

# Essex County Tourism Master Planning Project

## Ticonderoga December 2008 Progress Report

### Key Discussions

There is general agreement that Ticonderoga would be well served to build some solid tourism experiences that will draw visitors to Ticonderoga whether or not Fort Ticonderoga is able to overcome its current difficulties.

A key focus is the re-creation of the historic French Sawmill. This is envisioned to be a fully functional working sawmill. Visitors will be able to examine the mill as a historic replica – and watch its operation. Most importantly the sawmill will spawn other business activities that will 1) increase visitor demand and quality of visitor experience, 2) be good matches for the skill sets of locals, 3) generate more jobs for locals and dollars into the local economy, and 4) reinforce Ticonderoga's sense of history. Those businesses include (but are not at all limited to) horse logging, timber framing (production and school), and wood crafts and furniture construction and sales. Some of those businesses are intended to find homes on Main Street (as the Main Street project and Pride continue to improve opportunities), drawing visitors into this important part of Ticonderoga. The sawmill will generate its own set of revenues based on the output of the mill, some wood products feeding those other businesses and others sold directly to consumers at high values. There are a number of good symbiotic linkages between the sawmill and local/regional educational institutions – as well as those institutions teaching traditional building arts.

The French Mill discussion has moved beyond talk and is progressing toward action on four paths. First, one team is working on a vision statement. A second team is studying organizational structure for the sawmill (private enterprise, NGO, town owned, etc.). A third team is consulting with some design experts on the estimated cost and particulars of construction. Pride is examining options to raise the funds if the NGO or town-owned options seem best.

Ticonderoga is beginning to feel the benefits of having more current lodging in town. The planning team has listed several sites that offer good potential for additional lodging. There is one site just upstream of the proposed French Sawmill site and streamside of lower downtown that would tie lodging, downtown, and sawmill activity into a walking experience. The town owns the land and is interested in courting a lodging establishment to the area. Discussions have centered around targeting regional investors (if possible) to build something that might sell for \$150-\$200/night in the current high season market.

A second set of lodging interest may be materializing on fort-owned land near the Amtrak station. Changes at the fort may open an opportunity that has long been of interest to some are residents who are interested in developing a high-end lodging complex.

There has been an ongoing effort to revitalize the historic downtown of Ticonderoga. That effort led by Main Street and Pride continues to make good progress and is fully integrated into this planning effort. The Ticonderoga planning team considers this planning effort to be a continuation and expansion of the earlier efforts, expanding into all of the Town of Ticonderoga. The coordination of new lodging, the French Sawmill, timber framing, and other new enterprises close to downtown will reinforce the value of what these teams have been working on for some time.

### **Visitor Perspective**

Ticonderoga is determined to create a legitimate history-based tourism draw that is perceived and managed separately from Fort Ticonderoga. The perfect outcome would be a multi-draw destination where all products reinforce each other and provide multi-day visitor experiences that are a good match for history-focused travelers.

Ticonderoga has a number of other tourism experiences that are important to the future. The working group has discussed how the existing change in lodging has already made the regional fishing tournaments better for both visitors and the local economy. That lodging base does open many of the outdoor experiences (especially boating and fishing) to more visitors. It also provides a base camp from which visitors can explore the Adirondacks, Lake Champlain, and nearby southern Vermont. The development of more lodging and a viable downtown feed into this sense of destination and base camp.

### **Local Perspective**

Ticonderoga has a population that is accustomed to working for big employers. One of the goals of the planning team is to identify a tourism development path that will entice residents to consider entrepreneurial activity – or at least find employment that resonates with their history of working with their hands.

The local planning team is working very hard on choosing an appropriate organizational style for the French Sawmill. There are a number of tender feelings in the community related to frictions between the Fort and the community, many of which come back to an organizational structure that has no real place for local input.

### **Structural Perspective**

Ticonderoga has been working for some time to build the basic infrastructure for a revitalized economy. Steps toward restoration of the historic downtown, the building of a new hotel, and the new river trail have all laid the foundation for a new tourism economy.

Ticonderoga's planning team is very focused on the continuation of that infrastructure expansion and development. Key items (described above) include new lodging, the French Sawmill, and further restoration of downtown buildings. The team has begun to

move with determination toward the realization of the French Sawmill. Steps are underway toward the development of one of the lodging sites. And options are under discussion for another. The Main Street initiative and Pride continue strong efforts to rebuild capacity in historic downtown.

The committee has discussed the logic of looking at the path of the La Chute River as core area for visitor experiences, opening opportunities on both Lake George and Lake Champlain.

There are some structural issues associated with the sawmill. Those include log storage, raw lumber drying, staging for timber framing, ensuring visitors get a good set of angles on the building and the process, and managing pedestrian traffic flow between downtown, the river walk, the sawmill site, timber framing complex, and the potential new downtown lodging facility.