
Sonoma County Tourism Sustainability & Resilience Master Plan





“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” — Albert Einstein

Sustainability and Resilience Master Plan - Timeline



Outreach Approach

Focus Groups:

- Over 80 participants across 12 different verticals
 - Business Associations
 - Chambers of Commerce
 - Climate Resiliency & Emergency Preparedness
 - Cultural Organizations
 - Elected Officials
 - Equity, Diversity & Inclusion
 - Financial
 - Government
 - Natural Resources
 - Tourism centric organizations
 - Transportation
 - Wine/Breweries/Spirits

* In February 2023, SCT also communicated back to focus group participants on



Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Assessment



- Sonoma County: one of 39 destinations globally to complete a comprehensive destination sustainability assessment
- Sonoma County: one of 4 U.S. destinations to complete the GSTC assessment (first in California)
- Assessment completed: December 2022



GSTC Assessment Timeline



- Public release of GSTC Assessment: May 2023, during National Travel and Tourism Week (NTTW) along with long-term Sustainability & Resilience Master Plan

GSTC Criteria



Sustainable Destination Management

- Destination management responsibility
- Destination management strategy and action plan
- Monitoring & reporting
- Enterprise engagement & sustainability standards
- Resident engagement & feedback
- Visitor engagement & feedback
- Promotion and information
- Managing visitor volumes & activities
- Planning regulations and development control
- Climate Change adaptation
- Risk and Crisis

Socioeconomic Impacts

- Measuring economic contribution of tourism
- Decent work and career opportunities
- Supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade
- Support for community
- Preventing exploitation and discrimination
- Property and User Rights
- Safety & Security
- Access for All


Cultural Impacts

- Protection of cultural assets
- Cultural artifacts
- Intangible heritage
- Traditional access
- Intellectual Property
- Visitor Management at Cultural Sites
- Site Interpretation

Environmental Impacts

- Protection of sensitive environments
- Visitor management at natural sites
- Wildlife interaction
- Species exploitation and animal welfare
- Energy Conservation
- Water Stewardship
- Water Quality
- Wastewater
- Solid Waste
- GHG emissions and Climate Change mitigation
- Low impact transportation
- Light & Noise Pollution

Total Criteria	Total Indicators
38	174



Resident Sentiment Survey

- **595 survey responses**, promoted in English and Spanish
 - Input from Community Engagement Committee on designing the survey
- **Resident insights:** also gained through two virtual community town halls
- **Resident communications:** North Bay Business Journal –
Plan updates

Master Plan Themes --- Getting Focused

1. Diversified and sustainable transportation
2. Beyond Wine
3. Workforce Housing
4. Evolution of Lodging
5. Diverse and Inclusive Visitation
6. Climate Change, Fire, and Drought
7. Tourism Sentiment
8. Brand Position



**Build a Naturally Resilient
Destination
Strengthen the Health
of
Our Economy
Elevate the Resident Quality
of Life**

**Enhance the Breath of
Products
and Experiences**

**Acknowledge and Advance
Sonoma
County's Culture and Heritage**

* Additional input from SME's was gained during this phase to align the plan with community planning efforts related to Arts & Culture; Transportation; Outdoor Recreation and Community Resilience.

Plan Overview



THE HOTEL PETALUMA
BUILT
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1923
AND IN THE 73RD YEAR OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF CALIFORNIA
MADE POSSIBLE
THROUGH THE COOPERATIVE
EFFORT OF EIGHT HUNDRED AND
FIFTY FIVE MEN AND WOMEN
OF PETALUMA.

ITS FRIENDLY DOORS WELCOME
THE STRANGER AND UNDER ITS
HOSPITABLE ROOF THE FRIENDS
OF PETALUMA FIND ALWAYS ONLY
GOODWILL.

IT STANDS
AS EVIDENCE AND PROOF OF
THE FAITH WHICH THE PEOPLE
OF PETALUMA HAVE IN EACH
OTHER AND IN THEIR CITY.

HERITAGE HOME
OF
PETALUMA

Objectives

Frame

Frame the architecture for building Sonoma County as a destination of choice into the future.



Enhance

Enhance the quality of life for Sonoma County residents.



Align

Align SCT with local businesses and organizations in determining the road ahead for the area.

Mission, Vision



Mission: Inspire a commitment to innovation and community amongst all stakeholders that achieves a collective long-term vision for Sonoma County.

Vision: A Sonoma County where industry sectors coalesce around a shared vision for a sustainable and resilient destination, a diversified economy and stellar resident quality of life.

Values



Authentic – Programming and the approach to conveying the story around the programming will be authentic, truthful, transparent and real.

Collaborative – Accomplishment of any of the programs will require collaboration and alignment around the roadmap to achievement. This effort will be most effective through a synergistic approach.

Aspirational – Many of the complex goals outlined require all entities to stretch capacity to accomplish. Through a data-driven, metrics-based approach, goals and programs will be monitored to determine progress toward the goal.

Dynamic – Issues arise that can take a plan in a direction other than the one originally conceived. Part of being resilient is having the flexibility to respond to situations that require a course correction.

Overarching Goals

Sonoma County will be the catalyst for an evolution in partnerships and community alignment that move the destination forward toward true resilience and sustainability.



Sonoma County will have the foundation through adequate housing and robust workforce development to sustain the industry growth that will come as a result of the plan.



Residents feel part of enhancing the region's quality of life and development a destination that compels responsible travelers.

Spheres of Influence

01

Driver – SCT is at the helm of developing and achieving the goal.

02

Partner – SCT works cooperatively with other entities to accomplish the goal

03

Influencer – SCT has no direct capacity to impact the outcome, but as the owner of the plan, can influence the driver toward achieving the goal.

Imperative 1: Build a Naturally Resilient Destination

- **SPHERE OF INFLUENCE:** Sonoma County Tourism as a DRIVER and PARTNER
- **INDUSTRY SECTORS/PARTNERS:** Government (emergency/crisis management, land management), private and non-profit land managers, marine protection, water agencies, national and international agencies and organizations committed to sustainable travel.
- **BIG AUDACIOUS GOAL:** Sonoma County becomes the center of global climate change thought leadership through an annual convening of the most forward-thinking agriculture, marine, air and land management innovators.
- **OVERVIEW:** Ensure the policies, procedures and activities are in place to that protect and preserve the environment, mitigate natural disasters and ensure Sonoma County Tourism is prepared to manage any change.



Imperative 1: Build a Naturally Resilient Destination

STRATEGIES:

- Ensure the Sonoma County Tourism industry and partners are prepared to manage and mitigate a crisis.
- Work to find alternative funding sources for Sonoma County Tourism that give the organization greater capacity to withstand funding pressure from any one source.
- Integrate programming that works to shift visitor behavior toward more responsible actions and activities.
- Identify the intersection of current preservation efforts with the commitment to protect the natural environment of Sonoma County's indigenous people. Work to create programs and communications that elevate this commitment and help travelers to better appreciate the responsibility we all have to lessen impacts and strengthen preservation efforts.



Imperative 2: Strengthen the Health of the Region's Economy

- **SPHERE OF INFLUENCE:** Sonoma County Tourism as a DRIVER and PARTNER
- **INDUSTRY SECTORS/PARTNERS:** Government (Economic Development Board, Creative Sonoma, permitting agencies, city councils, city managers), Chambers of Commerce, Visitor Centers, Sonoma County Tourism (board and committees)
- **BIG AUDACIOUS GOAL:** Build a fully sustainable “convening center” that can house meetings, corporate trainings, special events or other gatherings.
- **OVERVIEW:** Sonoma County’s economy is largely dependent on tourism. Through the initiatives outlined in this plan, the tourism-facing economy will continue to grow in strategic and innovative ways. Through robust partnership these initiatives will go above and beyond the day-to-day activities of Sonoma County Tourism.

STRATEGIES:

- Elevate current partnerships with organizations and agencies with a mission to drive the economy.
- Forge new partnerships with sectors such as technology, banking and other business sectors that can help convey an overarching effort for destination sustainability.



Imperative 3: Elevate the Resident Quality of Life

- **SPHERE OF INFLUENCE:** Sonoma County Tourism as INFLUENCER and DRIVER
- **KEY SECTORS/PARTNERS:** Transportation (Sonoma County Transportation Authority, Charles M. Schulz Sonoma County Airport), Housing (primarily affordable housing for tourism/hospitality workforce), agencies working to mitigate and serve the unsheltered community.
- **BIG AUDACIOUS GOAL:** Sonoma County has housing sufficient to accommodate persons at all economic levels.
- **OVERVIEW:** Create a quality of life that works well for residents, resulting in safe and comfortable neighborhoods, a robust workforce, affordable housing solutions and innovative transportation options.
- **STRATEGIES:**
 - Partner with transportation agencies including the Sonoma County Transportation Authority and the Charles M. Schulz Sonoma County Airport (STS) to identify innovative initiatives.
 - Work with government agencies overseeing housing and the housing to support efforts to create affordable housing and find solutions to the issues surrounding the unsheltered population.
 - Work with industry and government agencies, including the Economic Development Board and the Sonoma County Hospitality Association on programs that create a compelling invitation for workers (primarily in hospitality/tourism) to choose Sonoma County.



Imperative 4: Enhance the Breadth of Products and Experiences

- **SPHERE OF INFLUENCE:** Sonoma County Tourism as DRIVER and PARTNER
- **KEY SECTORS/PARTNERS:** Property developers, city and county permitting agencies, Sonoma County's tourism industry partners.
- **BIG AUDACIOUS GOAL:** Two new flagged hotel properties that integrate with the assets of the region, align with the SCT brand and offer significant meeting space are built in areas that collect the BIA.
- **OVERVIEW:** As tourism continues to grow in Sonoma County, ensuring the lodging properties developed and the experiences offered to travelers are equitable and in alignment with the brand will be critical to creating a compelling destination.



Imperative 4: Enhance the Breadth of Products and Experiences

STRATEGIES:

- Engage with county and city permitting agencies to help create a more efficient permitting process.
- Work with local community groups, MACs, neighborhood organizations to mitigate the concern regarding development.
- Educate partners on consumer behavior preference that help determine the types of experiences that may be offered.
- Engage consultants to help identify effective methodology to achieving the overall goals of both built environment developers and guest experience creators.



Imperative 5: Acknowledge and Advance Sonoma County's Culture and Heritage

- **SPHERE OF INFLUENCE:** Sonoma County Tourism as an INFLUENCER and PARTNER
- **KEY SECTORS/PARTNERS:** Creative Sonoma, Chambers of Commerce, Sonoma County Tourism (boards and committees), organizations and agencies dedicated to each cultural community.
- **BIG AUDACIOUS GOAL:** Sonoma County offers at least one trail and experience that curate an authentic story of each of the identified communities within its textured history.
- **OVERVIEW:** As the storyteller to the region's visitors, Sonoma County Tourism will authentically convey and deliver quality cultural heritage experiences to visitors while respecting and protecting the county's unique history, lifestyles, and cultures.



Imperative 5: Acknowledge and Advance Sonoma County's Culture and Heritage

STRATEGIES:

- Collaborate with organizations dedicated to each cultural group to help identify key issues and programming opportunities.
- Partner with Creative Sonoma and other cultural organizations to curate authentic stories about Sonoma County's history. Showcase these stories through oral and visual histories.
- Conduct research around cultural heritage tourism to better understand what an evolving travel sector wants from a destination to gain a "sense of place."

