

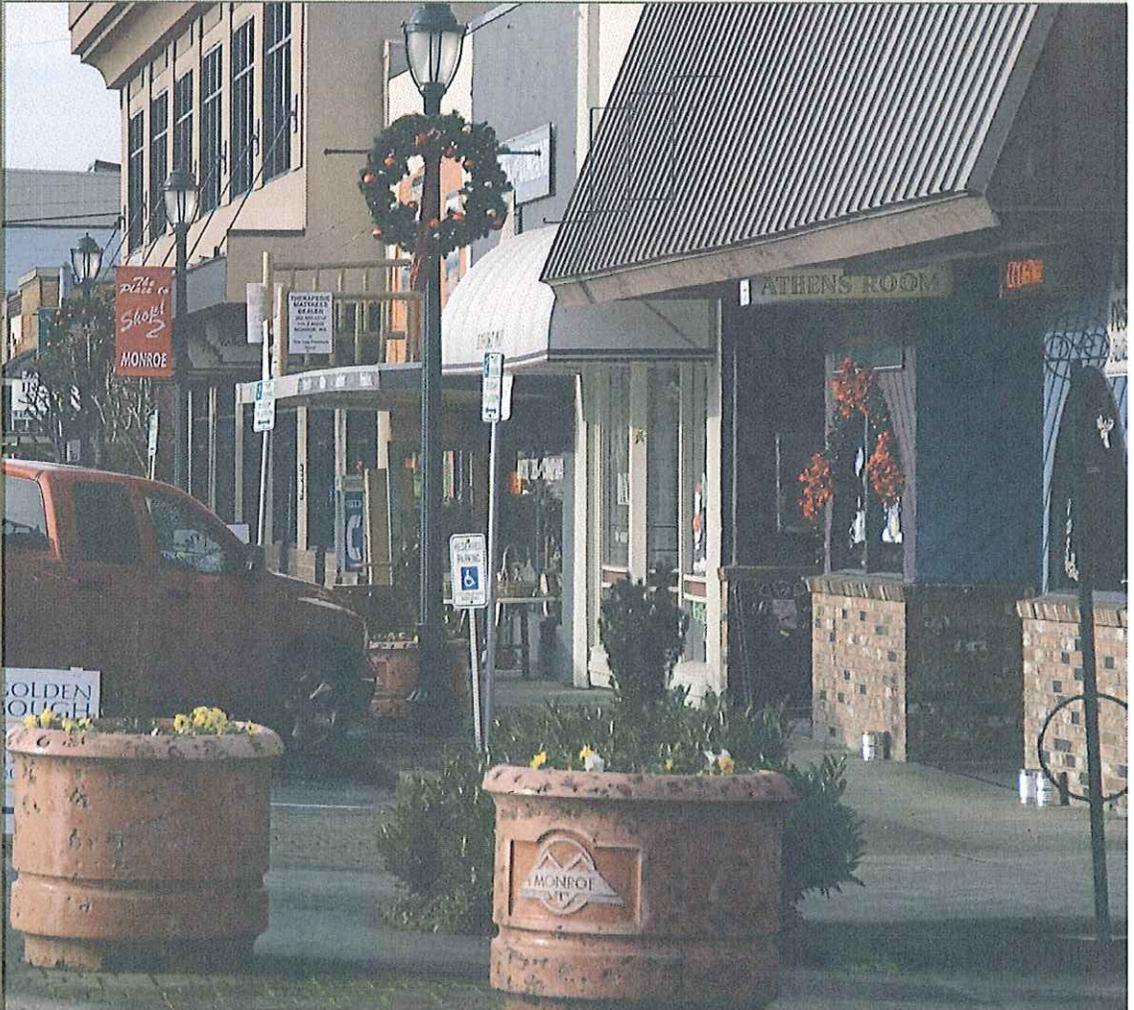


January 2006



MONROE, WASHINGTON

VISITOR/TOURISM ASSESSMENT



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Monroe, Washington • January, 2006

First impressions

...and some ideas to increase tourism spending.



2 • Monroe, Washington • January 2006

In January of 2006, a Tourism Assessment of Monroe was conducted, and presented in a two-hour workshop. A "Tourism Assessment" is a process in which the area is looked at from the eyes of a visitor. No prior research was facilitated, no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project, and the town and surrounding area was "secretly shopped."

The assessment is a no-holds-barred look at the community from a visitor's perspective. It includes marketing, signage, things to see and do (attractions mix), critical mass, ease of getting around, customer service, availability of visitor amenities (information, rest rooms, parking, etc.), general appeal, and the community's ability to attract overnight visitors, who spend three times that of day visitors.

There are two primary elements to the assessment process:

- 1) A Marketing Effectiveness Assessment
- 2) On-site Assessment

In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment two people were asked to plan trips to the area both as a leisure and business traveler. They are not told in advance what communities are actually being assessed. They are to use whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel guides, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, etc.

The community has four opportunities to close the sale:

- Personal contact (visitor information, trade shows, etc.)
- Internet (websites)
- Brochures and printed materials
- Word of mouth (referrals, image)

In this process we test all four methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, looking for activities via the internet, requesting and reviewing printed materials, and asking visitors and regional contacts about their opinions of the area. This last method also includes looking at on-line articles, AAA Tour Book reviews, etc.

The findings determine how "visible" the community is during the research and whether or not the materials and/or per-

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

sonal contacts were good enough to "close the sale," convincing the potential visitor to make the community worth either a day trip, stop, or an overnight stay.

The On-site Assessment process includes a look at enticement from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, things that would pull a visitor off the primary roadways), beautification, wayfinding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public restrooms, visitor information, parking), things to see and do, overall appeal of the community, business attractiveness (drawing power), signage (public and private), customer service, area attractions (things that might prompt a visitor to spend the night), retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass (are these things concentrated in a pedestrian-oriented area?), availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The "Recommendations" made herein are referred to as "suggestions," as they were developed without consulting the local community. It will be up to the community to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we have provided a low-cost suggestion (when possible) on how the challenge, obstacle or negative element can be corrected. It's important to point out, that to increase the community's tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions will have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all of them, can have a profoundly successful impact on the community's ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a community effort - involving both privately owned businesses as well as county and state agencies, where appropriate.

A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO or CVB, Chamber, etc.) cannot be successful if the tourism effort is not a community-wide effort.

Tourism is largely a private-sector industry, after all, the benefit of tourism is to convince visitors to come, spend money, then go home. That spending takes place, primar-

ily, in local businesses.

Product development is far more of a driving factor in tourism than marketing. After all, you must be able to deliver on your marketing promises. Visitors are drawn to activities, not cities or counties.

The Visitor/Tourism Assessment took place over a four day period - three days in the community, and one day spent assessing the marketing efforts, providing a low-cost overall assessment with ideas the community can discuss and hopefully implement.

Successful tourism translates to cash

- The idea is to import more cash into your community than you export. When local residents earn money in the community and spend some of it outside the community, this is referred to as "leakage." Tourism is a way to fill that gap, importing cash into the community, without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services.

Communities with successful tourism programs will see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas communities which don't have successful tourism programs find that they are subsidizing visitors - providing services which visitors use, but don't leave enough money behind to cover the cost of having them available.

There are three kinds of tourism

• **1. Status quo**

If you do nothing to further the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, just by the fact that some visitors will pull off local highways or freeways for services (gas, food, lodging), and by the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have tourism.

• **2. Getting people to stop**

Getting people to stop is always the first priority of successful tourism. Imagine how successful the businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through (there are hundreds of thousands every year) pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community.

And if there's a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in the community, which almost always translates to additional spending.

• **3. Becoming the destination**

You cannot be a successful tourism destination if you can't get people to stop. And to become the destination, you must have attractions (things to see and do) or amenities that will convince visitors to spend the night.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors making a "pit stop."

The Four-Times Rule

• Visitors will make it a point of stopping or staying in your community if you have enough to offer to keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes). If a visitor drives an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

In a nutshell, if you hope to keep visitors overnight, you must make it worth the drive.

The more you have to offer, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay. This is why rural communities MUST typically market more than just the immediate downtown areas. You need to market neighboring communities, outdoor recreational opportunities, exploration, and discovery.

Finally, you must also be different. Too many communities promote "outdoor recreation" as a primary draw. But if residents living in the markets you're hoping to attract can enjoy the same activities closer to home, then why should they go out of their way or the extra distance to visit you?

Branding

The biggest challenge communities make is trying to be all things to all people. When marketing your community ask yourself this primary question:

"What do we have that the visitor can't get closer to home."

Nearly every community promotes:

- Outdoor recreation
- Hunting, fishing, biking, hiking
- Wildlife viewing, birding
- Local events
- Museums
- Unique shops, dining
- Historic downtown

Is there a town anywhere in North America that doesn't offer these things? You MUST find the things that:

1. Make you worth a special trip
2. Are different than what the visitor can get closer to home. This might even be a specific restaurant or a specific shop that is truly unique.

Words to avoid in your marketing efforts:

- Gateway
- We have it all
- Something for everyone
- Four season destination
- Outdoor recreation
- Unique
- The center of it all
- Discover
- Explore

Don't just list what you have, but always tell the visitor WHY they should discover or explore the area.

Branding is the art of differentiation. What makes you special? If you don't have a hook, you may need to create one.

Critical mass means cash

- While it may not be the primary reason *why* visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity - and where visitors spend the most amount of money - other than lodging.

Do you have a pedestrian-oriented shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many rural communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian "village" which would include visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, restrooms, etc., all in an attractive, well-landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb is seven to nine retail stores (more on that in a minute), and three or more dining establishments which can include sit-down restaurants, espresso bars, cafes, dessert and ice cream shops, etc.

"Visitor Retail" would include antique stores, galleries, collectibles, souvenir shops, T-shirt shops, outfitters, bike and jeep rentals, guided tour operations, activity shops (kites, hiking, climbing gear, etc.), home accents, jewelry, old-fashioned hardware stores, casinos, entertainment facilities such as movie theaters, pubs, etc.

By grouping these businesses together, you will create the "critical mass" in a pedestrian setting that will draw visitors and will make it worth their while to stop and shop.

Have you ever noticed at major intersections you will see a Chevron, Union 76, Conoco, and Shell on each

of the four corners? Or how about fast food franchises? McDonald's, Burger King, Jack In The Box, and Wendy's on each corner. You would think these places would avoid being next to the competition, but they know that visitors are drawn to the "critical mass" where they have multiple choices that are convenient.

Where are your visitor-oriented shops? If they are spread out, they will be marginally successful when it comes to tapping into visitor spending. Put them all together, and you have what it takes to get visitors out of their cars (or busses and RV's) and into your stores.

Market the broader package

- Every communities **MUST** market more than just the community in order to be successful with their tourism efforts.

Remember the Four-Times Rule and also remember that visitors don't stay within or care about boundaries - so market the attractions you have around your community that might keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some shopping, or an overnight stay.

The more you have to offer "collectively," the longer visitors will stay. And the longer they stay, the more they spend.

You must be different or better than everyone else

- To become a destination community where you're the place visitors spend the night or multiple days, you must set yourself apart from everyone else.

In order to make your community "worth the drive" and/or "worth a special trip," you must be better or different from other competing communities.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, adopted its Shakespeare Festival which runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. It became "different" than other communities and the festival set it apart.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and all of their events revolve around the Bavarian theme. The town is one of the primary tourist attractions in Washington state, hosting more than two million visitors annually. They have something different to offer.

Okanogan County, Washington (just south of the Canadian border in central Washington) is an outdoor recreational paradise - but so are 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guide books, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising efforts. They started using quotes along the line of "Pinch Yourself, you're in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent."

This, and numerous other quotes,

makes it "worth the extra drive" to visit Okanogan Country. They used third party endorsements to show that they are the "best."

Just look at how powerful movie ratings are when it comes to box office receipts. "Two thumbs up" carries a lot of weight.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

Tourism is an economic development activity

The object is to have people come, spend money, then go home

90% of tourism industry businesses are small businesses.

83% of tourism spending is by visitors with annual household incomes of \$70,000 plus.

Tourism is a \$11.5 billion dollar industry in Washington

A tourism-friendly city will spawn non-tourism industries faster than others

Tourism does not only include "leisure travel."

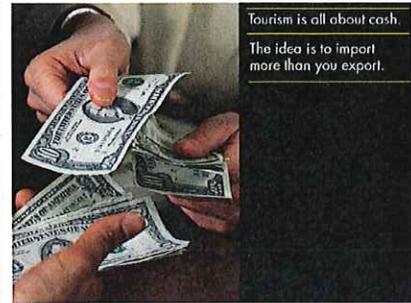
Look at the traffic numbers:

Highway 2 at SR 522:
29,304,000 persons per year

Highway 2 at SR 203 (downtown):
27,101,250 persons per year

Even if 75% of these were commuters:
You would still have 7,000,000 visitors passing through Monroe every year.

Monroe needs to work on product development to shift from a pass-through community to a destination community.



Tourism is all about cash.
The idea is to import more than you export.

Tourism is the fastest growing industry in Washington and the number one diversification strategy for the rural areas across the U.S.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, so tourism isn't always about bringing in more people. The secret lies in getting them to stop, stay a little longer, and getting them to come back.

Millions of visitors travel through Monroe every year. Do you do a good job in convincing these "pass through" visitors to stop and spend time - and money - in Monroe?

Are you doing a good job in making Monroe the "hub" for the Cascade Mountain experience, which can generate increased overnight stays in the community.

The assessment process:

- Marketing effectiveness
 - Visibility (finding information)
 - Effectiveness: Ability to close the sale
 - Competitive analysis
 - Convenience
- On-site assessment
 - Signage, gateways, wayfinding
 - Overall appeal
 - Critical mass
 - Amenities: parking, restrooms, information
 - Attractions: things to see and do
 - Customer service, cross selling



Suggestion #1

SR 522: Nice entrance sign (middle left). Consider just one simple graphic. Make it legible from a distance. Nearly every community in the Northwest uses trees, mountains, sun and water in their logos. Consider a logo that defines Monroe differently than everyone else.

Suggestion #2:

Add mileage on the sign to downtown: "Historic downtown Monroe - 1 mile." Visitors will always judge the book by the cover. Look at the placement of your gateway signs. First impressions are lasting impressions. By adding "Downtown - 1 mile" you are saying to the visitor "don't judge us yet, you have another mile to go."

Suggestion #3:

Work with DOT to change the "City Center" sign to "Downtown," which has more visitor appeal (bottom right photo).

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



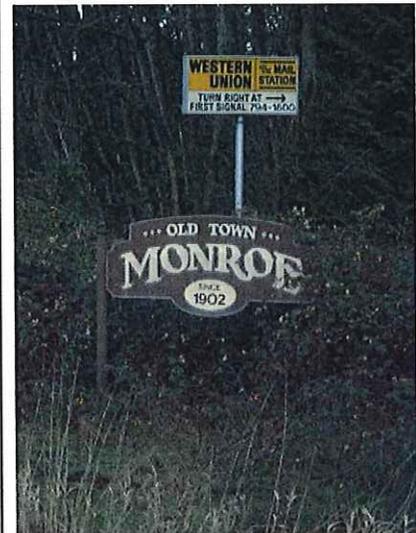
NOTE:

Coming over the bridge. This sign is in a good location where there is a good first impression. Consider developing a raised planter around the sign to hide the concrete foundations and to add some curb appeal.



Suggestion #4:

Consider replacing all these signs with something decorative that includes welcome and directions.



Suggestion #5:

Remove this sign post (left). Is this really how you want to introduce visitors to Monroe? Is this Old Town Monroe? It doesn't look that historic. Develop an attractive gateway, marquee sign that states, "Monroe's Historic Shopping District, left 1/2 mile."



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion #6:

This is the entrance sign coming in from Everett along Hwy. 2. Consider reducing the size of the Garden Club sign and make it part of the welcome sign. Avoid sign clutter at all costs. Visitors have four seconds to read signs.

While the garden club should be congratulated for making the entryways beautiful, promote the community, not the club.



Suggestion #7:

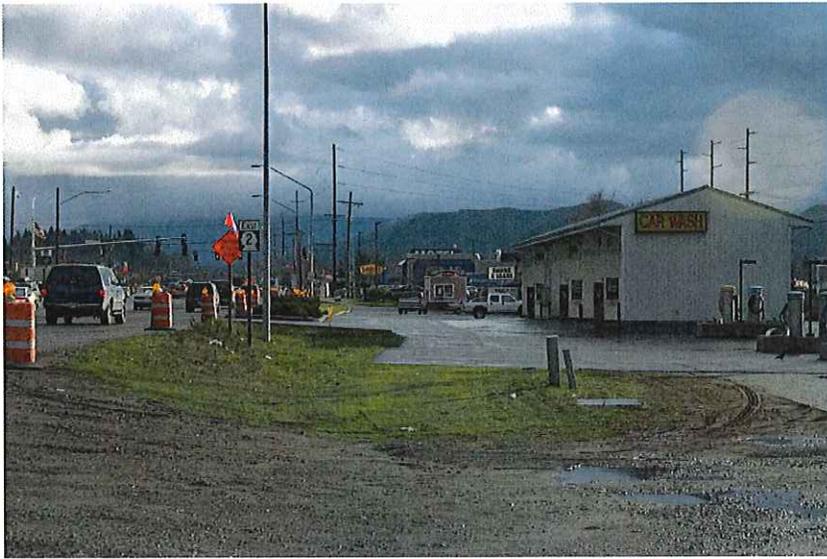
Add a directional sign to downtown. This is not a good first impression. Is this a place you'd want to spend time and money?

Suggestion #8:

Remove the high school sign, the empty sign post, other welcome signs. This is "Old Town Monroe?" Once again, direct visitors to somewhere else so they don't judge the town by this poor first impression.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



NOTE:

“Old Town Monroe” doesn’t seem very historic. This is, by far, the primary entranceway into Monroe from the major population centers. It is also the poorest impression of Monroe.

There is no requirement that says you must put your entrance or gateway signs at the city limits. Always put them where you will make the first, best impression. That will translate to increased spending.



NOTE:

You want your businesses to be successful, but first impressions are lasting impressions. ALWAYS put your gateway signs where they will make the first, best impression. All the signs coming into Monroe, except off of 522 (west side of town), should be removed and replaced with directional signs i.e. “Historic Shopping District - Right 1/2 mile.”

Suggestion #9:

Get involved with the Keep America Beautiful organization. This national non-profit agency assists states and communities with clean-ups, beautification, signage and other issues.

The nation's largest
community improvement
network

www.kab.org

KEEP
AMERICA
BEAUTIFUL
INC.

Suggestion #9: Get
involved with KAB

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion #10:

Finding Monroe from 522 or 2 is easy. Change the blue signs to brown "Historic Shopping District" and blue "Visitor Info."

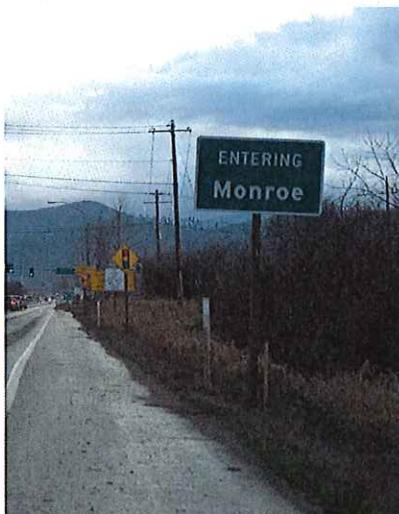


NOTE

Downtown was easy to find from westbound Hwy. 2 although "Downtown" should be changed to "Historic Shopping District" and be on a brown (attraction) sign. Always sell the experience, the activity.

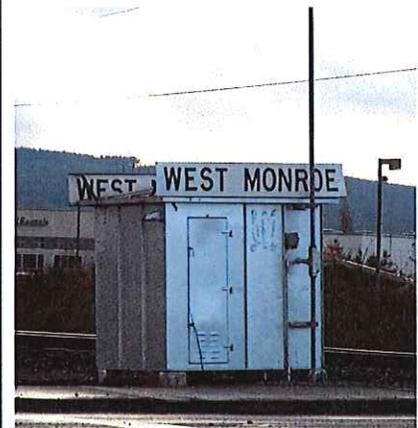
NOTE

Is this (below) really a good way to promote Monroe? Perhaps some screening or even paint to make this fun or inviting.



Suggestion #11:

Consider removing this sign. What purpose does it serve?





NOTE

We had no problem finding the fairgrounds from Eastbound Highway 2. This is a good first impression of the state fairgrounds and nearly impossible to miss.



NOTE

Finding the fairgrounds from Westbound 2 was relatively easy, however, there is a collection of different signs - all with a different look, that make it confusing and don't provide any directions to the fairgrounds entrance. There are 1960s looking florescent signs, brick signs, painted signs, all in different locations, etc. Consider creating some gateways with continuity.



Suggestion #12:

Consider larger, decorative wayfinding signs to visitor information. The chamber sign is easily missed. We drove past it twice before noticing the small signs.

This seems like a poor location for visitor information.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



NOTE

Really? No parking for customers looking for visitor info? Did we miss something? Where is the visitor information center? Do you see it here?



Suggestion #13:

If there is visitor info here, it needs to be more clearly defined. We almost left - twice.



NOTE

It was nearly impossible to find a parking space for visitors... It's obvious that parking is an issue here. Nearly every space had a lengthy warning sign.

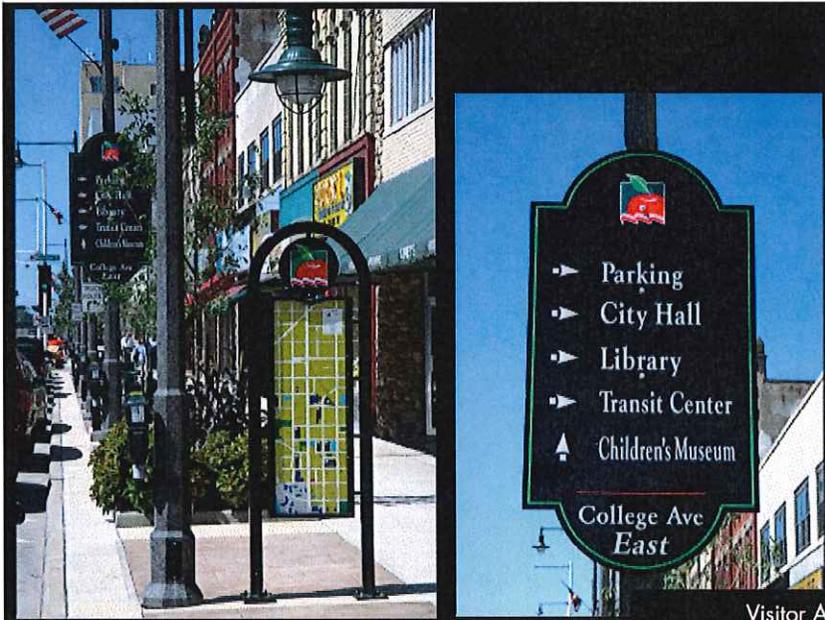


TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion #14:

Are visitors considered “customers?” Provide parking for visitors or consider moving elsewhere. This is NOT a great location for visitor info. We were shocked at the number of reserved signs here. Most visitors would probably just give up and go elsewhere.



Suggestion #15:

Consider having a Gateway, Wayfinding & Signage Plan developed and implemented. The plan would include wayfinding (directional signage), would address your gateways, would identify your attractions, amenities and services, and would include the use of billboards, marketing displays, downtown merchant signage (including the use of sandwich boards), etc. Don't leave visitors to “guess” where Monroe is (middle far right photo).

Visitor Attractions/Amenities

Oak Harbor
WHIDBEY ISLAND, WASHINGTON

Community Services

- Library
- Hospital
- City hall/police
- Senior center
- Restrooms

Pioneer Way

- Deception Pass
- Regatta Park
- The Boardwalk
- Visitor info
- Restrooms

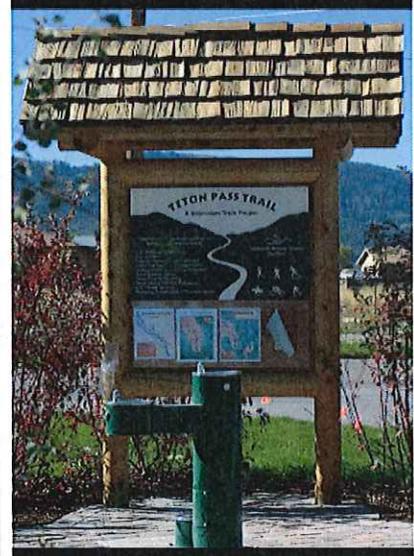
Pioneer Way

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



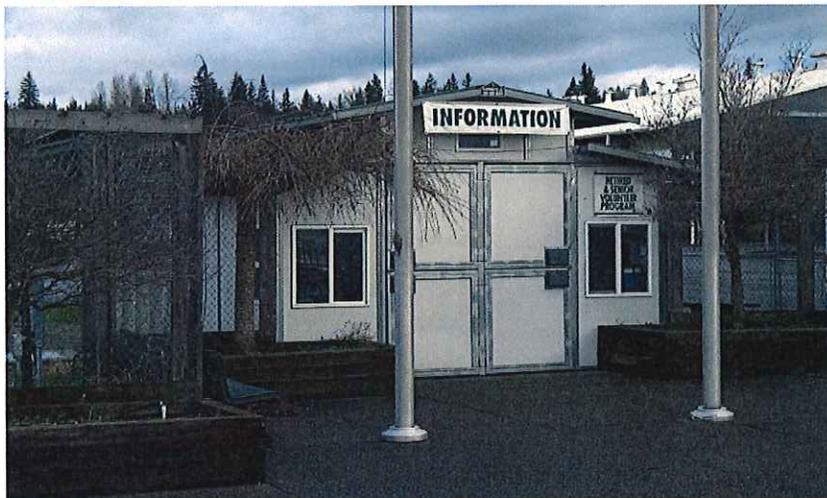
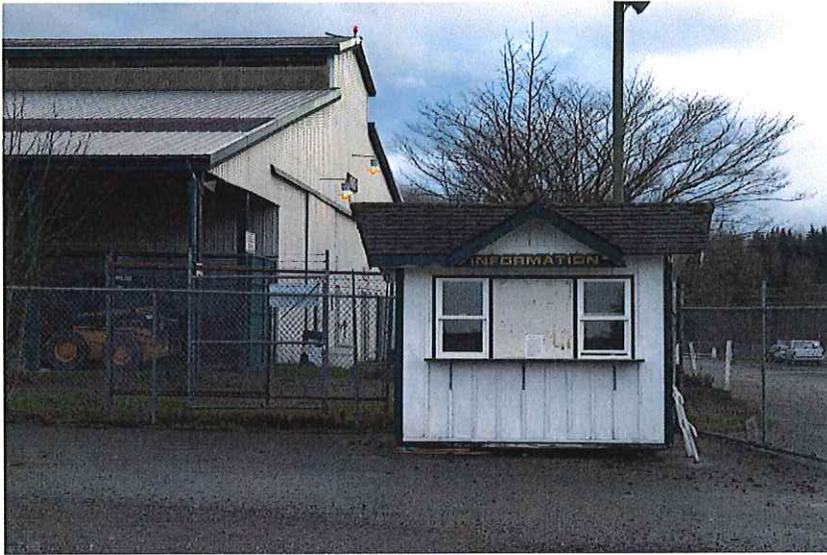
Suggestion #16:

The chamber was closed over the holidays. No retailers (that we could find) had any visitor information. There are great opportunities to add visitor information kiosks or displays outside the chamber office (above). Kiosks should be placed throughout Monroe. The photos on this page are sample kiosks used in other communities.



Moses Lake, WA

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion #17:

Consider adding a calendar of events and visitor information - for the fairgrounds and community.

Suggestion #18:

Another opportunity for a visitor info kiosk. Visitor information should be working 24/7, 365 days a year. Always promote what's coming to the fairgrounds and also promote other activities in the area.

Suggestion #19:

Are the grounds only open between August 25th and September 5th? Add a calendar of events. Remove the dates from the header sign (left).





Suggestion #20:

Consider placing visitor info outside the fairgrounds so it's usable when the grounds aren't open. Without binoculars, it would be impossible to read the signage you can see in the background (left).



NOTE

We'd love to visit again, but provide us with a reason. Perhaps replace this readerboard with a nicer one that has "Coming Attractions" with two or three events listed on it.

With signage, never use more than five lines of text. People in vehicles typically only have a few seconds to read the sign. Also maintain the sign regularly. The "v" is missing from Visiting.



Suggestion #21:

Perhaps another good location for visitor information. You should have a visitor information kiosk in the heart of the historic shopping district as well.



Suggestion #24:

Change your two-hour parking to four-hour parking as you further develop downtown as a destination.

The average visitor will spend four hours in a pedestrian-friendly shopping district. While Monroe doesn't have four hours worth of shopping and dining, the goal would be to work towards that. The more you have, the further people will come and the longer they will stay.

How much time do you spend in downtown Leavenworth, Winthrop, Poulsbo, Victoria, Port Townsend, and other pedestrian friendly shopping districts? Don't send customers away before they are done spending money.

Suggestion #22:

Three of four of these around town might be options for visitor information. You should have 24/7 visitor information at the following locations:

- Downtown
- The fairgrounds (in several locations)
- At or near local hotels
- Along the highway in three or four convenient pull-off locations

Make sure you include brochure distribution. People like taking information with them.

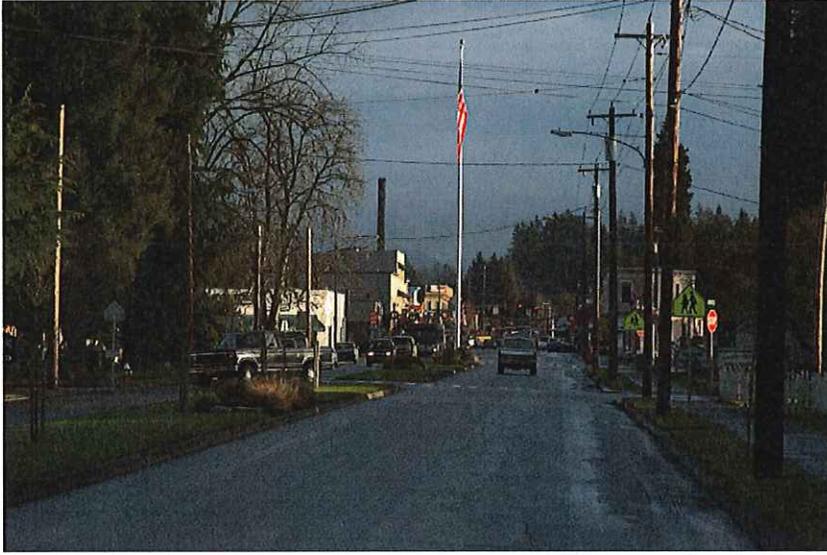
Suggestion #23:

While you may have public restrooms, it's best if they are located where visitors can spend money.

Fact: Once visitors get out of the car, you have a four-times greater chance of getting them to spend money. So put your restrooms and visitor information where it can spur additional spending in the community.

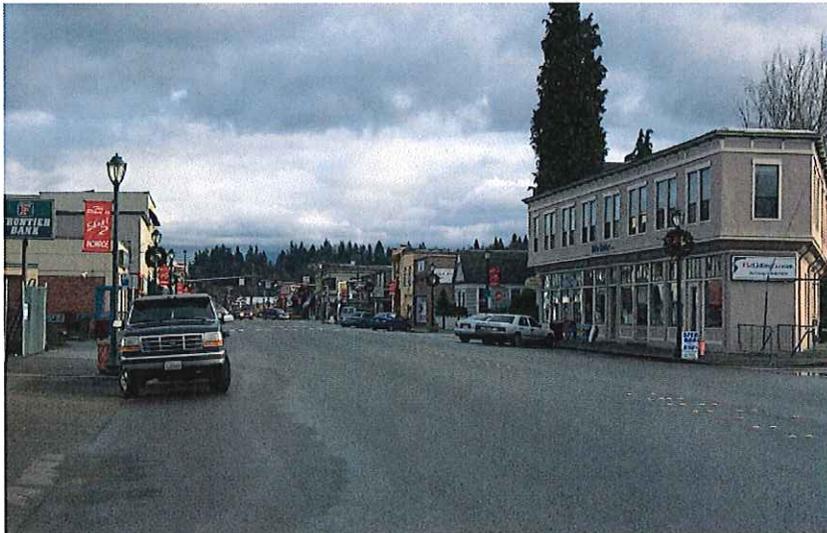


TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



NOTE

After taking the first 522 exit, we finally find what might be downtown Monroe. The flagpole is terrific and creates a good first impression and provides a gateway into downtown Monroe.



Suggestion #25:

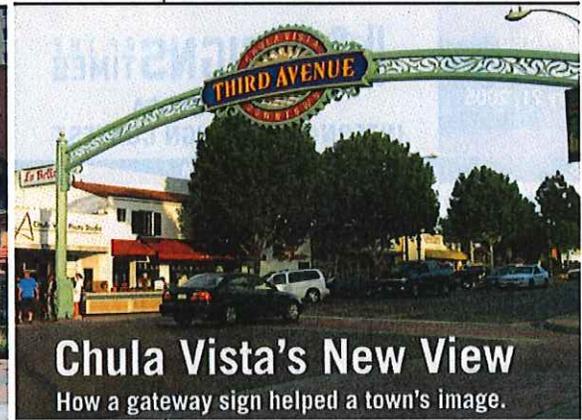
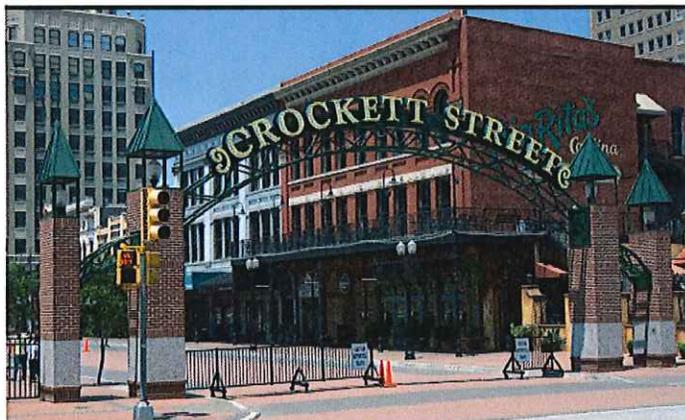
A good location for a gateway to downtown. Consider naming downtown something to make it a destination.

Downtown destinations:

- Seattle: Pioneer Square
- San Diego: Gaslamp District
- Nelson, BC: Baker Street
- Santa Monica, CA: 3rd Street Promenade
- Portland, OR: Pearl District
- Snoqualmie, WA: Rail District and Marketplace
- New Orleans: The French Quarter, Bourbon Street

Below are a couple of samples of how downtowns have created physical gateways to identify their entertainment district (Crockett Street in Beaumont, Texas), or shopping district (Chula Vista, CA).

“Old Town” seemed rather generic to our secret shoppers.



Chula Vista's New View

How a gateway sign helped a town's image.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion #26:

The “gateway” from Highway 2 is questionable. The mural certainly helps but needs some landscaping and other enhancements to offset the overall gravel and industrial look to the beginning of your historic district.

Suggestion #27:

Consider extending the mural to this side of the street (middle left) as well. This is a poor first impression with no curb appeal. If you entice visitors to this area, what would your first impression be?

Option: Add signage that says “Shopping district - one more block.”



Suggestion #28:

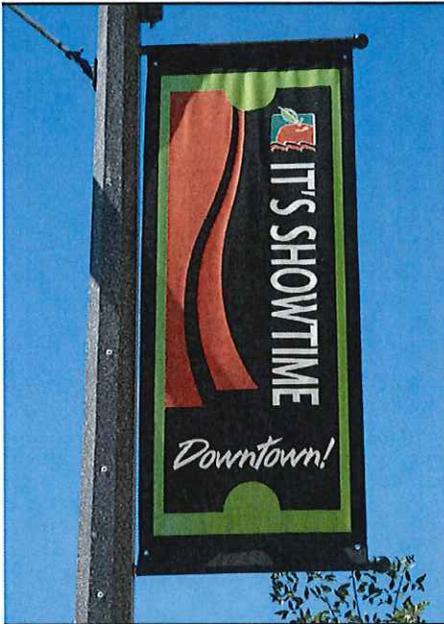
Consider landscaping, removing banners downtown, installing signs (sitting on the ground), etc. This is a gateway building.

Suggestion #29:

Consider changing the pole banners. Don't allow sale banners downtown. Is this really an historic district? It seems more like a garage sale type of area. Don't promote buildings in your banners, promote the experience. This would be addressed in a Signage Plan.

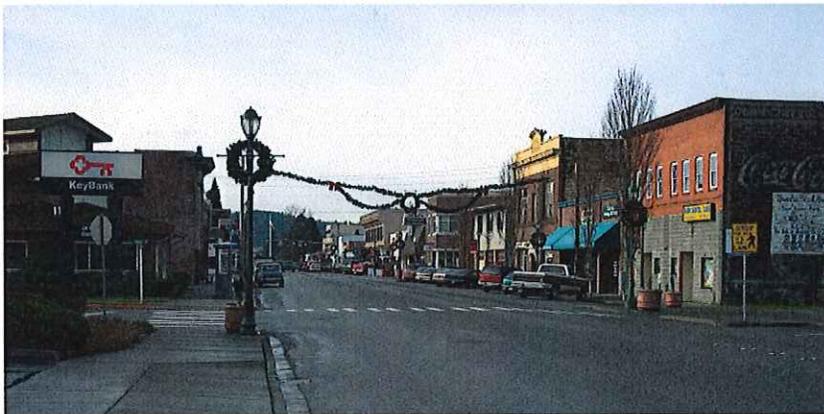


TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Banners should always reflect the community's "brand" or a reason to make downtown the destination.

Remember: People are looking for experiences, not places or buildings.



Suggestion #30:

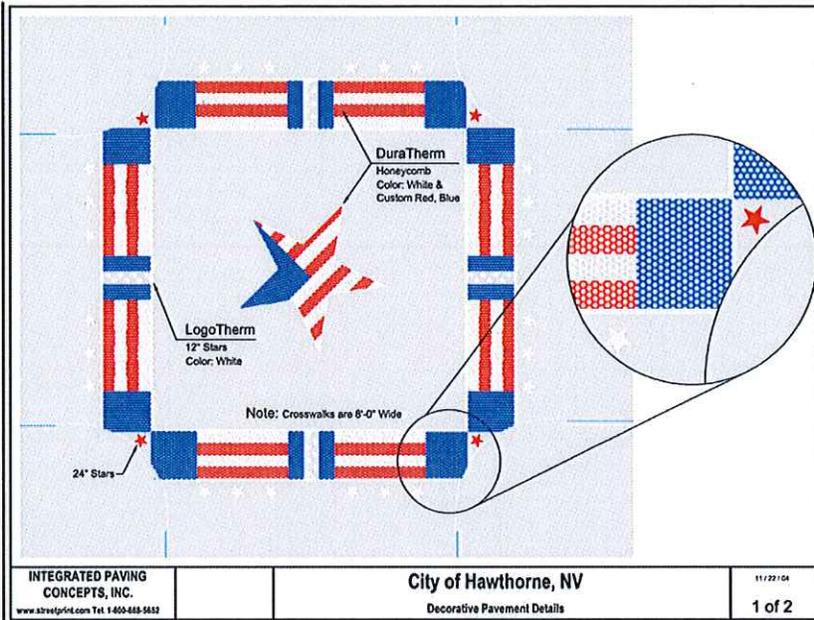
Perhaps this (left) would be a good gateway location where there's a good first impression. The core area of downtown is beautiful and has tremendous potential as a destination retail center. Consider narrowing the street and widening the sidewalks. Make it an intimate setting. It will slow traffic and increase sales.



Suggestion #31:

A great intersection for some decorative treatments (see next page). This is a key intersection and should be a show-stopper.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



NOTE

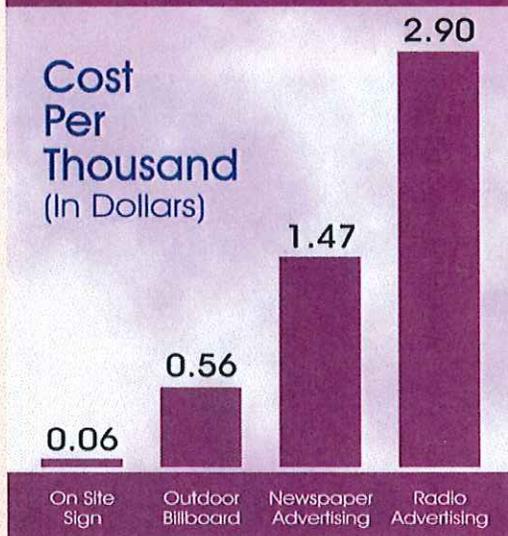
Hawthorne, Nevada, developing a patriotic theme around "America's Patriotic Hometown" is working on making every intersection in town look like the design shown here.

The next couple of pages have to do with the power of attractive and professionally produced signage.

The graph shown below demonstrates the powerful return on investment for well-developed signage - particularly in a downtown location.

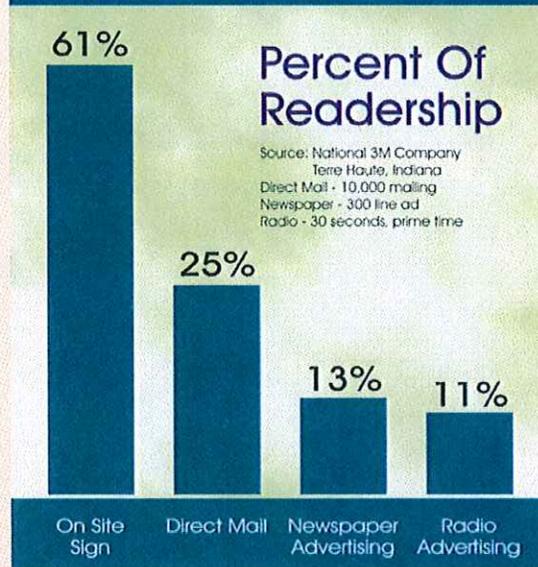
Signage is a great investment - if done right

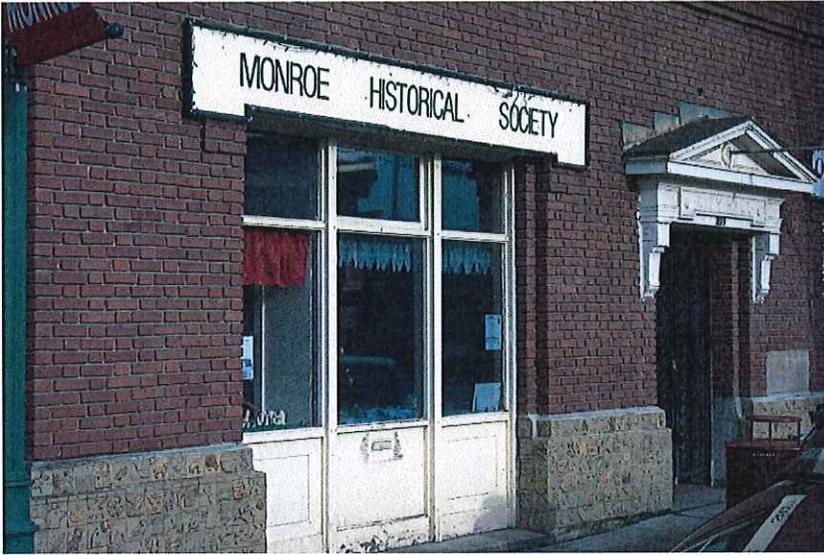
Typical Monthly Advertising Costs
Of Various Advertising Media



Cost per thousand exposures in a community of approximately 130,000 population
Source: Signs and Your Business
US Small Business Administration / Claus and Claus

Readership Comparisons
Of Various Advertising Media





Suggestion #32:

A museum or offices for the historical society? If a museum, promote the activity instead of the organization. Always promote the lure, not the business, or in this case, the organization.

Include operating hours so visitors are enticed back to the museum. Make sure the museum tells stories and is not just a collection of artifacts. Always engage the visitor.



Suggestion #33:

Consider only allowing sandwich boards to be placed "on premise." The proliferation of sandwich boards creates a poor impression of Monroe. Consider a couple of directories instead.



Suggestion #34:

Develop a perpendicular (blade) signage program downtown. This would reduce the need for so many sandwich boards.

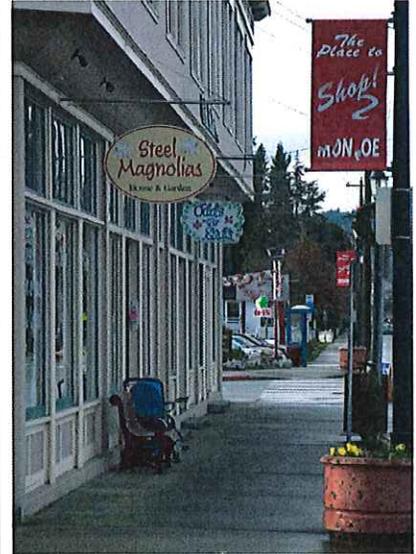


TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



NOTE

"The place to shop" banners won't close the sale. Curb appeal will. A good start with these shops, but could be enhanced even more.



Suggestion #35:

These blade signs are excellent - although the shops could use some hanging baskets and additional beautification. The banners, placed throughout downtown, should be replaced.

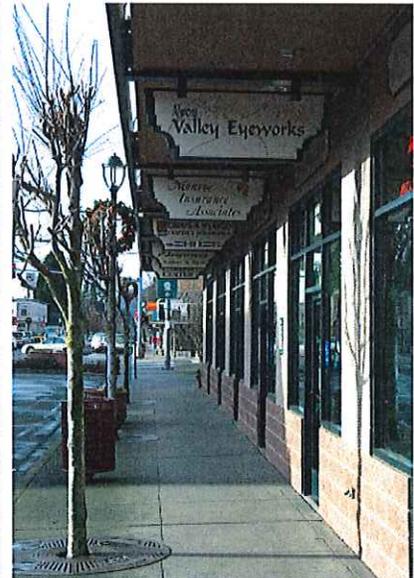
NOTE

Without perpendicular blade signs, it's nearly impossible to see what you have to offer. Visitors both in vehicles and on foot notice signs that are perpendicular to the building. Without them merchants are forced to use sandwich boards in order to inform shoppers of what's available downtown.



NOTE

These signs, in Leavenworth, do a great job of attracting customers. They are of similar size, height from the sidewalk, and sell the lure rather than the name of the business.



Suggestion #36:

These businesses have the right idea. Consider adding planters, pots, benches, etc. to pull attention to the storefronts.

Suggestion #37:

Work with property owners regarding replacement of 60s style florescent signs to something that fits the character of the town and provides a better reflection on the business they aim to promote.



NOTE

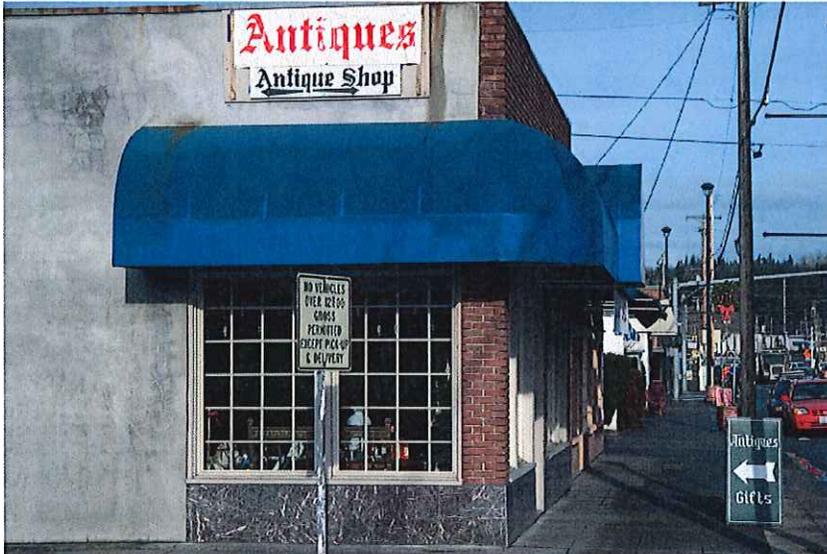
Keep perpendicular signs between 7' and 9' from ground level. If you are promoting an "old fashioned soda fountain" the sign should reflect that. Always sell the "experience."



NOTE

A nice property but the sign diminishes its appeal and perceived value.

In these examples, the signs do little to attract customers and generally bring down the quality of the downtown, its merchants, and the goods being sold. Compare these to signage you'll see in LaConner, Leavenworth, Winthrop, Victoria, Whistler Resort, Port Townsend, Poulsbo, etc. - all with highly successful retail districts.



Suggestion #38:

Sign clutter can hurt business more than help (left). Consider developing merchant-driven signage, beautification, and exterior display standards for downtown. This can be a merchant-driven program.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



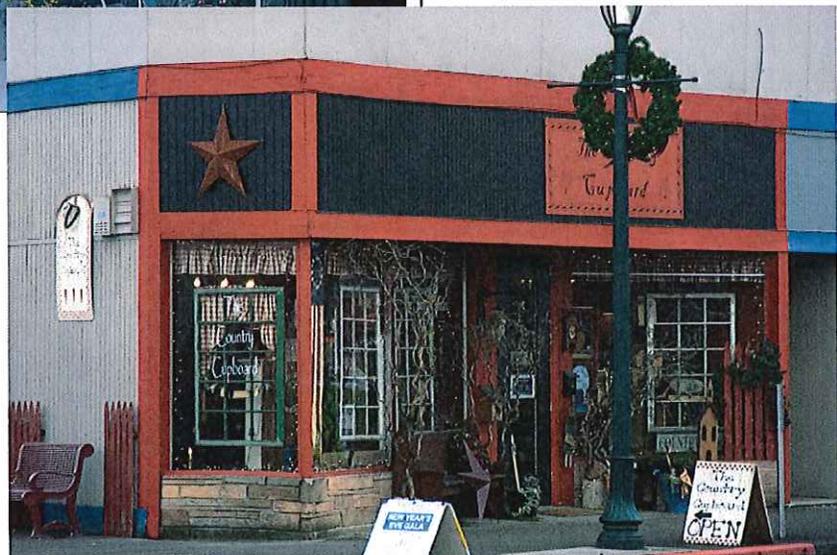
Suggestion #39:

Allow exterior extension of window displays, but not outdoor retail. Notice the photo, center left, that was taken in Blaine, WA. While the building is rather non-descript, this gift shop and florist has done an excellent job of extending window displays outside.

Setting merchandise outside or on tables, makes the community appear to be more of a garage-sale town.

NOTE

The Country Cupboard sets the standard for downtown Monroe. It was also the busiest shop downtown. Great job, excellent appeal.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



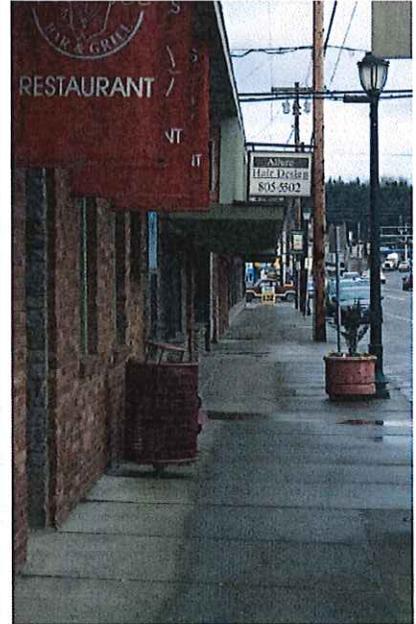
Suggestion #40:

Heaven Scent has good curb appeal, but poor signage. Forget the phone number. Add hanging baskets.

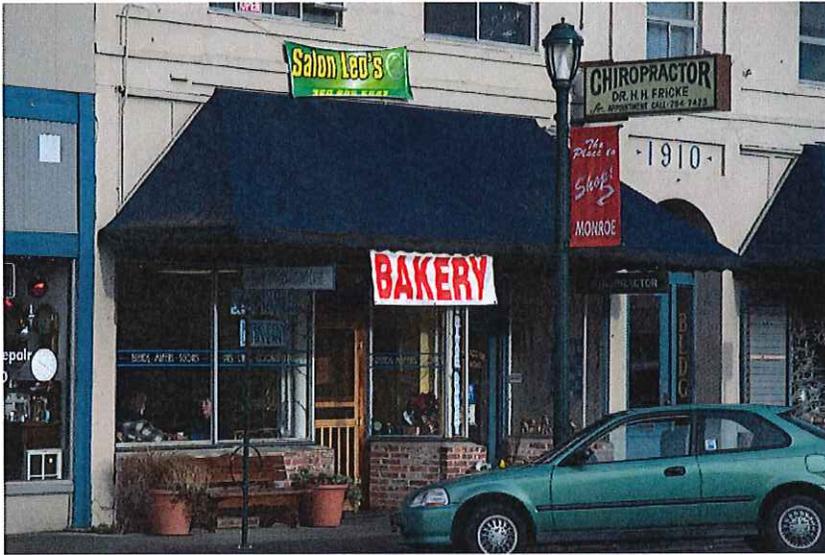


NOTE

Curb appeal is an investment with an excellent return. Invest in it. It doesn't have to be seasonal. The photo to the left was taken in Leavenworth. Visitors are drawn to beautiful places.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion #41:

Good curb appeal, but we'd suggest getting rid of the banner signs. They reduce the overall appeal of the shop and downtown. Plastic banners and historic buildings don't mix. You want to take visitors back to another era. The overall ambiance is reduced with sign clutter, back-lit fluorescent signs, little in the way of beautification, and poorly designed merchant signage.



Suggestion #42:

Branding is the art of differentiation. Don't be afraid to promote what visitors can't get closer to home. All About the Fly looks like a terrific shop that would be worth, all by itself, a special trip for any fishing enthusiast. To be successful you MUST promote specific shops that make Monroe worth a special trip. Others will benefit. What shops do you have that are different than what visitors can get closer to home? Promote those.



Suggestion #43:

Downtown Monroe has tremendous potential. Have a Downtown Development, Branding & Marketing Action Plan created.

Downtown in a nutshell:

- Develop signage standards
- Get rid of banner signs
- Add beautification
- Narrow the street and create gathering places
- Work on facade improvements
- Change the business mix
- Develop new pole banners

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

Monroe Chamber Perfect Proximity

Home Maps Visitors Information Center

Hike, Bike, Rest, and Relax... All year long!

WINTER SPORTS

Cross-country and downhill skiing at nearby Stevens Pass (49 miles east of Monroe) with 1,800 feet of vertical drop; 26 major runs, covering 1,125 acres, 14 lifts and night skiing. There are many trails for snowmobiles in the Cascade foothills. Stevens Pass Ski area has a ski school, rentals, a restaurants and day lodges.

SUMMER RECREATION

Fishing, white-water rafting on the Skykomish River, March through July (rated a class V), swimming and other water sports can be enjoyed in a variety of rivers, streams and lakes, as well as in salt water, which only 15 miles away (Puget Sound). The area from Index to Stevens Pass offers many trails and campsites for all to enjoy, with a panorama of waterfalls, streams and mountain lakes.

GOLF, OF COURSE!

- Blue Boy West Golf Course, located on Florence Acres Road, is also nine holes, with pro shop and a grill serving breakfast and lunch.
- Flowing Lake Golf Course, with 18 holes, is 10 miles northwest of Monroe on Flowing Lake.

SPECTATOR EVENTS AND SHOWS

- Equestrian events
- Car racing (including NASCAR West)
- ATV racing
- Antique, Art, & Crafts shows
- Antique & classic car shows and shows
- Dog and cat shows
- RV, home & garden, and boat shows
- Rodeo

Suggestion #48:

You must include specifics. Equestrian events doesn't tell the visitor anything other than the fact that you have some. Secondly, what do you have that a visitor can't get closer to home?

Other than the fair, it doesn't look like Monroe has much to offer visitors.

Provide specifics. Details. Not generalities.

NOTE

The "Shop Monroe First" website looks like part of a regional or national commercial site - not geared towards visitors. Secondly, it is just a phone book of businesses that advertise on the site (or looks that way).

Monroe Chamber Perfect Proximity

Home Maps Visitors Information Center

What's Happening in Monroe?

THE EVERGREEN STATE FAIR - the #1 County Fair

It spans for its full Twelve days, starting in late August and ending on Labor Day. The fair offers a whole spectrum of exhibits and events, including popular pig racing, hogger shows and chain saw carving, a carnival, continuous entertainment on various small stages, and headliner special entertainment from pop, rock, and country stars. The fairground encompasses 230 acres and is a showcase of innovative preparations, attracting over 850,000 attendees each year and growing!

MONROE FAIR DAYS PARADE

This event kicks off the Evergreen State Fair and is fun for people of all ages. It is held in Downtown Monroe on the first Saturday of the Evergreen State Fair. The parade features over 100 entries, with music, drill teams, floats, horses, antique and classic cars, down, crazy spectacles, and lots of fun!

SUMMERFEST

Sponsored by the Sky Valley Artist Guild featuring local art, crafts, music, food, and the 3 on 3 basketball tournament at Lake Tyee Park.

City of Monroe Washington City Hall 806 West Main Street Monroe, WA 98272 Monroe WA Shopping Site Map

This is your first stop for local information!

shop Monroe First PORTAL

Kool Change PRINTING INC. 360-794-9019

WELCOME TO OUR CITY INFORMATION PORTAL!

QUICK FIND CATEGORIES: Accommodations, Antiques & Collectables, Automotive Related, Banking & Finance, Child Care & Learning, Classified Ads (Post Free), Computer Related, Entertainment, Finance & Investment, Fitness & Wellbeing, Food & Grocery, Gifts and Collectables, Home & Garden, Jewelry, Maps of Monroe, Medical & Dental, Photo & Video Services, Real Estate Related, Veterinarian

SEARCH BY CATEGORY: Category Search CITY GUIDE (Printable)

EVERETT HERALD NEWS

Sports: After a few days of rest, relaxation and recharging the mental batteries, the Seattle Seahawks return to the field this week for a more normal schedule.

More Information

Sports: EVERETT - There was out-rage at the Everett Events Center on Sunday night.

More Information

Local News: Local clinics are reporting the first wave of patients with the flu, and the number of cases is expected to pick up during the next two weeks.

More Information

MONROE WASHINGTON

Kool Change Printing, Inc. Count on Kool Change Printing, Inc. for quality printing and friendly service. We can provide you with everything from photocopies to multi color printing. We can provide you with custom design service or you can supply your own design.

Suggestion #49:

Drop this site with regards to tourism. It doesn't look like Monroe has anything worth visiting since so few businesses are listed.

shop Monroe First PORTAL

SEARCH BY CATEGORY: Category Search CITY GUIDE (Printable)

EVERETT HERALD NEWS

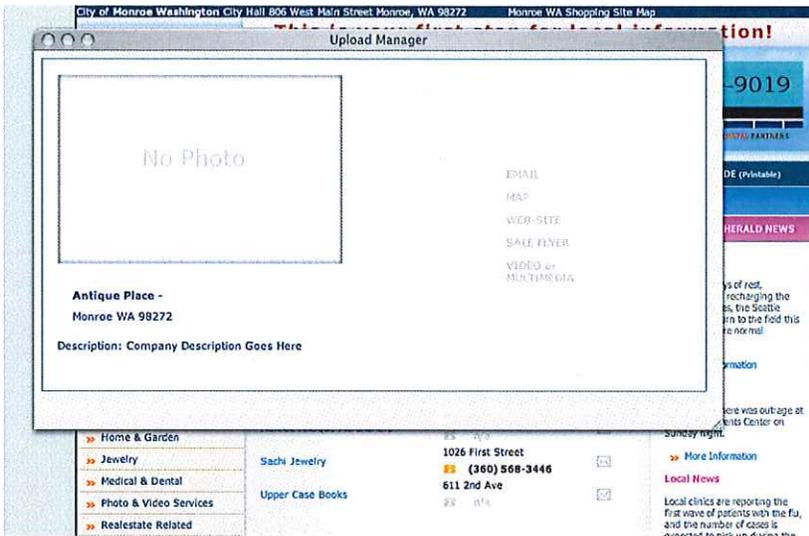
Local News: Local clinics are reporting the first wave of patients with the flu, and the number of cases is expected to pick up during the next two weeks.

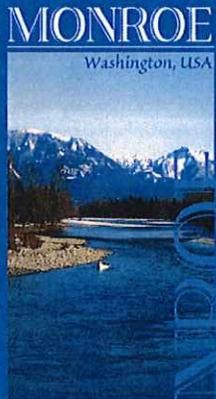
More Information

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TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS





...where your Northwest adventure begins

In order to succeed you must:

- Tell me **WHY** I should visit
- Tell me what's unique about Monroe
- Sell activities and experiences

- Northwest adventure begins here
- Historic Downtown
- Opportunities to shop, eat, relax
- Landscaped city streets
- Largest county fair in Washington
- A variety of farms
- This is Horse Country
- Portal to outdoor recreation
- Fishing, swimming, boating
- White water rafting
- Many golf courses
- Trails, biking, hiking
- Dance, doze, reminisce

NOTE

Even the info pages of the Shop Monroe First site do nothing to attract visitors - and perhaps not even locals.

The internet will play a critical role in attracting visitors to Monroe, and making the community a destination.

Ninety-four percent of people with internet access use it to decide where to go for vacations, getaways, and even day trips.

Having a website is one thing, but is it good enough to close the sale? Does it provide the details necessary to plan a trip to the area?

Are your brochures downloadable on the website?

Start the website with "Pick Your Season". Then with "Pick Your Passion," which lists activities and attractions available that time of year. Always promote what's different or special and then promote the diversions: The things visitors can do closer to home but will do while in the area.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



It takes a village to obtain success. It must also be a grassroots effort - top down seldom works.

- The business community must take the lead

- Business organizations take on the cause

- Together they come to the city for help

- The business community STILL takes the lead. The city only provides support: grants, ordinances, funding, technical assistance

- Winning popularity contests won't result in a successful effort. You can't be all things to all people.

- Every branding effort requires a tireless "pioneer."

We recommend that Monroe consider having a Tourism Development, Branding & Marketing Action Plan developed that would address all of the "suggestions" made in this assessment, as well as signage, gateways, downtown improvements, etc.

Developing a strong brand is critical to a successful tourism and economic development program and creates the foundation for downtown development, tourism marketing, signage, gateways, etc.

Suggestions #50 - #57:

#50. Sell experiences, not geography, not organizations.

#51. Provide specifics, not generalities. Develop day trips making Monroe the hub for area activities.

#52. Develop a Style Guide to create continuity in your marketing efforts.

#53. Tell your visitors WHY they should visit Monroe.

#54. Promote what visitors can't get closer to home. Those are your primary "attractors." Then promote the "diversions" - things visitors can do closer to home, but will do in their "down time" in Monroe.

#55. Lodging taxes should be invested, not given away as grants. Are you seeing a return on your investment?

#56. Don't "cheapen" the product with coupons, poorly produced brochures and fliers.

#57. Promote the heck out of your greatest asset, the fairgrounds, as a hub to the Cascade Mountain Experience. It is your greatest tourism asset. Leverage it as much as possible.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

When performing the assessment process, we asked two individuals their impressions of Monroe. A brand does not revolve around logos or slogans, but is what you are known for. A brand is what people think of you.

In this exercise, we asked these two people (one lives in Everett, the other in Puyallup) what they know of Monroe and what their impressions of the community are. We did this by asking a series of questions and having them do some research about the community - as any visitor might.

1. Without doing any research, what is your impression of Monroe? What does the city conjure up in your mind?

As a Washington resident all my life, my first image of Monroe is that of a small, out of the way town along Highway 2. I've driven past while going over the mountains a couple of times, but I've never stopped there. I know the Evergreen State Fair is held there, but that's about it.

2. Would you go to Monroe for a day trip or an overnight stay? If so, why? If not, why not?

Without researching what there is to see and do, no, I wouldn't go to Monroe for a day trip or overnight stay. I can't think of any particular reason to go; I'm not familiar enough with the area to know if there would be something there to make it worthwhile, and it isn't a place I would think of as a good getaway.

3. Review websites and call visitor information and critique both. Let me know if the marketing materials you receive or people you talk to would entice you to visit.

The person at the Chamber of Commerce was friendly and helpful. She described Monroe as a nice, small rural town with beautiful scenery and outdoor activities. She also mentioned the fairgrounds and various events that are held there, including the State Fair. She sent a packet of materials including a brochure on Monroe and a stack of other various brochures and guides.

The main brochure isn't bad, quality wise. It includes a handy insert with restaurants, hotels, etc. It's full color, glossy, which is nice, but it's low on information. It basically contains a few short snippets of information around some nice photos. It doesn't present Monroe as being much of a destination, other than mentioning the Fair. The other brochures show Monroe as having a lot of parks and outdoor activities available; but that's not unique to a community in this area. You can go to Issaquah or Snoqualmie for good hiking and biking, and most communities have nice parks and outdoor areas. The Fairgrounds seems to be their main draw.

The Chamber of Commerce website overall lacks a good graphic look and feel. The visitor section has some basic information, such as lodging options, restaurants and so forth, but doesn't provide enough information or phone numbers. It makes little effort to answer the question, "Why should I go there?" There is a short section on recreation that gives brief descriptions of what there is to do in the area, but it isn't much. I also didn't like the fact

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

that each link you opened in the visitor section opened a new browser window; and, the navigation menu on the newly opened window was different from the visitor section navigation menu. That might be confusing to some users and make it more difficult for people to find the information they are looking for.

All in all, the website and printed materials on Monroe were not good enough to close the sale. After looking into Monroe, I'm left with the same conclusion I started with: it isn't a place I'd think of as a good getaway. Unless I was planning to go to the Fair or to another event held at the fairgrounds, I wouldn't visit Monroe. I didn't find anything that showed me that the community was unique or had activities to make me want to visit.

MARKETING ASSESSMENT #2

Initial image and impressions of Monroe:

As a Western Washington resident, my experience of Monroe conjures up images of a strip mall city on the way to Stevens Pass. The correctional facility comes to mind, and lastly, the Evergreen State Fair.

Would a trip to Monroe be a day trip or an overnight stay?

I would consider staying there overnight to be a bit closer to Stevens Pass, or if for some reason, I was participating in an event at the fairground. I do not think I would have a reason to just visit the city. I might stop there for an hour on the way to Stevens Pass or the east side of the mountains. One of my best friends grew up there and still visits friends there, but has never suggested we have a girls shopping/luncheon day there, although we have been to Snohomish, La Conner, Langley and Mount Vernon for the day.

Review of websites and chamber information:

When I telephoned the Monroe Chamber of Commerce, the representative was very helpful. We spoke for a little over 8 minutes, and she gave me phone numbers for four motels and made several restaurant suggestions. Interestingly, her first suggestion was the Cascadia Inn in Skykomish, as they were a "member". (I had told her I was considering coming for New Years with two teenagers, and we would be skiing). She was very descriptive about accommodations and dining spots that teenagers would enjoy. She gave me numbers for Stevens Pass and all the restaurants she mentioned. She did not suggest sending me marketing materials, so I forgot to ask, but later called back and spoke with Denise, requested their tourist packet, and it arrived the next day.

The first item out of the envelope was the Hometown Values Coupon Magazine, which only confirmed my impression of Monroe being a strip mall city. The first page featured Cold Stone Creamery and various pizza places. I noticed that the Calendar of Events for Oct. – Dec., showcased 12 events, however only 6 of those were happening in Monroe, the others were either in Everett, Snohomish or Kirkland.

There was no specific pamphlet for just Monroe, however there was one entitled The Great Outdoors, and it was very informative. It made me realize that Monroe would be a great jumping off point for hikers, mountain bikers, and river rafters. I also appreciated the East Snohomish County Area Map as it was large and showed all the important places, i.e. schools, parks and downtown area. The newspaper included covered all the small towns in the Cascade Valley, I think that's what they called it, and was somewhat interesting. It would be good for someone relocating, but didn't have tourist information. At this point, although the Chamber representative was very friendly, I don't see that Monroe has much to offer me as a visitor.

Monroe is not listed in Best Places Northwest. The next step was the web. Googling Monroe, WA got me to the City of Monroe site (www.ci.monroe.wa.us); however, it does not list Visitor Information anywhere! I searched through the site, and finally, from the "Other links and downloads" on the

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

Home Page, found the Monroe Chamber of Commerce site (www.chamber-monroe.org). Going to the Chamber site, I clicked on Visitor Information Page. The pictures of the Information Center and the pamphlet rack certainly don't inspire a visit. The page has a very unsophisticated look. The Lodging page provided the few area accommodations, but could use better descriptions and the Dining page was not in alphabetical order.

I was intrigued by the Shop Monroe First logo (www.shopmonroefirst.com) and decided to check it out. While the categories listed covered a lot of areas, you can tell that it is seriously lacking as there were no categories for apparel, clothing by type (i.e. men/women/children), sportswear or sports equipment. I found this hard to believe especially when they have a Fred Meyer there that carries everything. I discovered the Fred Meyer listing under jewelry. The majority of the places mentioned did not have phone numbers, which was especially frustrating in the accommodation category. Very few listings provided a direct link to the business's website. I found the website to be unattractive and lacking in any information to inspire a visit, let alone plan a visit. The phone book would be much more helpful.

Moving on to www.experiencewashington.com I received a nice, generic description of Monroe with the Chamber listed as a contact point. The State site did nothing to help sell Monroe after checking out Things to Do and going through several options that either sent me back to the Chamber site or onto the Snohomish County website (www.snohomish.org).

The County website simply lists any event or listing that contains the word Monroe; under Communities there is a nice description of Monroe along with links to the chamber, city, school district, etc.

One of my favorite sources of travel information is TripAdvisor's forums (www.tripadvisor.com), but no one has ever written about Monroe or asked any questions about it. Expedia, Orbitz and Hotels.com all were listed as having accommodations in Monroe, but this only held true for Expedia and Orbitz.

Searching through Washington Tourist (www.washingtontourist.com) I was rewarded with two quilting references. Frommer's (www.frommers.com) mentioned passing through Monroe to get to Leavenworth. Finally, Go Northwest (www.gonorthwest.com) baffled me by making me choose between Puget Sound and the Cascade Mountains -- Monroe is considered to be part of the Central Cascades at this site. There was a one page listing with the usual four motels with nothing listed for Attractions or Activities.

My conclusions after my research were that there is not much for a visitor to do in Monroe unless one is going to the fair. However, even then, there is nothing to entice a visitor into downtown Monroe.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

This visitor assessment was prepared by the team at:



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