



April 2, 2012

Dear Members of the Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders:

The South Jersey Bayshore Coalition (SJBC) comprises non-profit organizations working together to preserve the environmental and cultural heritage unique to the Delaware Bayshore Region, which includes all of Salem County. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on our concerns relating to changes that would affect tourism in Salem County.

We are writing to urge you to retain Salem County's Tourism Department, so that the County can continue its valuable promotion of tourism that has accomplished significant results over the past few years.

The South Jersey Bayshore Coalition (SJBC) is the sponsor of the Bayshore Heritage Byway, which is a 125-mile route winding along existing roads from the Delaware Memorial Bridge to the Cape May Lewes Ferry. This route includes Salem County special points of interest (Salem River Wildlife Management Area; Supawna Meadows National Wildlife Refuge; Fort Mott State Park; Hancock House; Salem City) and provides potential for additional spur routes and special "cluster" sites to follow.

The Byway is already designated as an "official NJ Byway", and in 2010, the South Jersey Bayshore Heritage Byway was recognized with an Award of Engineering Excellence. In about a year, signs will be in place and marketing will begin.

The Byway will provide maximum opportunity to build tourism that will generate revenue for existing and new businesses. One of the goals of the Corridor Manage Plan is to highlight all that Salem County has to offer: arts; music; birding; fishing; architecture; historic significance (Revolutionary War and Underground Railroad sites); recreational sports (camping, canoing, kayaking); Main Street USA; events at County Fair Grounds; and agriculture (markets, wineries, you-pick farms).

Salem County has the potential to increase local tourism. It is home to the oldest weekly rodeo in the United States. In addition, the building in which the Freeholders meet is the oldest continually operating courthouse in the entire United States. Salem County is ideally located with direct access to the Turnpike, Route 295, Delaware Memorial Bridge, just minutes away from the Commodore Barry Bridge, and within two hours from major cities that capitalize on tourism.

In 2010 New Jersey's tourism industry brought in \$35.5 BILLION, which was a 0.8% increase over 2009. Even in depressed economic times, tourism was one of the few industries in NJ that continued to thrive. At its pre-recession high in 2007, tourism was even a bit higher at \$39.5 BILLION.

In spite of tough economic conditions and budget deficits, Governor Christie continues to make significant investments in tourism, arts, history and cultural organizations. A report conducted by Vantage Strategy reaffirmed the critical importance that the tourism industry plays in New Jersey's ongoing economic recovery. Tourism is our State's third largest industry:

Supporting over 300,000 private sector jobs
\$10 BILLION in wages and salaries (2010).

TOURISM MEANS JOBS. Out-of-State visitors' expenditures represent 68% of overall tourism dollars; 23+% from in-state visitors; and 5% from business related travelers.

Tourism creates jobs not only directly related to tourism-related businesses, but also many that are not related (Mom & Pop Main Street businesses) and enhances New Jersey's quality of life.

Looking at Salem County statistics – every \$1 spent on tourism marketing last year generated over \$300 in incremental spending. Prior to launching Salem County's tourism marketing campaign, Salem County ranked LAST in tourism industry in dollars generated. Salem County is just now beginning to tap its potential, creating jobs and supporting local businesses.

Before Jim Turk assumed directorship of the Cultural & Heritage Commission for Salem County, it was in disarray and non-functional. However, in a short time the County's investment in his position proved to be well spent. In 2011, Salem County ranked #1 in tourism growth statewide and the NJ Council of the Arts awarded Salem County a Citation of Excellence – its highest rating. Last year, Salem County Arts in Bloom generated in excess of \$20,000 in just two days.

Providing funding for Salem County's Tourism Department is essential in order to build upon the valuable work accomplished over the past few years. Eliminating Cultural & Heritage tourism from the County budget would be a mistake at a time when its investments are yielding significant results.

With so much to offer in Salem County, tourism can and should be a major industry here. South Jersey Bayshore Coalition looks forward to working with Salem County to highlight its historical and agricultural significance and to build a tourism industry.

We welcome the opportunity to meet at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Reardon
South Jersey Bayshore Coalition

www.sjbayshore.org