

# Final Report Holyoke Tourism Strategic Plan

June 23, 2020



Burlington, Vermont  
[www.craneassociates.us](http://www.craneassociates.us)





Table of Contents	
<i>Executive Summary</i>	6
<i>A Vision for Tourism in Holyoke</i>	8
<i>Introduction</i>	9
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	11
<i>Inventory of Tourism Assets and Services</i>	12
<b>The Children's Museum at Holyoke</b>	12
<b>Connecticut River</b>	13
HG&E Holyoke Dam and Fish Elevator:	13
Holyoke Canoe Club	14
<b>The Jones Ferry River Access</b>	14
<b>Gateway City Arts</b>	15
<b>Heritage State Park</b>	15
<b>The Holyoke Canal System</b>	16
<b>The Holyoke Mall at Ingleside</b>	16
<b>Mount Tom State Park</b>	17
<b>Nueva Esperanza</b>	18
<b>St Patrick's Day Parade and Road Race</b>	19
<b>Victory Theater</b>	20
<b>Volleyball Hall of Fame</b>	20
<b>The Whiting Street Reservoir</b>	20
<b>The Wistariahurst Museum (commonly referred to as simply "Wistariahurst")</b>	21
<i>Visitor Services</i>	22
<b>Accommodations</b>	22

<b>Air Transportation</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Ground Transportation</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Amtrak Train Station</b>	<b>25</b>
<b><i>Tourism Market Data and Market Area</i></b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Market Data Analysis</b>	<b>26</b>
<b><i>Tourism Trade Area For Holyoke</i></b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Holyoke Mall Market Area</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Children’s Museum Market Area</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Holyoke Heritage State Park Market Area</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Out of State Visitor to Holyoke</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau (GSCVB)</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Holyoke’s Untapped Tourism Potential</b>	<b>35</b>
<b><i>Strategic Planning</i></b>	<b>38</b>
<b>The Process</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Two workshops were designed to bring the stakeholders through the strategic planning process.</b>	<b>39</b>
Workshop 1 results	40
Strategic Thrust 1 Positive Public Perception of Holyoke:	41
Strategic Thrust 2 Effective and Coordinated Strategic Marketing:	41
Strategic Thrust 3 Attractive Destinations:	41
<b>Vision Statement</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Strategic Thrusts and SMART Goals for Holyoke Tourism</b>	<b>42</b>
<b><i>Recommendations</i></b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Three Strategic Thrusts</b>	<b>43</b>
Creating a Positive Public Perception of Holyoke	43
Effective and Coordinated Strategic Marketing	44
A Signature Destination	44

<b>Recommendation 1: Create and Market a New Brand for Holyoke</b>	<b>45</b>
Implementation Actions for Recommendation 1	45
<b>Recommendation 2: Permit Reform</b>	<b>47</b>
Implementation Actions for Recommendation 2	47
<b>Recommendation 3: Monitor and Report Progress</b>	<b>47</b>
Implementation Actions for Recommendation 3	48
<b>Recommendation 4: Improved Infrastructure Maintenance Program</b>	<b>48</b>
Implementation Actions for Recommendation 4	48
<b>Recommendation 5: Coordinate business communications and Holyoke tourism opportunities into one marketing effort</b>	<b>49</b>
Implementation Steps for Recommendation 5	49
<b>Recommendation 6: Create Holyoke’s Signature Destination</b>	<b>50</b>
Implementation Actions for Recommendation 6	50
<b>Recommendation 7: Establish a Puerto Rican Cultural District on Main Street</b>	<b>52</b>
Implementation Actions for Recommendation 7	53
<b>Recommendation 8: Promoting Natural Areas</b>	<b>54</b>
Implementation Actions for Recommendation 8	55
<b>Recommendation 9: Develop Opportunities with MGM Springfield</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Recommendation 10: Complete a financial and human resources plan to implement these recommendations</b>	<b>57</b>
Implementation Actions for Recommendation 9	58
<b><i>Next Steps</i></b>	<b>59</b>
<b><i>Appendices</i></b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Workshop Results</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Mill Tour</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Canal Map</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Bike-Ped Trail</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Signs of Progress</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Appendix 6: Sustainable Holyoke</b>	<b>60</b>

## Executive Summary

Holyoke was planned by industrialist and merchant investors who first constructed a granite dam over the Hadley Falls in 1849 and channeled the flow of the Connecticut River through four and a half miles of canals that powered some of the most productive mills in America. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, those canals powered over 40 mills and manufacturing plants and elevated Holyoke to the heights of industrial productivity and prosperity. By the late 1900's, after a combination of macro-economic changes, Holyoke suffered the same economic crisis that afflicted industrial mill cities throughout the eastern United States, substantially reducing it's socioeconomic position. Today Holyoke stands at the threshold of a major economic transition. America's most thriving cities are capitalizing on the information age, high-tech services, creative economies, and nimble entrepreneurship. Holyoke is working hard to adapt to modern economic times, while it uses its past as an asset, such as the hundreds of thousands of square feet in empty industrial and commercial building spaces. As part of this transformation, one potentially major export sector is being sought to propel local economic conditions: tourism.

Holyoke and tourism may not be generally associated with each other in the public's eye. Tourist don't flock to Holyoke. Holyoke doesn't have a wide reputation as a destination, nor does the city have large infrastructure to host tourists. Holyoke has only 7.5% of the region's hotel beds, lacks advanced wayfinding, there are few recreational options, and transportation services are not visitor friendly. Tourism is clearly far from being Holyoke's core economic foundation. Nonetheless, tourism is a legitimate economic sector that generates large amounts of income for Massachusetts. Tourism is the Commonwealth's third largest employer, generating 116 million jobs and paying over \$3.8 billion in payroll. Over 4 million tourists come to the Pioneer Valley each year generating a total economic impact of \$662 million dollars annually. Nearly 70% of these visitors are on vacation seeking cultural experiences, museums, history, and outdoor recreation. Holyoke has many of the features tourists are seeking but captures very little of this sector. This report calculates that Holyoke's untapped share of the Pioneer Valley's tourist market is about 1.7 million out-of-state visitors



annually. As a result of not capturing them, the city is foregoing up to approximately \$126 million dollars of annual tourism spending within the city. This is the economic equivalent of six St Patrick's Day Parades spread throughout the year. Even though Holyoke has plenty of interesting destinations to attract visitors, it has thus far done little to invite them.

A strategic approach is required to attract more visitors and overcome long-held, preconceived notions about Holyoke's visitor appeal if the City is to capture its proportion of tourist market share. Specifically, Holyoke's tourism economy is hampered by a negative, and primarily false, reputation that Holyoke is unsafe. Attracting a larger market will require a concerted effort of product development, branding and marketing, as well as a commitment from cross-sectional city leadership.

While changing public perception is clearly the priority, this can be an expensive proposition. Done well, it requires a long-term commitment of financial and human resources over at least a ten-year period. It is a serious investment but changing this perception also benefits all sectors of the economy, not only tourism. The cost of the investment required to attract a reasonable tourism market share is unknown at this time. One of the final recommendations is to determine what that investment entails.

Another major recommendation in this is plan is to create a signature destination for Holyoke, a place which visitors can readily identify. For example, if Las Vegas has the Strip and Los Angeles has Hollywood Boulevard, then what is Holyoke's signature destination? The canal area is an ideal location. The canals led Holyoke into an era of industry, great employment and a thriving economy. Holyoke is America's first planned Industrial City and today the canals are tangible proof of America's ingenuity, drive, and spirit. The canal area along Race Street is the heart of Holyoke's Innovation District and leading the way in energy, sustainability, and creativity. This represents the economy of the future and the canals can lead America again to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Holyoke's canals are a signature destination for the city because they symbolize all of what Holyoke was and the promise of its future.

While Holyoke has many great assets, its greatest asset is its people. The drive and human capital to implement action in Holyoke is a case study for other cities. This is evident by the St Patrick's Day parade festivities, widespread community garden activities, the Heart of Holyoke project, and many other initiatives that have broad organizational support large and small; from weaving cooperatives, to artist communities, sporting clubs and more. This is Holyoke's greatest asset.

In total, there are nine priority recommendations with several implementation actions within each. While there are many additional actions that the City could consider, these nine would make the largest impact if implemented. The recommendations are aimed at more than simply attracting visitors. They are foundational changes for the city that will have lasting impacts on retaining and attracting residents, employers, skilled employees, entrepreneurs, investors, and generally improve the quality of life for all residents. In that sense, this plan is expected to transcend tourism and facilitate broader economic vibrancy. Although implementing this plan

will require much more work than what it took to compile, the payoff will help transform Holyoke into a place where it can thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### A Vision for Tourism in Holyoke

*“Holyoke is a city where visitors become inspired by its cultural diversity, informed by its history, charmed by its canals, and so enriched that they want to return.”*



## Introduction

Creating the Holyoke Tourism Strategic Plan is the first attempt of its kind in modern times (or possibly ever). As such, the efforts were a pleasant surprise for city's residents and businesses who are in the day-to-day business of attracting visitors and were consulted in the drafting of the plan. The work involved several months of research, site visits, data collection, analysis, interviews, and workshops with the city's leading stakeholders in tourism and economic development. The Holyoke Office of Planning and Economic Development led this project, created the scope of work, directed the consultant, collected information, and organized the stakeholders.

The process follows a traditional strategic planning process from vision to implementing actions. It started by identifying the city's most valuable tourism assets and services. The consultant visited each one and to the extent possible interviewed the managers or owners of these assets. The plans most valuable information came from the one-on-one interviews and then through group discussions during two workshops that were held on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The process directed the stakeholders to identify the key priorities for making long-term and lasting changes to Holyoke's tourism economy. Both workshops resulted in clear majority feedback on the most important priorities and actions. These key priorities, also referred to as strategic thrusts, are not implementation actions by themselves. They coordinate groups of actions and are designed to make overarching directional changes to the whole economy of Holyoke. As such, tourism and all other economic sectors, will benefit. The stakeholder process identified three strategic thrusts: 1) Positive Public Perception of Holyoke; 2) Effective and Coordinated Strategic Marketing; 3) and Signature Destination(s).

The stakeholders then gathered for a second workshop to brainstorm the most important actions to implement the strategic thrusts. The consultant collected these opinions, combined them with the knowledge, data, and analysis of the previous stages of this work, and from this emerged nine strategic recommendations. Each recommendation has several implementing actions. While these recommendations are likely to require a significant amount of financial and human resources, estimating the amount of resources involved was outside of the scope of this planning process. As such, the ninth recommendation is to create a financial and human resources plan which would help identify the resources to implement the preceding eight recommendations.

Holyoke is a great city with considerable human capacity and tourism potential. If the city committed to capturing its share of the regional tourism economy, then it will be successful.



## Acknowledgements

Contributors to this plan include (in alphabetical order by first name)

Name	Organization
Bill Rigalski	Holyoke Mall
Cynthia Espinosa	Nueva Esperanza
Denis Luzuriaga	The Cubit
Diosdado Lopez	Hispanic Family Festival
Don Sanders	MIFA - Victory Theater
Eileen Kavanaugh	Holyoke Boys & Girls Club
Eric Suher	ES Sports
George Mulvey	Volleyball Hall of Fame
Jay Candelario	Jay's Bed and Breakfast
Jim Lavelle	HG&E
Jordan Hart	Holyoke Chamber of Commerce
Joseph Krupczynski	UMass & Center for Design and Engagement
Josh Knox	Trustees of the Reservation
Kate Preissler	Wisteriahurst Museum
Kate Sullivan Craven	Holyoke Gas & Electric
Kathy Anderson	Holyoke Hospital
Laurie Devine/Vitek Kruta	Gateway City Arts
Mike Mathis	MGM Springfield
Mike Moriarty	OneHolyoke Development
Peter Rosskothien	Delaney House, D Suites and Hotels
Sara English	Holyoke Canoe Club
Tessa Romboletti-Murphy	EforAll
Tony Witman	Witman Properties

### Holyoke City Staff

#### **Marcos A. Marrero**

Director  
Office of Planning & Economic Development

#### **Curtis B. Wiemann**

Planner I  
Office of Planning & Economic Development

**Photo Credits:** All photos by Michael Crane, Crane Associates, unless otherwise indicated.



## Inventory of Tourism Assets and Services

### The Children's Museum at Holyoke



The Children's Museum has been a Holyoke landmark for decades. Residents of nearby cities and out-of-state visitors bring their kids to visit the museum, where they can play in imaginary kitchens, climb on the jungle gyms, blow very large bubbles, and more. Some families who visit larger cities in Western Mass decide to visit Holyoke solely for a chance to bring their children to the museum. It has been favorably compared to museums in other larger cities, such as The Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia. Not only does it have regular admission days, but it hosts birthday parties, has special programs, organizes a yearly dance competition fundraiser, and partners with other nonprofits to produce targeted learning opportunities for groups of children with special needs. The museum's interactive, hands-on exhibits have been updated over time, retaining their original charm but still engaging children today. New exhibits and

programs are routinely added to enhance children's' experience. The museum offers memberships at discounted rates. Its location in downtown, next to Heritage State Park and the Merry go Round is ideal to attract visitors. It also gives children the opportunity to play outside in the park, and the merry go round adds to the experience

### Connecticut River

Is an impressive natural resource that flows along the city and serves many purposes from generating power, to recreation and aesthetic enjoyment, to the reason Holyoke has had such a long and successful industrial history. The river can play an important role in attracting visitors. Several assets along the river include:

HG&E Holyoke Dam and Fish Elevator: Holyoke Gas and Electric owns and operates the Holyoke Dam and the City's canal system with associated hydroelectric facilities, which it purchased from Northeast Utilities in 2001. The Holyoke Dam is a 30-foot high granite dam that spans the river from Holyoke to South Hadley. The dam creates a spectacular waterfall for travelers crossing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge on MA-116 and for visitors to the park lands and shores in Holyoke and South Hadley. Public Parks on the Holyoke side include an underdeveloped river access that extends from HG&E lands under the bridge and along the river that is primarily used by anglers. On the South Hadley side there is the Hadley Falls Canal Park, a more formal public park with parking and walking connections to the public library. Fishing is extremely popular activity here. During the spring Shad season the bridge is crowded with local residents fishing off the edge. The river is busy with boats and the shoreline anglers are competing for space. One can often see anglers in waders carrying tackle and rods along the streets near the river.



HG&E manages a fish elevator to allow upstream migration of anadromous fish including American Shad, Sea Lamprey, Atlantic Salmon, and Blueback Herring. After many decades of efforts, the Atlantic Salmon restoration project is discontinued due to lack of success. Therefore, anglers are not seeking them. However, American Shad, Small and Largemouth Bass, and Striped Bass are popular sport species which attract many visitors from the region. As of May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019, biologists counted 77,891 American Shad that went through the fish elevator. The fish elevator

also attracts people. Approximately 10,000 visitors per year come to the viewing room in the Holyoke Dam to observe the fish migration and the panoramic views of the dam itself. Viewing is open for 6 weeks per year from early May until mid-June. The tour to the dam also includes natural history interpretation on the Connecticut River, information on HG&E electricity production, the

Holyoke Canoe Club located on the banks of the river about 2 miles upstream from the city center. The Canoe Club has



been accommodating boaters on the Connecticut River for over 100 years. The Club started in 1885 as a venue to promote canoe racing. Today, the Club offers 45 boat slips for a membership fee of 950 dollars. Members also enjoy the use of 2 pools, 8 clay courts, and an historic club house with event space and barbeque facilities on 10 acres along the river. The club’s location on the river presents opportunities to use it for attracting visitors, such as a venue for rowing and sculling races and other public sporting events

The Jones Ferry River Access is a public building, parking lot and river docking area owned by the City and largely maintained by Holyoke Rows, a local non-profit community organization



“with the goal to offer a rowing program open to everyone.” The large parking lot, boat ramp, and dock is available to the general public and provides convenient access to the Connecticut River downstream of the Holyoke Dam. Boaters can launch here and motor upstream to the dam for excellent sport fishing below the dam. Anglers can also enjoy bank fishing from the dock.

Holyoke Rows has a goal of making passive river recreation accessible to the entire community “by eliminating the physical, financial and social barriers to participating in our programs.” The organization administers a community boathouse that is open and inviting to the community. They encourage participation in rowing and river recreation from all ages, incomes and abilities. There are a wide range of boating programs all year long that try to meet the full spectrum of community

needs. The boathouse includes a gathering space that can accommodate about 30 people and is available for rent. It overlooks the river and has sliding glass doors opening onto a large porch with picnic tables, chairs, and outside grill, inside sink area, and restrooms.

**Gateway City Arts** is a large restored mill building with multiple venues serving artist, musicians, public dining, and creative economy entrepreneurs. The building is located in the heart of Race Street and the Canalwalk. It contains a nightclub with a capacity of 500 people as well as two smaller performance/event spaces that together hold about 125 people, all of which can be rented for private parties, weddings, fund raisers and other functions. The Bistro and beer garden serve local craft beers and New America cuisine. It also recently opened a full, sit-down restaurant called Judds. The building also has a small art gallery, co-working studios that hold an all-purpose art studio, ceramics studio, a woodshop, and shared office workspace for start-up businesses, entrepreneurs, and sole proprietors. The music venue attracts the most out-of-town visitors to this site. Musical acts from all corners of the United States and abroad come to Holyoke. Local booking agents bring in both established Grammy award-winning artist and new bands. The musical shows attract between 50,000 to 60,000 visitors per year. Gateway City Arts employs 30 people and is growing.

**Heritage State Park** is located in the heart of the city between City Hall, the Volleyball Hall of Fame, and the Children’s Museum.



The visitor’s center showcases Holyoke’s industrial heritage and is surrounded by the textile, paper and machinery mills that lays the foundation of this history. Outside the visitor’s center is an inviting park with shade trees, splash park, and the historic Holyoke Merry-Go-Round, which was once housed at Holyoke’s Mountain Park. Heritage Park is a critical asset to Holyoke’s tourism opportunities. It is one of the few local assets that is promoted by entities outside the City such as Greater Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau and, naturally, the State of Massachusetts. Holyoke’s heritage is what ties many of other attraction together, including Wistariahurst, Canalwalk, the Connecticut River, Gateway City Arts and others. Therefore, this park and visitor center can play a vital role in promoting more visitation to Holyoke.

history of the dam, and an observation platform with a close-up view of the falls. The bridge over the river is also pedestrian friendly and offers interesting views of the river and falls. This walk can then lead to the riverside park in

South Hadley and the public library. Visitors to the dam can spend a long afternoon relaxing, exploring the river's edge, and fishing and picnicking along the shoreline.

The Holyoke Canal System is a national landmark on the U.S. Register of Historic Places and a unique piece of Holyoke's industrial history.



The Canal system include three levels of canals (First Canal, Second and Third) that flow from the Holyoke Dam 4.5 miles on three elevations until it returns to the river. The system was first dug by men with picks and shovels in 1848 and construction continued until 1892. The First Level Canal contains 12 gates regulating water coming into the system. It is 140 feet wide and 22 feet deep. It extends eastward from the dam about a thousand feet and then sweeps south for more than one mile to supply several upper level of mills. The Second Level Canal runs parallel to the First but about 400 feet east or one city block, and about 15 feet lower in elevation. It begins at its south end, fed by First Canal, and runs back north for over a mile. For its first 2,000 feet it is 140 feet wide, then gradually narrows to 100 feet. Its average water depth is 15 feet. The Third Canal begins at the south end of the Second Level, but 12' lower, and extends 3,550 feet long until it returns to the Connecticut River near Cabot Street. It is about

100 feet wide and 10 feet deep.

The Canal system first produced municipal electricity in 1884. Today, it is owned by Holyoke Gas and Electric Department and is still producing electricity for the city. The City lists 47 mills that were once connected to the canal system that produced primarily paper and textiles. Some of the mills also produced wood and metal products. They occupied nearly 1,000 acres of land including reservoirs and its distribution system. This canal system is one of the most unique elements of the city's history and culture and sets the city apart from other New England industrial mill towns. Holyoke has recognized the canal's importance by building the Canalwalk and providing canal history tours. As a tourism asset, this may be one of the city's most valuable.

The Holyoke Mall at Ingleside is Holyoke and Western Mass' premier retail destination and one of the largest commercial entities of the City, with over 1.5 million square feet of shopping and entertainment offerings. Shopping Malls nationwide are struggling to stay in business. Credit Swiss Bank estimates that 25% of America's shopping malls will shutter in 5 years due to declining sales lost to

internet retail sales<sup>i</sup>. The Malls that will survive will do so by changing their image and brand from one of simply shopping to a more



holistic lifestyle experience that includes dining, entertainment, exercise, and civic engagement in addition to shopping. The Holyoke Mall appears to be winning the challenge. While anchor tenant Macy’s has closed in Enfield, Eastfield, and Berkshire, it decided to designate their Holyoke store a “Grow 100” store and was ranked in the top 150 out of their 570 stores nationwide. Holyoke Mall has also made several changes to meet shoppers’ evolving preferences such as more entertainment, fashion shows, charitable events, and a kid’s summer club that attracted 1,800 visitors. New tenants include Sumo Japanese Steakhouse and Sushi, 110 Grill, Flight Fit and Fun Trampoline Park, Round 1 Bowling and Entertainment, Xfinity, Cinemark and Planet Fitness.

This is all good news for the City of Holyoke. It presents an opportunity for other areas of the city, including Downtown, albeit a yet untapped and likely unrecognized, opportunity. Based on the Mall’s marketing materials, the trade area extends north into central Vermont and New Hampshire, south into Connecticut, west to the Berkshires, and east to Worcester. It includes a population of 1.7 million people in 670,000 households that have an annual average income of \$88,000. The Mall attracts 18 million visitors annually spending \$375 million dollars.

### Mount Tom State Park



Mount Tom State Park is a modest mountain overlooking the City of Holyoke from 1,202 feet. The mountain is located on the west bank of the Connecticut River only 4.5 miles northwest of downtown. Mt Tom is the southernmost and highest peak of the Mount Tom Range and the highest traprock peak of the 100-mile long Metacomet Ridge. As such it has become a popular hiking destination attracting outdoor enthusiasts from throughout New England. The summit is on the 110-mile long Metacomet-Monadnock Trail. For the less adventurous, a network of shorter hiking trails, and a park road, offer plenty of outdoor recreation activities. The road is used for bicycling, running, and mountain biking, and in the winter, cross country skiing and ski touring. Geocaching is a popular activity at the park. The mountain is also well known as a place to watch seasonal raptor migrations; an observation tower on nearby Goat Peak is maintained for that purpose.

The mountain is known for its continuous line of cliffs and talus slopes visible from the south and west, its dramatic 1,100-foot rise over the surrounding Connecticut River Valley, and its rare plant communities and microclimate ecosystems.



**Nueva Esperanza** is a community development corporation and therefore would not typically be considered a tourism asset. However, their mission, in addition to providing safe affordable housing, is to celebrate and highlight Puerto Rican and Afro-Caribbean culture. Considering that Holyoke has one of the highest concentrations of Puerto Rican populations in the country per capita, celebrating this culture is a tourism opportunity and Nueva Esperanza is an asset to help make this happen.

It was originally founded in 1982 to restore neglected apartment buildings in South Holyoke. They incorporated as a community development corporation (CDC) in the

late 1980's and is now considered a leader in community-based programs in Holyoke that celebrate and highlight the Puerto Rican/Afro Caribbean culture. "Nueva is rooted in its new Mission and Vision that will help it rise again from the ashes to a place of developing the community as a whole.<sup>1</sup>" It has most recently been a leading partner in the implementation of "The Heart of Holyoke" placemaking project on Main Street.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.nuevaofholioke.org](https://www.nuevaofholioke.org)

### St Patrick's Day Parade and Road Race



<https://holykestpatricksparade.com>

This \$20+ million-dollar event is hosted yearly with a parade route weaving through nearly 3 miles of the streets of downtown Holyoke. Thousands compete in the road race, held the day before the parade. The event has generated quite a following since its inception in the 1950s and now sees up to 400,000 attendees. The road race is now the largest race in Western New England.

The Holyoke St. Patrick's Day parade is one of the largest of its kind and is one of the greatest contributors to the city's prominence. The event gives the city a large economic boost. The parade committee employs local citizens and patronizes local hotels for housing its award winners. It partners with local businesses to maintain financing and holds events that will generate visibility for both. It also produces many new parade visitors through news coverage of associated events leading up to the parade and race. This past year, in the months previous to the parade and road race, award winners were recognized at 72 dinners, which were covered by local TV network WWLP. There were over 100 commercials for the parade on local stations 22 News and WGGB 40. Popular bands paid to play in the parade typically play at other venues in town before the parade. Last year, this amount of publicity even required a last-minute change in one of the event venues to accommodate 100 additional people. Attendees came from at least 29

different states and 2 Canadian provinces and traveled an average of 36.9 miles.

The success of the parade and road race can be attributed to the vitality of the organizing group's membership. This is more than a once-a-year parade and race, but a year-long social networking opportunity turned into social force grown out of a Holyoke tradition. The organization itself has evolved by engaging new members and promoting inclusiveness and diversity. It invites outsiders, whether of Irish decent or not, to join the community. The Library of Congress designated the Holyoke St Patrick's Day Parade as a Local Legacy, joining the ranks with the New Orleans Mardi Gras, the Newport Folk Festival, and the Daytona 500.

[Victory Theater](#) is an architectural exemplar of the city’s golden industrial age located in the heart of downtown Holyoke and now



owned by the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts (MIFA), which is completing its fundraising to renovate it. The art deco theater was built by Mowll & Rand, an architecture firm based out of Boston, and opened on December 31, 1920 containing 1,680 seats in three levels. It is considered the last of its type between Boston and Albany. The Victory’s name is a reference to the Allied forces’ victory during World War I. The use of the theater evolved from vaudeville to movies over its 58-year life. It permanently closed in 1978, at a time when city mills were also shuttering and the local economy was declining. The city took ownership of the theater soon after due to non-payment of taxes, and in September 2008 sold ownership of the theater to MIFA.

### [Volleyball Hall of Fame](#)



Volleyball was invented at the Holyoke YMCA in 1895 by William G. Morgan. In 1971 the Greater Holyoke Chamber of Commerce established a nonprofit corporation for the purpose of “planning, promoting, establishing and maintaining a living memorial to the sport of volleyball.” In 1998, the Hall of Fame moved from a 1600sf exhibit to a permanent 5,000 square feet (460 m<sup>2</sup>) location in the Skinner Mill Warehouse in downtown Holyoke's Heritage State Park sharing the building with the Holyoke Children's Museum.

The museum features exhibits honoring each year's inductees, a replica of a full-size volleyball court, sport timelines, photos, and unique and meaningful memorabilia of the sport along with an interactive video kiosk, a special inductee display area, and a gift shop.

A total of 140 men and women from 25 countries around the world have since been inducted. The international appeal of the sport explains a shift in the pool of inductees since 1998. Since that time, inductees have come from around the world and contribute to the honoring of the sport and its home in Holyoke. In 2014, the name of the corporation was changed to the International Volleyball Hall of Fame.

[The Whiting Street Reservoir](#), constructed in 1888 is owned and operated by the Holyoke Water Works. The Reservoir has an impound capacity of 479 million gallons and a safe yield of 1.5 million gallons of water per day. The Reservoir drainage area is 897

acres, of which 367 acres is owned by the Holyoke Water Works. The Whiting Street Reservoir dam is a stone masonry and earthen embankment dam with a height of 19 feet and an approximate length of 1,900 feet. In addition to its vital role as part of the City’s water supply, the Reservoir is a popular destination for hikers of all skill levels.

The Wistariahurst Museum (commonly referred to as simply “Wistariahurst”) is an ornate mansion near the center of Holyoke, formerly owned by the nation’s largest silk manufacturer, William Skinner. It was built in 1874 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The home and its beautiful gardens were donated to the City of Holyoke in 1959. It is now a cultural and educational center dedicated to “preserving Holyoke’s history and inspiring an appreciation of history and culture through educational programs, exhibits and special events.” Wistariahurst is more than an historic building, it is the headquarters for the City’s Department of Museums and Monuments. As such, the Department’s staff holds educational programs, history projects, and outreach activities throughout the city. They build community partnerships and coordinate events off site in places such as the War Memorial and City Hall Ballroom. In addition to public events, Wistariahurst can be rented for private parties, weddings, fund raisers and exhibits. The activities at Wistariahurst generate approximately 12,000 visitors annually. About 50% of the visitors are from Holyoke and the remaining are from neighboring towns.



## Visitor Services

### Accommodations

A visitor to Holyoke has limited options for staying within the City boundaries. There is a total of 399 rooms in Holyoke compared to

Table 1: Accommodations in Holyoke<sup>2</sup>

Hotel	Location	Rooms	Suites
FAIRFIELD INN & SUITES SPRINGFIELD HOLYOKE (413) 533-2800; www.marriott.com	229 Whiting Farms Road, Holyoke	91	4
HOMEWOOD SUITES BY HILTON (413) 532-3100; www.homewoodsuites3.hilton.com	375 Whitney Ave., Holyoke, MA		114
D. HOTEL & SUITES (413) 533-2100; www.stayatthed.com	1 Country Club Road, Holyoke	62	27
JAY’S B&B 718-496-9857	1109 Dwight Street, Holyoke	5	-
AMERICA’S BEST VALUE INN 413-536-3377	671 Northampton Street, Holyoke	17	-
MOTEL SIX 413-536-1980	1515 Northampton Street, Holyoke	110	
<b>Total Rooms and Suites</b>	<b>Holyoke</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>7.5%</b>
<b>Total Rooms and Suites</b>	<b>Pioneer Valley</b>	<b>5252</b>	<b>100%</b>

5,252 for the Pioneer Valley. Two hotels operated by Marriott and Hilton are located on the southern edge of the city. This is a convenient location for access to major employers in the region and the intersections of I-91 and I-90, and a popular destination for business travelers whether or not they are coming to Holyoke. D. Hotel and Suites is independently owned by a local family and is located on the northern edge of the city near Mt Tom State Park, the Connecticut River, and other recreation areas. This hotel also has a high-quality restaurant, spa services, and is a popular location for weddings and social gatherings. All three of these hotels can accommodate larger groups. Jay’s Bed and Breakfast is a restored mansion which holds historic significance to the city. The owner provides a hearty 5-star breakfast and offers catering services to host events on-site that can accommodate up to approximately 100 people. Four of the five rooms have shared bath and may be limited to more flexible travelers. Jay’s Bed and Breakfast has the only accommodations that are within walking distance to

downtown, the visitors center, and train station. America’s Best Value Inn is a 2-star motel near the Connecticut River serving the budget traveler. Motel Six is a 1-star budget motel that has “approximately 110 rooms” according to their corporate office. They will leave the light on for transients, temporary shelter services, and the most adventurous low-budget traveler.

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://businesswest.com/guides/tourism-hospitality-2019/>, Crane Associates, and Motel Six corporate office

### Air Transportation

International commercial air passenger service for Holyoke is most closely provided by Bradley International Airport in Hartford

**Table 2: Commercial Air Passenger Service for Holyoke**

Airline	Cities Served	Annual Passenger Volume
AER LINGUS www.aerlingus.com	Dublin	
AIR CANADA www.aircanada.com	Montreal, Toronto	22,120
AMERICAN AIRLINES www.aa.com	Charlotte, Chicago (O’Hare), Dallas-Fort Worth, Los Angeles, Miami, Philadelphia, Washington (Reagan)	753,762
DELTA AIRLINES www.delta.com	Atlanta, Cancun, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Minneapolis, Raleigh-Durham	654,065
JETBLUE www.jetblue.com	Fort Lauderdale, Fort Meyers, Orlando, San Juan, Washington (Reagan), Tampa, West Palm Beach	424,457
NORWEGIAN AIR www.norwegian.com	Edinburgh	
ONE JET www.onejet.com	Pittsburgh	
SOUTHWEST AIRLINES www.southwest.com	Baltimore, Chicago (Midway), Denver, Fort Lauderdale, Fort Myers, Las Vegas, Orlando, St. Louis, Tampa, West Palm Beach	827,147
SPIRIT AIRLINES www.spirit.com	Fort Lauderdale, Myrtle Beach, Orlando, Fort Myers (starting 11/17), Tampa (starting 11/17)	
UNITED AIRLINES www.united.com	Chicago (O’Hare), Denver, Houston, Newark, Washington (Dulles)	282,365

Connecticut located 37 miles south from downtown. Some of the nation’s largest airlines, including American, United, Delta, Jet Blue, and Southwest, serve Bradley Airport. Air Lingus provides non-stop service to Dublin from Hartford on nearly every day of the week. This is a great opportunity to market Holyoke to Ireland. Jet Blue provides non-stop service to San Juan, Puerto Rico, which also provides an excellent opportunity to market Holyoke to Puerto Rico. Holyoke’s strong cultural connections to Ireland and Puerto Rico can be leveraged to generate more visitors to the city and these nonstop flights are opportunities that should be leveraged.

Nonstop services from Hartford are also available to many other major cities including following: Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Houston, Los Angles, Washington and several in Florida.

Albany and Boston are the next nearest airports, but they are both about 90 miles away. Boston will provide full service to all major international and domestic destinations. Travelling out of Albany may provide almost no additional benefits over Hartford.

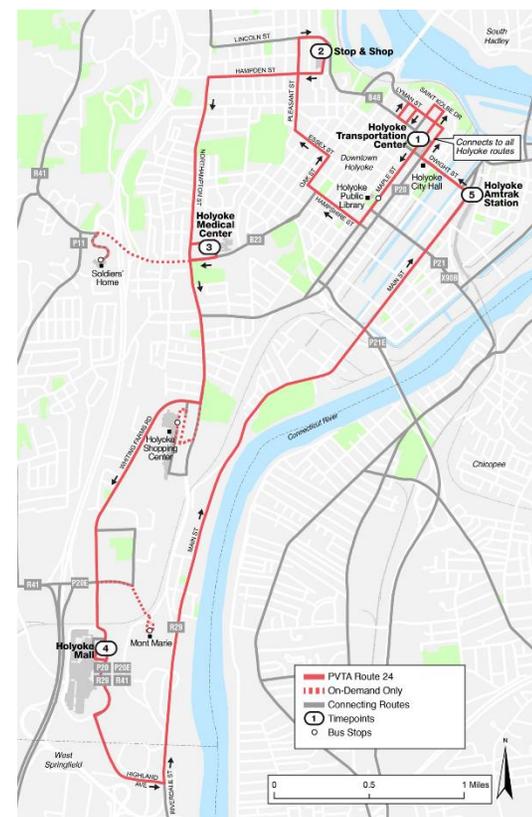
### Ground Transportation

Ground transportation services in Holyoke are limited. Very few car share or taxi options are available. The Yellow Cab company was the only taxi service found in Holyoke. Ride share and car services (ie. Uber and Lyft) have limited reliability. ZipCar has two vehicles in the downtown which can be reserved for hourly and daily use. The City is also a participant in the ValleyBike regional bike share system, currently hosting 9 station stations with a total of 105 bikes, and set to expand with 3 additional stations in 2021.

City buses are provided in Holyoke by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA). The PVTA web site shows that there are 12 routes that travel to Holyoke. Most of these connect Holyoke with other cities and towns within the region. They offer connections between the major area colleges and the Holyoke Mall. They also

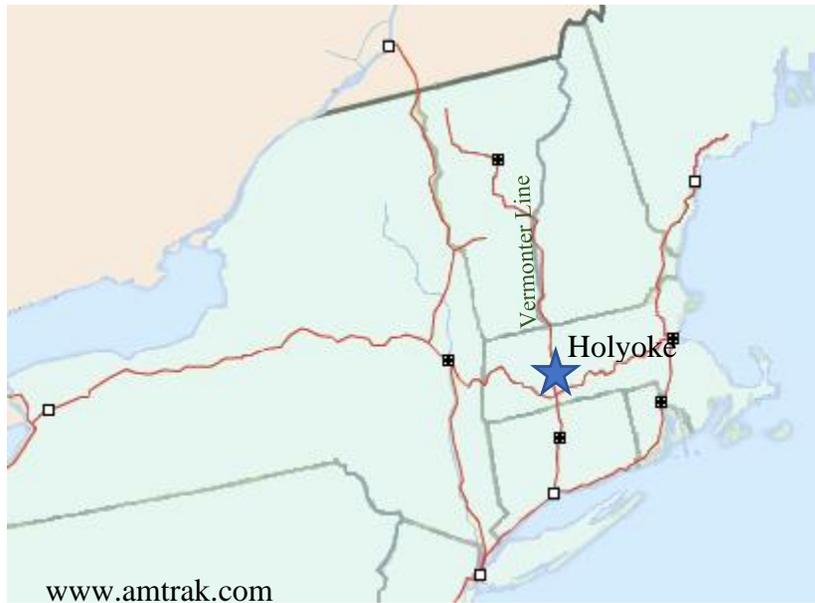
offer several connections between Holyoke and downtown Springfield while stopping at major employers on route. This is a valuable service for area residents and students. Tourists on the other hand need a different type of bus service. Tourists seek transportation that connect area attractions and their accommodations. In other words, an inner-city bus service within Holyoke proper is more valuable to tourists. PVTA offers one route like this. The R-24, otherwise known as the Paper City Express, will travel around the City within 35 minutes and connect the Downtown and Visitors Center to the Holyoke Mall, Jones Ferry Road River Access, the proposed Canal District and Little Puerto Rico, and the Amtrak train station. There is an untapped opportunity here to connect visitors to all of Holyoke’s best destinations.

<b>Table 3: Holyoke PVTA Bus Routes</b>
B6 - Ludlow via Bay Street
P11 - Holyoke Community College Express
P20 - Holyoke/ Springfield via Riverdale St
P20E - Holyoke Mall/Union Station I-91 Express
P21 - Holyoke/Springfield via Chicopee
P21E - Springfield/Holyoke via 391 Express
B23 - Holyoke/Westfield via HCC
R24 - Cabot-PleasantSt-Holyoke Medical Ctr-Sargeant St
R29 - Amherst/Holyoke Mall via Rt 116 & Holyoke Trans Ctr
X90 - Inner Crosstown
R41 - Northampton/Easthampton/HCC/Holyoke Mall
B48 - Northampton/ Holyoke via Route 5



Paper City Express. Source [www.PVTA.com](http://www.PVTA.com)

Amtrak Train Station

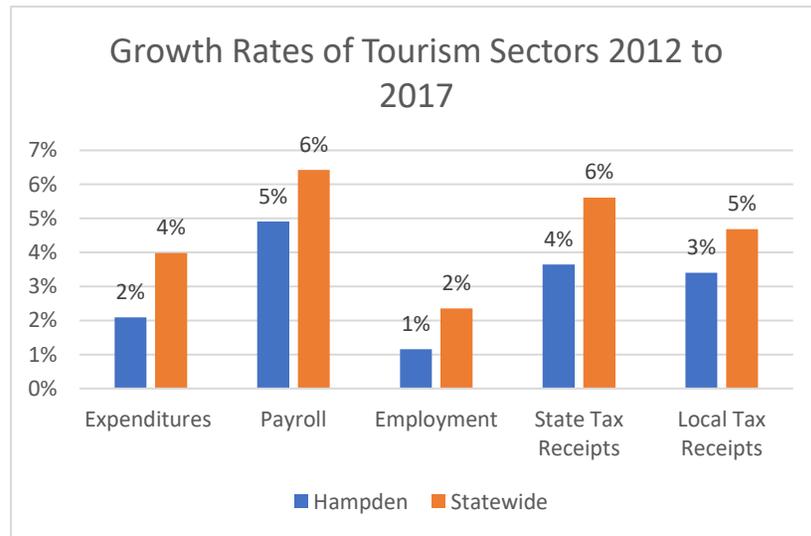
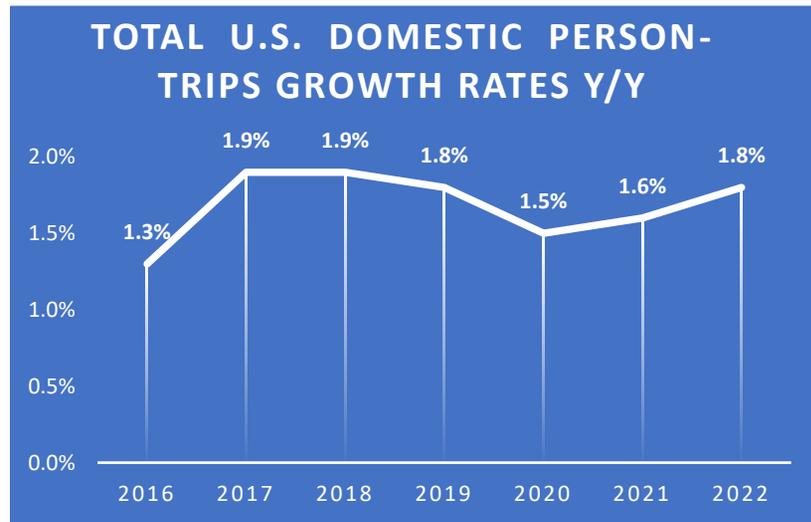


Holyoke has a brand new train service. On August 30<sup>th</sup> of 2019, Amtrak, in partnerships with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, started operating the Valley Flyer. The service is designed for commuters and passengers with operations seven days per week. The schedule allows passengers to travel to New York and return in the same day. The Valley Flyer starts/ends in Greenfield and stops in Northampton; Holyoke; Springfield; Windsor Locks; Windsor; Hartford; Berlin; Meriden; Wallingford; and New Haven where passengers can transfer on one of four different train services for New York City or Providence RI. The train departs Holyoke at 8:15am and returns to Holyoke 9:41pm, each day.

A second train also serves Holyoke. The Vermonter originates in Washington DC and travels to northern Vermont (St Albans) each day. The southbound Vermonter stops in Holyoke at 2:16 Monday through Friday and at 2:35 on Saturdays and Sundays. The northbound train will stop in Holyoke at 3:41 each day.

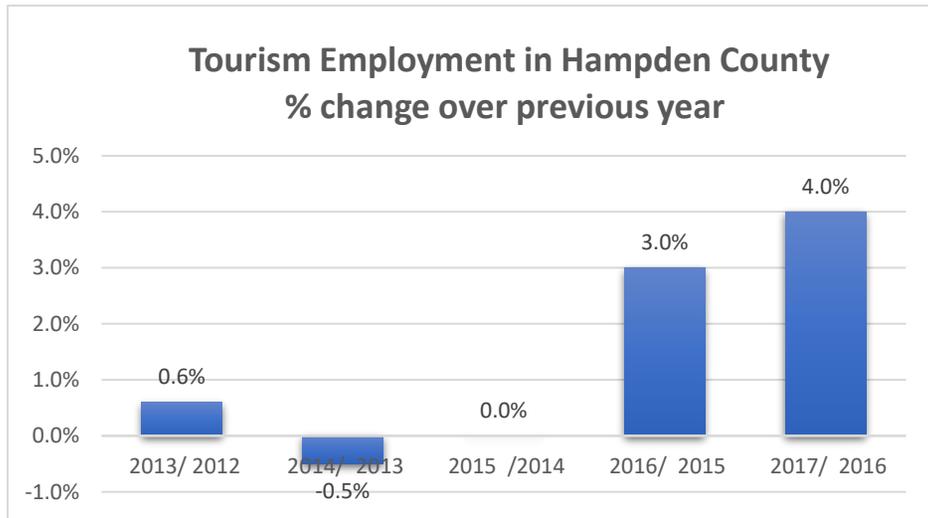
## Tourism Market Data and Market Area

### Market Data Analysis



Travel and tourism spending in the United States has enjoyed a period of solid growth over the past 5 years culminating in the apex year of 2018 that boasted 81 million visitors in 2.3 billion trips, and who spent over \$1 trillion dollars nationwide. Travel and tourism in the US amounted to about 8.1% of GDP in 2016 and is expected to rise to 9% in by 2027. Like all strong growth cycles, this one is expected to ease into steady and modest growth for the next three years according to the US Travel Association.

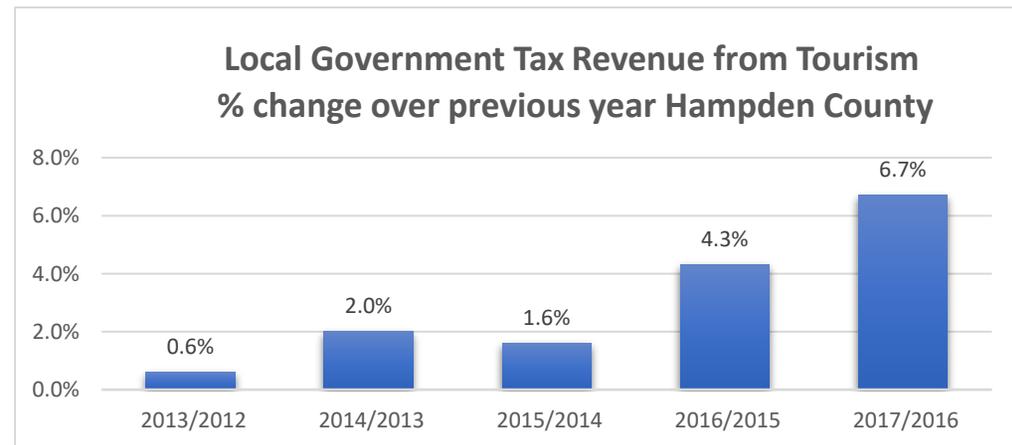
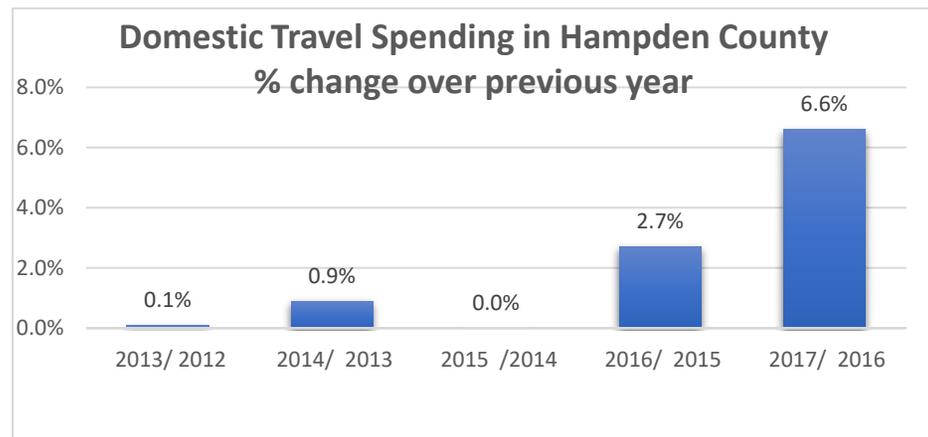
The travel and tourism economy in Massachusetts is following a similar trend as the nation. Tourism is Massachusetts’ third largest employer generating 116 million jobs and paying over 3.8 billion in payroll. The objective of this study and resulting Tourism Strategic Plan for Holyoke is to capture an increasingly larger share of the state’s tourism economy. Since the national tourism sector is on reasonably solid ground, we can generally rely on the state tourism sector to continue to generate visitors. The real challenge lies within Hampden County and Holyoke in particular. Travel and tourism to Massachusetts is both an opportunity and challenge for Holyoke. While the visitors come to Massachusetts, they are primary concentrated in the Boston and Cape Cod regions. From this perspective, the eastern part of the state might appear to be competition to Holyoke. On the other hand, that area of the state is likely drawing out-of-state tourists who might not otherwise come to Massachusetts at all and in that regard, it is an asset and an opportunity for Holyoke. The tourism products and services offered in Boston and Cape Cod are not in competition with Holyoke. Therefore, it is incumbent on Holyoke to attract them with a unique visitor experience, and Holyoke has plenty of unique assets and opportunities to do just that.



Hampden County is currently experiencing a dramatic shift in its tourism economy which presents a unique opportunity for Holyoke. No doubt this rapid change is due to MGM Springfield, which employs approximately 3,000 people. From 2011 to 2015, Hampden County experienced nearly 0% growth in tourism spending. In 2016, spending grew by 2.6%. Payroll to tourism employees doubled in this same one-year period and the number of jobs created went from negative territory to 3% growth.

Hampden County ranks 8 out of 14 counties for tourism expenditures in MA and tourism generates \$11.2 million in local tax revenue, ranking 9<sup>th</sup> in the state. This ranking places Holyoke in the middle of the list; however, rankings can be deceiving.

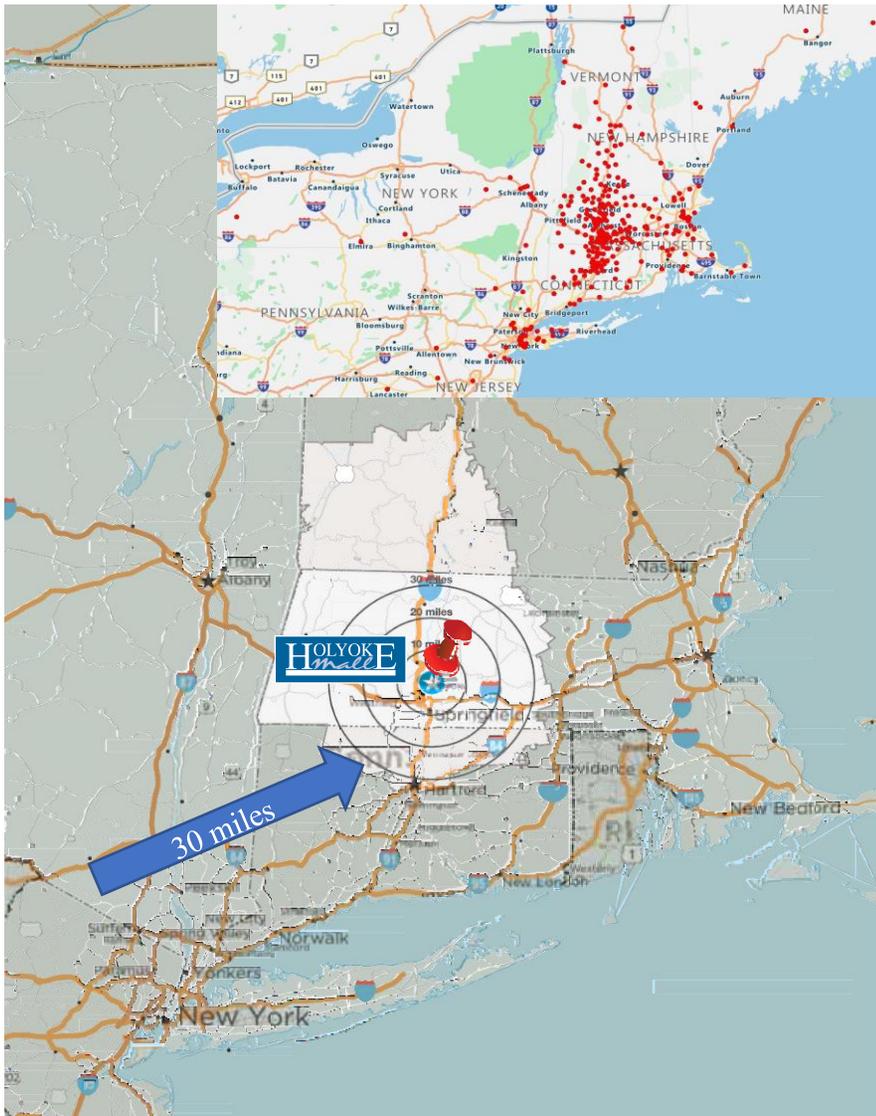
The actual expenditures show a different picture. The number one county, Suffolk, received \$9.2 billion in tourism spending while Hampden County received only 5% of that amount or \$535 million. Suffolk County received 50% of all tourism expenditures in the commonwealth while Hampden County received only 2.8%. (Tables 4 and 5)



<b>Table 4: 2017 Domestic Travel Impact on Massachusetts</b>						
<b>Ranking of Counties by Expenditure Levels, Preliminary 2017</b>						
		Expenditures	Payroll	Employment	State Tax	Local Tax
	County	(\$ Millions)	(\$ Millions)	(Thousands)	Receipts (\$ Millions)	Receipts (\$ Millions)
<b>1</b>	Suffolk	\$9,207.66	\$1,904.50	48.26	\$253.53	\$177.14
<b>2</b>	Middlesex	2,741.48	773.53	22.20	159.12	75.11
<b>3</b>	Norfolk	1,186.37	384.95	10.87	66.70	26.96
<b>4</b>	Barnstable	1,060.92	293.64	9.35	47.83	65.79
<b>5</b>	Essex	949.94	233.41	7.15	52.78	24.86
<b>6</b>	Worcester	935.20	194.67	5.97	52.08	21.82
<b>7</b>	Plymouth	634.14	134.80	4.13	32.47	30.13
<b>8</b>	<b>Hampden</b>	<b>535.65</b>	<b>129.15</b>	<b>3.40</b>	<b>31.04</b>	<b>11.22</b>
<b>9</b>	Bristol	503.78	110.30	3.22	27.77	10.21
<b>10</b>	Berkshire	456.61	121.74	3.95	23.78	13.50
<b>11</b>	Nantucket	172.36	39.83	1.07	5.51	6.19
<b>12</b>	Dukes	143.47	38.07	1.27	5.74	8.47
<b>13</b>	Hampshire	139.78	32.15	0.94	7.85	3.90
<b>14</b>	Franklin	63.72	12.62	0.39	3.68	2.12
	<b>Statewide</b>	<b>\$18,731.08</b>	<b>\$4,403.34</b>	<b>122.18</b>	<b>\$769.90</b>	<b>\$477.43</b>

<b>Table 5: Percent of Statewide Domestic Travel Spending Hampden Co. vs. #1 ranked county 2017</b>						
County	Expenditures	Payroll	Employment	State Tax	Local Tax	
Hampden	2.86%	2.93%	2.78%	4.03%	2.35%	
Suffolk	49.16%	43.25%	39.50%	32.93%	37.10%	

## Tourism Trade Area For Holyoke Holyoke Mall Market Area



The trade area for the Holyoke Mall is an excellent indicator of the market area and market size of tourism for the entire city. This is because the Holyoke Mall, as well as most shopping malls in the United States, serves as leisure, recreation and retail activities for its patrons.

**Figure 1: Trade Area Maps and Distances to Holyoke Mall**

Distance	%	Total
5 MILES	43.60%	43.60%
10 MILES	31.10%	74.70%
20 MILES	9.10%	83.70%
30 MILES	2.80%	86.50%
40 MILES	3.60%	90.20%
50 MILES	1.60%	91.80%
60 MILES	1.60%	93.40%
70 MILES	0.80%	94.20%
80 MILES	0.80%	95.00%
90 MILES	1.00%	95.90%
100 MILES	0.30%	96.20%
150 MILES	3.70%	100.00%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

Source of Table and Map: Holyoke Mall

Figure 1 shows the trade area of the Holyoke Mall in graphic and tabular form. Approximately 75% of the mall’s trade area is in the Pioneer Valley. The mall’s marketing department uses a 30-mile radius as its primary market area. This covers approximately 86.5 percent of their total market area. All of their marketing analysis and

a majority of their marketing budget is concentrated within this thirty-mile area. Thirty miles north of the Holyoke Mall is the Vermont border, and thirty miles south will bring you to Hartford Connecticut. Head east for 30 miles and you arrive in Sturbridge and going west that distance is Becket, MA. Another 15 % of the market area is beyond 30 miles. Primarily, the remaining 15% of the market comes from New York City, Boston and Albany.

**Table 6: Holyoke Mall Trade Area**

Distance from Holyoke	Population		Households	
	2018 Estimate	2023 Projection	2018 Estimate	2023 Projection
3 mile ring	63,493	64,152	25,181	25,450
5 mile ring	158,788	160,539	64,408	65,213
10 mile ring	435,484	441,455	170,630	173,223
15 mile ring	599,447	607,512	233,759	237,376
20 mile ring	728,863	738,255	278,788	283,100
25 mile ring	940,153	949,987	363,809	368,574
30 mile ring	1,343,913	1,353,469	523,526	528,494
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,693,460</b>	<b>1,702,091</b>	<b>671,693</b>	<b>677,019</b>

source: Holyoke Mall

Shopping malls in America are undergoing a significant economic transformation. Approximately 25% of America’s shopping malls will close in the next 5 years, but the Holyoke Mall is likely to survive this macro-economic change by responding to the demands of its market. Because the mall is improving its entertainment and lifestyle offerings, it serves as a valuable indicator of the tourism market for Holyoke. While the entire city, with its charming canals, historic architecture, multi-cultural diversity, and urban feel provides a very different amenity for visitors than the mall, it nonetheless is an important indicator of the City’s market size. The mall estimates that it attracts 18 million visitors each year and in that sense is an invaluable opportunity for bringing people downtown. Knowing who is coming to the mall is important for marketing tourism and defining the tourism trade area for Holyoke.

<b>2018 Estimated Population by Ethnicity (Hispanic or Latino)</b>	<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	<b>Not Hispanic or Latino</b>
3 mile ring	28,833	34,660
	45.41%	54.59%
5 mile ring	59,900	98,888
	37.72%	62.28%
10 mile ring	119,243	316,241
	27.38%	72.62%
15 mile ring	129,633	469,814
	21.63%	78.37%
20 mile ring	137,550	591,313
	18.87%	81.13%
25 mile ring	150,189	789,964
	15.97%	84.03%
30 mile ring	243,614	1,100,299
	18.13%	81.87%
Trade Area	243,304	1,450,156
	14.37%	85.63%

Source: Holyoke Mall

	<b>2018 Median Household Income</b>	<b>2018 Median Effective Buying Income</b>
3 mile ring	\$44,478	\$37,968
5 mile ring	\$47,496	\$40,620
10 mile ring	\$53,973	\$44,870
15 mile ring	\$60,663	\$48,911
20 mile ring	\$63,190	\$50,560
25 mile ring	\$68,059	\$54,359
30 mile ring	\$66,057	\$52,609
Trade Area	\$64,709	\$51,731

The trade area for the mall has approximately 1.7 million people. Nearly 45% of the people within 3 miles of the mall are of Hispanic or Latino origin. As you move farther away, the percentage declines steadily to about 18% at a 30-mile distance (Table 7).

Household incomes and buying power also increase steadily as you move farther away from the mall with the greatest effective annual buying power of \$54,359 at a 25-mile distance (Table 8). More details on household incomes and distances are provided in appendix 6.

### Children’s Museum Market Area

Another indicator of the market area for Holyoke tourism is the visitation to the Holyoke Children’s Museum. The data are only provided by state of origin, so the information is less refined as Holyoke Mall. Nonetheless it is valuable to see that two thirds of all visitors to the Children’s Museum are from Massachusetts. Another 5% are from all other northeastern regional states. This indicates that visitation to Holyoke is primary from Massachusetts residents and, if the visitation patterns are similar to the Heritage State Park, then they are primarily from Holyoke and the Pioneer Valley. Potential visitors from neighboring New England states are not attracted to downtown Holyoke. These data are captured by museum staff at the time of entrance payment is made.

### Holyoke Heritage State Park Market Area

While the data for the Children’s Museum does not provide a breakdown of locations within Massachusetts, the Heritage State Park does. Table 10 shows 12 months of data from June 2018 to May 2019. These data show that most visitors (54%) are from Holyoke proper, 79% are from the Pioneer Valley and 88% are from Massachusetts. These data are less comprehensive than the museum since it is collected only from those who voluntarily sign the guest book.

**Table 9: Children’s Museum Attendance by State**

CT	2872	2.99%
MA	64807	67.49%
ME	46	0.05%
NH	174	0.18%
NJ	763	0.79%
NY	566	0.59%
PA	64	0.07%
RI	120	0.12%
VT	51	0.05%
Subtotal	69463	72.34%
All Other States	26558	27.66%
Total	96021	100.00%

Source: Holyoke Children’s Museum

**Table 10: Holyoke Heritage State Park Visitor Center Attendance – Only those who signed the guest book**

Mo/Yr.	Holyoke	South Hadley	East-hampton	Westfield	Chicopee	Springfield & area	North-hampton & area	Amherst & area	Pioneer Valley other	MA outside Pioneer Valley	CT	US other	foreign	Totals
6/18-5/19														
<b>Subtotal – Pioneer Valley</b>														
<b>Subtotal - Massachusetts</b>														
<b>Totals</b>	658	25	19	17	68	75	62	32	8	113	31	101	17	1226
<b>Percent</b>	54%	2%	2%	1%	6%	6%	5%	3%	1%	9%	3%	8%	1%	100%

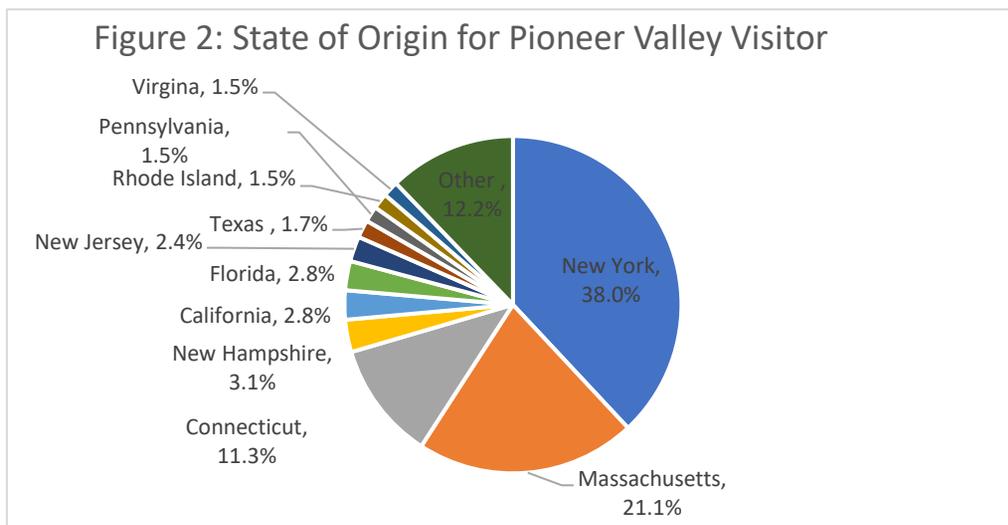
### Out of State Visitor to Holyoke

For purposes of estimating out-of-state visitors to Holyoke, we know that 86.5% of the market area is within 30 miles, however, a percentage of this amount is in northern Connecticut and the greater Hartford area. There are no data to separate this out of state portion from the remaining 30-mile market area. A best estimate of 5% is allocated to out of state visitors from within 30 miles. These are added to the remaining 15% from the New York City, Boston and Albany areas. A total estimation of out-of-state visitors to Holyoke is 20% based on visitation to the Holyoke Mall. Two other sources of data also provide estimates of out of state visitors. The Children's Museum estimates that 32.5% of their visitors are from out-of-state. Heritage State Park estimates that 12% is from out of state. The mall data is judged to be the most reliable based on its continuous collection procedures. Since the mall visitation estimate lies at nearly the mean between these other two estimates, then 20% will be used for this report.

Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau (GSCVB)

The GSCVB is the Pioneer Valley’s Destination Marketing Organization. Its mission is to promote the hospitality and tourism offerings of the region. They also study their market area and point of origin of their visitors. A review of their data is helpful to the

objectives of this plan. Point of origin data from GSCVB shows that most visitors are coming from New York. Combining New York and Connecticut visitors, nearly half of all visitors are from outside of Massachusetts. GSVCB data on visitors shows that only 21% are from this state. This is a stark difference from the visitation to Holyoke, in which 70% to 90% come from within Massachusetts. This difference can tell several stories. Primarily, the difference demonstrates the lost opportunity that is available to Holyoke but for several reasons they are unable to secure.



Considering that Holyoke and Springfield are nearly neighboring municipalities only seven miles away, the difference cannot be explained by location or

**Table 11 Awareness of Key Attractions** (Source: GCVB 2018)

Yankee Candle Village	60%
Six Flags New England	53%
Big E	30%
The Emily Dickenson Museum	27%
Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame	23%
Smith College Museum of Art	23%
Springfield Museums and The Dr Seuss Memorial	20%
Springfield Armory National Historic Site	20%
Magic Wings Butterfly Conservatory& Gardens	20%
Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art	13%
Bright Nights at Forest Park	13%

**Table 12: Purpose of the Trip** (Source: GSCVB 2018)

Pleasure/Vacation	69%
Visit Friends/Relatives	39%
Special Events	22%
Passed Through	20%
Business	14%
Visit College/Student	12%
Attend Sporting Event	10%
Conference/Meeting	6%

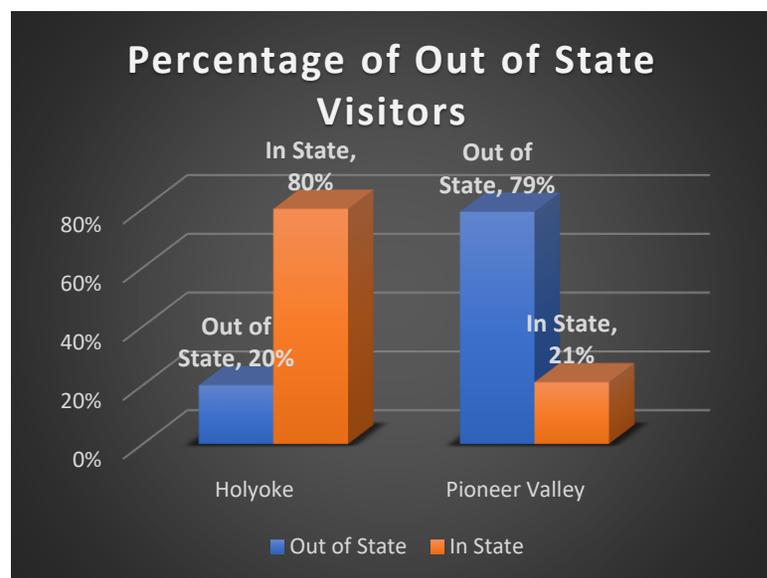
geography. Most visitors (nearly 70%) are coming to the Pioneer Valley for a vacation (Table 12). Seventy-seven percent are families or couples and have come for the attractions and the scenic beauty in the region. The most common attractions are Yankee Candle Village, Six Flags Adventure Park, and the Big E Fair (Table 11).

None of these attractions are in Holyoke. This is unfortunate, but represents a large untapped opportunity. Visitors who arrive in the area to enjoy the above-mentioned attractions are on vacation rather than on a trip for business. They are coming to explore the Pioneer Valley and enjoy leisure time with their family. As these visitors are already exploring and enjoying local attractions, they are more willing to stop in Holyoke to continue their exploration of the Valley as compared to business travelers who would need to be convinced to take time away from their work. Holyoke is also ideally located in the middle of the most popular attractions. Regional visitors are literally passing through Holyoke to go their favorite locations. Several of these attractions are cultural and sports related. Over 30% of the visitors' primary purpose is to visit historic sites and museums. This is one high-visibility target market for Holyoke, where marketing at those locations would likely be effective at creating new visitors. Visitors going to the popular sites in Table 11 are also likely to enjoy visiting the Canalwalk, and Mill Tours, Wistariahurst, the Volleyball Hall of Fame, Children's Museum, Merry Go-Round, Holyoke Heritage State Park, and, in the future, Victory Theater and Little Puerto Rico.

### Holyoke's Untapped Tourism Potential

To understand the unrealized tourism opportunities for Holyoke, it is important to understand the magnitude of visitors coming to the Pioneer Valley region but who are not stopping in Holyoke. Of particular interest are those visitors who could be captured as Holyoke's target market. In other words, those visitors who are coming to the Valley for a similar experience as what Holyoke can offer. The Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau estimates that the Pioneer Valley receives about 4 million visitors per year. Of that number, there are an estimated 3.1 million out-of-state visitors coming to the Pioneer Valley, or about 77%. We estimate that approximately 20% of Holyoke's visitors are from out of state, a much lower share than the region. To determine the untapped visitor potential to Holyoke, an Equal Allocation Method is used. This methodology assumes that Holyoke can have an equal chance of being visited as any other destination in the Pioneer Valley if it implements the correct adjustments to meet visitor demands. It does not mean that the Valley will have more visitors, it means that the existing visitor population will be redistributed. For example, this method assumes that visitors to the Basketball Hall of Fame and Yankee Candle will stop in Holyoke on the way through. The necessary improvements to improve the likelihood of this assumption being true are investments, actions, and procedures discussed in the implementation section of this report. If Holyoke achieved an equal chance of being visited then its out-of-state percentage of visitors would reflect the regional profile, going from about 20% to 79%. If each out-of-state visitor to the Pioneer Valley were a potential visitor to Holyoke then 20% of that number is subtracted to avoid double counting the number of out-of-state visitors that are already in Holyoke. This amounts to about 2.5 million uncaptured out-of-state visitors. Approximately 70% of them, or 1.7 million out-of-state visitors are on vacation and therefore represent a high valued target market for additional visitors to Holyoke destinations.

Table 13 shows the top reasons people are coming to the Pioneer Valley. Holyoke offers these visitors many of the experiences they are looking for including, scenic beauty, museums and historic sites, outdoor recreation, shopping, and special events. This calculation only includes out-of-state visitors. There is additional untapped tourist potential from Massachusetts residents as well. This is estimated at an additional 21% or another 371,000. Combined, the untapped tourism potential for Holyoke is estimated between 1.7 and 2 million visitors. The average daily spending for each party is approximately \$270. A party size is on average 3.1 people. Therefore, the untapped tourism spending that Holyoke is missing is estimated to be \$126 million per year (Table 15), the economic equivalent to about 8 more Saint Patrick weekends a year for the City.



Attractions	44%
Scenic Beauty	41%
Serene / Calm atmosphere	39%
Museum/ Historic Sites	31%
Outdoor Recreation	31%
Shopping	31%
Theme parks	28%
Special Events	28%

Source: GVCVB 2018

Per party/day	\$270
Lodging	\$86
Shopping	\$53
Recreation	\$51
Food and Beverage	\$36
Transportation	\$30
Other	\$13

Source: GVCVB 2018

**Table 15: Untapped Tourism Potential in Holyoke**

<b>Visitor Volume</b>	Holyoke	Pioneer Valley	4,000,000	Gross Market Share Potential in Holyoke	Net Market Share Potential. (less existing visitors)
<b>Out-of-State</b>	20%	79%	3,160,000	2,496,400	1,997,120
<b>In-State</b>	80%	21%	840,000	366,971	73,394
<b>On Vacation</b>		70%	2,800,000	1,747,480	1,449,360
<b>average party size</b>				3.1	
<b>Average daily spending/party</b>				\$ 270	
<b>Tourism spending</b>				\$ 152,199,871	\$ 126,234,573

## Strategic Planning

### The Process

A strategic plan for increasing visitation and tourism in Holyoke is designed to leverage the city's most valuable assets into attractive destinations. The City's unique and valuable assets are used to develop an intentional experience - a reason for visiting. The Plan must use the city's assets to give people an incentive for leaving their homes and coming to Holyoke. A successful strategic plan does this by building on what is working well and correcting the weaknesses or challenges that hinder visitation.

The process follows a traditional strategic planning process from vision to implementing actions. It started by identifying the city's most valuable tourism assets and services. The consultant visited each one and to the extent possible interviewed the managers or owners of these assets. The plans most valuable information came from the one-on-one interviews and then through group discussions during two workshops that were held on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The process directed the stakeholders to identify the key priorities for making long-term and lasting changes to Holyoke's tourism economy. Both workshops resulted in clear majority feedback on the most important priorities and actions. These key priorities, also referred to as strategic thrusts, are not implementation actions by themselves. They are designed to coordinate groups of actions and make overarching directional changes to the whole economy of Holyoke. As such, tourism and all other economic sectors, will benefit. The stakeholder process identified three strategic thrusts: 1) Positive Public Perception of Holyoke; 2) Effective and Coordinated Strategic Marketing; 3) and Signature Destination(s).

The stakeholders then gathered for a second workshop to brainstorm the most important actions to implement the strategic thrusts. The consultant collected these opinions, combined them with the knowledge, data, and analysis of the previous stages of this work, and from this emerged nine strategic recommendations. Each recommendation has several implementing actions. While these recommendations are likely to require a significant amount of financial and human resources, estimating the amount of resources involved was outside of the scope of this planning process. As such, the ninth recommendation is to create a financial and human resources plan which would help identify the resources to implement the preceding eight recommendations.

Holyoke's Tourism Strategic Plan was designed to:

- identify the City's challenges and constraints with respect to tourism
- generate meaningful contributions from the city's leading tourism stakeholders; and
- identify and use the city's most valuable assets that can increase visitation

The strategic plan document was compiled from 5 interconnecting components: 1) the Vision Statement for tourism in Holyoke. This is an overarching statement that tells us the future of Holyoke tourism and what this Plan will attempt to create.

2) Strategic Thrusts are the highest priorities in attracting tourism to Holyoke. They are carefully targeted objectives that are limited in number but powerful. They are intended to have a widespread impact across many areas in the city. They are designed to address and overcome the biggest hurdles that prevent tourism.

3) SMART goals define the strategic thrusts in tangible terms of who, what, where, when, and how. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timed. SMART goals are accountable and measurable.

4) Actions are specific activities that are designed to implement the goals and strategic thrusts. Actions are the projects that need people, funding, and a schedule. They may be long-term or short-term projects and may include multiple sub-activities required to accomplish the project. The actions are accountable the measurable through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

5) KPIs or Key Performance Indicators are relevant and objective measurements that are used to track progress of a certain activity. This 5-step process was used to create a tourism strategic plan for Holyoke.

The heart of the process relied on interviewing and engaging key stakeholders and local professionals in the tourism, hospitality, recreation, and economic development fields in and around Holyoke. The consultant first reviewed baseline data, conducted several site visits, completed an inventory of tourism related services and assets, and studied tourism statistics for the region and city. This information was used as a launching point to structure the interviews, learn from the stakeholders, and to develop a more refined list of opportunities and challenges to attract more visitors. The list of stakeholders engaged in this process is provided in appendix 2. After the baseline data was studies and interviews with stakeholders were completed, two workshops were held.

### Workshops

Two workshops were designed to bring the stakeholders through the strategic planning process.

The first workshop was used to generate stakeholder opinions and information for the purposes of creating strategic thrusts for the plan. The meeting resulting in the stakeholders prioritizing the most critical issues and weaknesses that prevent tourism visitation in Holyoke. The results are shown in table 16.

Workshop 1 results

Large group discussion removed overlap between similar issues raised in each small group.

A consolidated list of 25 weaknesses and threats resulted from this conversation. Stakeholders were then given three votes each and were asked to rank the 25 issues according to the following: Red = 1<sup>st</sup> priority ; Yellow = 2<sup>nd</sup> priority; Green = 3<sup>rd</sup> priority

Table 16: Priority of weaknesses that prevent tourism in Holyoke

<b>Weakness or Threat</b>	<b>Highest Priority (red)</b>	<b>2nd Priority (yellow)</b>	<b>3rd priority (green)</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<i>Perception</i>	6	1	2	9
<i>Lack of Tourism Marketing</i>	2	2	1	5
<i>Lack of Big Picture Coordination on Tourism</i>	2	1	2	5
<i>Transportation</i>	1	1	0	2
<i>No One Stop Shop for businesses (Permitting)</i>	1		1	2
<i>Poor Wayfinding</i>		4	1	5
<i>Lack of Affordable Event Space for +300</i>		2	1	3
<i>ADA accessibility</i>		1		1
<i>Not Eligible for MassSave</i>		1		1
<i>Lack of Maintance on Parking Garage</i>		1		1
<i>Lack of Family Friend Downtown</i>			2	2
<i>Events are risky</i>			2	2
<i>Racism</i>			1	1
<i>PVTA</i>				0
<i>Digital Competition</i>				0
<i>Poverty</i>				0
<i>Media</i>				0
<i>Places to go in extreme Temps</i>				0
<i>Climate Change</i>				0
<i>Market Size</i>				0
<i>Empty Buildings</i>				0
<i>Not celebrating diversity</i>				0
<i>Lack of Anchors</i>				0
<i>Competition in Region</i>				0
<i>Utility Legislation</i>				0

Based on the results of this workshop three Strategic Thrusts were developed.

**Strategic Thrust 1 Positive Public Perception of Holyoke:** Many visitors are simply afraid to go to Holyoke. Fear is the driving motivation to stay away and the human emotion that must be addressed. The negative perception of Holyoke is based on past reputations that do not hold true today. However, the perception still exists but must be reversed in order to attract tourists. Creating a positive public perception means changing the public image of the entire city. It requires a long-term effort organized by the City of Holyoke that addresses the root causes of the negative perception.

**Strategic Thrust 2 Effective and Coordinated Strategic Marketing:** A marketing campaign is used to attract visitors to specific destinations and assets. An effective and coordinated marketing campaign mean that the owners and managers of Holyoke’s tourist destinations are coordinated to achieve maximum return on advertising dollar. While creating a positive public perception overlaps in some ways with an effective and coordinated strategic marketing campaign, they differ in implementation. Changes to perception will come from improvements in public assets and a coordinated public message from City Hall. A marketing campaign is largely developed by private sector interests but coordinated for the overall benefit of the entire city.

**Strategic Thrust 3 Attractive Destinations:** The final strategic thrust is to create destinations that will attract tourists who are currently visiting the Pioneer Valley. Holyoke has plenty of valuable tourism assets but they are largely unknown, underdeveloped, or are missing key features that meet tourism demands. Primarily, Holyoke is missing a “signature destination” that put the city on the tourism map.

These three strategic thrusts form the basis of several goals and recommendations. They are in priority order. Strategic thrust 1 resolves the driving motivation to stay away and it allows the second strategic thrust to work ; strategic thrust 2 uses the power of the private sector to attract visitors but can only be effective if the city is perceived to be safe; strategic thrust 3 creates a signature destination(s) that honors the city and establishes itself as a unique experience.

### Vision Statement

The workshops and remote dialogue with the planning participants produced the following Vision Statement

*“Holyoke is a city where visitors become inspired by its cultural diversity, informed by its history, charmed by its canals, and so enriched that they want to return.”*

### Strategic Thrusts and SMART Goals for Holyoke Tourism

The following 14 goals were developed from the three strategic thrusts:

#### Strategic Thrust 1: Positive Public Perception of Holyoke

SMART Goal 1A: Within one year a professional marketing firm is hired to improve public image of Holyoke.  
SMART Goal 1B: The media (printed, on-line, TV, and radio) produces a positive story about Holyoke at least three times per year.  
SMART Goal 1C: A majority of a random sample of visitors in an annual visitor survey report having a positive image of Holyoke.  
SMART Goal 1D: City-owned parking garages, parking lots, and other infrastructure are clean.  
SMART goal 1E: City establishes a one-stop-shop for permitting.

#### Strategic Thrust 2: Effective and Coordinated Strategic Marketing

SMART Goal 2A: By July 2020 Holyoke has a new brand and unified marketing message.  
SMART Goal 2B: Holyoke’s Business Community meets on a regular basis to specifically improve and implement marketing efforts.  
SMART Goal 2C: The new marketing message is effectively distributed to the target market(s).

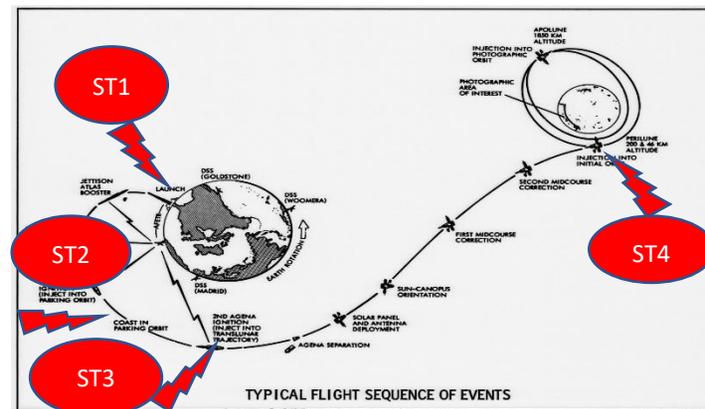
#### Strategic Thrust 3: Attractive Destinations

SMART Goal 3A: The Canal District is officially established; the Canalwalk is expanded; and two to three public celebrations are held in this district.  
SMART Goal 3B: Little Puerto Rico is officially established on a one-mile section of Main Street.  
SMART Goal 3C: Victory Theater is open for business by July 2021.  
SMART goal 3C: The Connecticut River is promoted as a destination and has new and/or improved public access.  
SMART goal 3C: The natural areas in and around Mt Tom are promoted as a Holyoke asset and its visitors are encouraged to visit downtown Holyoke.  
SMART goal 3C: The city has improved wayfinding.

## Recommendations

The recommendations in this strategic plan are designed to implement three overarching strategic priorities, also known as strategic thrusts. These three strategic thrusts were chosen after careful review of tourism data, site visits, interviews and two workshops with leading stakeholders in Holyoke’s tourism economy. The data shows that tourism in Holyoke is missing a large share of its potential and the two workshops culminated in an identified landscape of the major weaknesses within Holyoke that hinder visitation and tourism sector growth.

Strategic Thrusts are not specific actions in and of themselves, they are groups of actions that, when combined, will make significant changes to the entire tourism environment and facilitate growth. An analogy of a strategic thrust is when NASA launches spacecraft to the moon. To accomplish a lunar mission, NASA uses only 4 strategic thrusts: 1) ignition for launch; 2) ignition into “earth’s parking orbit”; 3) ignition into “translunar trajectory”; and 4) ignition into lunar orbit. These four thrusts provide the supporting environment for hundreds of smaller mid-course corrections to function effectively and for the space craft to travel 290,000 miles through two different atmospheres.



Four Strategic Thrusts of a Lunar Mission

The Holyoke Tourism Strategic Plan will have three strategic thrusts. These three thrusts are designed to change the overall trajectory of Holyoke’s tourism economy so that individual actors in this sector can do what they do best and implement site specific tourism development activities within their realm. Implementing these strategic thrusts will take teamwork of multiple actors over time, many of whom might not have been involved in this planning process. Therefore, it will require the stakeholders involved in this process to convey the merits of implementing this plan, as well as City leadership, whether it’s an elected official, department head, director of a non-governmental organization, or a private sector entity.

### Three Strategic Thrusts

The three strategic thrusts are:

#### Creating a Positive Public Perception of Holyoke

Holyoke’s tourism economy is hampered by a negative, and primarily false, reputation that Holyoke is unsafe. The author has walked High Street, Main Street and many other areas of downtown at night and felt entirely safe. However, one individual’s experience does not create nor change a reputation. No matter how false it is, Holyoke is battling a negative perception and it prevents much more than tourism development; it negatively impacts economic investment in all sectors of the economy, prevents job growth, decreases property values, which in turn eliminates an incentive to invest in private property, producing

more derelict buildings, and strengthening a negative downward economic spiral. The author is, as many active citizens are, aware of many exciting, positive, and innovative developments, large and small, that are happening throughout the city. Nonetheless, the media perpetuates a negative stereotype that may have held some truth decades ago, but its only value today is to sell news stories. Changing this negative perception is a top priority for this plan and should be for the entire city. Because there are many positive actions occurring across all sectors of the City on which Holyoke can boast, and because all citizens would benefit from an improved reputation, it would behoove the City of Holyoke to spend taxpayer dollars on fighting and changing this negative perception. It is difficult to change a reputation. It will take a long-term effort (5 to 10 years), hard work, money, and marketing skills, but the effort will produce a net positive return on investment for all of Holyoke.

#### Effective and Coordinated Strategic Marketing

Strategic marketing efforts overlap and should be coordinated with the first strategic thrust, creating a positive public perception. Strategic marketing is only one, albeit important, tool for changing a reputation across the city. The first strategic thrust involves many other tools and expertise and is concerned with all elements of the city. The second strategic thrust is focused more on creating a tourism brand, coordinating all tourism efforts within the City, and creating a unified force to attract visitors. This involves coordinating the business community, facilitating tourism from the customers perspective, informing them of the City's tourism assets, and making them easy to visit through effective marketing and coordinated information.

#### A Signature Destination

The third and final strategic thrust builds on the first two. Marketing efforts need to promote destinations. Creating attractive destinations for the visitor is a key priority that involves improving all tourism assets in the city. This plan identifies the tourism assets that are valuable attractors for the visitor. The entities who own and/or manage these assets are proud of them and take great care in creating the best experience and visitor destination possible. The recommendations in all three strategic thrusts are designed to augment these efforts. This strategic thrust is more specifically designed to create a "signature destination" for the City. While there are many interesting destinations in Holyoke, the city needs a "place" where people can identify Holyoke. A signature destination is not one building or event, or statue, it is an area, a district, or a neighborhood. A signature destination can be found in many great cities: Times Square; the Mall in Washington DC; the Las Vegas Strip; Hollywood Boulevard; Miami's South Beach; San Francisco's China Town or Seattle's Pike's Place to name a few. This strategic thrust for Holyoke is to create a place that says, "This is Holyoke." A place that identifies Holyoke like none other is the canals. Before the canals there was raw land. The land on which the City of Holyoke sits was purchased in one fell swoop because of the potential that the Connecticut River and canals offered. The canals were built first, dictating the location of the streets, walks, and housing. The canals led Holyoke into an era of industry, great employment and a thriving economy.

Holyoke is America’s first planned Industrial City and today the canals are tangible proof of America’s ingenuity, drive, and spirit. Today the canal area along Race Street is the heart of Holyoke’s innovation and leading the way in energy, sustainability, and creativity. The canals can lead America again to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Holyoke’s canals are a signature destination for the city.

These three strategic thrusts are listed in order of priority. If only one was implemented it should be the first, if two are worked on it should be the first two and so forth. Nothing is more important than changing the negative perception of Holyoke since many other actions can grow naturally from private sector activities if this was corrected.

## Creating a Positive Public Perception of Holyoke

### Recommendation 1: Create and Market a New Brand for Holyoke

This recommendation involves several actions and sub-activities, all of which have the intention of implementing the first strategic thrust. Creating a new brand for Holyoke will be used to market the city in its entirety. It will promote not only tourism, but it will also be used to attract employers from all sectors, a skilled workforce, and private investors. Changing a city’s reputation is a long-term effort. One might remember the reputation of Manhattan neighborhoods Times Square or the Bowery during the 70’s and 80’s. Today they are safe and hold valuable real estate, but it took a couple of decades of time, along with a coordinated effort with law enforcement, economic development, marketing, and long-term strategies to change these reputations. Holyoke can do the same. This is not a short-term commitment, nor will it be free. Like all worthwhile efforts this one will take time and money. If the current city leadership stands behind this recommendation today, then it will survive changes in government administrations for the likely duration necessary to see progress, investments, and positive change.

#### Implementation Actions for Recommendation 1

**Action 1a.** A Tourism Advisory Committee is established. This TAC is largely composed of stakeholders that advised this Plan, many of whom expressed enthusiastic interest during the planning process. TAC membership includes:

- Hoteliers/Accommodations Industry Representative
- Nightlife Representative
- Parade Committee Representative
- Economic Development Department Staffperson
- Real Estate Representative
- Cultural representative
- Recreation Representative

- MGM Representative

This committee is staffed by a Tourism Coordinator who is either an employee or contractor of the City.

**Action 1b.** The City of Holyoke appoints a lead person to serve as chief marketer for the city. This is a new position held by a person of considerable marketing and public relations talent who is responsible for implementing these strategic thrusts and recommendations within this plan. The TAC writes the position description, conducts the search, interviews candidates, and makes a recommendation on the finalist to the appropriate City department.

**Action 1c.** A media consultant and branding expert is hired to create Holyoke’s new brand. The CMO, TAC and Tourism Coordinator work to write the scope of work, find funding, hire and direct the consultant. The consultant delivers Holyoke’s new brand and a 5-year public relations & marketing strategy to publicize this brand.

**Action 1d.** The CMO holds numerous other responsibilities and works with the TAC, Mayor’s Office, and City Council to create an annual work plan to refine these responsibilities. As of this writing the additional responsibilities include:

- a. Create monthly stories Mass Appeal and other news media reflecting positive happenings in Holyoke;
- b. Engage the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, work with their marketing agents, and become a paying member;
- c. Take the lead on city beautification efforts; including:
  - i. working with TAC to identify abandoned buildings for murals
  - ii. engage local artists for city wide beautification ideas and actions
  - iii. support the Heart of Holyoke program for Main Street
- d. support designation of two new city districts (Canal District and Little Puerto Rico)
- e. upgrade city’s web site for improved functionality, visual appeal, professionalism
- f. work with the Police Department to publicize their best efforts at keeping the city safe
- g. work with TAC to promote and market the city’s tourism assets
- h. promote the permit reform committee’s progress and final results
- i. Implement a wayfinding and signage program
- j. Work with Department of Museums and Monuments to promote cultural events
- k. Work with Volleyball Hall of Fame to promote volleyball throughout the city
- l. Establish Holyoke tourism promotion campaigns in Ireland and Puerto Rico
- m. Market Holyoke Irish and Puerto Rican heritage and cultures to targeted markets throughout the US and abroad
- n. Work with TAC, OPED on placemaking efforts throughout the city
- o. Implement the 5-year public relations & brand strategy
- p. Write and follow an Annual Work Plan

### Recommendation 2: Permit Reform

Reforming the permitting process is clearly a top priority. Based on the information gathered from stakeholders, many of whom have experienced the permitting process firsthand, the procedures for acquiring an event permit is so mired in confusion and internal contradictions that the system appears broken. Tourism is impacted by a disfunctiona permitting process in many ways. First, several stakeholders have stated how they have “given up” on trying to acquire a permit to hold special events at their venues. The numerous departments that they must visit, paperwork that must be completed and conflicting messages on permit requirements have led the stakeholders to cancel their event. Food vending is another process that is mired in difficulty according to the stakeholders. The process to acquire a permit is difficult. Public art permits are also difficult to acquire. Public arts are significant attrators to visitors, they promote foot traffic and intices visitors to linger in the city. Finally, the cost to acquire a permit often can be an economic disincentive when the risk of low sales balanced with the permits costs may not return a profit. There are many best practices and examples in municipalities around the country that have fixed their permit process. Holyoke can learn from them, if it chooses. Whether there are the institutional incentives to reform the system or keep the status quo remains to be seen. Nonetheless, the demand for a functional and efficient permit system and therefore a permit reform process is recommended.

#### Implementation Actions for Recommendation 2

**Action 2a.** City Council establishes a permit reform committee that includes:

- Ordinance Committee
- Licensing Board
- City Council
- Economic Development Department
- Local Vendors (the Customer)
- Police, Fire and Public Safety representatives

**Action 2b.** Permit reform committee meets monthly for one specific purpose: to modify the entire permitting process for events, public gatherings, beautification, and public art. Monthly meetings will last until December 2020 when the Committee completes a new permit process for the City council to approve.

### Recommendation 3: Monitor and Report Progress

All good plans include a monitoring initiative. Monitoring progress allows the implementers to learn from unforeseen challenges that affect the plan’s goals and to adjust actions so that the goals remain in focus. Monitoring makes the plan a living document and keeps

it flexible. Monitoring for progress on this Strategic Thrust, creating a positive public perception of Holyoke, is performed by a statistically valid survey administered annually.

#### Implementation Actions for Recommendation 3

**Action 3a.** Office of Planning and Economic Development create a survey methodology that ensures accurate statistical monitoring over multiple years. They may engage a local university to assist or complete this in-house. The objective of the survey is to:

1. determine if visitors are feeling safe in Holyoke
2. determine what the visitor's general perception of Holyoke was
3. whether they enjoyed their visit
4. what could be improved or changed

The survey is conducted at regular intervals to allow for comparison and to adjust the plan's implementation actions.

#### Recommendation 4: Improved Infrastructure Maintenance Program

Several tourism stakeholders have commented on how the conditions of the city public spaces and infrastructure is a deterrent to tourism and contributes to the negative perception of Holyoke. Clean parking garages and parking lots, trimmed vegetation, and clean public spaces are inviting to tourists. The exact source for the problem was not identified during the research for this report. Therefore, the first step in implementing any improvement is for the TAC is clearly identify the problem and make recommendations for improvement.

#### Implementation Actions for Recommendation 4

**Action 4a.** The TAC tours the sites of concern and documents the problems that need addressing.

**Action 4b.** The TAC and the appropriate city Department meet to discuss the issues and create a plan of action

**Action 4c.** Contract for maintenance is reviewed and revised as needed.

**Action 4d.** Contract is enforced through a newly established monitoring plan.

## Effective and Coordinated Marketing Campaign

**Recommendation 5: Coordinate business communications and Holyoke tourism opportunities into one marketing effort**  
During primary data collection and interviews with tourism stakeholders, the author was stuck by the lack of communication and information sharing between different factions within the city. Each group operates within its own isolated silo and very little information is shared with those outside. It is normal for business transactions to remain confidential until the deal is done so that calculations and negotiations are not mired with confusion. However, the issue in Holyoke goes beyond basic business strategy and math. In Holyoke the issue seems to be rooted in culture, customs, and emotion. A Tourism Plan will not be able to break those barriers, nor should we try here. This recommendation only seeks to increase communication on tourism planning, efforts, and activities for the purposes of saving everyone marketing dollars and gaining an economy of scale in attracting visitors to the city.

### Implementation Steps for Recommendation 5

**Action 5a.** The TAC is established by the City Council and staffed by the CMO and Tourism Coordinator. One of leading responsibilities of the TAC is to improve communications and information sharing among the city’s tourism leaders. To this end the City Council directs the TAC to improve tourism communications by conducting monthly meetings to share updates on each representatives’ recent and forthcoming activities. The TAC will also be working on a branding message, a marketing and PR plan, promoting events, supporting permit reform, improving signage and wayfinding, and promoting events. All these efforts will also have the effect of sharing information between factions and in that way will contribute to improving communications.

**Action 5b.** The TAC creates a tourism marketing calendar. This monthly calendar displays tourism marketing efforts that each TAC member expects to undertake. During regular monthly TAC meetings, a review and discussion of the calendar will reveal opportunities to coordinate efforts, combine resources, and gain an economy of scale. It will also help coordinate events so that they don’t compete for the same audience.

**Action 5c.** The Permit Reform Committee creates a “Permitting Official” position (Ombudsman, inter-departmental representative, etc) also to serve as the “one-stop-shop” for facilitating permits through the newly reformed permit process. The Department maintains a calendar of events; and they work with CMO to market and advertise the events. Personnel Department reassigns the necessary exiting city employees to staff this new workload.

**Action 5d.** The Volleyball Hall of Fame, Department of Parks and Recreation, School District, the Community College and other entities work together to promote more volleyball events.

## A Signature Destination

### Recommendation 6: Create Holyoke's Signature Destination

Holyoke's canals are the roots of Holyoke's history, culture and economy. Imagine Holyoke without them and it would resemble a more generic, brick-lined industrial mill town in New England. The canals place Holyoke on the map of great American innovation. Today the businesses that occupy those canal-laden mill buildings are quietly continuing this tradition. The canals are still serving their original purpose by delivering power to those businesses. One of the most valuable tourism assets in any city is its history and culture, especially New England's mill towns, because that is what sets that city apart from the others. As the canals flow from the river to the buildings and back to the river, they are connecting Holyoke's history to its future. Despite all the communication silos that exist in the city, the canals are probably the one asset that connects all factions of Holyoke. For this reason, the canals are valuable assets. The businesses know it, the artists know it, historians know it, HG&E knows it, and most people in Holyoke know it. However, most visitors don't know what they are looking at, other than a channel of water next to a brick building. The stories behind this view are truly amazing. The canals should be boosted to become Holyoke's signature destination. They can be used to attract visitors from across the country if developed and marketed correctly. The seeds for attracting tourist are already planted. These include: the Canalwalk; the mill tours; the nightlife, the artists' studios; public art and parks; and live/co-workspaces. This recommendation is to establish a canal district and to market it as Holyoke signature destination.

### Implementation Actions for Recommendation 6

**Action 6a.** The Planning and Economic Development Office maps out the district boundaries. Zoning ordinances and other relevant policy documents are edited to include the Canal District. The city council adopts a new zoning ordinance that amends the zone boundaries and officially establishes the Canal District. Proposed district boundaries are shown in Map 1.

**Action 6b.** The new Canal District is promoted in marketing materials by the CMO and others.

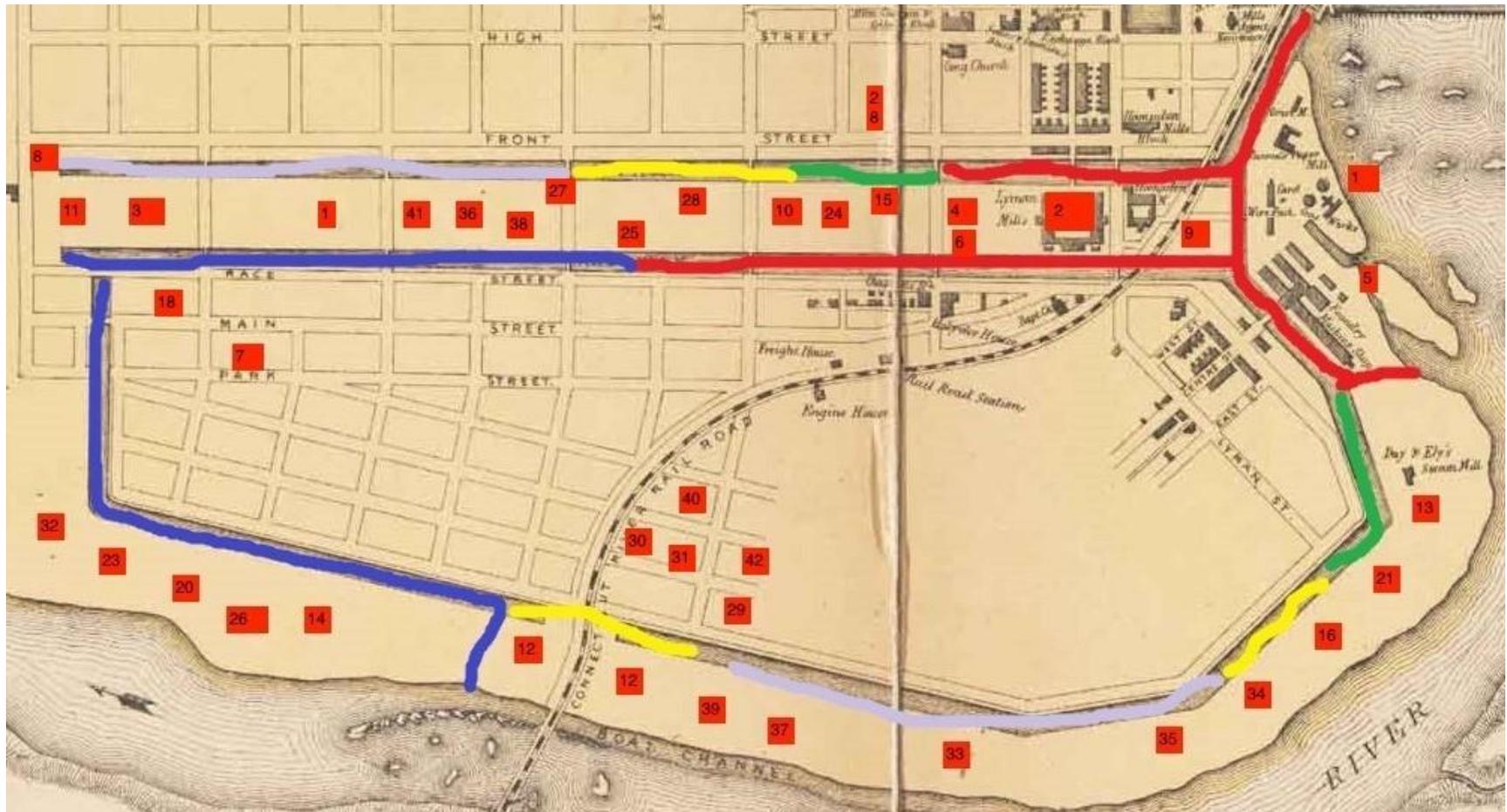
**Action 6c.** OP&ED coordinates the business community within the district to create the Canal District Business Association (CaDi). The association holds regular meetings to discuss mutually beneficial activities, promotions, events, local policies, development and improvement goals and objectives.

**Action 6d.** Events and promotions are scheduled and marketed. These include annual block parties, art fairs, open studio weekends, Canalwalk programs and tours, historical tours of the mills. Currently a sustainability tour is available through the Holyoke Heritage Visitors Center. This tour is temporary and should be endorsed permanently. The tour is described in Appendix 7.

**Action 6e.** Interpretation efforts are implemented. Currently a visitor to the Canalwalk doesn't understand the meaning of its environs. There are hundreds of stories behind the water and the buildings. Tell the visitor what is special about this place. Currently, there is little to no information. Interpretation of the canals can occur in as many ways as art can be creative. There are many artists in the district and their collective creative minds should be engaged to determine the best way to explain the canals. Plus, they work there every day so their opinions and their vested interest in the district can best explain what happened there and why. The TAC, CaDi, and local artists should meet to discuss a plan to bring life to the canal district. Some ideas for interpretation include:

- a. A series of interpretive signs that provide a self-guided walk through the canals. An Antioch graduate student is currently working on this. The project is called Signs of Progress. This work should be vetted through the TAC and CaDi and eventually implemented. The description of this project is included in Appendix 5.
- b. Public sculpture, especially large, eye-catching, and thought-provoking installations should be installed throughout the walk. Restrictions to allow these sculptures are lifted. The TAC and CaDi are authorized by City Council to review and serve as final authority of approval of public art in this district.
- c. The HG&E, TAC and CaDi host a competition for water art. Water art should be installed in the canals. This can come in many different forms, including water sculptures, fountains, water spray shows, fire and water demonstrations, and light shows Artists should be asked to bring the water "back to life."

**Action 6f.** Beautification efforts are increased and maintenance schedules improved. There are limited places to sit and enjoy the view. The vegetation is overgrown in many places. There are no activities in the area and limited eating options. Expansion of the Canalwalk and improvements could include tables, more seating, landscaping improvements, and public art.



Map 1 Holyoke Canal District and Historic Mills

Recommendation 7: Establish a Puerto Rican Cultural District on Main Street

A one-mile section of Main Street should be designated as an official Cultural District to promote Puerto Rican heritage and culture, similar to initiatives designating a “Little Italy” or “Chinatown”. Holyoke has the highest per capita concentration of Puerto Rican residents of any city in the continental United States. Puerto Rican culture, cuisine, and community are already a vital part of Holyoke’s identity. Holyoke is already popular for many people of Hispanic and Latino ethnicity who visit the city for food and entertainment. In fact, this stretch around Main Street is already recognized as the “Puerto Rican Cultural Area” by City Council resolution and is the site of “The Heart of Holyoke” public art project, which has garnered regional and even national attention. By establishing an official Cultural District as defined by Massachusetts State Law, the culture, food, music and vibe of Puerto Rico can be, not only celebrated and advertised as a unique attraction to the city, but also could access additional resources to bolster its programming. Nueva Esperanza is located in the center of this one-mile section of Main Street and currently serves as an important center for Puerto Rican and Afro Caribbean culture in the city. It is registered as a community development corporation and supports Latinx residents and businesses through a wide array of programs. They also own and operate a popular venue that hosts music, entertainment, lectures and public events. Nueva Esperanza is the natural leader for implementing this recommendation. The Heart of Holyoke is a Place-making and beautification program that is focused on improving the visual appeal of this same section of Main Street. All of these efforts and connections should be supported by the city.



Implementation Actions for Recommendation 7

**Action 7a.** The Office of Planning and Economic Development creates a map of the boundaries of a Puerto Rican Cultural District on Main Street. The Cultural District is officially adopted by the City. Reviewing existing zoning throughout the district would also be advisable, to make sure the City’s regulations for long term development are aligned with the desired physical attributes of the district.

**Action 7b.** The existing Heart of Holyoke efforts continue to be supported by the city. These efforts are showing positive progress but as of this writing the efforts still needs support from the city. Eventually it will be self supporting.

**Action 7c.** Nueva Esperanza and the Heart of Holyoke team organize the community to design two decorative “entrance gates”, significant markers denoting the boundaries of the district, at each end of Main Street. The team and the Holyoke DPW work together to erect these gates.

**Action 7d.** The Canal District envelops the Puerto Rican Cultural District, so the CaDi includes business members from this area. The Business improvement efforts within CaDi are also aimed at improving and adding Latino businesses in the area, especially those that promote food, music and Puerto Rican and Afro Caribbean culture.

**Action 7e.** A business improvement plan specifically tailored for Latino businesses is created. The Office of Planning and Economic Development works with EforAll Holyoke and other business development organizations, start-up capital funds, banks, and potential new business owners to write a business development plan specifically for the limited properties on this one-mile section of Main street. This involves, bi-lingual business education, access to credit, establishing business cooperatives. This is a highly-focused business development plan that is aimed at establishing specific businesses within the Puerto Rican Cultural District. The goal of the plan is to establish businesses such as: Latinx restaurants; music venues; bakeries; retail shops selling clothes, music, art; artist galleries; a cinema; dance hall; a farmer’s market and craft market.

#### Recommendation 8: Promoting Natural Areas

The Connecticut River and Mt Tom are two highly popular natural areas that are attractive to visitors. According to two hoteliers in Holyoke, many of their guests are coming to hike, walk, ski, fish, boat, golf, and otherwise enjoy these natural areas. These are valuable assets that can be used to attract additional guests. They also can be used to market Holyoke’s downtown and canal district to visitors coming here. Mt Tom is a state reservation 4 miles outside of Holyoke and primarily managed by Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. It is 2000 acres of wooded hiking trails. Adjacent to this area are several other large parcels of land owned by State government, private landowners, non-profit organizations, and the City of Holyoke. The latter being the Whiting reservoir. There is great potential for these limited entities combining efforts to cooperate on a multi-use recreation plan. Each parcel has unique opportunities and legal restrictions. If they collaborated, a huge outdoor recreation mecca could be developed. This effort would take a separate recreation plan.

The Connecticut River is especially an important and underutilized asset that can be leveraged to attract visitors. Just like the canals are the source of Holyoke’s industry and economy, the Connecticut River is the source of the canals. The South Hadley Falls reminds the visitor of the great source of power that drove and still drives Holyoke’ industry and commerce. The proposed canal district is only possible because of the Connecticut River and therefore the two bodies of water should be connected through infrastructure and events.



Holyoke’s Connecticut River waterfront is lined with industrial buildings, private property, steep banks, and inhospitable vegetation. Since the land is underutilized there is a unique opportunity for the City to acquire easements and rights of way for a riverfront trail and improved access. A river front trail connecting the canals to the river in an historic and recreational loop can become a major attraction to visitors. This area is historically where immigrant labor lived and worked. Among residents it is thought of as the “low rent” area and has been largely overlooked in urban planning and economic development. However, industrial riverfronts across the United States are being converted to highly valuable real estate. The municipalities that have best taken advantage of this trend are those that planned well before the private sector has started speculating and investing. Now is the time for Holyoke to create a long-term riverfront development plan to accommodate the changing economy of New England river towns.

Implementation Actions for Recommendation 8

**Action 8a.** Tourism advisory committee works with the State Park to Holyoke in its promotional materials. Information about Holyoke’s downtown, canals, main street, museums and parks is disseminated to park visitors in various and creative ways as discussed by the TAC and Park.

**Action 8b.** Interpretive signs at the overlooks in the Park inform visitors of Holyoke heritage.

**Action 8c.** Develop inter-municipal cooperation with South Hadley to promote visitation to the falls and Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge. The bridge provides safe and enjoyable pedestrian access to view the falls and is currently enjoyed by many anglers. Inter-municipal cooperation with HG&E to illuminate the falls for nighttime viewing would be a tourist attraction.

**Action 8d.** Mt Tom State Park and Holyoke Heritage State Park are promoted as a package. Visitors gain access to both at the price of one.

**Action 8e.** Canal-Riverfront Trail feasibility study is initiated. This study will investigate path alignments to create a Canal-River bike-ped recreation trail loop. The study analyses the physical limitations, land ownership, legal restrictions, social demands, and infrastructure requirements. A proposed alignment loops around the Canal District as shown in Map 1, connecting the mills on the mill tour, with the canals and public access to the river with public rest areas, picnic stops along the way (See map in Appendix 4)

**Action 8f.** Jones Ferry River Access is actively promoted to the public. Improvements to the area include a new public pavilion, fishing pier, improved parking lot, landscaping and picnic tables.

**Action 8g.** The CMO works with Holyoke Rows and the Parks Department to promote rowing race.

**Action 8h.** HG&E provides an ADA accessible fishing access to the Connecticut River at North Bridge Street called Slim Shad point. This is an excellent public resource that is primarily known only to locals. This is a good starting point for improved river access including benches and picnic tables and to promote its use to visitors.

### Recommendation 9: Develop Opportunities with MGM Springfield

Tourism revenue and visitation is on the rise in Hampden County mainly because of the MGM Casino and Hotel in Springfield. MGM attracts a large number of visitors and resulting in tourism spending increasing exponentially in the last 3 years. This is a great opportunity for Holyoke. Several cross-marketing and promotional actions should be planned and implemented to tap into this new opportunity. The actions should be mutually beneficial and lead to a long-term cooperation. The specific details of the actions should be vetted by those who will implement them. That has not been done as of this writing. However, some ideas include:

1. Discounts or free entry for MGM customers to Holyoke tourist venues such as the State Park, Merry-go-Round, Volleyball Hall of Fame and Children's Museum.
2. Discounted hotel rooms for MGM customers to Holyoke accommodations
3. Cross marketing on nightly entertainment between MGM and Gateway City Arts and other venues
4. Promotional gaming chances or discounted food/beverage at MGM to St Patrick Day Parade visitors (after the parade weekend).
5. More convenient transportation between MGM and Holyoke such as: incentivized car services; direct shuttlebuses; and tourist train.
6. A gaming riverboat ferry between Springfield and Holyoke.

### Recommendation 10: Complete a financial and human resources plan to implement these recommendations

Many strategic plans have not been implemented because they ignored the difficult realities of human resources and the sources of funding. This plan may be at risk of the same fate unless detailed follow up on these issues is completed. Due to limited resources and the overall scope of the tasks a thorough analysis of the financial and human resource options could not be conducted. There are too many different funding opportunities and too many human resource requirements to match up with all the recommendations in the plan to complete this task with any level of detail. The funding and HR requirements will require detailed discussion with numerous city departments and implementing stakeholders.

Summarizing the human resource requirements, this plan asks for the following paid and/or reassigned positions:

1. An appointed Chief Marketing and Communications Officer (CMO);
2. a 6 to 9-month consultant for branding and marketing;
3. a reassigned city staff person to staff the Tourism Advisory Committee;
4. a web site marketing coordinator (either new or reassigned);
5. a 4-month consultant to redesign the web site;
6. a creative economy director/ CaDi staffperson
7. it also asks to create a one-stop-shop for event permitting, which in theory should reduce the workload of several people but increase the workload of the entity that becomes the one-stop-shop. Currently this is suggested as DMM.

On top of these paid positions, the City Council is asked to create two committees, the full time Tourism Advisory Committee and the temporary Permit Reform Committee. This is a significant amount of people shuffling and budgeting. To suggest that this simply happens without discussion with the affected departments and authorities would be a disservice to this plan and render it to a dusty shelf. The author is fully aware of the cash-strapped position that Holyoke (and many similar New England industrial towns) are facing. Funding these positions is expected to create a return on investment, and if the right people are hired, assigned the right authority, and are supervised correctly then the return on investment will likely be experienced in increase visitation, tourism spending, improved quality of life, and vibrancy in the city. Nonetheless, the money for the initial investments must be found. In addition to funding the positions mentioned here, there are additional capital expenses that are required. Some of these are expensive and require long term capital improvement budgeting. Those expenses include:

1. Expanding the Canalwalk
2. Beautification work
3. Interpretation and public art
4. Marketing materials and expenses

If the City is truly committed to capturing its share of the tourism sector, then it must make the investment. There is a lot of untapped tourism potential so the investment can pay off. However, for Holyoke there are no quick wins or simple solutions. Breaking down false perceptions, marketing a city, and creating attractive destinations will take a long-term coordinated effort from all city departments and dedication at the highest levels of city leadership to ensure the right human resources and financial plans are in place.

#### Implementation Actions for Recommendation 9

**Action 9a.** The City Council meets with the TAC and OP&ED to understand and discuss the full HR and financial implications of this plan. The City Council provides opinion on the plans recommendation and directs staff to move forward on creating a HR and financial plan for their review. If support is directed from the Council, then a capital improvement plan and a HR plan should be created.

**Action 9b.** The city's capital improvement plan is modified to include the new capital expenses that are identified in this plan. Each expense must be assigned an acquisition or purchasing schedule, funding source, and implementation schedule as necessary.

**Action 9c.** The Personnel Department and the OP&ED work together to create human resources plan. The plan must identify the source of funds for the new hire or temporary consultants. The reassigned positions will need new descriptions. Entire departments may need new descriptions.

### Next Steps

While this report was built on input from stakeholders at 2 workshops and multiple interviews, it was not enough for the successful launching of a strategic plan. The input from stakeholders was used primarily to form the basis of the needs and challenges in the tourism sector and to set the general direction of where the future of tourism should be headed. However, this is a strategic plan not a vision statement. A strategic plan needs to include details on specific actions that are implemented by actual people or entities identified in the plan and according to a general timeline. This level of detail must be vetted by the people who would be responsible for implementation. None of this vetting or community conversation has yet taken place. The next immediate step that the City should take is to reengage the stakeholders who worked hard to contribute on this first draft. Over time, this plan should be revised to find a balance between actions that are detailed and feasible but can be implemented within the constraints of existing resources. This balance can only be found after engaging all responsible parties.



## Appendices

Appendix 1: Workshop Results

Appendix 2: Mill Tour

Appendix 3: Canal Map

Appendix 4: Bike-Ped Trail

Appendix 5: Signs of Progress

Appendix 6: Sustainable Holyoke

Appendix 1: Workshop Results :

**Workshop 1:**

The First Workshop was held on August 8th, 2019, from 10:00 to 12:00 at the Culinary Arts Institute in the Cubit, 164 Race Street.

The day’s agenda was

10:00am Introductions and Goals for the Day:

10:20 – 11:00 – Small Group SWOT analysis

11:00-11:30 - Large Group Discussion- Consolidation of SWOT analysis and priority “ranking of needs”

11:30 - 11:50 – Review and Assessment: Agreement on 2 – 4 Strategic Priorities

11:50 – 12:00 – Homework; Unresolved Issues; Next Workshop

The goals of workshop 1 were to identify the most important Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats to Holyoke’s Tourism economy

and to create 2 to 4 Strategic Thrusts or Strategic Priorities. In attendance were:

Workshop 1 Attendance

Bill Rigalski	Holyoke Mall
Cynthia Espinoza	Nueva Esperanza
Don Sanders	Victory Theater
George Mulvey	Volleyball Hall of Fame
Jay Candelario	Jay's Bed and Breakfast
Jordan Hart	Holyoke Chamber of Commerce
Josh Knox	Trustees of the Reservation
Kate Preissler	Wisteriahurst
Kate Sullivan	HG&E
Kathy Anderson	Holyoke Hospital
Mike Moriarty	One Holyoke
Sara English	Holyoke Canoe Club

**Workshop 1 results**

Large group discussion removed overlap between similar issues raised in each small group.

A consolidated list of 25 weaknesses and threats resulted from this conversation. The attendees were then given three votes each and were asked to rank the 25<sup>th</sup> issues raised according to the following code:

Red = 1<sup>st</sup> priority ; Yellow = 2<sup>nd</sup> priority; Green = 3<sup>rd</sup> priority

<b>Weakness or Threat</b>	<b>Highest Priority (red)</b>	<b>2nd Priority (yellow)</b>	<b>3rd priority (green)</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<i>Perception</i>	6	1	2	9
<i>Lack of Tourism Marketing</i>	2	2	1	5
<i>Lack of Big Picture Coordination on Tourism</i>	2	1	2	5
<i>Transportation</i>	1	1	0	2
<i>No One Stop Shop for businesses (Permitting)</i>	1		1	2
<i>Poor Wayfinding</i>		4	1	5
<i>Lack of Affordable Event Space for +300</i>		2	1	3
<i>ADA accessibility</i>		1		1
<i>Not Eligible for MassSave</i>		1		1
<i>Lack of Maintance on Parking Garage</i>		1		1
<i>Lack of Family Friend Downtown</i>			2	2
<i>Events are risky</i>			2	2
<i>Racism</i>			1	1
<i>PVTA</i>				0
<i>Digital Competition</i>				0
<i>Poverty</i>				0
<i>Media</i>				0
<i>Places to go in extreme Temps</i>				0
<i>Climate Change</i>				0
<i>Market Size</i>				0
<i>Empty Buildings</i>				0
<i>Not celebrating diversity</i>				0
<i>Lack of Anchors</i>				0
<i>Competition in Region</i>				0
<i>Utility Legislation</i>				0

Based on the results of this workshop three Strategic Thrusts were developed. The consultant sent all stakeholders (both in attendance and absent) the draft list and requested comments through email and a web-based survey. As a result, the follow three Strategic Thrusts were chosen to drive the Strategic Plan:

- 1) Positive Public Perception of Holyoke
- 2) Effective and Coordinated Strategic Marketing
- 3) Attractive Destinations



## Workshop 2:

The second and final workshop was held on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at Culinary Arts Institute in the Cubit, 164 Race Street from 10:00 to 12:00

The goals of the second workshop were to identify specific actions that will implement the Strategic Priorities and SMART goals previously created in Workshop 1. Attendance in workshop 2 included:

Bill Rigalski	Holyoke Mall
Cynthia Espinoza	Nueva Esperanza
Don Sanders	Victory Theater
George Mulvey	Volleyball Hall of Fame
Tessa Murphy-Romboletti	Spark E for All
Jordan Hart	Holyoke Chamber of Commerce
Ginny Patsun	Holyoke Heritage State Park
Kate Preissler	Wisteriahurst
Kathy Anderson	Holyoke Hospital
Vitek Kruta	Gateway City Arts
Iohann Vega	Holyoke Media

The agenda for the day was:

**10:00am** Introductions-

Goals for the Day:

**10:20 – 11:00** – What specific actions would implement the goals of Key Priority 1, include indicators to measure progress

**11:00 - 11:20** - What specific actions would implement the goals of Key Priority 2 include indicators to measure progress

**11:20 - 11:40** – What specific actions would implement the goals of Key Priority 3 include indicators to measure progress

**11:40 – 12:00** – Ranking, group discussion, wrap up

The second and final workshop was held on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at Culinary Arts Institute in the Cubit, 164 Race Street from 10:00 to 12:00

## Workshop 2 results

**SMART Goal 1A:** Within one year a professional marketing firm is hired to improve public image of Holyoke

**SMART Goal 1B:** The media (printed, on-line, TV, and radio) produces a positive story about Holyoke at least three times per year

**Actions:**

Create monthly stories for Mass Appeal and other news media  
City appoints a lead person to implement many of the plan’s recommendations  
Write scope of work and identify funding for identifying this position  
City procures media and marketing consulting firm to change the image and brand of Holyoke

Engage Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau and become a dues paying member  
Dedicated web site for tourism featuring positive stories about Holyoke  
Hire or reassign existing employee as web site marketing coordinator  
Create a food directory and market Holyoke’s authentic places

**SMART Goal 1C:** A majority of a random sample of visitors in an annual visitor survey report having a positive image of Holyoke

**Actions:**

Highly Visible and deteriorated buildings are cleaned up.  
Abandoned buildings along Routes 116;141; 91 exits are identified and targeted for clean up  
Building owners are contacted to discuss options; regulations on abandoned buildings are enforced  
City Council should pass an improved vacant property ordinance  
Certain buildings are used to “tell a story” of Holyoke; murals are used; heart of Holyoke and Hidden Legends along Main street.  
Partner with local artists to create art on vacant buildings  
A message at the gateways should show that something is happening  
Survey those who are not coming to Holyoke to determine their reasons why  
Find out why not enough artists are responding to requests for proposals  
Tell the story of Holyoke on every boarded-up window or abandoned building wall

**SMART goal 1E:** City establishes a one-stop-shop for permitting

**Actions:**

Create a permit reform committee that includes:

- Ordinance Committee
- Licensing Board
- City Council
- Economic Development Dept
- Local Vendors (the Customer)
- Police, Fire and Public Safety representatives

The Economic Development department previously created inventory of permits and internal procedures necessary to acquire a permit. Use this information as a starting point to educate the committee and to agree on a problem statement.

Permit reform committee meets monthly for one specific purpose: to modify the entire permitting process

Monthly meetings will last until December 2020 when the Committee completes a new permit process for the City council to approve.

The focus of each monthly meeting is:

- 1) Review and study current status
- 2) Receive testimonials from past applicants
- 3) Review Best Practices from other municipalities
- 4) Identify the Problem: Create and agree upon on a Problem Statement that will be fixed
- 5) Solution Session - brainstorm
- 6) Solution Session - past applicant opinions
- 7) Solution Session – test runs
- 8) Solution Session – draft policy, protocol, procedures, and rules
- 9) Solution Session – draft policy, protocol, procedures, and rules
- 10) Draft Permit reform manual – Meeting with City Council – collect opinions
- 11) Revise Draft based on comments received
- 12) Complete final draft – submit to City Council for adoption

**SMART Goal 2A:** By July 2020 Holyoke has a new brand and unified marketing message

**Actions:**

Study past examples and efforts in Holyoke. Learn from them, revive those that worked, such as:

Holyoke Hot Dam, and

Passport Holyoke

Also study what not to do

Create a tourism coordinator position to implements these ideas

Promote Volleyball throughout the city including in schools, local team sports, pick up leagues.

Host a volleyball open

**SMART Goal 2B:** Holyoke’s Business Community meets on a regular basis to specifically improve and implement marketing efforts

**Actions:**

City establishes a permanent tourism advisory committee. They include:

City Council

Police Department

City Cultural Dept  
Hoteliers/Accommodations Industry  
Nightlife representative  
Museums representative  
Economic Development department  
Real Estate representative  
Cultural representative  
Recreation representative  
MGM  
HG&E  
3 at-large representatives

A City position called “Tourism Coordinator” staffs this committee. City takes the lead on holding monthly tourism coordination meetings. These meetings are held to discuss idea on marketing, implementation of the strategic plan.

On-line chat or email chain links the tourism stakeholders together.

Join Chamber of Commerce

City initiates Gateway Beautification Program. Like the previously created “adopt an Island” program, the city buildings on this idea to create an adopt a gateway, adopt a parking lot, or adopt an abandoned building.

Engage a gardening club to beautify the city.

City has 4 signs for wayfinding. One is hanging at Beech and Appleton. The others are not installed. City should continue the wayfinding/ signage programs that was initiated previously.

Ensure all marketing is bi-lingual

**SMART Goal 2C:** The new marketing message is effectively distributed to the entire market area.

Holyoke is a “City” not a village or suburb or rural natural area but a City in the true sense of the word. We need to market that image

Include signs in Spanish

Foster and Communicate Puerto Rican Business and Cultural shops

Advertise to PR and Hispanic visitors

**SMART Goal 3A:** The Canal District is officially established; the Canalwalk is expanded; and two to three public celebrations are held in this district

### **Actions**

Planning Department maps out the Canal District boundaries;  
Zoning Ordinance and other relevant policy documents are edited to include Canal District  
City Council adopts new zoning by-laws that includes Canal District  
New Canal District is established and used as a focus for marketing  
Create an annual block party that will grow over time. Examples include Westerly RI “Downtown Shutdown” and the Burlington “Art Hop”  
Promote Small Businesses in the district  
Maximize visibility and utility of the canals  
Host an open studio weekend

**SMART Goal 3B:** Little Puerto Rico is officially established on a one-mile section of Main Street  
Establish a Little Puerto Rico district along one-mile section of Main Street  
Planning Department maps out the Little Puerto Rico District boundaries;  
Zoning Ordinance and other relevant policy documents are edited to include Little Puerto Rico  
City Council adopts new zoning by-laws and maps that includes Little Puerto Rico District  
City should endorse the placemaking efforts for Main Street

**SMART goal 4C:** The Connecticut River is promoted as a destination and has new and/or improved public access  
Market Jones Ferry Public Access as a place for all to enjoy  
Revive Friends of Canalwalk program  
Expand Canalwalk  
Hold more events along the canal  
Revive the “Creative Economy Director” position  
redesign the position as more of an economic development position  
Engage Wisteriahurst as the events and marketing coordinator for the city.

**SMART goal 5C:** The natural areas in and around Mt Tom are promoted as a Holyoke asset and its visitors are encouraged to visit downtown Holyoke.

**SMART goal 6C:** The city has improved wayfinding

Table 13: Workshop Participants' Top Priority Actions	
Action	Vote Tally
Improve permitting process	11
<b>Create Puerto Rican Cultural District</b>	4
City Gateway Beautification like adopt an island program	4
Create City Chief PR Marketing Officer	4
Create Distinct Neighborhood Identities	3
Create Canal District and Little Puerto Rico District	3
Create Permit Reform Committee	3
Improve Visitors Center	1
Create Marketable Brand for Holyoke	1
Create Canal District	1
Hold Annual Canal District block party	1
Tourism Business Leaders Coordination	1
Use Vacant buildings for beautification, murals, to tell a story	1
Promote Volleyball in many ways	1
Bi-Lingual Marketing/Target Hispanic Market	
Maximize visibility and utility of the Canals	
Placemaking through banners, beautification, maintenance, investment	
Pass improved vacant building ordinance	
Partner with local artists	
Redevelopment authority of Holyoke leads promoting small businesses in canal and PR districts	

Revive Creative Economy Director position	
Hold events to increase notoriety	
Study past examples, learn from past	
City leads tourism coordination meetings	

Workshop participants were then asked to vote for the preferred action. They were each given three gold star votes and were asked to place them on any action. They were allowed to allocate their three

votes in any distribution they chose including placing all three on the same action to placing one vote on three actions or any combination thereof. The results are as follows:

The results show an overwhelming preference by the stakeholders to improve the permitting process. The sentiment of the group was that the permitting process was so cumbersome and bureaucratic that many events were either curtailed, such as eliminating alcoholic beverages, or cancelled altogether. The forgone opportunities because of the permitting process represents lost income in terms of revenue to the city as well as households, lost jobs, and damage to the city’s opportunity for improving its public perception and image. The group opinion was that once this problem is resolved, the other actions can follow much easier. Clearly, the top priority of the group is to create a permitting process for events and beautification that is simple, inexpensive, and swift.

---

<sup>i</sup> Credit Suisse, Chriatian Buss. Apparel Retail&Brands: Making Sense of Softline's Following a Tumultuous Twelve Months. May 2017.

## Appendices

APPENDIX 1

**MILLS OF HOLYOKE**

	mill names	origin year	closed in Holyoke	location	first owner	other names	other locations	products
<b>1</b>	<a href="#">Parsons</a>	1853	2006	first	Joseph Parsons	no		fine paper
<b>2</b>	<a href="#">Lyman</a>	1854	1927	first	Hadley Falls Co	no		cotton
<b>3</b>	Holyoke Paper	1857		second	David Butterfield	no		
<b>4</b>	Prentiss Wire	1857		first	George Prentiss	no		iron wire
<b>5</b>	<a href="#">Hadley Thread</a>	1863		second	Hadley Falls Co	American Thread		cotton
<b>6</b>	Beebe	1863		first				fine paper
<b>7</b>	Holyoke Machine	1863						
<b>8</b>	New York Woolen	1864		second			New York	wool
<b>9</b>	<a href="#">Whiting</a>	1864		first	William Whiting			fine paper
<b>10</b>	<a href="#">Merrick Thread</a>	1865		first	Timothy Merrick	American Thread		cotton thread
<b>11</b>	Germania	1865		second				
<b>12</b>	<a href="#">Riverside</a>	1866		third	Charles Chapin		three mills	fine paper
<b>13</b>	Valley	1866		second	David Butterfield		none	fine paper
<b>14</b>	Franklin	1866		third	James Newton			fine paper
<b>15</b>	Wauregan	1869		first	James Newton			
<b>16</b>	Albion	1869		second	Daniel Newton			book paper
<b>17</b>	Holyoke Steam Boiler	1869						
<b>18</b>	Holyoke Warp	1869		none				cotton – weaved
<b>19</b>	Union Paper	1870		third	Henry Dickinson			fine paper
<b>20</b>	Springfield Blanket	1870		third				horse blankets
<b>21</b>	<a href="#">Crocker</a>	1870		second	Daniel Newton			
<b>22</b>	Holbrooke	1872		first				
<b>23</b>	Newton Paper	1873		third	Moses Newton		heavy paper	

<b>24</b>	Massasoit	1873		first			extra fine paper	fine paper
<b>25</b>	Farr Alpaca	1873			Hubert Farr			alpaca wool
<b>26</b>	Excelsior	1873			Daniel Newton			
<b>27</b>	Massachusetts Screw	1873			James Newton			screws
<b>28</b>	Skinner Silk	1874	1961	first	William Skinner	Unquomok		silk
<b>29</b>	Deane Pump	1875		none		Worthington		steam pumps
<b>30</b>	Seymour Cutlery	1878		none	Henry Seymour			scissors
<b>31</b>	Buchanan Bolt	1878		none				
<b>32</b>	Chemical Paper	1880		third				
<b>33</b>	Winona	1880		second		Gill		
<b>34</b>	Syms	1880		second		Mount Tom		
<b>35</b>	<a href="#">Nonotuck</a>	1880		second				
<b>36</b>	Holyoke Envelope	1880						
<b>37</b>	Hampden Glaze	1880	still exists	second	George Fowler	Hampden Papers		
<b>38</b>	Whitmore	1880						
<b>39</b>	National Blank Book	1881		second				blank books
<b>40</b>	Merrick Lumber	1881						wood products
<b>41</b>	Dickinson	1882		first				
<b>42</b>	American Pad	1882	2005	none	Thomas Holley			
<b>43</b>	Holyoke Manila Mill	1875		second	Robertson brothers	Robertson	tissue paper	
<b>44</b>	Connecticut River Pulp	1876		first	James Newton		wood pulp	
<b>45</b>	Norman	1910		second				
<b>46</b>	Mount Tom Paper			second				

Coghlan's  
Holyoke Steam  
Boiler

**SOURCE:**

<http://www.holyokecanaltour.org/mill-history/>

# Flow Map of Holyoke Hydroelectric Facilities

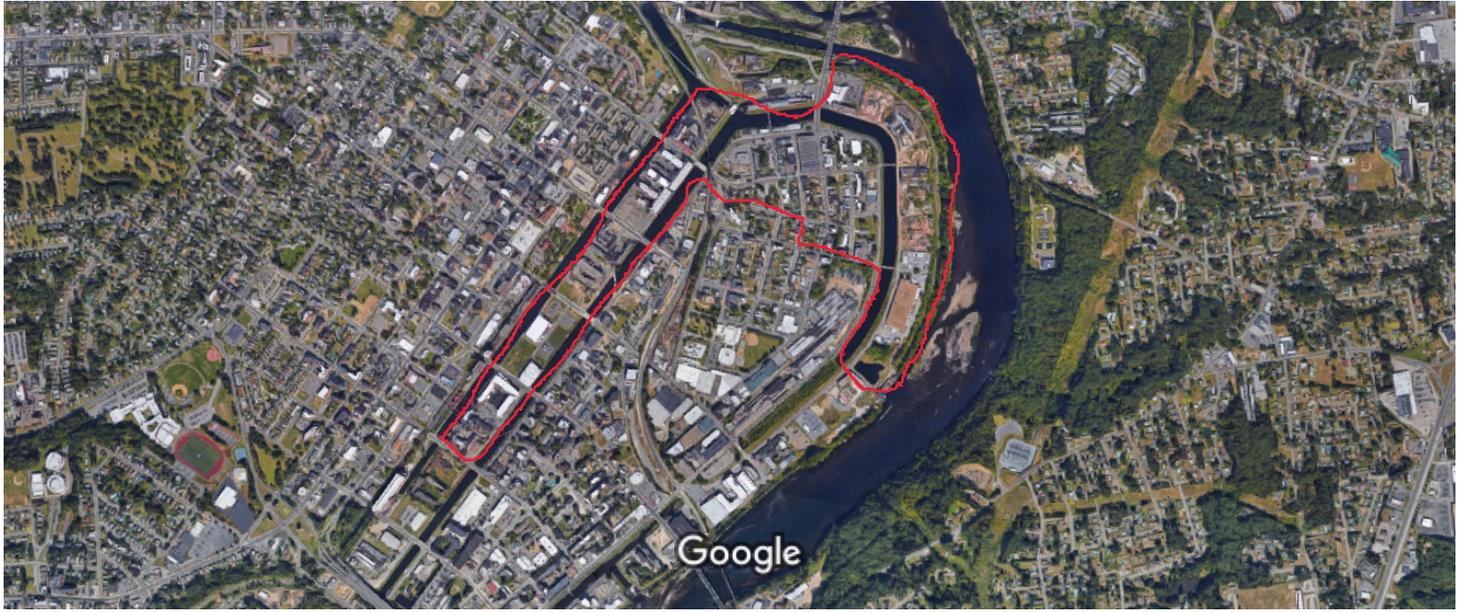


**LEGEND**

HG&E Hydro Facilities

Scale: 1/4 Mile

Google Maps Canal-River Bike Ped Trail



Imagery ©2019 Google, Imagery ©2019 CNES / Airbus, MassGIS, Commonwealth of Massachusetts EOE, Maxar Technologies, U.S. 1000 ft  Geological Survey, USDA Farm Service Agency, Map data ©2019

## Signs of Progress: an interpretive exhibit of the evolution of downtown Holyoke

Ginny Patsun, Park Interpreter, Holyoke Heritage State Park  
Antioch University New England

September 23, 2019

Downtown Holyoke has been experiencing a renaissance thanks to the collaborative effort of new businesses, city initiatives and investors. A multi-million-dollar promenade, the Canalwalk (see figure 1), was constructed a few years ago to encourage people to walk and bike downtown. The one thing missing is a guide that helps people learn about the history and purpose of the canal system and the stories behind the massive brick buildings that line their banks.



*Figure 1 Canalwalk bridge northeast view - second level canal*

This summary outlines the proposal for the City of Holyoke to incorporate a permanent interpretive sign exhibit along the Canalwalk. Each sign will explain the purpose of the canals, shed light on the people who helped build the city, and how Holyoke has become what it is today.

This exhibit will consist of up to 11 signs with text in English and Spanish enhanced by graphics and a mobile application. This exhibit will act as a template for future exhibits to be designed and installed in other parts of historical downtown Holyoke.

Signs of Progress is designed to be a community-involved city-guided project with the intent to help visitors and residents feel welcome, and invite them to stay a little longer and explore downtown. Children will benefit from the signs as they learn some of the history of the city and appreciate the people who had come before them. Residents will feel a sense of community pride by appreciating the city's resiliency to falling into the grasp of conventionalism.

Signs of Progress will be an all-inclusive exhibit. The signs will be accessible to small children and people in wheelchairs. The signs are to accommodate the visually impaired through audio from the mobile app. The mobile app will have the capability to accommodate speakers of multiple languages.

Currently, the concept plan for Signs of Progress is in its development stage and will be submitted in 2020. Several other cities benefit from exhibits similar to Signs of Progress' concept, including the interpretive signs along the canals of Lowell, MA.

Below are photographs of two signs (see figures 2 & 3) displayed at Lowell National Historical Park. These examples can be models for the signs along the Canalwalk.



Figure 2 Lowell National Historical Park canal sign-side view

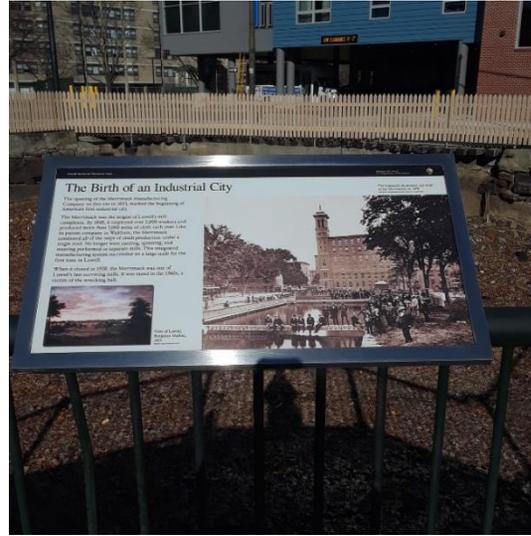


Figure 3 Lowell National Historical Park interpretive historical sign

4 &  
The  
they



5) are  
signs  
are



will be an in

Two interpretive signs (see figures displayed at Holyoke Heritage State Park. were fabricated by a company in Holyoke. These signs require minimal maintenance and can be easily replaced if damaged.

in Holyoke. The signs will promote engagement in historical

*Figure 4 Sign number one displayed at the Flywheel at Holyoke Heritage State Park*

*Figure 5 Sign number two displayed at the Flywheel at Holyoke Heritage State Park*

# Sustainable Holyoke

## Interpretative Tours of Holyoke's Creative Economy

By

Ginny Patsun, Park Interpreter,

Holyoke Heritage State Park

September 23, 2019

The purpose of the Sustainable Holyoke tours is to connect visitors with the history of the city and service providers who occupy the historical buildings. The businesses visited on these tours engage in sustainable practices, such as recycling, reducing, repurposing of materials, and community empowerment. These businesses are powered by the city of Holyoke's Holyoke Gas and Electric who currently provide the 90% of the city's electricity through carbon free sources and 70% of that is from renewable energy sources including solar, wind and local hydropower. Some of this power is even produced directly in the mill buildings on this tour. Remarkably, many businesses have settled in Holyoke because of the available green energy.

The following is a list of businesses, artists, and building owners located in downtown Holyoke and descriptions of the sustainable practices they employ. During these tours the public is made aware of additional choices available that can help reduce their carbon footprint and produce less waste. The bold font denotes the businesses, artists and building owners. Each of them has websites with more information.



*Figure 1. The Plan's renovated space.*

**The Plan** (opened in 6/19) is a sustainable beauty salon and recycles 95% of their waste including hair which can be used to clean up oil spills. They are located in **The Wauregan** building which is a former paper mill.

The plaster was removed from the walls exposing the brick (see **Figure 1**), the furniture is from **Conklin Office Furniture** which sells recycled and refurbished furniture, and much of its décor has recycled origins. There is a wood door (see **Figure 2**) that was made by **Kamil Peters** who is a contemporary metal artist whose studio **Diesel Works** is located below The Plan.

**Gateway City Arts** is co-owned by two artists. Their building is a former paper mill and has been adapted into different uses, including a bistro, restaurant, music venue, studios, and office space rentals.



*Figure 2. Wood door in The Plan.*



Figure 3. Second floor Paper City Studios.

**Paper City Studios** (see **Figure 3**) is owned by **Bruce Fowler**. Bruce is an artist who assembles sculptures using recycled items. His building houses his and other artists' studios and **Pulp**, which is a gallery that displays local artists' work.

**HCC Culinary Arts Institute** is located in **The Cubit** building (also has apartments located on the top two floors). The Culinary Arts offers state-of-the-art facilities for training food service professionals and offers food preparation programs for people who are financially challenged. They compost their food waste.

**Freight Farms** are located near the Culinary Arts Institute. The freight farms grow several varieties of lettuce (see **Figure 4**), certify locals in hydroponics in preparation of the influx of more freight farm businesses in Holyoke, and donate 10% of its harvest to food insecure students who attend the Culinary Arts Institute.

**Print Shop** is a collaborative workspace where locals can go to take classes and get guidance in starting and building their own business.



Figure 4. Freight Farm lettuce production.



Figure 5. Table runner at ArteSana.

**ArteSana** is a non-profit social enterprise that trains community members in fiber arts. They have several looms they use to weave items (see **Figure 5**) to be sold on their online store. The best thing about ArteSana is they use donated tee-shirts for their weaving material.

**Timna Tarr** has been quilt-making for 25 years and is a national award-winning quilter. She has her studio on the second floor of Paper City Studios. Quilting is another dying art that is in dire need

of revival. Hand-made quilts are heirloom items that are passed down to generations; not disposed of like store-bought blankets.

**City Joinery** is a sustainable custom-made furniture company using salvaged wood to make their products (see **Figure 6**). Though many of their customers are from NYC, they located to Holyoke for the green energy. The sawdust is composted and the furniture is stained with natural oils.

**Nuestras Raices** is an urban agriculture organization that teaches people about nutrition through community farming



Figure 6. City Joinery furniture.



Figure 7. Nuestras Raices.

and allows access for the community to purchase locally grown food (see **Figure 7**).

**Robert E. Barrett Fishway** is located alongside the Holyoke Dam. It is run by **Holyoke Gas and Electric**. A fish lift is designed to shuttle migrating fish up and over the dam. The fish are put into a holding tank before their release to keep track of numbers of species passing through. The Fishway offers free guided tours for the public during spawning season during the spring.

**Nueva Esperanza** is a non-profit community development organization servicing the Afro-Caribbean and Puerto Rican communities.

**Blue Door Gatherings** is a small catering company that sources its ingredients from local farms. It is located in The Wauregan (see **Figure 8**).

**The Brick Coop** is a collaborative workspace for engineers, artists, and designers.

**Open Square** claims it is *the country's largest zero net energy mix-use development with Class A Office, Creative studio, Retail and Distribution/warehouse space available*. Open Square is the former Lyman Mills that manufactured cotton products and one of two buildings in Holyoke that has retained its water rights for electrical generation.



Figure 8. Blue Door Gatherings.

Transportation: **Holyoke Amtrak Station, Electric Bike Share Program, and the Canalwalk;** a pedestrian walkway.