	FY2023					FY2024					FY2025					FY2026					FY2027																																						
	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J											
Build cash reserves	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█									
Execute staffing structure							█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█																																											
Board approves planning phase			★																																																								
Commence review of asset and identify potential enhancements													█	█	█	█	█																																										
Concept and programming development																				█	█	█	█	█																																			
Concept and budget approval																								★																																			
Implement																											█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█																						
Completion																																																				★							

Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Enhance and Expand the Destination Experience

Leverage private sector relationships and identify complementary assets that can be combined with current destination experiences to strengthen their appeal, in addition to providing new organic marketing opportunities:

- Art and agriculture
- Agritourism and outdoor recreation (new adventures)
- Food and beverage and the arts
- Heritage tourism sites
- Local main streets and downtowns in Rowan County
- Mainstay events and festivals

Proposed funding model: Rowan Tourism funding + private sector funding





Completion & Connection Update: Imperative 2: Enhance and Expand the Destination Experience

Potential examples include:

- A zipline at a working farm
- Growing public art and agriculture
- Infrastructure for live music in every Rowan County community

Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Enhance and Expand the Destination Experience

Invest in the development of additional outdoor experiences that connect visitors to Rowan County's outdoor assets.

- Work with Parks and Recreation and entities like Three Rivers Land Trust to identify opportunities for investment in assets that attract new visitors, provide greater destination satisfaction, and increase length of stay.
- Encourage regional trail development and connectivity as a means of creating a critical mass of trails that are also competitive with other destinations.

Proposed funding model: Rowan Tourism + local, state, and federal funding + non-profit grants



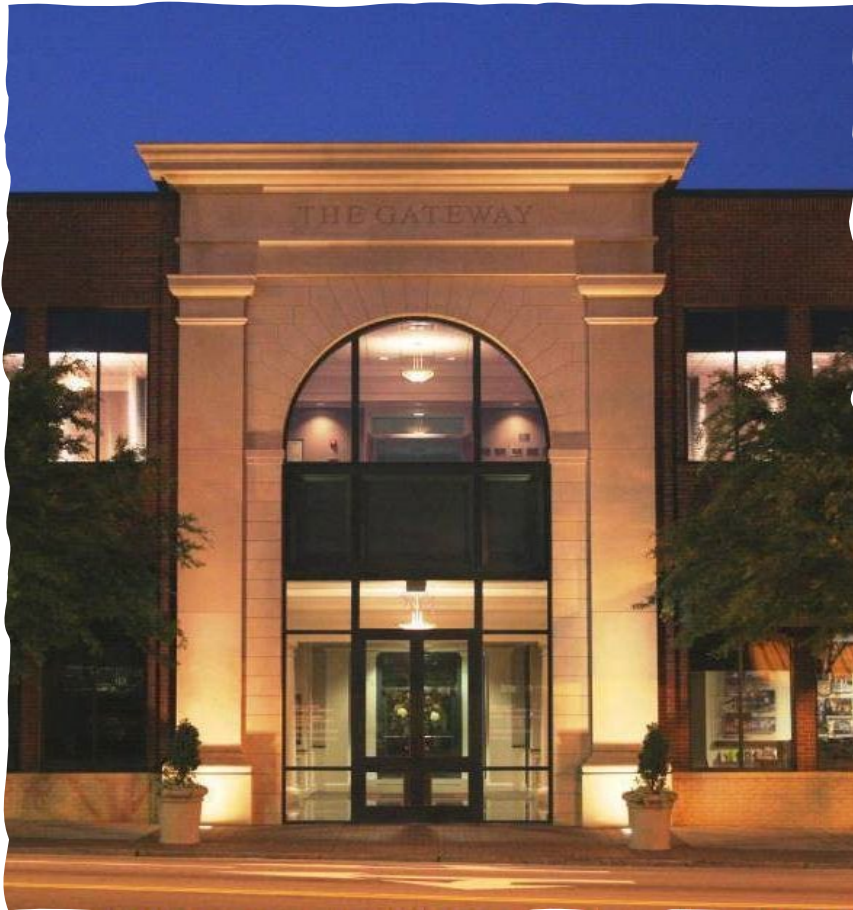


**Completion & Connection Update:
Imperative 2: Enhance and Expand
the Destination Experience**

Potential examples include:

- New boat access points
- Public art on greenways
- A forest canopy walk at Dan Nicholas Park

Completion & Connection Update: Imperative: Facilitate Visitor Engagement



Define the role of the Gateway Building lobby and “finish the welcome mat” by investing in assets that help connect visitors to Rowan County’s remarkable destination experiences.

- Identify assets that can communicate depth and breadth of the destination and be supported without additional staff.
- Investigate how social media, e-ticketing, trolleys, and other activities could be incorporated into the space.

Proposed funding model: Rowan Tourism funding + consideration of sponsorship revenue

Rowan County TDA Completion & Connection Update: Facilitate Visitor Engagement: Gateway Building Visitor Center

Tasks	FY2023					FY2024					FY2025					FY2026					FY2027																												
	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	
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Roles of the DMO in Product Development

Advisor: Offer research, destination knowledge, audience insight

Influencer: Demonstrate market demand and community benefit

Instigator: Lead, build support, identifies partners and funding

Supporter: Lend marketing and sales assistance

Funder: Provide direct or indirect construction or operational funding

Partner: Has a stake (financial or other) in the project

Operator: Actively manages or executes the project

Initiative	Advisor	Influencer	Instigator	Supporter	Funder	Partner	Operator
Complete countywide wayfinding system	X		X	X	X		
Invest in the Gateway Bldg. as visitor asset	X		X		X	X	X
Improve connectivity to outdoor assets	X	X	X	X	X		
Cheerwine brand experience	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Next phase of Railwalk	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Complementary asset development	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Regional trail development	X	X		X	X	X	
Social media facilitation	X	X	X	X	X		X

Completion & Connection Funding and Investment

- Volatility of construction costs and supply chain issues present challenges for estimating specific investments required for future projects at this time.
- Projections for future Tourism revenue are also challenging to forecast due to continued uncertainty around the return of business travel, economy, and inflation.
 - Through August and early September 2022, Rowan is still growing ahead of 2021's record pace.
- Recommendation is to plan for a target range of 15-25% allocated annually to tourism development (\$180,000 - \$300,000 at current budget levels).
- Increase staffing resources for product development.
 - Develop a product development staffing structure similar to the marketing and communications structure currently at Rowan Tourism, dedicated development and project management staff.
 - Consistent project leadership and management will be critical for long term success.
- Launch product development grants program for businesses and other tourism partners for funding of tourism-related capital projects and to expedite investment and completion of new tourism assets and opportunities. Funding will support all three strategic initiatives.
- Leverage Rowan Tourism funds against other sources from the public and private sectors.

Rowan County TDA Completion & Connection Update

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