



2016 Annual Report



Historic Wethersfield Tourism Commission

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

History and Mission

The Wethersfield Tourism Commission has been overseeing Tourism efforts in Wethersfield for 17 years. The adopted mission of the Commission is "To promote and encourage tourism to make visitors to the New England area aware of Wethersfield's heritage and it's historic and scenic sites, to coordinate a year round calendar of events and promotions, and to assist in the marketing of any product promoting Wethersfield."

Programs

In support of this mission the Commission has established a number of ongoing programs:

- The maintenance of a tourism specific website/internet presence to promote the Historic Wethersfield brand www.historicwethersfield.org
- Design and distribution of high quality color print collateral to promote the sites and attractions found in Wethersfield.
- A marketing and media campaign to promote the brand through press releases, newspaper, magazine and television promotions.
- Maintenance of a year round calendar of events on the website.
- Distribution of a monthly E-Newsletter promoting local events and news.
- Visitor inquiry information packets for distribution to interested potential visitors.
- Partnerships and coordination with State, Regional and local tourism stakeholders.
- Support of special events and projects designed to improve the visitor experience.

Benefits

Heritage tourism continues to be a growing niche market segments in the travel industry today. People who engage in historic and cultural activities spend more, do more, and stay longer than other types of U.S. travelers.

The continued development of tourism in Wethersfield will bring more visitors with money to spend in business located along the Silas Deane Highway and Berlin Turnpike as well as in Old Wethersfield. Increased tourism will not only support our local historic sites and museums and increase business, but it will help to reduce future increases in the heavy tax burdens that fall upon our businesses and residential property owners.

Membership

The Award Winning Commission consists of the following volunteers representing the following stakeholders:

Julie Lemos -	Chamber of Commerce
Kate Sullivan -	Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism
Dorcas McHugh -	Economic Development & Improvement Commission
Charles Ford -	Old Wethersfield Shopkeepers Association
Charles Forsdick -	Resident at Large
Chris Traczyk -	Silas Deane Highway Business Community
Charles Lyle -	Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum
Beth Thompson -	Wethersfield Historical Society
Ellen Spratlin -	Business Community
Carol Hall -	Alternate
Carol Bruce -	Alternate

The Commission receives staff support from Peter Gillespie, Director of Planning and Economic Development.

During 2016, the Commission continued many of its ongoing programs and activities and started several new initiatives. Specifically, the Commission reports on the following accomplishments:

Media – Tourism utilized a variety of strategies to raise awareness of Wethersfield’s attributes and to attract visitors.

- The Historic Wethersfield website continues to be a primary tool to promote the Town to prospective visitors. In 2016 there were 32,185 visits to the site down slightly from 2015.
- Our webmaster distributes a monthly newsletter promoting upcoming events. This electronic newsletter is sent out to more than 942 contacts and distributed to the Board of Education for distribution in the schools.
- Tourism hosts a Facebook page and uses it to promote events and activity in Wethersfield. Facebook offers a low cost advertising option to post events on the top of newsfeeds. Tourism has used this option to boost key events resulting in a much larger audience. The Tourism Facebook page has 1195 followers. Actual touch points increased proportionally as followers share or comment on postings.
- Annually the Tourism Commission selects publications and sites, print and digital for advertising and promotion. Tourism has ads on the RI Visitor Center Digital Explore Board, Visit Ct Digital Map, Vacation Fun IBrochure, and the Boston Globe fall travel guide in 2015 and 2016.
- The Commission continues to respond to information requests submitted via the website.
- Several stories appeared in the media in 2016 promoting visitation to Wethersfield including: New England Today Travel Section – Holiday Doors of Connecticut (November), The Culture Trip – 10 Most Beautiful Towns in Connecticut (April), Boston Globe – Annual Fall Travel Issue (September), Top 23 Winter Wonderlands in America (November), New England Today – 15 Prettiest Winter Villages in New England (February).

Brochures/Promotional Material

- The Commission utilizes rack cards and postcards as its main print collateral. These cost effective double sided cards are a quick snapshot of attractions and steer people to our website. The post cards will enable Tourism to respond to requests for information quickly with reduced postage costs.
- We continued our relationship with CTM Media Group to assist with the distribution of more than 45,000 of our rack cards at Hotels and Visitor locations along the Interstate 91 and 95 corridors, I-91 MA Hotels, Mystic Visitor center and I84.
- Photo Contest – Tourism has sponsored a photo contest since 2012. The resulting photos taken by talented residents are being used in promotional material, in the town calendar and on our website.
- Tourism designed and printed a brochure to accompany the Heritage Walk, Copies are available at the Keeney Center and the Webb Deane Stevens Museum.

Visitor Promotions

- Tourism has been hosting regular meetings of a Stakeholders group. The meetings keep members apprised of individual activities as well as providing a review of upcoming events and programs. The group regularly shares calendars, discusses opportunities for “piggybacking” on events and shared marketing. Stakeholders have created several ongoing events
 - May “encampment” hosted by Webb Deane Stevens and Wethersfield Historical Society. Last year Comstock Ferre added to the encampments with a spring festival that included plants, workshops and craft vendors.

- Expanded Halloween offerings including Lantern Tours, lecture series in addition to the Annual Scarecrows on Main Street.
- Holidays on Main – the annual ushering in of the Holiday season has quickly become a town favorite in early December.
- Tourism has created half day and full day group tour packages that includes tours at Webb Deane Stevens and Wethersfield Historical Society houses and a lunch option. The tour packages are designed for groups of 10 to 25 visitors
- For the last two years Wethersfield Tourism has participated in the Discover New England Conference. This two day conference allow participants to set up one on meetings with tour operators in addition to the exhibit hall. We have been fortunate to share exhibit space with the CT River Valley Regional Tourism District.

Special Projects

- Wethersfield Heritage Walk – With grants from CT Humanities and Hartford Foundation for Public Giving the Tourism Commission spearheaded the creation of a series of interpretive panels installed throughout Old Wethersfield. Over the course of 18 months a committee of knowledgeable local historians took on the task of laying out the walk and researching each panel. 15 public meetings were held allowing the community to comment, add key factoids, offer documents and photos that could be used on the panels. More than 300 people were involved in project with over 1000 volunteer and in kind hours.
- Continued membership with the Greater Hartford Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- Continued designation as a Preserve America community.
- Tourism reviewed and offered suggestion during the design phase of intersection restructures where visitors may be impacted. This includes the Main and Church St. intersection – a key recommendation of the Preserve America Master Plan, and the most recently the intersection of State St/Hartford Ave and Nott St.

Benchmarks

- Through the combination of all of the Commissions media and public relations efforts in 2016 over 5 million impressions were generated for potential visitors.

Outlook for 2017/2018

- Continue to implement recommendations of Old Wethersfield Master Plan.
- Low cost- no cost implementation of collaborative strategic marketing plan with WDS and WHS.
- Complete the final phase of the wayfinding signage program.
- Exploration of regularly scheduled river cruises leaving from the cove during spring, summer and fall.
- Work towards creating a more bike and pedestrian friendly community.
- Continue to improve the functionality of the website.

We appreciate the Town Council's continued support of your Award Winning Tourism Commission and its efforts to promote tourism and generate economic development