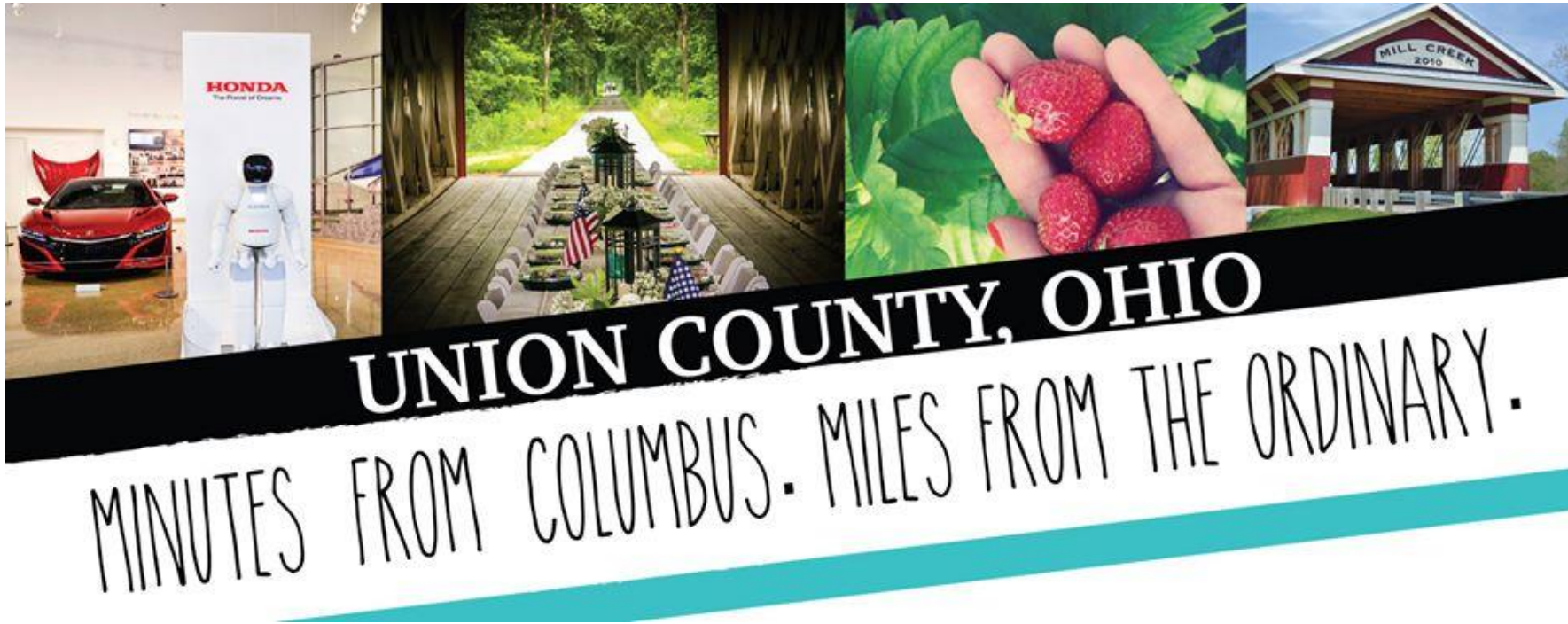


Union County Convention & Visitors Bureau



The following Strategic Plan is research-based and focused on economic development and includes input from 97 community, civic and travel industry leaders who participated in the DestinationNEXT Planning Model.

Plan Developed: March 2020
June 2020 V.1

Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025

Union County Convention & Visitors Bureau

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 - 2025

-1-

JUNE 2020 V.1

STRATEGIC PLAN

This strategic plan is research-based including input from 97 community, civic and travel industry leaders who participated in the DestinationNext Planning Model followed by a planning workshop on January 22, 2020 conducted with the Union County Convention & Visitors Bureau Board of Directors, staff and community leaders. The survey and workshop were conducted by Berkeley Young of Young Strategies, Inc.

IMPLEMENTATION

Annual reviews of this five-year strategic plan will be conducted in lieu of annual retreats. The annual review takes place with key staff and Board leadership. There is no need for a retreat if the plan implementation is on track and there are no external factors that change overall strategies and goals. If significant changes are needed, the Board/staff may schedule a retreat to adjust the plan.

Destination, Mission and Vision

Union County, OH – “Minutes from Columbus. Miles from the Ordinary”

Union County, OH is home to approximately 60,000 residents about 25,000 of whom reside in the city of Marysville. Located 30 miles northwest of downtown Columbus, Union County is easily accessible from anywhere in Ohio. Union County is perhaps best known for the Honda auto plant that opened in 1982 and now hosts thousands of visitors a year at the Honda Heritage Center, and Scotts-Miracle Gro the leader in the lawn care industry, which has called Marysville home since 1868. Agriculture based tourism is scattered throughout the county with wineries, breweries, farms, markets and seasonal offerings, Amish heritage and covered bridges.

Primary employment is in the professional and business services, manufacturing and government. Leisure hospitality accounts for 5% of employment. The Union County Convention & Visitors Bureau is tasked with promoting Union County as a destination.

The Mission of the Union County Chamber, EDP and Convention & Visitors Bureau is:

MISSION: “The Union County Chamber of Commerce, Union County-Marysville Economic Development Partnership, and the Union County Convention and Visitors Bureau shall champion economic development, community improvement, and business viability for the betterment of Union County.”

Vision: Union County will grow as a destination with a dynamic and active Marysville as the core of the visitor experience. Unique activities, dining, shopping and lodging will motivate visitation and drive extended lengths of stay throughout the county.

Union County Convention & Visitors Bureau

STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 - 2025

-2-

JUNE 2020 V.1

Overall Direction

Union County Convention & Visitors Bureau (UCCVB) is a destination marketing and management organization solely focused on growing the economy through the progressive increase of visitation to Union County, OH. This is done through a variety of marketing, advertising and partnership efforts.

UCCVB will promote and build awareness of Union County as a leisure and small group destination with the highest caliber staff in the industry providing leadership and innovation to drive:

- Increased overnight and day-trip visitation
- Increased spending per travel party
- increased engagement in local businesses
- Increased visitor satisfaction

UCCVB Board and staff are committed to creating a total visitor destination by partnering with local governments and economic development agencies to develop, improve and expand the overall visitor experience with new activities. The pillars of this strategic plan are:

- **Marketing the Destination and building a brand** – Union County is a small destination in proximity to the state capital city. Marketing Union County as a destination will have to be very targeted with Marysville at the core of the experience to avoid losing room nights to the neighboring communities.
- **A dynamic, engaging Marysville as the core of the visitor experience** – focus on unique shopping, dining, lodging, activities, entertainment, active-lifestyle outdoor experiences, evening entertainment and visitor parking/mobility.
- **Support the development of new facilities for group business** to drive year-round room demand in local lodging. The meetings and social markets have excellent potential for growth as do sports if facilities match-up with lodging low occupancy periods.
- **Workforce** – fostering a highly skilled hospitality workforce to support travel industry businesses is critical. Support local workforce & employers in the recruitment/training of new hospitality ready workers.
- **Advocacy for travel industry issues** and partnership with other economic development entities. Address issues affecting the travel industry. Maintain an updated crisis communications plan.

UCCVB STRUCTURE



Board Focus

The UCCVB Board of Directors will be engaged in two primary functions:

- 1) **Providing proper oversight** related to the function and ROI of the staff's research-based marketing of the destination.
- 2) **Fulfill the vision for Union County as a travel destination in 2025** in partnership with County/City Officials and other economic development groups. UCCVB will foster, facilitate and encourage the growth and development of the destination.

Staff Focus

- 1) **Marketing** Union County to visitors.
- 2) **Coordinating** the implementation of the Board Vision for the destination.

Sales, Marketing, Build Marysville Brand

New brand.
Marysville as
core with all
county
activities
featured.
Group sales to
fill hotels during
slow periods.
Build
recognition as a
weekend
getaway
destination.
Promote
evening
activities.

Marysville “core” experience

Connectivity
and core
density around
Marysville as
an active hub
for the county.
Expand trail
system to
connect hotels,
downtown,
group facilities.
Unique dining,
shopping.
New activities.
Evening
activities and
transportation.

New group capacity

Increased use
and expansion
of existing
facilities.
Multi-purpose
indoor facility.
Expanded ball
fields.
Group tour
activities.

Workforce

Task Force –
hotels,
restaurants,
attractions,
schools.
Quarterly
inventory of
open jobs.
Training
Recruitment.

Advocacy

Task Force –
ongoing.
Priority issues.
Position
papers.
Reporting to
elected
officials.

Strategic Initiatives

1. **Market Union County as a destination and build a brand with the highest skilled and most dynamic sales and marketing team.** Union County is a small destination in close proximity to the state capital city. Marketing Union County as a destination will have to be very targeted to avoid losing room nights and spending to the neighboring communities. Union County will enhance the travel experiences, lodging, dining and group facilities to compete with regional communities. Union County must be very strategic to grow as a travel destination. It can and will be done!
 - a) **UCCVB is a research-based marketing organization** meeting the highest standards of DMO (Destination Marketing and Management Organizations) operations. Meet the highest standards of financial and ethical accountability with board providing oversight.
 - b) **UCCVB will update research and marketing strategy continually** as part of an annual plan that is supported by the local travel industry.
 - c) **Develop a brand with Marysville as the core of the destination** to appeal to a wider audience. Focus on the five-hour drive market.
 - d) **Support the staff in achieving the highest standards of excellence and performance** through on-going education, certifications, measurement and accountability. Maintain competitive wages/benefits and foster a creative and supportive work environment where the team thrives and continues to produce award winning sales and marketing programs.
 - e) **Partner with TourismOhio and other DMO's within the region** as well as travel industry partners to leverage the brand and reach a wider audience.
 - f) **Provide leadership to the Union County travel industry** through training, co-op sales/marketing programs, and workforce development.
 - g) **Provide dynamic visitor information services** for individual, group/event visitors to drive increased spending in-market.
 - h) **Tracking and accountability** to demonstrate highest possible Return-on-Investment (ROI) – Lodging market segmentation research of key performance metrics (KPIs) and lodging revenue tracking/analysis.

Measurable Success: *Annual Plan with trackable ROI (Return on Investment) . *Awards & Certifications.

*Increased participation in partner programs. *Growth in lodging room demand & ADR (Average Daily Rate).

*Staff Retention. *Group sales growth *Longer length of stay. *Increased Spending. *Increased visitor satisfaction.

Strategic Initiatives

2. **A dynamic, engaging Marysville as the core of the Union County visitor experience** – focus on unique shopping, dining, lodging, activities, entertainment, active-lifestyle outdoor experiences, evening entertainment and visitor parking/mobility.
 - a) **Destination dining** – Encourage the updating of existing and development of new unique dining that builds on the brand and experience. This strategy will attract people from the two-hour “day-trip” drive market as well as drive overnight visitation. A well-known chef, exceptionally good food, unique atmosphere, and scenic locations are just some of the unique elements that create destination dining.
 - b) **Unique shopping** – the expansion of local boutique/style unique shopping in all downtown areas will increase the appeal of Union County and will enhance the experience of those visiting for group activities and events.
 - c) **Improved and new pedestrian and bicycle paths and trails** – additional pedestrian and bicycle paths/trails will make it easier for visitors to travel within and among the communities in Union County and from hotels to dining, shopping, sports venues and activities in the downtown area without using a motorized vehicle. Connect the Jim Simmons Trail, the Multi-Purpose Trail to the hotels, sports parks, covered bridges and downtowns. Add bicycle lanes to roadways. Provide bicycle racks in downtown and other gathering sites.
 - d) **Recruit outfitters/guides** to provide access to rental bikes, kayaks, paddleboards, etc. Visitors want to engage with the waterways not just look at them. Access means providing the equipment as well as the points to park and “put-in” on the trails and waterways.
 - e) **Signage, wayfinding, parking and ride-sharing** are all critical to delivering visitors to experiences in Union County.
 - f) **Evening entertainment** at local restaurants and venues, as well as expanded arts and cultural offerings to attract visitors and convert day-trippers to overnight visitors. UCCVB staff to assist in identifying local performers to be available for local restaurants and venues.
 - g) **As the covered bridges are an attractor, develop attractions** and options to lengthen stay and economic impact.

Measurable Success:

*County-wide directional signage.

* Kayak access points.

* Pedestrian and bike trails that connect facilities and “hubs.”

* Outfitters/rentals in the downtowns.

*Evening entertainment throughout the year.

* New runs, races, events.

*Ample parking in visitor areas.

Strategic Initiatives

3. **Support the development of new facilities for group business (sports, conferences, events, tours)** to drive year-round room demand in local lodging. The meetings and social markets have excellent potential for growth as do sports if facilities match-up with lodging low occupancy periods.
 - a) **Promote the use of existing facilities** – tours for hoteliers to familiarize them with all local facilities to host groups. Work with facilities to establish booking policies and operational guidelines.
 - b) **Develop, improve and/or expand group multi-purpose facilities** – community leaders expressed interest in the development of indoor/outdoor group facilities for sports and events. Union County can NOT compete in size and scale with facilities found throughout metro-Columbus. Therefore, Union County should develop facilities to host small groups year-round at times when hotel occupancy is low. The addition of new hotels in the Marysville market will require “demand-drivers” to fill the additional inventory of rooms
 1. Multi-purpose indoor facility to host small meetings and indoor competitions
 2. Expanded tennis, soccer and baseball/softball fields in proximity to schools and public parks and trail systems
 - c) **Host recreation & sports events** to build recognition of Union County as an active-lifestyle destination – runs, races, competitions, etc.

Measurable Success:

* Pedestrian and bike trails that connect facilities and “hubs.”

* Outfitters/rentals in the downtowns. * New event facility.

* New runs, races, events.

* Kayak trail.

Strategic Initiatives

4. **Workforce** – fostering a highly skilled hospitality workforce to support travel industry businesses is critical. Support local workforce & employers in the recruitment/training of new hospitality ready workers. Partner with secondary, vocational and higher education institutions to produce a highly skilled workforce.
 - a) **Support local workforce & jobs entities** in the recruitment/training of new hospitality ready workers.
 - b) **Partner with secondary, vocational and higher education institutions** to produce a highly-skilled workforce. programs should be offered to
 - i. Generate interest in hospitality industry careers.
 - ii. Provide training and skills for careers in hospitality. Identify potential hospitality workers, provide training, conduct job fairs, provide transportation, etc. to move people from part-time jobs into full-time employment.
 - c) **Develop a system to conduct regular surveys with travel industry businesses** to identify the number of open full-time and part-time positions. Develop a job vacancy/employment rate monitoring tool and work to have every job filled as this provides the maximum revenue generation from visitors who receive the best service.
 - d) **Monitor the residence location of hospitality industry workforce** to determine the availability of affordable housing within Union County. The cost of housing and transportation to work are two of the issues behind lack of workforce to fill vacant positions at many local hospitality industry businesses.
 - e) **Encourage development of an expanded public transportation system.**

Measurable Success: * Increased applicants for hospitality jobs. * Less turnover in hospitality jobs.
* Higher visitor satisfaction ratings with service. * Part-time jobs converted to full-time jobs.
* On-going travel industry advocacy effort.

Strategic Initiatives

5. **Advocacy for travel industry issues and partnership with other economic development entities.** Address issues affecting the travel industry. Maintain an updated crisis communications plan.
- a) **Maintain long-term, sustainable and competitive funding for UCCVB.** Destination marketing and development is very competitive within Ohio. UCCVB must have adequate funding to compete and push Union County forward as a destination.
 - b) **Identify and address issues affecting the local travel industry** – issues that are likely to require attention in the coming years include lodging development and the home rentals market; event venue development; transportation, roads, parking.
 - c) **Maintain an updated crisis communications plan** and operating reserve account for emergencies.
 - d) **Maintain a series of white papers/position statements** addressing the issues identified by the travel industry.
 - e) **Retain lobbyist as necessary** to address issues at the state or federal level.
 - f) **Conduct bi-annual travel industry updates to elected bodies, economic development and civic organizations.** Communicate the impact of the travel industry to those not in the travel industry.
 - g) **The Union County Convention & Visitors Bureau will continue to partner with the Union County Chamber of Commerce and the Marysville/Union County Department of Development** to identify cooperative opportunities to economically impact Union County.

Measurable Success: *Crisis Communications Plan. * On-going travel industry advocacy effort.
*Bi-annual presentations to elected bodies.