

TOURISM INTRODUCTION

Greene County has several assets for the vital tourism industry. Proximity to Shenandoah National Park and many acres of scenic rural lands provide an ideal backdrop for visitors, and various amenities exist to serve those who visit. In recent years, Greene has significantly increased the tourism trade, resulting in tourism being one of the largest economic drivers in the community.

The County focuses marketing toward couples and families from metropolitan areas as well as hikers and bicyclists seeking vacation lodging accommodations. Recognizing that guests do not stop at county lines, the www.ExploreGreene.com website focuses on being a great place to get away and promotes many of the regional assets. In addition to the metropolitan areas within a three-hour drive, Greene's tourism capitalizes on the 1.5 million annual visitors to Shenandoah National Park and a vibrant wedding industry. With several wedding venues, Greene County had over (currently researching #) individual weddings in 2019.

In 2021, the town of Stanardsville completed the Greene Commons. Funded through a Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) grant, the venue offers a 2,000 square foot Pavilion and a large Performance Stage with seating for as many as three hundred guests. Regular music events and other special events make this gathering space a venue to connect tourists and members of our community, in a fun, outdoor, green space. The weekly highlight of the venue is the vibrant Greene Farmers Market (see the agricultural section for more detail.) Greene Commons is a public-private partnership that is working to restore economic vitality to Greene's historic county seat of Stanardsville. The activities of Greene Commons are directed by a volunteer Board of Directors as well as an Advisory Board composed of citizens from the community.

In addition, through the significant increase in Transient Occupancy Tax revenues, the county was able to purchase, with only tourism funds, a permanent highly visible location for the Visitor Center. Located on two acres in the heart of Ruckersville, the 1930 Taylor House has proven to be a much more visible location to promote the County's rural, agricultural tourism assets. Two outbuildings and the open space provide a tremendous asset for travelers to learn about the county, stop for a picnic, or attend the variety of tourism events that will be planned.

Other significant attractions to Greene's tourism include the Ruckersville Antique District and the very popular Blue Ridge Barn Quilt Trail. Currently, Greene is collaborating with Greene and Albemarle vineyards in the Dyke area to create the Simmons Gap Wine Trail and is seeking to designate routes 810 and 230 as VDOT Virginia Byways.

The Economic Development and Tourism Department, Greene County Chamber of Commerce, and Stanardsville promote the county, town, and surrounding areas through their websites, activities, programs, and events. Statewide programs also assist in building exposure for tourism. Likewise, the preservation of the rural character and scenic beauty of the county is equally important for building a healthy tourism industry.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

In the last several years, Greene County has made a concerted effort to bolster the tourism potential of the county and the Town of Stanardsville. It is well known that tourism can be an important driver of economic development, as well as a revenue source for local government. The current goals set forth

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are to identify the inherent strengths of Greene County and concentrate on enhancing these assets, to retain the rural character of the county that visitors seek, to coordinate tourism efforts regionally, and to attract a number of visitor services within the county.

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Tourism is clearly intertwined with many other elements of this comprehensive plan, especially economic development, natural resources, parks and recreation, land use, and transportation. However, it is still important to reflect upon how the momentum generated from these other endeavors can be effectively harnessed for the benefit of the tourism industry in Greene County. This requires a coordinated planning approach.

The Town of Stanardsville was awarded Planning Grant funds by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development for the preparation of a comprehensive Business District with the goal of, stimulating economic development and tourism within the Town. The Downtown Revitalization Project provided grant funds for façade improvements on commercial buildings; apartment upgrades on several housing properties; blight removal; and construction of a farmers' market / performance pavilion structure behind the County Administration building. The grant was awarded in September, 2016. As of 2021 What has been completed. add some text here.

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The Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) estimates the economic impact of travel for each locality in the State. The totals are drawn from a variety of travel related expenses, which includes, but is not limited to tourism spending. In 2019, \$22 million was spent in Greene County. This is a 5.8% increase in the monies spent by travelers in Greene County over the previous year.

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The primary tourism-related tax revenue sources are lodging and meals taxes. The current Greene County meals excise tax rate is 4% and the lodging tax is 5% which is commensurate with many other similar localities in the state. In 2020, #### was collected for meals tax, and \$312,344 was collected for lodging tax. Over the past 5 years, Transient Occupancy Taxes have increased by 77%. Overnight lodging gross receipts alone brought \$6.2 million into Greene's 2020 economy.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Heritage and cultural tourism is an important sector of the overall tourism industry in America. The region surrounding Greene County, with world-class attractions such as Montpelier, Monticello and the University of Virginia, is particularly well suited for capturing this market. Greene County itself has historical attractions and relevant services with potential to capitalize from some of the regional market. Whether historic sites are destinations in their own right or ancillary features of an overall pleasant environment, Greene County can benefit from recognizing and using its historic resources as economic assets and community-building tools.

In 2017, Greene County dedicated their Blue Ridge Heritage Project monument. Similar memorial sites are located in the eight counties where land was acquired to create the Shenandoah National Park. Each monument educates visitors about the lives and culture of the people who lived in the mountains before being evicted from the Park land. SNP guests can find solo standing chimneys, often the only remnants of these forgotten homesteads. Located in Stanardsville, the interpretive signage and a free-standing chimney monument memorialize all the names of these property owners.

The National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register contain eight entries for Greene County:

1. The Greene County Courthouse
2. The Octonia Stone (A marking for the northwest corner of the Octonia land grant in 1722)

3. Gibson Memorial Chapel and Martha Bagby Battle House at Blue Ridge School
4. Skyline Drive Historic District
5. Beadles House in Stanardsville
6. Powell-McMullan House in Stanardsville
7. Stanardsville Historic District

The highest concentration of historically-important structures is found in downtown Stanardsville, making this an obvious focal point for heritage tourism. The town contains over 20 buildings that date back to the early 19th century, including some that are currently in use as Bed and Breakfasts. The Lafayette Inn, built-in 1840, is a well-known restaurant and Bed and Breakfast. In small towns such as Stanardsville, the concentration of historic resources can create a vital synergy that is greater than the sum of its parts.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND AGRITOURISM

The Shenandoah National Park is perhaps the single most important resource for tourism in Greene County. A total of 15,285 acres of the national park reside in Greene County. The Swift Run Gap entrance, one of four entrances to the park, is directly accessible from Route 33. This entrance connects to the scenic Skyline Drive, provides direct access to 8 of the 10 most popular trails. In 2019, the National Park Service recorded 1.4 million visitors to the park, spending over \$96.7 million. To attract an increasing share of these visitors, the county continues to orient the range of services and promotional efforts toward meeting their specific needs.

Hunting and fishing draw visitors to the preserved land of Greene County. There are a total of 15 bodies of water for fishing in the county. The South River and mountain streams running from the national park are also popular trout fishing sites. The Rapidan Wildlife Management Area is a 10,326 acres piece of land along the border of Greene and Madison Counties operated by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. This natural area is a popular place for wildlife and fishing activities. While hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing are the primary uses of the area, other outdoor activities compatible with the wildlife management area include hiking, primitive camping, and nature photography. Road bicycling is another outdoor recreational activity that draws visitors. Road bicycling is extremely popular along Skyline Drive and in the foothills of Greene. Blue Ridge School provides premier mountain biking venues for Greene county residents and guests. The Charlottesville Area Mountain Biking Club offers several additional trails in the region, including the very popular Preddy Creek trails. Gravel bicycle riding has increased in popularity, and Greene County's rural, limited vehicle traveled roads attract many cyclists.

Agritourism is another important sector. Farmers' markets are growing in popularity around the country as anchor tourist destinations. Because these markets tend to showcase the unique characteristics of a community, in terms of locally grown foods and handmade crafts, they typically draw tourists who are looking for a retail experience they cannot replicate at home. See the agricultural section to learn more about the vibrant Farmers Market at Greene Commons. Wine tastings are another growing form of agri-tourism, and Virginia is gaining stature as a nationally-recognized region for vineyards. The Monticello Wine Trail, billed as a "guide to the birthplace of American Wine," passes through Greene County, with stops at Stone Mountain Vineyards and Kilaurwen Winery. Both Stone Mountain Vineyards and Kilaurwen Winery offer tastings and tours.

TOURISM PROMOTION

A number of entities are involved with promoting tourism in Greene County. The new Greene County Visitor Center exemplifies the county's rural, agricultural, and mountain heritage. It is located along

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The Town of Stanardsville was awarded a Community Development Block Grant in 2017 which is funded by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development for a comprehensive Business District to stimulate economic development and tourism within the Town. The Business District Revitalization Project provided grant funds for façade improvements on commercial buildings; apartment upgrades on several low-income housing properties; blight removal; and renovation of William Mills House on the hill above the library, and construction of a farmers' market/performance pavilion structure behind the County Administration Building.

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TOURISM PROMOTION

Several entities are involved with promoting tourism in Greene County. The new Greene County Visitor Center exemplifies the county's rural, agricultural, and mountain heritage. It is located along Route 29 with exposure to the large volumes of vehicles that travel along this corridor. The center directs visitors to destination sights and appropriate services in the county and disseminates materials such as maps and brochures. The property provides the opportunity to have several tourism-related events and attractions. State certification requires the visitor center to promote out-of-county attractions as well. The Economic Development and Tourism Department manages and markets the visitor center, coordinates other promotional material, and maintains a tourism website. The department's website, www.exploregreene.com, promotes local lodging, outdoor activities, vineyards, artisans, antiques, dining, wedding venues, and historic sites both in the county and in the region.

Greene County Economic Development and Tourism frequently collaborates with the Charlottesville-Albemarle Convention and Visitors' Bureau, Orange County Tourism, and Madison County Tourism to market visitors' information for the region and on other regional marketing initiatives. Additional certified centers in the area also point to Greene County attractions. At the state level, a "Virginia is for Lovers" guide and website are published each year for attractions throughout the state.

MAJOR PUBLIC EVENTS

Public events are not only celebrations for the community itself but often serve as an important draw for visitors from outside the county. Dates may vary from year to year.

- Strawberry Festival
- Stanardsville Independence Day Celebration
- Greene Farm and Livestock Show
- Tour de Greene
- Virginia Clay Festival
- Parade of Lights

GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Assure Stanardsville's Vitality and Sustainability
 - Explore EDA Small Business revolving Loan fund options for Tourism start-ups
 - Encourage the development of a Standardsville Merchants Alliance
 - Encourage a micro buy local campaign for Stanardsville
 - Encourage town residential growth to support tourism and other businesses
 - Maximize the use of the new pavilion and related facilities
 - Seek Transcontinental Bike Route (76 Route) alternate route through Stanardsville
 - Promote annual events (i.e. Virginia Clay Festival, 4th of July, Strawberry Festival, Parade of Lights, Greene County Fair)
 - Promote and preserve Stanardsville's historic district
 - Encourage safer multimodal transportation and address the impact on tractor-trailer traffic
- Capitalize on Shenandoah National Park's Assets and Potential Guests
 - Create a plan to get Stanardsville identified as an Appalachian Trail Community
 - Promote Blue Ridge Heritage Project on a website and other promotional material
 - Collaborate with the Blue Ridge Heritage Project and other DMOs to create a driving tour for all sites

- Create a partnership with Delaware North (SNP concessioner)
- Recruit a hostel entrepreneur to establish a business in Stanardsville to support hikers and bicyclists
- Market Stanardsville as Piedmont's SNP destination
- Develop a Comprehensive Marketing and Advertising Strategy
 - Identify key target markets (Tidewater, NOVA, Richmond, International, Washington DC)
 - Identify key demographics (age, interests, transportation {drivers, charter groups, hikers
 - Analyze current website's Search Engine Optimization (SEO) (fresh air, romance, seclusion, convenience, central location, rural scenery, natural beauty, mountain views, Piedmont views from above, night skies, agricultural, small-town charm, historic)
 - Create a marketing campaign specific for SNP and outdoor activities (hiking, biking, fishing, etc.
 - Continuously update ExploreGreene.com to maximize Search Engine Optimization and vibrancy of the site
 - Create initiatives to encourage return visits
 - Investigate having a URL for Skyline Drive leading to ExploreGreene.com (i.e. SkylineDriveSNP.com, loveSkylineDrive.com)
 - Communicate Greene as the central location to a region in all marketing initiatives
 - Increase visibility on third-party websites
 - Investigate third-party websites (HikingUpward.com, MapMyRide, etc.)
 - Establish a mechanism to survey current visitors on websites used to find Greene
- Advocate for Planning and Protection of Growth
 - Pursue identification of being a Dark Skies Community
 - Endorse the Ruckersville Master Plan to create a sense of place
 - Encourage the County to use Blight Abatement tools to address properties that are unsafe and harm tourism
 - Discourage urban sprawl by encouraging the BOS to implement designated growth areas identified in the Comprehensive Plan
 - Assess county ordinances that can enhance the tourism experiences
 - Explore designating Stanardsville and surrounding area as tourism district with unique ordinances to support tourism businesses (signage, zoning, buffers hiding development, etc.)
 - Encourage county to identify greater residential density close to Stanardsville's town limits
 - Recognize and protect Route 29 as a valuable asset
 - Ensure the County consults the Director of Tourism regarding the impact on tourism for all zoning, site plans, and ordinance changes
- Support Individual Tourism Industries
 - Hold semi-annual industry-specific meetings for lodging, restaurants, artisans, wedding destinations, antique shops, and agri-tourism
 - Create individual marketing plans for each tourism industry
 - Establish various industry weeks (restaurant week, antique week)
 - Collaborate with PVCC and the Small Business Development Center to provide training/coursework supporting successful small business practices
- Strengthen and Capitalize on Partnerships

- Support an SNP Regional Marketing Campaign with other localities
- Establish frequent communication and collaboration with Virginia Tourism Commission (VTC)
- Host annual concierge visits from Shenandoah Crossings, Massanutten Resort, and other major hotels (i.e. Boars Head Inn, Omni, Keswick Hall)
- Create a community public relations program communicating the tourism impact and how residents can play a role