



Economic Development Opportunities in the Shabbona, IL Area



Economic Development Opportunities in the Shabbona IL Area

Prepared by

Norman Walzer, Mim Evans, Brian Harger and Andy Blanke

Financial support for this project was provided by the DeKalb County Community Foundation, the Shabbona Village Board, and Resource Bank. Any comments or suggestions in this report belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NIU Board of Trustees, members of the Shabbona Village Board, or those interviewed for this project. The authors thank Kathy Siebrasse, CGS, for assistance in preparing the report.



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Center for
Governmental Studies**

Outreach, Engagement, and Regional Development

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Chapter 1. Introduction and Purposes of Study	7
Organization of Report	8
Chapter 2. Current Conditions in the Shabbona Area.....	10
Who lives in Shabbona?	10
What financial resources do residents have?.....	10
Where do Shabbona residents work?.....	11
Number of businesses.	13
For which industries do residents leave Shabbona?.....	13
The Shabbona Housing Market	14
Local Tourism and Outdoor Recreation	16
Chapter 3. Survey Findings	20
Chapter 4. Potential Strategies and Tasks to Consider	27
Broaden Appeal of Shabbona Lake State Park and the Surrounding Area	31
Attracting and Retaining Resident and Visitor Spending	38
Tasks to Consider	40
Stimulate Business Formation Through Entrepreneurship	42
Tasks to Consider.....	43
Create and Promote a Regional Identity to Attract Visitors.....	44
Tasks to Consider.....	45
Increase and Upgrade Housing Stock	46
Potential for Other Business and Industrial Employment.....	46
Chapter 5. A Path Forward	50
Organizing for Progress	50
Next Steps.....	52
Appendices	54
Project Scope of Work	54
Interviewed in Person or by Phone	56
Shabbona Area Lodging Sites	57

Figures

Figure 1. Population Change by Age, 2010-2016 & 2016-2021 Projections	10
Figure 2. % of Households by Income.....	11
Figure 3. Cities Where Shabbona Residents Work	12
Figure 4. Shabbona Commuting Patterns	12
Figure 5. Employment by Industry	13
Figure 6. Housing Costs in Shabbona and Surrounding Cities	15
Figure 7. Percentage of Housing Units by Year Built	15
Figure 8. Houses Sold in Shabbona, June 2016-June 2017	16
Figure 9. Average Daily Traffic Counts for Shabbona & Shabbona Lake State Park.....	17
Figure 10. Shabbona Area Lodging Sites.....	19
Figure 11. Location of Visitor Survey Respondents	20
Figure 12. Visitor Interest & Likelihood of Use for Potential Park Activities/Improvements	24
Figure 13. Potential Site for Development (if land available for purchase)	48

Executive Summary

The Shabbona, IL, area has many assets on which to build a prosperous future, some of which have not been fully developed. Thus, local leaders and the DeKalb County Community Foundation asked the Center for Governmental Studies at Northern Illinois University (NIU) to help shape local development approaches. This report examines these assets and presents several regional and local strategies, along with examples of specific approaches community leaders could implement.

The Village of Shabbona, like many small communities, does not have access to staff with expertise and experience in dealing with local development issues. So it must rely on local groups and residents to organize and pursue these efforts. Thus, rather than focus on one or two main approaches, the CGS team examines local assets that can be enhanced, reviews efforts underway in other communities that might guide local efforts, and presents a set of strategies with possible tasks to address them. The next steps will involve organizing community groups to consider alternative strategies and tasks, prioritize them, and determine an action plan based on interests and capacities of each group. Complete market analyses, economic impact analyses, and/or feasibility studies might be undertaken to determine the potential of the ideas presented in this report in more detail.

Assets and Potential

The Shabbona area can follow several paths in building a development plan. Key among these is Shabbona Lake State Park (SLSP) with nearly 500,000 visitors annually, most from the Chicago Metro Area. In addition to its proximity to a large natural recreation area, Shabbona also offers high performing schools in a safe, small-town living environment with moderate-price housing and relatively close proximity to employment opportunities in Aurora, Naperville, DeKalb-Sycamore, and Rockford, among other centers. This region also benefits from a rich pre-Civil War history, most notably with Chief Shabbona living in Shabbona Grove.

While many people visit the Shabbona area, their expenditures are limited by the availability of goods and services to purchase. This limitation results because a vast majority of Shabbona residents commute to other cities to work and make purchases. There also are wide swings in seasonal traffic patterns that limit the year-round potential for retail development. Thus, retail stores must depend on patronage by both residents and tourists or they must carry a broad range of merchandise that appeals to area residents. At the same time, there are several unique locally-produced items, including apples, candles, purses, wooden toys, wine, whiskey, painted gourds, turkeys, and other items that could be marketed more intensely to attract and expand tourism.

A primary goal in a development plan is to create and market an “experience,” whether for a day trip or a weekend or longer, for both tourists and residents within the broader region, recognizing that families have multiple interests. Thus, bundling activities that appeal to various age groups can be important to expanding not only the potential of the Shabbona area but also its ability to capture or retain spending in the area.

Current Conditions and Status

During the past decade or so, the population in Shabbona has remained stable with relatively little signs of future increases, which can limit the potential for development. At the same time, respondents in the residents' survey conducted for this project seemed satisfied with the community and relatively few indicate an intention to relocate and, if so, it was to leave the area. While a majority of residents said the community had not changed, a substantial number of residents and visitors said Shabbona had declined in the past three years. Some respondents reported that living near a natural recreation area is a preference.

The housing stock in Shabbona meets the needs of most survey respondents and they did not report intentions to move. However, a few respondents to the visitors' survey reported an interest in either a second home or moving to Shabbona under suitable housing conditions, so there may be possibility for some housing expansion. At the same time, available housing remains on the market longer in Shabbona than in Waterman, for instance.

Identified Strategies for Development

Based on researching potential markets in the region, surveying both residents and visitors to the area, and interviewing nearly 30 business and community leaders, the CGS team proposed several key strategies for local leaders to consider. Each strategy offers specific tasks that can be undertaken by various groups in the region. Many strategies are region-wide but have impact on the Village of Shabbona as key elements.

Build on Shabbona Lake State Park (SLSP) clientele. The strongest asset in the area is SLSP. Causing patrons to spend more time in the Park and make purchases in the area offers the most immediate potential for the Shabbona area. Visitors' surveys revealed an interest in being able to spend the night in the Park in a variety of accommodations. Recognizing the seasonality of those visits, several alternatives are suggested including yurts (round, tent-like houses) and portable "tiny houses" that could be relocated during various seasons to accommodate preferences of guests. Examples of their use in other areas are presented in the text along with tasks in which local groups could participate.

In addition, the area and SLSP might broaden its outdoor recreation appeal by target marketing the area with an active living theme. The topography of SLSP lends itself to walking, hiking, and bicycling or ATVs, so a graying population no longer able to climb major hills or do other strenuous exercise, but also with more available time, could be enticed to participate in local activities. Thus, a weekend experience that involves educational events such as Elderhostel or Lifelong Learning activities focusing on historical tradition, or even healthy eating, could generate more traffic.

Also important is to make contacts with visitors, mainly from the east, both to inform them of opportunities in the region and give them an opportunity to spend money on retail and restaurant purchases. Space is available at the eastern entrance of Shabbona to provide a "Welcome" type opportunity that provides information on area businesses and activities, sells locally-made products, has facilities for food service, and offers computer Internet access.

In designing a marketing program, it will help to have a regional focus to make the entire region more of a destination experience with SLSP as a focus. This, in turn, will help encourage

State investment in Shabbona as a regional tourism destination, as well as enlist support for the various regional tourism promotion agencies. In these efforts, Shabbona can continue to have a prime role because it is adjacent to SLSP and will have great opportunities to access visitors.

Upgrade Attractiveness of Downtown to Increase Local Purchases. In addition to intercepting visitors and informing them about opportunities in the area, it is important to make downtown Shabbona as enticing as possible. While downtown can serve both visitors and residents, it may be more suited as a center for residents. This is because visitors coming from either the east or west turn off to the Park before going through downtown, and the degree of investment necessary to upgrade downtown into an attraction that appeals to visitors, and downtowns' central location within the community making it easily accessible for all residents. In the short term, the local development committee could organize a downtown beautification day or weekend, enlisting support from vendors to help provide materials. Key to success is to engage local groups and residents who indicated on the survey that they are willing to invest time and funds in the future of the area. Over the longer term, downtown buildings will need to be rehabilitated.

However, a more attractive downtown is not enough. Equally, or more important, is to expand the number of items that Park visitors, residents, and people traveling Rt. 30 want to purchase. Shabbona has a successful restaurant that can be marketed as part of a package to lure visitors. Locally-made products and souvenirs or Native American lore are another example especially during the warmer months/tourist season. However, providing basic services such as a part-time, tele-pharmacy or similar enterprise, in conjunction with a local business, can also encourage groups to stop in Shabbona. Once downtown traffic increases, other businesses can become more viable and trigger local investment. Federal grants and low-cost loan programs exist to help with business startups.

Local efforts to start new businesses based on trades, locally-made merchandise, or other approaches by working with secondary school or community college graduates may provide development opportunities, especially if a local investment fund was created to provide incentives or financing. This approach retains talent in the community and brings several vacant buildings back into productive use. Stimulating entrepreneurship in new and effective ways can be key to local revitalization efforts. Programs such as the Creating Entrepreneurship Opportunities (CEO), an after-school program in secondary schools, have been effective in other communities.

Upgrading and expanding the Housing Stock. While a majority of residents responding to the survey reported no immediate intentions to move, limited opportunities still exist to attract new residents with more modern, yet affordable, housing. Interviews with residents indicated a shortage of housing in certain price ranges. Thus, a review of housing market opportunities and discussions with contractors about alternative housing accommodations are worth having. The aging of the overall population and the need to bring young families to the area might suggest smaller houses or elder-friendly homes to which some residents can move and thereby free-up larger homes for young families in the community. Renovations are likely to be necessary in order to make these older homes attractive to today's buyers, so a program that assists in these efforts could be useful. It is important to both attract new residents but also retain

as many current residents as possible, while providing an environment where grown children have opportunities and want to stay or return to Shabbona.

Possible New Industry Attraction. Key to long-term development in the Shabbona area is to find opportunities for local companies to expand or new businesses to start. The fact that a high percentage of Shabbona residents commute to jobs in other communities offers a possibility to attract a business that effectively uses their skills. One opportunity available to Shabbona is potential land available for purchase and development on the eastern edge of the Village, with relatively close proximity to high-speed broadband fiber and Rt. 30. The land is currently privately-owned and undeveloped. The Village and Economic Development Committee should determine the ownership and availability of this land for potential future development. It would involve relatively high development costs depending on use, but the site might be suitable for technology related service businesses targeted to clients in the Aurora, Naperville, or even Chicago area. Not to be overlooked is access to I-39 to the west, with further access to I-88 and communities beyond. Shabbona is well-situated for a light industry, assembly, or technology service company. These options are discussed further in the report.

Path Forward. Shabbona has made several development efforts including a SWOT session, design of a path from the Park to downtown, and raising funds for a project to identify strategies and ways to implement them. The current project generated multiple options for development, but a strategic action plan that incorporates community preferences is essential to reach successful outcomes. Shabbona does not have a full-time economic development professional so successful development will require combined and coordinated efforts by residents and leaders.

After the Economic Development Committee reviews these report materials, the next step is to convene a community gathering. The purpose will be to identify both interest in specific tasks, and also the capacity and networks available to complete them in a timely way. This meeting will generate a specific action plan adopted by the community with commitment to tasks, timelines, and expected measureable outcomes. Not everyone will be engaged in these efforts but the opportunities suggested in this report are community-wide so that many residents can be involved.

Local funding to monitor and implement strategies that the community accepts is limited. It may be worthwhile for the Village to apply to the Corporation for National and Community Service (AmeriCorps) for a volunteer to help coordinate these activities. Participants are often college-age students earning funds to repay educational loans or senior citizens interested in contributing time to the community. Likewise, CGS can continue to offer technical assistance on specific projects.

Shabbona is at a key point in its future with many assets to market and an established market for recreational users. There are opportunities to rebrand and more extensively market an entertainment or recreational experience that also includes spending more time with Shabbona businesses. Positive efforts are already underway. The findings in this report can make solid contributions to the next phase of community-driven development.

Chapter 1. Introduction and Purposes of the Study

Shabbona, IL, is exploring opportunities for economic growth and asked the Center for Governmental Studies to help local leaders identify potential development options and address several specific issues of interest. The overall intent of the project is to inform the Village of Shabbona Economic Development Committee about potential ways to increase local economic activity by leveraging Shabbona Lake State Park (SLSP), developing additional tourist attractions and supporting businesses, encouraging development of a technology park, and attracting new residents through improved housing options. This report provides the basis for the Village to decide which options it wishes to pursue further through community discussions and additional detailed analyses.

In examining ways to expand tourism in the area, the project focused on an area broader than the Village of Shabbona because many visitors to SLSP travel an hour or more to reach the Park. Keeping tourists longer in the area, as well as attracting more visitors, involves providing additional things to do in addition to effectively marketing the region to new audiences. Thus, ideas are presented in this report to help Shabbona work with other entities to increase region-wide tourism efforts. Key to effective marketing is to understand the interests and preferences of current and potential tourists.

Of additional interest in this project is whether a potential market exists for a motel, bed and breakfast, or other overnight accommodations, given the seasonal nature of the SLSP traffic. Several options were investigated and those that are most likely to be successful in Shabbona are presented in some detail.

Along the same lines, residents and visitors were asked about the suitability of current housing options and future housing plans. This information can help developers and the Village plan for changes to meet the needs of current residents and attract potential new residents who are possibly interested in living near a major recreational site. Actions taken by other communities and recreational sites are explored to shed light on potential strategies in the Shabbona area, recognizing that local economic vitality depends on both tourists and local spending by residents. Increasing spending by both groups will depend on an expansion of existing businesses and the addition of new businesses.

Among the development options examined is land on the eastern edge of the Village with potential for connections to high speed Internet access. The current property is undeveloped but could be a location for assembly, light manufacturing, or some type of technical park. This issue is not explored in great detail because it currently is undeveloped land. Rather, insights into what would have to be done, how it might be marketed, and potential examples of successful ventures elsewhere are provided.

The project scope is intentionally broad, addressing many options, and therefore not intended to completely research the potential for any one option. The intent is to offer possibilities that, after consideration and evaluation by local community and business leaders, can be further explored and converted to economic development strategies for both Shabbona and the surrounding area. After local leaders and residents review the options provided, a second phase could use a local or regional visioning process to gauge interest and reach a consensus regarding which strategies to implement. The result of that phase will be an action plan with best

practices and ways for Shabbona to build on local assets, including the surrounding area to incorporate their initiatives in the overall DeKalb County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Report Organization

The requested scope of work has several major components (Appendix A). This report is organized to address each component starting with an examination of current economic conditions and issues to set the stage for examining potential development opportunities. This discussion examines population characteristics and recent trends in the Shabbona area such as age profiles, financial resources, and whether residents work locally or commute to other communities. Next is a review of local housing market conditions. The discussion concludes with an analysis of the tourism industry especially as it relates to Shabbona Lake State Park and other nearby attractions.

The second section of the report discusses responses from the surveys of both visitors and residents. The analysis explores the characteristics and interests of both groups of respondents, the demand for overnight accommodations, interest in various activities, and types of goods and services that visitors and residents would purchase in the area, if available. Respondents' thoughts regarding the local housing market are also discussed. This information helps to sharpen the focus of the development potential for the area as well as provide evidence of ways in which respondents would support such efforts with their time and resources.

Once the characteristics of the region have been presented along with stated preferences by residents and visitors, attention is turned to options that community and business leaders might consider as part of a development initiative. Many of the options presented are ideas that would have to be researched further to completely assess their feasibility. They are presented to help foster discussions of new and/or different approaches from what has been discussed in the past. Other options are possible strategies that Shabbona and the surrounding area could try as ways to: a) attract more visitors; b) increase the number of overnight stays; c) provide opportunities to spend more money locally; and d) enhance the overall ability of Shabbona to reach new markets, especially along Rt. 30 to the west. In some cases, similar efforts used in other locations are presented to suggest ways to possibly proceed.

The presentation is organized around alternative potential strategies that could be pursued along with tasks that might be considered under each. This material can then be used in a strategic planning process in such a way that local groups can organize around issues or approaches in which they are interested and willing to work. The potential approaches presented are based partly on examples taken from the professional development literature or locations with some comparability to SLSP. However, to be seriously considered as viable, these approaches must be more fully researched both as to outcomes obtained and suitability for local characteristics in the area.

Finally, the report concludes with suggested next steps for the Village in developing and implementing an action plan for economic growth. To succeed, this effort requires engagement from many organizations and groups within the Village pursuing specific objectives and goals.

Important to note is that Shabbona already has a strong start on local development efforts. An Economic Development Committee formed in January, 2013, including a broad base of participants from various sectors, is active. The committee conducted a SWOT analysis to identify possible development activities to consider. In August, 2013, a survey of visitors (594 respondents) to Shabbona Lake State Park was conducted to identify attractions in which they were interested. In response to the SWOT analysis, three short-term goals were created:

- Create a pathway to bridge the community with amenities;
- Provide beach/swimming at the State Park; and
- Provide additional lodging for visitors to the Park.

In addition, two longer term goals were:

- Utilize increased revenue from tourism to develop infrastructure in the business park; and
- Create sustainable employment opportunities.

Successes following the 2013 planning effort include creating the Waterman-Shabbona Business Association (WSBA) that meets to discuss more regional development issues. Likewise, several businesses in Shabbona, including two financial institutions, a restaurant and a flower shop, re-opened along with the country club becoming more viable in the community with possible interest in expanding. These advances follow some earlier setbacks such as closing of a hardware store and a lumber yard following the recession.

The Village and Economic Development Committee applied to the DeKalb County Community Foundation for funds to assist in upgrading their list of development options and refocusing the implementation plans. Thus, the intent of the current project, funded by DCCF and the Village, is to reevaluate and revise or modify some of the current options based on additional analyses and identify new alternative strategies that could be pursued based on input from the community. These strategies build on current efforts underway and provide opportunities that will encourage other community residents and businesses to engage more directly in community and regional development activities. Underlying the overall effort is to include the Shabbona region in the overall Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) being prepared by the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation (DCEDC).

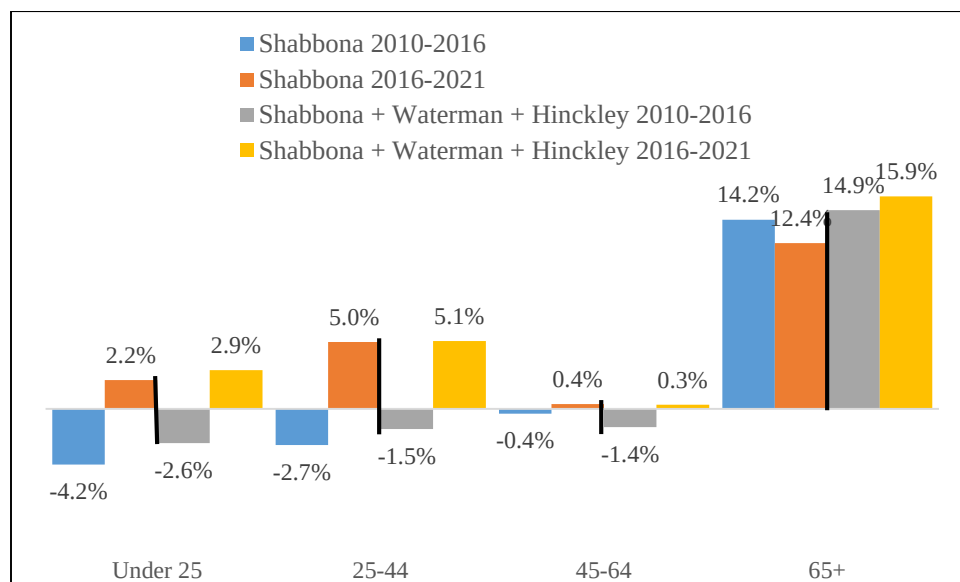
Chapter 2. Current Conditions in the Shabbona Area

This chapter profiles current local conditions and explores opportunities to improve the ability of the area to attract business activity, additional residents, and more tourists. It lays the groundwork for later discussions about potential strategies.

Who lives in Shabbona? According to estimates from EASI Analytics, Inc., the overall population of Shabbona has remained relatively stable since 2010, increasing from 969 to 976 (0.8%). Several population changes in the past several years are especially worth examining. First, the number of residents under age 25 decreased 4.2%, which is consistent with a 2.6% decrease in the same age group across Shabbona, Waterman, and Hinckley combined.

Second, EASI Analytics, Inc., estimated a large increase in residents over age 65 since 2010. This trend most likely reflects 2010 residents reaching retirement age by 2016. In fact, this increase was accompanied by a 0.4% decrease in the pre-retirement population, ages 45-64. A stable population that ages in place, however, implies lower future birth rates, different housing needs, and changes in other services discussed later. However, potential increases in the local work force and opportunities for development are promising compared with other rural areas facing long-term population declines. At this time, however, these trends are mainly conjecture and need more detailed primary local research to verify precisely what has happened.

Figure 1. Population Change by Age, 2010-2016 & 2016-2021 Projections



Source: EASI Analytics, Inc., 2016.

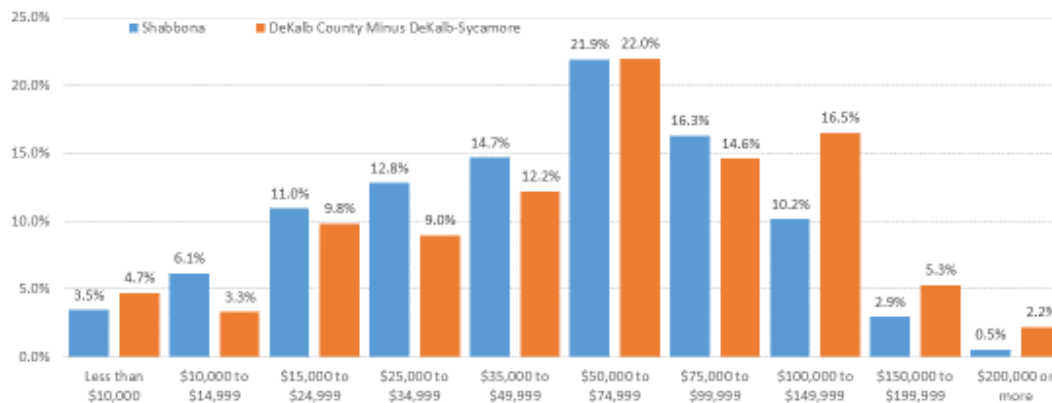
The median age of Shabbona residents in 2010 was 49.8 years, compared with 37.7 in the State of Illinois (2010). This finding stresses the importance of finding ways to continue making Shabbona attractive to families employed in surrounding areas who are interested and willing to commute. As is discussed later, Shabbona offers distinct advantages to this group.

What financial resources do residents have? For business and economic planning, the amount of income in the community is nearly as important as population size. The median household

income (MHI) in the Village of Shabbona (2015) was \$53,259, compared with the State of Illinois at \$59,588. But the latter figure includes the Chicago suburbs with higher costs of living. However, the MHI in Shabbona increased 17.0 percent compared with the \$45,526 in 2000. Thus, representative local incomes are less than the average in Illinois but, nevertheless, increased in spite of the Great Recession. For reference, \$10,000 in January 2000 had the same buying power as \$13,800 in January 2015 (inflation rate of 38.0%, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>), so local income growth did not completely keep pace with inflation.

When Shabbona is compared with rural countywide trends (removing DeKalb and Sycamore) it has a lower concentration of residents earning \$100,000 or more than surrounding communities. This may be because other communities, such as Genoa, are in closer proximity to DeKalb-Sycamore which provide larger manufacturing industries and Northern Illinois University with more high-paying jobs. Nevertheless, the highest concentration (21.9%) of income in Shabbona is \$50,000-\$74,999, nearly the same as rural DeKalb County. Only 20.6% of households earn less than \$25,000 and this group probably includes mainly retirees and part-time workers.

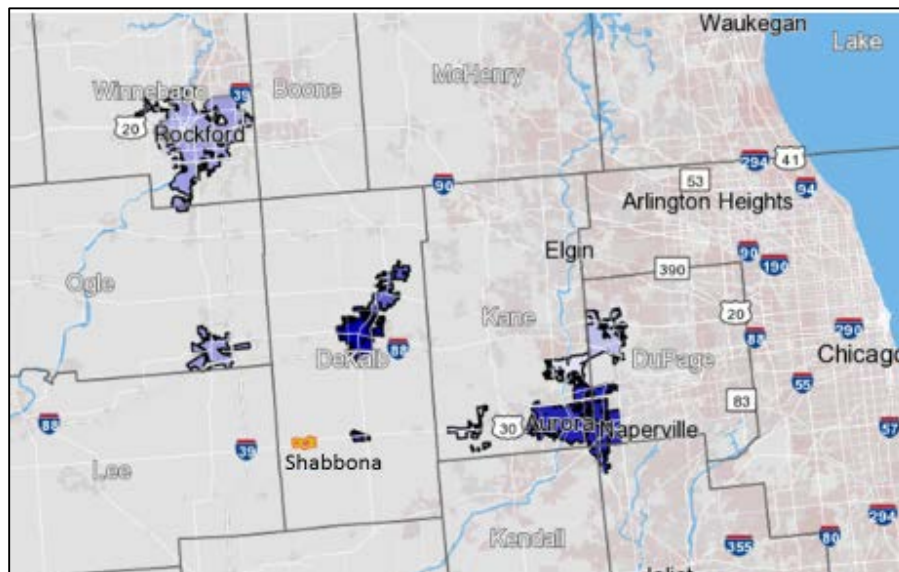
Figure 2. % of Households by Income



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2015

Where do Shabbona residents work? Worker commuting patterns are examined from two perspectives. The first involves those working locally. Based on 2010 Census information, 351 people are employed in the community, but only 14 (5.6%) actually reside there. The largest number (25) of those employed in Shabbona live in Waterman and 21 commute from DeKalb. The remaining 150 (59.8%) workers commute from other surrounding communities. The fact that workers are willing to commute to Shabbona may indicate the potential for new businesses or industry to locate there or for additional local housing to accommodate workers now commuting for local employment. Increasing employment opportunities in Shabbona would perhaps require additional housing.

Figure 3. Cities Where Shabbona Residents Work



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *OnTheMap*, 2014.

A second perspective examines where Shabbona residents work. Far and away, the largest number (66) of residents who commute (23.3%) are employed in DeKalb, followed by 23 in Aurora (7.8%), 18 in Waterman (6.1%), and 16 in Sycamore (5.4%). A somewhat unexpected finding is that only 14 (4.7%) local residents also work locally. A total of 126 residents (42.6%) work in places as far away as Rockford and West Chicago, indicating that at least some residents may be interested in attractions offered in the area and willing to commute. These issues are explored in a later section of this report when the residents' survey offers insights into living preferences and related issues. Local economic conditions are discussed next.

Figure 4. Shabbona Commuting Patterns



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *OnTheMap*, 2014

Number of businesses. In 2017, the Dunn and Bradstreet business registry listed 76 business in Shabbona. Construction businesses (11) were highest on the list, followed by agriculture (8). This list may be incomplete because it is based partly on business applications for credit. Likewise, it may not always count branch offices or divisions of companies in another city or may differ in ways that retail stores are counted versus entertainment.

For which industries do residents leave Shabbona? The largest number of employed local residents work in educational services (64). This sector is crucial to local employment and economic vitality so population projections regarding school-age children are important to consider because they directly affect demands for local education services.

Figure 5. Employment by Industry

Jobs by Type	2014 Counts		2009-2014 Change		% of Total in 2014	
	Lives in Shabbona	Works in Shabbona	Lives in Shabbona	Works in Shabbona	Lives in Shabbona	Works in Shabbona
Educational Services	64	68	-20.0%	-15.0%	21.6%	27.1%
Manufacturing	32	0	6.7%		10.8%	0.0%
Health Care and Social Assistance	32	85	-39.6%	-34.6%	10.8%	33.9%
Retail Trade	29	21	-21.6%	-38.2%	9.8%	8.4%
Construction	18	17	0.0%	13.3%	6.1%	6.8%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	15	0	25.0%		5.1%	0.0%
Transportation and Warehousing	14	16	-17.6%	-11.1%	4.7%	6.4%
Administrative Services	14	4	7.7%		4.7%	1.6%
Wholesale Trade	12	1	-36.8%	-83.3%	4.1%	0.4%
Public Administration	12	11	-36.8%		4.1%	4.4%
Accommodation and Food Services	11	9	-38.9%		3.7%	3.6%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	10	4	-37.5%		3.4%	1.6%
Finance and Insurance	9	1	-25.0%	-90.9%	3.0%	0.4%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	7	10	-22.2%	-44.4%	2.4%	4.0%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	6	0	0.0%		2.0%	0.0%
Information	3	2	-70.0%	-60.0%	1.0%	0.8%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	2	0			0.7%	0.0%
Utilities	2	0	100.0%		0.7%	0.0%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	2	0	0.0%		0.7%	0.0%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	2	2	-83.3%	-33.3%	0.7%	0.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics

Manufacturing and Health Care-Social Services each employ the second largest number (32) of village residents. However, no manufacturing workers and fewer than half of health care-social services workers work locally according to Census estimates.

Retail trade is the fourth largest employer of Shabbona residents (29) and nearly the same number live locally. This comparison, however, may include commuters both to and away that cancel each other out. Nevertheless, retail is an important local employer. A more detailed examination of similar size cities regarding employment in retail could help determine opportunities for expansions in this sector and in which types of businesses.

Equally important are the substantial changes in the employment patterns recorded between 2009 and 2014. Relatively small employment numbers can make percentage changes

misleading but, overall, the local employment changes have been mainly negative, perhaps reflecting a weak recovery from the Great Recession and thus beyond local control. At the same time, they adversely affected the local economy and housing market.

For local residents, agriculture and related industries and manufacturing increased in number of jobs. Regarding the number of people employed locally, construction provided the only increase in number of jobs (13.3%), with the main declines being in health care and social assistance (39.6%), professional and technical assistance (37.5%), retail trade (21.6%) and retail (21.6%). The accommodations and food services sector (38.9%) also declined. Unfortunately, more recent data are not available to determine whether some of these industries have recovered since 2014.

How do the schools perform? Given the economic importance of educational services as an employer in the local economy and the impact school quality usually has on attracting residents, this section examines how well Indian Creek CUSD 425 meets or surpasses other school districts of similar size in the area on several measures. CUSD 425 ranked above its counterparts, except Sycamore, on percentage of students meeting or surpassing PARCC assessments. Likewise, the graduation rate of 95% is above counterparts in the region. The percentage (57%) of students who meet ACT benchmarks is higher than surrounding schools. However, the percentage of



graduates in remedial classes in community college and the percentage of students who qualify for free/reduced lunches is mixed. The 91% retention rate equals or exceeds others in the region.

The fact that CUSD 425 performs well strengthens the basis for attracting future residents to bolster the work force even if they commute to other communities.

The Shabbona Housing Market. Shabbona did not experience as much new construction in earlier housing booms as did neighboring communities such as Waterman. Consequently, the local housing stock is older, with 39.3% of occupied housing units built in 1939 or earlier. This figure compares with 22.8% in other rural DeKalb County communities. Shabbona had a minor spurt in housing construction during the 1970s, but it was not substantial. Approximately 12% of the housing was built in the early 2000s. Thus, the current supply includes older houses, some of which may need modernizing or upgrades.

At the same time, Shabbona housing costs are competitive with neighboring communities. For instance, the median monthly housing ownership costs in Shabbona are \$1,225, compared with \$1,312 in Waterman, \$1,349 in Hinckley, \$1,232 in Sandwich, and \$975 in Paw Paw. However, the \$1,225 in Shabbona may not compete well with either DeKalb (\$1,247) or Sycamore (\$1,269) where there are more services and employment opportunities. This housing comparison helps frame later discussions about additional housing in Shabbona to attract future residents.

Figure 6. Housing Costs in Shabbona and Surrounding Cities

Place	Median Monthly Housing Ownership Costs*	Median Gross Rent**
Shabbona	\$1,225	\$754
Waterman	\$1,312	\$785
Hinckley	\$1,349	\$860
Sandwich	\$1,232	\$892
Rochelle	\$961	\$707
DeKalb	\$1,247	\$827
Sycamore	\$1,269	\$935
Paw Paw	\$985	\$662

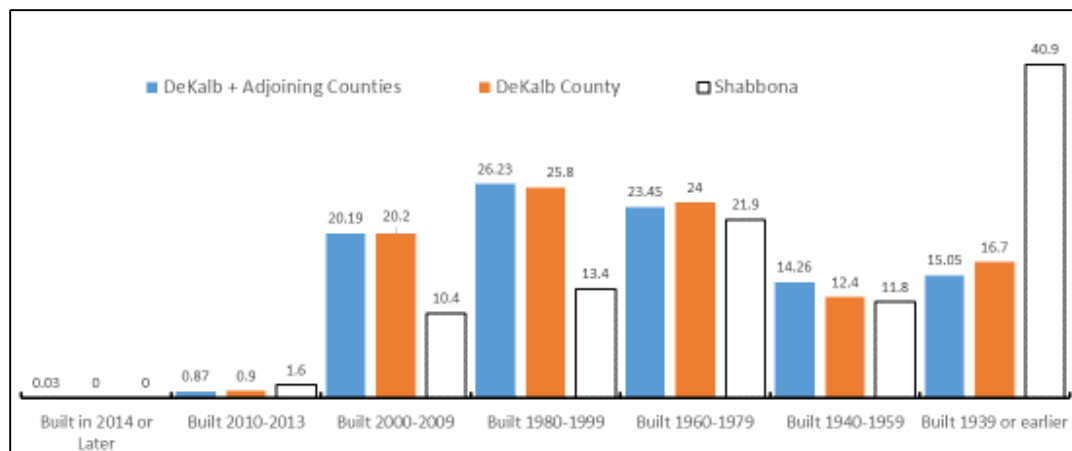
*Includes property tax, property insurance, utilities, mortgages, etc.

**Includes utilities

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2009-2015.

When considering a move to this area for whatever reason, potential incoming residents have access to newer housing in neighboring cities, especially to the east, which commuters to Aurora and DeKalb-Sycamore may find attractive. The large percentage of housing structures in Shabbona built before 1939 exceeds the county and regional averages (Figure 6) and may limit the ability of the community to attract new residents.

Figure 7. Percentage of Housing Units by Year Built



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2009-2015.

Related to the relatively older housing stock, houses sold in Shabbona during the past year took considerably longer to sell than the average home sale statewide. In Shabbona between June 2016 and June 2017, the average home was on the market for 175 days before it was sold (Figure 7). According to the Illinois Association of Realtors, the average home sold statewide was on the market for 63 days between listing date and sale date. For sure, these

statewide figures include sales in the more competitive metropolitan and suburban housing markets. Regardless, home sales in Shabbona did not occur as quickly as in other communities.

By reference, the average home sold in Waterman between June 2016 and June 2017 spent an average of 153 days on the market. The difference becomes more apparent when controlling for outliers and using the *median* days on the market. The median Shabbona home sale took 165 days and the median home sale in Waterman took 96 days.

Figure 8. Houses Sold in Shabbona, June 2016-June 2017

Address	Sale Price	Beds	Baths	Sq Ft.	Days on Market Before Sale
305 N Illini St	\$170,000	3	2	2200	237
4473 Shabbona Grove Rd	\$160,000				
301 S Shabbona Rd	\$105,000	4	1	1500	165
507 W Comanche Ave	\$95,000	5	3	1247	181
6691 East St	\$179,500	4	2	2800	323
2284 Lee Rd	\$165,000				
204 E Cherokee Ave	\$100,000	2	2	1000	133
1453 Houghty Rd	\$155,000	4	3	2200	78
304 N Illini St	\$148,000				
206 W Cherokee Ave	\$144,000	4	2	1700	105
<i>Average*</i>	<i>\$142,150</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1,807</i>	<i>175</i>
<i>Median</i>	<i>\$151,500</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1,700</i>	<i>165</i>
<i>Average for Waterman</i>	<i>\$149,000</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1,941</i>	<i>153</i>
<i>Median for Waterman</i>	<i>\$130,000</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1,800</i>	<i>96</i>

*According to the Illinois Realtors association, the average home statewide spent 63 days on the market in 2016.

Source: Zillow.com

Local Tourism and Outdoor Recreation

Shabbona Lake State Park is a unique asset for the community and should play a prominent role in development plans. This manmade lake and surrounding natural area, along with the adjacent Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve, not only add to quality of life for residents, but bring many visitors from outside the area. This offers opportunities for related development. The Village has expressed an interest in growing the local tourism economy. A discussion of the status of tourism in the area follows.



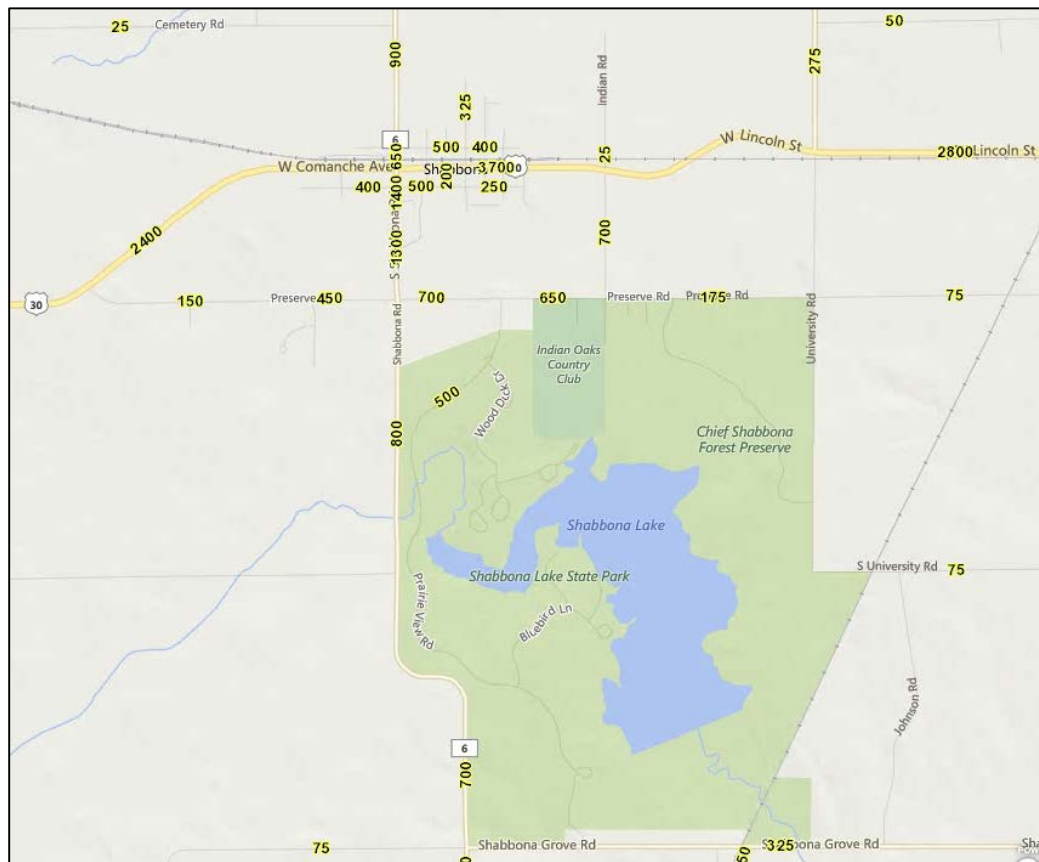
Illinois Department of Natural Resources attendance records show that SLSP attracted 482,987 visitors in 2015, an increase of 12,071 over the previous year. Park management estimates confirm that slightly less than 500,000 people visited the park in 2016.

Information on where Park visitors come from was collected in 2013 and revised in the 2017 visitor survey. Both document that many more visitors come from east of the Park than from the west. That is not surprising given the large Chicago metropolitan population to the east

as opposed to the more rural area to the west. This may suggest increasing marketing efforts toward the west, given proximity to two major interstates.

On a local level, the Park can be accessed from either the east or west side of Shabbona via U.S. Rt. 30, the main road to Shabbona and the main street through the downtown area. Traffic counts east and west of downtown differ, with 2,800 vehicles per day just before the turn off to the Park from the east and 2,400 VPD right before the turnoff coming from the west. However, it is difficult to say how many of the cars on the road from either direction are traveling to the Park. The count in downtown Shabbona is 3,700 VPD, indicating that much of the traffic on Route 30 is not Park related. Likewise, 700 VPD travel each of the two roads leading from downtown to SLSP (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Average Daily Traffic Counts for Shabbona & Shabbona Lake State Park



Source: Illinois Department of Transportation, *Getting Around Illinois* mapping tool:
<https://www.gettingaroundillinois.com/gai.htm?mt=aadt>

By comparison, Utica (pop. 1,352), located close to Starved Rock State Park, has 2,900 VPD south of downtown on Rt. 78, and 4,300 north of downtown. But Mill Street, in downtown Utica, has only 650 VPD (Illinois Department of Transportation, 2015). Utica has been able to develop a more well-rounded downtown shopping area with shops selling locally-produced goods, a specialty leather store that appeals to bikers, and several other stores that help make it a destination.

A more significant point regarding Park generated vehicular traffic is that regardless of from which direction visitors arrive, they turn off Rt. 30 before reaching downtown Shabbona.

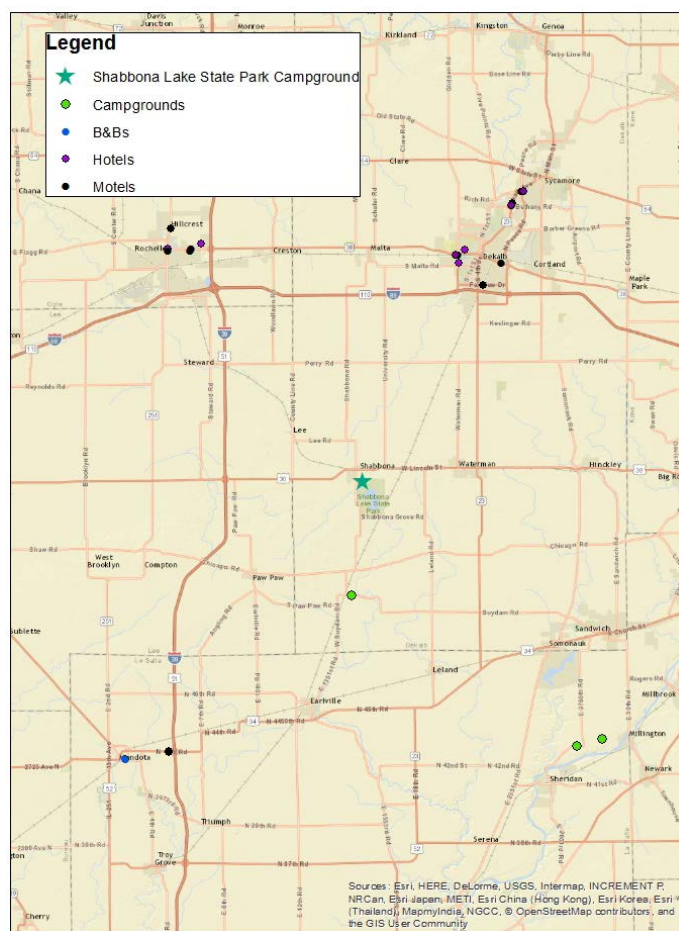
These comparisons suggest that Shabbona has a relatively high traffic count passing through its downtown but misses many, if not most, Park visitors from the east, north, and west, who currently are not encouraged to pass through downtown. They may be largely unaware of the goods and services available, and without additional patronage, new businesses are not encouraged to start without assistance or other incentives.



Currently, SLSP is known for outstanding fishing with hunting also permitted in the park. Camping, boating and hiking are other popular activities. While, overall, participation in outdoor recreation is projected to grow, some activities will increase in the number of participant days while others may decline. A study prepared for the National Forest Service projects an increase in most activities, with relatively passive activities such as nature viewing and birding increasing the most.¹ Declines are projected for just a few activities, to include hunting, non-motorized boating, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. However, the number of fishing licenses in Illinois has declined in the past 5 years, so the pool of potential fishing related visitors may be smaller in the future.

Overnight stays typically result in higher spending per visitor than day trips. Overnight accommodations in the area are limited to those in SLSP, which has 150 campsites and two primitive cabins. These facilities are often full during the summer months, but in less demand at other times of the year. Other lodging options within DeKalb County require a drive of nearly 30 minutes or more (see Figure 10). The table in the appendix summarizes overnight accommodations in the broader region.

Figure 10. Shabbona Area Lodging Sites



Source: Analysis by NIU-CGS.

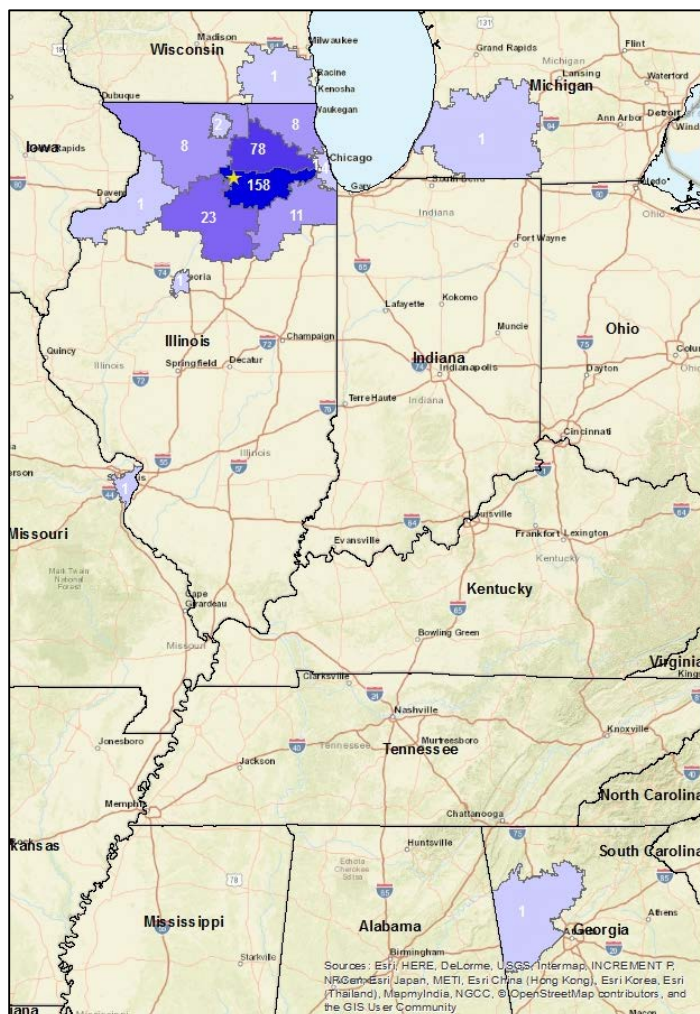
There are other tourist attractions in the Shabbona area. Indian Oaks Country Club, with a 9-hole golf course, is located adjacent to SLSP. This quality course attracts golfers mainly from within 30 miles, but might reach further if the course were expanded. That would require being able to access land from IDNR. In addition, several agri-tourism attractions are nearby including Waterman Winery, Whiskey Acres, Honeyhill Orchard, Jonamac Orchard and others, that could be featured in Shabbona marketing materials. While not quantified in this report, these attractions bring many additional visitors to the area who could also visit Shabbona and stimulate the local economy with additional spending. Thus, they should be recognized as development attractions in the community and region.

Chapter 3. Survey Findings

Development strategies benefit from current data so two surveys were conducted in Shabbona in the summer and fall of 2017, to gather input regarding ideas about development and the potential of Shabbona. A survey of visitors to the Park and the community was based partly on questions included in a previous survey. Residents were asked to complete a different survey focusing on issues relating specifically to them, although there were common questions. Especially important is information about the willingness and interest of residents in contributing time and possibly funds for development projects.

In addition, a separate group of visitors completed the resident survey, providing an outsider view on some of the resident issues. The surveys were available online and paper copies were available at several locations in Shabbona. In total, 464 people responded to the surveys.

Figure 11. Location of Visitor Survey Respondents



Source: 2017 NIU-Shabbona Visitor Survey.

Where do visitors live? Figure 11 shows the broad, 3-digit ZIP codes of visitors participating in the survey. About half of visitor respondents came from ZIP codes beginning with 605, which includes Aurora, Batavia, Naperville, and other smaller cities such as Sandwich and Somonauk.

Slightly less than a quarter of respondents came from ZIP codes beginning with 601 which includes DeKalb, Algonquin, Schaumburg, Geneva, and Elgin. Altogether, 88% of visitors came from east of Shabbona.

Comparatively few came from west of Shabbona and only 4 visitors were from out of state. These results may vary by season or time of year but may suggest other marketing strategies to explore.

What do people think of Shabbona? Local residents were asked several questions about the status of Shabbona and possible improvements that would make it a better place to live. Most respondents (54%) report the Village has not changed much during the past three years. However, among those reporting changes, 17% said it improved and 26% reported declines. At the same time, most visitors (56%) agreed that the community has not changed much during the past three years, but, among those who saw a change, 10% think it has improved and 17% think it has declined. The remainder were not familiar with Shabbona over this time period. Residents thought that SLSP should be leveraged to grow the local economy with 85% in favor.

The significant number of residents who think the community has declined may suggest additional work to update and beautify the community making it a more attractive place to visit and live. Residents and visitors commented on improvements needed. The most frequent comments involved improving the appearance of the downtown with more activities, especially for children and teens. Feelings reported in the surveys were: downtown looks unwelcoming, the buildings could be better maintained, there are too many vacancies, and some businesses could be more appealing. Specific comments by residents indicate that children must be taken to other towns for activities and also that seniors lack local events or facilities. Other frequently mentioned needed improvements were access to more restaurants and grocery supplies.

What are thoughts on housing? Shabbona residents were asked several questions about housing. Most (67%) thought the selection of housing available is good and 71% consider it affordable. Previous cost comparisons tend to support this perception. Nearly all respondents (83%) were homeowners and many said that they did not know much about the rental housing supply. More specific questions asked about available housing brought mixed responses. While 40% agreed that the houses are old, out of style, or rundown, most (53%) disagreed with that perception. A similar percentage (54%) disagreed with the statement that the houses are too small, while 26% agreed.

27% of visitors would consider making Shabbona their primary residence and 21% would consider a second home.

Approximately 75% of respondents to the residents' survey have no plans to move. Of those who do plan to move, most say they are likely to move somewhere other than Shabbona. Thus, there does not seem to be high demand for new houses by *current* residents, but they are not necessarily the only intended market. Likewise, as housing opportunities increase, some of these responses could change.

Somewhat encouraging is that when visitors were asked about their interest in a home in Shabbona, 27% of respondents (39) would consider making Shabbona their primary residence, 21% would consider a second home, and 15% would be interested in rent-sharing. There is overlap among these three options since respondents could indicate an interest in one or more of these options. Therefore, further analysis will be of the largest group—those who would consider Shabbona as a primary residence.

Most respondents who might be interested in a primary residence live east of Shabbona, with slightly less than half (48%) living in communities to the northeast and 39% to the southeast. The remaining 13% live to the west. In total, 77% live to the east of Shabbona, which is consistent with the earlier reported information about visitors.

Respondents interested in a home in Shabbona were more often women than men by approximately 2:1, although the households included both men and women. They were likely to have a full-time worker in the household (89%), but nearly one-quarter (23%) also had a retired person in the household. The largest number of households responding were in the \$50,001-\$75,000 annual income category, but 80% have household incomes above \$50,000, and 37% have household incomes above \$100,000.

Visitors who would consider purchasing a primary home in Shabbona were most often willing to pay \$100,000-\$150,000, with 35% willing to pay more and 26% saying they would pay \$200,000 or more. However, the total number of responses to this question was only 24 so they do not represent a large market. The potential for additional housing would have to be researched in more detail.

Respondents interested in a second home desired a \$100,000-\$150,000 price range (61%), with the remaining respondents fairly evenly divided between those willing to pay less than \$100,000 and those willing to pay \$200,000 or more. While the number of respondents is not large, they may justify a small number of spec houses marketed to this population base.

Many visitors (30%) responded that they did not know much about housing in Shabbona. However, those who felt knowledgeable were less positive than current residents and their responses were fairly evenly split between those who thought the housing selection was good and those who thought it was not.

Visitors were more focused on the Park than residents, with many suggestions for improvements involving adding facilities or activities there. This is likely a somewhat biased sample because the visitors were usually from out of the area and were attracted to the lake activities. However, they also were interested in improvements to the downtown with more restaurants and other activities.

Use of SLSP and outdoor recreation activities. Both residents and visitors were asked about their use of SLSP facilities. Many residents were frequent users with nearly one-third (32%) spending time in the park 16 or more times per year. However, the largest group of residents (51%) are in the Park 10 times or less per year. Visitors were asked how many times they had visited SLSP over the past three years. The largest group (28%) visited 20 or more times. All but 14% had visited the Park multiple times.

Residents and visitors responded similarly when asked what activities they most often participated in when visiting SLSP. Both listed walking and hiking first, followed by fishing, with picnics a distant third. Least popular was hunting, but this finding could be affected by the timing of the survey.

Both residents and visitors list walking and hiking as their most frequent SLSP activity, followed by fishing.

Residents seem to value SLSP, even when it was not a factor in their choice to live locally. While only 26% say the lake was a factor, 71% say that living near an outdoor recreation asset like Shabbona Lake is “very or somewhat important” to them, perhaps indicating that they currently enjoy it and consider it important to quality of life.

Ninety-one percent of visitors said they planned to increase the time they spent at outdoor recreation areas during the next 3-5 years. When asked where they planned to spend their time, 88% identified Illinois. The most frequently cited reason for choosing a destination was fishing, which is not surprising given SLSP's reputation for quality fishing. Fishing was followed by location and cost as affecting destination choice.

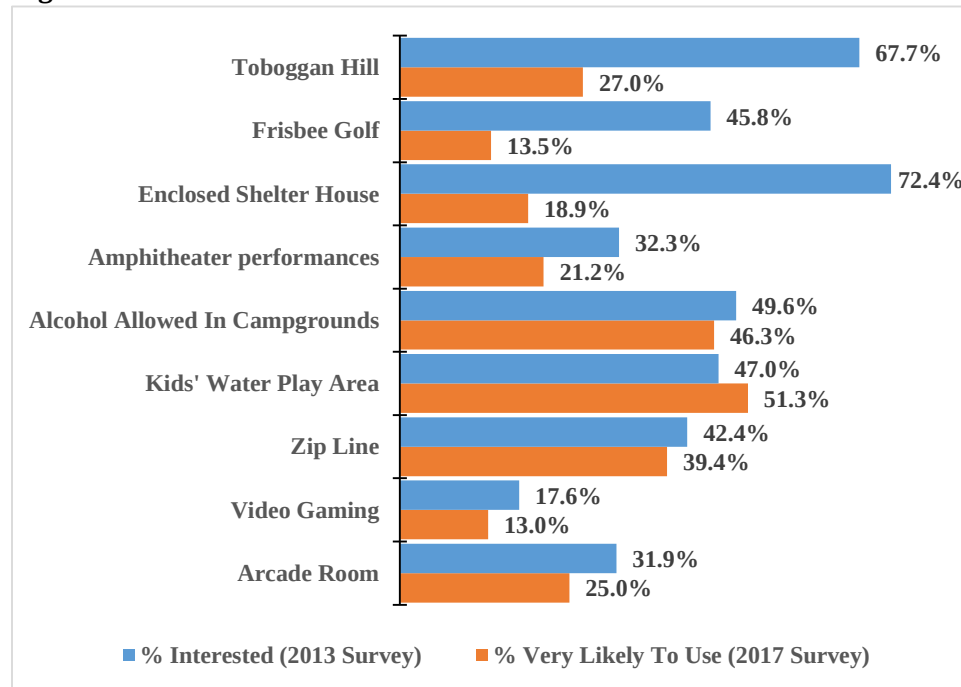
Figure 10 shows the interest that visitors expressed in various Park additions and improvements in the 2013 and 2017 visitor surveys. Care is needed in comparing the two surveys because some questions differ slightly. The 2013 survey included both visitors and residents, while the 2017 survey focused more on visitors.

In the 2013 survey, people were asked if they were interested in various additions to park facilities, while in 2017 they were asked about their *likelihood of using them*. Regardless, interest in some activities and improvements remained strong between 2013 and 2017. In the 2013 survey, 47% of visitors were interested in a water play area for children, such as a fountain or splash pad. In the 2017 survey, 51% of visitors were very likely to use such a play area if available. Approximately 40% of respondents in 2017 were very likely to use a zip line if available, which is consistent with the 2013 survey (42% interested).

Slightly more than two-thirds of visitors surveyed in 2013 were interested in a toboggan hill, but only 27.0% of those surveyed in 2017 said they would be very likely to use it. Interest in bringing alcohol to the campgrounds, if allowed, was mixed in 2013 (49.6% were interested), while 46.3% of visitors in 2017 said they would be very likely to bring alcohol if allowed, and only 25.3% responded with "not likely."

Residents, on the other hand, were interested in many of the same improvements as visitors, with water related activities chosen by a large group (41% for water play area and 42% for a beach - see Figure 12). However, an amphitheater for performances was the top choice at 45%. Other options selected by approximately one-third of residents include an enclosed shelter, culture and arts activities, and a toboggan hill. Fewer residents (34%) indicated an interest in bringing alcohol into the park.

Figure 12. Visitor Interest & Likelihood of Use for Potential Park Activities/Improvements



Source: Visitor Surveys conducted by the Shabbona Lake State Park concessions (2013) and the NIU Center for Governmental Studies (2017)

Interest in overnight accommodations. Survey findings show that more than half of visitors are interested in staying overnight. This is significant because approximately 85% had never stayed overnight when visiting SLSP, which also may be evidence of a need for improvements. Modern cabins were the preferred form of lodging (60% of visitors reported they would use them), with a full-service lodge the second most popular choice (51%).

More than half of visitors are interested in overnight stays.

A location inside the Park was preferred for both types of lodging. Respondents expressed a willingness to pay from \$50-\$124 per night for lodging other than camping, with respondents fairly evenly spread along that spectrum. Approximately 57% were willing to pay \$75 or more, and one-third were willing to pay \$100 or more. These rates are some indication of the rates visitors would pay, but the number of respondents answering this question was relatively small (58) and respondents had no information about the size, quality or amenities of the lodging. By comparison, cabins in White Pines State Park (Oregon, IL) that include a bathroom, but no kitchen, and sleep up to 4 people, cost approximately \$104-\$124 per night in high season. New, more luxurious, cabins just outside of the park that sleep 7-12, with kitchen and bath, cost more than \$200 per night in high season. Cabins at Eldon Hazlet State Park (Carlyle, IL) that sleep 4, with a bathroom and kitchenette, cost \$115-\$120 in high season. Rooms in Starved Rock Lodge (Utica, IL) start at \$121 per night in high season.

Residents also were asked about the likelihood that their overnight guests would use lodging facilities. Approximately 68% responded yes. Of those whose guests would likely use lodging, 56% said this would be a once per year occurrence, with the remainder replying it would occur several times per year.

A rough calculation for a cabin that rented for \$110 per night and was occupied every weekend in high season plus an additional 30 nights at other times, would generate \$6,600 in annual revenue. If this cabin cost \$50,000 to build (with a bathroom and kitchenette), it would take approximately 8 years to recoup the cost. This estimate does not include changes in rates, higher or lower occupancy, maintenance costs or many other details that must be considered.

Interest in meeting/banquet facilities. Both visitors and residents were asked if they were likely to use meeting/banquet facilities. More than half of residents said yes, but with most needing space once per year for a group of up to 50 people. Visitors were less likely to use a meeting facility, with 44% responding yes. Visitors also were most likely to need space for a group of up to 50.

Where do people spend money and what are their interests? Based on visitors' responses, concessions inside the park are well-used by visitors, with 62% visiting Pokanoka's Café; 49% Lakeside Bait, Tackle and Boat Rental; and 35% the Campstore. There may be additional opportunities to increase this trade. Visitors also frequented several local businesses and other attractions outside of the Park. The most popular places are Casey's west of downtown (43%) and the BP east of downtown (50%). The higher percentage at the BP may reflect the larger concentration of visitors arriving from the east, but the difference is not as large as the difference in origin of visitors. The next most visited businesses were Shabbona Café (36%), Screammers Ice Cream (33%), and Jonamac Orchard (29%). Other businesses benefit from Park visitors to a lesser degree and this could reflect lack of awareness or types of merchandise sold.



Visitors do not spend large amounts in the area, with 39% spending less than \$25, and 26% spending between \$25-\$50 on a trip. These expenditure amounts exclude gasoline which is important but harder to affect locally through marketing and promotions. At the same time, however, using the stations at entrances to the Village to distribute marketing materials to make visitors aware of what is available may be useful.

Visitors also were asked what products they would buy locally, if available. By far, the most often mentioned purchase was food (65% indicated this was the type of expenditure they most wanted to be able to make). This included groceries, meals and snacks, and restaurant meals. While some types of food can be purchased in town now, respondents reported that more options would make shopping more appealing depending on quality and price variations.

Likewise, while no other single type of expenditure was mentioned as a first choice by more than 10% of visitors, other items mentioned multiple times include sweatshirts, fishing supplies, firewood and hardware. There may be opportunities for local establishments to incorporate these items into their inventories after further examination of the survey results and discussions with residents.

Responses to the surveys identified several possible areas to explore further in development policy. Several findings stand out:

- Visitors reported that the overall condition of downtown was not especially appealing or inviting.
- Respondents said they would like to buy more of certain items, some of which were souvenir merchandise that could also serve to market the Park and region in new areas.
- Residents expressed interest in additional things for youth and elderly to do locally. Both visitors and residents expressed interest in an amphitheater or other entertainment venue.
- A substantial number of visitors said they would stay overnight in the Park, given suitable accommodations such as modern cabins or similar structures. They also expressed interest in additional activities in the Park.
- A small number, but a significant proportion of visitors, reported some interest in having Shabbona as a primary residence or possibly a second home if suitable housing were available.

Chapter 4. Potential Strategies and Tasks to Consider

Previous discussions in this report document opportunities for Shabbona to expand by building on local assets if it can design and implement a community-wide implementation plan with agreed-on goals, strategies, and actions that continue the progress made in the past several years. Shabbona Lake State Park must be central to a local development strategy with additional marketing possibly to new groups as one option along with helping to raise resources that enhance facilities and program offerings in the Park.

Also important is to find ways to cause visitors and residents to spend more dollars locally by upgrading or bringing in businesses and services that not only retain funds but also contribute to the uniqueness of the area as a destination. Some of these businesses may supply other larger companies in the region, use high-speed Internet, or provide places where residents can work locally even if their main employment is in another location.

Attracting new residents to replace natural population turnover is also important even if these residents commute to other places to work. This approach may involve housing modernization efforts or new construction that appeals to home buyers even if on a small scale to provide attractive housing choices for those interested in living in Shabbona.

An integral part of these efforts involves designing an effective marketing plan that incorporates current groups such as the Visit Rt. 30 (Visit30.com), Northern Illinois Tourism Bureau, Dekalb County Convention & Visitors Bureau, and similar organizations.

This chapter builds on past discussions to provide a range of strategies for Shabbona to employ along with actions to consider in implementing them. The strategies have often been used successfully elsewhere, but are not prioritized, because residents and community leaders can select them based on resources available and willingness of residents to pursue them.

Need for a Clear Vision. Discussions with nearly 25 community and business leaders did not reveal a generally-accepted and agreed-upon vision for the community so additional efforts to determine what residents prefer and are willing to invest in (time and resources) are needed. Nevertheless, the area has several recognized assets and considerable interest has been expressed in investing in them as part of an overall revitalization or redevelopment strategy.

Without an agreed-upon and community-wide vision it is difficult for community and business leaders to define and organize a work plan that brings local investment in the area resulting in increased employment and prosperity. Shabbona has had a stagnant population and declining employment trends much like other communities of similar size and location. Reversing these trends, if a local goal, will require concerted efforts on organized initiatives focusing on local assets.

Similar size rural municipalities provide examples of general approaches to economic development. Elizabeth, IL, a town of 752 residents, has adopted a new plan and prepared a promotional video (<https://www.youtube.com/embed/B5DCITQv9Ew>). Carthage, IL, population 2,542, has developed effective partnerships to encourage development (<http://www.carthage-il.com/>). Utica, IL (pop.1,352) has developed a commercial district based on visitors to nearby state parks (<http://utica-il.gov/>). Mount Morris, IL (pop. 2,998) has

benefitted from nearby White Pines State Park (<http://mtmorrisil.net/>). Morrison, IL, a larger community (pop. 4,188) with previous population declines, is reorganizing the downtown area by incorporating arts, crafts, and educational opportunities (www.morrisonil.org). While the efforts undertaken in each of the communities differ, in all cases the local economy was reorganized around unique local assets.

Ways to Focus Activity

Opportunities to the east. One strategic decision to be made is where to focus development efforts. While downtown is the traditional center of the community, Shabbona might find that expanding development at the intersection of Rt. 30 and Indian Road first could lead to downtown enhancement. The eastern corridor already sees the largest number of visitors so intercepting them with new commercial or visitor facilities could be relatively high impact and low cost. The proximity to the Park entrance makes it easy for Park visitors to access the site for purchases of souvenirs, information about opportunities in the region, and other items not sold in downtown or park locations. The existing BP station and Resource Bank currently generate traffic that could further support a business venture. The inclusion of the old one-room school in the Resource Bank building adds a historic element to the location. Development at this location could include visitor-oriented retail, restaurant, and entertainment.

Expanding development at Rt. 30 and Indian Road could lead to downtown enhancement.

The intersection is also close to a potential technology park site that could make use of high-speed broadband fiber opportunities to create a joint working environment, community center, or visitors' center combination that provides information about the region including local businesses. This could be an advantage because, as noted in the surveys, the overall approach and downtown area is not seen as very appealing to some visitors. At the very least, the visitors' center or retail site would help identify local opportunities, generate some sales, and increase awareness.



Along similar lines, attractive signage at the entrance to the Village prominently displaying the businesses available could help significantly in making visitors aware of buying opportunities. This could be a collaborative effort by current businesses and the Village to improve the image of the area at relatively low cost. It might be possible to work with a local industrial arts class to make an attractive sign and instill more pride in the community.



Opportunities downtown. In the long run, downtown businesses must rely more heavily on serving area residents and traffic on Rt. 30 due to the seasonality of attendance at the Park. A detailed market study could identify businesses well-suited to downtown. Buildings could be upgraded to accommodate those purposes along with suitable parking facilities. Combined with streetscape improvements and increased interest by residents and entrepreneurs, downtown could become a vibrant small business and employment center.

Downtown should rely more on serving residents and Rt. 30 traffic.

An alternative is to combine local and visitor-oriented businesses downtown. To do this successfully would require significant renovations to existing businesses and streetscape improvements. A strategy to direct visitors away from their natural travel patterns into the downtown area also would need to be developed, which will probably take longer to have an impact.

Opportunities to the west. Likewise, the fact the VPD are lower on the west suggests opportunities to market the area more extensively to places such as Rockford, Bloomington-Normal, Sterling-Rock Falls, and the Quad-Cities, using relatively easy access to I-39. While the total population in these areas is less than to the east, the competition for unique goods, services, and experiences is also less. Shabbona could expand its marketing efforts more in this direction. But again, it must find ways to encourage traffic from the west to visit commercial activities whether downtown or at the intersection of Rt. 30 and Indian Road. Access to the Rt. 30/Indian Road intersection is relatively easy from within the Park, so visitors from the west might be targeted after they arrive rather than en route. The western direction might be better suited to attracting small assembly plants or service businesses that need access to the interstate leading to more distant markets.

The western edge of Shabbona is suited to businesses that need access to I-39.

Major Approaches to Consider

Shabbona-Waterman has a school system that outperforms other districts on many levels, which makes it attractive for young families. A quality 9-hole golf course with an expressed interest in expansion is an additional outdoor recreation amenity for people willing to drive to surrounding areas for employment. Options for renting land from the state can be pursued with DNR. The region also has unique locally-produced products such as whiskey, wine, soy-based candles, purses, wooden toys, decorated gourds, and organic turkeys to name a few that, if marketed effectively, could help upgrade the area as a tourist destination. Proximity to employment opportunities in DeKalb, Sycamore, Aurora, Naperville, the western suburbs, and other higher income communities offers options not always available in other rural communities.

A short-term development goal, then, involves agreeing on a set of strategies that incorporates these assets in a plan to enhance prosperity in both Shabbona and the surrounding area. Access to employment opportunities in DeKalb and Aurora within easy commuting distance for people interested in living near a large natural recreational area, but in a place with reasonable housing costs and high-quality services, offers yet another set of development strategies. In the short term, continuing to entice commuters may be a useful development option to pursue, given that most people who live in Shabbona currently work elsewhere. A longer goal could be to entice businesses to the area.

Strengthening SLSP as a tourist destination and making tourism a more effective development strategy involves two main elements. First is making the local area a more important destination to attract additional visitors for a longer period of time. To a limited extent, this is already happening but additional and directed marketing could increase traffic and local spending. Shabbona is the third city in DeKalb County along Rt. 30 from the east so it faces some competition for goods and services already provided in Hinckley and Waterman. This location increases the importance of finding more unique goods or services to offer and more interesting activities for visitors in addition to, or to supplement those in SLSP, as well as increased marketing efforts to the west.

Tourism as a development strategy requires attracting more visitors, plus increasing sales through an attractive and easily accessible environment such as the intersection of Rt. 30 and Indian Road.

Second, and equally important, is that these goods/services must be marketed effectively and available in an attractive and easily accessible environment including time and place. The east side location at Rt. 30 and Indian Road could provide such an environment. Also, the Park has peak tourism times and seasons that may not always conform with when local establishments are open for business so some adjustments may be needed. Store hours and other arrangements represent special issues in communities where large proportions of residents commute to work out of the city or places where traffic is seasonal. Shabbona must accommodate both situations.

An increasingly popular strategy in some small communities is to attract specialty stores, such as antiques or crafts, open during the busy seasons and operated by owners who spend the winter months in warmer climates. These are mainly part-time businesses, they can survive during the summer months and attract tourists, and they can add a uniqueness to the community. An example is Bonaparte, IA (pop. 433) with two recently opened antique stores whose owners spend the winters in other areas

(<http://www.bonaparte-iowa.com/>). It also has a grocery store that was financed by residents contributing small amounts of funds. Attracting a part-time business may also work when the local store is one of several stores in other locations owned by the same individual or corporation. An important feature is the flexibility of hours and minimal investment in inventory in the off-season such as has become popular in antique malls.



Princeton, WI (pop. 1,175) (<http://www.princetonwi.com/>) has revitalized its downtown, building on proximity to a natural recreation site with a combination of other features, including a well-established flea market and antiques, that appeal to residents in larger cities across the state and make it a destination. These are only a few examples of innovative approaches that have succeeded in small towns.

Several other specific development opportunities and ideas to consider are presented next, not as specific recommendations but as approaches to consider in light of information and interest compiled by CGS from surveys, interviews with local leaders, research on broad trends in industries such as tourism, retail, and lodging, and insights from experiences with similar communities. CGS can help local leaders develop these approaches in the future as needed.

The following strategies focus on: expanding tourist attractions in both SLSP and the community; increasing the capacity of Shabbona and surrounding communities to attract and retain spending by visitors with upgraded store facilities and/or alternative arrangements for selling unique merchandise in a more attractive setting; marketing the region as a destination rather than a set of individual communities; increasing the potential for starting, attracting, or expanding business activity including an office tech park or other facility; and expanding the housing supply along the lines suggested by the surveys. Each suggested approach is followed by tasks or directions that could be tried.

Broaden Appeal of Shabbona Lake State Park and the Surrounding Area

This strategy has two main components—expand the appeal of the Park and then market widely to new groups in different ways and venues.

Promoting local assets where SLSP excels along with providing opportunities for visitors to stay longer, participate more fully, and buy local products capitalizes on growing trends. This approach may mean marketing local attractions in new venues such as health oriented social media. There is growing interest in maintaining a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise. Because

of its relatively flat terrain, SLSP is especially suited to hiking and less strenuous activities attractive to active older adults and families with young children. In addition to promoting the Park as a high-quality fishing experience, it might add a healthy exercise and recreation theme for the Park to appeal to an aging population base. This approach could involve renting bicycles and selling locally-grown healthy foods.

Adopting a marketing program around this theme builds on existing local advantages and, at the same time, does not deplete the assets of the Park. It could also link with educational programs or low-cost workshops that support increased hiking or biking opportunities to support an increasing clientele. Marketing souvenirs and related promotional activities to a targeted age group could help stimulate tourism year-round. In other words, market the trip to the area more broadly as a healthy weekend or experience and then provide support activities to warrant the trip. Discussions of options for overnight accommodations are presented later. The DeKalb County Convention & Visitors Bureau (DCCVB) can be a strong partner in these efforts and Shabbona can actively participate in these functions.

It is equally important for SLSP to be a destination site for larger numbers of people by balancing peak times (fishing) with shoulder season activities (hiking, camping, hunting, and other activities). Currently, the Park is marketed well as a quality fishing experience with record Muskie catches, beautiful scenery, camping, and trails. That theme attracts a target audience and works well based on questionnaires from visitors and residents. Building on fishing as a main theme, the Park can be marketed in a variety of new ways including social media to audiences, especially to the west, where the traffic counts currently are lower. Perhaps create an active video display of record fish catches or testimonials of past fishermen talking about their favorite fishing spot and similar topics. This display could be presented in the Park somewhere, but also at the Shabbona Café or other places along Rt. 30. Some of these efforts may already be underway but can be repackaged based on an evaluation of current efforts.

Important to understand, however, is that the SLSP is a regional asset funded by the State of Illinois with a potential attraction for the entire area through collaborative marketing efforts. So, other complementary themes can be created and marketed to selected groups, based on age projections. For instance, statewide, the two fastest growing markets, seniors and Millennials, place a high value on entertainment options but with different venues. Both groups are active, value healthy lifestyles although they have different preferences for activities as noted previously. SLSP offers these opportunities and is especially attractive because it is a relatively short travel distance to the Chicago area, but also Rockford, the Quad-Cities, and Sterling-Rock Falls among other population centers.

While some Millennials may prefer the more strenuous landscape of locations such as Starved Rock State Park, as they have families the gentler terrain of SLSP will be well-suited to strollers and children on bicycles. SLSP can appeal to both of the fastest growing population cohorts, many of whom are within easy drive of Shabbona. The challenge will be tailoring materials to specific markets and then informing potential users.

Tasks to Consider

Market the current Park facilities and activities in new ways. Review, and possibly update, the logo for SLSP and make it available on apparel or other inexpensive souvenir items that patrons can purchase and use. The intent is to build a recognizable brand or theme for the region and market it more broadly. At the same time, it provides opportunities for tourists to purchase items in the Park as well as at local businesses or in communities along Rt. 30 to the Park, plus in Sandwich, DeKalb, Sycamore and other areas. The intent is for patrons to market the Park as they travel to other places and bond Shabbona and surrounding places to the SLSP as a “regional destination.”

Expand Shabbona’s exposure along with the Park. Especially important is for Shabbona to expand its visibility and help market the area to larger audiences. Additional events in the community that attract visitors who also participate in park activities such as hiking, fishing and so on would build a presence. Educational events of interest to residents and others in the region can be held in the Park, high school facilities, or Indian Oaks Country Club facilities to broaden Park usage in off seasons, bring visitors to the community, and increase quality of life. Especially important is to make Shabbona a location for special activities of interest to both local residents and visitors.

Create a slogan or other approaches to create a brand. “Shabbona is where... happens,” or other catchy phrases that summarize the local experience, are easy to remember, and can be marketed inexpensively can help raise the visibility of the area. If funds are available, a marketing professional can help develop the brand and suggest marketing alternatives. Ideas can be obtained from local groups and students to make the materials appeal to multiple age groups. This effort could be a fund-raiser for local agencies or groups, again to build buy-in from the community. Some merchandise can be produced by local vendors and made accessible in various locations including the Park, downtown or the suggested site at the eastern edge of Shabbona.

Undertake a professional review of current marketing materials and websites. Make sure they are current, consistent, attractive to viewers, and actively used. A comparison of competing locations can be a starting point. Based on this review, find resources to produce and market these materials to a variety of interests described previously. Perhaps consider a phone app for SLSP and surrounding attractions that guides users to various locations in the region.

Enhancing Attractions Outside of the Park

Marketing and, if possible, expanding facilities for activities likely to have broad appeal and growing participation can position the area well as a destination in the future. One approach might be to raise the Native American lore image. Shabbona streets are named for Indian tribes. Additional research on Chief Shabbona and his role in various historical events could provide new insights and approaches with some of this work completed by school classes. An excellent source on such a history was prepared by Sands-Deutsch and Sands, 1999; and Hatch, 1915² and it could be researched further. However, these sources clearly document Shabbona’s relationship with Blackhawk, the Blackhawk War of 1832, Abraham Lincoln, and other important history sources. A possibility might exist to develop a trail based on Native American heritage linking Chief Shabbona and Blackhawk with Dixon and Fort Dearborn (Chicago) or other places. It

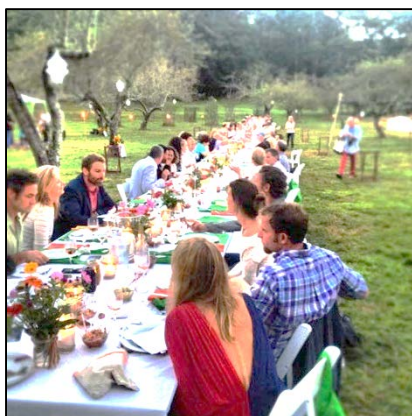
could be marketed as a weekend family educational excursion with opportunities for children to earn or purchase badges or other incentives based on this trip. President Lincoln served temporarily in the Blackhawk Indian War in 1832, and was an ally of Chief Shabbona, who was instrumental in protecting settlers and in later years allegedly attended the Lincoln-Douglas debate in Ottawa.

Oregon, IL, identifies with Blackhawk and Lowden Park. It has a local store selling items with a Native American theme. Perhaps a branch of this store with limited inventory could operate in Shabbona during the tourist season or be included in an existing retail activity. Expanded history and educational programs could be provided through the Shabbona-Lee-Rollo Historical Museum in Shabbona during the heavy tourist season. Likewise, a historical link or path to “Looking for Lincoln Natural Heritage Area” could market the Shabbona area in some way. (<http://www.lookingforlincoln.com/Explore/AbrahamLincolnNationalHeritageArea.aspx>)

Tasks to Consider

Design marketing strategies targeting unique interests, e.g., Native American or agricultural heritage. The strategy could feature experiences that each group prefers and provide additional facilities to meet growing visitor interests. The projected growth in interest about nature viewing and birding might indicate the types of additional facilities to provide (interpretive center, hiking trails, viewing areas), as well as marketing themes. An annual bird count is conducted at the Justin Trails B&B Resort in Athelstane, WI, and the resort is marketed on its nature and wildlife trails (<https://www.justintrails.com/wisconsin-getaway.html#activities>).

Develop and market local food products to residents and visitors. High quality local foods are attractive to all age groups. The 2017 survey of visitors included two questions that indicate an interest in local food. When asked what items they would like to purchase, the most common response was food, with local fresh foods often mentioned. When asked about businesses outside of the Park that they had visited, Jonamac Orchard was reported by 29%. These findings suggest several expansion opportunities. Local producers and growers can be grouped and marketed in several ways. Possibilities include on-site shopping at each source, tours of multiple sites, special reserved farm to table dinners, advertising the use of local foods at local restaurants, cooking classes, tastings, selling local foods at other local businesses, and setting up special markets to promote and sell local foods either in the park or another location.



An example of how Shabbona might market locally-produced products is to participate in the Family Farmed dinner program. Family Farmed provides an annual guide to farm to table dinners within 200 miles of Chicago. The dinners are held throughout the designated geographic area, each setting its unique prices, style, and menu. Seating is by reservation and dinners frequently sell out. See <http://www.familyfarmed.org/farm-dinners/> for more information.

New facilities in the Park based on resident & visitor surveys. Residents and visitors were asked which facilities they had most interest in adding to the Park. Swimming/water play activities were the top choice of both groups and were also suggested in the previous survey. However, neither residents nor visitors expressed much willingness to pay more for new facilities, and a pool or beach would be expensive to build and maintain. Therefore, these are probably not realistic at this time without a significant infusion of state dollars, but could be placed on a list for possible future expansion activities.

Visitors also expressed interest in a toboggan hill. Any activity requiring snow cover is questionable in northern Illinois, but this could be a good off-season activity requiring little maintenance. Other areas in a landscape with more hills such as the Galena area use hills not just in the winter, but also in warmer months for activities such as sliding and zip lines.

Other activities of interest expressed in the survey include horseback riding and more trails for hiking, bikes and ATVs. Of these activities, hiking and biking are most likely to cross all age groups in terms of interest. They also can use the same trails.

“Kid-friendly” was a term mentioned by multiple respondents. As previously discussed, SLSP’s gentle terrain can be well-suited to strollers, bikes and family walks. Interpretive programs, improved playground facilities, and other activities with children in mind can increase visits by young families.

Additional Overnight Accommodations. Visitors who stay overnight spend significantly more than day trippers so finding ways to increase the number of overnight visitors can generate support for local businesses if they provide interesting goods and entertainment opportunities.

Seasonality of demand must be overcome if additional lodging is to be financially viable. Visitors to the community can provide demand for lodging during the warm weather months with some hunting demand at other times. However, this still leaves many months with little visitor traffic, but residents and businesses in the area potentially could help generate off-season demand. Survey respondents expressed interest in having guests stay at a lodging property but only once per year, probably mainly around major holidays or at special times.

Therefore, resident demand may help but is not likely to be sufficient to make even a small full-service lodging property viable. This was confirmed in discussions with Cobblestone Hotels, which specializes in building full service properties in small towns. A company representative stated that Cobblestone would not be interested in a Shabbona area location for several reasons, including seasonality of demand and excessive reliance on tourists to generate stays. Additionally, he felt a Cobblestone property in Shabbona would have to compete with lodging in other communities within a reasonable drive, particularly for business travelers. Another concern was that Shabbona lacked the support services, particularly nationally known fast food and other restaurants, that their guests desire. He suggested a small (20 room), economy property with exterior room entrances and no common areas or services, preferably located inside the Park, as an alternative.

Overnight demand might be increased by using school, country club, or other facilities for small group meetings such as hobby associations, educational groups, or special interest organizations that would attract 50 or so participants. The ability to spend time on outdoor

activities, even in the off-season, could bring overnight stays. These associations could be contacted regarding meeting locations and schedules.

Another option for small scale overnight accommodations is either a bed and breakfast or Airbnbs. While a bed and breakfast usually requires significant improvements to an existing house, Airbnbs often require little investment before beginning to take reservations. Eight survey respondents expressed interest in learning more about starting a bed and breakfast or Airbnb in the area. Perhaps offering a workshop on what is involved would be a first step toward developing these options and possibly encouraging other homeowners to be involved.

Shabbona also could gradually build overnight stays by starting with smaller scale accommodations that require low upfront investment and carrying costs. As already described, modern cabins were the preferred type of additional lodging mentioned by survey respondents. Cabins can be added in small numbers, building more as demand indicates. The investment is relatively small compared to a lodge. Other areas have used this strategy such as the modern cabins recently built near White Pines State Park. The size and configuration of the cabins can be designed to enhance other tourism related objectives. For example, the cabins inside White Pines do not include kitchens, encouraging overnight visitors to patronize the onsite restaurant.



(<http://www.whitepinesinn.com/cabins-mainmenu-240/pine-creek-cabins.html>). Using a similar approach, Hamilton County, IA, built several modern cabins at a county park (<http://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Hamilton/Content/Cabins.aspx>).

Tiny house rentals (i.e. less than 1,000 square feet) are another lodging option to consider, as has been done in several tourist destinations in Wisconsin

(<https://www.travelwisconsin.com/article/cabins-cottages/home-sweet-tiny-home-5-tiny-cabins-for-your-wisconsin-vacation>). Their smaller size makes them relatively inexpensive to build and maintain, and they can offer a quaint lodging option for visitors. Tiny houses and cabin rentals are offered at several price points across multiple sites in Wisconsin. The Wildman Adventure Resort in Athelstane offers minimalist, one-room, 5-bed cabins for \$72 per night (<http://www.wildmanranch.com/lodging-Peshtigo.php>). Larger, more luxurious cabins rent for up to \$425 per night on weekends. The Wildman Resort offers a range of outdoor activities, including paintballing and whitewater rafting. The tiny houses are primarily for active visitors who spend less time indoors during their stay.

The Justin Trails B&B Resort in Sparta, WI, offers tiny cabins at varying price points (approx. \$215 per night, compared to \$195 for a full-size cabin or \$155 for a conventional suite; (<https://www.justrails.com/cabins-in-wisconsin.html>)). The tiny cabin at Justin Trails is marketed primarily to couples and includes a whirlpool spa. The resort is within minutes of the Elroy-Sparta State Trail for bicycling. It also has a disc golf course and a bird count is performed on the site annually.

In most Wisconsin lodging sites with tiny cabins, some amenities are located at shared, central locations in order to conserve space in the cabins themselves. At the Wildman Adventure Resort, a shower house is maintained instead of installing showers in the cabins. At the Justin Trails B&B, dining is available in a central area instead of individual kitchens. Canoe Bay has a shared library and fitness center for entertainment and exercise.

Several companies prefabricate tiny houses and deliver them across the United States via truck. The Rice Lake, WI-based Escape Traveler company (<http://www.escapetraveler.net/>) designed the ones at Canoe Bay and has installed others in Chicago, Las Vegas, and other areas. They offer several different models with prices ranging from \$66,000-\$100,000. Utopian Villas in Oak Creek, WI, manufacturers park model (i.e. prebuilt and delivered on trailers) tiny houses and offers delivery across Illinois, for approximately the same price range as Escape Traveler (<http://www.utopian-villas.com/models/>). The South Elgin-based Titan Tiny Houses company builds small structures for approximately \$50,000 (<https://titantinyhouses.com/our-tiny-houses-for-sale/passage-tiny-house-for-sale>) and sells foundations and wall kits for use by other contractors (<https://titantinyhouses.com/how-to-build-a-tiny-house>).

Not to be overlooked is the possibility for a local high school shop class to build a tiny house in the community with a specific design based on expressed interest by visitors. This could be an inexpensive learning project that builds trade skills in the community and perhaps creates future jobs. This building a local house approach was common in the past and still continues in some communities. The tiny house perspective could reduce input costs and make the project more affordable for the secondary schools involved, especially if groups of residents pooled and invested their fund in this project.



Tiny houses have also been marketed to seniors as a customized and inexpensive way to lower housing costs and/or possibly provide a second home in an attractive environment for long-term vacations.

<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=tiny+houses+wisconsin+manufacturer&qpvt=tiny+houses+wisconsin+manufacturer&FORM=IGRE>.

In the case of Shabbona, it could be possible to place tiny houses at strategic locations around the area for use during the busy season in the Park, but also in the off-season by people visiting residents or for other activities. Arrangements for utilities and other accommodations would have to be explored.

The investment in tiny houses could be relatively low and there are a variety of unique styles. They are mobile, can appeal to families on short-term vacations, and seem kid-friendly as requested in survey responses. They could be marketed effectively because television shows are already generating high interest in tiny homes. Along these lines, yurts (round houses) could be explored in an effort to address the “glorified camping” (glamping) audience

(www.yurtsofamerica.com). The Wildman Adventure Resort in Wisconsin offers yurt rentals in addition to its tiny houses and other lodging options (<http://www.wildmanranch.com/lodging-Peshigo.php>). The Stonehouse Farm Eco-Retreat and Sanctuary in Paw Paw, IL, also offers yurts rentals at its campsite (<http://www.stonehousefarm.com/lodging/>). The important point is to market the area as a reasonably priced short-term get-away package.



Federal, state, and private or local organizations could support specific projects to expand Park clientele, but also strengthen or start businesses. Since attracting visitors and building local capacity must be a community effort, investment by residents and business leaders is needed in local facilities, marketing, and other activities. These investments will be discussed in more detail later.

Attracting and Retaining Resident and Visitor Spending

The increasing age of business operators and possible pending retirements are growing in importance in many rural areas because these businesses have been key attractions in the past. Without an infusion of new blood, operators may reduce their physical and emotional investment in the business including fewer hours of operation, limited advertising, inventory reductions, and other efforts that make the business less attractive to customers. Over time, the business venture can become more of a hobby or past-time with a shrinking clientele. Key to revival will be to match young adults or others in the community willing to invest time and effort and give them an opportunity to participate in the business at some level. It is important to keep the business successful for the economic vitality of the community, as well as retaining goodwill value when the proprietor chooses to sell.

The range of items for sale should be broadened rather than competing with what is already sold in the Park or elsewhere in the community.

All too often, neither communities nor business owners have a succession plan that links retiring business owners with possible entrepreneurs. Equally important is to have a local venture fund where young adults can financially invest in current or new businesses. This is a role that financial institutions can sometimes play. Closely related is the need for local governments to have realistic building codes and/or access to funds to help with modernization improvements when needed so that the costs of required renovations don't exceed the value of the structure for current market opportunities. The code issue was raised several times in interviews with business and community representatives. Code requirements imposed by the Village, rather than State or Federal agencies, should be reviewed to see if flexibility is possible.

Survey responses show that visitors spend little money in the Shabbona area. Thus, it is important for the community to make SLSP visitors more aware of opportunities to purchase meals, supplies, unique local items, and/or souvenirs. At the same time, efforts must be made to broaden the range of items rather than competing with merchandise already sold in the Park or other places. The focus has to be on complementary merchandise. The visitors' surveys identified items that they are interested in purchasing, some of which already exist, but they did not seem to be aware. Improved signage at the entrances to the community, brochures that are distributed in the Park, perhaps a kiosk describing local opportunities, or even specials by local businesses are potential low-cost strategies.

The intersection of Rt. 30 and Indian Road is well-positioned to capture visitor spending. Visitors need interesting things to do including relatively unique shopping, eating, drinking, and entertainment options and these could start part-time during the busy tourist season. While the businesses should provide goods and services desired by visitors, many will appeal to residents

as well, such as restaurants, local foods, and entertainment venues. Promoting these businesses through a variety of media will help increase the flow of funds locally, increase sales taxes, and make the area more enticing to new customers. Downtown is well-suited to meeting the needs of local residents, the businesses that cater to them, and public uses such as the library, Post Office and Village offices. Its central location and available space should enable it to fulfill this role for the foreseeable future.

Several vacant downtown buildings could possibly be returned to productive uses under the right circumstances. Without more detailed knowledge of the prices of the buildings or the costs of investments needed to make them meet code, it is difficult to be specific about actions that could be taken to return them to more productive uses. However, discussions with building owners and residents interested in starting businesses is a place to begin. This strategy would include both improvements to current buildings as well as stimulating investment by community members in local ventures.



The downtown streetscape could be more attractive and inviting with interesting street lighting, sidewalks, planters and possibly street furniture to encourage residents to congregate there. Especially useful will be more prominent signage that identifies businesses. This is in addition to the sign at the entrance of the Village. While Shabbona does not have

historic buildings, making the downtown inviting with consistent signage can upgrade its appearance at relatively low cost.

Grant funding such as the ITEP grants may be available for these types of expenses and USDA-RD grants (RBDG) could help local businesses plan and evaluate markets and even start operations. NIU's CGS can assist in identifying and contacting some of these organizations. If grant funds are not available, or while waiting for grant funds, low-cost improvements with inexpensive materials and volunteer labor can be made, sometimes with support and time provided by local vendors. Planters, murals, and repainted street furniture and light poles are possibilities with funding from contributions by local businesses used to match grants.

Starved Rock State Park has an active Starved Rock Foundation (501c3) that raises funds from private groups as well as provides temporary staff during busy seasons. Examples of these efforts include using volunteers to staff the visitors' center, provide guided hikes, lead birdwatching efforts, and other special events. A main source of Foundation funds involves proceeds generated by a bookstore managed by Foundation members. The funds are then used to make physical improvements in the Park as well as to support other activities. In 2015 a nonprofit group was formed to support Shabbona Lake, Friends of Shabbona Lake State Park. The role of this 501c3 should be further defined going forward.

Recent legislation passed by the General Assembly broadens the ability of the public to work in state parks, but the rules for this involvement have not yet been published. However,

they may assist SLSP efforts to make needed repairs especially during stringent fiscal times. While local efforts are already underway by volunteers in SLSP, there may be other opportunities to strengthen efforts with Shabbona and the region to not only raise funds for park activities, but also to expand ways to better link Shabbona tie in these efforts.

Façade improvements are another way to significantly improve downtown appearance and many municipalities have façade grant programs. Often, these are matching funds available to building owners or tenants wishing to make upgrades. The municipal portion of the funding can come from sources such as the general fund, a designated fund supported by a specified source, or donated funds from one or more donors.

Regardless of the targeted location, it would be well-worth reviewing the surveys to identify potential markets and then evaluate local options for businesses currently operating in other communities that could start a branch operation in Shabbona. Following a similar project in Genoa and other places, it may be possible for several businesses to share a currently vacant building and share management responsibilities. Likewise, there is growing interest in starting businesses with locally-raised funds using Community Supported Enterprises, Crowd-funding, or other approaches such as used in Oregon, IL. These ideas should be seriously considered by local groups interested in specific projects.

In addition to encouraging new businesses, existing businesses may also have growth potential with a more careful examination of potential markets. As previously mentioned, greater access to local foods was commonly cited as something visitors desired to buy. The current grocery store could help fill this role with additions or changes in inventory tailored to suggestions by residents' and visitors' surveys. Several unique handmade products are currently

In addition to encouraging new businesses, existing businesses may also have growth potential that can be nurtured.

being produced locally and sold either on the Internet or at home. These could become attractive downtown business locations, even if only on a seasonal basis. The Shabbona Café and other eating establishments could specialize in local foods or unique atmospheres that more reflect the local heritage.

The Shabbona region (including neighboring communities) can inventory local business opportunities, resources such as vacant buildings and facilities, potential funding sources, and ways to promote interest by potential entrepreneurs to take over an existing business or start, or restart, one that has closed but is considered highly important in the region.

Tasks to Consider



Organize a local group to update the Shabbona downtown area. Contact Lowes, Home Depot, or other similar businesses inviting them to contribute or provide discounts on paint, lumber, and other building materials to improve buildings in the downtown area. Perhaps organize groups of residents, by age, to volunteer a weekend to paint, make minor repairs, and other efforts to enhance the downtown. This could include signage, decorating

buildings, or other enhancements that increase stops by visitors as well as those passing through the Village. Genoa undertook a similar successful program. Morrison hosts a “decorate the downtown streets event” each year that builds local enthusiasm and it is currently using a strategy to bring local arts and crafts downtown. (<http://www.saukvalley.com/2017/10/26/the-art-of-downtown-revitalization-in-morrison/aaef0wn/>)

Signage at the Village entrances listing businesses and/or locally-made products can be an important incentive for travelers to stop. Thirty-one percent of residents participating in the survey were willing to volunteer to help improve downtown. These activities build pride in the community as well as make the area more attractive to spend time in, with the aim being to bring in businesses or entertainment activities.

Compile a list of underutilized or vacant business properties that could be returned to service with reasonable investment.

Review current business codes to determine their adequacy or possible modifications depending on types of businesses that might be interested. The current codes and enforcement in



Shabbona can be compared with other communities of similar size to determine competitiveness. A similar initiative was successful in Mount Morris, NY, in partnership with the State University of New York in Geneseo (<https://www.scribd.com/document/204250757/Mt-Morris-Downtown-Revitalization-in-Rural-New-York-State>). In 2016, a vacancy study was conducted in Freeport, IL, with 15 of 25 vacant structures identified for potential mixed-use developments, e.g. retail on ground level and apartments or condos on the upper levels (<http://www.journalstandard.com/news/20170104/city-centre-freeport-identifies-prime-downtown-development-sites>).

Provide affordable space for new businesses. The Village or a nonprofit organization could provide affordable space for startup businesses or businesses new to the community in several ways. These might include a traditional lease or buying an existing building, but lower risk alternatives could include the following:

- A business incubator without walls can provide all the services of a traditional bricks and mortar incubator without the upfront costs of acquiring a building through purchase or lease, making needed renovations, and ongoing maintenance costs (see, for example, Lyndonville, VT: <http://lyndonstate.edu/academics/center-for-rural-entrepreneurship/incubator-without-walls/>). The sponsoring organization can compile a list of building owners willing to negotiate an affordable rent and then refer entrepreneurs to the owners. It can organize mentors to provide technical assistance either at each business' location or at a central meeting space. A buying club can be organized to purchase supplies and services at a discount.
- Short-term or variable leases with first right of refusal are a less risky approach if an incubator building is desired. Short-term leases that can be renewed allow the sponsoring organization to bow out if tenants are not doing well or there are not

enough tenants to justify maintaining the physical incubator. By adding a first right of refusal if a potential tenant or buyer for the building materializes outside of the incubator program, the property owner eliminates the risk of renting an empty building at a reduced rent for a long period of time and missing an opportunity to rent or sell at market to a non-incubator tenant.

- A pop-up incubator differs from a traditional incubator even though it has a physical location. The sponsoring organization arranges for use of the building on a short-term basis. Entrepreneurs can then arrange to use the space for a week at a time, or some other short time period. This type of incubator can work well for retailers or other businesses requiring a physical space for a short time. Each week or other designated time period, a different entrepreneur can use the space to market products, sell directly to the public, provide services, or conduct an activity necessary to the business but requiring a prime space only occasionally or for a short time.

Explore development of an entrepreneurship fund. Depending on outcomes of previous discussions, talk with financial and community organizations about their interest in starting or expanding a regional investment fund for entrepreneurs to explore business opportunities and provide seed capital. Federal, state, and local programs might also support and maintain this type of initiative. USDA-RD has low interest loans for infrastructure or building repair and these programs could assist a building buyer with rehabilitation costs or perhaps help with meeting local codes, but these are usually loans rather than grants.

Retain key local businesses via Community Supported Enterprises. There is growing interest in small towns across the U.S. in raising capital for essential operations using Community Supported Enterprises (CSE)³. The program pools small investments by local residents or contributors leveraged by funds from financial institutions. Many of these ventures include grocery stores, but restaurants, book stores and pharmacies have also been financed in this way, so there could be opportunities in Shabbona. The CSEs involve residents pooling local funds to purchase a property/building, renovate it with local contractors or volunteers, and then hire an operator who pays the investors a regular return.

USDA-RD has programs to help rural communities work with small businesses on various issues. The CGS, NIU College of Business and Kishwaukee Community College can possibly participate in this effort with their entrepreneurship support programs. Respondents to the residents' survey disclosed an interest in volunteering time and some funds toward local businesses or a CSE type of arrangement. Several examples of successful CSEs are available at <https://ptvermont.org/cat/inspiration/stories/>.

Stimulate Business Formation Through Entrepreneurship

A continued aging of the overall population in the next decade or so will substantially increase the need for trades including carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and roofers, building repairs and maintenance. There is already a documented shortage of trades in many places aggravated by the recent natural disasters, but also because of an aging workforce. The demand for these services will increase in the future.

The trades offer distinct opportunities for businesses in small rural places because these services are provided at the customer's site which minimizes the transaction costs for buyers.

Building owners needing repairs can use the Web to select potential vendors, contact them by email or phone, and then pay for the service when finished without leaving their residence. Therefore, being located in a distant rural place does not put the tradesperson at a disadvantage. The service area is limited only by travel costs since inputs are usually available either on-line or in larger nearby communities.

Likewise, there is growing interest by workers in occupations such as IT in working from home, part-time, and/or working in GIG economy arrangements similar to contract work. This group seeks attractive places to live within commuting distance of a larger center. Local features with excellent Internet access, pleasant recreational opportunities, high quality schools, and affordable housing are important. Depending on age, they also seek areas with a concentration of residents of the same age group and socialization opportunities. Shabbona has many of the characteristics described previously and could explore opportunities to lure even more workers in Aurora, DeKalb-Sycamore, or other areas by marketing access to recreation, high quality schools, and other benefits of living in the area.

The existence of a relatively high proportion of residents in the area who in the next 10 years will reach retirement age may suggest opportunities to start home-base businesses or local consulting activities. Access to high-speed broadband fiber can support these types of efforts and would, again, argue for the presence of a co-working or makers' space in the area. These initiatives could be started in conjunction with the CUSD 425 and encourage the expected large increase in young adults to remain local or return after attending higher education institutions such as NIU or Kish College.

Shabbona, in conjunction with neighboring communities, could examine possibilities for a tradesperson incubator or co-working facility using currently underused facilities such as the former lumberyard. Perhaps a consortium of businesses or trades could market their services as a group to a wide area. Tradespeople are currently available in some cases for local projects, but may not be interested in traveling to jobs at more distant locations. Clearly these service occupations face a growing demand and one that pays well, often with reasonable startup capital requirements.

Tasks to Consider

Explore future business opportunities in construction trades. Further examine projected population changes in the next 10-15 years, average age of structures, and number of tradespersons available to serve a construction market within a reasonable travel distance. Estimate the potential demand for various trades for the next 5-10 years to see if current trades have opportunities to expand or whether they see other markets opening up for remodeling or construction.

Partner with educators on a regional trades incubator or co-working space. Consult with school personnel (secondary and higher education institutions) to determine the number of graduates from trade and related programs, interest in expanding the education/training available, viability of incubating a trades venture, and ways schools could participate in a regional initiative to start a trades incubator or a co-working space. Indian Creek School District is exploring an incubator program next year which could dovetail with other local efforts sponsored by the Village.

Explore opportunities for entrepreneurship-focused distance learning. Discuss with the NIU College of Engineering and Engineering Technology (CEET) opportunities to provide educational options through distance learning venues for even a small group of interested students. The NIU College of Business offers programs and student organizations that could possibly help with this effort. Community leaders and others can organize to evaluate available options.

If this initiative is of interest and seems viable, assemble a group of local investors, realtors, and others interested in supporting such an operation and under what conditions—ROI, management involvement, etc., to explore options. A CSE type of financing system or Crowdfunding may be an option to raise the necessary funds.

Explore opportunities for part-time businesses involving local arts/crafts/hobbies. Identify associated businesses in the area and discuss part-time business opportunities with those involved. For example, possibly supplement or expand the current wooden toy business with related artisan wood crafts to build a stronger market in the area. Products could be marketed through Etsy and similar places on the Web or possibly through a store downtown during the busy tourist seasons. This merchandise could be marketed through brochures provided in the Park and other places along Rt. 30. List the products in the Made in Illinois program. Examine similar ventures that have been tried elsewhere to determine their outcomes.

Create and Promote a Regional Identity to Attract Visitors

Shabbona, Waterman, Hinckley and other villages can all gain from organized regional marketing efforts in which they share costs while still emphasizing and marketing unique assets and characteristics. Past reductions in retail businesses due to population changes eliminated duplication of stores and services available so there is less direct competition among stores in these cities than in the past. Each community is too small to provide a complete set of goods and services, but by working collectively, they can provide better access for residents to businesses. The current focus on population retention will shift to making sure that essential services exist conveniently in the region rather than necessarily in each town.



Communities in this region can organize regionally to market agriculture based attractions with limited risk of competition. Including Whiskey Acres, Waterman Winery, 1803 Candles, apple orchards, Ho-Ka turkeys, pumpkin fields and other agribusinesses in a regional attraction strategy, along with lodging accommodations, can incentivize tourists and other visitors to stay longer in the area. In 2016, the Village of Oswego developed a Go Oswego campaign to market area restaurants, retailers, and events, which might be an example (<https://gooswego.org>). The Food Works initiative in Carbondale is a regional agriculture marketing program (<https://www.fwsoil.org/>).

Define a region to market collectively to targeted *audiences* based on products identified, possibly with markets designated by age, income characteristics, and residence. For instance, perhaps local apples could be marketed jointly with the winery. Or specific items that complement the wine and whiskey produced could be sold by other producers. Forming an agri-tourism group to explore these opportunities might be worth considering with the intent to enhance the area as a destination, especially in months when SLSP is less active. The DeKalb County Convention & Visitors Bureau already markets around these products and could be a partner for additional efforts. The Visit Rt. 30 effort offers opportunities to market a regional corridor with a small but significant traffic volume running through several communities in the region. But even if traffic increases, opportunities for tourists to spend money locally are somewhat limited. Therefore, serious attention could be paid to enhancing the downtown areas to cause tourists or visitors to stop and spend money. These stops could involve nonprofit groups, museums, educational exhibits, or other activities of interest to non-residents.

Tasks to Consider

Form an alliance of community and business leaders to refer visitors. Raising the status of local history can be part of a regional strategy. A regional brochure listing all of the businesses could be a start especially if regularly distributed at the main stopping points locally and in neighboring communities. An important approach is to market the businesses over social media and link websites and social media pages of different attractions and businesses. The visitor questionnaires cited kid-friendly activities as especially important so including media popular with children and their parents may be effective. In some instances, it may involve encouraging crafters or hobbyists currently in their houses to participate in joint ventures.

Conduct a windshield survey of downtown conditions in participating communities. Then talk with owners of these properties to determine investment intentions, needs, and public policies (possibly zoning) that could stimulate repair, remodeling, etc. In some cases, state or federal grants may assist in financing the improvements. A 2016 downtown revitalization study in Freeport, IL, began with a windshield survey before architects performed a more in-depth assessment of maintenance needs and suitability for reclaiming vacant structures (<http://www.journalstandard.com/news/20170104/city-centre-freeport-identifies-prime-downtown-development-sites>).

Identify regional gaps in business offerings and other opportunities, using information collected in the survey of SLSP visitors. In other words, what would visitors (and residents) buy locally (in the region) if available? Visitors traveling Rt. 30 represent potential customers for several communities along the way. A coordinated marketing referral system where businesses market other non-competing businesses in neighboring communities along the route can work in some cases. The extra purchases made increase retail sales in the region overall and benefit everyone. This marketing effort could involve social media and electronic advertising on various web pages or perhaps a regional flyer(s) targeted to specific recreational or age groups. These brochures can be distributed at all Rt. 30 stops and the DeKalb I-88 rest stop.

Special interest groups in the area interested in holding regional meetings can generate additional traffic to the area in off-season months. Again, the DCCVB can coordinate and assist in these efforts to market an initiative specifically targeted for (and funded by) interest groups in participating communities. Actions such as providing theme-related kiosks at various locations, selling logo-related materials, hosting regional events, etc., sponsored by participating

communities can be considered. These events could be rotated throughout the area engaging residents and students in the various towns.

Increase and Upgrade Housing Stock

While the community can prosper through the growth of business supported by visitors, additional housing is another possibility to attract more residents especially if other changes are made that enhance the attractiveness of the Village as a place to live. Capitalizing on assets such as high-speed Internet access in a small co-working space or establishing a makers' space that might appeal to home-based workers or entrepreneurs were mentioned previously.

Even small residential growth can generate tax revenue and bring additional potential customers for local businesses. The project survey findings regarding housing interests can be discussed with local builders to gain their perspectives on developing new housing or remodeling existing structures. Depending on development options that are pursued, new opportunities may arise to attract home buyers. Likewise, detailed discussions with residents traveling from other areas to work in Shabbona might suggest opportunities for limited housing construction with suitable price and accommodations. Some communities such as Ohio, IL, successfully offered property tax reimbursements for several years to people who build housing under certain conditions. It might be worth exploring these alternatives further as part of a more complete development action plan.



Potential for Other Business and Industrial Employment

The eastern edge of Shabbona may offer serious potential for further development with access to Rt. 30 and opportunities to connect with high-speed Internet. The Village and Community Development Committee would benefit from exploring land that is available for purchase and development. Placing an entry location (business) at which visitors can obtain area information, Internet-access, locally-made products, and possibly a place to work for short periods of time may be a useful strategic move for property adjacent to Rt. 30. Other parcels north of the railroad could provide further development opportunities including light assembly, or information technology-support businesses with suitable utilities, roadway access, and other features. Interested companies could market and distribute their services mainly over the Internet and would be based in this location partly due to quality of life considerations, e.g., proximity to recreation and moderately priced housing.

The property on the north side of the Rt. 30 (if available for purchase) offers an opportunity because it could be expanded north of the railroad tracks (Figure 13). However, it currently is raw land without access to a modern road or utilities, both of which are essential to place the area in serious contention for development. While this lack of facilities is a definite disadvantage and the costs to prepare the site for development will be substantial, the fact that it is currently undeveloped means facilities could be constructed based on intended use rather than requiring additional demolition and modernization costs that would not add to the space already in the community.

Figure 13. Potential Site for Development (if land available for purchase)



Usually, development sites that are “shovel-ready” are more attractive to prospective tenants since they allow for a shorter construction and occupancy timetable. This status means that the subject property is either owned or optioned by the seller (either the Village or a public or private development entity) and has required land surveys, soil and environmental testing, and zoning, with site plans completed and approved. This status is nearly essential and involves some cost to the Village or other development agency. Otherwise, there will likely be little interest in the property and may not be worth the trouble to try to seriously market it.

Also, the site should have suitable utilities and infrastructure available (electricity, gas, water, sewer and telecommunications). If the intended or planned use of the site is known, it is sometimes possible to save costs by tailoring development costs. For instance, a technology-based site more like a small office building requires lower demands than a site intended for heavy industry. The opportunity to design the site may be more attractive to investors than modifications to an existing site. Nevertheless, certain public improvements such as high-quality road access and basic utilities are essential to all sites. Several of these facilities are discussed next.

Infrastructure Requirements. The quality and capacity of utilities available at the site are critical as they determine to a great degree the size and type of businesses that can locate there. Presumably, utility mains already exist nearby, but must be extended into the site. The cost can be substantial depending on the desired service capacity and the easements needed. Before proceeding further, the Village is well-advised to engage a qualified engineering consultant to evaluate and determine the costs and feasibility of extending utilities the site, especially if intended uses are known.

Electricity and natural gas. Utility companies often have programs that help communities defray the costs of these extensions. State and Federal governments also offer similar programs (e.g. U.S. Economic Development Administration or USDA-RD) that help underwrite the costs either through a grant or a low-cost loan especially if the number of jobs to be generated is significant. This support can be the initial stimulus to making the project viable.

Water and Wastewater. The capacity of the local public water and sewer system in the community can determine to a great degree the infrastructure that can be extended to potential development sites, as well as the size and type of businesses which can locate there. Thus, local capacity is a place to begin discussions both regarding feasibility of the site on the east side of the Village, but also the types of businesses viable for the location. Again, early discussions with a qualified engineering consultant to evaluate and determine the costs and feasibility of extending utilities to any site are important if this information is not already available.

Telecommunications (Broadband). Local and long-distance telecom providers will be key to a technology based project and their capacity to provide services should be determined early. The costs of local services can vary greatly depending on carrier, distance the service has to be extended to the site, right-of-way easements, and any needed upgrades to existing capacity. Assembling this information early is important because these costs may ultimately determine the viability of both the site and the type of business to contact. There also may be opportunities for local providers to contribute to the design of the site if it affects the costs of services.

The potential identified property (availability to be determined) is approximately one-half mile from current broadband fiber locations (see Figure 13). This fiber is owned by the DATA network with a commercial portion owned by Syndeo Networks/DFO. Easements to serve the subject property will be necessary and the approximate costs to install fiber are \$60,000 per mile (\$30,000 per half-mile). In addition, depending on specific site, an easement across the BNSF railway right-of-way may be necessary to serve the property. The costs for such an easement can vary between \$2,500-\$3,000 or more.

Transportation. A hard surface road meeting expected traffic demands to and into the site is a necessity, as is traffic control at the intersection of Indian Road and East Comanche Street (U.S. Rt. 30). These improvements and expenses likely represent costs to the Village government but may also serve other purposes. The railroad grade crossing may need significant upgrades to allow for safe passage of car and truck traffic to the property and this investment will require substantial coordination between the Village, IDOT and the Railroad.

Suitable Businesses

The types of businesses interested in a specific site or community are determined by many factors, the most important of which are costs (site acquisition, construction and taxes), infrastructure capacity, accessibility to customers or suppliers, and access to qualified workers. Some rural communities face greater challenges due to lack of infrastructure or low infrastructure capacity and a smaller potential labor market with a narrow range of skills or experience.

On a positive note, rural communities often have lower labor and operating costs, as well as low land acquisition costs. Shabbona is situated close to the Chicago suburban market with quick access to the western suburbs and surrounding communities. It offers a desirable quality of

life in a small-town environment with recreational opportunities and a high quality school system. It also is only 7 miles from north-south I-39, with a slightly longer distance to east-west I-88. If the Village pursues other approaches outlined in this report, it can be even more competitive as a place to live and to attract business investment.

Based on a brief analysis of the region, dominant industries, the specialization of the labor market and the potential of the subject site, the community may be most attractive to contract businesses, wholesale distributors, transload facilities (truck-rail), light manufacturing or industrial-technology service businesses (e.g. CAD/CAM, industrial prototyping). Many of these jobs pay well and could stimulate business activities, including retail, in the community.

Site Marketing

If the Village does not have staff with appropriate expertise and experience to market the potential site, it may consider retaining an industrial realtor for that purpose. When working with a realtor, it may be advisable to select a broker or agency specializing in marketing commercial or industrial sites and with strong relationships in the professional and business community. Suitable firms or agents are listed in professional associations such as CCIM, NAIOP and SIOR. Following are several professional association links:

- CCIM (Certified Commercial Investment Members): <https://www.ccim.com/?gmSsoPc=1>
- NAIOP (National Association of Industrial and Office Parks): <http://www.naiopchicago.org/>
- SIOR (Society of Industrial and Office Realtors): <http://www.sior.com/>

The Illinois Department of Employment and Economic Opportunity also has a website (Location One) that maintains a database of available buildings and sites across Illinois (Link: <https://app.locationone.com/buildings?organization=59eaba35bec80e09b4bbf0df>). Communities can post site information on this website at no charge and it is the place to start the process. Concurrently, Shabbona can work with the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation to be integrated more completely into its networks and marketing efforts. This also offers the advantage of linking with current businesses that might be considering sites for expansion or adding suppliers in close proximity.

While much of the focus in this project has been on retaining spending by residents and SLSP visitors in Shabbona, there are other opportunities to attract businesses that supply products and services to other areas. A review of potential opportunities within the supply chain of larger companies is a worthwhile effort. Especially viable is looking to the west, where there is relatively easy access to Rockford, Sterling-Rock Falls, the Quad-Cities, and other locations, in addition to Aurora and places to the east. Attracting these companies, however, will require investment in infrastructure, including utilities, but may still be worth the outlay if it expands local employment opportunities.

Chapter 5. A Path Forward

This report presents possible actions local leaders and residents can take in deciding about the future of the area. The information, however, is not yet a strategic plan to implement. There are insufficient local resources to undertake all the actions. The community needs to evaluate the potential of each, given the expected associated costs, and agree on specific strategies to pursue in the near-term (3-5 years), as well as the long-term (5 years or more). This process can involve bringing residents and leaders together in a facilitated exercise that elicits commitments by various groups who, through their networks, can make the agreed-upon strategies and tasks happen. CGS staff is available to assist in these efforts if, and when, desired.

Some projects are more expensive than others, but fortunately external resources are sometimes available to assist with specific approaches. The USDA-RD and Economic Development Administration provide funds for planning and technical assistance related to business development, for instance. In other cases, much of the effort may involve commitments by residents and businesses in time and resources.

Organizing for Progress

As noted previously, Shabbona has assets that it can leverage to stimulate economic growth, including access to a high volume of visitors during certain seasons. If it chooses to use these assets to generate growth and development, broad community support behind one or more lead organizations is essential to plan and implement various projects. Eliciting this support can not only build interest in the community but it can also unleash local talent to apply to development issues. Often, this is at minimal or even no financial cost when residents are willing to donate their expertise and contacts.

Community support can best be generated by involving a broad base of residents, property owners and business people in the planning process. This often begins with a community visioning activity. Interested individuals meet several times to review options such as those included in this report and discuss changes they would like in the community given the realistic potential of the area. Based on these meetings and supporting research, the community can arrive at a common vision and several goals. These goals then are the basis for an action plan and a specific work program to complete prioritized projects. Often, identifying several low-cost, short-term projects and quickly completing them can generate and mobilize additional interest and resources for more complex and challenging work.

Many communities identify who will be responsible for downtown revitalization. Based on a recent survey of Illinois mayors, this task is most often done by a city staff person. However, in a village the size of Shabbona, this may not be possible. Alternatively, a nonprofit created specifically for downtown advancement, a chamber of commerce or another business group, a downtown development corporation, or a consultant or private contractor may be appropriate. The most suitable arrangement depends on the tasks to complete and the resources available. For example, if a major redevelopment project is anticipated, a downtown development corporation may be a good choice. If an ongoing responsibility involves beautification efforts and public events, a downtown volunteer organization is often successful.

If marketing and business development are the top priorities, the chamber or another business led organization may work. Another possibility is to engage an AmeriCorps volunteer willing to help lead the efforts. The Corporation for National and Community Service provides grants to local governments and other agencies to help make improvements in the community (<https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities>). Several programs exist to engage seniors as well as help college-age students repay debt for working part-time in the community.

In any case, a paid staff person, even if part-time, and a funding plan to keep the organization solvent allowing a focus on downtown improvements instead of continual fundraising, greatly enhances the chances of success. Again, turning to survey responses from Illinois mayors, cities have used many ways to fund downtown planning and improvements (http://cgs.niu.edu/Growing-Communities/strategiesdowntowndev_imr04_2017.pdf). Those more commonly employed are tax increment financing, municipal property taxes and sales taxes. Funds raised by local organizations, or private investments by residents, can be significant sources of revenue for downtown improvements. Some federal grant programs, especially through USDA, are also appropriate.

A smaller number of municipalities use special service area taxes, special assessments, or user fees. Economic development efforts focus on more than downtown revitalization. Business development is important area-wide. This might include training sessions, technical assistance, idea exchanges, buying clubs, and group advertising. The Waterman-Shabbona Business Association may be able to help coordinate these activities. As with downtown revitalization, a paid staff person and consistent funding are critical to success. Broad business support is also needed but some technical support may be available from nonprofit organizations such as a Small Business Development Center, Kishwaukee Community College and SCORE.

Tourism promotion assistance is available through the DeKalb County Convention & Visitors Bureau (DCCVB) with a marketing program that reaches potential visitors and meeting/event planners throughout the region. The DCCVB also develops special marketing programs focused on narrower interests such as wineries or museums. The DCCVB can be included in discussions regarding marketing to visitors to see what assistance is available and coordinate with ongoing efforts. At the state level, the Illinois Tourism Bureau promotes attractions and events throughout the state. Its *Illinois Made* program markets unique Illinois products of interest to visitors. Criteria for inclusion in this program are available at <https://www.enjoyillinois.com/illinois-made/illinois-made-criteria/>.

Not to be overlooked are possibilities to attract high-tech businesses to serve mainly markets to the east. Also important, though, is to explore in more detail opportunities to supply expanding businesses to the west. The Village may not currently have the resources in terms of funding or staff to lead or even manage every worthwhile project. However, as an active partner with the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, it could participate in county-wide efforts. To do so effectively, Shabbona must be ready to market even small shovel-ready industrial or business sites to prospective businesses. Pursuing these opportunities will require incentives and financing support which may involve participating in the DeKalb County Enterprise Zone, a Tax Increment Finance district, or another such instrument. Shabbona can collaborate with DCEDC on smaller projects that match its potential. The important contribution

of Shabbona is access to a high quality recreational site, reasonable housing costs, and proximity to I-39 and I-88 as major transportation routes.

Shabbona has an excellent opportunity to explore its future and make a commitment to a definite course of action that builds on its unique assets. Multiple viable options listed in this report that can be pursued make the choices more difficult and require community leaders and residents to organize in a productive way. The Center for Governmental Studies can help place local organizations in touch with resources and appropriate agencies, as well as provide background research or other support to help shape future plans.

The potential in Shabbona, however, will depend on determining the appropriate action(s) to take and generating the resources to enable local leadership to pursue community objectives. This will require local leaders and residents to step forward to assist with these efforts to build a bright future for Shabbona in whatever ways residents will invest.

Next Steps

This study began with a request from the Village of Shabbona to investigate options for economic growth, particularly tourism, housing and a technology park. Surveys, interviews, site visits, best practices, and research on industry trends painted a picture of how Shabbona's assets might be leveraged to generate increases in revenue, new businesses, attract residents and visitors, improve economic conditions for existing businesses and raise the quality of life for residents. This report describes that analysis and specific actions to encourage positive change. As the Village considers these findings, the following steps are one way to approach economic development.

Step 1: Reach consensus on a community-wide vision and goals. This report provides information on directions the Village could pursue. Village officials and leaders, local business owners, service providers, residents, and others can meaningfully discuss realistic growth paths and work towards an agreed-upon vision for the future of Shabbona. Once this vision is adopted, specific goals based on the suggestions in the plan or others generated by the community, can be proposed. Together, the vision and goals will form the basis for Shabbona's strategic plan.

Step 2: Determine the feasibility of selected options for growth. This study provides an overview of the opportunities and challenges for several different directions in which the Village could go. Based on the strategies selected, select several options for a more thorough investigation including ways to implement them.

Step 3: Organize for implementation. Responsibilities must be accepted, and funding secured for projects to move forward. This requires formal organizations and collaborations. Using the suggestions in this report and examples from elsewhere, determine who will do what, when it will be done, associated costs, and how the necessary money will be raised.

Step 4: Monitor activity and communicate progress. While several projects can be underway at the same time with responsibility for each involving a different person or organization, the Village should keep focus on the big picture. This requires some centralized reporting on activities. Community support through volunteering, donating and shared thoughts will be critical to success. Regular communication through multiple channels is suggested.

Step 5: Measure success. Measuring success has three parts. The first is tracking the completion of specific projects, such as building improvements, new construction, establishing a marketing campaign, or establishing an entrepreneurship program. The second involves measuring whether the projects completed are generating the desired results such as attracting more visitors, new businesses opening, or interest from developers. The third part requires reviewing the strategic plan to see if goals are being achieved and the Village is moving closer to its vision. For example, are businesses more successful because of increased visitor spending? Is downtown more vibrant because people are enjoying the improved environment? Are residents and workers spending more money at new and existing businesses?

Step 6: Update and revise plans to reflect changing conditions and new opportunities. New opportunities and challenges will arise as progress is made on the plan. Maintain relationships with communities and organizations in the region. Keep lines of communication with residents, business owners, service providers and local leaders open in both directions. Evaluate progress and the need for change on a regular basis.

While the implementation process may seem complicated and overwhelming, it becomes relatively straightforward as it is integrated into the daily activities of the community. Residents engaged in various projects become excited about seeing progress being made. In turn, they will find additional tasks that can lead to more successes. A critical feature is that it is a community-wide effort that spreads the work among many individuals and agencies participating in relatively small projects in which they have special expertise and interest.

Resources

¹Bowker, J.M.; Askew, Ashley E. 2013. *Outlook for Outdoor Recreation in the Northern United States. A Technical Document Supporting the Northern Forest Futures Project with Projections through 2060*. Gen. Tech. Rep. NRS-120. Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station. 62 pp.

²Sands-Deutsch, Rebecca Ann and Sands, Dennis R., ed. ,1999, *Chief Shabbona to Shabbona Lake State Park*. mimeo; and Luther A. Hatch, 1915, *The Indian Chief Shabbona*, n.p.

³Walzer, Norman, and Sandoval, Jessica, 2016, *Emergence and Use of Community Supported Enterprises*. (East Lansing, MI: North Central Regional Center for Rural Development).

Appendices

Project Scope of Work

1. Meet with business leaders such as economic development committee members, Shabbona Lake State Park representatives, Pottawatomi Tribe representatives, and other community stakeholders in the area to gather background information for the project. Additional work elements proposed in this information gathering phase may exceed the budget in this project and CGS will provide cost estimates on request.
2. Determine adequacy of the 2013 survey data from Shabbona Lake visitors and tourists for analysis with special attention paid to visitors' stated interests in overnight stays, spending while in the area, desired attractions, and related items. Based on a review and assessment of available data, identify need for updates to more accurately estimate demand and fill-in data gaps and help design a process to collect visitor information from May to August. Work with local personnel to gather the survey information.
3. Prepare a general profile of lodging trends based on industry sources and interviews with the management of relevant properties to help determine demand needed to support a property characteristic of potential guests, and property facilities, size and services that may contribute to success.
4. Use available data from professional recreational and lodging industry sources to provide information on the potential impact on the community of developing lodging and other suggested major improvements both inside and outside of Shabbona Lake State Park. Additional data collection such as using intercept surveys or other approaches may exceed the budget in this project and CGS will provide cost estimates on request.
5. Review visitor projections with Pottawatomi Tribe representatives for a proposed Bingo hall and experiences in other sites such as in Wisconsin to glean available information similar to (2.)
6. Examine how other areas have marketed a relatively unique historical heritage such as Native Americans to enhance the potential for attracting visitors. The Starved Rock - Utica area is one example where a Native American heritage site has been marketed along with recreational opportunities.
7. Examine opportunities for innovative lodging opportunities in the area such as bed and breakfasts, AirBnBs, and possible other alternatives that have been used successfully in small communities near recreation sites. The potential for additional camping and increasing local spending by campers will also be considered.
8. Identify goods and services that could be offered in the Shabbona area to improve its attraction for overnight stays based on expressed interests by visitors and provide suggestions for new investment in businesses especially suited to visitors.
9. Assemble best practices for communities in close proximity to similar lakes, with and without a bingo hall, to determine ways in which they have marketed the location to build a clientele. These sites can then be visited later by decision-makers in Shabbona.
10. Examine opportunities to market a Technical Park including places to advertise, list of potential contacts, trade associations, and related materials. This scope of work does not include a feasibility analysis of acquiring or determining available property.

11. Review housing data including recent sales, time on market, summary of realtor information to provide a snapshot of the housing market. Research innovative tools developed elsewhere to increase housing market activity.
12. Prepare a report with materials that support local planning for recreation-related economic development and can be the basis for further discussions regarding the potential for lodging facilities. Also provide a list of implementation action items, such as lists of hospitality investors/groups, relevant trade shows, small business development assistance networks and public incentives/policies to consider.

Interviewed in Person or by Phone

Hon. Claudia Hicks	Village President
Debbie Armstrong	DeKalb County Convention & Visitors Bureau
Joe Lenkaitis	Superintendent, Shabbona Lake State Park
Dennis & Kathy Sands	Shabbona Lake concessionaire
Clint & Heather Sands	Lakeside Bait and Tackle
Jim Johnson	Shabbona Township Supervisor
Tom Wursing	Wursing Groceries
Judy Sprenkle	JKS Creations
Jerry Foster	Resource Bank
John Houghtby	Carter's Gun Shop
Ellis Barnes	Barnes Woodcraft
Bruce Novak	Indian Oaks Country Club
Chad Willis	Superintendent of Schools
Terrie & Lex Tuntland	Waterman Winery
Darryl Beach	1803 Candles in Waterman
Kathy Casstevens	Marketing Director, Starved Rock State Park Lodge
Cheryl Barto	Starved Rock State Park
John Muir	Starved Rock Foundation
Roger Blomgren	Shabbona Realtor
Dan Nolan	Shabbona Development Committee Member
John Rood	Shabbona Development Committee Member
Jolene Willis	DeKalb County Planning Commission Member
Norm Beeh	Village of Shabbona Engineer
Beth Einsele	Shabbona Realtor
Ben Wogernos	Cobblestone Hotels
David Lombardo	Aurora Sportsmen's Club

Several others, such as museum volunteers, were interviewed on visits to Shabbona.

Shabbona Area Lodging Sites

Business Name	City	Rooms or Campsites	Amenities	Rates
Student-run hotel, NIU Holmes Student Center	DeKalb	78	Bowling, arcade	
Travelodge	DeKalb	7	Pool, RV parking, pet-friendly	
Hampton Inn	DeKalb	80	Pool	
Red Roof Inn & Suites	DeKalb	74	Pool	
DeKalb Motel	DeKalb			
Super 8 DeKalb	DeKalb	44	Pool	\$60-\$100
Comfort Inn	Mendota	69	Pool	\$81-\$127
Super 8 Mendota	Mendota	43	N/A	\$55-\$72
Lord Stockings Bed & Breakfast	Mendota	3	N/A	\$70 and up
Housestead B&B	Plano	6	Labyrinth and hedge maze	\$125 - \$225
Holiday Inn Express	Rochelle	80	Pool	\$135 - \$187
Country Hearth Inn	Rochelle	59	N/A	\$63 - \$88
Hillcrest Motel	Rochelle			
Colonade Motel	Rochelle			
Concord Hotel Mgt Partnr	Rochelle			
Super 8 Rochelle	Rochelle	63	N/A	\$67 - \$92
Rolling Oaks Campgrounds	Sheridan	500 RV Sites, 20 Tent Sites	Outdoor Recreation	\$25-\$30
Deer Creek/Mallard Bend Campgrounds	Sheridan	127 cabins, tent sites, RV sites	Pool, outdoor recreation	\$60