

# Ecotourism and Recreation Economy

## SUMMARY

This Community Transformation Strategy focuses on the built environment and recreational activities that currently serve as drivers of tourism for the local economy. This strategy should seek to provide a balanced approach to address all facets of a tourism and recreation based economy, ranging from lodging and events to businesses and organizational policies, which will in turn support new or existing infrastructure. This strategy capitalizes on existing regional resources that can serve as economic drivers for the downtown district.

## KEY DESCRIPTORS

Natural resources, outdoor activities, cultural tourism, supporting industry, outfitter businesses, youth leagues, experiential, volunteerism, lodging, public facilities, public partners, regionalism, active and healthy living, forest bathing, nature enthusiast, volunteers and youth engagement.

“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.”

— John Muir

## PROS

- This strategy can encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- This strategy appeals to varied ages, abilities and lifestyle interests.
- It connects downtown to regional amenities.
- It can highlight local history and culture.

## CONS

- There can be a large initial investment cost.
- Land acquisition costs can be expensive or challenging.
- Climate and seasonal considerations can pose challenges.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Amenities can be leveraged to serve multiple purposes.
- It is important to define your “niche” because you won’t be able to serve everyone and everything.
- Consider handicap accessibility.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- What recreational attractions or amenities already exist?
- What businesses do you have to leverage your resources?
- What are these amenities connection to downtown?
- Where will tourists stay?
- What existing wayfinding tools exist or need to be developed?

Rome, ExploreGeorgia.org



# FOUR-POINT APPROACH ACTIVITIES

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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- Develop a diverse business mix to support the existing recreational amenities (i.e. outfitters, equipment rental, etc.).
- Work with the community and downtown to provide diverse lodging options and price points.
- Encourage restaurants to offer brown bag lunches or food that is portable and travel-friendly.
- Recruit new business that provide food-to-go or convenience store options.
- Develop infrastructure to engage the existing natural amenities and directly connect them to downtown. For example, connect to a river with walkways or docks, encourage trails to have spurs that lead downtown and connect to parks and greenspaces downtown.
- Businesses offer discounts to citizens who bike or walk, taking advantage of alternative transportation options.

## DESIGN

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- Develop wayfinding signage to assist with navigating downtown businesses and how to access recreational sites.
- Consider including a step counter or a mile marker to illustrate how close or far local resources are located to downtown.
- Offer scooter or bike rental opportunities and provide additional bike stand stations downtown to encourage people to consider alternative transportation options.
- Install fitness stations on existing trails or paths to enhance the user experience.
- Install water refill stations and public restrooms.
- Develop infrastructure to encourage owners to bring their pets to downtown. For example, set out water bowls for pets, develop a dog park and set up pet sanitation disposal stations.
- Consider adding bike lanes to make cyclists feel safer on downtown streets.

## PROMOTIONS

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- Develop a Downtown Dollars program or shop local campaign that is specifically geared to support these niche businesses.
- When possible consider how you can take a regional focus and partner with other organizations or Main Streets.
- Highlight cultural and heritage tourism attractions through both physical and digital marketing pieces.
- Create incentive-based programs to connect regional amenities to downtown businesses, such as a city pass, one day discount or coupons.
- Offer to host awards ceremony downtown for local or regional sports competitions.
- Host a recreation fair downtown.
- Develop a website dedicated to promoting your region's specific ecotourism and recreation amenities and connecting them to downtown.
- Develop a hashtag that connects your downtown to the recreational amenities. Examples include #kayakcolumbus and #hiketoccoa.

## ORGANIZATION

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- Develop a multi-community business association to support regional amenities.
- Appoint board members who represent local amenities.
- Join water trails or rail-to-trails organizations/ partnerships and take advantage of available training opportunities.
- Work with local elected officials to identify diverse funding streams, such as SPLOST and hotel/motel tax dollars.
- Partner with local governments to promote regional amenities.
- Work with the Georgia Department of Economic Development to host a Tourism Product Development Team or walking audit to identify local resources and amenities.
- Work with local partners to develop a walking tour of downtown buildings and sites of interests.
- Work with local partners to develop a bicycle tour or shuttle service that connects downtown sites and resources with assets outside downtown.

# PARTNERS

Georgia Department of Economic Development  
Georgia River Network  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
PATH Foundation  
Other local governments in the region  
Land and Water Conservation Fund  
Local convention and visitors bureau  
Recreational Trails Program  
Georgia Department of Transportation  
Georgia Trail Summit  
State visitor centers  
Georgia Botanical Society  
Audubon Society  
Local and regional outdoor clubs and destination hoteliers  
Managers of ecotourism and recreational assets