

The International Countryside Stewardship Exchange

Report from the Schuylkill County/Tamaqua Area Exchange Team

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June 1995, a team of planning, recreation, conservation, and economic development experts visited Tamaqua and the townships of Rush, Walker, Schuylkill, and West Penn as part of the International Countryside Stewardship Exchange program, held in cooperation with the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. The exchange team was invited by the steering committee of Tamaqua 2004, led by State Rep. David Argall and a group of businesspeople and citizens committed to fostering positive change in the Tamaqua area with respect to downtown revitalization, recreation, historic preservation and tourism, and economic and industrial development.

The exchange team found the Tamaqua area full of potential as a place to do business, visit as a tourist, and to enjoy the outdoors. However, the team also observed a number of "big picture" problems that are hampering the efforts of local units of government, volunteer groups, and other organizations to provide services, institute new programs, and improve economic conditions. Specifically, the team found a lack of community confidence, a fragmented political system that discourages cooperation, a shortage of local leaders, a need for new partnerships to manage initiatives, a lack of overall strategy for meeting goals, and ineffective mechanisms for delivering programs and services.

This report contains the team's recommendations on ways to address the big picture problems as well as specific recommendations to guide the efforts of the four task forces. The team's key recommendations that affect all subsequent recommendations and work of the task forces are as follows:

- Work with the Center for Rural Pennsylvania to appoint a staff person to Tamaqua 2004 to develop an areawide plan to identify key goals, objectives, and programs in each issue area to use as a context for implementing the tasks of the Tamaqua 2004 strategic work plan *and* the recommendations of this report.
- Review the composition of the Tamaqua 2004 committees and task forces to improve representation of all key stakeholders in each issue area and to increase participation by young people.
- Begin by focusing on small achievable tasks that can stimulate community pride and generate greater involvement in Tamaqua 2004.

The exchange team does not want its involvement with the Tamaqua area to end with submittal of this report. To that end, *the team requests a formal response to this report from the Tamaqua 2004 Steering Committee as well as a one-year progress report in June 1996.* The purpose would be to allow team members to provide additional ideas or assistance as well as clarification on recommendations where necessary.

The major recommendations for each of the issue areas are as follows:

Downtown Revitalization

Apply for Main Street designation through the National Main Street Center. This will give structure and assistance to all programs to improve the downtown and will facilitate the implementation of all subsequent recommendations for downtown revitalization.

Improve the Design and Visual Quality of downtown. This will require an inventory, research, and analysis of existing building stock; drafting and adopting design guidelines based on Tamaqua's historic character; adopting and enforcing a minimum maintenance ordinance.

Recreation

Research, develop, and implement a plan to guide all recreation activities and management in the Tamaqua area. This plan should incorporate: 1) an inventory of existing and potential recreational activities within the project area; 2) an inventory of existing natural and manmade resources in the project area; 3) a list of priorities; 4) an assessment of human and financial resources available; and 5) a description of roles and responsibilities of current and potential partner organizations.

Strengthen the relationship of the Tamaqua area with the state Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor and the federal Lehigh and Delaware River Heritage Corridor. Tamaqua is uniquely positioned to become the bridge that connects these two important corridors. With the borough serving as a receptor site in the corridors, users of the corridor could be attracted to take advantage of other Tamaqua area recreation and tourism opportunities as they become available.

Historic Preservation and Tourism

Develop an areawide tourism strategy. This strategy should contain a mission statement, a list of available and potential heritage resources, and an outline of tourism and historic themes on which to base a marketing strategy.

Increase Availability of Tourism Information. The QA building should be restored and used for this purpose in conjunction with the Save Our Station office. In general, more signage is needed to direct visitors and create awareness of the area's historic and recreational sites.

Economic Development

Restructure the industrial attraction strategy to focus on bringing in specifically targeted industries. Small and large businesses and industries that supply or support the area's industries are the most likely to relocate to the area and should be pursued.

Integrate the economic development strategy with downtown revitalization efforts and with the activities of the other task forces. Recognize the mutually supportive relationship of downtown improvements and the likelihood of attracting quality industries.

THE TAMAQUA AREA

The Tamaqua area of Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, is comprised of the Borough of Tamaqua and the Townships of Rush, Walker, Schuylkill, and West Penn. Its landscape is marked by mountains and farms, an abundance of wildlife, and is crisscrossed with several miles of prime trout streams and the Little Schuylkill River.

The area has a combined population of 16,177, of which nearly half reside in Tamaqua. The citizens have widely diverse ethnic backgrounds. Slovak, Irish, Italian, Welsh, German, Polish, English, and other settlers, were drawn to the area in the mid-1800s by the anthracite coal mines. The mines sustained a thriving economy until the 1950s, fueling the Industrial Revolution. The massive decline in the use of coal led the Tamaqua area into an economic decline from which it has never fully recovered. The study area is based on the existing school district boundaries, which includes the four townships and the borough.

THE BIG PICTURE

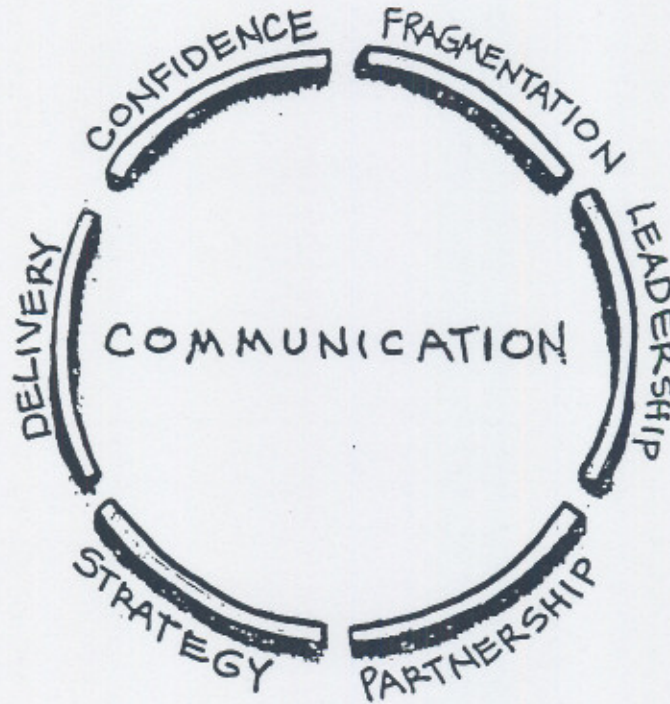
The exchange team was invited to the area by Pennsylvania State Representative David Argall, who is spearheading Tamaqua 2004, a business and volunteer-driven effort. The community provided the exchange team with a well-organized series of questions to guide our meetings and deliberations. The questions were grouped according to the four Tamaqua 2004 Task Forces: Downtown Revitalization; Historic Preservation and Tourism; Economic Development; and Recreation.

- ▣ **Downtown Revitalization** Hard economic times in Tamaqua have resulted in a downtown that is physically deteriorated, with approximately 25 percent of the storefronts standing vacant. Two major state highways intersect near the center of the Borough, creating noise and air pollution and a hostile environment for shoppers and pedestrians. Currently drivers have little reason to stop on their way through town.
- ▣ **Recreation** The area is rich with outdoor recreational opportunity. There are pristine streams, reservoirs filled with fish, state parks, game lands, boating access, and close proximity to a state and a federal heritage corridors, but the Borough and Townships lack a coordinated strategy for sharing, using, or promoting these assets.
- ▣ **Historic Preservation and Tourism** Downtown Tamaqua and the countryside have a beautiful architectural heritage, many historic churches, and a fascinating coal mining legacy, but there is no means for tourists to find or interpret the sites.
- ▣ **Economic Development** The industrial attraction program currently in place in Tamaqua lacks both a focus and a comprehensive strategy. Too few individuals and firms are relied upon to generate new jobs and little is done to develop skills and professionalism among Tamaqua area youth.

The four issue areas are a useful to analyze an intricate web of interrelated issues. After looking for common threads among the four areas, the exchange team identified six shared by all. Together these elements are limiting the efforts of Tamaqua 2004 or other individuals or groups to be effective or to succeed in improving the quality of life for Tamaqua area residents. These themes are Confidence, Fragmentation, Leadership, Partnership, Strategy, and Delivery. The overarching issue that is limiting the community's ability to

adequately address these themes is communication.

By the end of the week, it was clear to the team that unless these issues are addressed, few of the specific recommendations will make lasting change. The six themes we identified are, in our experience common to all rural communities, regardless of their geography, social or economic make-up. The community needs to rediscover those elements that once made the Tamaqua area great and prosperous and tackle the weaknesses that have been eroding the foundations of community spirit for the last few decades.



Confidence

The exchange team found great variation in confidence within the community, from desperation and despair to unbounded enthusiasm and hope. There is no right or wrong way nor quick fix to rebuild community confidence, and there will be successes and failures and only enthusiasm and energy coupled with determination will succeed. The issue of confidence needs to be recognized and tackled, and the team suggests that the following would be a good start:

- An areawide publicity campaign that emphasizes the need to move forward and to accentuate the positive qualities of the area.
- A 'tactical' approach to problem solving that focuses on a progression of small achievable tasks for every part of the community.
- The celebration of any achievement no matter how small.

Fragmentation

The exchange team was struck by the number of initiatives happening in the area, often in isolation and uncoordinated. The Tamaqua 2004 initiative needs to recognize the merit of individualism in the community but also the benefits of collectively working for the greater good. We therefore feel that while there should be a strong push to create an identity for Tamaqua 2004 (related to the campaign suggestion above) there should also be active encouragement of each townships' and the borough's distinctiveness. As a first step we suggest:

- Develop a stronger identity for the initiative that can highlight the distinctiveness and diversity of townships and the borough but recognize the need to think of the area as one community.
- Schedule regular meetings (at various locations in all five municipalities) of the Tamaqua 2004 Steering Committee and task forces to maintain momentum.
- There should be a review of the make up and structure of Tamaqua 2004 annually to ensure it is still fulfilling its purpose and that it is truly addressing current and future issues, as well as representing the whole community.
- Include a stronger proportion of young people/youth on the steering committee as full voting members.

Leadership

The exchange team met many leaders from the community, ranging from life-long residents who are experienced in community affairs to young people who are still contemplating their future. We also came across potential leaders who, with the right support, coaching, and mentors will form the new leadership by 2004. As a first step Tamaqua 2004 should:

- Start to actively recruit, encourage, train and develop new leaders.
- Seek out the "rising stars" across the age spectrum.
- NOT assume that new leadership must come from outside the community.
- Be prepared to expand and turnover leadership in Tamaqua 2004 as the projects evolve and the agendas change.

Partnership

Fragmentation is a sign of a lack of partnerships. Partnerships are complex and productive relationships among people and institutions. The exchange team found the general picture was one of a lack of true partnership and collaboration. Dwelling on past failures at attempts to work together (either among townships or the borough and the townships) was commonplace. Yet when pressed the team uncovered good examples of past partnerships that succeeded. We therefore recommend that Tamaqua 2004:

- Review the existing and proposed partnerships for each project in the Tamaqua 2004 program and check to see if all the relevant organizations/stakeholders are represented.
- Identify good practice and understand it and use it as a good example.

Strategy

The exchange team was impressed by the strategic work plan for Tamaqua 2004, but felt there was a void between the mission statement and principles and the timetable outlining programs and tasks. In essence, the group felt that the document was not a true strategy and did not tackle some fundamental issues, e.g., the market segments to be targeted for tourism and heritage; the balance of formal vs. informal recreation; the types of industry that TIDE wishes to attract, etc. This, we believe leads to a lack of direction and impact, and may even change the priorities already identified, e.g., the needs of the youth may dictate different priorities. We therefore recommend:

- Develop a framework for the four key issue areas to bridge the Tamaqua 2004 mission statement and the strategic work plan.
- Identify goals, key objectives, and programs for each issue area.
- Set standards of what you are trying to achieve in each area.

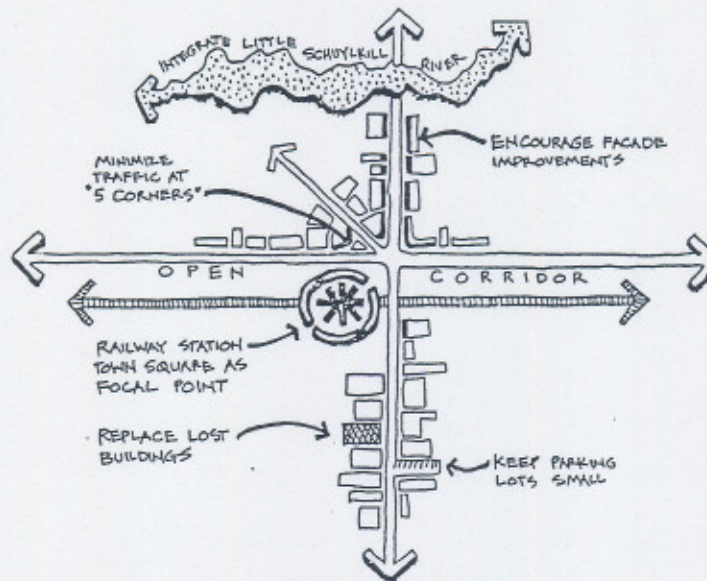
Delivery

The exchange team believes that Tamaqua 2004 has reached a critical point in its development. While expectations of the community may be mixed, if the group does not show evidence of success soon, then, to coin a phrase from one local resident, "they'll be blown out of the water." The team recognizes the tremendous volunteer work done so far, but also appreciates that the reliance of the initiative on volunteers is also a weakness. The time has come to gear things up in a do or die effort. We therefore recommend:

- Tamaqua 2004 appoint an executive director, even before pursuing the more specific need to hire a recreation director or Main Street manager.
- Review the priorities for Tamaqua 2004 and focus on small, achievable flagship projects.
- Recognize that all progress is not linear; the various components will have to be worked on simultaneously.

Keeping in mind these six overarching issues, we now offer our observations, perceptions of the key issues, and recommendations for action in the areas of downtown revitalization, recreation, historic preservation and tourism, and economic development.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION



OBSERVATIONS

The deterioration of downtown Tamaqua can be traced to the decline of the coal industry from the 1930s onwards. Once a thriving borough and the hub of the community, it is now pock-marked with vacant stores and dirt-ridden, inaccurately remodeled Victorian architecture. The sidewalks are a checkerboard of asphalt, concrete, and occasional bricks with an obvious void of shade trees, greenery, benches, and lampposts.

Alternatively, the downtown possesses a captive audience of residents who live in either upper-story apartments or row houses contiguous to the downtown. The key is to attract these consumers into the downtown and to target businesses to better serve their needs. The absence of a coordinated strategy or plan for improving the downtown that comprehensively addresses the various problems in the most significant limitation in revitalizing downtown Tamaqua.

KEY ISSUES

- ➔ Lack of an overall downtown plan or management program.
- ➔ Lack of design and visual quality: There is no cohesive buildingscape, streetscape, maintenance standard, facades, greenery, etc.
- ➔ Absentee ownership and vacant storefronts.
- ➔ Empty lots.
- ➔ Traffic and its side effects: poor circulation, noise and air pollution, and parking.

- Failure by borough council to enforce codes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations respond to the questions posed to the exchange team by the Tamaqua 2004 Downtown Revitalization Task Force. Specifically, the exchange team was asked:

- ✓ How do we address comprehensively the numerous problems facing downtown? and,
- ✓ How do we develop a revitalization plan for downtown?

1. Apply for the Main Street program through the National Main Street Center, 1785 Massachusetts Ave, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 673-4000. (Exchange team member Ronni Wood can provide preliminary information.)

- a. Hire full-time manager
- b. Explore funding via: corporate, public, private memberships; foundations, special assessment district or business improvement district; and tax increment financing (TIF).
Seek advice from the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs to determine which tools municipalities are authorized to use.

2. Improve downtown design and visual quality.

- a. Undertake inventory, research, and analysis of existing building stock.
- b. Develop and adopt via ordinance Tamaqua design guidelines based on historic building materials, design, colors, and building orientation and scale.
- c. Apply for National Register District designation.
- d. Establish and enforce a minimum maintenance ordinance.
- e. Make improvements to the facade improvement program to increase its use and extend the program to include signs.
- f. Develop annual awards program/competition for retailers and residents who improve their properties.
- g. Develop a proactive approach to encourage downtown business owners to restore their facades to their historical origin, in accordance with Tamaqua design guidelines.

3. Discourage Absentee Ownership and Storefront Vacancies

- a. Survey and list downtown property owners to determine exact amount of absenteeism.
- b. Explore possibility taxing district and/or special assessment to serve as disincentive to absentee ownership (among other purposes) and unkempt storefronts.
- c. Publish photos or list names of negligent owners in newspapers.
- d. Use the minimum maintenance ordinance to regulate the appearance of vacant stores.

4. Improve use and appearance of vacant lots.

- a. Adopt and enforce minimum maintenance standards or code.
- b. Encourage a positive enhancement program, e.g., murals, landscaping, off-street parking.
- c. Require landscaping or parks on vacant lots on a temporary basis until lots are developed.

5. Study and impose restrictions on traffic circulation, noise and dirt pollution, and parking.

- a. Designate a truck route to remove oversized vehicles from Broad St. Contact PennDOT for information.
- b. Impose weight limit restrictions on vehicles traveling through downtown.
- c. Develop parking strategy that includes or addresses the following:
 1. Inventory actual v. perceived demand for street parking.
 2. Reassess need for meters on Broad St. and side streets.
 3. Remove parking restrictions on side streets adjacent to Broad St.
 4. Review traffic control and light synchronization of Five Corners intersection; contact PennDOT for assistance.

6. Aggressively enforce existing ordinances and codes.

- a. Initiate an intense public relations campaign on the benefits of aesthetic value.
- b. Develop and ENFORCE new codes e.g., minimum maintenance ordinance.
- c. Review the negative contribution being made to the downtown by dilapidated Borough-owned structures and vacant lots--LEAD BY EXAMPLE!

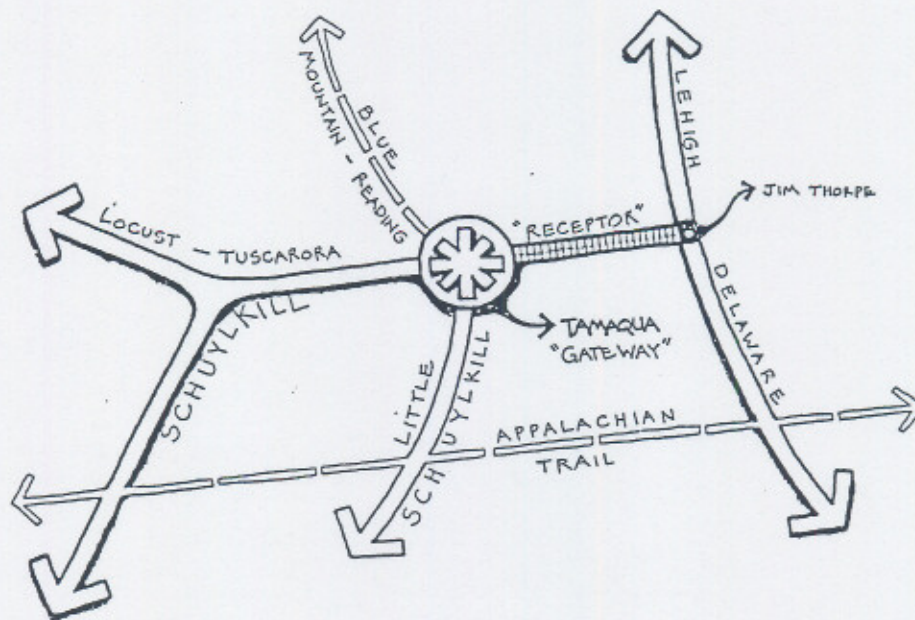
7. Develop a landscaping scheme.

- a. Coordinate with Penn State School of Landscape Architecture to supply graduate students.
- b. Include the following components in the downtown landscape scheme: develop distinct "gateways" announcing entry to historic Tamaqua; develop a town square/park on the vacant land adjacent to the train station; Little Schuylkill River Walkway; plant street trees on Broad Street (following the example of the beautification committee's planting of pear trees along the railway).

8. Develop and implement a downtown plan.

- a. Direct the Main Street Manager to produce a downtown plan that includes all of the above and present a time frame for implementation.

RECREATION



OBSERVATIONS

The Borough of Tamaqua and the townships of West Penn, Walker, Rush, and Schuylkill exhibit a rich variety of potential and existing recreational resources, including several reservoirs, state game lands, and state parks. The exchange team was encouraged by the enthusiasm of individuals and groups who wish to use these resources both for their own enjoyment and for visitors. Most of the resources are easily accessible from Tamaqua and its neighboring townships. Recreational activities currently available include hunting, fishing, canoeing, walking, birdwatching, skiing, baseball, swimming, soccer, and picnicking.

Opening or expanding access and use of these resources appeared to the exchange team to require a relatively minimal financial investment. The largest obstacle is the lack of coordinated effort on the part of stakeholders and decision makers, including township and borough officials, potential users, and current providers of recreation, including the school system, the YMCA, the state Department of Environmental Resources, and the state game and fish commissions.

For example, there has been no effort to collect, document, and describe the range, type, and scale of existing and potential recreational opportunities and the demand for these within the Tamaqua area. Nor was there evidence that these resources, opportunities, and activities had been analyzed, evaluated, or prioritized in a way that could reflect the range of interests identified. Further, individual recreational opportunities, though seemingly well-organized in themselves, appeared to be pursued in isolation.

KEY ISSUES

- ➔ The development of reservoirs as a recreational resource is a top priority.

- The Tamaqua 2004 Recreation Task Force does not have adequate representation from all key stakeholders involved in recreation, e.g., YMCA, school system, state game/fish commissions, etc.
- There is an incomplete understanding of residents and visitors of the recreational resources currently available to them and of the recreation demand of residents and visitors.
- There is a lack of programming and cooperation between recreation provider groups (urban and rural) and also within each group.
- There is a need to link related recreation functions and sites that are currently isolated from each other.
- There is a lack of coordinated community input in recreation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations address the questions posed to the exchange team by the Tamaqua 2004 Recreation Task Force. The questions were:

- ✓ How can Tamaqua best use its position as a receptor site between the two river heritage corridors?;
- ✓ How can the five municipalities reach consensus to develop a coordinated tourism effort?; and
- ✓ What are some of the negative consequences of tourism development and what are the ways to overcome them?

The team emphasizes that all recommendations should be implemented in a way that takes full account of the integrity of the natural environment.

1. Research, develop, and implement a framework to guide all recreation provisions and management in the Tamaqua area.

This is the most important stage in the development of Tamaqua's recreational resources. Such a framework will not delay immediate action, but will give such actions a context and guide the task contain in the existing Tamaqua 2004 Strategic Work Plan for recreation. A framework does not need to be an exhaustive document but should incorporate the following key components:

1. Inventory of existing and potential recreational activities within the project area;
2. Inventory of existing natural and manmade resources in the project area;
3. Prioritization of tasks or programs;
4. Assessment of human and financial resources available; and
5. Description of roles and responsibilities of partnership organizations.

2. Tamaqua 2004 needs to strengthen its involvement in the two existing river corridor projects. These are the state Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor and the federal Lehigh and Delaware River

Heritage Corridor.

Plans for the corridors envision the Tamaqua region as a "gateway" receptor site to the anthracite coal region and a significant link between the two heritage river watersheds. In addition, this region provides key intermodal transportation functions along the corridors.

Implementation steps and sources of assistance:

- a. Seek assistance from the National Park Service, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Program. This program provides technical assistance to municipalities that are planning and operationalizing a greenway or trail program. Contact exchange team member John Monroe for details.
- b. Apply for grants under the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) Enhancement Program, which provides grants for projects that encourage transportation alternatives such as bicycling, railways, and trails, and the facilities required to construct these projects. Contact PennDOT, Center for Program Development, (717) 783-2258.
- c. Maximize volunteer efforts: Work with DER to start a "Friends of Tuscarora State Park" or other program to mobilize work groups for trail clearing, stewardship, and celebrations.
- d. Publish and distribute brochures that guide visitors to existing federal, state, municipal, and local recreational facilities.
- e. Contact local chapter of Appalachian Mountain Club or Appalachian Trail Conference to facilitate discussion of connection of Tamaqua-area trails to the Appalachian Trail. Appalachian Mountain Club, 5 Joy St., Boston, MA 02108; (617) 525-0636. Appalachian Trail Conference, Washington and Jackson Sts., P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425; (304) 535-6331.

3. Appoint a full-time recreation coordinator or jointly with the YMCA.

Obtain municipal consensus to appoint a full-time, rural recreation and open space coordinator. The development of a linked network of multi-use lands, users, and trails is viewed as a priority for facilitating the success of the entire Tamaqua 2004 recreation and tourism strategies. The position should include some liaison with urban recreational programs such as YMCAs and schools. Priority tasks of the new director could include opening reservoirs, connecting state parks and lands, integrating the Little Schuylkill River, developing local trails in the Tamaqua Borough, and rebuilding or improving the four playgrounds in Tamaqua Borough.

4. Open selected reservoirs for recreation by involving DER, State Game and Fish Commissions and the Tamaqua Borough.

As soon as possible, Owl Creek (Tamaqua) Reservoir should be developed as a multi-use facility for the general public. Of all the reservoirs visited by the team, Owl Creek has the fewest locational constraints and will not be required for municipal water supply. It is currently owned by the Tamaqua Borough, which should assume liability for recreational use (which would be no different than the Borough's currently liability for existing parks and borough-owned property). The reservoir is fully surrounded by public land, has a trail encircling it, contains a variety of fish species, and has

potential parking and picnic areas.

The opening of Owl Creek would immediately provide opportunities for up to 10 recreational activities. This proposal should be drawn up as a short paper and presented to the Recreation Task Force, and borough officials.

5. Encourage and coordinate public and private sector partnerships and recreation projects.

The gamebird rearing and the trout hatchery programs, established and managed by the Little Schuylkill Conservation Club and Air Products, is an excellent example of a public and private sector partnership. Positive features of this project are the educational opportunities, involvement of young volunteers in restocking programs, its contribution to the natural environment, and the enhancement of Air Products' image within the community.

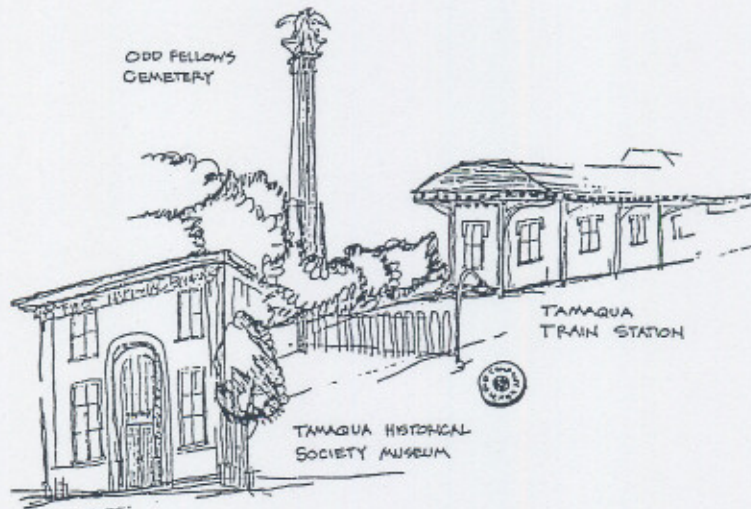
6. Maximize shared use of urban recreation facilities and events and activities.

Sharing public recreational facilities is an established, effective practice in other parts of the U.S. The main challenge is to develop a culture of cooperation among the borough and townships, school authorities, the Recreational Task Force, YMCA, and local interest groups. The benefits can be the cost-effective maximizing of sporting and recreational facilities, which rarely requires new staff. The current arrangement under which the YMCA uses the school facilities to hold its programs can serve as a model. Also, instituting a uniform fee for use of the Bungalow by borough and township residents would promote further cooperation and sense of common purpose in the area of recreation.

7. Establish a public lands trust for access and conservation easements and agreements.

Land trusts are one of the most popular mechanisms used in the U.S. to conserve natural resources. A land trust is a voluntary partnership among private landowners and volunteers formed to manage private lands for activities of public interest. It is not a government agency or program: land trusts do not buy land or impose regulations on landowners. There are property tax exemptions and implementation grants available to landowners who enter a land trust. Contact the Land Trust Alliance to discuss opportunities to establish a local land trust to conserve land for trails, green ways, and other public uses. Land Trust Alliance, 900 17th St. N.W. Suite 410, Washington, DC 20006. (202) 785-1410.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND TOURISM



OBSERVATIONS

Tamaqua Borough and the surrounding townships are rich with history both in physical and cultural terms. The area has much to offer both visitors and residents, but residents currently have a low appreciation of the area's heritage. There is no current means for visitors to find points of interest or to learn about the area's history. Further, the potential benefits to the Tamaqua area of being a receptor site and a major link between the two heritage river corridors have not been fully explored. There is a lack of suitable accommodations for overnight visitors. When restored, the Tamaqua Railway Station will serve as a key attraction in the area, but given the expected completion year of 2000, other tourist-related projects must be undertaken in the interim.

KEY ISSUES

- The Tamaqua area lacks a well developed strategy for protecting historic resources and promoting tourism.
- There is no central repository for visitors seeking information about the area's historic resources.
- The role of the newly hired Schuylkill County Tourism Bureau Director in developing and promoting Tamaqua's unique selling points needs to be made clear.
- The role of the Tamaqua area in the planning and programming for the two Heritage Corridors needs to be analyzed.
- The area has few signs directing visitors to historic points of interest.
- There is no current mechanism to place historic properties or districts in the borough or townships on the National Register of Historic Places.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through discussions with the Tamaqua 2004 Recreation Task Force and with other individuals involved with recreation, the team concluded that tourism should be an important element in the Tamaqua area's economic base, to be promoted with equal emphasis as other programs. However, the community must have the products and sites available that are suitable for use before actively promoting the area as a destination site. The question raised by the task force was:

- ✓ How can we utilize the area's numerous and diverse historic and tourism resources to market the entire area as one?

1. Develop an areawide tourism strategy containing the following elements:

- a. A mission statement
- b. A theme for the Tamaqua area which will form the basis of any marketing strategy
- c. Target audiences for future marketing campaigns
- d. A complete list of available heritage resources
- e. A promotion program that focuses on the following six tourism-based themes:
 - Molly Maguires
 - churches
 - living history of coal
 - railroad lore
 - cultural heritage
 - recreation: hunting, fishing, hiking, and mountain biking

2. Increase availability of tourism information.

- a. Open a central tourism information facility. We recommend that the QA building be restored and used for this purpose in conjunction with the Save Our Station office.
- b. Improve signs in the townships and the borough directing visitors to historic and recreational sites. Signage assistance may be available through the heritage corridor programs. Local signs should be consistent with regional schemes.

2. Increase local appreciation for Tamaqua's heritage.

- a. Tamaqua 2004 needs to provide more seasonal programs to draw people from outside the area, such as Victorian house tours at Christmas time.
- b. Make greater use of the Reading & Blue Mountain Railway, such as excursions into Tamaqua from surrounding areas.
- c. Broaden support for the Summerfest and Tamaqua Heritage Festival by soliciting financial support from local businesses.
- d. Move quickly to secure funding and complete restoration of the Tamaqua Railway Station as a priority and show of public commitment.

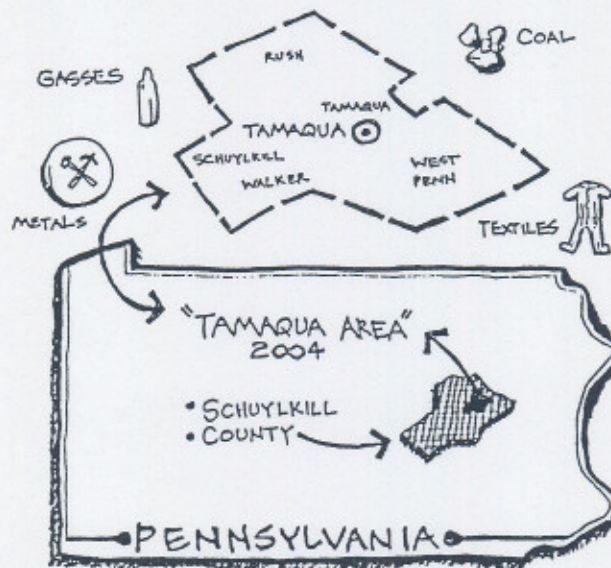
3. Actively encourage the siting of overnight accommodations for tourists visiting the area.

- a. The Tamaqua 2004 Economic Development Task Force should speed up its effort to site a franchise hotel chain or independent hotel/motel in Tamaqua.
- b. Survey and produce a list of existing accommodations in the borough and four townships.
- c. Consider the potential for bed and breakfasts in a variety of settings:
 - Victorian houses
 - working farms stays
 - restored coal miner houses
 - barn conversions providing basic hostel-style accommodation (of particular appeal to young people on hiking or cycling holidays) and users of the heritage corridors, including motor coach tours.

4. Define the role and interrelationships of the Tamaqua area and the heritage corridors.

- a. Cross-promote the state and federal heritage corridors with Tamaqua with Tamaqua area sites.
- b. Promote Tamaqua area's position as a receptor site.
- c. Investigate funding partnerships particularly with the Schuylkill River Heritage Corridor and the Delaware & Lehigh Canal National Heritage Corridor.
- d. Create a tourism forum for all counties in the two corridors to maximize promotion and minimize duplication.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



OBSERVATIONS

The Tamaqua area has a quiet, scenic, rural character and offers a desirable alternative to city and suburban living. There are several strengths of the Tamaqua area economic development efforts that should be highlighted and enhanced. First, there is a marketing program for the Tamaqua Industrial Development Enterprise (TIDE) with a video, information packet, and other materials that can be sent to prospective businesses. TIDE has also signed a marketing agreement with the Schuylkill county Development Corporation, under which SEDCO will market Tamaqua area at trade shows. Further, the Tamaqua area has tremendous physical and infrastructure assets, including ready-access to the Interstate, and abundant water. Another positive is that there are several major, stable employers that employ approximately 2,000 people, and that have immediate plans to expand.

The downside is that the current industrial development strategy is confined attracting businesses from outside the area. This results in enormous expenditure of time and money competing with every other state, region, and local government looking to build its industrial tax base. Second, industrial development is currently being considered as a separate issue from the need to improve downtown businesses and the retail sector. The exchange team repeatedly heard that, "No one would want to move their business to the industrial park after they driving through the dilapidated downtown." Third, the area labor force lacks the skills needed to be promoted into the higher paying positions at local industries. Further, there are limited career opportunities for young people who want to stay in the area after high school graduation or college.

KEY ISSUES

→ The TIDE approach to attracting industry is very narrow and reactive and cannot be considered successful. It is limited to efforts at seeking out *any* potential industry or employer without considering they type of firm that would be appropriate to the Tamaqua area.

- The current industrial recruitment and attraction strategy, which emphasizes broad brush marketing (which forces the Tamaqua area to try to compete with every other city, county, and state in the U.S. that needs to expand its industrial base) is unfocused.
- Qualified professionals do not want to relocate to Tamaqua because it lacks several basic amenities that make a community livable, including a movie theater, "decent" restaurants, and activities for teenagers.
- There is very little opportunity for Tamaqua area residents or youth to receive job training or succeed as a professional in a local firm.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With those general positives and negatives in mind, we now turn to the questions posed to the exchange team by the Tamaqua 2004 Economic Development Task force and offer specific observations and recommendations for improvement.

- ✓ How can we attract and recruit industry and retail stores in the Tamaqua area? and,
- ✓ How can we better prepare our graduates to compete in the future?

- 1. Restructure the industrial attraction campaign to target businesses that can serve and supply existing industries in the area.** The term for this is industrial targeting or import substitution. Information on such approaches is available from the Council for Urban Economic Development, 1730 K St., NW, Suite 915, Washington, D.C. 20006, and from team member Marya Morris in Chicago.
- 2. Integrate the economic development strategy with downtown revitalization efforts and with the activities of the other task forces.** Recognize the mutually supportive relationship of downtown improvements and attraction of quality industries.
- 3. Expand the Peer-to-Peer Program,** under which local business leaders interact one-on-one with prospective CEOs, to include small businesses and shop owners downtown.
- 4. Investigate Commonwealth Department of Community Affairs programs that are designed to encourage, support, and finance small business start-ups.** Be prepared to assist prospective entrepreneurs with DCA applications.
- 5. Identify local business people who could serve as mentors for new entrepreneurs.** Many people have good ideas, but they need help fine tuning them, developing a business plan, and seeking out financial support.
- 6. Work with school district and local colleges to provide technical assistance and conduct seminars for entrepreneurs and small businesses,** such as a "how-to" on developing a business plan.
- 7. Reduce regulatory barriers and attitudes in the borough that discourage home-based businesses.** This could be accomplished through the adoption of a home occupations ordinance which establishes a list of permitted home occupations, (e.g., telecommuting, sewing, tax preparation, repair work) and set standards to limit the impact of such business on the surrounding neighborhood (hours of operation, parking, signage).

8. Identify the specific skill needs of local industry and work with the school system and campuses to devise skills training programs targeted at meeting the needs of local employers.

9. Establish a mentor program under which local business people would advise college-bound people on course selection and provide internships in local businesses.

* Note: Success or limitations of the local vo-tech program needs to be analyzed in terms of its ability to serve local employers. This was not reviewed by the exchange team.

THE FUTURE

The above observations and recommendations are based on the team's five days of community roundtable meetings, local tours, Tamaqua 2004 Task Force meetings, and informal discussions with residents. Although the team's visit to the Tamaqua area was brief, our commitment to helping the community improve and succeed will continue until 2004 and beyond. To that end, the team requests a formal response to this report from the Tamaqua 2004 Steering Committee as well as a one-year progress report in June 1996.

The team realizes that many of the recommendations contained in this report require more specific guidance and staff in order to be achieved. We hope that Tamaqua 2004 participants and other local leaders will recognize areas in which they can take the initiative to start a program, apply for a grant or further technical assistance, and in general build support for these programs in the community. It should also be reiterated that success in any of these areas depends largely on the residents of the Tamaqua area to solve the "Big Picture" problems of confidence, fragmentation, leadership, partnership, strategy, and delivery.

All exchange team members are available to provide additional detail or clarification on any of the recommendations provided in this report or during the exchange. Further the team is developing a resource library for use by the Tamaqua 2004 committees and area residents. It contains books, reports, and case studies on recreation, historic preservation, tourism, economic development, and downtown revitalization. Those materials are currently available at Rep. David Argall's office, 237 W. Broad St., Tamaqua.

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