



CANTON

OBSERVATION STRUCTURE

Canton Tourism Commission
2014 to 2017

Canton Tourism Commission 2014 to 2017

Tourism Commission Mission

To develop and position the City of Canton Missouri as a destination that attracts people to our community in a way that adds economic value, is respectful of our resources and supports our natural environment.



Personal Comment -

While the mission of the tourism effort is the same as when the 2011 – 2013 master plan was written, many things have changed. My sense is that the community is supporting and becoming actively involved in the work of the Commission. There have been requests for additional signage, an American flag, restroom facilities on the river front and an improved rail road crossing to allow for a baby stroller to be pushed easily over the intersection and even a pelican fountain has been mentioned. There are occasional complaints about this and that – which personally I look at as a message that citizens are starting to care about the area. It should be pointed out that the buildings recently cleaned up on the riverfront by the IDA paved the way for the current developments to be more successful than they would have been in the middle of four dilapidated buildings with stored hazardous materials.

The statute that created the Commission allows for five voting members. Fortunately, the reality is that there is a larger group of interested people working on the tourism effort who are willing to spend their time and talents to move this effort forward. There has always been more work than five volunteers could manage. People move in and out of the “official” group. Also the “official group” has listened to the others. For instance, the Observation Deck would not have happened without the professional eye of Joe Clark. Joe was not an official member of the Commission but the Commission would not have moved forward on the project without a nod from Joe. Robin Jarvis and Charlie Walters have rotated off the Commission but will hopefully still work on tourism projects and may someday rotate back on again as voting members – no one does the interviews with the media better than Robin and everyone has great respect of Charlie’s advice. Dr. Joe Coelho is now joining the Commission but has come to our meetings for years, has been our rock on Eagle Days and will give us a chance to make the Ecotourism focus a reality.

This is one way of looking at our direction – “at first we built attractions, now we need to market what we have”. Marketing is tricky with limited resources. Our objective will be to identify no and low cost marketing approaches that have measurable results. Easy to say and hard to do. We also have to work with the City of Canton and the Mainstreet effort to upgrade the general look and feel of the Canton Downtown area. At this point I am optimistic about our direction and there is an open invitation for anyone to join us in our work.

Jim Upchurch
July 2014

Tourism Commission Objectives

1. To develop sustainable ecotourism attractions in the Canton, Missouri area that are easily accessible, educational and economically beneficial to the community.
 - a) To promote Canton as a destination for Audubon related activities.
 - b) To support environmental educational opportunities in the local public schools and colleges.
 - c) To develop a national reputation for being an interesting and friendly place to enjoy the river and the surrounding area.
 - d) To advocate for projects that reflect our commitment to being good stewards of all our resources.

2. To improve the signage and other information available to help tourists find the interesting internal features of Canton.
 - a) Welcome to Canton signs
 - b) Internal Informational Signs – around town
 - c) Web site maps
 - d) Brochures and flyers
 - e) Establish a group of ambassadors that can meet people interested in Canton, give directions and answer questions.

3. To improve the awareness of those from outside of Canton and encourage them to come and visit our community.
 - a) Market to the tri-state area.
 - b) Provide “First Contact” training for those who are likely to come into early contact with our tourists.
 - c) Develop and implement a budget for marketing.

Tourism Commission Members

The five member tourism commission includes the following citizens of Canton.

Jim Upchurch, Chairperson,

Crystal Bell, Member

Tina Uhlmeyer, Member

Sandy Trudell, Member

Joe Coelho, Member

Dan Steinbeck, City Council Liaison



Tourism Commission Principles

- A. The commission's projects must be manageable by available number of volunteers.

- B. Our formula is for every one hour a person travels there needs to be at least two hours of activities.

- C. Events must have realistic, attainable, and measurable objectives and be timely and sustainable.

Progress Against Previous Planned Projects – July 2014

- A. The Wetlands Educational Trail (WET) – A rock trail that includes three bridges was put around the wetlands pond bridges. The WET is actively used by the local public school as an environmental lab and demonstration area for the science and agriculture departments have used the area to support lessons for the high school students. The public use trail is also used for walking and for riding mountain bikes. Improvements are being planned.
- B. Levee Walk – The tourism commission working with MODOT has installed a 2,000 foot concrete levee walk on a portion of the levee between River View Park and the Southern Rail Road gate. The walk way includes seven metal benches, an observation area, and an informational kiosk. Stairs on the North end of the walk go down to a Missouri Department of Conservation area know as the “Canton ferry access” which features a boat ramp and courtesy dock to the Mississippi River. An ADA compliant trailhead is located at the east end of Lewis Street. It features a concrete parking lot and ramp allowing easy access to the Levee Walk. The commission used a MODOT grant and paid for 20% of the project with MODOT paying the remaining 80%. The parking lot was completely paid for by the Tourism Commission. The walk is heavily used and the project is considered complete.
- C. Observation Deck – Using a base that was part of the 1930’s Canton water plant, a structure was built that allows people to walk up a flight of stairs and view the river, river traffic and migrating birds. The structure has a interesting roof structure what was designed by Kim Mulch, an architect from Klingner and Associates in Quincy, Il. Feed back by users has been very encouraging and the deck is seeing frequent use by local and visitors to the area. The project is considered complete.
- D. Signage – Directional signs have been designed and the Tourism Commission and the Board of Alderman have approved the design, cost and location. The signs are expected to be in place by late summer or early fall. Work on internal signage will continue during the 2014 – 2017 period.

Status of Previous Planned Projects – July 2014

- A. Environmental Improvement - Wetlands Recovery & Conservation Easements – The recovery planning was an over-reach for our early planning years but it is the intention of the commission to re-visit this project and slowly work in this direction. It is still a worthy goal.
- B. Pelican Sand Bar Blind – The concept of photography/observation blinds was sent back for planning as it became obvious that a blind on the river would need to be portable when the river rises, as it often does in late spring or early summer. The group is going to keep this thought alive but is considering placing photography/observation blinds in the Wetlands Educational Trail (WET) area. Additional sites on the inside of the levee may be possible.
- C. Island and River Tours – This is an idea that depends on outside businesses to develop this type of business. We will continue to attempt to partner with private companies to make this happen.

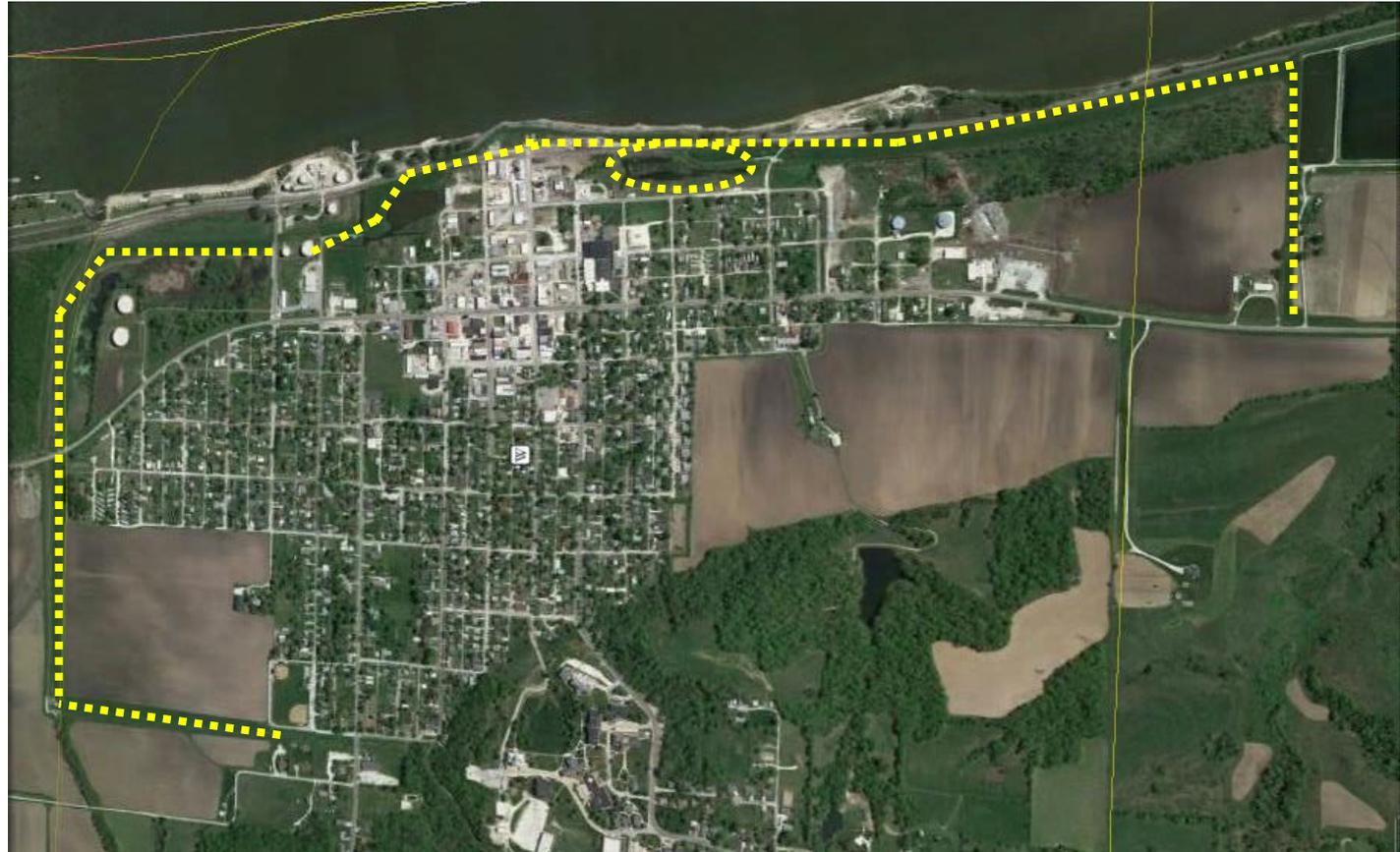
Explore the possibility of using the levee for additional recreational purposes – 2015 - 2016

Canton is protected by a three mile levee system. Currently some 2,000 feet of the levee has a concrete side walk that is used and enjoyed by local residents and visitors alike to walk along the river. The project is well engineered and approved by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Realistically, we don't expect there will be funding to extend the levee walk using the same type of structure but we will do a study to see what other stretches might have a realistic use for recreation. The levee has two railroad gates and a number of street and highway intersections. Practical access to the complete system may or may not be feasible.

Action:

1. Discover what other areas are doing with their levee systems for recreational use.
2. Develop a concept plan.
3. Discuss the plan with the USACE for their reaction.
4. Get approval of the City Council.
5. Partnership if possible with MODOT.

Estimated Costs: \$



Restoration of the Canton Rail Road Station – 2014 to 2017

The Canton Depot is owned by the Lewis County Industrial Development Authority (LCIDA), Bill Smith is currently the Executive Director of that group. The \$2MDollar Stimulus Grant received from Governor Nixon allowed the IDA, as part of their project, to moth ball the existing Canton Depot according to Federal Standards including the cleaning up a small amount of asbestos that was in the building. A depot project needs to be 100% sustainable. Without a revenue generating entity involved to provide funds for maintenance and utilities, a restored depot without a source of income will become a huge burden. The LCIDA is in agreement with that approach.

Action:

1. Partner with the IDA
2. Identify a qualified sustainable retail business who is interested in the building and the opportunity
3. Develop financing options.
4. Restore the structure.
5. Install and promote the new business.

Estimated Costs: \$

The general strategy will be to place a retail business into the building. The business owner will need to see potential in Canton and have a plan to use the building in a way that is profitable to the business and maintain a focus on the river's natural and cultural heritage. It make take a while to find a good fit.

The current Canton Depot is the second railroad station on the site. The original depot building was moved west and became a fish market. The second station was built in 1913 and opened on Monday, September 8th of that year. The new depot was erected at a cost of \$14,000. It was thought to be "not such a large building but will be ample to accommodate the passenger traffic of this city for several years to come, no matter how fast we grow."



Tourism Related Events – 2014 to 2017

The Missouri Department of Tourism gave the Canton Tourism Commission a caution about small communities trying to hold one or two day events. Their concern was that they are not sustainable. They often use a huge amount of local people power for many months in advance for one or two good days a year and people are often burned out and have to be continuously replaced as there is an attempt to do the event on a yearly basis. However if we can host events that are not for the locals but designed to draw in specific groups to our communities, then the income from the event could be self sustaining and the community would still benefit.

1. Canton Eagle Days – The Tourism Commission inherited this early February event from the Canton Community Betterment group several years ago. It is fairly popular with a local audience and includes viewing Eagles from the river bank, a nature related movie and a talk on Eagles by a local expert on the subject. There are probably upward of 25 Eagle Days at different sites along the Mississippi River. To be more competitive, Canton could expand the usual Eagle days into Winter Raptor Days and take advantage of our Pelican Population, Owls, Hawks, Falcons and other Winter birds that can usually be seen at the Canton river front.
2. A river related event could be planned for the warmer part of the year but caution should be had with concern for sustainability as part of the design. Is there a supporting group willing to carry the burden of organization? For example, our neighbors, Grafton , Illinois held a Catfishing Tournament this July. <http://www.enjoygrifton.com/feature-stories/detail/138/1st-annual-river-rat-catfish-tournament> In looking at their site, it looked like it was organized similar to a golf tournament but without green fees. Something like this would be easier to organize than a River Heritage days, would possibly bring in people in from a 150 mile radius, focus on the river and generate revenue. If they are willing, we could contact Grafton and perhaps “benchmark “ their system. We also could work with them and develop a Catfishing Tournament circuit.
3. There are black powder and primitive weapon groups in the area that might attend and help sponsor an old fashioned River Rendezvous with shooting and archery contests. If done correctly this could be a sustainable activity with a good deal of the logistics coming from the targeted groups. <http://www.talking-bear.com/events.htm> Take a look at this. People come from all over to attend these kind of events, they will need to eat, stay and play. (However this group could probably kill enough game to live off the land)

Tourism Marketing – 2014 to 2017

Marketing is the most critical part of making Canton tourism a viable income producing element of the community. It is possible to spend a sizable amount of resources, both human and financial, and not have any tangible results. Getting the message out to the specific people who need to hear it who will act by coming to “eat, play and stay” is the Commission’s most important goal. We need to focus on the following:

1. Demographics – We should look at and have an accurate set of statistics of the population within a one hour drive of Canton, 50 miles away. And then identify sub sets of targeted groups that are a three hours drive from Canton, 150 miles. For example, how many photography groups, Audubon organizations, Kayak and Canoe groups, Biking Groups, camping clubs, fishermen are within 150 miles of Canton. What is the expected age of each of these groups, financial profile, ability to travel. How do we best contact each of these target groups.
2. Training for first contact personnel – What is the best way to get every one that may be a first contact tourism contact trained in basic information about our community. This needs to be done in a way that is individualized, delivered anytime, quick and cost effective. An online training program that would take no more than fifteen minutes would be a good goal. There also could be supplemental flyers available. All materials should be easily updated when features change.
3. Literature and maps should be readily available to people who want to know more about our community . Materials should all be digitally held and printed on an “as needed” base. City Hall has a colored digital printer and all literature and maps should be done on a common format like PowerPoint.
4. A plan should be in place that positions Canton with a common marketing theme in the State of Missouri.
5. A realistic Marketing Budget will be generated to make sure we have the income to cover the evolving marketing expenses.



Edited by Mary Fretwell