COMMUNITY TOURISM BASICS

Presentation before the Bryan City Council
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Mr. Mayor and Councilmen of Bryan, It is a real pleasure for me to present some fundamentals of community tourism development. I base this on a fifty-year career of study and teaching of tourism. My information has been derived primarily from contact with communities and their tourism development. This has been my laboratory. I commend you for your present process of creating a blueprint for the future.

At the outset, I want to emphasize that tourism is unlike any other economic development. Although it is the largest item of world trade, it is not very well understood. It is not like industrial development because it is not under control of one CEO, involves nearly every facet of a community, involves both the public and private sectors, and cannot be planned like a building.

For the next few minutes, I would like to highlight just a few of the key basics of community tourism development. More detailed information can be found in my two books—Tourism Planning and Vacationscape: Developing Tourist Areas, both recently revised as third editions. My comments are general conclusions regarding community tourism development. I have not made a study of tourism here in the Brazos Valley. For my discussion today, I will focus on just three main topics: tourism as a system, positive and negative tradeoffs, and the role of government.

THE TOURISM SYSTEM

Generally, when we think of tourism, the hotels, motels, and advertising come to mind. Although these are important, we need to look at the broader picture if tourism is to be of greatest benefit to the community.

A good starting point is to view tourism from the demand and supply sides. The travel market demand encompasses all the characteristics of present and potential travelers. Market researchers now remind us that not all tourists are alike, there are many travel market segments, each seeking different activities in a destination. The supply side includes all the things that are developed to meet the needs and interests of tourists who come to an area. Key to successful tourism is to seek a balance between demand and supply. And so, the question is—how well does our supply meet the needs of the visitors?

What do I mean by the supply side? It can be described as including five major components. Attractions include all the things visitors see and do and give them satisfaction. Transportation involves the quality and capacity of all means of access to and circulation within the community. Services are primarily for lodging, food and travel assistance. It is here that most of the income from tourism is made. I have found it helpful to separate information and promotion as two different functions. The component of information includes all descriptive literature, videos, maps, guide books, and Websites that help visitors locate and understand a destination whereas promotion is intended to entice visitors to an area. Promotion includes paid advertising, publicity, public relations, and incentives. These five components include all the
functioning parts of tourism development.

The essential point here is to recognize the *absolute interdependence* among all the parts. No one component can succeed without the others and any change in one affects the others. But the problem is that each business, such as a hotel, and each public establishment, such as a highway, concentrates only on its own objectives. This is necessary but is not enough for good tourism development.

Needed is a way for each part in all components to integrate its functions with all other parts. This is not an academic issue. Each tourist business and public tourism establishment will gain if it develops linkages with other parts that influence its success. To make the tourism functional system run smoothly is a major challenge before communities today that seek to enlarge their tourism development.

**POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE TRADEOFFS**

My next point deals with the topic of seeking a balance between the bright and the dark sides of tourism. The popular notion that tourism has no impact on a community and that all we have to do is advertise to get those free tourist dollars is false. There can be a negative side to tourism, as many communities are finding out. Most of the pitfalls can be overcome but it is well to think of them in advance so they can be avoided. I'd like to discuss these tradeoffs in four categories—economic, social, environmental, and managerial.

**ECONOMIC TRADEOFFS**

It is well documented that tourism has many *economic benefits*. Perhaps later on in your process, Dick Forester of the Convention and Visitors Bureau can give you figures on this for the Brazos Valley. Tourism does generate *jobs, income, and tax returns*. Without tourism, many communities would have greater unemployment, lower incomes, and would have to increase taxation to provide many public services. In addition, tourism can add diversity to the economy of a community.

At the same time, tourism development has several very important *economic costs*. For example, capital investment in tourism is substantial and the financial support must come from somewhere. In the past, many banks and financial institutions have been reluctant to loan to tourism development in the belief that it was soft and frivolous, not solid like a factory. Tourism development does cost investment moneys.

Many communities have been surprised to find that tourism growth demanded *new costs of infrastructure*. They discovered that their water supply, waste disposal systems, police, and fire protection services were insufficient and needed to be expanded, even requiring new bonding projects. Tourism growth can require new investment in street improvements, new lighting, and new transportation systems. City governments generally have been unaware of these potential costs when the Chamber of Commerce increases its marketing of local tourism.

A consequence of tourism expansion may be *escalated land values and increased taxation*. This happens when tourists become so interested in a destination that they settle there. At the same time this may have some benefit, it can make local costs so high that residents are forced to leave.

And so, the question is—will the economic returns from tourism exceed the economic costs?
SOCIAL TRADEOFFS

My next point may not be as conspicuous but can be a real issue in some communities—social impacts from great volumes of visitors coming to a community.

Some have discovered that many visitors can actually enhance the local quality of life. They bring in new ideas. They often build new and lasting friendships with local people. Conference visitors become acquainted with local businesses and professions, stimulating follow up of further contact.

Tourism growth has been known to produce funding for amenities that are good for residents as well as visitors. For example, I have seen tourist dollars support new parks, museums, and entertainment centers as well as better community maintenance. These are attractions for visitors as well as civic improvements for local residents. Some communities have cited tourism as holding young people in the area because of entrance jobs in tourist businesses, such as fast food restaurants, motels, and guide services.

However, in some instances tourism can make significant negative social impacts. Tourists can become so numerous that downtown shops have become touristy, such as for souvenirs, gifts, antiques, and other tourist goods. This change forced regular stores to move out to the suburbs. Residents who used to shop downtown now have to drive several miles for their shopping.

Perhaps the greatest complaint from citizens is increased traffic congestion and the stress it causes. More passenger cars, more RVs, and more tour buses can take over the streets and parking. Local residents wish that tourists would go away.

Another social issue of tourism's growth is foreign intrusion of customs. This may not be an issue in Texas but it is in other parts of the world. In some countries, Americans are not welcome because of their dress and desire for a McDonalds on every corner. As Texas receives greater international tourists, this can become an important factor. There may be some towns in Texas where local people resent Hispanic tourists, especially if they cannot handle English.

And so, the question is—do the social benefits from more tourists outweigh the negative impacts?

ENVIRONMENTAL TRADEOFFS

Tourism has both positive and negative influences on the environment when it is expanded greatly.

In some instances, tourist dollars have been applied to resource protection. New land purchases may be used to stop encroachment from urban sprawl. Or, it may be used to establish new nature parks, of value to both tourists and residents. In some cases, tourist expenditures are used to support restoration of historic sites. Another important use could be the establishment of visitor interpretive centers. These can become attractions unto themselves, providing visitors with entertaining and educational information through exhibits, videos, and demonstrations.

But, one must admit that often tourism expansion can cause negative environmental impacts. As more tourists come in cars, RVs, and tour buses, there is bound to be greater air pollution. Even though environmental protection controls are being increased, the net effect can become serious, especially in larger cities and major attraction areas. Because tourism growth requires new land development, nearby resources are eroded. Wooded areas and hills that are beautiful and give the community its distinction are bulldozed flat for building construction. These assets are then gone forever. And, as new franchise strips are developed along entrance
roads, the landscape becomes homogenized. By that, I mean that every town looks like every other town. It makes you wonder if you really have left home.

The question is--do the environmental advantages outweigh environmental degradation?

MANAGERIAL TRADEOFFS

How much tourism can a community manage?

From a positive standpoint, sometimes tourist dollars can be directed toward greater control of visitors and land development. There may be new moneys for increased public and private staffing. And, tourism expansion sometimes prompts city governments to create new policies. New ordinances of land use and special tourism committees that foster cooperation among the many players may be supported from new tourist dollars.

On the other hand, increased tourist dollars may not be sufficient to support these new functions. When done properly, tourism can exert considerable drain on existing staff. Tourism may require entirely new organization. Some communities have added tourism responsibilities to the Chamber of Commerce whereas others have opted for an entirely new organization devoted entirely to tourism. This is sometimes superior because it can include nonprofit representatives, such as for historic preservation, performing arts, athletic events, and festivals--members that are normally excluded from a Chamber.

The question is--can the community manage more tourism?

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

For my third point I'd like to cite just six roles that are important for city governments--infrastructure, transportation, amenities, information, beautification, and planning and zoning.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Probably the greatest responsibility of city government for tourism is the establishment and management of infrastructure. Generally, the needs of water, waste disposal, police, fire protection, and streets are predicated only on population growth. This practice does not reflect the increased demand created by volumes of new visitors and their support services. All planning of infrastructure should be integrated with representatives of tourism. Forecasting tourism growth is as important as projecting increases in the population of an area. The question before a community is whether it can cope with increased demand on its infrastructure, especially who will pay for expansion?

TRANSPORTATION

A major issue of tourism development today is the movement of people. It is important for a city to plan and manage traffic for residents, such as movement from home to school, to shopping, to medical care, to churches, and places of employment. But visitor movement is a different issue and often forgotten.

Visitors need more information and guidance, especially signage. They are not as familiar with the area as local residents. They need to know about all transportation services--taxis, air access and shuttle from airport, car rentals, or linkage with mass transit. It may be helpful for a city to make a survey of visitors to determine their transportation needs.
AMENITIES

Cities seldom realize it but they are often responsible for a great many amenities important to visitors. The more attractive and liveable a community is, the better it is for tourism. Parks, museums, recreation areas, convention centers, swimming pools, and yes, golf courses are often developed with public moneys. But, because these are popular with visitors as well as residents, seldom are they planned and managed for visitors. An even more important consideration—to what extent do the tourist businesses support these public amenities that help give them customers? I have yet to see the motels and restaurants give funding for these important developments. It is a challenge city governments should consider.

INFORMATION

Communities have an important role in tourist information. Some cities, especially in Canada and England, identify the location of information centers on all highway maps. Then, as one approaches the city with such a center, roadside signage directs tourists to the site. And, because tourists need information at odd hours, these centers are open for 24 hours. In spite of much tourist advertising and Website information, it is still difficult for newcomers to learn what there is to see and do, how to get there, and the hours these facilities are open. City governments, in collaboration with the private sector of tourism, can improve the information gap considerably.

PLANNING/ZONING

Finally, in a land where we cherish private land ownership and control, we hate to give in to any governmental control. However, the overall social good also must be considered. Most of the issues I have addressed could be fostered greatly by city governmental planning and action. However, I have yet to find a city planning department that includes tourism in its scope of policies and activities. In fact, tourism is not included in any curriculum of university planning departments.

The point is that when city planning departments consider resident growth issues related to transportation, housing, shopping, amenities, and infrastructure, the overlay of visitor needs should be added to resident needs. And, as I am sure you are well aware, zoning is of no value unless careful and thorough planning comes first.

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Let me conclude by saying I hope that even this incomplete sketch of community tourism basics will be of some help to you. Again, I commend you for making this effort to plan for the future. Paraphrasing a line from South Pacific, "If you don't have a dream, how can you have a dream come true?"