

# **Bay City Tourism Advisory Council & Matagorda County Eco-Tourism Partnership**

In March 2024, the Bay City Tourism Advisory Council (TAC) and the Matagorda County Eco-Tourism Partnership (MCETP) embarked on a joint strategic planning process to develop the strategic priorities for Fiscal Year 2025 through 2026. The following is the process used to reach the conclusions for the joint Strategic Plan.

On May 8, 2024, the Bay City Tourism Manager, Darve Smith, the Bay City Tourism Advisory Board, and the Matagorda County Eco-Tourism Partnership Board of Directors met at the Beachside Clubhouse in Palacios, Texas for a strategic planning workshop to begin planning for fiscal years 2025 through 2026. Alysia A. Cook, PCED, IOM with Opportunity Strategies LLC served as their facilitator throughout this process.

During the Strategic Planning Retreat, the participants received the feedback from the attendees of the Bay City Tourism/Hospitality Focus Group discussion held on March 21, 2024, at the USO Service Center.

Following the Focus Group feedback review, the participants engaged in two exercises.

The first was a SWOT Analysis where the group brainstormed the strengths, weaknesses, potential opportunities, and potential threats facing the Tourism industry in Bay City and Matagorda County.

The second was an exercise called Start-Stop-Accelerate where the facilitator asked the participants to list what both organizations needed to start doing, stop doing, and accelerate their efforts to achieve.

Midway through the Strategic Planning Retreat, both organizations welcomed the Associate General Counsel of the Texas Hotel & Lodging Association to present the most recent updates to the laws in Texas regarding Hotel Occupancy Taxes including the legalities around HOT monies collections, administration, and expenditures.

The following is the joint group's FY 2025-2026 Strategic Plan.

## **Bay City Tourism Advisory Council Mission Statement**

Bay City TAC promotes and develops tourism and awareness of our beaches, birds, thriving arts and downtown culture.

## **Vision Statement**

The Vision Statement is to be a nationally recognized as the Birding Capitol and finest family destination in North America.

## **Matagorda County Eco-Tourism Partnership Mission Statement**

Responsibly Unlocking the Wonders of Matagorda County

The Matagorda County Eco-Tourism Partnership is a collaborative team, dedicated to unlocking the hidden gems of our unique ecosystems for both local families and eco-conscious travelers. By working hand-in-hand, we unlock the true potential of Matagorda County – a vibrant destination where discovery thrives in balance with conservation, enriching lives and leaving a lasting legacy for all.

## **We strive to achieve the following goals:**

1. Safeguard our irreplaceable natural treasures: By prioritizing conservation and sustainable practices, we ensure the wonders of Matagorda County flourish for generations to come.
2. Craft unforgettable experiences: We provide responsible access to nature, fostering appreciation and understanding through immersive encounters with our diverse ecosystems and rich cultural heritage.

3. Embrace responsible tourism: We attract eco-tourists who share our values, seeking partners who contribute to the well-being of our communities and environment.
  4. Cultivate environmental stewards: We offer educational programs for all ages and abilities, inspiring a deep sense of responsibility for protecting our natural world.
  5. Thrive together: Through collaboration, we empower local businesses and communities, ensuring economic prosperity alongside environmental harmony.
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## **SWOT Analysis**

The facilitator engaged the participants in an exercise to brainstorm and list the strengths and weaknesses of the Bay City Tourism Advisory Council and Matagorda County Eco-Tourism Partnership, as well as the current and/or potential opportunities and threats facing the organizations. The facilitator shared the aggregated responses with the whole group and discussed the comments collected. The results of the SWOT are listed here:

### **Strengths**

- Blank Slate
- Environment
  - Weather
  - Wildlife
  - Water
- Motivated
- Diverse
- Open-minded
- History
  - Home of La Belle
- Heritage
  - Matagorda - 3rd oldest city in Texas
- Governmental
  - Backing
  - Collaboration
- Location
- Waterfront
- Fishing
- Birding

- Willingness for change

### **Weaknesses**

- Organization of Committee
- Staffing
- Volunteers/Commitment
- Dedicated members
- Budget information
- Collaboration with other cities and local
- Lack of eating establishments
  - Variety?
- Tour guides for birding
- Wayfinding signs
- Lack of Aquatic Center
- Geographically challenged
  - Spread out
- Public education and communication
  - Who we are
  - Assets we have
- Seasonal opportunities
  - Winter void
  - 100°+ void
- Market Day \$

## **Opportunities**

- Other funding
  - City general funding
  - County budget
  - Greater percentage of existing funding
- Create a Unique Tourist Draw/Attraction
  - Like Sulphur Springs' Mirrored Bathrooms
- Roundabout
  - Sculpture
- Cottonwood Creek
- Seafood industries
  - Celebrate and support
- Educational
  - Kids
  - Adults
- Diversity
  - Culture
- Need seafood restaurant
- Culinary
- Artists
- Collaborations
  - Marketing and organization
  - Countywide
  - Social Media
  - Event coordinator
- Harbor
  - Captive audience
- On water experiences
- Outdoor experiences
  - Birding
  - Beach
  - Fishing
  - Nature Center and more
- Unique tours
- Adopt-A-Spot
  - Litter pick-up
  - Taste of Palacios
  - Seafood Market

## **Potential Threats**

- Shrimping industry
- HOT tax management
- Taking on too much too soon
- Beach erosion/management
- Lack of participation - Apathy
- Lack of community collaboration
- Communication
- Turnover
- Other tourism attractions - Competition
- Weather – Hurricanes

### **Start – Stop – Accelerate**

The facilitator engaged participants in a group exercise called Start – Stop – Accelerate which divides participants into small groups and has them offer feedback on what the Bay City Tourism Advisory Council and Matagorda County Eco-Tourism Partnership need to start doing, stop doing, and accelerate efforts to do.

These are individual recommendations and not necessarily agreed to by all participants.

The responses are as follows:

#### **Start**

- Hotel roundtables
- Budget and staff support
- Support TAC
  - Organize TAC
- ID target audience/diversity
- Arts sub-committee
  - Festival/events

#### **Stop**

Organizational chaos  
Apathy  
Vague expectations

#### **Accelerate**

- Signage
  - Wayfinding
- Tourist Itineraries
- Arts - support projects
- Eco-tourism sub-committee
- Advisory Council expectations/roles
- Kiosk project
- More staff

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## **Goal #1: Organizational Structure**

***To review and revise tourism organizational structures.***

### **Strategies**

- 1.1 Solidify names of council and sub-committee
- 1.2 Create board/council commitment forms
- 1.3 Create onboarding binder
- 1.4 Schedule board/council training

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## **Goal #2: Visitor Center**

***To re-establish the Downtown Visitor Center kiosk.***

### **Strategies**

- 2.1 Turn on power/new door lock/clean
- 2.2 Establish hours
- 2.3 Gather updated materials
- 2.4 Open during hours of special events
- 2.5 Market Visitor Center to local entities
- 2.6 Monitor materials in kiosk Darve Smith Ongoing Ongoing

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## **Goal #3: Marketing and Data**

***To create and execute a Marketing Plan.***

### **Strategies**

- 3.1 Gathering of data
  - Gather prices on purchasing cell phone data
  - Gather Hotelier data (see Goal 4)
- 3.2 Create tourist/visitor avatars
  - Identify target audience for tourism ads
- 3.3 Create Marketing Plan
  - Website
  - Visitor guide
- 3.4 Invest more money into market and research
- 3.5 Build itineraries for Tourists
- 3.6 Location logistics
  - Design/idea
  - Wayfinding (see Goal 6)
  - How to get here
- 3.7 Staff under Tourism
- 3.8 Research the Brazoria County Avatar(s)

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## **Goal #4: Build Relationships**

**To enhance tourism collaboration.**

### **Strategies**

- 4.1 Foster and grow hotelier relationships
  - Identify and contact hoteliers
  - Schedule semi-annual roundtables
  - Collaborate and exchange ideas/data
- 4.2 Report to City Council quarterly

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## **Goal #5: Events**

**To support and promote Matagorda County events.**

### **Strategies**

- 5.1 Create an Event Coordinator position (paid)
  - Coordinate Social Media
  - Create event checklist for processes
- 5.2 Promote Day of the Dead, Artwalk Series, Matagorda Bay Birdfest, Camofest, and other main tourist events
- 5.3 Seafood Festival feat. shrimpers, oysters, etc.
- 5.4 Utilize Bay City digital signs to promote events
- 5.5 Promote events on billboards
- 5.6 Promote Mud Races (Van Vleck)

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## **Goal #6: Art/Culture**

**To increase the presence of public arts and culture.**

### **Strategies**

- 6.1 Invest in more visual art displays
  - 6.1.1 Have an idea/identify location
  - 6.1.2 Commission artist
  - 6.1.3 Review completion of artwork
- 6.2 Develop an Arts Committee to leverage diversity and culture through art events
- 6.3 Create visually appealing wayfinding signs
  - 6.3.1 Research award-winning wayfinding signs
  - 6.3.2 Identify the location of signs
  - 6.3.3 Contact sign companies for bid
  - 6.3.4 Select company and manage installation