

#3

CITY OF DEARBORN, MICHIGAN
MAYOR JOHN B. O'REILLY, JR.

MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2015

TESTIMONY
**THE HOUSE TOURISM AND OUTDOOR RECREATION
COMMITTEE**

Dearborn has long relied on tourism and travel to support our local economy. When visitors first arrived in Detroit via the C & O Canal from the East coast of the U.S. on their way to points west, Dearborn was one day's journey from where they debarked in Detroit. The Sauk Trail, later known as the Chicago Pike Road, was an established route from Lake Erie to the southern end of Lake Michigan and on to points west and south. At that time Dearborn hosted Fort Dearborn which quartered the U.S. Military and an ammunition depot. Remnants of the fort remain and the Chicago Pike Road Became Michigan Ave or US 12.

In the early days we offered food and shelter to travelers as we still do today although now we are better known as the hometown of Henry Ford. Because of Henry Ford we have the The Henry Ford we meet in today and all of the supporting activates that bring so many travelers to our community. The Museum and Village could not be replicated today at any cost because everything that Henry Ford brought to this facility is a one of a kind original.

The elements of tourism that are significant to Dearborn are:

- Dearborn Museums:
 - the Henry Ford
 - Dominates Dearborn's tourism landscape
 - Promote Dearborn as hub of innovation
 - Arab American National Museum
 - Smithsonian Affiliate Museum
 - our own Dearborn Historical Museum, with loyal following
 - The Commandants Headquarters and the McFadden-Ross House which tie back to the original Fort Dearborn and the early role of Dearborn in the development of this region

- Auto heritage:
 - The Henry Ford
 - Auto Hall of Fame;
 - walking and bike tours through Dearborn mapped out by MotorCities National Heritage Area
 - Henry Ford Estate Fair Lane
 - Part of the Historic Ford Estates
 - New energy and capital
 - Plans are for re-opening in 2020, but activities to keep interest annually

- Potential for kayaking and canoeing in the Rouge River
 - Potential for water activities at the Oxbow at The Henry Ford
 - Rouge River could be marketed as a bigger asset

- Interesting restaurants
 - Some destination restaurants, like Andiamo, Big Fish
 - Authentic ethnic cuisine
 - Popular Taste of Dearborn annual event draws from region
 - Trend toward more diversity of restaurants

- One microbrewery to at least capitalize on brewery trend
- Dearborn is very friendly for international tourists
 - Among our resources is the American Arab Chamber of Commerce
- Convention business, evolving in new ways, but still important
- Entertainment at a level to draw visitors
 - Ford Community & Performing Arts Center-Michael A. Guido Theater
 - Internationally known performers
 - Rentals for niche shows with loyal audiences
- Plenty of shopping in Dearborn
 - Mostly generic
 - Regional enclosed mall
 - Regional shopping strips
 - Specialty shops with Middle Eastern flavor
 - Downtowns with potential for cache or “funkiness”
 - Green Brain Comics, especially Free Comic Book Day
 - Stormy Records/Dearborn Records
- Plenty of new hotel space
 - Country Inn and Suites
 - Holiday Inn Express
 - Extended Stay
 - Hampton Inn

- New train station in Dearborn, opened in Dec 2014
 - Capitalize on high speed rail initiatives
 - Raise interest in Detroit to Chicago trips
 - But more importantly, Chicago to Detroit trips
 - Connection to M1 in Detroit
 - Entertainment
 - Sports
 - Nightlife
 - Built on the edge of the Henry Ford
 - New entrance planned soon

- New Dearborn mobile App
 - Developed by Dearborn Area Chamber of Commerce with support from our two DDDAs and the City
 - Needs some tweaks, but step in the right direction to promote businesses
 - Make it easier for travelers to find what they need
- Chamber of Commerce just added a full-time person to address Tourism in Dearborn
 - Also in charge of Farmers Market
 - Downtown market also helps promote businesses as well as “eat local” and “eat real foods” movements

Challenges to Dearborn’s tourism industry:

- Adoba Hotel
 - One of the largest hotels in Michigan
 - Convention-oriented
 - In transition

- Need better intercity transportation
 - Working on regular cab service for the train station and/or a car rental on site
 - Some type of “trolley” for all of Dearborn connecting the train station, Artspace, Fairlane Town Center, The Henry Ford and Michigan Avenue to Telegraph.
 - Need a state commitment to fund community roads
 - Need a state commitment to fund more bike trails as a viable way to travel through Dearborn

- Intercity transportation geared toward visitors
 - Excursion trains should be implemented
 - Reliable bus transportation between cities

- Need better walk-ability of our downtowns
 - Signage to direct visitors, as many businesses and restaurants have rear entrances

- Need more coordination between stakeholders to promote Dearborn
 - Combined promotion pieces, websites, social media
 - Dearborn could benefit from being part of Pure Michigan, beyond the Henry Ford

- Pure Michigan’s promotion of the state’s ethnic diversity could help promote Dearborn’s ethnic diversity
 - Wonderful features of our community could be an even bigger draw
 - Sometimes perceived by visitors as a drawback instead
 - Help dispel fears of visiting here, based on inaccurate portrayals of our community in irresponsible media across the nation
 - Both Chamber and the City contacted regularly from people wanting reassurance about traveling here
 - How Dearborn is perceived on this topic affects how state is perceived.

