**Williamsburg “Lower Trail” Final Report**

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**Introduction**

At the start of this project, we decided on a few objectives to help Williamsburg’s economy and development. Unfortunately, COVID-19 interfered with our survey plans, but we hope that we can still offer useful input and resources. Below are our reflections on our preliminary research, as well as our survey and a rough plan for its usage.

Williamsburg may not be as prosperous as it once was, but it’s clear that the town has plenty of potential. It has active community members and organizations like The Crossroad that bring the town together and push for improvements in all walks of life. It also has a deep and rich history, underappreciated but very valuable for developing a town identity. Finally, it has the Lower Trail, a very popular recreational resource that could revitalize the town if harnessed correctly.

**Overview of areas of improvement**

Information

Information is a very important resource for developing the town. Specifically, it should be a top priority to make sure that visitors can easily find information about local businesses, history, and points of interest. This can be done in a few ways.

* Improved signage for trail visitors.
	+ There is relatively little information available for people moving along the Lower Trail. By adding signs at the edge of Williamsburg and near the center, the town can encourage people to visit local businesses or simply walk around and explore the place.
* Website
	+ Williamsburg would also benefit greatly from a website. This can go along with signage projects - the signs can include the URL of the website, as well as a QR code that lets visitors easily find more information online. The site itself could be created and updated by tech-savvy members of local organizations, such as The Crossroad. There are many free resources available to set up basic websites such as this, including Wix or Squarespace. The site could provide more information on businesses, history, and even include a map of the local area.
* Trail impact information for locals
	+ Providing info for visitors is very important, but it’s likewise important to provide more information to locals about the benefits of the Lower Trail. A small PR campaign with posters and/or a website could help encourage the town to come together and make the most of its neighboring trail. Maybe a future CED 475 group could conduct an economic analysis to figure out the exact impact of trail usage on Williamsburg, then use those statistics to help support “trail town” initiatives.

Visuals

Another effective way to encourage visitors to come into town and visit stores and restaurants is to build an appealing environment. It’s important to get the community involved on this initiative, since cleaning up the town has benefits for locals as well as visitors. Increasing their sense of local pride and belonging can start a positive feedback loop, with people putting more effort into taking care of their community and beautifying it.

* First Impressions program
	+ Bring in experts from outside the community to do a thorough analysis of their first impressions, what they think could be improved to encourage more visitors.
* Clear signage for parking, public spaces
	+ Like we stated above, it’s important to make the community easy to navigate and understand. Putting up a few signs to direct visitors to specific parking areas could go a long way in making the community seem more welcoming to outsiders.
* Downtown cleanup
	+ Improving the quality of infrastructure is an investment that might be too expensive at the moment, but there are still plenty of things that locals can do to make their town prettier and more appealing. Specific actions can be brainstormed at a local meeting or enacted by local organizations like Crossroad. The First Impressions program can also help in the brainstorming process. Some improvements might include banners for holidays, improved street lighting and sidewalks, or more flowers, trees, and basic landscaping.

History

Williamsburg does have a lot going for it, and one of the main things that could pull in visitors and increase revenue is its history. Developing a town culture based around the trail and the shared history of the community would make Williamsburg a more appealing destination. There are several things to tap into, like we discussed during our visit. The waterway to the old paper mill is scenic and impressive as an engineering feat, while the old manor is a valuable historical resource that could make a very effective bed & breakfast destination (though its usage seems to be on hiatus at the moment). As well, some of the old unused industrial spaces could be revamped into community centers, though it’s up to the community to decide on what specific uses would be most appealing. Priority should be given to uses that could bring in visitors, like farmers’ markets or crafts festivals.

**Review of potential business ideas**

Chicken and the Egg

Bringing in businesses is a sort of “chicken and the egg” problem - if demand isn’t there, business won’t flourish, but if businesses aren’t there, existing demand will go elsewhere. We talked about this regarding grocery stores: because there’s little selection in Williamsburg, people have gotten used to leaving town to do their grocery shopping, which only makes it harder for a local store to get started. The unfortunate truth is that starting a business in the area is inherently risky. It might be hard to convince larger chains to move in until there’s more demand in the area.

Locally-owned businesses

Rather than prioritizing large external businesses, we believe that it would be more beneficial to focus on small, local businesses. These have several benefits. First of all, local people have roots in the area, meaning that they have more motivation and less risk when founding their business, compared to outsiders who have few connections or history in the community. In addition, more money stays in the community rather than being siphoned off to a corporate headquarters c) builds a sense of local pride, “we can do this”, which is great for both local action and for bringing in outsiders

Make use of existing resources

There are multiple vacant buildings in the town that could be repurposed for a variety of uses - community centers, restaurants, stores, and more. It’s encouraging to see that development is ongoing, such as the construction next door to The Crossroad. Still, the trail survey could help determine what these buildings should be used for. Historical buildings and landmarks are also key resources, and could be opened for tours, weddings, and community events. Local community involvement would also be important for deciding these usages. Perhaps following the survey, the Crossroad group can hold a public forum to discuss how the town should develop, allowing every citizen to share their opinion if they see fit.

**Implementation plan for survey**

Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of COVID-19, we were unable to administer the survey or set up procedures for it. However, once the economy stabilizes and life returns to normal, The Crossroad or other local groups can make use of the survey in order to gain a better understanding of the interests of Lower Trail users. This data can help guide further development, making priorities more clear.

The survey can be set up on an online platform such as Google Forms or Survey Monkey, then shared via URL and QR code on signage along the Lower Trail. This saves time by eliminating the need for volunteers to staff the trail or transfer data from dozens of paper handouts onto a computer for analysis. The data will be neatly organized and easy to use with comparatively little effort. It can also be collected over a long period of time, allowing you to track trends throughout the development process.

On the following page is our survey instrument. We hope that it will provide valuable information and guide Williamsburg’s future development.

**Williamsburg’s Lower Trail Survey**

*Dear Lower Trail user,*

*We thank you for taking time out of your day for this important survey. The intent of this survey is to gather feedback from you, Lower Trail users, on what the town of Williamsburg can provide for you. Developing our community and economy and giving you the best experience in Williamsburg is our top priority. This survey is voluntary, but your input is greatly appreciated.*

**Trail User Activity:**

1. How often do you visit the Lower Trail? Check one answer.

◯ a) This is my first time ◯ b) Once every few years

◯ c) 1-3 times per year ◯ d) 6-12 times a year

◯ e) Several times a month ◯ f) Several times a week

1. What do you use the Lower Trail for? Check all relevant answers.

❐ a) biking ❐ b) horseback riding ❐ c) bird watching

❐ d) walking ❐ e) fishing ❐ f) running

❐ g) other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. How would you rate your satisfaction with the trail? Check one answer.

◯ a) Very unsatisfied ◯ b) Unsatisfied ◯ c) Neutral

◯ d) Satisfied ◯ e) Very satisfied

**Williamsburg Upgrades:**

1. How far do you travel to get to the Williamsburg stretch of the Lower Trail? Check one answer.

◯ a) I live in Williamsburg ◯ b) I live less than 30 minutes away

◯ d) I live 30-60 minutes away ◯ e) I live 1 or more hours away

1. When you visit the Lower Trail, do you also visit Williamsburg? Check one answer.

◯ a) Never ◯ b) Sometimes ◯ c) Usually ◯ d) Almost always

1. When you visit Williamsburg, what do you usually do there? Check all relevant answers.

 ❐ a) Eat at a restaurant ❐ b) Buy gas / snacks / etc at the gas station

 ❐ c) Buy ice cream at the Lower Trail Creamery

❐ d) Buy beer at Williamsburg Beverage Co.

❐ e) Visit other local businesses (Mill Hill Farm Supply, garages, etc)

1. Which of the following enterprises in Williamsburg would interest you? Please check all relevant answers.

❐ a) Fast food ❐ b) Coffee shop

❐ c) Bar / tavern ❐ d) Craft brewery

❐ e) Lower Trail gift shop ❐ f) Bike shop

❐ g) Outdoors / hiking store ❐ h) Grocery store

❐ i) Museum ❐ j) Canoe / kayak / tubing rental

1. Please rate how likely you would be to compete in a “Fun-Run-Triathlon” (Shorter distances, unique sections for each part of the race)? 1-5, 1 being I will not compete, 5 being most likely to compete in this race.

◯ 1: I will not compete ◯ 2: I probably won’t compete

◯ 3: I might compete ◯ 4: I will probably compete

◯ 5: I will definitely compete

1. Do you have any other thoughts, suggestions or concerns regarding the Lower Trail and Williamsburg? If so, please share them below.

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**Thank you for completing our survey! We appreciate your input.**