

LAINGSBURG MARKETING PLAN



2012 Report

**STRATEGIC PARTNERS
FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Don Hamilton, AICP
Landscape Architects & Planners, Inc.
McConnell & Associates



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Marketing Committee Members and Staff	3
Introductory Marketing Meeting	3
Initial Discoveries	4
Initial Analysis and Observations	5
Target Audiences	6
Potential Marketing Opportunities	6
Marketing Recommendations	11
Beginning Actions	12
Future Actions	16
Media & Communications Recommendations	20
Conclusions	23
One Final Note on the Laingsburg Experience	25

Laingsburg Marketing Plan

Submitted by Strategic Partners

January 30, 2012

Laingsburg Marketing Committee Members and Staff:

Tom Jelenek	Carolyn Kirkby
Gary Bendall	Dane Nickols
Tim Leonard	Mark Brink
Bob Ford	Mike Foster
Don Hamilton	Tim Machowicz
Tom McConnell	Lori Stechschulte
Jim Carpenter	Paula Willoughby

INTRODUCTORY MARKETING MEETING

On October 5th, 2011, a marketing committee meeting was held at the Laingsburg City offices. The purpose of this initial meeting was to discover the unique attributes of the community and the surrounding area. These many attributes will ultimately serve as the foundation upon which a branding and marketing campaign can be created. The act of doing a verbal “inventory” of these unique qualities defines the strengths of the village’s offerings to potential visitors and new residents, as well as entrepreneurs. It also shares with the entire committee any known weaknesses and addresses any previous successful or unsuccessful marketing efforts.

Many on the committee felt that the greatest opportunity in economic development for Laingsburg lay in increasing the number of visitors to town, thereby exposing them to the unique quality of life the community has to offer. Attractions drawing visitors to

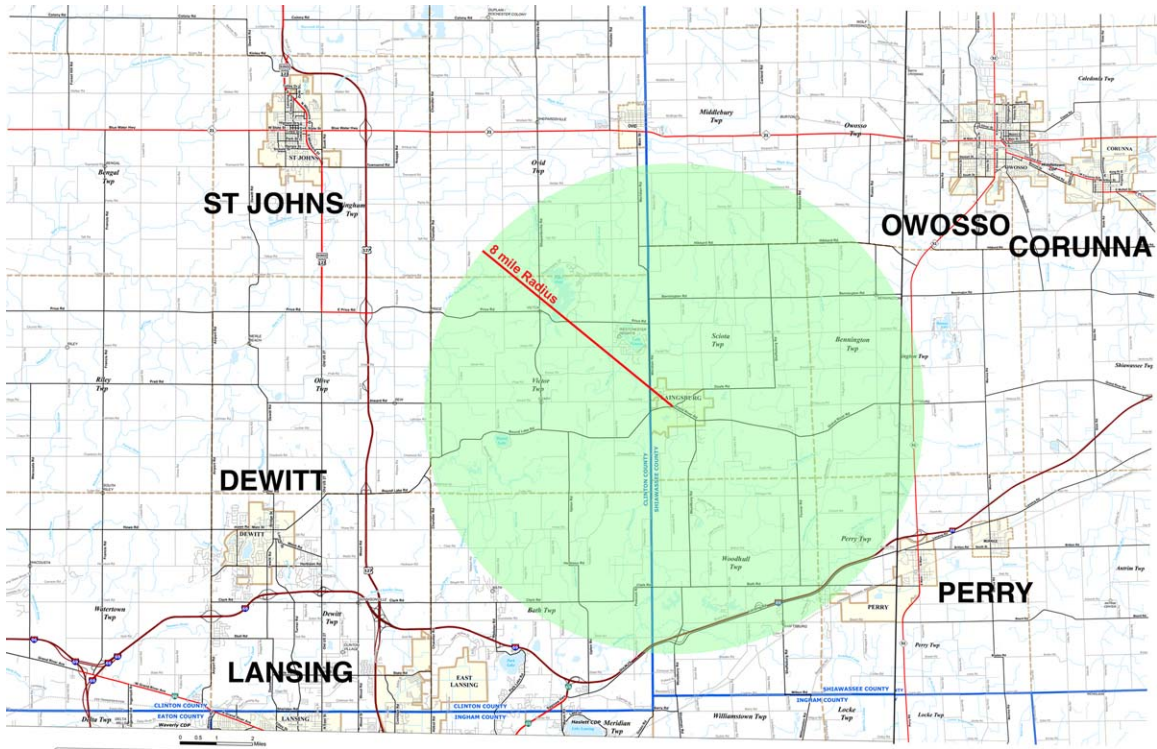
Laingsburg, including existing special events and other activities in and around town, were discussed and assessed. The possibility of creating new events and the support and logistics of these possible new events were discussed.

INITIAL DISCOVERIES

Located less than a half hour from Lansing, Flint, and the county seats of St. Johns and Owosso, Laingsburg is an excellent hometown for those wishing for an alternative to hectic urban living. The town offers a number of positive amenities: excellent schools, a plethora of outdoor recreational opportunities, proximity to Michigan State University and Lansing, the state capital, near but not on I-69 and relatively close to US 127 and I-96, good housing choices, and a safe, relaxed quality of life. Those who value a less stressful environment to take up residence and raise their children would find Laingsburg an excellent relocation choice. However, they need to be invited to Laingsburg to experience what it has to offer.

From a marketing standpoint, it was discovered that one of the greatest marketing exposure opportunities is only six miles away from Laingsburg -- Sleepy Hollow State Park. This park sees an inordinate amount of traffic throughout the spring, summer, and fall. The numbers shared at the meeting by Park staff were: 55,000 overnight stays and 295,000 day trips. Laingsburg needs to focus on these visitors and recognize they can have a significant impact on its economy.

Laingsburg is also at the center of a sizable population of some wealth. The eight-mile radius population of Laingsburg in 2009 was estimated to be 23,547 persons with approximately 8,598 households. The median income of these households was \$61,566, much higher than the Michigan median household income of \$45,255. The growth of both population and income is not likely to continue to increase as rapidly as in recent decades, but the existing numbers represent a healthy market from which to draw patrons to Laingsburg and its businesses.



Eight Mile Radius Showing Communities Surrounding Laingsburg

INITIAL ANALYSIS AND OBSERVATIONS

Following the meeting, analysis and discussion among the Strategic Partners led to some initial observations. To the outsider, what's missing right now in Laingsburg is a “Wow” factor. The Wow factor is the emotional response that impresses and intrigues a first time visitor. It is both a critical first impression and a lasting impression. The good news is this: with the planned remodeling of storefronts in the “union block” area (Twilligers, The Connection and The Clothesline) and some restoration by the owners of vintage downtown properties, the Wow factor process is now beginning to happen. As the Union Block Project is completed, Laingsburg will be sending a message to all new visitors and potential residents that it is a town on the upswing.

And although the several empty storefronts on the main street right now send a message of a downtown in decline, this also sends a message to would-be entrepreneurs that

affordable retail space is available (and probably very negotiable). Many retail economic models will work in these empty spaces, but all of them will be dependent on increased foot traffic. Therefore, drawing more visitors (and area residents) into the downtown area to shop, eat, and socialize will be a primary objective of the marketing plan.

TARGET AUDIENCES

At the initial marketing meeting, potential target “customers” were identified. Several types were discussed, but virtually all can fit into two main groups: 1) the occasional visitor of Laingsburg who enjoys one of the city’s special events, local restaurants, or the outdoor recreational opportunities offered, and 2) the person or family desiring to relocate to Laingsburg or the surrounding rural area. The second group is made up of many differing demographic sub-groups: young professionals and others wishing to raise a family and retirees wanting to stay in a safe environment. It also includes individuals who enjoy outdoor recreation, those wishing to escape the stress of urban living and willing to commute, and entrepreneurs with an online business who can live anywhere.

Both of these main groups will have economic impact. The first group would have short and long-term economic impact, and the second group would have a significant long-term impact.

POTENTIAL MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES

Everyone agreed that the creation of new special events that can draw people from other communities would have the most immediate effect on the Laingsburg business community. Offering additional events based on recreational and cultural activities that Laingsburg currently offers will provide good reasons for visitors to spend more time in town and will endear the village to them. Several current recreational and cultural offerings were identified:

Recreational

Bicycling- Bicyclists already enjoy the gently rolling terrain, limited traffic, and well-paved roads surrounding Laingsburg. Many riders from surrounding communities come through town every day during spring, summer, and fall months. Mountain bike riding opportunities also exist at Sleepy Hollow State Park.

Equestrian- In this area, Sleepy Hollow State Park is one of the favorite locations for horseback riding among the equestrian community (even though there is no overnight camping for horses and riders except for special events). The park draws particularly well from Lansing and suburban Detroit. The local Sleepy Hollow Trail Riders Association holds many events throughout the year, and these events draw riders from other clubs. It was learned that even though riders enjoy the trails inside the park boundaries, they would love to be able to ride greater distances, and especially into the town of Laingsburg.

Fishing- Several area lakes and the Looking Glass River provide excellent fishing opportunities. Bass tournaments take place several times a year on Lake Ovid (Sleepy Hollow State Park), and muskie can be found there as well-- a very rare angling opportunity in southern Michigan. There is also a boater no-wake policy on the lake that provides an unusual level of serenity, also rare for a lake in southern Michigan. Round Lake is another public access opportunity for pan fish with boat rentals available for family outings, and is great for beginning anglers. Most of the other all-sport lakes are private (Scenic Lake and Lake Victoria) and are attractions to the moderate and upper end housing market.



Hunting- Hunting is allowed in the 4,140 acres of the Rose Lake Wildlife Preserve. The Preserve is considered to be a hunter's paradise in southern Michigan. It also serves as a research area for small game, farming practices related to game, wildlife demonstrations, census and tracking of game to help develop hunting regulations and cooperate with sportsman in developing better game management programs. The primary hunting draw is white tail deer, but turkey, pheasant and other small game abound there as well. This nationally recognized preserve is an important and unique cultural resource for mid-Michigan and the state. We need to provide sportsmen a reason to drive just five miles farther north to Laingsburg when they are enjoying the area. And we need to open communications with the managers of Rose Lake so we can promote Laingsburg at the preserve's events and have city businesses coordinate their marketing with these events.

Golfing- Pine Hills Golf Course is an eighteen-hole golf course conveniently located immediately adjacent to town. Bruce Matthews, a nationally known golf course architect, renovated the golf course in 1994. The course features rolling fairways and well-manicured greens, an abundance of wetlands, and wildlife. It is playable at all golfing skill levels and is priced very reasonably. Pine Hills has outings that could be coordinated with events downtown or business specials. Pine Hills has also shown an interest in obtaining a liquor license that will enhance their business and attract more outings and regular golfers. An abandoned roadway along the southern boundary of the course is available as a natural walking path for hiking and wildlife viewing.

McClintock Park- The centerpiece of the city is McClintock Park which was renovated from 2004 to 2008. The community park is popular with everyone as it provides facilities and activities for all— playgrounds, twin shelters, updated restrooms, a sledding hill, a skate park, tennis courts, sand volleyball courts and a quarter mile walk and jog asphalt pathway. This park adds great value to the community and is a source of civic pride, social activity and exercise for the townspeople. In 2010, the city began showing movies in the park on Wednesday summer evenings. Santa visits at Christmastime and Christmas displays have been added. Many other activities are being planned as this park continues to evolve into one of the most treasured assets of the community. Bates Park on the north side of town also offers baseball, soccer and picnicking in a grove of towering oaks.

Cultural Special Events

Farmers Market- A Farmers Market is held on Wednesdays from 4-8 pm on Roosevelt Row, thanks to the efforts of the Laingsburg Business and Community Association (LBCA). The city has recently acquired property for a future permanent facility just west of the current location. This new location will provide the opportunity for more improvements, such as a pavilion and parking for vendors off Roosevelt Row. The Farmers Market, if promoted well, will draw patrons from much of the surrounding area.

Pancake Breakfast- Every year the LBCA sponsors a pancake breakfast that brings hundreds of visitors to town on the last Saturday of July. The LBCA only accepts donations and does not have a specific charge for the breakfast. This event may be examined to see if there is potential to draw more participants and if there is a way to structure it so that it can be beneficial for people attending, business owners, and vendors and for garnering monies for marketing Laingsburg. It is estimated that this single event attracts over 1600 people to town.

Car Show and Cruise In- An antique and collectable car show attracts auto enthusiasts from the surrounding region. Currently it is held on the same day as the pancake breakfast. There may be an opportunity here to extend the visits of attendees or make this a stand-alone event. Following the car show is the *Cruise In*. It is estimated that this event alone brings another 1500+ visitors to town. People drive their vintage cars into town, and there is an established route for cars to cruise Laingsburg. It is believed that the majority of people who attend the pancake breakfast are not the same people who attend the car show and the *Cruise In*.

Laingsburg High School- The Laingsburg High School also has events that could become part of the community marketing effort. The school provides a three week European exchange program, the oldest continuous foreign exchange program for high schools in the U.S. Students also participate in newspaper reporting, TV and video broadcasting, and drama programs among many others. Many of the students earn local, state, and national awards in these competitions while developing their skills and leadership abilities. Laingsburg Community Schools are recognized by Fortune Magazine as one of the “Top 100 Value in Education” schools.

Additional Events

- Lions Club Springtime Festival
- Tractor Pull the first weekend in October
- Buck Pole in November
- Winter Fest

- Ichabod Crane Days at Sleepy Hollow State Park
- Laingsburg Library Events and Programs
- Dance Studio Programs
- Peacock Tree Farm special events

MARKETING RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic Partners is creating and recommending branding vehicles that tell the Laingsburg story. Currently, these elements are: a new logo, a positioning statement, advertising recommendations, website recommendations, and wayfinding signage to tie all elements together in the form of an integrated marketing campaign. The input from the initial meeting provided Strategic Partners the information to build the marketing foundation. With additional research and input from representatives of the committee, we have produced a marketing strategy and created the initial components necessary to commence a marketing campaign.

The short term objective is clear— get more people to visit Laingsburg. These visitors will tell others and the level of awareness of the City of Laingsburg will change. A certain percentage of these new visitors will decide to purchase property and choose to make this area their permanent home. Steady, sustainable growth will be the long term goal of the marketing campaign.

In order to achieve these objectives, we recommend that a permanent marketing committee (or board) should to be created that includes a representative from each city entity. That will ensure universal input from everyone that would benefit from this marketing effort, essentially all stakeholders committed to the successful future of Laingsburg.

BEGINNING ACTIONS

Logo and Positioning Statement

Based on input from the marketing committee, a new logo has been developed that visually displays the unique attributes of Laingsburg. In addition, a positioning statement that communicates the unique benefits of residing in Laingsburg has been developed. The final logo design has the iconography that should be included on all signage, advertising, and message materials. The same is true for the positioning statement. It is the promise of what a visitor will experience in Laingsburg, and a direct reflection of Laingsburg's spirit and attributes.



Discover ★ Enjoy ★ Celebrate!

Wayfinding Signage

Every year there are thousands of visitors who enjoy Sleepy Hollow State Park, Rose Lake Preserve, other recreation destinations, and special events in the area.

Unfortunately, there are no directional signs pointing to Laingsburg when one leaves

either Sleepy Hollow State Park or Rose Lake Research Center. In fact there are very few directional signs throughout the entire area. Finding Laingsburg is a challenge. Visitors from suburban Detroit with little knowledge of the area would have no idea there is an attractive village so close by with all the amenities needed to compliment their trips to the area. Every effort should be made to point the way to town from the parks and the other sites of interest in the area. Park visitors and other day trippers are critical to the success of current and future Laingsburg businesses. A series of signs has been designed and locations chosen for installation throughout the area.

The Park also provides a "Passport Parks Program" that allows businesses to advertise on the MDNR / Sleepy Hollow State Park website and provide discounts or "perks" for campers and day users. Laingsburg businesses need to be engaged in this program to direct more campers into town.

SIGNS



“Bicycling Friendly” Routes and Activities

The Laingsburg area is ideal for riders in that it has everything a road bicyclist wants: beautiful countryside, low traffic volume, and a winding and rolling countryside. It’s exactly what riders find appealing, and why there are so many riders in the area on a regular basis. The shoulders on main roads leading to Laingsburg need widening for the safety of bicycle riders. News of this simple “bicycle friendly” road improvement will spread throughout the road biking community very quickly. Laingsburg will become the favorite route for riding once these needs are met.

Efforts should be made to reach out to cycling clubs in surrounding communities and counties to explore the possibility of holding bicycling events once or twice a year that begin and/or end in Laingsburg. If these events are organized and well publicized by the clubs, they would have significant impact on existing businesses. In addition, businesses that cater to bicycling could enjoy a profitable existence here and these events will create a “cool factor” for the village.



Horseback Riding Opportunities

Every effort should be undertaken to create a horseback riding trail that travels the six miles from the Sleepy Hollow State Park into Laingsburg. It would make Laingsburg unique in south central Michigan with riders, put the city on the map with the regional and national equestrian community, and provide a greater opportunity to draw increased revenue from this market segment. The announcement of this “rider friendly” effort has an excellent chance of publication as a news feature and can even become a “how to” article in horse and rider publications. The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund has recently funded a Statewide Equestrian Initiative to develop equestrian trails, trailheads, camping, and support facilities. Even though projects may already have been selected, the city could perhaps receive aid in another round of funding. The city should work with the DNR to pursue opportunities to develop equestrian facilities in the surrounding area.

Joggers and Runners

There are several running events that are held in Laingsburg which usually start at McClintock Park. The first is the Laingsburg 5K, held in conjunction with the Lions Festival, which is held usually in May. It is a 3.1-mile Run/Walk. In 2011 it had approximately 115 participants. The second running event has been traditionally called Jacob’s Race and was originally started to raise money for a sick child. The child is now better and the family is trying to keep the race going and is searching for a new cause to support. The race has previously run in late August. The participation for this race is as good if not better than the Laingsburg 5K. The City should encourage other groups to expand the use of Laingsburg as their hub for race events.

Laingsburg High School

Filmmaking is currently taught at the high school. We would encourage the showing of films that are created by Laingsburg students at a student film festival on the big screen in the park in the summer, perhaps in cooperation with the Michigan State University film department. Another idea is to start a film festival showcasing college films. Other high school projects and programs could be featured at the proposed gallery/arts incubator building. These types of events could be done in Tom Jelenek’s building, “The

Connection,” where smaller versions of these types of events could be held until an incubator is created. Events such as the Mother and Son and Daddy and Daughter dances at the high school could be featured by local businesses offering coordinated specials and promotions.

Motorcyclists

There are many motorcyclists who travel the area and visit the pubs and restaurants in Laingsburg. Round Lake Road is an ideal road to ride due to its curves and tree lined canopy as well as its smooth pavement. Riders can also take a short cruise through Wacousta, DeWitt, Laingsburg, Bancroft to Byron, all about 10 miles apart. Efforts should be made to contact area clubs and create events for them.

Coordination with Local and Surrounding Area Events

The DDA and LBCA should develop and keep current a list of events being held by the Sleepy Hollow Park, Rose Lake, the Laingsburg School District and others in the area including, fishing tournaments, dances, celebrations such as Ichabod Crane Days. The business organizations could then coordinate downtown sales, specials, and events to compliment the events going on in the area. Sponsorships, advertising and signs at the events would draw patrons to downtown Laingsburg.

FUTURE ACTIONS

Arts and Crafts Exhibition Center/Business Incubator

We recommend exploring the possibility of buying or renting one of the empty storefronts on the main street in Laingsburg and converting it into an incubator arts/cultural center. This facility could be used for such things as art exhibitions and studio classes, craft exhibitions and demonstrations, and musical events. There are many craftspeople in the area who would benefit from the additional exposure the center would provide. These activities could open the door for the sharing of ideas and brainstorming annual fundraising events. Selling booth spaces and a collecting a commission from

everything sold at annual arts and crafts fairs could generate revenue that can be used to market the event from year to year. A board of directors made up of local artisans and art fair participants should take up the cause and manage the event once it is established. This operation could also include rental space for artists and craftspeople and other new entrepreneurs who need a low cost space to begin an enterprise.

Prospecting for the Right Mix

Based upon the conclusions put forth in this plan and the subsequent actions taken, the DDA and the LBCA and others should attempt to promote specific types of businesses to buy or rent downtown buildings. These enterprises should form a mix that will attract shoppers and visitors. Examples of the types of businesses (some mentioned earlier) are a bicycle shop, a bakery and coffee shop with WIFI, and antique shops. Also mentioned as a needed enterprise is a boating repair, service and storage facility that would draw people to town.

Develop a Regional Non-Motorized Trails Plan

As discussed earlier, Laingsburg could become the hub for bicycling tours that could go to Sleepy Hollow and elsewhere. It could be a destination or launching point for horseback trail rides going to Sleepy Hollow and beyond. Hiking and jogging trails could take off from McClintock Park and travel the countryside eventually hooking up with the new trail in Owosso. A trails plan needs to be created that can incorporate all of the possibilities in order to put Laingsburg in a position to construct these trails in cooperation with any partners and funders available including local foundations, Safe Routes 2 School, MDOT and MDNR as examples.

Organize Additional Festivals

The committee discussed organizing a Fall Harvest Festival in coordination with the Farmers Market and/or a Winter Festival that might include a Clyde Rison exhibit. The Laingsburg Winter Festival might also be held in conjunction with the Sleepy Hollow Winter fest. Any successful events will draw additional visitors to Laingsburg to patronize its businesses.

McClintock Park

New events can be marketed around the movies in the park, for instance, volleyball tournaments, skateboard demonstrations, and tennis lessons. Music has been added prior to the movies to increase attendance. Other ideas include indoor/outdoor dinners, which might be sponsored by local restaurants, a farmers market, and music concerts promoted especially to Sleepy Hollow campground visitors.

Promote Lodging, Senior Housing, and Family Housing

As more events take place, more businesses downtown open, and the marketing of the community is successful, bed and breakfast establishments should become viable enterprises. The town has some beautiful old houses perfect for this use, and just outside town the Looking Glass River and the pastoral countryside are ideal locations. Additionally, the committee discussed the number of senior citizens in the community. Many of these folks as well as others drawn to the offerings of the town and its countryside may desire the type of housing provided by senior citizen developments. A feasibility study could be done by the LBCA and/or the city in order to market this opportunity to developers in this field.

Laingsburg currently has three subdivisions that have open lots available to construct new housing. Each subdivision appeals to a different economic bracket ranging from \$120,000 to over \$350,000. Since the bust in the housing market of 2008, there has been a decline in housing construction, but there is inventory available within the city limits to accommodate almost any market demand. There is also a fair amount of older housing stock within the city that is available currently at very reasonable prices due to the recession. Many of these houses can be renovated to provide for the rental market, which is usually a very active market. There are also three lakes with subdivisions that have good quality homes at varying prices. Lake homes can be purchased as low as \$140,000 off the lake. There is also a fair quantity of expensive homes on the lake.

There are some apartments in the city that seem to be occupied most of the time and there are some MSHDA financed low economic and senior complexes within the city again that are usually occupied. Most of these units rent around the \$550 to \$700 range, not including subsidies. If there is a housing bracket that seems to be inadequate, it is for younger persons between the ages of 18-30. The East Lansing/Haslett area usually supplies this market. The LBCA and DDA could develop a brochure with real estate agents illustrating possibilities for potential new residents to market all these opportunities.

Round Lake

There are three public access spots on Round Lake along with the private launch at Don's Party Store/Marina where kayaks and pontoon boats are available for rent. Fishing is excellent on this lake and could be promoted better with an advertised "take your kids fishing" special that is underwritten in part by the DDA and the LBA on Michigan's free fishing weekend.



Looking Glass River

Public access just downstream from Laingsburg provides kayaking and canoeing opportunities all the way to the Grand River in Portland. From there, one could go all the way on the Grand River to Grand Rapids or Lake Michigan. Kayaking is one of the most popular outdoor activities right now. With some aggressive advertising, water enthusiasts might make Laingsburg the next place to enjoy these types of activities. The city owns a small parcel of land off of Laingsburg Road where it crosses the Looking Glass River. If developed, this could serve as a canoe / kayak launch site within a mile of downtown Laingsburg.

MEDIA & MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS

After the Wayfinding Signage project has been completed, here are the marketing communications components we have identified that will need to move the Laingsburg marketing campaign forward, listed in order of priority.

Highway Billboard Placement

The most expedient way to draw attention and reach out to potential visitors will be to place billboards on the main arteries that people travel everyday. There is no better vehicle for repeat impressions in the media world on a *cost per impression* basis.

Billboard placements will serve two major purposes: to bring new awareness of Laingsburg's desire to reach out and invite visitors to town, and to raise awareness of Laingsburg's location relative to commuting traffic.

There are several major highways in close proximity to Laingsburg including US-127, Old US 27 and I-69. We recommend renting two boards for one year each, and as close to the Laingsburg exits as possible. Prices vary based on size of board and, more importantly, location. Future year placements would be dependent upon effectiveness of Year One's campaign.

Estimated Costs: \$25,000 for two boards

Production and installation per board = \$1,500 (range \$500-\$1500)

Rental per board (12 month board rental at \$900 per month) = \$10,800

Sleepy Hollow State Park Brochure

As mentioned previously, Laingsburg needs to find ways to attract State Park campers to town. In addition to signage, we recommend producing a rack brochure (4" x 9" three fold) that introduces campers to all of the businesses Laingsburg has to offer, and places special emphasis on how close Laingsburg is to the State Park. The template produced in Year One could be used in years to come. This same piece could be placed in other surrounding locations besides the State Park. For example, if brochures were placed in all major MDOT rest centers around the state Laingsburg can expect a printing need of approximately 5000 per year.

Estimated Costs: \$2000

Production (design, layout, copy, image selection and placement) = \$500

Printing (5000 copies) = \$1500

Website Revisions/Updates

The www.laingsburg.us website should be updated to include *more marketing information* and enhanced to be more visually appealing and to increase viewer traffic. This will include the addition of design and layout elements, website-friendly copy and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) implementation. A listing of recreational activities should be included with recreational trail PDF documents. At the very least, a calendar of Laingsburg events should also be included on the website, with a one to two paragraph description of each event.

The importance of a good web presence cannot be emphasized enough. The website of a community, especially one in the tourism segment, is now one of the most important communication vehicles in the marketing mix. Today's consumers *expect* to find volumes of information to peruse and then plan their outing by using the web (whether with a

computer or smart phone). This is especially true of the 35 and under demographic group– those young families that will have long term impact on the tax base, school system, and future success of Laingsburg.

Estimated Cost: \$5,000 in Year One

\$500 annually in Years 2-5 for updates

Farmers Market Promotion

These weekly markets are very popular and should be promoted more in the surrounding area including Lansing. Promotion would be essential throughout the farmers market season. We would also recommend adding Saturday back to make it more successful. The markets are also a perfect place to promote upcoming special events.

Estimated Cost for spring and summer classified ad promotion program: \$1,500

Classified ads in local and regional newspapers:

Placement: \$100/week total for up to four publications

(including *Lansing State Journal* and *Lansing City Pulse*)

Ad Production: \$25/week

Special Events/Festival Promotion

Committee members should decide which events are important enough to warrant additional promotional efforts. Targeted promotion programs can quickly pay dividends in terms of event attendance and also provide valuable assistance in determining which events have the biggest impact/appeal. Promotional tools include local radio and print media advertising. Attempts should also be made to nurture relationships with the local media to solicit feature newspaper and magazine articles and television news coverage of these events.

Estimated Cost: \$500 per event

Television Advertising

TV advertising is the very best medium at our disposal and can have a tremendous impact on the community. But prior to using TV, a major event will need to be created that charges an admission fee. This new event, promoted with television, can be a large enough revenue provider to fund all future marketing activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Laingsburg has a vast resource of amenities and recreational opportunities, a vacation-like lifestyle to offer, and throngs of visitors coming to the Sleepy Hollow State Park. We just need to let more people know about it. Research indicates that men make the majority of sporting event/recreational pursuit decisions, whereas women make the majority of decisions related to the arts and history. Women also tend to do more vacation planning and day trip planning than men. Since all of these elements are integral parts of the Laingsburg unique selling proposition, the marketing plan recommendations must be extremely flexible.

Like so many Michigan small towns, Laingsburg is at a crossroads. What once was a vibrant place composed of successful agricultural operations and the retail stores to support them, is now a community in a new world economy. It is suffering with the after effects of a severe recession, and a number of businesses are struggling to survive. It's a town in transition from an old economic model to a 21st century model. Many small towns throughout southern Michigan find themselves in this same situation. Now is the time to decide what Laingsburg should be. What would it look like ten years from now if it were a vibrant community again? Would all the vacant storefronts be filled with fun, interesting shops and galleries? Would it attract visitors from a 100 mile radius who enjoy daytrips and browsing for an afternoon? Would Laingsburg residents enjoy bringing friends and relatives downtown to shop? Or would they actually hang out there themselves?

Some towns that were faced with this same situation have successfully made the transition. They are small towns that made a concerted effort to invite into their communities the types of small, unique businesses that shoppers find interesting. When these businesses were successful, others followed, and the towns changed. This reinvention process requires vision and commitment. But what it requires most is belief—belief that the community can become a vital, viable, and fun place to reside. That is exactly why we all are going through this marketing exercise— to envision what Laingsburg can be in the future, and to identify the elements of the change.

The good news is, unlike many of those other small towns, Laingsburg has a vast resource of amenities and recreational opportunities, and a vacation-like lifestyle to offer. We need to let more people know about Laingsburg and what can be found here. More visitors mean more revenue. More revenue attracts more business and the transition begins to snowball.

It all begins with the combined energies of those who really care about Laingsburg.

Though this marketing project is not meant to be an economic development plan, it gives many ingredients for one. The City, DDA, and LBCA should utilize these elements to create an organized plan to pursue the various possibilities for economic revitalization.



ONE FINAL NOTE ON THE LAINGSBURG EXPERIENCE

The marketing campaign will bring significantly more first-time visitors to Laingsburg. What impression will they come away with?

The most powerful advertising is a positive referral between individuals. Nothing can replace a good “word-of-mouth” recommendation. Conversely, nothing has a more powerful impact than a negative story. And, research shows that significantly more negative comments are passed along to others than positive ones. The resulting impact can be catastrophic to any business or organization. The message doesn’t even need to be true; it only needs repetition to sustain believability.

Laingsburg merchants will have a rare opportunity to create long-term, returning customers that fall in love with the City. That love affair can begin if these first timers have a positive first impression of the *people* of Laingsburg. It cannot be stressed enough that this critical first impression needs to be a memorable and positive one.

If there is one single consequence of the marketing campaign, it is that a group of *crusaders* will be created. That group of crusaders will be made up of visitors, and they will have a choice. They can either sing the praises of Laingsburg to others when they return home, or they can spread a negative message to everyone who will listen. Laingsburg’s merchants control their own destiny, through their smiling faces, friendly engagements, and welcoming demeanor. The future of Laingsburg is in these very important one-on-one, person-to-person experiences.