



BELLINGHAM AND WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN: 2018-2022

Prepared for the City of Bellingham
and Bellingham and Whatcom County Tourism

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this *Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategic Plan* is to increase visitation and the associated new spending generated from tourists to Bellingham and Whatcom County because of cultural and heritage attractions and activities.

Stakeholders of arts, cultural and historical organizations in Bellingham and greater Whatcom County have expressed a need to communicate with their partners and improve coordination to increase awareness of and visitation to the numerous cultural and historic venues, festivals and activities in Bellingham and Whatcom County.

This *Strategic Plan* was developed through a six-stage planning process and focuses on growing cultural heritage tourism: **"travel directed toward experiencing the history, art and culture of a place."** Under the definition of "culture," the *Strategic Plan* includes:

- All forms of traditional and contemporary arts - sculpture, painting, photography, music, performance, dance, literature, theatre and film
- Activities that make up the current culture - the personality of a place - festivals, art walks, farmers' markets, locally-sourced brewpubs & distilleries, etc.
- History and heritage, including historic buildings, districts, sites, structures, objects, landscapes, archaeological sites, First Nation traditional and contemporary arts and events, etc.
- Both culture and heritage can take the form of place-based activities and events unique to the area.



The annual Stommish Festival on Bellingham Bay is a Lummi traditional event that welcomes all. (City of Bellingham photo.)



Downtown Sounds concert series in Bellingham's Arts District. (City of Bellingham photo.)



North Cascades Institute hosts an October feast featuring the bounty of the local harvest. (Photo courtesy NCI website.)



Ferndale's Pioneer Park. (Photo courtesy Ferndale Heritage website.)



Historic Fairhaven's annual Dirty Dan Days festival (City of Bellingham photo.)

The planning process included forming a Core Planning Committee and Advisory Stakeholder Group, compiling a countywide Cultural Heritage Tourism Asset Inventory, conducting a "visitor-readiness" assessment of current cultural heritage tourism experiences and venues, and analyzing the county's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Competitive destinations – Asheville, North Carolina; Bend, Oregon; the San Juan Islands and Yakima Valley, Washington – were assessed as to their similar products and promotions. The findings from the Competitive Analysis determined that Bellingham and Whatcom County have great potential to attract multiple audiences – the Cultural Heritage Tourist; Regional Tourists (particularly the Seattle – Vancouver, B.C. market); and the Generational Market (Millennials, Generation Xs, and Baby Boomers) – to enhance the county's destination brand and increase the annual economic impact from tourism.



Hovander historic homestead, a county park in Ferndale hosts festivals and other events. (Photo courtesy Ferndale Heritage website.)



The historic Civilian Conservation Corp bridge in Bellingham's Whatcom Falls Park. (City of Bellingham photo.)

Tourists spent \$588 million in Whatcom County in 2016.

Their direct spending generated **\$51 million in State and local taxes**, and supported **6,800 local jobs**.

Increasing seasonality and improving local assets could expand Bellingham and Whatcom County's tourism growth.



Mt. Baker Theater in Bellingham's Downtown Arts District. (City of Bellingham photo.)



Public art in Blaine on the boardwalk. (Photo courtesy Blaine Chamber of Commerce.)

Visitor-ready cultural heritage attractions, activities, and events provide the impetus to attract tourists year-round and to extend the stay of nature-based and recreational tourists. The following vision, mission, goals and strategies outlined in this *Strategic Plan* help shape the direction and desired outcomes for cultural heritage tourism in Bellingham and Whatcom County.

To jumpstart the partnerships, development and marketing of cultural heritage tourism, stakeholders will work together – and with a broader range of tourism industry partners – to **achieve the following short-term projects:**

- 1) Establish regular communications between CHT stakeholders to encourage partnerships and cross-marketing;
- 2) Promote visitor-ready cultural heritage sites, events and experiences through existing marketing channels;
- 3) Inform cultural heritage institutions/ sites about funding/tourism grants to stimulate new or expanded products and experiences;
- 4) Develop greater capacity and access, especially at city and county parks and historic sites; and
- 5) Create cultural heritage tourism packages to increase off-season visitation.

These projects meet the criteria set forth in this *Strategic Plan*, and contribute to the vision, produce a positive impact, have allocated or identified resources, improve access and are sustainable.

Cultural Heritage Tourism Vision

We are a collaborative, communicative and creative consortium of cultural heritage tourism stakeholders that promote visitation, prolonged stays, and present a unified voice for Bellingham and Whatcom County to foster quality stewardship of local cultural heritage assets, stimulate economic prosperity for local businesses, and enhance resident’s quality of life.

Cultural Heritage Tourism Mission

To enhance the economic and social prosperity of Bellingham and Whatcom County by promoting and delivering quality cultural heritage experiences to tourists, while respecting and protecting the county’s unique and diverse ecosystems, environments, history, lifestyles and cultures.



Downtown Sounds bring all ages into Downtown Bellingham's Arts District during the month of July. (City of Bellingham photo, by Aaron Brick.)



Guided historical tours are popular with both visitors and residents. (City of Bellingham photo.)

**GOAL 1
PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION**

- 1.1 Improve collaboration and communication among all cultural heritage tourism stakeholders.
- 1.2 Strengthen partnerships among all cultural, history, and historic preservation stakeholder organizations and government agencies to foster greater public access, quality experiences, increased visitation, and stewardship.
- 1.3 Foster engagement with both the Lummi and Nooksack Nations to identify respectful and appropriate opportunities for cultural heritage tourism and education.
- 1.4 Engage college students to enhance connectivity between educational institutions (WWU, Northwest Indian College, WCC, BTC, etc.) and local communities, businesses, attractions and lodging to build more integrated experiences for tourists and students.
- 1.5 Encourage collaborations between Main Street (downtown revitalization) and community economic development organizations to organize and promote cultural heritage events, activities, and programs for tourists year-round.



Cross-marketing historic museums such as the Lynden Pioneer Museum help promote longer stays. (Photo above courtesy Lynden Pioneer Museum website, photo below courtesy City of Bellingham, by David Scherrer.



The Lummi and Nooksack Tribes hold some events that are open to the public. (City of Bellingham photo.)



The WWU sculpture garden welcomes visitors year round. (Photo courtesy WWU website.)

**GOAL 2
EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT &
PRODUCT ENHANCEMENT**

- 2.1 Encourage providers to expand existing or create new cultural heritage tourism experience (products or programs) to increase non peak-season visitation and spending in Whatcom County.
- 2.2 Develop county-wide interpretive products to share the history and culture of Whatcom County's peoples, industry, and place.
- 2.3 Work with partners to preserve, protect and enhance historic and cultural sites through sustainable policies, stewardship programs, and increased funding.



History comes alive when Tall Ship Lady Washington docks during the summer months in Bellingham Bay and Blaine's Drayton Harbor. (City of Bellingham photo.)



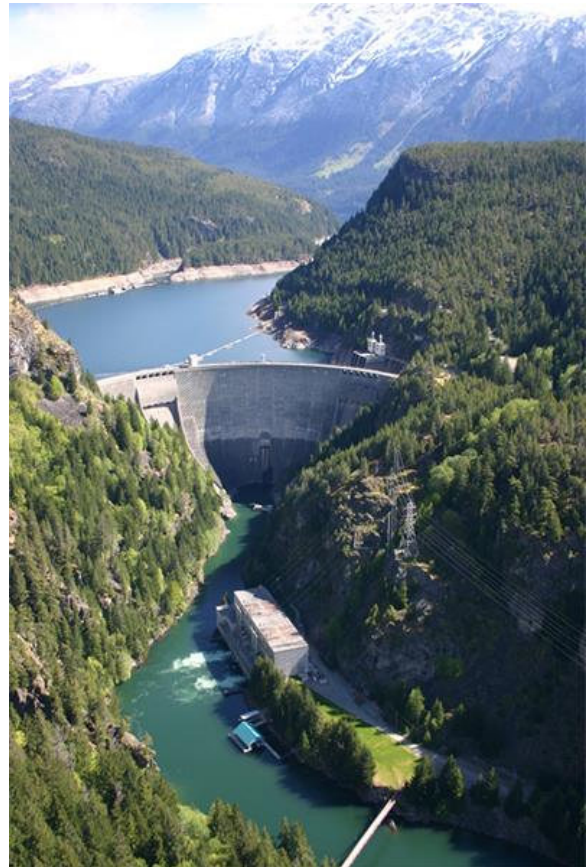
Lummi story poles along the Ferndale River Walk are a contemporary art form, and draw interest from visitors and residents. (Photo courtesy Ferndale Chamber of Commerce website.)



The Territorial Courthouse in Bellingham's Old Town is the oldest brick building in Washington State. (Photo courtesy Whatcom County Historical Society website.)

**GOAL 3
MARKETING**

- 3.1. Establish unified messaging and marketing platform to respectfully promote Whatcom County’s cultural heritage experiences.
- 3.2 Cross-market cultural heritage activities and attractions with other like venues (i.e. museums promote visitation to each other) to encourage multi-site visitation throughout the county
- 3.3 Cross-market cultural heritage activities with recreation-based experiences to encourage tourists to stay longer in Whatcom County.



Cross-marketing nature with culture: Tours of the Ross Dam and Gorge Power Plant in North Cascades National Park offer opportunities to experience the spectacular natural environment while learning about the history through industry, engineering and architecture of the area. (Photos above and below courtesy seattle.gov website.)



Historic Fairhaven in South Bellingham and Downtown would benefit from cross-marketing. (City of Bellingham photos above and below.)



Lynden’s historic downtown has new retail and lodging opportunities that serve the entire county. (Bellingham & Whatcom County Tourism photo)

1. INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The purpose of the *Strategic Plan* is to increase visitation, and the associated new spending generated from tourists, to Bellingham and Whatcom County because of cultural and heritage attractions or activities.

What do we mean by Cultural Heritage Tourism?

For the purposes of this plan, cultural heritage tourism is defined as **"travel directed toward experiencing the history, art and culture of a place."** Culture is further defined to include:

- All forms of *traditional* and *contemporary* arts - sculpture, painting, photography, music, performance, dance, literature, theatre and film;
- Activities that make up the contemporary culture - or the personality of the place - including festivals, art walks, farmers' markets, locally-sourced brewpubs & distilleries, etc.;
- History and heritage – prehistoric and archaeological sites, the historic built environment (architecture, landscape architecture and engineering), First Nation

traditional and contemporary arts and events; and

- Both culture and heritage may take the form of place-based activities and events unique to the area.

For the purposes of this plan, "tourist" is used to describe both leisure day and overnight visitors, in keeping with the definition adopted by the Washington State Legislature. For tourism, and cultural heritage tourism, to flourish, the target markets are visitors originating from at least 50 miles away from Whatcom County and staying overnight.

Washington State defines TOURISTS as people traveling for business or pleasure on a trip:

Away from their place of residence or business and staying overnight in paid accommodations;

To a place 50 miles or more one way from their place of residence for business for the day or staying overnight; or

From another country or state outside of their place of residence or business.

EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM as defined by the STRATEGIC PLAN					
ARTS				CULTURE	HERITAGE
performing arts	visual arts	educational, exploration & maker arts	culinary arts	includes traditional cultural sites, centers, events as well as contemporary culture	historic & prehistoric sites & activities
dance, music, theatre, comedy clubs, etc.	folk & fine arts - painting, sculpture, galleries, museums, film, photography, etc.	museums, art centers, libraries, literature; classes / experiences for all ages, etc.	locally-sourced food; craft beer, wine, spirits, etc.	Native American and other public traditional events; festivals, programs, farmers markets, museums, libraries, art/cultural experiences, etc.	walking tours, museums, house museums, historic districts, architecture, farmsteads, heritage trails, maritime assets, events & programs, etc.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The City of Bellingham and Bellingham & Whatcom County Tourism (BWCT) began working together after receiving a \$15,000 grant from the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation to create a Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategic Plan. In 2016 a scope of work was developed and after a competitive procurement process Cherey Hargrove, of Hargrove International, Inc. was hired to work with stakeholders and community leaders to identify, prioritize, and plan key strategies to grow cultural heritage tourism as an economic driver in Bellingham and Whatcom County. Key considerations for BWCT are the potential to:

- Encourage current tourists to stay longer and spend more, enticed by the availability of local cultural and heritage experiences;
- Expand the seasonality of visitation to complement the busy summer season with new or enhanced cultural and heritage activities; and
- Enhance the Bellingham/Whatcom brand through the unique and authentic cultural heritage assets available to tourists and residents.

Project Proponents

The first step was to form a Core Planning Committee and a Stakeholder Advisory Group composed of representatives from the county's major cultural venues and attractions, Chambers of Commerce and historical societies. The entities involved included the following:

CORE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- City of Bellingham Planning & Community Development www.cob.org/gov/dept/pcc
- Bellingham and Whatcom County Tourism www.bellingham.org
- Downtown Bellingham Partnership www.downtownbellingham.com
- Historic Fairhaven Association www.fairhaven.com/business/historic-fairhaven-association

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS

1. Allied Arts of Whatcom County www.alliedarts.org
2. Blaine Chamber of Commerce www.blainechamber.com
3. Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce www.birchbaychamber.com
4. City of Bellingham Parks & Recreation www.cob.org/gov/dept/parks
5. Ferndale Chamber of Commerce www.ferndale-chamber.com
6. Lummi Nation www.lummi-nsn.org
7. Lynden Pioneer Museum www.lyndenpioneermuseum.com
8. Mt. Baker Foothills Chamber of Commerce www.mtbakerchamber.org
9. Mt. Baker Theatre www.mountbakertheatre.com
10. Nooksack Tribe www.nooksacktribe.org
11. North Cascades Institute www.ncascades.org
12. Pickford Film Center www.pickfordfilmcenter.org
13. Point Roberts Press www.pointrobertspress.com
14. Port of Bellingham www.portofbellingham.com
15. Spark Museum of Electrical Invention www.sparkmuseum.org
16. SeaFeast www.bellinghamseafeast.com
17. Sylvia Center for the Arts www.sylviacenterforthearts.org
18. Washington State Historical Society www.washingtonhistory.org
19. Whatcom County Historical Society www.whatcomhistory.net
20. WWU Heritage Resources www.library.wvu.edu/hr
21. WWU Western Gallery and Outdoor Sculpture www.westerngallery.wvu.edu
22. WWU Performing Arts www.cfpa.wvu.edu
23. Whatcom County Parks www.co.whatcom.wa.us/1787/Parks-Recreation
24. Whatcom Museum www.whatcommuseum.org

The Planning Process

Utilizing a holistic approach to planning and an information-based decision making process, Hargrove engaged, educated, and empowered stakeholders to establish a positive course of action for cultural heritage tourism to benefit Bellingham and Whatcom County tourists, businesses and residents.

Creating the *Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategic Plan* was a nine-month process conducted in 2017 that involved six tasks:

- **Task 1** included creating a Cultural Heritage Asset Inventory, giving a community presentation on the value of growing cultural heritage tourism, making an on-site assessment of current cultural heritage tourism experiences, and creation of an analysis report (*January – March 2017*)
- **Task 2** focused on stakeholder engagement and education. The Core Planning Committee appointed a Stakeholder Advisory Group to provide insights into the planning process. An on-line survey was created and distributed to stakeholders to get opinions and recommendations for prioritizing activities. Review of the survey results helped frame discussion of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT), as well as cultural heritage tourism goals and desired outcomes. (*February – April 2017*)
- **Task 3** involved research of target markets for cultural heritage tourism and identification of trends impacting cultural heritage tourism today. Hargrove presented the target market profiles and trends report to the Core Planning Committee for reference and use in developing goals and objectives. An on-line survey was sent to hoteliers to determine their opinions and recommendations for advancing cultural heritage tourism. On April 28th, Hargrove facilitated a Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting. (*February – April 2017*). The results of the Stakeholder and Hotelier surveys are provided in **Appendix G and H**.
- **Task 4** reviewed stakeholder meeting results and SWOT Analysis to define core goals and objectives, marketing opportunities and stakeholder pledges of commitment to help implement the Plan's action steps. (*April – July 2017*). The specific pledges are described in **Appendix D**.
- **Task 5** created a "strategy screen" set of criteria to help prioritize goals and objectives in the *Strategic Plan*. This set of criteria reflect the recommendations and desired outcomes of the Core Planning Committee and Stakeholder Advisory Group. (*July – August 2017*). The feedback provided by the Stakeholder Advisory Group on goals and strategies is outlined in **Appendix I**.
- **Task 6** identified priority projects for year one, and produced a detailed *Action Plan* with specific details and timelines to accomplish results. The Action Plan assigns specific roles and responsibilities for the management and implementation process. (*August – September 2017*).

The *Strategic Plan* will be used in conjunction with the one-year *Action Plan*. BWCT will take the lead, continuing to involve stakeholders in project implementation.

Special thanks to all involved for their contribution of time and talents to make this Plan a reality.



WWU's outdoor sculpture collection draws visitors of all ages. (City of Bellingham photo.)

2. SITUATION ANALYSIS

2. SITUATION ANALYSIS

For Bellingham and Whatcom County to realize its full potential from cultural heritage tourism, the current situation of the destination must be understood, as well as the opportunities and issues impacting growth in this sector.

Destination Overview

Surrounded by emerald forests and calm inland waters, Bellingham (population 86,000) and Whatcom County (population 215,000) are located on the Salish Sea in the far northwest corner of Washington State. Adjacent to the U.S.-Canada border and near the San Juan Islands, Bellingham and Whatcom County are also located between the major cities of Seattle and Vancouver, B.C.

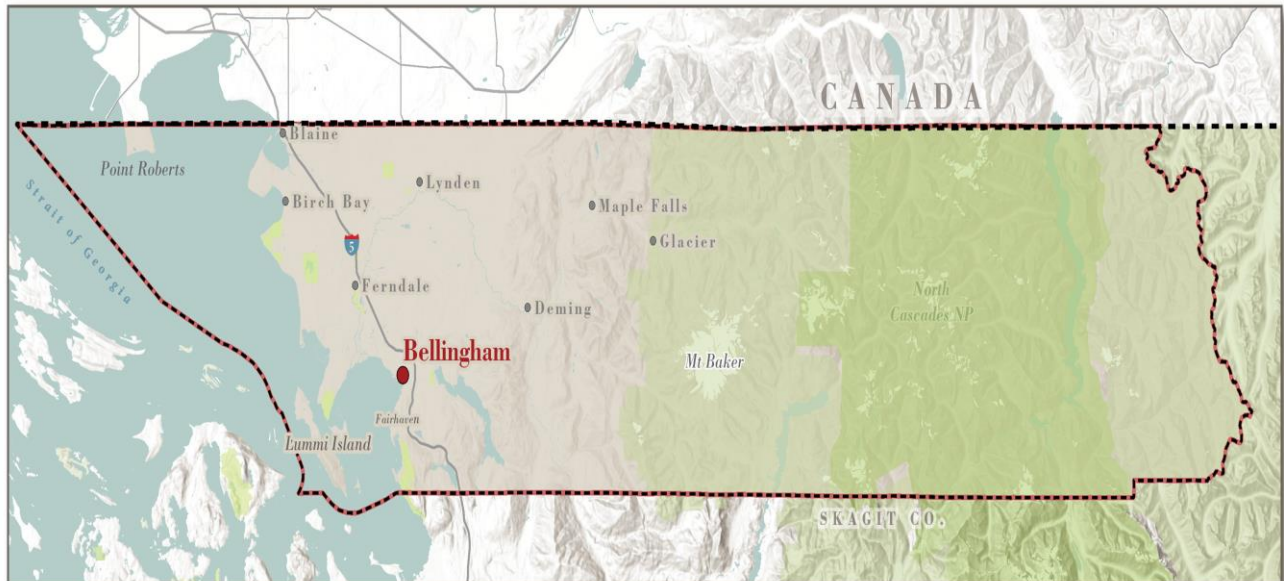
Many visitors are drawn to Bellingham and Whatcom County as a destination for its natural beauty and outdoor recreational activities. Whatcom County has Mt. Baker, North Cascades National Park, numerous state and county parks, and hundreds of miles of earth and water trails winding through a mountainous, evergreen landscape. Today, more than half of the county's land remains wilderness.

Bellingham ranks as a "top 10" city in the nation for personal fitness, best place to play year-round, best place to reboot your life, and is frequently highly ranked for paddling, mountain biking, cycling, skiing and adventure.

The Salish Sea is one of the world's largest and most biologically rich inland waters, which the Coast Salish people traditionally navigated by cedar canoe. Whatcom County remains the home of the Lummi and Nooksack Tribes, both of which have maintained their traditional and contemporary culture. Salmon fishing is an historic industry in Bellingham and Blaine, both



Map of Whatcom County within Washington State.



Map of Whatcom County, Washington.

2. SITUATION ANALYSIS

of which are situated on the shoreline with views of the San Juan Islands of Washington and the Gulf Islands of British Columbia. Bellingham Bay, Chuckanut Bay, Birch Bay, Semiahmoo Bay and Drayton Harbor are all included within the destination, as are Lummi Island, Lake Whatcom, Lake Padden, Lake Samish and the Nooksack River.

Cultural Heritage Tourism Assets

Although nature and recreation predominate, cultural heritage attractions and activities are plentiful in Bellingham and Whatcom County. To illustrate the viewpoint of the tourist, Hargrove conducted an independent assessment of cultural heritage tourism assets of Bellingham and Whatcom County March 1st - 3rd, 2017. Hargrove asserted that beyond the attractions and cultural heritage activities, a holistic tourist experience includes a place to shop, a place to eat, and a place to sleep.

In her assessment Hargrove found an abundance of distinctive museums, historic

Current Tourism Economic Impacts

In 2016, tourists spent \$588 million in Whatcom County. Their direct spending generated \$51 million in State and local taxes, and supported 6,800 local jobs.

The largest percentage of spending by tourists was on food service (30%), followed by retail sales (17%), air and ground travel (16%), accommodations (15%), recreation and the arts (12%), and transportation/gas (10%).

Tourist spending in Whatcom County ranks 5th in Washington State after King, Pierce, Spokane and Snohomish Counties.

Research indicates that people staying in commercial lodging (hotels, motels, B&Bs, vacation rentals) account for slightly over 60% of all visitor spending.



Pickford Film Center offers outdoor cinema during the summer on downtown Bellingham Parking Garage roof. (City of Bellingham photo, by Aaron Brick.)

2. SITUATION ANALYSIS

theatres, attractive downtowns, maritime heritage, parks and scenic drives.

The region's natural heritage is evident through its strong roots in the fishing and recreation industry. The Lummi and Nooksack tribes provide a cultural lens unique to the area, with contemporary Lummi story poles sharing legacies of these native peoples.

Bellingham values its history and seeks to preserve a sense of place in its commercial areas and neighborhoods, and in 2007 became a Preserve America Community. Bellingham's investment in its Downtown Arts District over the last decade has created a dynamic cluster of cultural venues, such as the Whatcom Museum (a Smithsonian Affiliate, with rotating art and history exhibitions); the Pickford Film Center (a Sundance Affiliate specializing in independent film); and the Spark Museum of Electrical Invention, which has one of the largest collections of early electrical devices and antique radios in the nation and one of the largest functioning Tesla Coils. The historic Mount Baker Theatre features nationally touring shows year-round, and the recently created Sylvia Art Center features smaller-scale independent theater.

In 2013 Downtown Bellingham became a Main Street community, and the City's update of its [Downtown Bellingham Plan](#) in 2014 illustrates

its goal to create a dynamic cultural center by an entire chapter to downtown cultural activities and tourism.

Artsy historic districts and urban villages feature local boutique shops. The Fairhaven Historic District in southern Bellingham has been successfully promoted as a cultural heritage destination since the 1980s by the Historic Fairhaven Association.

Western Washington University is the intellectual center of the county, has been named one of the 30 most beautiful coastal colleges in the nation, and features a highly acclaimed outdoor sculpture collection.

Historic Woodstock Farm on the south end of Bellingham is a diamond in the rough, and Ferndale's historic Hovander Homestead Park provides a beautiful bucolic setting for festivals and other events.

In other parts of the county, the Lynden Pioneer Museum has the largest collection of historic horse-drawn vehicles west of the Mississippi River. Ferndale's Pioneer Park is home to one of the largest collection of pioneer constructed cedar-slab log cabins in the world. Indigenous history and values are visible throughout the county in cedar story poles, a relatively contemporary art form practiced by Lummi carvers. Lynden's Jansen Art Center offer classes, performances, and other cultural experiences.

Foodies thrive in Bellingham and Whatcom County. The fertile farmland of the Nooksack Valley, surrounding the communities of Lynden, Sumas, Everson and Ferndale, produces more than 60% of the U.S. red raspberry crop and is a major supplier of dairy products



Bellingham's historic Woodstock Farm has become a popular wedding venue, and would benefit from additional programming, interpretation and access. (Photo courtesy City of Bellingham Parks & Recreation Dept., by Wildgrass Photography.)

2. SITUATION ANALYSIS

(including artisan cheese and ice cream). These same communities, as well as Deming, Van Zandt and Acme, support a new wave of small, local farms. Residents throughout Whatcom County are committed to sourcing local food and the farm-to-table concept, which many inventive restaurants and food makers have embraced. Hyperlocal menus are a key ingredient at The Willows Inn on Lummi Island - rated as one of the top 10 restaurants in the world. The Bellingham Farmer's Market offers local food, produce and crafts every Saturday April through December at the Railroad Avenue Depot Market, and is recognized as one of the best in Washington State. The craft beer movement has taken hold in Bellingham and Whatcom County, and many local breweries have earned national awards.

See the **Asset Inventory in Appendix E.** for a full list of the many cultural and heritage venues and activities that exist in Bellingham and Whatcom County.

Cultural Heritage Tourism Asset Assessment

Hargrove's assessment resulted in the following conclusions:

- While outdoor recreation and nature-based activities may be a primary motivator for most leisure tourists to Bellingham and Whatcom County, the historic and cultural fabric of the destination are catalysts for attracting tourists year round – and encouraging them to spend more, stay longer, and return often.
- Bellingham and Whatcom County excel at offering distinctive restaurants (breweries, farm-to-table dining, artisan eats, and various cuisine), unique local shopping (including many galleries, museum shops and book stores) that encourage visitation and spending;
- Evening entertainment is available at several theatres and nightclubs;



MegaZapper and Faraday Cage at the Spark Museum of Electrical Invention in Bellingham. (Photo courtesy Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism.)

2. SITUATION ANALYSIS

- Events like the monthly Downtown Bellingham Art Walk and annual SeaFeast event attract tourists and residents alike to explore Bellingham's assets.;
- Several boutique hotels complement the abundance of cultural heritage attractions, offering guests a distinctive destination experience from time of arrival to departure.
- Many of the county's cultural and historic assets are "visitor-ready," offering distinctive experiences in peak season (May –September), if not year round.
- Some museums and related attractions – especially in the county – have limited open hours and days, and experiences for Sunday through Wednesday visitation are lacking. The clustering, or critical mass, of unique dining and retail experiences can become a destination driver to attract regional tourists in off-peak seasons;
- To maximize impact, museums and cultural and heritage sites also need to be open and available for tourists on a more frequent schedule.
- The Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe present a unique educational opportunity for tourists, yet must be cultivated with respect for and directed by the tribal leadership. In particular, tourists have expressed interest in the Lummi traditional art of cedar bark weaving, and more contemporary art of story pole carving.

As part of the assessment, Hargrove developed an on-line survey and asked 35 local cultural heritage stakeholders to name what they thought were the top five cultural heritage attractions in the county. A similar survey was conducted with 22 local hoteliers in county, and BWCT was asked to share their tabulations of what they saw as the top attractions and activities for tourists. The three groups identified slightly different cultural heritage assets. (See **Table 1** to see the results of these surveys.)

Opinion Poll from On-line Survey		
Top Five Cultural Heritage Attractions in Whatcom County		
Response from Cultural Heritage Stakeholders	Response from Bellingham/Whatcom Hoteliers	BWCT identified requests from Tourists to Bellingham
1. Mount Baker Theatre	Western Washington University (campus/students, Sculpture Collection, spring graduations)	Spark Museum
2. Whatcom Museum & Lightcatcher	Mount Baker Theatre Whatcom Museum & Lightcatcher Ski to Sea	Bellingham Railway Museum
3. Lummi (culture, Nation, Stommish Festival) Downtown Fairhaven	Fairhaven (historic buildings) Breweries/Beer Week	Whatcom Museum
4. Lynden Museum; SeaFeast; and Pioneer Park	Bellingham Bay/Environs/Waterfront	Mindport Exhibits
5. Northwest Washington Fair Western Washington University Sculpture Pickett House Pickford Theatre Plover Ferry Farm tour/map Bellingham Farmer's Market	Bellingham Bells games Concerts: MBT, Wild Buffalo Deming Logging Show Good Time Girls' Walking Tours Hiking/Biking Interurban Trail and Environs Lynden Raspberry Festival Pickford Theatre Summer Soccer Tournaments Whatcom Falls Park	Downtown Bellingham Historic Walking Tour

Table 1: Top Five Cultural Heritage Tourism Attractions in Whatcom County as identified by an on-line survey of CHT stakeholders, hoteliers, and requests from tourists at the BWCT information center.

2. SITUATION ANALYSIS

Current Marketing of the Destination

Bellingham and Whatcom County Tourism is the official tourism agency representing the county, and uses a “BE in Bellingham” campaign to promote the numerous and varied activities in Bellingham, Blaine, Birch Bay, Ferndale, Lummi Island, the Lummi Nation, Lynden, Sumas, Point Roberts, the Mount Baker Foothills, North Cascades and all of Whatcom County. The campaign tag line is “*One Destination, Many Adventures,*” which allows flexibility in promoting a variety of year-round visitor attractions including scenic beauty, outdoor recreation, cultural and heritage venues and experiences, festivals and events, local food, agritourism, shopping and more. BWCT has also developed a separate “Basecamp Bellingham” advertising campaign focusing on the “human powered” outdoor activities and special events that draw visitors seeking an adventurous immersion in nature, such as hiking, running, mountain biking, road biking, paddling, snowboarding, skiing and multi-sport races. The Basecamp Bellingham campaign was developed in collaboration with the county’s many race directors seeking to promote Bellingham on the national level as a cohesive outdoor recreation destination.

Stakeholders of arts, cultural and historical organizations in Bellingham and Whatcom County have expressed a similar interest in networking with their partners and improving communication and collaboration to increase awareness of and visitation to the numerous cultural and historic venues, festivals and activities in Bellingham and Whatcom County. BWCT has been successful throughout the years in promoting these venues through media relations, utilizing their news releases of upcoming venue openings, exhibits and events to place stories with travel media. BWCT also maintains extensive information about the county’s cultural heritage venues on its website (Bellingham.org), including specific pages for Museums & Galleries, Theaters & Music, Attractions, Annual Events, Agricultural, and an active online Events Calendar searchable by

date, activity and location. Cultural heritage is further promoted in BWCT’s annual printed visitor’s guide, on its social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), in paid advertisements, through brochure distribution at five locations in Whatcom County, and at travel shows throughout the West Coast.

The BWCT Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Marketing Plan includes a diverse strategy focusing on print and digital advertising, media relations, and content creation. Bellingham is in the early stages of a focused outdoor recreation campaign. The marketing driver for BWCT is the Bellingham.org website, with more than one million visitors in 2016. According to BWCT’s 2016 Annual Report, total page views for Bellingham.org increased 33% from 2015 to 2016, and unique pageviews rose 36% in the same period. Insider blogs were very popular, with 178,652 total pageviews in 2016. Top visitors to the site originated, in order, from Bellingham, Seattle, Vancouver B.C., and Surrey B.C. Social media also helped increase awareness and connect with potential and past visitors, with Facebook, Instagram and Twitter all experiencing an increase in likes and/or impressions in 2016. E-mail newsletters and print media (visitors guide, visitor information brochure, downtown map, Mt. Baker Hiking Guide, Mt. Baker Highway brochure, and Chuckanut Drive brochure) were also important products for distribution of information to visitors. BWCT currently promotes cultural heritage activities and events in its marketing materials. While the “Basecamp Bellingham” advertising campaign focuses on outdoor recreation, arts, cultural and heritage tourism activities are also heavily showcased in media relations activities (familiarization tours, press releases, influencer marketing/blogs, etc).

3. SWOT ANALYSIS

The following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) were identified through individual conversations with stakeholders, on-line survey, and during a stakeholder meeting on April 28th. The SWOT analysis was used by the group to provide a baseline from which to build the *Strategic Plan*,



Bellingham's Upfront Theatre is an all-ages cabaret style venue that offers live improv comedy every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night. (Photo courtesy Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism website.)

and to define goals, objectives and desired outcomes.

STRENGTHS

- Whatcom County offers many outdoor recreation opportunities, at all expertise levels
- Mount Baker has world-wide recognition
- Whale watching is unique
- Western Washington University offers cultural activities
- Bellingham and Whatcom County are often promoted in Top 10 lists - Top 10 in country for writers/poets (Village Books always recognized); Top 10 places to retire, etc.
- Bellingham waterfront is slowly being redeveloped, offers opportunity for CHT to be integrated into new infrastructure
- Location between major cities of Seattle and Vancouver, BC.
- Active and interested Tribal communities



The Jansen Art Center in downtown Lynden is a cultural asset that serves residents, visitors and tourists county-wide. (Photo courtesy Zervasgroup.com website.)

3. SWOT ANALYSIS

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of communication, networking and collaboration between CHT stakeholders, and between CHT stakeholders and recreation promoters
- Personnel at many of the county's cultural heritage venues are unaware of the full range of efforts BWCT provides on their behalf, or of the activities of other venues in the community. Currently there is no clear system for these venues to work collaboratively or communicate collectively, and many promote independently of each other, resulting in inefficiencies of time and effort.
- Lack of wayfinding signage and tourist transportation may also negatively impact overall growth in tourism.¹
- Lack of funding to promote tourism - if people knew more, they would do more
- "Not old compared to East Coast" – people are unaware of CHT opportunities in Whatcom County. Is this an opportunity for education and myth busting?
- Lack of capital available to small businesses
- Perception by WWU parents and students that the greater community is not very inclusive - monoculture
- WWU events are perceived by the community as insular, not connected to the general, non-student population
- Lack of interesting retail in downtown Bellingham; long-term vacancies hold it back; difficulty maintaining anchor retail businesses
- Development, demolition of buildings and loss of identity

- The visitor experience varies at cultural heritage venues, ranging from highly developed and visitor-ready to undeveloped potential and limited access

OPPORTUNITIES

- Opportunity to engage with tribal communities – it is a priority for many to identify ways to work together. Local partners seek better understanding of Lummi cultural tourism goals to move a destination-wide cultural heritage tourism strategy forward respectfully.
- Opportunity to expand guided historical tours by Good Time Girls, Whatcom Museum, others
- Western Washington University – opportunity for expanded collaboration, coordination and promotion between student body, their families, and the Downtown and greater Bellingham and Whatcom County areas
- Market to younger generations via responsive design (optimize websites for mobile use, apps, social networks)
- Promote CHT to influx of new residents
- Bundle season cruise package, Amtrak, Airport, Alaska Ferry
- Utilize local farms for farm-to-table experiences and collectively promote local food experiences, extend reach and visitor engagement. Agri-tourism or culinary tourism experiences could help link county assets with Bellingham, Fairhaven, Ferndale and Lynden.
- Capitalize on winery, distillery & beer culture for 21 or older – offer and expand tours
- Enhance appeal of maritime heritage and seafood technology to showcase

¹ Wayfinding will not be covered in this Plan, as BWCT is currently addressing the issue using Roger Brook's July, 2015 Assessment Report (see Appendix).

3. SWOT ANALYSIS

waterfront communities, grow connectivity between land and water

- Create gateway improvements through the county-wide wayfinding project
- Agritourism or culinary tourism may be a potential opportunity to link the county assets with Bellingham, Fairhaven, Ferndale and Lynden experiences to extend reach and visitor engagement.

THREATS

- Better, more distinctive retail is available in other regional destinations
- Increasing competition from a variety of sources for visitor time and money

- Technology, and social media in particular, allow visitors to post 24/7; bad customer service is communicated quickly and broadly
- Border issues and currency fluctuations impact Canadian travel
- Homelessness and vagrancy in downtown Bellingham creates a challenge to sell safety to visitors.
- The lack of a state tourism office diminishes the potential to leverage marketing resources and extend the county's brand. BWCT must work directly with tourism partners to increase international visitation and expand domestic travel.



Peace Arch Park, Blaine. (Photo courtesy Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism website.)

This SWOT Analysis provides the foundation for developing a strategic and realistic plan of action for implementation. Several issues may impact the success or failure of cultural heritage tourism in Bellingham and Whatcom County, and may require consideration by elected officials, stakeholders and government agencies as to how best to mitigate the potential negative impacts.

4. COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

For Bellingham and Whatcom County to grow its cultural heritage tourism audience, it is important to understand its competition.

Cultural heritage tourism has grown exponentially in the past two decades, and so has the competition for these desired tourists. The following statistics illustrate this growth:

- The number of museums almost doubled from 17,500 to 35,144 from the 1990s to 2014.²
- The National Register of Historic Places has 90,540 listings, representing a total of 1.4 million individual contributing resources (including buildings, sites, districts, structures, objects).³
- The United States also has designated 2,532 National Historic Landmarks, 20 World Heritage Sites, 49 national heritage areas, and more than 800 Preserve America communities.
- There are more than 2,000 Main Street communities across the country.

As evidenced by these statistics, the supply of cultural heritage “product” is high. Bellingham and Whatcom County are in the running, and have a number of quality museums; numerous National Register of Historic Places designated buildings, structures, districts, objects and sites; Bellingham is a Preserve America Community; and its downtown is a designated Main Street community.

Destinations large and small, urban and rural, are focusing on asset-based economic development – particularly showcasing cultural, historic, and natural resources – to develop authentic and distinctive activities and attractions to lure tourists and their spending.

With a desire for more authentic experiences, a focus on health and well-being, and distinctive places in which to escape from everyday life, the outlook is positive for destinations that provide a balance of both nature-based and place-based cultural heritage experiences.

Three key markets / audiences that are most appropriate and desired for Bellingham and Whatcom County include:

- **The Cultural Heritage Traveler**
- **The Regional Visitor** (Seattle and Vancouver B.C. markets)
- **The Generational Market** (Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials)

As other destinations are targeting these desired audiences for their visitation and spending, it is important to understand their profile and desires, wants and needs.

The cultural heritage assets, attractions, activities – stewarded by significant stakeholders and leaders throughout the county – offer a unique collection of experiences to distinguish Bellingham and Whatcom County among all its competitors.

² Institute of Museum & Library Services (May 2014) <https://www.imls.gov/news-events/news-releases/government-doubles-official-estimate-there-are-35000-active-museums-us>

³ National Register of Historic Places, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/>

4. COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Target Audience: Cultural Heritage Traveler

Mandala Research, LLC produced the most recent national study on the profile and impact of the cultural heritage traveler in 2013. The report cites that 76% of all leisure travelers – or 129.6 million adults annually – engage in a cultural or heritage activity, spending \$171 billion U.S. *This study supported previous research reports **profiling the cultural heritage traveler as:***

- Older (49 vs. 47)
- More affluent
- Generally have higher education (many with graduate or higher level degrees)
- Likely to be married or with a partner

While Baby Boomers continue to dominate the market, Gen X are rapidly growing as a cultural heritage tourism segment. Multi-generational travel to historic and cultural attractions and events is also on the rise. The *2013 Mandala Research Report* determined these attractive characteristics of the Cultural Heritage Traveler:

- Stay longer, spend more than general U.S. leisure travelers (\$1,319 vs \$820) and are more likely to stay in a hotel, motel or B&B
- Are frequent travelers – taking 3.61 leisure trips in the last three years (compared with 3.4 trips for the general leisure traveler)
- 46% of their total trip activities were spent on activities, dining & shopping
- 72% seek travel experiences where the destination, buildings and surroundings have retained their historical character
- 66% prefer leisure travel that is educational
- 52% spend more money on cultural and heritage activities while on their

vacation/trip, and 49% will pay more for lodging that has a distinctive cultural or heritage component (historic building, local art or decor, architecture, etc.)

- A majority of Cultural Heritage Travelers want to engage with locals and “do” something (immersion and participation rather than be a spectator)

A *2009 Mandala Research Report* revealed the top activities of Cultural Heritage Travelers as:

- Visiting historic sites (66%)
- Participating in historical re-enactments (64%)⁴
- Visiting art museums/galleries (54%)
- Attending an art/craft fair or festival (45%)
- Attending a professional dance performance (44%)
- Visiting state/national parks (41%)
- Shopping in museum stores (32%)
- Exploring urban neighborhoods (30%)

And cultural heritage tourism is not limited to domestic U.S. travelers. International travelers are also interested in U.S. cultural heritage.

According to the *2015 Cultural Heritage*



The historic Pickett House in Bellingham's Old Town.

⁴ This percentage may be higher than normal, due to the timing of the study (events leading up to the Civil War Sesquicentennial)

4. COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Traveler report produced by the National Travel and Tourism Office at the U.S. Department of Commerce, more than 22 million overseas tourists to the U.S. (excluding Canada and Mexico) engage in a cultural heritage activity – or 28% of all international inbound tourists. This represents a 56% increase from 2008 to 2015, with the majority (78%) of these tourists on vacation/holiday.⁵ Like domestic tourists, shopping continues to be the number one activity for international tourists while in the United States. However, they traditionally favor – and participate in – cultural and heritage activities during their holiday here. Specifically:

- 61% visit National Parks/Monuments;
- 50% visit art galleries or museums;
- 46% visit historic locations (more than amusement/theme parks at 33%);
- 40% visit small towns/countryside;
- 32% participate in a guided tour;
- 28% attend concert/play/musical;
- 28% visit cultural/ethnic heritage sites; and
- 9% visit American Indian Communities.⁶

This clustering of preferred cultural heritage activities bodes well for Bellingham/Whatcom County as the destination offers all of these activities in its current visitor-ready wheelhouse.

Target Audience: Regional Markets

The Canadian Travel Activities and Motivations Survey (TAMS) provides some of the most relevant and current market research available for specific tourism segments, including the demographic profile of heritage travelers (US and Canadian). TAMS research profiling

⁵ Preliminary “2015 Sector Report: Cultural Heritage Traveler” provided by National Travel and Tourism Office, International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce (August 2016)

⁶ Preliminary “2015 Sector Report: Cultural Heritage Traveler” provided by National Travel and Tourism Office, International

THE GENERATIONS DEFINED
<u>The Millennial Generation</u> Born: 1981 to 1997 Age of adults in 2016: 19 to 35*
<u>Generation X</u> Born: 1965 to 1980 Age in 2016: 36 to 51
<u>The Baby Boom Generation</u> Born: 1946 to 1964 Age in 2016: 52 to 70
<u>The Silent Generation</u> Born: 1928 to 1945 Age in 2016: 71 to 88
<u>The Greatest Generation</u> Born: Before 1928 Age in 2016: 86 to 101
*No chronological end point has been set for this group. Source: Pew Research Center

pleasure travelers to British Columbia 2007-2009 found a similar profile of the Cultural Heritage Traveler to the Mandala Research LLC studies – educated and affluent – although the Canadian heritage travelers were younger with the largest group between ages of 18 to 34 (31% participated; 29% motivated by historic sites and museums). Those motivated by archeology and interpretive programs were more likely to be age 45-54.⁷

Aboriginal cultural tourism is strong in British Columbia totaling \$42 million in 2011, up from \$20 million in 2006. According to the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia (AtBC),

Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce (August 2016)

⁷ Tourism British Columbia, Heritage Tourism Product Overview, April 2009

4. COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

the average Aboriginal cultural tourism visitor to British Columbia tends to be female, middle-to late-aged, well-educated, and earns an upper-middle income. AtBC reports, “Aboriginal cultural tourism visitors under the age of 50 prefer active experiences such as canoeing, kayaking, dog-sledding and horseback riding, while visitors aged 50+ prefer less vigorous experiences such as hiking, walks, nature observation, and indoor activities.”⁸

Target Audience: Generational Markets

Much has been studied and written about the generations of today. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Millennials surpassed Baby Boomers as the nation’s largest living

generation in early 2017. Each of these demographic markets has specific psychographic and behavioral characteristics. These markets are profiled and analyzed below to help assess their potential for Bellingham and Whatcom County, with a lens on motivations and expectations.

Millennials (Gen Y) in the U.S. now number 75.4 million. This growth is due in part to young immigrants. The Millennial population is projected to peak in 2036 at 81.1 million. By 2050 there will be a projected 79.2 million Millennials.⁹ A few statistics:

- They comprise 24% of the US population;



Small farm operations like the Goat Boat Farm near Wickersham offer locally produced food as well as unique experiences such as Goat Yoga, popular across all generations. (Photo courtesy Jane Talbot.)

⁸ Tourism Sector Profile, Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia (May 2014), p2, [http://www.destinationbc.ca/getattachment/Research/Research-by-Activity/All-Sector-Profiles/Aboriginal-Cultural-Tourism-Sector-](http://www.destinationbc.ca/getattachment/Research/Research-by-Activity/All-Sector-Profiles/Aboriginal-Cultural-Tourism-Sector-Profile,-May-20/Tourism-Sector-Profile_AboriginalCulturalTourism_May2014.pdf.aspx)

[Profile,-May-20/Tourism-Sector-Profile_AboriginalCulturalTourism_May2014.pdf.aspx](http://www.destinationbc.ca/getattachment/Research/Research-by-Activity/All-Sector-Profiles/Aboriginal-Cultural-Tourism-Sector-Profile,-May-20/Tourism-Sector-Profile_AboriginalCulturalTourism_May2014.pdf.aspx)
⁹ Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>

4. COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

- Median income for younger Millennials is \$25,000, while older Millennials make almost double that amount (\$48,000);
- Only 21% are married;
- They are the most educated generation; 23% have a bachelor's degree or higher; 38% are bilingual;
- Most ethnically and racially diverse generation, with 19% being Hispanic, 14% African-American, and 5% Asian
- Two in three Millennials are U.S.-born; 11% are born to at least one immigrant parent;
- Millennials account for one-fifth of same-sex couples; and
- Top 10 markets by concentration for Millennials are primarily in the Western part of the country (Austin, TX; Salt Lake City, UT; San Diego, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Denver, CO; Washington, D.C.; Houston, TX; Las Vegas, NV; San Francisco, CA; and Dallas-Fort Worth, TX).¹⁰

Baby Boomers, defined by the boom in U.S. births following World War II, were the largest generation and peaked at 78.8 million in 1999. They remain an important market, especially for travel, due to their size (74.9 million) and wealth.¹¹ Boomers have the highest concentration of the super-affluent (\$5 to \$25 million in investible assets) and ultra-affluent (more than \$25 million) of any generation.¹² This market is exploration hungry, interested in culture, wants the real destination (not commercial tourism product), loves nature, is driven by food and cuisine, and seeks activity.¹³ Baby Boomers spend \$157 billion on trips each

year and many polls rank travel as this market's #1 leisure activity.¹⁴ Boomers are active travelers, taking an average of four to five trips per year. More than half (55%) of Boomers will travel only within the U.S.; 91% have vacation time available, and 51% will use all of it. Profile of the U.S. Baby Boomer is:

- 20% of the population;
- Controls 80% of the disposable income;
- Wants choice and flexibility in their lives;
- Motivated by self-esteem, personal satisfaction, commitment to cause, making a difference, volunteering and giving back to community, health and longevity, and their legacy;¹⁵
- Top 5 markets for Baby Boomers are Portland-Auburn, ME; Burlington, VT; Albany, NY; Hartford & New Haven, CT; and Pittsburgh, PA;¹⁶
- Top motivations for personal travel are: to get away from normal, everyday life (57%); to spend time with family and friends (55%); and to relax and rejuvenate (54%); and
- Popular domestic trip types include multi-generational, summer vacations, and weekend getaways.

Generation X is the "middle child" of generations, caught between two larger generations of the Millennials and the Baby Boomers, Gen X is also known as the "Baby Bust" generation. Profile of the Gen X is as follows:

- 55 million members of Generation X constitute 17% of all adults;

¹⁰ Neilsen, <http://www.marketingcharts.com/traditional/demographic-stats-about-us-millennials-40016/>

¹¹ Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>

¹² Goldberg, B. *The Truth About How Different Generations Travel*, Virtuoso Luxury Traveler (May 2015)

http://blog.virtuoso.com/traveler_trends/the-truth-about-how-different-generations-travel/

¹³ <http://www.statista.com/statistics/318071/profile-of-baby-boomer-travelers-in-the-us/>

¹⁴ Gerber, S. Next Avenue Living & Learning channel, *The Hottest Trends in Boomer Travel* (August 2013)

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2013/08/01/the-hottest-trends-in-boomer-travel/#3316f10b2cd4>

¹⁵ <http://boomerbaggage.com/profile-baby-boomers/>

¹⁶ <http://www.marketingcharts.com/demographics-and-audiences-40016>

4. COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS



Bellingham and Whatcom County have a growing craft beer culture that draws visitors of all ages and interests throughout the year. (Photos courtesy Asian Brewing Company, Boundary Bay Brewery & Bistro, and Wander Brewing, respectively.)

- 62% are non-Hispanic White; 12% are non-Hispanic Black; 6% are non-Hispanic Asian; 18% are Hispanic (any race); and 2% are all other races;
- 50% male, 50% female;
- Are projected to pass the Boomers in population by 2028;
- 36% of upscale members (about 2 million) have a household income of more than \$250,000 annually; and
- Motivated by their desire to take care of their families, take care of themselves, and play it safe (worried about crime and climate change, stressed about retirement).¹⁷

Non-travel threats to leisure time

The competition for leisure time spending is intense. According to the American Time Use Survey (2015) by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly everyone age 15 and over (96%) engaged in some sort of leisure activity; the top three are watching TV (2.8 hours day), socializing (51 minutes), or participating in sports, exercise and recreation (29 minutes).¹⁸ The shift to use of electronics as leisure activities is highlighted in Nielsen’s Total Audience Report where “Americans aged 18 and older spend more than 11 hours a day watching TV, listening to the radio or using smartphones and other electronic devices.”¹⁹

Bellingham/Whatcom County Destination Competitors

Destination	Population City/County	Tourism Budget	Tourism Jobs	Economic Impact from Tourism
Bellingham/Whatcom County, WA	85,000/216,000	\$1 million	6,800	\$588 million
Asheville/Buncombe County, NC	89,121/250,539	\$8.8 million	26,700	\$1.9 billion
Bend/Deschutes County, OR	84,000/175,268	\$3.26 million	8,480	\$535 million
San Juan Islands/Island County, WA	694/16,339	\$758,000	1,580	\$203 million
Yakima Valley, WA	246,636	\$2.82 million	3,530	\$359 million

¹⁷ Gen X Profile, <https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/mmi/publications/Profiles/mmi-gen-x-demographic-profile.pdf>

¹⁸ “American Time Use Survey – 2015 Results”, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/atus.pdf>

¹⁹ Nielsen’s Total Audience Report, Americans Use Electronic Media 11+ Hours a Day (Q4 2014), <https://www.statista.com/chart/1971/electronic-media-use/>

4. COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

DESTINATION COMPETITORS

Competition may be viewed in different ways. Regionally, destinations in Washington State and British Columbia provide options for key target markets (especially Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. residents) to explore within a 150-mile radius. For the Seattle and Vancouver B.C. tourist, the plethora of year-round, world-class cultural heritage activities is impressive. Local residents may choose to attend one of these metropolitan city's festivals, special museum exhibitions or immersion experiences (art class, culinary demonstration, etc.). Furthermore, the resident may engage visiting friends and relatives in local activities in their respective cities rather than journeying out to regional destinations. The desired quality and quantity of available experiences is necessary to entice this urban market.

Other destinations may offer a similar experience to Bellingham and Whatcom County via a clustering of natural assets for world-class recreation, distinctive dining and lodging with cultural heritage activities. Four destinations – Asheville, North Carolina; Bend, Oregon; San Juan Islands and Yakima Valley, Washington – were identified as places having a similar profile to Bellingham and Whatcom County or attract the desired audiences for cultural heritage experiences. These destinations are profiled in this section, with particular attention to the development and marketing of cultural heritage assets, activities, attractions and experiences.

Asheville, North Carolina features layers of lush mountains that abound with adventure, profound cultural roots from literary giants to American royalty, and inspired locals whose passion projects jump from pop-up kitchens to performance art. Asheville has been a point of pilgrimage since the 1800s as a destination for inspiration, rejuvenation and self-expression. No wonder George W. Vanderbilt chose this

Blue Ridge city for his greatest legacy, **Biltmore**. And perhaps why *Lonely Planet* named Asheville as the #1 destination in 2017, just one of many accolades for this hip mountain town.

Bend, Oregon: Six hours southeast of Bellingham, or a short 55-minute flight from Seattle, the community of Bend, Oregon serves as the gateway to the Umpqua National Forest and the Warm Springs Reservation. With a relatively young population (average age of 37.3 years) of 84,000, Bend offers several world-class attractions including the Mount Bachelor ski area; Deschutes National Forest (with hiking, forest, cave, wildlife, and camping); Lava Butte (volcano and hiking); Tumalo State Park, La Pine State Park, Pilot Butte, Farewell Bend State Park, and Dillon Falls; and several manmade parks. The High Desert Museum educates visitors about the region through natural and cultural history exhibits. Art in the High District (juried show), the historic Tower Theatre, Les Schwab Amphitheatre, public art program, and Jazz at the Oxford Hotel are just some of the cultural and historic attractions in the community. Bend hosts three million visitors annually,²⁰ with 63% of the visitors living outside Oregon and 14.7% of summer visitors from Washington State. Travel and tourism is responsible for 8,480 jobs in Deschutes County.²¹ Lodging occupancy rates ranged from 88.8% (peak) in July 2016 to 54.5% (low) in January 2017.²² In FY16, Transient Room Tax (TRT) generated \$7.6 million for the city; in FY14 and 15, the TRT generated \$6.3 million in local tax.²³

San Juan Islands, Washington: The Business Association of San Juan County, doing business as San Juan Islands Visitors Bureau (SJIVB), was formed in 1999 as a private, nonprofit, volunteer destination marketing organization. The SJIVB has served as San Juan County's, and the Town of Friday Harbor's, official, locally-

²⁰ Source: RRC

²¹ Source: Dean Runyon

²² <http://www.visitbend.com/2017.4.21-Bend-Oregon-Occupancy-Report.pdf>

²³ Bend Oregon FY 2017 Business Plan,

<http://www.visitbend.com/About-Us/Business-plan/>

4. COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

staffed destination marketing organization (DMO) since 2003. The organization’s mission is to enhance the economic prosperity of San Juan County by promoting the San Juan Islands as a preferred, year-round travel destination, while respecting and sustaining the Islands’ unique and diverse ecosystems, environments, lifestyles and cultures. The organization currently has 292 members, is managed by a 15-member board of Directors, and five staff. The Brand Positioning Statement is “For Adults 25-64, the SJIVB helps me imagine and plan a getaway for me and my family and friends that will reconnect us to a quality of life where there’s breathtaking beauty, rich activities, and wonder and discovery encased in a soothing, rural, small-town atmosphere where life feels a little slower paced and a little safer.”

Yakima Valley, Washington: The Yakima Valley is a collective of charming communities located within Central Washington. Boasting four seasons and over 300 days of annual sunshine, the Yakima Valley is an agricultural and multi-recreational area. The geography consists of various types of terrain including dense forests, stark desert landscapes, vineyards, hop and produce fields, orchards, rolling hills, scenic vistas which include Mt. Rainier and Mt. Adams and multiple water formations. Numerous historic towns, vintage electric trolleys and scenic wonders are within the Yakima Valley’s countryside.

Detailed profiles of these destinations are provided in **Appendix A: Competitive Analysis**.

Cultural Heritage Overview of Competitors		
Destination	National Register of Historic Places Listings	Accredited Museum (AAM)
Bellingham WA / Whatcom County	46 city/ 74 county	Whatcom Museum
Asheville, NC / Buncombe County	90 city/116 county	Asheville Art Museum
Bend, OR / Deschutes County	29 city/ 38 county	High Desert Museum
San Juan Islands, WA / San Juan County	44 on 20 islands	0
Yakima Valley, WA / Yakima County	106 in county	Yakima Valley Museum

5. GOALS, STRATEGIES & OUTCOMES

5. GOALS, STRATEGIES & OUTCOMES

The major goals of the *Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategic Plan* are to bring the county's cultural heritage organizations and major stakeholders (such as government and hotel tourism industry) together to enhance coordination, collaboration, and communication; improve programming and services; and to market collaboratively for success.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group identified goals and strategies to showcase its cultural heritage strengths Bellingham and Whatcom County, take advantage of opportunities, minimize threats and overcome weaknesses. Focusing on an external and sustainable approach to cultural heritage tourism ensures that Bellingham and Whatcom County are defining and implementing strategies that will be of interest to and desired by tourists, of financial benefit to the county, important for business and resource managers/organizations, and will add value to residents' quality of life.

To guide the development and implementation of this *Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategic Plan* in Bellingham and Whatcom County, the Planning Committee and Stakeholder Advisory Group established the following goals and strategies. These goals stem from three specific areas of emphasis: 1) Partnerships & Collaborations; 2) Product Development & Enhancement; and 3) Marketing. Specific strategies have been identified to accomplish each goal. Additional management and measurement instruction is provided in **Section 7**.

This *Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategic Plan* has a five-year horizon; the accompanying **Action Plan** is for year one and designed to jumpstart the initiatives set forth in this Strategic Plan. The following goals and strategies set forth a proposed course of action to implement in context with other initiatives, thereby ensuring a holistic and integrated

approach to planning, execution and evaluation. Demonstrating the value of cultural heritage, especially in relation to recreation, is important to sustainable tourism development and marketing; it also becomes important when vying for funding or other resources.

For purposes of this Plan, the following definitions apply:

- A **GOAL** is a desired result or possible outcome that a person or a system envisions, plans and commits to achieve, within a finite time or deadlines.
- A **STRATEGY** is a method of process chosen to bring about a desired future, such as achievement of a goal or solution to a problem.
- An **ACTION PLAN** identifies the steps - or actions - needed to accomplish or achieve a goal.

Cultural Heritage Tourism Vision

We are a collaborative, communicative and creative consortium of cultural heritage tourism stakeholders that promote visitation, prolonged stays, and present a unified voice for Bellingham and Whatcom County to foster quality stewardship of local cultural heritage assets, stimulate economic prosperity for local businesses, and enhance resident's quality of life.

Cultural Heritage Tourism Mission

To enhance the economic and social prosperity of Bellingham and Whatcom County by promoting and delivering quality cultural heritage experiences to tourists, while respecting and protecting the county's unique and diverse ecosystems, environments, history, lifestyles and cultures.

5. GOALS, STRATEGIES & OUTCOMES

GOAL 1. Partnership & Collaboration

Leveraging cultural heritage assets and resources is paramount to advancing the quality and availability of desired experiences in Bellingham and Whatcom County. Defining strategies to collaborate and cross-market, partner and promote allows individual attractions and organizations to reach broader audiences and increase visitation. Ideally, these partnerships also net a positive return on investment as resources are extended through multiple channels and more cost-effective strategies to attract target audiences and visitor spending.

Creative partnerships can expand beyond marketing into resource sharing for staffing, retail, exhibitions, curation, and funding. Identifying ways to strengthen cultural and heritage institutions make for healthier partnerships and more sustainable year-round operations. This foundation is paramount to building and providing “evergreen” (consistent, non-seasonal) experiences for tourists and residents alike. The development of a cultural heritage inventory, the creation of the Advisory Group, and the involvement of tourism industry leaders (hoteliers, marketers) allow for a sound foundation to create partnerships and cultivate new alliances with both public and private entities.

PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION GOALS

- 1.1 Improve collaboration and communication among all cultural heritage tourism stakeholders.
- 1.2 Strengthen partnerships among all cultural, history, and historic preservation stakeholder organizations and government agencies to foster greater public access, quality experiences, increased visitation, and stewardship.
- 1.3 Foster engagement with both the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe to identify respectful and appropriate opportunities for cultural heritage tourism and education.
- 1.4 Engage college students to enhance connectivity between educational institutions (WWU, Northwest Indian College, WCC, BTC, etc.) and local communities, businesses, attractions and lodging to build more integrated experiences for tourists and students.
- 1.5 Encourage collaborations between Main Street (downtown revitalization) and community economic development organizations to organize and promote cultural heritage events, activities, and programs for tourists year-round.

Partnership & Collaboration Strategies		Short-Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
1.a	Create a Cultural Heritage Tourism Steering Committee through BWCT to advise on implementation of the Strategic Plan and Action Plan	X		
1.b	Organize regularly scheduled forum for information exchange among cultural heritage tourism stakeholders (ex: committee, list serve, newsletter, Facebook group, or combined offerings)	X		
1.c	Expand collaboration beyond original stakeholder group to include all cultural heritage providers county-wide (based on visitor-ready criteria)	X		
1.d	Update and maintain CHT Asset inventory and evaluate “visitor ready” standards (compliance)	X	X	X
1.e	Host forums to educate stakeholders, elected officials, tourism leaders and front-line tourism personnel on value of cultural heritage tourism to county, and showcase available cultural heritage experiences (local familiarization tour)		X	
1.f	With Lummi and Nooksack guidance and approval, identify appropriate ways to educate visitors about Native American culture and heritage (traditions, story poles, fishing, events, etc.)		X	

5. GOALS, STRATEGIES & OUTCOMES

GOAL 2. Experience Development & Enhancement

Destinations seeking to expand visitation through cultural heritage tourism must have desired cultural heritage tourism experiences to offer, either as a motivation for travel or as a complement to existing activities. Bellingham and Whatcom County offer world-class recreation and nature-based activities. Providing additional evening, “rainy day” (or inclement weather) and off-peak activities expands the offerings available to visitors.

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT & ENHANCEMENT GOALS

- 2.1 Encourage providers to expand existing or create new cultural heritage tourism experience (product or programs) to increase non peak-season visitation and spending in Whatcom County.
- 2.2 Develop county-wide interpretive products to share the history and culture of Whatcom County’s peoples, industry, and place.
- 2.3 Work with partners to preserve, protect and enhance historic and cultural sites through sustainable policies, stewardship programs, and increased funding.

Experience Development & Enhancement Strategies		Short-Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
2.a	Educate all CHT providers about all Tourism Promotion Grant funding opportunities.	X		
2.b	Engage with City and County Parks’ Departments to help build capacity, develop targeted programs, etc.	X		
2.c	Integrate cultural heritage components into redeveloped and/or new infrastructure (wayfinding, signage, gateways, parking, beautification, aesthetics) to enhance Bellingham/Whatcom County’s “sense of place.”	X	X	X
2.d	Establish a county-wide “Cultural Heritage Trail” with map and descriptions of various locations.		X	
2.e	Engage students of colleges and universities (BTC, WCC, WUU) to promote events & experiences to their visiting families.		X	
2.f	Expand retail promotions and evening cultural heritage entertainment options to increase overnight visitation.		X	
2.g	Develop county-wide maritime history interpretation products to connect waterfront cities of Bellingham, Blaine, Birch Bay and Semiahmoo and increase visitation.			X
2.h	Establish a “Culture Shuttle” to move visitors around the county (from hotels, to downtown Bellingham, to Fairhaven, to Lynden, etc.).			X
2.i	Develop shared loyalty program/ “Cultural Heritage” passport with stamps (or incentives) to visit.			X
2.j	Create cultural heritage itineraries (thematic and time-based) for specific target audiences (Millennials, Regional/Seattle-Vancouver, Recreation- based travelers).			X

5. GOALS, STRATEGIES & OUTCOMES

GOAL 3. Marketing

The BWCT marketing brand and its travel promise to visitors is heavily weighted on the rich and diverse outdoor recreation experiences and world-class natural assets and related events available via boating, skiing, hiking, and other sporting activities. BWCT oversees the growth and sustainability of the industry, and markets via an integrated promotional campaign utilizing digital and social media, advertising, collateral material and public/media relations.

Some cultural heritage attractions and events in Bellingham and Whatcom County conduct their own marketing, and many utilize Tourism Promotion Grants to boost their marketing efforts. Larger cultural heritage venues, such as the Whatcom Museum and the Mt. Baker Theatre, have marketing staff to increase awareness and sales. Leveraging the collective marketing of cultural heritage institutions with BWCT can be a successful strategy to increase awareness, boost attendance and generate revenue from visitors. Similarly, partnering with

MARKETING GOALS

- 3.1. Establish unified messaging and marketing platform to respectfully promote Whatcom County’s cultural heritage experiences.
- 3.2 Cross-market cultural heritage activities and attractions with other like venues (i.e. museums promote visitation to each other) to encourage multi-site visitation throughout the county.
- 3.3 Cross-market cultural heritage activities with recreational-based experiences to encourage tourists to stay longer in Whatcom County.

hotels can stimulate opportunities to attract more overnight guests. The potential to grow cultural heritage tourism is desired as a viable way to increase visitation and tourist spending, especially to convert day visitors to overnight tourists, along with expanding the potential to attract tourists in shoulder and off-season periods.

Marketing Strategies		Short-Term	Mid-Term	Long-Term
3.a	Include all cultural heritage attractions, activities and events on relevant city, county, and government agency’s marketing platforms.	X		
3.b	Encourage cultural heritage organizations and attractions to utilize and link to Bellingham/Whatcom County Tourism marketing platforms.	X		
3.c	Create and advertise packages between existing venues, events, hotels, etc. to promote specific cultural heritage tourism experiences, especially in the off-season.	X		
3.d	Engage students, tourists and the general public to create Youtube videos about their positive cultural heritage tourism experiences in Bellingham and Whatcom County.			X
3.e	Create recommendation lists for visitors (i.e. “If you enjoyed this, then visit XYZ”) to help cross-market attractions and activities around the county.			X
3.f	Host media familiarization tours to showcase cultural heritage assets and experiences in tandem with culinary and nature-based activities.			X

6. MANAGEMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

6. MANAGEMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

All plans need a home, an entity responsible for providing the oversight (and often resources) to implement the goals and strategies to help realize the vision. BWCT has agreed to serve as the “keeper of the plan” and facilitate the implementation process. This ownership ensures that cultural heritage tourism can be integrated into broader tourism strategies, utilize existing marketing and funding programs to leverage resources, and provide the staff and talent required to keep efforts moving forward. Specifically, BWCT will:

- Advise cultural heritage organizations on marketing opportunities;
- Connect cultural heritage representatives with lodging and recreation industry; and
- Through market research, identify needs and desires of current and potential tourists that relate specifically to the destination’s quest to grow cultural heritage tourism.

To be successful, this *Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategic Plan* requires many partners – both public and private – to accomplish the outlined tasks. Therefore, BWCT will enlist the support of multiple stakeholders to realize the partnership / collaboration goals and also accomplish the development and marketing goals.

Leadership

Critical to the successful implementation of any plan is leadership and management. As many stakeholders have been identified to have roles in developing, marketing, managing, hosting and funding of cultural heritage tourism, the assignment of oversight responsibilities is necessary to keep projects on track toward measurable results.

The Advisory Stakeholder Group tapped for this planning process recognize the need for continued oversight, and therefore formation of

a **Cultural Heritage Tourism (CHT) Team** is recommended to advise on prioritization of activities and specific implementation of the plan. The CHT Team should be comprised of 15-18 representatives of the cultural heritage tourism community including every assessment category:

- Arts
 - Performing Arts
 - Visual Arts
 - Education/Maker Arts
 - Culinary Arts
- Culture
 - Cultural sites
 - Cultural centers
 - Cultural events
- Heritage
 - Historic sites
 - Historic activities (tours)
 - Historic events

In addition, the CHT Team should include representation from throughout the county, and can include historical societies, arts organizations, downtown development authorities and/or Main Street organizations to provide geographic perspective. Tourism industry representation and wayfinding steering committee may also want to participate as members of this CHT Team, to gain/give knowledge and perspective, and forge relationships with the cultural heritage community. Additional representation by the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County is required, as funding and other resources, policies and support services are part of their jurisdiction. Rotating terms of Team members will allow for greater input. Team members will be asked to confirm participation in a minimum of three of four meetings annually. Quarterly meetings of the CHT Team allow members to focus on prior accomplishments and advise on upcoming activities. As needed, the CHT Team will be tapped to review or participate in other commitments, events or activities required for implementation.

6. MANAGEMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

BWCT and the CHT Team will need to communicate with and engage existing organizations, agencies or commissions that impact or influence growth in cultural heritage tourism. Therefore, the following and any other relevant entities should be recognized and communicated with to ensure pro-active participation:

- The City of Bellingham Historic Preservation, Arts and Tourism Commissions. (The roles and responsibilities of these organizations are summarized in **Appendix B**);
- Similar agencies and commissions in other Whatcom County cities such as the Blaine Tourism Advisory Committee, Lynden Tourism Advisory Committee, Ferndale Tourism Advisory Committee, and the Whatcom County Tourism Advisory Committee.

Additional private sector, non-government entities such as Chambers of Commerce, Development Authorities, Main Street and Downtown Merchant Associations – can also play a vital role in the conversations and implementation phase for cultural heritage tourism development, marketing, management and measurement.

Cultural Heritage Stakeholder Engagement

BWCT will tap individual or collective cultural heritage tourism stakeholders for specific projects or activities. As appropriate, special focused meetings or forums will be held to action specific tasks or to confer on processes to achieve desired results. Individual stakeholders are also encouraged and empowered to initiate projects or programs – solely or with partners – to further the mission and vision for cultural heritage tourism. These activities should be communicated to BWCT for wide-spread endorsement and promotion as appropriate.

Collaboration in the form of mentorship, idea sharing, and also planning complementary

events or programs, is encouraged among cultural heritage institutions and organizations. Helping sites meet or retain visitor readiness criteria, create new programs to increase visitation, or cross-market events and exhibitions are key ways for cultural heritage institutions to collaborate.

Communication

Clear, concise and consistent communication is required when engaging different groups of stakeholders. Minimizing jargon, defining collaborative strategies that result in unified outcomes will help build trust and engagement.

- Consistent communication among the cultural heritage community with tourism officials is essential.
- Engagement and identification of ways to work together with tribal communities is a priority.
- Demonstrating the value of cultural heritage, especially in relation to recreation, is important to sustainable tourism development and marketing.

BWCT will be responsible for maintaining contact lists for all stakeholders, leadership entities, and other key partners as the distribution for a pro-active communications plan for cultural heritage tourism. This plan may include various formats for communicating regular updates, actions, requests, activities or events: email, listserv, private social media groups, public meetings, committees, or newsletters. BWCT will determine the frequency and format for communicating internally with stakeholders and significant partners (leadership, government) based on the prioritization of activities for year one.

Setting Priorities

As ideas are generated, criteria helps stakeholders and planners identify the projects that have the best chance for success. This values-based criteria, defined as a **Strategy Screen**, was discussed at the July 27

6. MANAGEMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

Stakeholder Meeting and further refined in an August stakeholder survey.

The Strategy Screen helps guide strategic decisions using the following criteria:



Budget

Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism plans to provide the necessary human and financial resources for oversight and implementation of this plan. If funds are available (through grants or Tourism Commission appropriation), BWCT will provide the necessary (financial, contracted) resources to create and manage the specific activities and evaluation required to demonstrate a positive impact/growth of cultural heritage tourism in Bellingham and Whatcom County. Additional government agencies and individual organizations may be called upon to provide in-kind services to produce the projects outlined in this plan.

Short-term, long-term sustainability

The United Nation's International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (2017)

defines “sustainable” in environmental, economic, social and cultural terms. For Bellingham and Whatcom County, sustainability must focus on the ability of individual organizations, government agencies, Tribes, and residents working together to retain authentic “sense of place” and distinctive cultural identity. For cultural heritage tourism, sustainability also includes demonstrating how the past is relevant to the present along with good stewardship of both physical and human resources. Sustainable cultural heritage tourism depends on sound capacity-based practices and policies that ensure adequate and appropriate preservation and protection, respectful promotion, and quality delivery of authentic products and services that result in a benefit for the resident, the resource and the tourist.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation developed five principles to serve as a guide for sustainable cultural heritage tourism development, marketing, management and measurement:

- 1) Collaborate – identify partners that can help meet the goals
- 2) Find What Fits – determine realistic types of cultural heritage tourism the community needs and can provide support for
- 3) Enliven Site Interpretation – find ways to engage the visitors’ five senses (hearing, seeing, reading, doing, tasting)
- 4) Focus on Authenticity and Quality – define what is unique and do it well
- 5) Preserve and Protect Resources – buildings, special places, landscapes, and qualities that attract visitors and residents alike.

Parallel to the criteria outlined in the Strategy Screen, these principles help guide prioritization of activities that provide quality experiences and help realize the cultural heritage tourism vision for Bellingham/Whatcom County.

7. MEASUREMENT BENCHMARKS FOR SUCCESS

Without measurement, Bellingham and Whatcom County cannot determine the impact – positive or negative – of cultural heritage tourism on the destination. The goals define specific outcomes and benchmarks for success:

- Cultural, heritage, cultural & heritage – identity for branding
- Enhanced sense of place
- Increased economic impact
- Increased visitation
- Increased community value, pride, benefit

The most valued criteria in the Strategy Screen (favored by more than 80% of the Advisory Stakeholder Group) is a measurable impact.

Therefore, every project, product, service or promotion needs to have a mechanism in place for measuring impact. A baseline for future comparison is paramount to measuring impact, and must be established at the start of each initiative. A system for collecting the necessary data to define the desired impact must be included in the implementation phase – before the project begins, as it is much harder to define impact after the fact.

BWCT, as lead organization for this cultural heritage tourism plan, can provide instruction on how measurement can be conducted (especially in tandem with existing tourism research). Local universities and colleges may provide guidance or technical assistance in defining systems to conduct qualitative or quantitative research to help measure impact. Each stakeholder or partner will also provide input on their ability to conduct on-site research for analysis, and commitment to measuring impact of cultural heritage tourism. Visitor-ready sites, activities and events will assist with county-wide research efforts to measure impacts of cultural heritage tourism. At minimum, the following annual measurement strategies are required to ensure progress to realize the cultural heritage tourism vision.

Annual Measurement Strategies:

1. Research to determine economic impact of tourism.
2. Work with CHT Team to develop a visitor satisfaction survey administered by cultural heritage attractions, events and activities.
3. Review of visitor readiness at all cultural heritage attractions, events, activities.
4. Impact analysis of any special cultural heritage tourism project, promotion conducted in the past 12 months.

