



# Visit Hardy Strategic Plan

**2023 -2024**



# Introduction



**West Virginia's** scenic highways, mountain vistas and outdoor recreation have long provided tourism opportunities for the state. The pandemic, coupled with remote work options and a new national park, has elevated the interest from visitors and residents to the Mountain State. With that enhanced interest comes opportunities and the need for an increased emphasis in helping to ensure our communities are equipped with resources and knowledge to sustain those tourism opportunities in the long term. In addition, the tourism industry has been actively promoting a shift in the focus of destination organizations from a marketing to a management approach.

In rural areas especially, Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVB's) are the primary and often sole destination marketing and management organization (DMO). As such, they face considerable challenges as they attempt to promote economic prosperity through tourism, including limited funding for marketing and development, limited capacity, and perhaps most importantly balancing the competing objectives of increasing visitation while simultaneously managing growth and maintaining a sense of place (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). In recent years, issues such as over-tourism and destination stewardship have emerged as central topics for the tourism industry (Skift, 2020; Destination Analysts, 2019; Destination International, 2019), and have gained new urgency, in light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

To help destination organizations and other community leaders and partners better understand the principles of sustainable rural tourism and destination

management and to create a platform to discuss opportunities to apply these principles in West Virginia, West Virginia University Extension Service faculty developed a monthly webinar series to provide participants with knowledge and resources to incorporate sustainable tourism principles into their communities. The "Sustainable Rural Tourism" webinar series illustrates basic principles and demonstrates how community leaders can apply them collaboratively to further enhance the future of tourism in West Virginia. The sessions cover topics such as understanding destination management roles and engaging partners; leadership and capacity; participatory planning; developing a tourism master plan; using data to make informed decisions; funding tourism development, and more.

Visit Hardy's Executive Director, Michele Moure-Reeves, attended many of the sustainable tourism webinars in 2022. Through follow-up conversations with WVU Extension's Rural Tourism Specialist, Michele expressed her interests in addressing how to weigh the pros and cons of the changes in the county and continue to grow tourism assets while maintaining the unique sense of place, protecting the rural environment and culture, identifying who the local partners are in facing and managing this challenge, and promoting destination stewardship and sustainable destination management. After discussing the relevant issues, Visit Hardy agreed to collaborate to facilitate a strategic planning process for their board and local partners and to develop a strategic plan to guide the organization for the next year.

# State of Hardy County Tourism



Visit Hardy, like all West Virginia CVBs, is supported by the occupancy tax collected from visitors who stay overnight. Due to the 2021 West Virginia legislation enforcing collection of local occupancy taxes, Hardy County's revenue has increased approximately 32% to \$169,000. For several years, Visit Hardy's tax revenue hovered around \$85,000 (+/- \$2K) until 2020. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and

concerns for public/personal safety, occupancy tax dropped to about \$63,000. Because of Hardy County's proximity to the DC Metro area, rural (isolated) environment, and outdoor recreation assets, the county became a likely site for urban residents to escape nearby congested metro regions. Hardy County's occupancy tax rose to \$116,000 in 2021. This was completely unexpected, resulting in a carry-over of funds to 2022.

The result of the impacts of COVID-19, in addition to other recent occurrences in 2021, have left Hardy County with some issues which require a proactive management strategy. Labor shortages across the state have impacted all industries but have been particularly difficult for the tourism industry. In Hardy County, some businesses have closed, others delayed opening, and some have changed their hours of operation due to the labor issues.

## Changes in Housing Market

In the case of Hardy County, the greatest issue to impact our economy has been the changes in the housing market greatly affecting all facets of life in the county. In 2021, Hardy County had the 5th largest increase in second home mortgages *in the country* (Pacaso 2021). 37% of all homes in the county are second homes. According to Redfin, the median price of a home in Hardy County increased by 19% since 2021. (This has not been confirmed locally).

Second homeowners nationally tend to be high income, high asset, highly educated, middle age or older couples, with children nearing adulthood or children no longer living at home, according to a Colorado study from 2004. This quote from 2004 is consistent with information from a variety of sources through 2022.





### What does this mean?

- Property values quickly accelerated, often resulting in bidding wars for properties.
- Increases in property values make it difficult for moderate income buyers to purchase property.
- Many second homes have been converted to vacation rental properties (data on this is difficult to find but the number of vacation properties available on market facilitator sites has increased to over 140 since 2021).
- Long term rental properties have become scarce and expensive.

### And what could it mean?

- Decrease in number of school age children due to second home sales?
- Further reason for young families and recent graduates to leave the county?
- No rental housing available for service workers and seasonal/temporary employees (some rental apartments are being constructed in Moorefield by Pilgrim's Pride)?
- Change in the rural environment and culture?

### And/or?

- New tax revenue generated by second homeowners and vacation rental visitors to support county services.
- Increased support of the trades primarily in the construction and service industries.
- Increased spending in local food and entertainment establishments.
- Support for development of new businesses and tourism assets.
- Opportunity to educate new residents about the value of good stewardship, respect for traditional culture, understanding of agricultural practices and traditions, importance of community and sense of place in a rural environment.

## Visit Hardy's Response

What should the role of Visit Hardy be in supporting mechanisms to ensure appropriate tourism development? In addition to regular attendance at WVACVB meetings and tourism conferences to assure that Visit Hardy is aware of the State legislative changes and challenges, Visit Hardy's Executive Director attends County Commission and Planning Commission meetings and has reviewed and discussed segments of the comprehensive plan that impact tourism. The comprehensive plan is an important tool in determining the direction of our county's growth. Zoning ordinances are very much in need of updating but this cannot truly happen without the information and expressed need being set forth in the comprehensive plan.

The Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals regulate issuance of Conditional Use Permits based on existing ordinances. With the guidance of the County Planner, the Planning Commission, and the Health Department, the language of ordinances can be clarified for regulating growth, particularly of campsites and recreational subdivisions. Again, it is the comprehensive plan that will be critical to how zoning for vacation rentals of all forms will be regulated in the future protecting tourism assets, agricultural land, and residential subdivisions.

The comprehensive plan is a public document and, once written, the process takes more than two years to be completed. The writing of the comprehensive plan is directed

and required every 10 years by WV State Code (<https://www.wvlegislature.gov/wvcode/code.cfm?chap=8A&art=3>). Participation in the process is an important civic responsibility. A comprehensive plan aids the Planning Commission in designing and making recommendations to the County Commission that will ultimately result in protecting land use and "...preserving and enhancing the unique quality of life and culture in [our] community and in adapting to future changes of use of an economic, physical or social nature." The draft of the comprehensive plan currently being written is posted on the Hardy County website as are the results of the public surveys. (<https://hardywavplanning.weebly.com/comprehensive-plan.html>).

The challenge is to balance the above and still develop tourism assets that enhance quality of life for county residents and draw visitors to the county. *Should there be a county-wide ad hoc committee to discuss and plan for the growth of tourism?* This is a question that needs consideration. Visit Hardy is proactively seeking to address how to weigh the pros and cons of the changes in the county, continue to grow tourism assets while maintaining a sense of place, protecting rural environment and culture, and promoting destination stewardship and sustainable destination management. These are community measures and are all best addressed in collaboration with our community partners.

# Visit Hardy's role in support of Hardy County's Tourism Industry

In addition to Visit Hardy's local partnerships and collaborations within the county, Visit Hardy's role includes collaboration with other West Virginia counties, particularly those in the Potomac Highlands; with the regional tourism organization, Highlands Creative Economy; with the body that represents the CVBs interests before the legislature and provides accreditation certification, the WV Association of CVBs; and with the WV Department of Tourism which markets West Virginia nationally and internationally.

To support Visit Hardy's efforts to grow tourism in Hardy County, over \$250,000 in grants have been awarded to develop tourism assets, assets that also maintain and grow the quality of life for those who live here. This work has supported the development of the Hardy County Heritage Trails program, the beginnings of the Lost River State Park Mountain Bike Trail System, the Robert Higgins House Museum and Hardy County Travel Information Center (details below). Without grant funds, Visit Hardy would be unable to compete in the tourism arena attracting visitors to stay overnight in Hardy County and spend their money at local businesses. Visitors come to Hardy County (and return) when there are places to stay, a variety of things to do, and genuine hospitality offered by those of us who live here.

The intention, and as has been Visit Hardy's practice, is for all the assets

initiated by the CVB to be ultimately managed by individual community organizations. Visit Hardy works with these organizations, assisting in their development as they grow to take over the project. Lost River Educational Foundation (LREF) assumed the operation of the Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail. Lost River Trails Coalition (LRTC) is working with the National Park Service to strengthen their organizational and volunteer capacity while working on the mountain bike trails at Lost River State Park. Mountain Heritage Trails will assume the Heritage Trails program later this year and Visit Hardy will maintain operation and oversight of the Higgins House as it will also be home to our Travel Information Center.

To support our tourism related partners, Visit Hardy also offers Tourism Advertising Grants to encourage the produc-

tion and printing of travel literature and the marketing and advertising of local events. Visit Hardy also supports the Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail through grants to county residents and businesses for the barn quilts painted by LREF.

With the newly increased tax revenue, the funds available for marketing Hardy County have significantly increased. Required by the CVB Oversight legislation and the accreditation requirements, 40% of our tax revenue is to be spent on marketing, including building a library of images and videos, expanding the production, printing, and distribution of our travel literature, and updating our website, all current needs. In addition, the increased tax revenue permits the completion of our travel information center, as well as the hiring of AmeriCorps members and staff support.



# Mission, Vision, and Structure:

The mission statement clearly articulates what Visit Hardy is meant to do while leaving room for growth and the vision expounds upon that mission. After much discussion there are only three changes suggested, two minor and the other to make our vision more inclusive:

## Visit Hardy Mission:

*The mission of Visit Hardy is to strengthen and sustain Hardy County's tourism industry through education and collaboration and by promoting the awareness, visibility, and uniqueness of the County as a travel destination.*

## Visit Hardy Vision:

*The Vision of Visit Hardy is to acknowledge that we exist to strengthen and promote Hardy County's tourism industry and to do that successfully, we must:*

- *Support community development efforts that diversify, strengthen, and expand Hardy County's tourism industry thus economically sustaining the county.*
- *Develop and maintain local and regional partnerships engaging in regular and supportive discourse and collaborations.*
- *Support our community and local tourism partners through education, information sharing, and grants.*
- *Recognize the social and environmental impacts of tourism, the need for inclusivity, and the imperative that the rural character of Hardy County is protected while Visit Hardy responsibly grows tourism.*

## Visit Hardy Structure

Visit Hardy has one full-time employee, the Executive Director. Starting as a part-time employee in 2015, Michele Moure-Reeves was hired full-time in March 2016. Michele's first tasks that spring were to apply for accreditation (required every three years), work with the board and a consultant, Mikula-Harris, to develop branding for Visit Hardy, and lead a team of board members to develop a new website with MESH, a Charleston based website designer.

Significant changes have taken place since 2016 but Michele remains the only full-time employee. To assist in the asset-building projects, AmeriCorps Members have been engaged to focus on their design and management. The Hardy County Heritage Trail project, and specifically the Hardy County Historic Schoolhouse Trail, is managed by Shefa Benoit. Josh Taylor has recently been brought on to work with Lost River Trails Coalition and the Lost River State Park Mountain Bike Trail System.

Shefa leaves her AmeriCorps position this year and an application has been made to renew her position (with a new person). Josh's position will also be renewed, and he will return in the same position in September. A third position is being sought to work with other projects currently in development. While these AmeriCorps Members are critical to the on-going success of Visit Hardy's projects, full-time staff assistance will be necessary when the travel information center opens in late 2023.

Visit Hardy is governed by a volunteer board made up of 8 to 12 members of the community. They are representative of a range of interests, business sectors, and areas of the county. The 2023 board has three new members taking the total number to twelve. This is the highest number of board members Visit Hardy has had for several years which increases the minimum number who must be present for a quorum at board meetings.

The members understand that they have joined a working board and in so doing have made a commitment to attend the pre-scheduled board meetings (the second Thursday of February, April, June, August, October, and December). Each member volunteered or was assigned to a specific committee where the work of Visit Hardy is accomplished. The committee chairs schedule the meetings and present the committee reports to the full board for their approval. The board members have been participating fully in the planning process, a process that is integral to the success of Visit Hardy.

## Visit Hardy Board Members as of January 2023

NAME	TERM BEGAN	PROFESSION	SECTOR	REGION/TOWN
Daniele, Rick*	1/1/23	Cliffside Falls	Lodging	South Fork
Caldwell, Colby	7/1/22	LRSP Park Superintendent	Lodging/Recreation	Lost River
England, Marlene	1/1/22	WordPlay & WordPlay Connects	Retail/Cultural Events	Wardensville
Flanagan, Jean	1/1/22	Writer/Artist/LREF (retired Moorefield Ex Editor)	Arts	Baker
Freeman, Rick	1/1/16	Moorefield Town Clerk	Moorefield/Finance	Moorefield
Harvey, Toni Mathias	1/1/18	Innkeeper/Gen Store & Café (retired)	Retail/Lodging	Wardensville
See, Morgan*	1/1/23	Hardy County Wellness Center/ Hardy County Chamber of Commerce	Non-profit/At-Large	Moorefield
Sullivan, Pete	1/1/22	Geologist (retired) Member at Large	<b>President</b> History /Heritage	South Fork
Tucker, Angela*	1/1/23	Our Roots - Retail	Retail	Moorefield
West, Amanda	1/1/22	Westhill Winery - Retail	<b>Treasurer</b> Agritourism	Fisher
Williams, Hunter	1/1/21	Misty Mtn Event Barn Farmer/Venue operator	Agritourism/Venue	Fisher
Workman, David	1/1/16	Hardy County Commissioner	<b>Vice President</b> Hardy County Commission Fairs & Festivals	Moorefield

\* New members

## Standing Committees

The committees remain the same this year but the roles of two have changed somewhat:

- The Community Outreach Committee is undergoing change this year. With its new Chair, Jean Flanagan, the committee will focus on internal marketing, increasing the visibility of Visit Hardy within Hardy County and on the possible revamping of our Tourism Advertising Grant program. The committee also manages the Hardy County Barn Quilt grants.
- The Marketing Committee will remain basically the same, focusing on our external marketing, reviewing the marketing plan, and advertising schedule, and working with our social media contractor to increase our online presence. The Marketing Committee is also responsible for our surveys which will increase in number this year. Toni Harvey is the Chair of the Marketing Committee.
- The Special Projects Committee has undergone the greatest change. The committee originally researched and initiated projects but the development of new projects is currently on hold. Presently there are several projects that are active or in early development, enough to keep us well occupied for a while. Each project will have a board or AmeriCorps member who will support the project. Michele will be the Chair of the committee which includes 5 projects.



# Developing a Strategic Plan for Visit Hardy



Following participation in the West Virginia University Extension Service's Sustainable Rural Tourism Webinar Series, Visit Hardy's Executive Director requested the support of the Extension Service's Rural Tourism Specialist to facilitate a strategic planning process for Visit Hardy with the goal of engaging the board and local stakeholders in establishing short-term goals and objectives (12 months) for the organization as well as discussion of future longer-term goals.

## Methodology: Surveys and Meetings

**Surveys:** Prior to engaging WVU Extension, a preliminary survey was emailed by Visit Hardy to local tourism stakeholders to gather initial feedback to guide the planning process. It was difficult to source contact information from various organizations so with a

low response rate (only 26 responses with 150+ surveys emailed), it was also difficult to envision the current state and perceive the future of our tourism industry without knowing the thoughts and opinions of local stakeholders.

**Planning Meetings:** To broaden our reach, local stakeholders were invited to two meetings convened and facilitated by Doug Arbogast, WVU's Extension Service Rural Tourism Specialist. The first meeting was held on January 19, 2023, and the second was held on March 9th, 2023. The meetings were structured to foster feedback from the participants and inform them about the projects and committee structure of Visit Hardy while gathering information that would guide the Visit Hardy planning process and aid in determining the goals and objectives.

Doug provided an overview of tourism trends in West Virginia and the evolution of destination marketing organizations (i.e., convention and visitor bureaus) to becoming destination management organizations and the roles and responsibilities of destination management organizations.

Michele provided an overview of the purpose and objectives of the meetings and the current structure, mission, and vision of Visit Hardy. Breakout group discussions were conducted at each meeting. Meeting participants and breakout group activities and outcomes are described on the following page.



## Strategic Planning Meetings

### January 19, 2023, Planning Meeting and Participants

Of the 27 individuals invited, fourteen stakeholders attended as well as the Visit Hardy Board Members and the two AmeriCorps Members. Some individuals who could not attend sent staff or group members in their stead (\*). This group was comprised of public officials, educators, nonprofits, and business owners.

NAME	BUSINESS	EMAIL
Castillo, Jazmin*	GWNF, Lee Ranger District	Jazmin.Castillo@usda.gov
Greenwalt, Greg	Rural Development Authority & EWVCTC	ggreenwalt@hardynet.com
Kavanaugh, Kathy	Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail	kathrynkavanagh401@gmail.com
O'Neill, Mike	Restaurant, past Hardy County CVB Board	michael.oneill@aol.com
Orndorff-Sayres, Betsy	Mayor, Wardensville	betsy@wardensville.com
Sample, Jennifer	Firefly Inn (lodging)	jen@fireflyinnwv.com
Sherman, Tracy	Hardy County Chamber of Commerce	tracy.sherman@pilgrims.com
Fitzgerald, Eric* & Joy, Mike*	Lost River Trails Coalition	lostrivertrailscoalition@gmail.com
Burns, Robert*	EWV Community & Technical College	robert.burns@easternwv.edu
Markwood, Jessica*	Hardy County Schools	jessica.markwood@k12.wv.us
Williams, Robert	Hardy County Planning Commission	rwilliams@hardynet.com
Zuber, Carol	Mayor, Moorefield	mayor@townofmoorefield.com
Sullivan, Pete	Visit Hardy	See March list
Harvey, Toni Mathias	Visit Hardy	See March list
Freeman, Rick	Visit Hardy	See March list
England, Marlene	Visit Hardy	See March list
West, Amanda	Visit Hardy	See March list
Danieli, Rick	Visit Hardy	See March list
Williams, Hunter	Visit Hardy	See March list
Tucker, Angela	Visit Hardy	See March list
See, Morgan	Visit Hardy	See March list
Flanagan, Jean	Visit Hardy	See March list
Caldwell, Colby	Visit Hardy	See March list
Workman, David	Visit Hardy	See March list
Benoit, Shefa	AmeriCorps (Visit Hardy)	See March list
Taylor, Josh	AmeriCorps (Visit Hardy)	See March list

### March 9, 2023, Planning Meeting and Participants

Focusing this list primarily on lodging owners, marketing specialists, and public officials, we sent out about 32 email invitations as well as numerous invitations to lodging owners through their third-party sites (i.e., Airbnb). As with the attempt to get email addresses for the survey and first session, we found it impossible to reach these lodging owners. One lodging owner attended in January and aside from board members representing the lodging industry, no others were in attendance.

NAME	BUSINESS	EMAIL
Leatherman, Miriam + 2 staff	Buena Vista Farm	bvfarm@hardynet.com
Strickler, Kristen	Hardy County Tour & Craft Assn	heritageweekend@hardynet.com
Helmick, Shayna	Hardy County Chamber	chamber@hardynet.com
Kirk, Anne	Farms Work Wonders	anne@farmsworkwonders.org
Sanford, Lindsey	Farms Work Wonders	lindsey@farmsworkwonders.org
Kneeland, Kelsey	Lost River Trading Post	Kelsey@lostrivertradingpost.com
Branson, Wendy	Hardy County Commission	hdycommi@court.state.wv.us
Moomau, Peggy	Hardy County Commission	secretary@hardycounty.com
Scott, Melissa	Hardy County Planning Commission	mscott.hardyplanner@gmail.com
Schetrom, Steven	Hardy County Commissioner	steven.schetrom@gmail.com
Workman, David	Hardy County Commissioner (Visit Hardy Vice President)	djworkman@mail.wvu.edu
England, Marlene	WordPlay - Visit Hardy	wordplaywv@gmail.com
Harvey, Toni Mathias	Visit Hardy	mathiasharvey@gmail.com
Danieli, Rick	Cliffside Falls - Visit Hardy	rick@cliffsidefalls.net
Flanagan, Jean	Visit Hardy	jflanagan@hardynet.com
Sullivan, Pete	Visit Hardy (President)	peterasullivan@yahoo.com
West, Amanda	Visit Hardy (Treasurer)	amandabwest10@gmail.com
Tucker, Angela	Visit Hardy	angelatucker@frontiernet.net
Williams, Hunter	Visit Hardy	mistymtfarm@hardynet.com
Benoit, Shefa	Visit Hardy/AmeriCorps/ Mountain Heri- tage Trails	hcheritagetrails@gmail.com
Taylor, Josh	Visit Hardy/AmeriCorps/LR Trails Coalition	josht2172@gmail.com

### Meeting Activities and Outcomes

After the opening discussions, participants in each meeting were asked to join a breakout group. A board member was assigned to each group to help guide the conversation, assign someone to take notes, and to be responsible for reporting back to the larger group.

The January groups were organized according to the current list of Visit Hardy projects and the Community Outreach Committee. Participants were provided with a written summary of accomplishments and status for each project and encouraged to discuss the following questions within each group.

- In what way will the project impact the community?
- In what way will the project impact Hardy County's tourism industry?
- What are 3 key milestones for success in 2023?
- What are some barriers to success?
- Can you recommend other partners for these projects?

For the most part the questions were not answered directly but the responses helped to focus our efforts on the improvement of our committees and the advancement of our projects.

Participants at the March meeting were asked to discuss the following questions while examples of Visit Hardy advertising were streaming on the screen:

### What are your favorite things to do in Hardy County?



### What one word or short phrase captures the visit hardy experience?





Later, gathering into groups, the participants were also asked to answer the following two questions:

### 1. What can we do to help you?

#### **Responses:**

- WGM is an agritourism business; would like to be part of the conversation and has lots to offer to it.
- Tourism ads/partner with Visit Hardy.
- Brainstorm and strategy for heads in beds partnerships.
- Bridge gap within county and between towns.
- Support Events (Chamber is a good place to collaborate with).
- Support Advertisement.
- Assist with soliciting volunteers and patrons (with a focus on VA, DC, etc.).
- Countywide Calendar.
- Make connections between Visit Hardy & area groups (e.g., Ruritans, Poultry Association, etc.).

### 2. What can you do to help us?

#### **Responses:**

- Provide essential feedback including demands and opportunities from the market.
- Use Visit Hardy website to promote local events.
- Encourage folks to get to know Visit Hardy & Board Members.
- Create ways for businesses to connect and invest in events & activities.
- Cluster activities - network to maximize the variety of offerings for visitors who invest time to come to the location.
- Provide Visit Hardy with event information with adequate notice.

There was some very distinct overlap in the responses to the questions and in the discussion with the two groups as a whole. The responses, along with board input formed the basis of the following Visit Hardy Strategic Plan, which was reviewed, amended, and [will be] approved by the board.

# Conclusion

Sustainable destination management begins with proactive destination leadership. Throughout this planning process the Visit Hardy staff and board have demonstrated their commitment to strategically weighing the pros and cons of the changes in their county; a deep commitment to continuing to grow their tourism assets while maintaining their unique sense of place and protecting the rural environment and culture; identifying and responding to local partners thoughts and concerns in facing and managing this challenge; and promoting destination stewardship and sustainable destination management.

This challenge is not unique to Hardy County as it faces the limited resources and capacity many rural destinations are strapped with. This document serves as a guide for the role of tourism as part of a sustainable economy for Hardy County. A commitment to the organization's mission and vision and to accomplishing the goals and objectives outlined in this plan can guide Hardy County on this journey.

## References

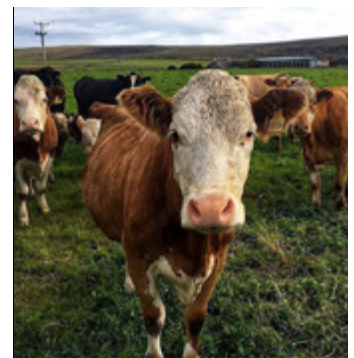
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# Visit Hardy Strategic Plan for 2023–2024:

## Goals and Objectives for Committees and Projects

The time and effort that has gone into the last few months has been meaningful and has resulted in a plan that defines specific goals for the growth and success of Visit Hardy and of Hardy County's tourism industry. To accomplish this, the information provided by the Visit Hardy Board of Directors and our community of stakeholders\*, individuals who generously gave of their time and ideas, was carefully considered leading to the development of an insightful plan, one that is inclusive, comprehensive, and, primarily, workable.

\*From the 2022 survey and the two 2023 planning sessions

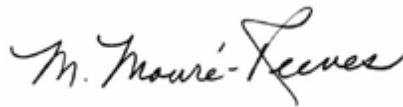
To assure that the plan was feasible it was necessary to determine what goals were achievable within the next year and what objectives were necessary to meet those goals. Rather than state that Visit Hardy should have X number of goals and to assure that achievability, the focus was on on the committee structure and projects, what the role of the board and staff will be in realizing the goals, and how this will be reflected in the accomplishment of the measurable objectives that have been integrated into the plan.

Finally, when we reach the end of this year (June 2024), we must be able to evaluate the soundness of our plan based on the level of that accomplishment. Ideally, the successes of this initial year will become the foundation of our next plan, hopefully one that is innovative, has deeper reach and possibly a longer range. Most importantly, however, is that going through this process will make Visit Hardy more effective, an adept organization realizing its mission to strengthen and sustain Hardy County's tourism industry.

Thank you to everyone who participated and who made this plan possible.



Pete Sullivan  
President



Michele Moure-Reeves  
Executive Director





## Community Outreach Committee

**Chair:** Jean Flanagan

**Board Members:** Rick Danieli and Morgan See

**Non-Board Members:** Michele Moure-Reeves

### GOAL FOR 2023-2024:

- Increase the visibility of Visit Hardy within the county and the understanding of our role.
- Develop new and strengthen existing community partnerships.
- Increase community participation in Tourism Advertising Grant program.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Distribute Visit Hardy travel literature, brochure racks, and signage to local businesses.
- Representing Visit Hardy, attend community events/meetings to introduce Visit Hardy projects and programs.
- Develop a county-wide ad hoc committee to discuss and plan for the growth of tourism in Hardy County and define Visit Hardy's role in the partnership.
- Increase listings on Visit Hardy website, and postings on Facebook page and Instagram.
- Review the Tourism Advertising Program and identify ways to increase participation.
- Working with Lost River Educational Foundation, review the Hardy County Barn Quilt grants.
- Update the business/event/tourism asset contact list (with emails!).

## Marketing Committee

**Chair:** Toni Mathias Harvey

**Board Members:** Marlene England and Angela Tucker

**Non-Board Members:** Michele Moure-Reeves

### GOALS FOR 2023-2024:

- Increase the number of Hardy County's overnight visitors.
- Plan strong and effective marketing strategies by evaluating Hardy County's travel trends utilizing Google Analytics, surveys, and other quantitative tools that monitor and track visitor behavioral patterns.
- Assist in the completion of the Hardy County Travel Information Center and Robert Higgins House Museum
- Maintain and elevate a positive Hardy County brand/product through print, social media, and other marketing efforts.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Publish 2023-24 travel guide.
- Research ways to "publish" the Ride the High 5 Motorcycle Map other than print.
- Expand photo library, videos, & reels (identify sites).
- Develop a "What to See in Hardy County" rack card.
- Increase our social media presence.
- Increase number of visitors to website.
- Publish surveys on regular basis and develop a better email list.
- Include Hardy County events in advertising/marketing.

## Special Projects Committee

**General Chair:** Michele Moure-Reeves

### Lost River State Park Mountain Bike Trail System

**Chair:** Josh Taylor (AmeriCorps Member)

**Board Members:** Colby Caldwell

**Non-Board Members:** Lost River Trails Coalition (LRTC), International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), and WVU Outdoor Economic Development Collaborative, West Virginia Interscholastic Cycling League, Wendy Branson, and Michele Moure-Reeves

### GOALS FOR 2023-2024:

- Increase the visibility of the project within the community and region.
- Complete 50% of the building of the Jay Moglia Beginner's Trail and plan future trail development
- Working with West Virginia Interscholastic Cycling League, develop a National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) youth cycling program.
- Support LRTC's organizational development and capacity building process (working with National Park Service (NPS)).



#### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Attend all LRTC meetings and events.
- Research and apply for grants/donations for trail design and construction.
- Work with LRTC and IMBA to develop a concept plan for the trail system.
- Work with LRTC and NPS to update bylaws, develop an annual budget, and create a development plan.
- Develop a trail at East Hardy High School for training youth group.
- Participate in National Interscholastic Cycling Association events (AmeriCorps).
- Include LRTC events in advertising/marketing.

### Hardy County Heritage Trails

(Focusing on Historic Schoolhouse Trail, Potomac Waterways, African American Cemeteries, and Barn Quilt Trail)

**Chair:** Shefa Benoit

**Board Members:** Jean Flanagan, Amanda West

**Non-Board Members:** Michele Moure-Reeves, Mike Crites, Lost River Educational Foundation (Kathy Kavanagh), and AmeriCorps Members

#### GOALS FOR 2023-2024:

- Establish a long-range plan for each project including project transfer process.
- Complete the initial phase of posting of the Historic Schoolhouse Trail to Story Maps.
- Collaborate with community partners on African American Cemeteries Project

- Develop and meet the deliverables for the Potomac Waterways project (pending grant award).
- Increase volunteer capacity.
- Collaborate with Lost River Educational Foundation (LREF) on Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail's progress.

#### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Apply for and secure two AmeriCorps Members with StoryMaps skills.
- Develop project timeline for each heritage project by September 2023.
- Continue collection of schoolhouse narratives and work on storyline development; post them on Story/Maps and TheClio.com by December 2023.
- Establish a plan for the African American Cemeteries Project.
- Submit a grant to the West Virginia Humanities Council by September 1, 2023, to fund African American cemeteries project.
- Continue development of associated educational literature and programs for each project in collaboration with Hardy County Schools.
- Award three or four Barn Quilt grants to LREF by December 2023.
- Post Hardy County Barn Quilt Trail on Visit Hardy website and on TheClio.org; train LREF representative on how to maintain content on TheClio.org.
- Continue working with other counties on Potomac Waterways Trail including database development, collection of narratives, and promotional campaign (Pending the receipt of the NPS Chesapeake Gateway

grant and securing an AmeriCorps Member – September 2023 to August 2024).

- Establish a plan by September 2023 for the transfer of the Heritage Trails program to community organization by June 2024.

### Fairfax Line Documentation and Geology Trail

**Chair:** Pete Sullivan

**Board Members:** Rick Danieli

**Non-Board Members:** Josh Taylor and Michele Moure-Reeves

#### GOALS FOR 2023-2024

- Install geological interpretive kiosks on the Mountain Skyway
- Organize content and post Fairfax Line history on The Clio.org and then on StoryMaps.

#### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Work with West Virginia Geological & Economic Survey to complete content for Mountain Skyway kiosks
- Work with West Virginia Dept of Highways on kiosk placement
- Plan a marketing campaign for both projects.
- Collaborate with Pete Sullivan and other partners to develop scope and content for the Fairfax Line Project.
- Work with Josh to post content of Fairfax Line history on TheClio.com with intention of expanding to StoryMaps by June 2024.



## Higgins House and Hardy County Travel Information Center

**Chair:** Michele Moure-Reeves

**Board Members:** Rick Freeman, Amanda West, Toni Mathias Harvey

**Non-Board Members:** Mary Burgess, Mike Crites, Gabe Neville, Kathy Kavanagh, Abbie Chessler, and Gerald Milnes

### GOALS FOR 2023-2024:

- Have 50% of Higgins House/Travel Information Center construction work completed by June 2024
- Meet West Virginia Humanities Council grant deadlines and requirements before October 30, 2023.
- Complete Higgins House museum displays by June 2024
- Open Robert Higgins House Museum and Travel Information Center by September 2024.
- Maintain hours required by CVB Oversight legislation (40-hour per week schedule).

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR 2023-2024:

- Post scope of work for completion of restoration work and building of additions
- Hire a construction contractor.
- Update project timeline including schedule of meetings with museum consultants by July 1, 2023.
- Schedule meetings with consultants to refine museum content, complete display design, and update budget for museum and information center interiors by October 1, 2023.

- Submit West Virginia Humanities Council interim report by October 30, 2023.
- Apply for USDA Community Facilities Grant to purchase media equipment, HVAC equipment, and lighting.
- Develop a Friends of the Higgins House group.
- Develop a policy and procedures manual for facility management, volunteers, and docents.
- Develop educational literature and programs in collaboration with Hardy County Schools.
- Hire staff and/or volunteers.

## Agritourism

**Chair:** Amanda West

**Board Members:** Hunter Williams, David Workman

**Non-Board Members:** Miriam Leatherman, Wardensville Garden Market, WVU Extension Service (Alex Smith), and Michele Moure-Reeves

### GOAL FOR 2023-2024:

- Provide tangible promotional support for agricultural tourism-based businesses in Hardy County.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE FOR 2023-2024:

- Identify and work with county-wide partners to assess needs for agritourism support and promotion

