

Wilmington Assessment

Updated November 2008

Intro Statement

Wilmington has often regarded itself as living in the shadow of Lake Placid. Indeed, Whiteface is in Wilmington, but is often associated with Lake Placid.

Wilmington lacks the upscale tourism products to capture and keep the visitors that are mainstay for Lake Placid. In fact, many of those enjoying the strongest experiences that Wilmington has to offer find it easier to sleep and dine in Lake Placid and come down to Wilmington to fish, run, bike, ski, and hike. Adding products, especially infrastructure, would help give those visitors a way to enter Wilmington's economy in addition to enjoying its experiences.

Many of Wilmington's lodging products have not seen significant "reinvestment" for years. Tourism infrastructure, globally, has evolved and that evolution has evolved demand in travelers who have come to expect style and amenities not reflected in many of Wilmington's lodging products.

There is another important side to the picture. Wilmington has retained a more classic Adirondack society and atmosphere than nearby Lake Placid. And, the people who live there don't want to lose that. Some have even gone so far as to say that it's important to design the future in a way that prevents Wilmington from being overwhelmed by outsiders the way they see Lake Placid to be.

Still, there seems to be a wish that more of the people hitting the lift lines and riding bikes up that highway were spending time in Wilmington eateries and sleeping in Wilmington lodging establishments. There is a desire for more and better paying jobs – and a little of the vibrancy that is sensed up the road.

Therein lies the challenge

Snapshot of Current Tourism

This is an evolving document – more will be added as it comes to the table through research and community discussion. The following lists are not prioritized.

Infrastructure

- Ski Area
- North Pole
- High Falls Gorge
- Ausable River
- Whiteface Memorial Highway
- State Lands

Experiences

- Fishing
- Hiking
- Climbing
- Skiing
- North Pole
- Running
- Biking
- Whiteface Memorial Highway
- Ironman
- Mountain Biking
- Gondola
- High Falls Gorge
- Swimming
- Canoeing and Kayaking
- Camping
- Annual Events

Products

- Ski Area
- North Pole
- Lodge
- Several small lodges and motels
- Campgrounds and RV park
- Seasonal dining
- Ironman
- High Falls Gorge
- Retail
- Farmers Market

Gaps

- Higher quality lodging and dining
- Retail
- Movie Theater
- Evening and night activities/entertainment
- Indoor activities (for rainy days)
- Pedestrian friendly hub/business center
- Destination amenities
- Basic visitor and resident amenities (grocery store and name brands)
- Shuttle to Lake Placid
- Local planning and zoning
- Unification of business community
- Community diversity of stay the same vs. change
- Hospitality education for work staff and local residents
- Improving way finding – more accurate signage for road, hotels, restaurants and visitor information
- Lack of a 52 week season because of mud season (2 fall and 2 spring) and spring vacation time

Seasons

Whiteface gives Wilmington a strong entry into a four season economy, if Wilmington can give visitors good reasons to lodge, dine, shop and recreate within Wilmington. The solid Adirondack orientation of Wilmington, coupled with the Whiteface Memorial Highway, fishing, skiing, the running and biking challenge of Highway 86, and High Falls Gorge, provide a good four-season base for experiences.

Quality

Needing quality lodging and dining. The curb appeal of Wilmington is not what it could be.

Rates

The quality and dated state of lodging makes Wilmington a lower value destination.

Competitiveness

Patrons are choosing lodging and dining at Lake Placid, even if their experience is in Wilmington

Positive and Negative Impacts

- Staying small has kept integrity of social makeup of town
- Wilmington “needs” more revenue from tourism
- To some extent, Wilmington has a “complex” about being in the shadow of Lake Placid

Benefits

- Small town
- No traffic
- Low crime
- Local economy
- Scenic/natural beauty
- Not commercialized
- Local to the Mountain

Visitors (demographics)

- Wilmington's visitors are primarily outdoor active
- Because of the limitations of lodging, there is a tendency toward the more budget crowd

Visitor Satisfaction

- Wilmington has a constituency that likes what it is now
- A number of people drive through Wilmington and lodge/dine elsewhere

Potential New Products and Experiences

- Potential of attracting motorcycle touring patrons
- Boat rental from beach
- More shops
- New lodging
- New dining
- Potential of using space at Whiteface outside the ski season
- Shuttles
 - So people can lodge in Wilmington but still get to Lake Placid
 - Lodging to the Mountain
- Doggie day care (for people traveling with pets)
- Outdoor guides
- Full packaged guided tours

Community Wants

- Not become another Lake Placid
- Indoor entertainment – gym and pool
- Retail
- Pharmacy
- Shall shops
- Sustain quality of life
- Survive economically
- Provide future for kids
- Increase amenities for people who live here
- Keep the people in business that are already in business
- Keep up the infrastructure of the Town (signs, roads, etc.)
- To make a better year round economy

Community Concerns

- Not become another Lake Placid
- Don't want development (tourism or second home) that changes nature of community
- There are two kinds of visitors – those looking for a “Lake George” atmosphere and the visitor who comes to see what is here (Wilmington wants the latter)

Visitor Perspectives

Products and Experiences that Contribute to a Sense of Destination

- Whiteface
- Ironman
- Fishing
- Bike races
- Uphill Foot Race
- Oktoberfest
- High Falls Gorge
- North Pole

Products and Experiences that build on Essex County/Adirondack Sense of Destination

- Whiteface
- Fishing
- Hiking
- High Falls Gorge

Products that Conflict with Destination Appeal

What Makes This (or Would Make This) a Destination

- More modern Adirondack themed lodging and dining
- Architectural standards
- Upgrade of area around main intersection
- Legitimate Adirondack gift shops
- More pedestrian friendly shopping area

Visitor Satisfaction (what contributes, what detracts, what is needed)

A visitor driving through Wilmington can't immediately sense community pride, or that this is a close knit community that has an incredible sense of who it is. Instead, the "curb" message is a community that is struggling. That sorts visitors in a way that does not lead to economic success. And it sends people driving onward, instead of getting to know the great people of this community.

Other Issues from Local Input

- Branding Wilmington as its own identity – as the Adirondack Town
- Market to families

Summary

It is clear that Wilmington values its character, its sense of a close knit Adirondack community. It's also clear that Wilmington would like to have more revenue from tourism in its economy. Infrastructure, in the form of competitive lodging and dining facilities, will be required to reach that success. Wilmington will also benefit from the development of shopping opportunities that reflect the legitimate Adirondack community it is. Wilmington would benefit from the development of a pedestrian center that combines retail, Adirondack crafts, and dining. And it would also help to turn some of those great experiences into products.

It will be important, in the planning process and later in execution, to manage the scale of development. Wilmington has a great sense of what it wants – but it also has a sense of what it does not want to become.