

SOCIAL DISTRICTS –

Special areas where visitors can grab an adult drink and stroll the streets

Towns create social districts to increase nightlife, tourism

It's not just the cities, but small towns in North Carolina are big on the idea of social districts.

Raleigh already has one in the works – and other communities have followed suit. These include Selma, Wilson and Oxford.

Oxford leaders expect their own social district to be open by the end of June.

The idea could increase foot-traffic for downtown businesses, while providing a more robust nightlife for the roughly 9,000 citizens in Oxford.

Even better, these small towns hope walkable social districts could increase tourism, making them a destination due to their proximity to the Triangle.

For a taste of Oxford, look to the street signs. They're garnished with red peppers, an homage to the annual North Carolina Hot Sauce Contest they host every September.

But Oxford has other tastes: Like craft beer and fine wine. At The Hub on Main Street, owner Pierre Gingue says downtown is ripe for a social district.

"I think most of the support is around the idea that Oxford can become a destination," Gingue said.

This month, all seven city commissioners voted to create a

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Photo: Sandra J. Milburn / The Hutchinson News

Destinations work with local artists to create murals that help spur visitation

Hutchinson, Kansas, has more than 40 murals that bring pride to the city. These murals boast of Kansas wildlife, the street art movement, the beauty of Kansas and its state symbols, Hutchinson landmarks and community stories.

Mural tourism has become a fascination for many, and interest has increased in part because influencers have posted their photographs on popular social media.

"It's becoming a big deal," said Jordan Roerman, marketing manager for Kansas Tourism, "a movement that began outside the state, but Kansas has picked up on it and run with it."

She said, for example, music artist Taylor Swift had a butterfly mural painted in Nashville and now people will line up and wait their turn to have their photo taken by the mural.

Selfies with murals are also popular, as is posting them online. This act

lets others know about the murals and where they are located.

"It's something that has become extremely popular," Roerman said. "At travelks.com, we've had so many online requests from people in our contact forms asking where they can travel to go see murals that we created an entire section on the site dedicated to murals in Kansas."

LeAnn Cox, vice president of operations and tourism at the Greater Hutchinson Convention/Visitors Bureau, said "more and more, we are seeing a greater interest in visitation due to murals in Hutchinson. Murals certainly enhance community pride, and we want to continue to support our local artists as they increase the overall attractiveness in our community."

Visit Hutch has a section on the visithutch.com site dedicated to the more than 40 murals in Hutchinson.

– hutchnews.com

The North Carolina General Assembly passed a law last year allowing cities to create districts where people can buy a drink from a restaurant or bar and walk the streets.



Albemarle, like a handful of other cities and towns in North Carolina, is considering a social district downtown. Albemarle hosted two public input sessions to get feedback from residents on how they feel about the idea of a social district. This is in a town that was dry until the late 1990s

Cities must follow strict guidelines

The North Carolina General Assembly passed the law last year allowing for cities and towns to create their own social districts, but there are a lot of specifics that cities and towns have to follow.

People are not allowed to bring outside alcohol into a social district. Bars and restaurants have to use plastic cups with a printed label or a sticker to allow customers to take drinks into the streets. People are not allowed to take a drink from one bar or restaurant into another.

Greensboro, Kannapolis, Monroe, Norwood and Newton have registered new social districts with the North Carolina ABC Commission since the law went into effect, according to commission spokesman Jeff Strickland. The ABC Commission oversees alcohol sales in the state.

– spectrumlocalnews.com

Oxford hopes its social district will generate more participation

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roughly two-block district where folks can stroll the streets with adult beverages in hand.

“I think it tells people that are looking at Oxford that we have some things going on,” said Mayor Jackie Sergent.

Visitors could leave a restaurant and browse some shops with drink-in-hand – as long as the shops are participating. Participating shops will have a green sticker on their door.

To help with competition, guests won’t be allowed to bring your drink into another business that sells alcohol.

Resident Joan Roberson said she fears the district creates too many risks. She’s nervous it could lead to drunk driving.

“You’re inviting people to drink openly in front of our children,” she says. “I don’t understand the necessity of walking with alcohol.”

However, Sergent says the district will not only be safe, it will make for easier socializing and shopping.

Gingue agrees, saying, “It’s not a Block Party. It’s not a permit for open drunkenness or disorderly conduct. This is a controlled area.”

Sergent says the social district would communicate to people that the City of Oxford is a forward-looking community – a community she hopes more people will visit and get a taste of its unique culture.

– wral.com

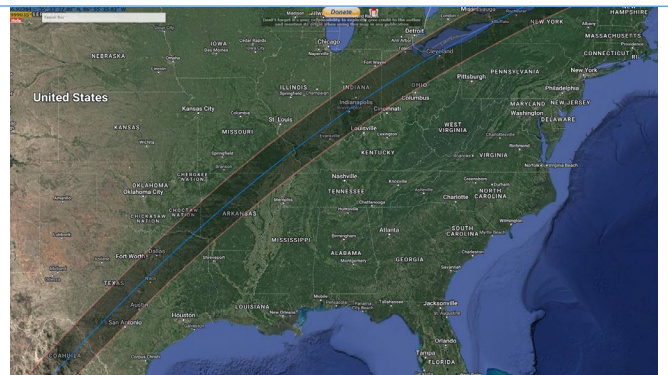
Arkansas prepares for 2024 eclipse

Tourism leaders in Arkansas have begun preparing for what they believe will be the largest influx of tourists in the state’s history.

On April 8, 2024, a total solar eclipse will be visible to a large portion of the Northern Hemisphere.

Kim Williams with the Arkansas Eclipse Project met with a group of Texarkana leaders to encourage businesses and citizens to prepare for an event she says will bring hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Natural State.

The last total solar eclipse was in 2017, and Williams says it proved to be a great economic boost for cities and states in the direct path.



The duration of totality will be up to 4 minutes and 27 seconds. In the U.S., totality will begin in Texas at 1:27 pm CDT and end in Maine at 3:35 pm ET.

– ksla.com