



Minutes: December 2 Public Meeting

To: Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area Board of Trustees

From: Elaine Carmichael, Economic Stewardship, Inc.
Tom Gallaher, Heritage Directions LLC

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Yesterday's open meeting¹, convened to consult with partners and the public about alternative approaches to implement the management action plan (hereafter, "the alternatives") drew 62 people who offered numerous ideas about how Housatonic Heritage could fulfill its mission, achieve its goals and realize its vision. Participants hailed from communities throughout the heritage area and represented a wide array of public- and not-for-profit sector partner organizations plus a smattering of private sector hospitality players and other resource stewards. Comments fell into four major categories:

- Focusing HH's Impact on Sustained Economic Vitality – How can HH engage the region in heritage-centric approaches to ensuring responsible prosperity?
- Convening Stakeholders and Decision-makers to Tackle Regional Issues – How can HH leverage its position as a respected organization with a regional portfolio?
- Enhancing Capacity and Creating Linkages between Organizations – How can HH help organizations?
- Serving HH's Audiences – To whom should HH's efforts be directed? What are their needs?

¹ Agenda, handouts and slideshow provided previously or available from Dan Bolognani.

Focusing HH's Impact on Sustained Economic Vitality

- Heritage isn't just about the past and HH can be about tomorrow too. What about working to extend heritage-consistent values into the future? For example, the Upper Housatonic Valley has a vibrant industrial history; how can that translate into entrepreneurship?
- Regarding tourism, the region's competitiveness rests on the combination of exceptional cultural assets in an exceptional setting... so conservation and preservation is key to sustainable tourism development. People need to understand the dynamics of that economic relationship and how it relates to their livelihoods: they have a economic stake in the resources and in the cultural institutions.
- Given how much our economy depends on our natural resources—not to mention that local values respect them—what if HH worked to expand the notion of infrastructure to include our natural resources and features... and then focus economic development on activities that strengthen our existing fabric?
- How to: link HH's planned accomplishments to the need to maintain authenticity, including ensuring the continued presence of the working landscape—agriculture—and ways for people to make a living here. The farming landscape, significantly, also contributes to the setting that drives the cultural tourism industry.
- Can HH help the region transition to a value-added approach to economic development? For example, local artists using local resources as source materials (so long as it's done responsibly) creates value-added economic activity that's consistent with our character.
- Local value-added craft-oriented economic activity stems from more than artists; it's also attributable to people who raise/prepare local food (e.g., Berkshire Grown).

Convening Stakeholders and Decision-makers to Tackle Regional Issues

- Could HH serve as a convener/facilitator/mediator for the necessary—but sometimes contentious—conversations between partners when their perspectives do not align on a given issue, e.g., sprawl, economic development, traffic, etc. It could help preserve the partners' relationship around other issues when their positions do comport.
- What if HH convened a group like those present at this meeting, perhaps once or twice a year, to raise issues requiring a regional perspective?
- What can HH do to support collaboration between organizations? Can it provide templates for MOUs, mediate conflicts, suggest partnerships, etc.? Technical assistance, issue identification, and relationship brokering are all needed.

- Regarding specific regional issues, what about...
 - Resource management? We all profess to value our natural resources and respect their contribution to the economy and quality of life, but resource management is key to their ongoing wise use. Since no organization is addressing resource management on a regional basis, is that a role for HH?
 - Invasive species? Invasive species (e.g., bittersweet, grapevine, etc.) threaten to take over the hills, which are just as important as the river in terms of the character they impart to the landscape? There are potential partners working on eradication programs (TNC, NRCS, Laurel Hill, the CIPC, etc.) but their efforts are not being coordinated on a regional basis.
 - Creating networks? Coordinating region-wide implementation of plans for a network of off-road bike paths? Currently, individual towns are undertaking various segments, but linking them together represents a regional task.
 - Gathering, managing and sharing data describing the region, e.g., via an approach like the Greenprinting project spearheaded by HVA?
 - Hosting an annual “Bio-Regional Summit” as a means to overcome artificial boundaries (e.g., state lines) and deal with regional problems on a regional basis?
 - How can HH leverage the existing organizations to bring their key skills to bear upon regional issues... especially when their participation is forestalled by limitations in their service areas, missions, etc.?

Enhancing Capacity and Creating Linkages between Organizations

- Could HH be a clearing house for information and assistance—a forum for those with questions who seek answers?
- How can HH help leverage the small, local historical societies and commissions? They do the research that ultimately results in the books that uncover history for posterity and their work gets people excited about their heritage... and so they provide the soil that nurtures the grassroots so often credited with being the driving force behind heritage areas.
- Can HH help organizations learn more about each other and promote cross-fertilization? What about indexing blogs and creating links to different organizations via HH’s web site?
- What if HH sponsored a heritage fair where everyone participated (a la the 2001 event)

Serving HH's Audiences

- Year-round residents, seasonal residents and visitors are all audiences for HH and the partners. Each group has different needs but they all need to know more about the Upper Housatonic Valley, especially the part-time residents.
- Elected officials and other local leaders represent another audience for HH... and another group that HH can hopefully get to the same table.
- The Upper Housatonic Valley is blessed with by its abundant heritage resources and organizations, so how to package it into discrete, understandable chunks for the various audiences?
- How can HH get more exposure so that it, in turn, can get more exposure for smaller organizations and foster a regional perspective?
- How to keep HH's programs and product relevant, e.g., how to keep the education course materials updated and expand their content and reach, especially since it's a means to build future generations of stewards?

Next Steps

- Compiling written comments for your review following a brief period to afford participants additional time. (Participants were also offered the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns in writing. Some submitted comments using space provided on the handouts for this purpose, while others indicated an intention to communicate by email in the next few days.)
- Refining the alternatives in light of the public consultation.
- Planning the January public meeting