



# 2025 Planning Retreat Summary

## Overview:

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The City of Forsyth Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) met on Friday, January 31, 2025, to undertake planning efforts for the upcoming year. After a brief business meeting, the CVB Authority members discussed their goals for their annual retreat. The group sought to maintain focused and efficient discussions that would allow them to obtain consensus on a well-developed priority list with specific goals from the meeting.

Authority Members and Staff in attendance:

Helen Walker – Chair

Paige Bryson – Vice–Chair

Sam Patel – Secretary / Treasurer

Lois Allen – City Council Representative

Denise Buff

Leslie Waters

Greg Tapley

Gilda Stanbery, Executive Director/CEO

Chelsea Kerr, Administrative Assistant

Ben Vaughn, Attorney

Diane Glidewell, Monroe County Reporter

Harry Patel, La Quinta GM

## Review of 2024 Activities:

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The CVB Authority members began by reviewing 2024 activities to discuss some of the achievements from the past year. Three of the four main priorities from 2024 were largely accomplished. These priorities included:

- **Overhaul CVB Website**
  - The Forsyth CVB implemented its new brand throughout 2024, which was recognized with a Communicator Award
  - New website was successfully launched.
  - Users report that the new, more interactive website is helpful for visitors and has increased usability for seniors.
- **Enhance Member Engagement and Capture Training Opportunities**
  - CVB Authority Board has been more active in the past 12 months with the Tourism Partners Meeting helping to spur engagement with the CVB. More than 20 people regularly attend these meetings.

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- Gilda and Chelsea attended CVB training from the Carl Vinson Institute. Chelsea also attended her first year of STS Marketing College, for a week in June. Gilda attended the Governor's Tourism Conference in September.
- **Continue Building Strategic Partnerships**
  - Partnership has continued and been enhanced with GPSTC. The CVB was able to reach out at a dozen new GPSTC events within the past year.
  - CVB secured the Triumph Motorcycle launch, which had an economic impact of \$250,000 on Forsyth. One example of working a large project, with significant international appeal, for many months.
  - New Chik-fil-a and QuikTrip continue to generate additional stops in Forsyth.
  - CVB ran advertisements on the Interstate 75 billboard to promote partner events
  - CVB new initiative: shop and dine coupons started for group travel customers, but kept growing

Beyond the strategic priorities that were set forth in 2024, the CVB continued to pursue many of its day-to-day responsibilities to support and promote the tourism economy within Forsyth and Monroe County. Accomplishments and other discussions noted from daily operations included:

- **Georgia Trend Trailblazer Award**
  - Received for the accessible Foxhunt
- **Marketing Materials**
  - Continued to utilize digital and print materials with new trackable QR codes.
  - Maintained literature at all 9 State Visitor Information Centers
    - Staff may try to visit some of these sites in 2025

## **Challenges:**

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Several challenges related to continued tourism promotion and the general operations of the CVB were also discussed. These included:

- **Decline in Print-Sourced Travel Leads**
  - The Fall Getaway campaign underperformed compared to recent years.
  - Southern Living has also seen a gradual decline in trips generated.
  - Digital ads have continued to work well, particularly through Atlanta Magazine.
- **Interstate Lighting and Signage**
  - Forsyth does not have the same infrastructure on I-75 that Exit 205 and Exit 201 have regarding high mast lighting and effective signage for visitors – seeing a decline in revenues.
- **Downtown Forsyth Parking**

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- Parking is a concern for downtown businesses, especially when the courts are in session. This can inhibit visitors. Bus parking and drop-off spaces are particularly needed as well. Spaces should be inventoried and marked with directional signage. Public parking lots identified.
- Spaces are also needed for charging electric vehicles.
- The CVB itself also needs parking, including ADA-accessible spaces.
- City of Forsyth may be able to work with MGRC on a parking study.
  
- **Lack of Community Meeting Space**
  - CVB Authority Board members noted that the need for meeting spaces was not being adequately met in the community. Specifically, spaces for groups from 10-100 were generally missing, and the 100+ person spaces were often expensive.
  - The Monroe County Conference Center (MCCC) now uses the CVB's Hotel Chart List, but it is missing other collaboration opportunities with the CVB.
    - MCCC does not proactively market to many new meetings
    - MCCC is not staffed or structured to recruit or host large events regularly.
  - The new College and Career Academy could be an option for new hospitality workers.
  - Electric Cities of Georgia is also working on a new location with meeting space.
  - Bank of Dudley, LaQuinta, Comfort Suites, and Hubbard Complex all have some meeting space.
  
- **CVB Office and Welcome Center Needs**
  - The CVB Office moved again in January 2025, which resulted in the cancellation of several planned events and obligations from September through the end of last year.
  - A new Welcome Center would hopefully have complimentary meeting space, easily accessible parking, accessible restrooms, and effective signage.
  - The CVB Office and Welcome Center should be in a visible location that could help to drive business into the surrounding community.

## CVB Goals for 2025:

Throughout the day, the group continued to discuss priorities for 2025, including both those identified by the Executive Director and members of the CVB Authority. A list of goals can be seen below in priority order. This list comes with refreshed priorities for the CVB, following the completion of many items in the last 12 months. Again, these goals and priorities refer to new initiatives or changes in scope. Much of what the CVB has continued to do effectively over the years will remain in place.

- **Continue Maintaining Partnerships**
  - Particularly important partnerships to enhance over the next 12 months include the Department of Agriculture—Georgia Grown Program, Department of Corrections, Forsyth Golf Course, Forsyth Community Development Director, MCCC, Monroe County Parks and Recreation, and Rose Theater.
  
- **2025 Year of Celebrations**

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- With several key community partners celebrating milestones in 2025, the CVB will dedicate time and energy to supporting these celebrations and visitor experience.
- Connections that were lost in late 2024 during the CVB Office relocation should be renewed and restrengthened.
- **Start a Forsyth CVB Newsletter**
  - Over 500 people have already signed up for the mailing list. Launch in February.
- **Public Arts Webpage and Tour**
  - Utilize grant funding to highlight public art in Forsyth and facilitate self-guided tours.
- **Permanent home for the CVB Office and Welcome Center**
  - While the current space is adequate, it does not possess the necessary space or infrastructure for all of the current needs.
- **Access the ATL Market**
  - Utilize the AJC Influencer Program to help get commercials into the Atlanta market.
  - Partner with Access Atlanta publications for marketing of opportunities in Forsyth.
- **Fish. Beer. (Repeat)**
  - Market Forsyth's location as a hub for outdoor recreation with a particular focus on a demographic of younger men.
  - Develop a getaway package for groups of young men visiting Forsyth and Monroe County complete with fishing and craft beer.
- **Distribute Local Swag**
  - Local businesses are ideal partners for giveaways and handouts that leave a positive impression of the City of Forsyth.
  - The CVB can expand this new initiative and help tell the story of these local companies and their products.



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