Summary of March 27 Visioning and Goal Setting Session

This document summarizes the process as well as the main findings of the Visioning and Goal Setting Session held upon the conclusion of the 2012 Pure Michigan Governor's Conference on Tourism, on the afternoon of Tuesday March 27, at the JW Marriott in Grand Rapids. This session represented the first major public stakeholder meeting of the strategic planning process. Approximately 100 industry members were in attendance at this event.

The Process

The session was introduced by George Zimmermann (Vice President of Travel Michigan) and Patricia Mooradian (Chair of the Michigan Travel Commission and President of The Henry Ford), and facilitated by Bonnie Zoia and Ginger Hentz (Michigan State University Extension) with assistance from Dr. Sarah Nicholls (leader of the strategic planning process).

Participants were asked to focus on one of eight theme areas during the session. These eight theme areas were identified based on evaluation of the previous plan and preliminary discussion with a subset of the Travel Commission, and they represent the topics that will form the basis of the eight preliminary goals of the next strategic plan. The eight theme areas are (in alphabetical order):

1. Collaboration, Cooperation and Partnerships
2. Funding and Financing
3. Natural Resources and the Environment
4. Product Development
5. Promotion, Marketing, and Communications
6. Public Policy and Government Support
7. Research and Technical Assistance
8. Service Excellence

Each theme was represented by a group of 8-12 individuals, other than the "Promotion, Marketing, and Communications" theme which was considered by two such groups. Each group was led through a series of exercises by a trained MSU facilitator. These exercises are summarized over the page.

First, participants were asked to consider two questions pertaining to their theme:

1. What does ... *your theme* ... mean to the Michigan tourism industry? That is, what is its significance?
2. How do you see things now in Michigan related to ... *your theme* ...?

Individuals recorded their responses in written format before reporting out to their group.

Next, participants were given the following instructions:

Imagine for a moment that you are suddenly called away from Michigan and gone for five years. You return in the year 2017 to resume your life and work. You check into the tourism scene and are thrilled to find an industry that is thriving. In fact, Michigan has become one of America's top travel destinations. In particular, you notice that ... your theme ... was extremely instrumental in making this happen. In general terms, what do you notice is different in the area of ... your theme ... to create this flourishing tourism economy in 2017 Michigan? Record below 3-5 bullet points of what is different related to your table's theme.

Again, individuals recorded their responses in written format before reporting out to their group.

Finally, participants were asked to consider development of a goal statement for their theme. Participants were instructed to consider the following preferred attributes of such a statement:

1. Statewide application
2. Action statement – begins with a verb
3. Specific, concise and brief
4. Lofty enough to inspire commitment and action (but not pie-in-the-sky)
5. Strategic enough to anchor objectives and strategies

Individuals' thoughts were collated by the group into one or a series of proposed statements.

The Main Results

A brief summary of the discussion of goal statements from each of the eight theme areas is presented below. Each group approached the exercises in different ways, thus, these brief reports vary in format from theme to theme. Full transcriptions of these discussions are presented separately.

Theme One: Collaboration, Cooperation and Partnerships

The group noted the need to encourage/facilitate less duplication and fragmentation within the industry, as well as the need to create multi-dimensional partnerships which maximize resource utilization and thereby increase visitor spending and revenue/profit.

Other key words or issues identified:

- the need to promote urban destinations as well as leisure destinations
- the need not to overlook smaller players/local communities
- the need for more cross promotion of leisure destinations with business travelers
- lack of collaboration between major transportation modes
- the need for tours/trails themed by interest area, not just geography
- the need to emphasis a total "MI Experience" versus being city or region specific
- greater emphasis on technology and provision of information to consumers in their preferred form
- greater consistency of built infrastructure throughout the state (roads, signage, etc.)

Theme Two: Funding and Financing

Words used to describe the current state of tourism funding and financing included: vital but inadequate, vulnerable, unbalanced, temporary, volatile, improving, dependent on the political process, proven (by ROI).

Discussion of the vision state for funding and financing included comments such as: $60 million/year, permanent public, sufficient public, effectively leveraging Brand USA, sufficient funding for needed support assets, model for inclusive private contributions to tourism investment, funded hospitality training/education and research, and access to capital.

Terms recorded with regards to a goal statement included: obtain public legislative support, secure adequate and permanent funding for all strategic planning initiatives, consistent, competitive, sustainable, measureable results, verifiable, justifiable, and public/private partnerships.

Theme Three: Natural Resources and the Environment

Participants in this group talked about protection, legacy and stewardship, about (re)discovering and appreciating the diversity of what we have in our backyards, about agriculture and the role of agri/culinary/heritage tourism, about management, education and enforcement, about creating memorable moments with something for everyone of every skill level, and of how intact, healthy ecosystems are vital to tourism.

In the future they saw a state recognized as a leader in environmental issues, where the tourism industry is a model of sustainable practices, where people take pride in their surroundings and where invasive species are under control. With respect to linkages with agriculture, they saw a revival of the family farm, an active farm to table movement, and awareness among people of where their food comes from.

Facilitators of such a vision would include appropriate tools (technology), the right people at the table to plan/promote/develop programs, and agencies that develop policies that enforce sustainability and promote travel at the same time.

Goal statements noted the desire for MI to be recognized as an international steward in preserving sustainable natural and agricultural resources and to improve access to our natural, historic, and cultural resources through ability-based communications which positively impact the image of Pure MI. One comment spoke of coordinated and uniform laws and regulations among townships, cities, counties, regions and the state which encourage responsible and practical ways for citizens/small businesses to do business.

Theme Four: Product Development

The product development group talked about specific activities and niches (beer, wine, etc.) as well as the packaging of such activities/niches (e.g., using trails), in particular in light of technological advances/gadgets and the green/environmental movement. They emphasized the role of transportation systems and the need for year round promotion of product. They also talked about the value of hands-on, immersive experiences and the value of/potential for education.

In the future they saw that attitudes of people in the industry had changed, that MI offered real life unique experiences and adventures, offered a simple, clear, consistent theme, and travel was based on cutting edge technology and universal rapid (motorized) and alternative (non-motorized) transit. They saw a state where Pure MI had become a way of life for residents, where residents had a sense of pride, and where graduates chose to stay in MI rather than move away. They saw a technologically advanced state with free Wi-Fi and charging stations for electric cars everywhere. They emphasized the importance of frontline staff, and the need for them to be trained in customer service and proactive in their work, as well as the need for language training to enable communication with an increasing number of international visitors.

Preliminary goal statements discussed by participants in the product development theme group referred to Michigan as a leader in creating a technology savvy and ecofriendly state with ease of access for visitors and a place focused on Pure MI's most important or first product: its people.

Theme Five: Promotion, Marketing, and Communications

The two groups that focused on promotion, marketing, and communications discussed the need to define market demand and develop programs to meet this demand, and to create interest/desire for people to explore MI and to then turn that interest/desire into action. As the theme of this year's conference emphasized, the need exists to deliver on the Pure MI promise.

The groups talked about the importance of businesses and residents speaking with one voice, as well the importance of a statewide communication system via which marketing and trend data are shared with all businesses. The need to not leave any counties behind was mentioned, as was the need to communicate with other relevant state agencies. Potential synergies with Brand USA were discussed.

Multiple references were made to the importance of customer service, and to a future experience where visitors are taken care of "every step of the way." This includes the need for residents to be welcoming to tourists and proud of Pure MI. The term "brand ambassadors" was used, and the need to build brand loyalty was considered. The implications of the increasing diversity of tourists were discussed (of varying nationalities, language, age, race/ethnicity, etc.).

The existence of four seasons, and the need to focus on all four of them, was also emphasized, as was the uniqueness and diversity of the state and its offerings. Such aspects could be highlighted via social media and via a cool, interactive, accessible, video-rich website. The need to overcome negative images of places such as Detroit and Flint was highlighted.

Elements of potential goal statements included "inspire travel to and within MI through effective marketing, creative promotion and cohesive communication," "communications and synergy within the industry," "increased funding through public/private partnerships in order to ensure MI remains a pristine destination that a well-rounded, world-class visitor experiences," "full implementation of Pure MI brand through all regions and agencies," "inspire everyone to communicate the Pure MI experience" and "grow the brand, deliver the promise" with "innovative energy via all channels regionally, nationally, and internationally."

Theme Six: Public Policy and Government Support

This group focused on the need for public officials to not only understand the economic significance of industry but also commit to and be held accountable for building and meeting tourism industry objectives. The role of government was identified to include both funding and activities besides/beyond funding. The potential for a cabinet level position in tourism was discussed. The number of government units and regulations was suggested to be excessive. Governor Snyder's leadership in the business community and support for tourism was identified as a key asset.

The group identified the need for policies that enable natural resources to be accessible and that deal with Asian carp. The need for increased involvement of tribal communities was discussed, in both gaming and non-gaming contexts. Inclusive pricing of goods and services, without hidden fees, was identified as an attractive option. The need for a central collection point for all tourism data was highlighted, as was better road, paths, and tourism oriented directional signage.

Consideration of a goal statement emphasized the need for a concise description of the economic and societal power of tourism as a benchmark for public policy decisions, and the need for the state to take tangible steps to strengthen and grow the industry, with genuine investment in promotion, research, experience development, and regulatory and government reform.

Theme Seven: Research and Technical Assistance

Key needs identified by this group included: a single, accurate, reliable, centralized, accessible and comprehensive statewide database of visitors and other relevant tourism research, with county level subsets and the ability to model/project, and more work with universities to prepare students. Other critical aspects of research/technical assistance as identified by the group included the need for recent and relevant data to be publicly available to all local communities, and for research/technical assistance to be funded in a sustainable manner and to be of a dynamic and understandable nature that can be used to inform decision making. The group suggested that statewide goals/metrics for success be set and monitored.

Two goal statements were submitted: "Establish an accessible information system, containing a set of aligned indicators to capture and report on inclusive research, enabled by a public/private partnership" and "Establish a set of balanced indicators, a set of processes and systems to capture and report on the indicators, enabled by a public/private partnership."

Theme Eight: Service Excellence

The group discussed the need for consistency in service across the state; for the state to be set apart from other states via its service excellence; and for service training across all venues and at every touch point for visitors, i.e., not just for tourism workers but also for citizens and students. Currently the big players are likely to have a customer service program, but smaller enterprises typically do not. The need to deliver on the Pure MI promise was identified, via a consistent approach to service and a genuine desire to welcome and serve. The implications of increasing international and otherwise diverse visitors were noted.

In five years the group foresaw an ongoing and effective, customizable training program based on a manifesto of expected standards. They envisaged that Michigan would be recognized as the most friendly state in the US, based on a genuinely welcoming spirit and infectious enthusiasm, as well as Michigan being seen as a state that is welcoming to international visitors and demonstrates cultural understanding, both in terms of its tourism employees and its residents. The group discussed a Pure MI rewards program for visitors.

Elements of a goal statement included the following: "Develop and implement consistent excellence training that is ongoing and provided to workers and citizens alike" and "Deliver the service experiences the Pure MI brand promises."