

# Livable Roanoke Valley

## Executive Summary Outdoors Amenities Meeting

### DRAFT #2

#### **Background**

The Partnership for a Livable Roanoke Valley is undertaking a coordinated, regional planning process to promote economic opportunity and quality of life in the Roanoke Valley. Central to the partnership is identifying how local governments, businesses, and nonprofits can bring together their separate efforts to pursue a common vision. Over 60 community leaders from our region have dedicated time towards achieving this overarching goal and we are now ready to develop integrated strategies to ensure our success. To develop these strategies, we are convening a series of workshops in areas of economic development, workforce, health, and vibrant communities.

In the area of economic development, we have identified three areas of strategic focus:

- Innovation through Higher Education
- Cultivate and Market Outdoor Recreation and Amenities
- Strategic Investments in Regional Infrastructure

On Friday September 6, a group of outdoor experts in the Roanoke Valley met to help us better understand the drivers and needs regarding “*Strategies to Cultivate and Market Outdoor Amenities*”.

#### **Participating in the process:**

- Doug Blount – Roanoke County
- Steve Buschor – City of Roanoke
- Paul Chapman – Franklin County
- Pete Eshelman - Roanoke Regional Partnership
- Landon Howard – Roanoke Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Daniel Knight - Orvis Corporation
- Pete Peters - Botetourt County
- Shane Sawyer – Regional Bicycle Advisory Committee
- John Shaner – City of Salem
- Jake Gilmer, Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission

#### **Purpose**

The goal for our discussion was to understand what kinds of amenities are gaining popularity in the Roanoke Valley; what we need to do to make our region competitive in attracting people and businesses; and what we can do to capitalize on current events hosted in the Valley to attract people and businesses to consider relocating here.

Following is an Executive Summary that outlines areas of focus both to protect and grow what we already have, as well as develop a plan to cultivate additional assets to differentiate us from other regions with similar offerings.

## **Executive Summary**

We are blessed with natural beauty here in the Roanoke Valley – how do we capitalize on that to attract more high-paying jobs and skilled professionals to our region?

Any conversation about enhancing outdoor amenities must be a blend of what local residents want more of; what vacationers and tourists are attracted to; and what will give our region a competitive advantage and additional visibility with companies and professionals that we want to relocate here.

### **Building on Current Assets**

#### **Protect our reputation as a sports tournament destination**

Over the years, a collaboration of localities, the RVCVB and sponsoring organizations has been able to develop our reputation as a premiere location for sports tournaments on the East Coast. We now host 80+ sports tournaments a year, which bring not only visitors to our area, but also revenue. We need to continue to maintain and expand our inventory of sports venues to ensure we protect and grow our reputation in this area.

#### **Develop an outdoor amenities packaging/concierge service**

While RoanokeOutside.com has a fairly extensive catalog of the current recreational offerings across the region, there is a need for “packaged” offerings that would help visitors and residents better plan their experience. That might also include an app and/or an Outdoors “Concierge Service” that would work with people to custom design their experience, and would also include concerts, night life and other urban activities.

#### **Improve signage and wayfinding**

If you are on the Blue Ridge Parkway, you could drive past Roanoke without realizing it due to the lack of signage. At the same time, if you live in Roanoke, you’d be hard-pressed to find signage to Carvins Cove or many other destinations, much less find cross-promotion and signage to other attractions. There needs to be a coordinated effort to identify missed opportunities and a plan to implement signage and wayfinding throughout the region.

#### **Create Ambassadors of our citizens through an “internal” marketing campaign**

While there are several efforts underway to market our outdoor amenities, perhaps one of the most overlooked targets is an image and awareness campaign focused on our own citizens. Our citizens, along with all of those in the outdoors amenities and hospitality service businesses, are our ambassadors to the region. Their familiarity, knowledge and excitement about our offerings will go a long way towards creating the hospitality and positive vibe that attracts the businesses and professionals who will want to make the Roanoke region their home.

### **Cultivating Additional Assets**

This is certainly a strong foundation to build from as we consider other amenities that can not only enhance the experience of these visitors, but also attract outdoor lifestyle enthusiasts who are looking for a “metro-mountain mix”. Following are several possible next steps to build on our already strong base of offerings...

#### **Further develop our water sports, outdoor adventure and biking offerings**

There is increasing interest in biking, outdoor adventure, and water sports activities. There is an opportunity to further develop our “Peddle and Paddle” experiences to take advantage of both the popularity of these activities, as well as showcase the natural beauty in our region. More specifically, we should evaluate what it would take to develop our water sport, outdoor adventure and biking offerings so that we became an East Coast destination. That would differentiate us and give us a competitive advantage over other localities that also now offer a “metro-mountain mix” experience.

#### **Increase camping and unique accommodations and lodging inventory**

There is increasing demand for quality campgrounds, cabin rentals, and other unique lodging options, particularly as we continue to attract outdoor enthusiasts to our area. We need to determine what types of accommodations we need and where, and develop a plan to approach private developers, franchises such as KOA, or explore state/govt. funded options to find ways to expand our inventory.