

# Essex County Tourism Master Planning Project

## Wilmington December 2008 Progress Report

### **Key Discussions**

Wilmington wants to be known for its family orientation. It intends to make tourism decisions and shape actions to support, refine, and improve its position in the family market.

### **Partnership**

The planning process has helped spawn a potential partnership between North Pole and the Whiteface Mountain complex. This potential partnership could help Whiteface present itself as more family-friendly in all seasons, and could extend the revenue producing season for North Pole. This partnership could pull in other local participants as well, and could lead to the development of a Halloween visitor experience that extends from Wilmington's beach to the castle at the summit of Whiteface Mountain.

### **Visitor Perspective**

While Wilmington has several strong aspects to its tourism economy, it wants to cast itself as the family-oriented Adirondack destination. Wilmington has a long history with the North Pole, with sharing its family-oriented town assets (such as the beach area), and with the family orientation of its lodging establishments.

At the same time, Wilmington acknowledges the importance of outdoor recreation and competitive events to its tourism industry. There is a particular focus on serving those who come to fish and those who come to compete in Ironman and similar events.

Wilmington intends to evolve a more competitive set of lodging, dining, and shopping experiences. Wilmington is aiming to court the development of multiple Adirondack Lodge style lodging properties, each with a room count that is a "fit" for the small town feel that Wilmington hopes to perpetuate.

### **Partnership**

The planning discussions have spawned the potential of a partnership between the Whiteface Mountain operation and North Pole. This partnership will potentially lead to 1) reindeer at the base of Whiteface during the ski season; 2) a month-long Halloween visitor experience that involves the castle, a forest experience on North Pole lands, and even something using the beach area; and 3) the use of existing trails (assuming permits are possible) between the ski area and North Pole to deliver winter and warm weather experiences.

Bridgette has a Paul Smith student making a capstone project of the Halloween idea development.

### *Tourism Retail/Dining Zone*

There is a distinct interest in developing a pedestrian friendly zone where visitors can access both retail and dining opportunities. The working group is grappling with location issues related to that zone. There is interest in the area alongside the road from the 86/431 intersection to the road into the beach area. There are other locations that have also been suggested.

### **Local Perspective**

There is great cohesion among the Wilmington working group regarding the desire to maintain the small town nature of Wilmington. To that end, Wilmington will pay close attention to both the scale of future developments and the rate at which things are developed.

There is a preference among the Wilmington planning group to engage in redevelopment of existing (run down) lodging properties by replacing them with new currently designed facilities.

### **Structural Perspective**

#### *Lodging*

The Wilmington planning team concurs with the need to add current and competitive lodging in Wilmington. There is a general agreement that it would be better to have several smaller (15-30) room Adirondack Lodge style lodging establishments than one or two larger ones, so that Wilmington can maintain its small town, family friendly atmosphere. There was general support for the idea that some of the existing older, less-well maintained lodging properties could be replaced with new lodging businesses.

#### *Transportation*

The group has been united behind the concept of public transportation between Wilmington lodging establishments and Whiteface and Lake Placid. Ideally, this transportation would be available year-round and several times a day, into the evening. This would enable those lodging in Wilmington to explore the broader selection of dining and shopping that Lake Placid offers, and to come and go from the ski area without needing to drive.

Randy Preston announced that a start-up of a regional shuttle service that connects Jay to Wilmington to Lake Placid would start this winter. Another branch will connect Lake Placid to Saranac Lake and beyond.

#### *Bike Lanes*

The Wilmington working group is eager to have bike lanes along the Ironman route to improve safety and visitor experience. There is additional interest in creating/finding bike friendly routes for family-oriented bike riding.

### Retail/Dining Pedestrian Zone

There is strong interest in developing a pedestrian-friendly retail and dining zone, perhaps along route 86, from the 86/431 intersection to the road into Wilmington's beach. Other sites have also been suggested. More discussions are needed.