

Schroon Lake's Destination Master Plan

***Designed by organizations and leaders
from the destination of Schroon Lake, New York***

Facilitated by Egret Communications
Through the Essex County Destination Master Planning Process

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and increase the quality of life in Schroon Lake
by recapturing our status as an Adirondack Lakeside Destination,
becoming a base camp for Adirondack adventures,
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Vision: Recapturing the Magic of Schroon Lake

Schroon Lake will recapture its status as an Adirondack Lakeside Destination by becoming a base camp for Adirondack adventures, expanding and upgrading its selection of lodging and dining, improving its curb appeal, building new outdoor-experience products, increasing visitor opportunities to access and view the lake, and improving visitor experiences. The goal is to increase jobs and business opportunities, and generate new year-round revenue.

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Executive Summary

The people, hospitality-related businesses, Chamber of Commerce, and public sector will combine efforts to build a stronger tourism economy in Schroon Lake that is “engineered” to produce benefits for residents.

That effort will be coordinated through a new “Tourism Council” which will execute this plan and lead an annual review of accomplishments and plan renewal.

Schroon Lake will evolve its lodging to be more current and competitive by both adding new units and upgrading existing lodging facilities, yielding 100 current and competitive rooms by 2012. Schroon Lake will attract new tourism investment, create incentives for new lodging development, and incubate new tourism businesses.

Schroon Lake will link lodging with experiences, becoming a base-camp for outdoor active visitors, and delivering experiences both nearby and within a day’s drive of that lodging.

Schroon Lake will continue to evolve its visitor products (dining, retail, recreation rentals, and events) and work hard to make sure that visitor activities (including lodging and dining) are available along the lakefront.

Schroon Lake will work hard on its curb appeal, especially in the corridor between the Northway entrances north and south of Schroon Lake. A primary focus of that effort will be the reduction of derelict and decaying tourism facilities either through improvement or removal.

Schroon Lake will further improve its destination appeal through the use of architectural standards, hospitality training, better use of state land, and an increased focus on music and the arts. Schroon Lake will increase outdoor events, especially off peak, and make them profitable for the community.

The destination of Schroon Lake will build a stronger web presence, highlighting visitor experiences that can be linked to a Schroon Lake base camp, packaging lodging with experiences, establishing a base line of visitor data, and tracking changes in that data.

Schroon Lake will strive to build a closer, more symbiotic relationship with Word of Life.

Schroon Assessment

Intro Statement

Schroon Lake is a quaint village on the shores of a beautiful lake. The town has had a long history with tourism. As a rule, early visitors were more affluent than current visitors and arrived by stage (and later auto) to stay at magnificent classic Adirondack lakeside retreats. Photos of those classic lodges adorn the walls of town hall and remind locals that Schroon Lake used to be a hopping place.

Travel patterns changed and Schroon Lake found itself serving weekenders driving north from the cities and staying in some fairly budget motels that were strategically placed to appeal to people on the highway.

Times changed again and the Northway construction left Schroon Lake and those motor lodges out of sight to highway travelers. Schroon Lake did not succeed in creating demand for continued strong patronage of the destination. Without a good flow of patrons, there was not ample reinvestment in lodging and Schroon Lake fell behind times.

The view from the highway as one passes south to north through Schroon Lake is dominated by out of date lodging. Some of that lodging is in poor repair. That image sticks in the mind and influences who spends time in Schroon Lake, what they are willing to pay, whether they seek a nice meal, how long they stay, whether they shop, and what kinds of activities they engage in. None of those outcomes are good for Schroon Lake.

In recent times, the town has reinvested in its historic downtown and the waterfront. The waterfront park is inviting. The boat launch and band shell areas look very good. The entire waterfront park is a classic Adirondack look and very well maintained.

Downtown is looking good. There is a selection of dining that is new and seems to be well received. The mix of retail is reflecting visitors' wants as well as local needs. If Schroon Lake could secure a steady flow of visitors who spend several nights and engage in activities from a local base, then downtown would flourish.

Schroon Lake has a great base-camp location. If one was comfortably lodged here, one could explore the region from Lake Champlain to the high country to the west. There are great hiking trails and quiet roads to explore by car or bicycle. In the winter there are miles of wilderness trails for snowshoeing or cross country skiing. There are ample opportunities to snowmobile and ice fish. Most of all there is Schroon Lake itself, which lends itself to great family boating and fishing.

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

- Town Park and Boat Launch
- Schroon Lake and beach
- Hiking and Snowmobile Trails
- Scenic Drives
- Proximity to Northway
- Proximity to Amtrak/Trailways Bus
- Forever Wild Lands
- Lakes and Ponds
- Historic Downtown
- Historic Homes and Churches
- Seagle Music Colony and Schroon Lake Arts
- Older lodging establishments
- Word of Life
- Sunrise Lutheran Camp
- Airport
- Golf Course
- Paradox Lake
- State Land
- Library
- Movie Theater
- Town's Infrastructure

Experiences

- Boating
- Fishing
- Hiking
- Ice Fishing
- Snowmobiling
- Snowshoeing
- Touring routes for Adirondack vistas
- Small and big game hunting
- Seagle Music Colony and Schroon Lake Arts
- Spiritual Retreats
- Movie Theater
- Lakes and Ponds
- History
- Cultural Events
- State Land
- Main Street
- Golf Course
- Tennis
- Beach/swimming
- X-C Skiing
- Ice Skating
- Town Park
- Ski Hill
- Annual Events
- Youth Events

Products

- Older lodging establishments
- Dining
- Downtown Retail
- B&Bs
- Local Events and Contests
- Ice Fishing Derby
- Guide Service
- Youth Events
- State Land
- Golf Course

Gaps

- Lodging that matches destination and current market demands
- Anchor experiences
- Turning experiences into products
- Dining – experience dining with a view
- More “current” lodging inventory – should contain amenities
- Conference/Banquet Center
- Limited year-round businesses
- Indoor activities for inclement weather
- Lakefront dining
- Parking and Traffic Flow
- Wilderness trail improvements on State Land (Hoffman Knotch)
- Signs and trailhead improvements (DEC needs to be doing)
- Year-round restaurants
- Bike trails
- Cell Phone Coverage and Internet Access
- Public Transportation
- Local Services (i.e. hair dresser)
- Empty storefronts

Seasons

Schroon Lake has an ample array of experiences to achieve a year-round economy. Currently, there are not specific motivators in place to drive that traffic to Schroon Lake.

Quality

Travelers have come to expect style and amenities that are lacking in the current lodging selections in Schroon Lake. There are great qualities of experiences in nature and in the historic downtown.

Rates

Lower than the destination deserves – far lower than potential.
B&B's are upgraded – motels are not.

Competitiveness

Most of the currently available lodging is of an earlier era and has not seen the reinvestment necessary to compete in the current era. B&B's are upgraded – motels are not.

Positive and Negative Impacts

There are a number of visitors evident in Schroon Lake and all of those visitors generate impacts (wear and tear on public infrastructure, sewage, power consumption, exhaust, congestion). Those visitors are not currently leaving enough in Schroon Lake's economy to offset those impacts.

Benefits

- Visitors are spending money downtown.

Visitors (demographics)

Lodging issues are driving down the demographic profile of Schroon Lake's overnight visitors.

Visitor Satisfaction

Potential New Products and Experiences

- Lodging
- Guided Experiences
- Ecotourism
- Geocaching
- Birding
- More guided experiences
- Paddling/Kayaking
- Dinner Cruises
- Mill Brook (area behind Main Street shops to the river that could open Main Street up)

Community Wants

- Jobs and Business Opportunities
- More visitors of a higher value

Community Concerns

- Second Home development driving out opportunity to have tourism infrastructure that interfaces the lake
- Are there enough local resources to bring about needed change?
- Lakefront is private property

Visitor Perspectives

Products and Experiences that Contribute to a Sense of Destination

- Schroon Lake
- Town Waterfront Park and Beach
- Historic Downtown
- Great Drives based from Schroon Lake
- Boating
- Great hiking and snowmobiling trails
- Lakes and Ponds
- State – Forever Wild Lands
- Annual Events
- Seagle Music Colony and Schroon Lake Arts
- Word of Life
- Guided Experiences
- Fishing

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

- Schroon Lake
- Town Waterfront Park and Beach
- Historic Downtown
- Great Drives based from Schroon Lake
- Boating
- Great hiking and snowmobiling trails
- Lakes and Ponds
- Fishing
- Guided Experiences
- Cultural Events

Products that Conflict with Destination Appeal

Outdated Lodging (sometimes in poor repair)

Second home development blocking tourism access to waterfront lodging and dining.

What Makes This (or Would Make This) a Destination

- Current Quality Lodging, preferably oriented to the Lake, woods, or a pond
- Dining with a view
- A standout image or experience that would capture potential visitors' imaginations and help them understand what Schroon Lake is all about

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

- The real question here is: What do the visitors Schroon Lake really want to see think of the current situation – what would bring them to Schroon Lake?
- Packaged ecotourism (needed)

Other Issues from Local Input

Word of Life

Summary

Schroon Lake is certainly challenged because it lacks a current and competitive lodging component. The lack of those facilities precludes Schroon Lake's success among visitors who might otherwise be a good match for the destination. The presence of outdated and (sometimes) poorly presented lodging facilities further devalues the destination and can serve to attract visitors who are not as profitable and could, themselves, make it more difficult to achieve long term success. The lack of ability to construct and operate those facilities in a way that faces Schroon Lake, certainly puts constraints on the development of quality tourism.

The second key issue for Schroon Lake is that it has a long list of quite acceptable experiences – but it does not have a key experience that defines the destination. While Schroon Lake is a great (perhaps even quintessential) small town Adirondack lakefront experience, it will need to better communicate that in order to differentiate Schroon Lake from other small towns that also regard and present themselves as quintessential small town Adirondack lakefront experiences. Schroon Lake will benefit from making some decisions about where to focus and then getting strong energy behind that direction – and making a name for itself.

It will be important for Schroon Lake to establish itself as a hub for multiple days of experiences. To do that, one will want to prepare exciting packages that show off the region's best assets, activities, and experiences and mix those with a variety of dining options.

Schroon Lake Analysis

Schroon Lake has an enviable history in tourism – a vibrant and iconic tourism that has now slipped away from Schroon Lake and left the town serving lower paying visitors. Still, Schroon Lake knows it can excel in tourism, has the natural resources to put together a dynamic tourism economy, and has the drive to make it happen.

There was no hesitation in the planning sessions when we asked whether Schroon Lake should aim for more similar spending visitors or whether it wants to build and operate a tourism economy aiming at higher return guests. Schroon Lake intends to aim higher than the average visitor it now serves. And the people in the room demonstrated a determination to succeed at that.

What will that take?

Schroon Lake needs to concentrate on the following issues to rebuild and retool its tourism economy to be vibrant and to attract and serve higher-paying clientele:

- Schroon Lake needs a new core of mid to upper-mid range lodging offerings
- Schroon Lake will benefit from developing architectural standards that reinforce the classic Schroon Lake look.
- Schroon Lake will need to look to the great collection of year round outdoor experiences and develop the stronger of those experiences into products.
- Schroon Lake has a good start on building a vibrant downtown – that needs to expand to include year-round dining that is a match for a higher-paying clientele and for families.
- Schroon Lake needs to take care of its curb appeal, especially on the approaches from the north and south.
- Schroon Lake needs to reopen the lake to visitors that seek dining and lodging with a view

If Schroon Lake is to recapture the vibrancy of its past it needs to aim for a clientele that spends more – that will require the development of mid to upper-mid range lodging. And that lodging will be more successful if it can be oriented to the great natural resources of the region (as those classic Schroon Lake lodges were). The era when it was important for visitors to see lodging as they drove past is over – at least if one is seeking the kinds of clientele that regard the lodging component as a part of their vacation experience.

Schroon Lake is so much more (and has a history to support it) than another lake you can come and play on – and it has much to gain by demanding that as time passes it looks more and more like the classic Schroon Lake that was so successful. That would mean that the community would come together behind some architectural standards (especially along the tourism corridor) that reinforce the classic Schroon Lake look. The payback over time could be enormous as the Schroon Lake look reinforces and becomes the icon for the message that this community is ready to host a world class experience and that it is the penultimate Adirondack lakeside community.

Sleeping in a destination is not enough – the target clientele will need a rich array of products and experiences that are grounded in the strengths of Schroon Lake. The planning group has assembled quite a list of potential products and experiences – those need to be sifted to find those that are differentiators for Schroon Lake. Those differentiators are the experiences that will drive tourism business to and for Schroon Lake – and they need to be developed and or fine tuned to be very successful.

Downtown Schroon Lake is important to the present tourism economy and will become more important to a vibrant new tourism economy. Downtown will need to evolve to match the evolving target market – there will be strong needs for more upscale and year-round dining opportunities, authentic Adirondack arts and crafts, more of the retail that supports outdoor adventures, and continued energy related to coffee shops and bakeries. These changes will also serve locals well, raising quality of life and providing new entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.

Schroon Lake needs to work on its curb appeal. Schroon Lake has done much to upgrade park and waterfront areas – and those efforts have really made a difference in keeping Schroon Lake viable until a substantial reinvestment on the private side can take hold. Downtown is looking much better than it did a few years ago – but a visitor approaching from the north or south passes by poorly maintained and derelict properties, many of which are related to tourism. If a visitor develops a poor impression before hitting town, the value of the experience has been degraded before it starts. There needs to be a strong and concerted effort to seriously upgrade those out of date lodging properties that can be upgraded and remove the rest from the sight of travelers.

The classic period in Schroon Lake’s tourism history focused on the waterfront – that needs to be revitalized. Since the days of the grand old lakefront Adirondack lodges, the lakefront has been bought up for the development of second homes. While this move has funneled some revenue into the local economy, it has choked off Schroon Lake’s ability to deliver lodging and dining experiences oriented to the lake that is central to the town’s history and tourism image. There is no easy answer to this dilemma, but it is an issue that needs to be faced and dealt with as Schroon Lake contemplates its future in tourism.

Those famous Adirondack chairs were designed to sit at a lakefront lodge and look out over the water – it's time to make that happen again in Schroon Lake.

Egret Communications firmly believes that Schroon Lake has the ability to develop a more vibrant tourism economy that serves a higher spending clientele than the average of those coming now. If the six points listed above are satisfactorily addressed, the other issues and opportunities related to the future of Schroon Lake tourism will be relatively easy to address.

Goals for Schroon Lake Tourism

- Maintain small town atmosphere – and keep Schroon Lake a place residents want to live
- Grow tourism economy
- Become a base camp for Adirondack adventures
- Increase number and competitiveness of lodging opportunities in Schroon Lake
- Generate jobs and business opportunities
- Make that economy function much of the year
- Generate higher return per visitor
- Have a higher percentage of visitors sleeping in Schroon Lake
- Recapture Schroon Lake’s status as a leading Adirondack Lakeside Destination

