



COTTAGE GROVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
& COTTAGE GROVE VISITORS BUREAU  
JOINT MEETING

February 11, 2025

12800 RAVINE PARKWAY SOUTH  
COTTAGE GROVE, MN 55016

TRAINING ROOM - 7:30 AM

1. Call to Order
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Roll Call
4. Approval of Minutes
  - A. Economic Development Regular Meeting Minutes (12/3/2024)  
*Staff Recommendation: Approve the December 3, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes.*
5. Business Items
  - A. Chandlerthinks Strategic Plan Final Review  
*Staff Recommendation: Receive the Chandlerthinks Strategic Plan Final Report.*
  - B. 2025 Meeting Schedule  
*Staff Recommendation: Approve the 2025 Meeting Schedule.*
  - C. DARTS updates  
*Staff Recommendation: Receive the DARTS Annual Report.*
6. Public Hearings
7. Other Business
8. Workshop
9. Presentations
10. Adjournment



## MINUTES

December 3, 2024

### CITY OF COTTAGE GROVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (EDA) MEETING

12800 Ravine Parkway South  
Cottage Grove, MN 55016

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a meeting of the Economic Development Authority was held on the 3rd day of December, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by EDA President Myron Bailey.

#### 2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

EDA President Bailey asked everyone to please stand and join in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### 3. ROLL CALL

Economic Development Director Gretchen Larson called the roll: EDA President Bailey-Here; EDA Vice President Olsen-Here; EDA Member Carey-Absent; EDA Member Jean-Baptiste-Here; EDA Member Myers-Absent; EDA Member Scott-Here; EDA Member Tschida-Here.

Members Absent: EDA Member Carey  
EDA Member Myers

Staff Present: Jennifer Levitt, City Administrator  
Gretchen Larson, Economic Development Director  
Brenda Malinowski, Finance Director

Others Present: None.

#### 4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Approve the November 12, 2024 EDA Meeting Minutes.

**EDA Vice President Olsen made a motion to approve the November 12, 2024 EDA Meeting Minutes. Motion was seconded by EDA Member Tschida. Motion passed unanimously (5-to-0 vote).**

#### 5. BUSINESS ITEMS - None.

#### 6. PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Adopting Final HRA Tax Levy

EDA President Bailey stated our Finance Director, Brenda Malinowski, is going to take us through this item this evening, and he welcomed her.

Director Malinowski stated I'm going to do a short presentation before you hold your Public Hearing regarding the Housing and Redevelopment (HRA) Levy for the City of Cottage Grove, and then you will adopt a resolution to approve that levy. Just a reminder that the EDA here in Cottage Grove has both an EDA and HRA authority; so, what that means is that your structure allows for property tax levies for both EDA activities and HRA activities. An EDA Levy, which we've utilized in the past, can be used for those traditional economic development activities. An HRA Levy can be used for housing and redevelopment; so, as our community starts to age, we can utilize that for those affordable housing and redevelopment activities.

In 2024, the current year, we have an EDA Levy in the amount of \$275,000; we use that for economic development activities and some redevelopment activities. Statutorily, by the State, the amount that we can levy is based on our Taxable Value; for 2025, we can levy for EDA activities about \$1.1 million dollars, so our \$275,000 is well below that limit. The EDA Levy is included on a property tax bill that comes from Washington County, on the same line as the City of Cottage Grove. For our residents and our businesses, they receive a property tax bill from Washington County and it has a line for each taxing jurisdiction within the County. So, there's a

## Economic Development Authority - Minutes

December 3, 2024

Page 2 of 3

line that says Washington County, and that's the amount of County property taxes that are being levied. The School District has a separate line, and then the City has another line. Our EDA Levy is on that line that's called City of Cottage Grove.

What we are recommending for 2025 is that we take the \$275,000 that we are levying in 2024 and that we create two separate levies: The first levy will be the EDA Levy, and then the second portion, \$137,500, will be utilized for the HRA Levy. That HRA Levy is more transparent for our property taxpayers because it's a separate line item on the property tax bill, it will say Cottage Grove HRA. So, there's a little more transparency as we start to do those redevelopment and housing-type activities, currently and in the future. An HRA Levy is also subject to limits set by the State; for 2025, it's about \$1.178 million that we could utilize for the HRA Levy. So, this \$137,500 that we're recommending is well below those limits.

Here on the screen are allowable uses of the HRA Levy, that was also included in your packet; so, it's those Housing and Redevelopment activities. For 2025, we have a budget that's included in the packet. What we're recommending is that we utilize that HRA Levy in 2025 to pay for staff salaries; we'll move a portion of staff salaries, that are currently budgeted in the EDA Fund, we'll move those over to the HRA Fund as we'll set up a new fund. Then about \$25,000 for Professional Services for Housing and Redevelopment type activities for Cottage Grove.

Included in the packet also were other cities and counties in the State that currently have HRA Levies; on this slide here that is in front of you are levies in the metro area for cities that have those HRA Levies. We have a new levy, so we were at the bottom of the list with that \$137,500.

Brenda said with that, I'm happy to answer any questions that you have before you hold the Public Hearing.

EDA President Bailey thanked Brenda and asked the EDA Members if they had any questions at this point on this.

EDA Member Tschida asked how did we arrive at that 50-50 split for EDA and HRA?

Director Malinowski replied we looked at half of the salaries that are in the EDA budget, and we moved a portion of those staff time over, and so it was a way to start utilizing those funds, that are currently the EDA funds, over for that HRA as we determine those costs that we need in the future for those Housing and Redevelopment activities.

EDA Member Tschida asked so, I guess, is there something more they can work on now that they're under the HRA umbrella, as opposed to the EDA? Are they going to be specifically working on more housing policy vs. the EDA? I guess, how are we arriving at who's going where?

Director Malinowski replied right, and we haven't looked at our staff members, we looked at City budgets each year; some staff members they may be budgeted in the General Fund, but they might be doing EDA activities and vice versa. So, we haven't looked at specific staff salaries that will be doing that, but as a reminder, we have that Housing Study that's coming back here early in 2025; so, there would be staff time as we work through that Housing Study for that affordable housing component. So, I would think that the Community Development Director, the EDA Director, the City Administrator, those would be some of those staff salaries that would be utilized in that HRA Levy.

EDA Member Tschida said fair enough, I think that's all I have for now.

EDA Member Jean-Baptiste said so, previously, they were under both the EDA and the HRA, and I believe that, and correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe that you had mentioned the maximum levy for the EDA had been like \$1.7 million, or something along those lines. But now that they're split into two, do they each have a maximum levy of \$1 million, so the total that they could raise together now becomes over \$2 million?

Director Malinowski replied that is true. When we did a 10-year Financial Management Plan (FMP) for the City just recently, in 2023, there wasn't the thought that we would be levying that amount of money, but yes, they do both have a separate authority to levy up to those amounts.

EDA Member Jean-Baptiste said got it, thank you.

EDA Member Tschida said I guess on the levy question, does a levy increase to either the EDA or the HRA come to the EDA itself, or is that just a City Council question?

Director Malinowski replied that's a good question. The HRA Levy would come in front of the EDA; an EDA Levy is set by the City Council.

EDA Member Tschida said, okay, thank you.

EDA President Bailey said one of the interesting things, as I think that brings up a good point, our intent has not been, at least not that I can see in the foreseeable future, that we would levy to the max. The whole idea here I think is it's a little bit more on the transparency side as we go forward. So, when you talk about the half and the half, eventually do I believe, I mean, that our recommendation at some point would be that the HRA, if you will, would take 100% as it relates to the amount of money that currently is being split between our General Fund and then the HRA. As a matter of fact, this year, with the budget that I believe

# Economic Development Authority - Minutes

December 3, 2024

Page 3 of 3

we'll be approving tomorrow night, the normal \$275,000, we just cut that in half; so, we didn't raise the levy higher for the general taxes in Cottage Grove, we didn't take above \$275,000, we kept it half and half. Do you know what I'm saying? We're not raising this amount and then raising this amount, it's flush. I know that sounds really weird for maybe the general public, who might be watching; so, if people are asking, hey, what are you doing with the EDA money or the HRA money, which is under the EDA, this is what it is. One of the challenges, if you saw a lot of the cities out there, one of the big things is that we do get redevelopment opportunities that come to our City; and yes, we do have some money in our EDA Trust Fund, but the reality is that it's limited. And if we can build up some revenue in this particular fund, then when these bigger projects come by, whether it's a redevelopment for housing or whatever, we can actually utilize a bigger pot of money. I believe if I heard right, and maybe I'll look at Jennifer and see if she remembers, I think the levy for Woodbury has what, \$2 million in theirs. Do you remember, by chance?

Director Malinowski replied that's the last number I heard.

EDA President Bailey said, so, Woodbury has an HRA Levy of about \$2 million that they're kind of sitting there right now, waiting for some other developer to come through where they can put some of that additional money towards a project for affordable housing in Woodbury. I'm just using them as an example because I remember seeing that out in the news.

EDA President Bailey said I know there's nobody in the audience, but to be official, EDA President Bailey opened the Public Hearing to see if anybody wants to speak. As there is nobody in the audience, EDA President Bailey closed the Public Hearing.

EDA President Bailey told the EDA Members before you is a recommendation from our staff on this proposal, and we would need to make a motion and a second to go forward.

**EDA Member Scott made a motion to Approve Resolution 2024-13 authorizing a Final Levy to be set on taxable property of the City of Cottage Grove, Washington County, Minnesota, for fiscal year 2025, a special benefit tax levy, not to exceed \$137,500, per the proposed 2025 budget on file with the City. Motion was seconded by EDA Member Jean-Baptiste.**

EDA President Bailey asked if there was any further discussion.

EDA Member Tschida said I'm sure I'll be the only one who votes no on this, but I'll state my concerns publicly. I'm concerned that we're going to come back next year and we're going to double this \$137,000, and we're going to pass it right now because it's not an increase; but next year it'll be twice what it is, and the following year it'll be twice what it is, and it's going to snowball and snowball and snowball. I don't know, it's not something I'm interested in.

**Motion passed (4-to-1 vote, nay vote by EDA Member Tschida).**

**7. OTHER BUSINESS** - None.

**8. WORKSHOP** - None.

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

**EDA Vice President Olsen made a motion to adjourn. Motion was seconded by EDA Member Scott. Motion passed unanimously (4-to-1 vote, nay vote by EDA Member Tschida). The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Gretchen Larson  
Economic Development Director

/jag



**TO:** Mayor Bailey and Members of the Economic Development Authority and CVB Chairman Olsen and Members of the Convention and Visitors Bureau

**FROM:** Gretchen Larson, Economic Development Director  
Phil Jents, Communications Manager and CVB Staff Liaison

**DATE:** February 4, 2025

**RE:** Chandlerthinks Strategic Plan Final Review

---

## **Background**

In June of 2024, Chandlerthinks was selected to create a strategic plan for the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). In addition to being the best fit to create the plan for the CVB, Chandlerthinks' proposal was also the lowest priced proposal submitted at \$35,750 with \$1,500 earmarked for post project consulting services upon finalization of the plan.

As a part of their research and planning, the team at Chandlerthinks conducted a site visit to the city on October 7 and 8, 2024. The City arranged in-person meetings with:

- The City Council
- EDA members
- CVB members
- River Oaks Golf Course and Event Center
- Parks and Recreation
- Area hoteliers
- Tourism-related businesses, event managers, and others

The team at Chandlerthinks also conducted virtual interviews for those who were not be able to attend an in-person meeting. They concluded their interviews with a virtual meeting on November 10, 2024 with the members of the Cottage Grove Athletic Association.

On November 26, 2024, City staff presented an update to the CVB board on the strategic planning process, and provided early feedback being considered for the City's tourism strategies.

On January 5, 2025, a strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis and goal setting session was held with Mayor Bailey, members of the CVB and EDA boards, the City Administrator, and city staff. After the meeting, all notes made by participants were submitted to Chandlerthinks for incorporation into the final plan.

Steve Chandler (Owner / Brand Strategist, Chandlerthinks) will be at the meeting on Tuesday, February 11 to present an overview of the final plan. Upon conclusion of the meeting and any additional feedback provided, the team at Chandlerthinks will make final edits to the plan and submit it to the city.

## **Recommendation**

Receive report.

A PLACE MARKETING COMPANY

# Discover Cottage Grove Strategic Plan



**CHANDLER**THINKS

February 11, 2025

**Chandlerthinks, LLC**

2929 Sidco Drive | Nashville, TN 37204

615-498-8313

[steve@chandlerthinks.com](mailto:steve@chandlerthinks.com)

# SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

In December of 2019, the City of Cottage Grove established a Convention and Visitor's Bureau (CVB). The CVB is also known as Discover Cottage Grove (DCG).

Discover Cottage Grove though still in its early stages, is focused on laying a strong foundation for its future growth. The funding for the CVB is through a 3% transient guest tax which generates roughly \$90,000 annually.

The CVB hired Chandlerthinks for the development of a Strategic Plan. The purpose of the Strategic Plan is to provide a road map to maintain and enhance CVB's competitive positioning relative to their competitive destination markets and identify growth markets while anticipating the future state of tourist needs and possible infrastructure upgrades that may be needed. The current and future needs of group meetings, conventions, and sports are also a priority.



# PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Ensure that funding and program development are aligned among CVB, its partners, government entities, non-profits and that the plan meets the long-term goals of the community.
2. Recommend actions to increase visitor flow across all segments (leisure, meetings, sports etc.).
3. Conduct a SWOT analysis of the effectiveness of CVB's marketing programs and recommendations to improve these initiatives.



# TOURISM GOALS

The goals for this tourism strategic plan are:

1. Become the authoritative voice for managing, promoting, and growing tourism for Cottage Grove.
2. Increase funding for tourism in Cottage Grove, MN.
3. Increase sales tax revenue by 3% over the next 3 years.
4. Increase visitor spending 3% in three years as reported by the state.



# SWOT ANALYSIS

**CHANDLER**THINKS

A PLACE MARKETING COMPANY

# STRENGTHS

- **Access to the Mississippi River** - Cottage Grove benefits from its proximity to the Mississippi River, offering potential for tourism development.
- **Well-Maintained and Beautiful City** - The city is recognized for its clean, attractive, and well-maintained environment.
- **Wedding Venue Appeal** - Cottage Grove offers beautiful wedding venues.
- **Sports Tournaments** - The city hosts several sports tournaments, such as softball, soccer, and hockey.
- **Positive attitude** - Optimistic towards tourism's future.
- **Events** – Some events, particularly Strawberry Festival, create strong attendance.

# WEAKNESSES

- **Limited Lodging** – Lack of hotels results in tourism revenue flowing to nearby communities like Woodbury and Hastings. Venues and businesses all indicate their “guests” stay in other communities.
- **Absence of a Tourism Culture** – Cottage Grove understanding and pattern of tourism is new.
- **No Major Attraction or Driver** – The city has limited tourism assets for attracting visitors.
- **No Central Gathering Space** – Cottage Grove does not have a defined “town center,” downtown, or main street to serve as a hub for community activities.
- **Location Challenge** – The city is not located along a primary travel corridor, which may limit its ability to attract visitors seeking convenient overnight stops.
- **Lacking Focus** – Tourism website and social media lacks focus and distracting with non-tourism content.
- **Low Awareness** – Low search inquiry volume and TripAdvisor results indicate Cottage Grove is very low on awareness as a destination.

# OPPORTUNITIES

- **Additional Lodging** – Adding more lodging seems to be a strong possibility. In fact, search inquiry volume shows people are actively searching for Cottage Grove hotels (and hotels near Woodbury and Hastings) each month. There is enough in the region to fill more overnight stays. Half of all visitors to Cottage Grove are staying in the Country Inn & Suites.
- **Packaging Assets** – Although lacking an attractor, Cottage Grove has the ability to assemble like assets for packaged experiences near Minneapolis.
- **Weddings** - Minneapolis wedding venues are a very active search inquiry.
- **Old Cottage Grove** – Develop Old Cottage Grove as a tourism destination.



# THREATS

- **Lodging shortfalls teach partners** to go elsewhere and those relationships are building.
- **Woodbury** - developing a strong destination marketing plan.



# AUDIENCES

**CHANDLER**THINKS

A PLACE MARKETING COMPANY

# LOCAL AUDIENCES

Local audiences play a critical role in creating and sustaining an appealing tourism environment. Friends and family will be your biggest marketing.

- Local Tourism Stakeholders
- Elected Leadership
- Residents
- Existing Business Owners
- Industry Peers



# VISITOR AUDIENCES

Visitor audiences remain a primary focus of tourism efforts, as they bring new economic opportunities and vitality to Cottage Grove.

- Corporate Travelers
- Sports Teams
- Weddings
- Surrounding Communities



# **FUNDAMENTALS OF TOURISM**

# For tourism to be real, it must be real.

Must have someone to own it.

Must have the organizational structure to be accountable and provide direction.

It must have a revenue source and funding.



# Keys to Tourism Success

## Promotion

How do we promote?  
What do we promote?  
Where do we promote?

## Ownership

Person  
Organization  
Accountability

## Product

Food  
Shopping  
Lodging  
Entertainment  
Amenities

## Funding

Occupancy Tax  
Tourism Special District  
Grants (State & Federal)  
Sponsorships  
Private



Tourism is about:



# RECOMMENDATIONS

# RECOMMENDED KEY INITIATIVES

- I. **Develop a Culture of Tourism**
- II. **Partnering and Packaging with Existing Assets**
- III. **Facilitate Product Development (Long-term)**
- IV. **On-Going Marketing**
- V. **Tracking and Reporting**



**KEY INITIATIVE I:  
DEVELOP A CULTURE OF TOURISM**

# DEVELOP A CULTURE OF TOURISM

Yes, this is a higher priority than any other.

It is a priority over developing another hotel.

It is a priority over spending dollars on marketing.

**Creating a culture of tourism must happen in order for it to develop into a real economic driver for Cottage Grove.**



# WHAT IS A CULTURE OF TOURISM?

It means.....

It's viewed as economic development.

It's viewed as a viable new business opportunity.

Businesses expect new faces and willing to help.

Businesses are connected to one another.

Unified understanding of what tourism creates.



# ESTABLISH THE STRUCTURE FOR TOURISM

## **Accountability to leadership AND tourism professionals**

Tourism board-steering is crucial. When stakeholders are a part of creating the direction, they will also make sure their business aligns.

## **Tourism management**

For now, Tourism should continue as a department of the City. At some point it may be necessary to create a separate tourism department or consider branding it out as a 501C6 .

As tourism grows, a dedicated tourism Director, Manager or Coordinator will be necessary.



# CHANGE THE DEPARTMENT NAME

Since you are not involved in “conventions”, we recommend changing the name of the organization to Cottage Grove Tourism or Cottage Grove Tourism & Sports.

You can keep DiscoverCottageGrove.com. Adding MN (discovercottagegrovemn.com) might be advantageous for search engine results.



# EDUCATE AND EVANGELIZE YOUR TOURISM BOARD

- Your board should represent tourism in some form and should be educated on tourism today.
- They need to be aware of the latest trends and local-regional tourism data.
- Always provide some level of ongoing education to the board.
- Use the newly formed Mission-Vision-Values as guiding lights for tourism, including how the board works with others and one another.



# ESTABLISH YOUR MISSION/VISION/VALUES

## PROPOSED MISSION STATEMENT

Stimulate the Cottage Grove economy for residents and businesses through the thoughtful promotion, coordination and preservation of tourism.

## PROPOSED VISION STATEMENT

To be seen as a desired community to visit, an economic catalyst into the local economy and a trusted community partner.



# ESTABLISH YOUR MISSION/VISION/VALUES

## PROPOSED VALUES

- PASSION
- EXPERTISE
- RESILIENCY
- COLLABORATIVE
- AUTHENTIC
- HOSPITALITY
- PRIDE



# DEFINE TOURISM

Create an agreed upon definition of tourism so everyone knows our purpose and focus. We have recommended one for you to work from below.

**Definition of Tourism** – Tourism is the new tax revenue and direct spending generated by those not living in Cottage Grove (ideally more than 50 miles away). This includes overnight stays and day trippers. This includes recreational, leisure or business purposes.

*For now Cottage Grove Tourism marketing efforts will be regional and will include the Twin Cities area.*



# DEFINE COTTAGE GROVE TOURISM'S ROLE

The role of a tourism agency is:

## **Destination Marketing**

Be the voice for why visitors (leisure, business and groups) should come to a destination.

## **Destination Leadership**

Bring partners and stakeholders together under a shared vision and destination strategy.

## **In-Destination Management**

Influence how visitors experience the destination and support sustainable development.



# HOST AN INTRODUCTORY STAKEHOLDER SUMMIT

- **Kick off with a comprehensive meeting for the tourism community**
- Include the Cottage Grove Tourism Board
- Communicate the value and impact of tourism on your local economy.
- Present your mission, vision, and values, alongside an in-depth look at the roles and responsibilities of Cottage Grove Tourism.
- Establishes tourism as a vital contributor to your community's success while sharing your strategic plans for the future.



# ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Tourism Director/Mgr/Coordinator must develop into the local expert.
- Seek industry training and ongoing learning.
- Require each Tourism Board member to attend at least one tourism-related educational event or class annually.
- Constantly share industry trends, other examples and initiatives.



# REGULAR STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS

- Launch a **quarterly/monthly stakeholder newsletter**
- Celebrate the successes of tourism efforts in Cottage Grove, highlight upcoming events, and provide insights into current projects and initiatives.
- Present short top-line overview Cottage Grove Tourism activity – report the numbers, any significant milestones or accomplishments, and upcoming opportunities.



# BE THE REGIONAL TOURISM HUB

- Position Discover Cottage Grove as a central connector for tourism in the region.
- Develop strong partnerships with neighboring communities through regular collaboration, such as a quarterly breakfast hosted by Discover Cottage Grove.
- Explore joint marketing campaigns and multi-county travel packages.



# VISITORS GUIDES

The primary goal of the Visitor's Guide is to **inspire** visitation. Focus is better. Create itineraries and easy listings of things to do and places to visit.

- More concise Visitors Guide – streamlined page count – add a dedicated section for “Paddle Sports”
- Create a standalone Wedding Guide





Nice and exciting!



# A WEBSITE BUILT FOR TOURISM

The website should have some similar connections to the Visitors Guide (of course it has more fun content).

Make updates similar the template of the guide but with more options and connections to partners.

Section dedicated to **Wedding Venues** which should include information on the Explore Cottage Grove's website before linking to the venue or other websites.

Include reference to Weddings in Twin Cities, St. Paul, Minneapolis. All of this helps with Search Engine Optimization.



# LOOK TO INCREASE FUNDING

- Annual budget needs to be \$150K - \$300K for marketing tourism.
- Apply for state tourism grants. Also many federal grants opportunities.
- Near future - increase lodging tax to 5% - additional 2% allocated to tourism.

*It's important to highlight that this tax is a non-resident tax, collected from visitors, ensuring that local residents are not burdened.*

Below are potential grant programs available through the Minnesota Division of Tourism:

<https://mn.gov/tourism-industry/industry-opportunities/grant-programs/>



**KEY INITIATIVE II:  
PARTNERING/PACKAGING WITH EXISTING ASSETS**

# PARTNERING AND PACKAGING

The goal is to package and promote existing assets to create attractive short-term products that will draw in visitors.

These recommendations focus on making the most of existing assets while partnering with local businesses and nearby communities to grow Cottage Grove's tourism industry.

By packaging these experiences into marketable products, Cottage Grove can attract more visitors and increase tourism revenue.



# CONNECT WITH TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS

The best ideas for connecting partners do not come from the consultant. They come from the partners. Bring them together for the purpose of developing ideas on how the community can work together to create tourism programs and events.



# HIGHLIGHTING FAMILY AND FRIENDS GATHERING

Many visitors come to Cottage Grove to reconnect with loved ones. However, our research shows that residents often take their guests to destinations outside of Cottage Grove.

To encourage locals to explore and enjoy what the area has to offer, we propose creating a brochure featuring the top five must-do activities in Cottage Grove. This will serve as a guide for residents, helping them discover great spots to take their family and friends right within their own community.



# WEDDING FAIR EVENT

- Host an annual Wedding Fair designed to showcase Cottage Grove as a premier wedding destination,
- Feature your beautiful venues and a variety of local vendors.
- Highlight Cottage Grove's unique wedding venues
- Include booths from local dress shops, florists, photographers, caterers, makeup artists, and entertainment services, creating a one-stop experience for couples planning their weddings.



# STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL – “BRING A FRIEND”

The Annual Strawberry Festival is a beloved event in Cottage Grove, celebrating the community's rich agricultural heritage and small-town charm. To make this festival even more impactful, we suggest launching a “Bring a Friend” initiative, encouraging locals to invite friends and family from outside the area to experience the festival and discover the charm of Cottage Grove firsthand.

This initiative can foster a sense of community pride while also introducing visitors to the town's unique attractions and local businesses, driving tourism and economic growth.



# COTTAGE GROVE DINING WEEK

Launch Cottage Grove Dining Week, a weeklong celebration of the vibrant local food scene designed to encourage both locals and visitors to explore the area's restaurants.

## Event Structure:

Special Menus & Pricing  
Burger Week Feature

## Marketing & PR:

Targeted PR Campaign  
Engage with Social Media

## Bonus Events at the Farmer's Market:

Cooking Demonstrations  
Live Music & Entertainment  
Pop-Up Food Tastings



**KEY INITIATIVE III:  
FACILITATE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT (LONG-TERM)**

# EXPAND LODGING CAPACITY

The City understands the need for a hotel. Currently Cottage Grove is missing potential for additional revenue.

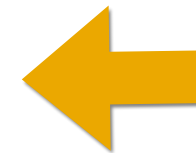
For example, if a new hotel with 90 rooms, with an average room rate of \$135 and a 60% occupancy rate with a 3% lodging tax can generate over \$80,000 annually in revenue for the city.

More than hotels. Encourage unique lodging experiences such as tiny homes, cabins, or glamping to attract niche travelers and nature enthusiasts.



# NEW HOTEL POTENTIAL

# of rooms	90
Total Rooms nights	32,850
Occupancy Rate	65%
Room Nights Sold	21,353
Avg. Daily Rate (ADR)	\$125
<b>Overall Hotel Revenue Generated</b>	<b>\$2,669,063</b>
MN Sales Tax Generated (6.85%)	\$182,831
Cottage Grove City Tax (.28%)	\$7,473
<b>Lodging Tax Generated (3%)</b>	<b>\$80,072</b>



# HOTEL LEAKAGE PROJECTIONS

The City is losing approximately \$5,000,000 in hotel revenue and \$4,000,000 in direct outside spending into local businesses.



# WINTER WONDERLAND – A MAGICAL HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE

- Look for opportunities to take existing winter events and create a “Winter Wonderland”.
- A magical and festive atmosphere that delights locals and draws visitors.
- Multi-week event can with holiday markets, family-friendly activities, and eye-catching decorations that encourage spending, dining, and even overnight stays at local accommodations.
- Could include: Christmas Market; Ice Skating Rink; Christmas Lights Tour; Tree Lighting Ceremony; Santa’s Village & Workshops



# BENEFITS OF CEDARHURST MANSION RESTORATION

Preserving a community asset and story telling venue could open doors for many opportunities:

- Corporate events
- Community and social events
- Live concerts
- Festivals
- Attracting locals and visitors!



# A TOWN CENTER ATTRACTS PEOPLE

By creating a town center or gathering place in Cottage Grove, MN, the community can experience enhanced cohesion, economic growth, and a stronger sense of identity, making it an even more attractive place to live, work, and visit.

Advantages to a town center:

- Foster Community Engagement
- Support Local Economy
- Enhance Walkability and Sustainability
- Cultural and Civic Identity
- Attracting Visitors



# DEVELOP MORE FAMILY-FRIENDLY ATTRACTIONS

Cottage Grove lacks entertainment options, especially for families and children. We recommend working with private investors to develop additional family-friendly attractions, such as:

- Indoor arcade with games, laser tag, and mini-golf.
- Outdoor adventure park offering zip-lining, obstacle courses, and climbing walls
- Big Swing



# LEVERAGE NATURAL AND RECREATIONAL ASSETS

- **Outdoor Adventure Promotion:** Cottage Grove's parks and trails could be marketed as a destination for outdoor recreation, including hiking, biking, kayaking, and bird-watching. Host outdoor events like 5Ks or nature walks to draw enthusiasts.
- **Mississippi River Access:** Develop waterfront activities like kayaking and paddle boats to capitalize on the scenic beauty and the calm backwaters of the Mississippi River.
- **Winter Tourism:** Promote winter sports like cross-country skiing, ice fishing, and snowshoeing. Consider hosting winter festivals or sporting events to bring tourists during the colder months.



# WINERY/BREWERY

If possible, pitch to investors to develop invest a local winery, brewery or distillery. These venues could host events like tastings, live music nights, or craft beer festivals.



**KEY INITIATIVE IV:  
ON-GOING MARKETING**

# MARKETING PRIORITIES

1. Branding
2. Website
3. Visitor guide
4. Social media
5. Content development
6. Targeted paid promotion (digital ad campaign)
7. Build database (for E-newsletters and future research)



**KEY INITIATIVE V:  
TRACKING & REPORTING**

# PROVIDE REGULAR UPDATES

Be tenacious in measuring and reporting tourism. On a semi-annual basis give a **State of Tourism Report** during a commission meeting or tourism's own Annual Meeting.

Consider recognizing a **Lodging Partner of the Year** and a **Hospitality Partner of the Year** for those who have helped in promoting tourism in Cottage Grove.

Create marketing materials on the impact of tourism during National Tourism week.




# PROVIDE REGULAR UPDATES

**Visit Delco, PA**  
May 20 at 10:42 AM · 🌐

We're celebrating National Travel and Tourism Week in Delaware County, PA! The travel industry powers the economy, creates quality job opportunities and supports our local businesses in #Delco. Thank you to all who #VisitDelcoPA!

#nationaltourismweek2024 #NTTW24 #TravelUSA #tourismweek2020 visitPA U.S. Travel Association Delaware County Commerce Center



**\$824 M**  
Visitor Spending in Delaware County in 2023

**\$1.2B**  
Total Economic Impact

**13,032**  
Total Jobs Generated

**\$104 M**  
State & Local Taxes Generated


NTTW  
Visit Delco  
DELAWARE COUNTY, PA

**Louisiana's Sweet Spot**  
May 20 at 4:36 PM · 🌐

Happy National Travel and Tourism Week! This week celebrates the industry's critical role in powering our state's economy, communities, and connections. Together let's demonstrate our industry's critical importance in every corner of Louisiana. #NTTW24

📍 Houmas House and Gardens  
#mylouisiana #visitlasweetspot #onlylouisiana #tourism

U.S. Travel Association | Louisiana Travel Association



>>>>>>>>> #VISITLASWEETSPOT >>>>>>>>>

**TRAVEL:**  
powering the economy and  
connecting Ascension Parish

LOUISIANA'S SWEET SPOT >NTTW  
ASCENSION PARISH NATIONAL TRAVEL & TOURISM WEEK  
TRAVEL & TOURISM

>>>>>>>>> #NTTW24 >>>>>>>>>



**QUESTIONS?**



A PLACE MARKETING COMPANY

# Visit Cottage Grove Strategic Plan



**CHANDLER**THINKS

February 11, 2024

**Chandlerthinks, LLC**

2929 Sidco Drive | Nashville, TN 37204

615-498-8313

[steve@chandlerthinks.com](mailto:steve@chandlerthinks.com)



**TO:** Mayor Bailey and Members of the Economic Development Authority  
**FROM:** Gretchen Larson, Economic Development Director  
**DATE:** February 6, 2025  
**RE:** 2025 Meeting Schedule

---

### **Discussion**

The Economic Development Authority holds regular meetings on the second Tuesday of each month and holds special meetings as needed. The schedule below adopts the regular meeting schedule for 2025.

### **Recommended Meetings Schedule for 2025**

#### **Regular Meetings – 7:30 am**

February 11, 2025  
March (**Note: no meeting**)  
April 8, 2025  
May 13, 2025  
June 10, 2025  
July 8, 2025  
August 12, 2025  
September 9, 2025  
October 14, 2025  
November 4, 2025 (**Note: this meeting is the first Tuesday of the month**)  
December 2, 2025 (**Note: this meeting will be held at 6:00 pm**)

### **Recommendation**

Adopt schedule for the regular meetings as presented.



**TO:** Mayor Bailey and Members of the Economic Development Authority  
**FROM:** Gretchen Larson, Economic Development Director  
**DATE:** February 4, 2025  
**RE:** DARTS Updates

---

## **Background**

DARTS Community Services is a nonprofit organization that empowers older adults and their caregivers in Dakota County and South Washington County. They provide much-needed services, including transportation, chore assistance, home repairs, caregiver support, tech support, resource navigation, and volunteer opportunities. These resources help create enriching connections for older adults which improve health and provide a sense of community. DARTS' mission is to create connections that enrich aging. Their goal is to transform the aging journey from a challenge into a celebration.

## **Discussion**

The city provides funding to the DARTS bus circulator via the EDA budget each year. The circulator bus provides rides to seniors in the community to select locations in the city such as the Walmart, Hy-Vee, Goodwill, Kohls, Allina Clinic, Menards and more. In recent meetings with the teams at DARTS, Basic Needs, and the staff at Washington County, we have discussed expanding their route to include stops at Basic Needs, the library and the soon to be opened Bluestem Apartments on 79<sup>th</sup> Street. As a part of the discussions, we requested the annual ridership numbers and received the 2024 report, attached.

The team at DARTS shared that so far, they haven't received any requests to stop at Basic Needs or the library. Our teams determined that perhaps this was a result of a lack of awareness about the new stops that had been added. To address this issue, each of the teams will place additional emphasis on marketing of the new stops and are considering quarterly or bi-annual in person presentations at all of our senior living facilities, including Bluestem, when it opens later in the spring. Once we finalize a schedule with the complexes we will report back accordingly. We hope that this extra effort will continue to enhance the lives of everyone who depends on the bus circulator services.

## **Recommendation**

Receive report.

## **Attachment**

2024 DARTS Ridership Stats

## Cottage Grove Loop 2024

Sum of Riders On	Average per Week
747	14
Stop Type	Riders On
Medical/Personal Care	6
Residential	371
Retail/Grocery/Dining	370
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>747</b>

Non-Residential	Riders On
Walmart	250
Target	61
Hy-Vee	34
Cub Foods	14
Allina Clinic	5
Burger King	4
ALDI	3
Dollar Tree	1
Great Clips	1
Taco Bell	1
Walgreens	1
Wells Fargo Bank	1

Residential	Riders On
Legends of Cottage Grove	270
Norris Square	54
Woodland Park Apts #2	30
Cottages of Cottage Grove	8
Woodland Park Apts #1	6
Residential--House	3

Date	Riders On
1/2/2024	16
1/9/2024	13
1/16/2024	11
1/23/2024	14
2/6/2024	8
2/13/2024	16
2/20/2024	16
2/27/2024	18
3/5/2024	18
3/12/2024	16
3/19/2024	14
3/26/2024	14
4/2/2024	15
4/9/2024	20
4/16/2024	12
4/23/2024	14
4/30/2024	16
5/6/2024	18
5/7/2024	15
5/14/2024	13
5/21/2024	18
5/28/2024	16
6/4/2024	15
6/11/2024	16
6/18/2024	17
6/25/2024	20
7/2/2024	14
7/9/2024	13
7/16/2024	12
7/23/2024	13
7/30/2024	14
8/6/2024	15
8/13/2024	15
8/20/2024	13
8/27/2024	13
9/3/2024	15
9/10/2024	10
9/17/2024	15
9/24/2024	12
10/1/2024	14
10/8/2024	12

10/15/2024	12
10/22/2024	14
10/29/2024	10
11/5/2024	22
11/12/2024	13
11/19/2024	13
11/26/2024	10
12/3/2024	15
12/10/2024	14
12/17/2024	12
12/31/2024	13
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>747</b>

Month/Week	Riders On
<b>January</b>	<b>54</b>
1/2/2024	16
1/9/2024	13
1/16/2024	11
1/23/2024	14
<b>February</b>	<b>58</b>
2/6/2024	8
2/13/2024	16
2/20/2024	16
2/27/2024	18
<b>March</b>	<b>62</b>
3/5/2024	18
3/12/2024	16
3/19/2024	14
3/26/2024	14
<b>April</b>	<b>77</b>
4/2/2024	15
4/9/2024	20
4/16/2024	12
4/23/2024	14
4/30/2024	16
<b>May</b>	<b>80</b>
5/6/2024	18
5/7/2024	15
5/14/2024	13
5/21/2024	18
5/28/2024	16
<b>June</b>	<b>68</b>
6/4/2024	15
6/11/2024	16
6/18/2024	17
6/25/2024	20
<b>July</b>	<b>66</b>
7/2/2024	14
7/9/2024	13
7/16/2024	12
7/23/2024	13
7/30/2024	14
<b>August</b>	<b>56</b>
8/6/2024	15
8/13/2024	15

8/20/2024	13
8/27/2024	13
<b>September</b>	<b>52</b>
9/3/2024	15
9/10/2024	10
9/17/2024	15
9/24/2024	12
<b>October</b>	<b>62</b>
10/1/2024	14
10/8/2024	12
10/15/2024	12
10/22/2024	14
10/29/2024	10
<b>November</b>	<b>58</b>
11/5/2024	22
11/12/2024	13
11/19/2024	13
11/26/2024	10
<b>December</b>	<b>54</b>
12/3/2024	15
12/10/2024	14
12/17/2024	12
12/31/2024	13
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>747</b>