

A Strategic Plan for the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum, Historic Schoenbrunn Village, and Clay Capital Heritage Center

January 17, 2023



Introduction

The multi-site Tuscarawas County nonprofit history organization comprised of Dennison Railroad Depot Museum (the governing organization), Historic Schoenbrunn Village and the Clay Capital Heritage Center (CCHC) in Uhrichsville updated its strategic plan in 2022.

The Dennison Railroad Depot Museum is the organization’s flagship, housed in a national historic landmark train station in Dennison, Ohio. The CCHC will be newly opened in 2023 in a historic building in downtown Uhrichsville; it is a move and expansion of the existing Museum of Clay Industry and Folk Art. Schoenbrunn, an Ohio History Connection (OHC) property that was locally managed by the Dennison Depot for 15 years, will be transitioned back to OHC management in 2023.

Under this plan, the organization is pursuing a range of community-serving uses that provide revenue support for its mission: the Streetside Center—a large, flexible venue in Dennison; the Pullman Bed & Breakfast—an overnight rental for visitors adjacent to the Depot; and the Business Car—a smaller rental space on the campus. It is also improving its flagship location in Dennison, opening a new museum, and ending some longtime agreements to make room for success in new priorities. As the organization, its audience, and the community fully emerge from two years of pandemic, there is much anticipate.



Core Elements

Mission Statement

We serve as the heart to our communities by delivering compelling stories, programs, experiences, and relationships through our historic sites.

Vision Statement

A new generation of passionate legacy keepers ensure continued pride in our history, our historic sites, and our communities.

Core Values



We are honored to serve as **stewards** of authentic historic places on behalf of the citizens of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

We inspire **pride** in and lift up our communities.

We bring history to life for all people through **meaningful**, memory-making **experiences**.

We strive to lead with **excellence** in everything we do.

We embody **hospitality** in our everyday attitude.

Experience Statement

These Experience Statements describe the experiences available to visitors at each site, including learning, attitudes, behavior, emotions, and sensory experiences.

Dennison Railroad Depot Museum

The Dennison Railroad Depot experience engages guests fully in a 1940s American train and canteen experience of the 1940s, including the authentic sights, sounds, and smells of that era. Through the hospitality, programs, exhibits, and events throughout this National Historic Landmark station, visitors feel inspired, excited, nostalgic, and touched by the experiences of United States military veterans and active duty servicepeople.

Clay Capital Heritage Center

The Clay Heritage Center experience connects art, history, and science to educate and inspire guests about the “Clay Capital of the World.” Visitors will learn about the clay industry and art “from mine to fire” through minds-on, hands-on encounters that build feelings of curiosity about the industry and community pride for the role of Tuscarawas clay in building America.

Priorities & Action Items

Organizational Sustainability

Sustainability encompasses adequate revenue, staffing, and volunteer help to support organizational activities. In addition, it includes a reasonably balanced goals between long-term audience growth and depth of impact within those served.

- A. **Address the staffing needs of the organization.** Because the organization is small and relies on volunteers for its large events and programs, it is essential that the staff skill and size fit the volume and complexity of programs/events, projects, and day-to-day responsibilities.
 1. Set staffing levels to workload and vice versa.
 2. Develop a succession plan for key staff positions, including the Executive Director.
 - a) Create a manual for key functions/positions in the organization.
 - b) Provide leadership development for staff members.
 3. Ensure higher pay can be achieved for high priority positions.
 4. Develop a succession plan for the train ride programs, including Polar Express, given their complexity and safety requirements.
 - a) Hire a Polar Express Manager with relevant expertise (EX: contracts, negotiation, and advocacy).
 - b) Create a manual for Polar Express management.
- B. **Establish and pursue a revenue/development plan.** Staff leadership does an excellent job acquiring sponsorships and transportation enhancement funds for major projects, and the annual fund is successful. Expansion on these efforts promises to diversify and stabilize the funding to the organization.
 1. Strengthen the membership program.
 2. Diversify the Annual Fund approach to integrate planned giving, stock giving, and a full range of options.
 3. Conduct a campaign (endowment) feasibility study.
- C. **Diversify earned revenue/program income.** Existing events and programs, such as Polar Express, offer models of success in community engagement and in revenue generation. However, adding other lines of revenue—especially some that do not rely on events or programs run by Dennison Railroad Depot staff and volunteers—will provide economic security for the organization. The primary method of earned revenue outside of programs available for growth is event, meeting, and overnight rentals across venues, and connecting and organizing venue rentals under one umbrella promises to be a more efficient effort for the organization. This could include setting a shared set of policies for rentals wherever possible; hosting a singular online presence for all rental spaces with prices, terms, conditions, and availability; and hiring one events manager staff position to handle all promotion, booking, and management of rentals:



1. Ensure the success of the Pullman business venture.
 2. Ensure the success of the Streetside Center venture.
 3. Launch the meeting and event space upstairs in the new Clay Capital Heritage Center.
 4. Promote the use of the “Red Room”/theater in the Depot for private events when appropriate.
 5. Utilize the restored Business Car/conference as a rental space.
- D. **Plan for COVID and similar disruptions.** As the pandemic continues to be part of public life, have a plan in place should partial or total closures or safety measures be reinstated.
- E. **Expand the audience for the sites, programs, and events year-round.** Though the organization enjoys a positive reputation, some know it only through a single event: the Polar Express or Fall Train Rides, for example. To be truly sustainable, an organization must be seen by its community as more than a single event.
1. Hire a dedicated marketing consultant to provide support for communications and promotion.
 2. Identify and pursue a diverse set of audience targets for site marketing: for example, younger adult visitors or families
 3. Clarify and categorize programs, events, and sites and market them clearly to audiences: signature events (Depot Polar Express and Depot Gala, for example), educational programs, community events (veterans’ remembrances), fundraisers, etc.
 4. Participate in or develop community-based events/programs throughout the year that encompass the sites. (EX: Connect to and expand participation in the Dennison Railroad Festival)
 5. Market the sites comprehensively year-round as part of the “History Loop” and as part of the “Dreamsville USA Tourism Corridor” route.

Community Support

Community support is a core value and a way of doing business for the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum organization. While visitor numbers are important to museums, the positive impacts generated

for the three communities that house the sites are an essential measure of success as well, and additional efforts are outlined as part of this Strategic Plan.

- A. **Create an annual engagement plan and implement with a focus on where to focus energy and time.** There are limitless opportunities to serve the community and to partner. Each year, take stock of upcoming projects, community needs, and organizational priorities, and determine where these intersect, focusing the most time and energy there.
- B. **Expand the Dennison Railroad Depot campus.** With the Dennison downtown undergoing a revitalization project, it is an ideal time for the Depot campus to expand. Include a full, 360-degree branding/marketing plan that encompasses the entire Dennison Depot Museum campus. Ensure visitors feel connected to the downtown project and welcomed to the Depot campus. Create a cohesive sense of place throughout the Depot, Streetside Center, Pullman B & B, and tracks area.
 - 1. Accept resignation of current restaurant operator and transition the space to make room for other priorities in the Depot building.
 - 2. Expand the gift shop with railroad, WWII, and local themed merchandise.
 - 3. Include a “lunch stand” service for refreshments.
- C. **Identify community needs that can be filled by the Streetside Center.** These might include WiFi, hospitality like cookies and coffee, and warming stations, for example.
- D. **Connect to emergency services for planning purposes.** Determine what role each site can play in the case of a disaster in the community, and be prepared as part of emergency planning.
- E. **Strengthen and promote the Dreamsville, USA Tourism Corridor.** The communities on the corridor are working to provide more options for travelers, and the sites are part of those options. Provide support for the corridor and its marketing and integrate its messaging into marketing about the towns.



History and Interpretation

- A. **Successfully open the Clay Capital Heritage Center.** This new museum site is a significant opportunity to better engage visitors, store the collections in an accessible space, and even earn revenue through the coffee shop.

- B. **Expand and revise select areas of the Dennison Railroad Depot campus.** Some elements of expansion at the Dennison Railroad Depot campus are in support of interpretation:
 1. Develop a new welcome and orientation area to serve as the waiting area for train rides.
 2. Create a railroad history video to augment the new welcome/orientation/waiting area.
 3. Revise the lower level, original exhibit spaces.
 4. Bring the platform alive as an outdoor exhibit and experience.
 5. Brand and market the site as all four corners, “streetside to trackside.”
- C. **Add train rides between Dennison and Newcomerstown from Memorial to Labor Day.** These will increase opportunities for interpretation and storytelling and increase activity around the site.

Excellence and Leadership

- A. **Establish National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) designation for the Clay Capital Heritage Center.** The NRHP is the listing of nationally historically significant sites and properties in the United States. Gaining NRHP status for the Clay Capital Heritage Center will generate additional community pride in and recognition for the importance of the site.
- B. **Complete the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) accreditation submission.** AAM is the national association for museums practice. Its accreditation program is the gold standard for best practice, so gaining accreditation would convey additional prestige and good reputation to the organization.
- C. **Improve collections.**
 1. Establish new collections storage in the Clay Capital Heritage Center (Phase 10).
 2. Actively collect items to fill gaps in collections based on “wish list.”
 3. Create a plan to handle artifact backlog.
 4. Create a moving plan to move artifacts from current storage to new storage.
 5. Actively expand our collections database.
- D. **As a regional leader in Historic Preservation, develop a strategy for addressing the maintenance backlog over time.** Every historic site has maintenance needs, and an organization overseeing multiple sites and a collection will have many ongoing maintenance demands. Identify a process for triaging, accomplishing, and tracking maintenance concerns to avoid overwhelm and burnout around maintenance.
- E. **Create a culture of appreciation.**
 1. Communicate the outcomes and benefits of major projects in public forums.
 2. Conduct regular appreciation get-togethers and/or send regular acknowledgement communications to note accomplishments.
 3. Make sincere expressions of appreciation a regular part of board, staff, volunteer, member and community interaction. Simply take a moment when seeing one another to express appreciation for jobs well done, work undertaken, assistance given, and great outcomes.

Implementation Matrix

Year	Priority: Action Item	Lead / Responsible Party	Cost	Support
	Organizational Sustainability (OS)			
	(OS) A. Address the staffing needs of the organization.			
2023	(OS) A.1. Set staffing levels to workload and vice versa.	Executive Director, Director of Museums, Chair of Board Personnel Committee	1) Increase hourly wages, 2) Increase all staff to competitive museum pay (long-term goal)	Personnel Committee, Staff Leadership
2022	(OS) A.2. Develop a succession plan for key staff positions, including the Executive Director.	Executive Director, incoming Board President	Existing staff time	Approved by Board at large
2023	(OS) A.2.a. Create a manual for key functions/positions in the organization.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	Existing staff time	Senior Staff
2022-2027	(OS) A.2.b. Provide leadership development for staff members.	Board, Executive Director	\$5,000	Director of Museums
2022-2027	(OS) A.3. Ensure higher pay can be achieved for high priority positions.	Board, Director of Museums	Existing staff time, additional funds for increases	Board, Senior staff
2022-2024	(OS) A.4. Develop a succession plan for the train ride programs, including Polar Express.	Executive Director	Existing staff time	Director of Museums, Polar Express Manager, Senior Staff
2022	(OS) A.4.a. Hire a Polar Express Manager.	Executive Director, Chair of Board Personnel	\$46,000	Personnel Committee

		Committee		
2022-23	(OS) A.4.b. Create a manual for Polar Express management.	Polar Express Manager	Existing staff time	Executive Director, Director of Museums, Senior Staff
2023-2025	(OS) B. Establish and pursue a revenue / development plan.	Board, Executive Director	Existing Staff time	Executive Director, Director of Museums, Senior Staff
2023-2025	(OS) B.1. Strengthen the membership program.	Executive Director, Membership Chair	\$3,000	Senior Staff, Board Approval
2022 - 2025	(OS) B.2. Diversify the Annual Fund (integrate planned giving, stock giving, etc.).	Executive Director	\$5,000	Director of Museums, Senior Staff
2024	(OS) B.3. Conduct a campaign (endowment) feasibility study.	Board	\$4,000	Executive Director
2023-2026	(OS) C. Diversify earned revenue/program income.	Director of Museums	Existing staff time, addition of facilities manager position (future)	Senior Staff, Executive Director, Board
2022-2023	(OS) C.1. Ensure the success of the Pullman business venture.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	Marketing Consultant @ \$18,000/year, Marketing Collateral @ \$5,000/year, Pullman Management Team @ \$7,500/year	Senior Staff, Staff, Board, Cleaning Team, AirBNB, Hospitable.com
2022-2023	(OS) C.2. Ensure the success of the Streetside Center venture.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	Marketing Consultant, Marketing Collateral,	Senior Staff, Staff, Board, Cleaning Team

			Management Team; Streetside Center Management Team	
2024	(OS) C.3. Launch the meeting and event space upstairs in the Clay Capital Heritage Center.	Executive Director, Director of Museums, Clay Advisory Committee	Existing staff time	City of Uhrichsville
2023	(OS) C.4. Promote the use of the "Red Room"/theater in the Depot for private events when appropriate.	Senior Staff	Existing staff time	Executive Director, Director of Museums, Senior Staff
2023	(OS) C.5. Utilize the restored Business Car/conference room as a rental space.	Senior Staff	Existing staff time	Executive Director, Director of Museums, Senior Staff
2023	(OS) D. Plan for COVID/pandemic disruptions.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	Existing staff time	Board
2023-2027	(OS) E. Expand the audience for the sites, programs, and events year-round.	Senior staff, marketing coordinator	Cost reviewed per event	Executive Director, Site Managers, Advisory Committees, Board
2024	(OS) E.1. Hire a dedicated marketing consultant to provide support for communications and promotion.	Executive Director, Director of Museums, Marketing Coordinator	\$18,000	Personnel Committee
2024	(OS) E.2. Identify and pursue a diverse set of audience targets for	Senior staff, Marketing	Existing staff time, consultant	Staff

	site marketing.	Consultant	fees	
2022-2025	(OS) E.3. Clarify and categorize programs, events, and sites and market them clearly to audiences: signature events (Depot Polar Express, Depot Gala, and Schoenbrunn Trade Faire), educational programs, community events (veterans' remembrances), fundraisers, etc.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	Existing staff time, consultant fees	Site Managers, Senior Staff, Volunteer Committees
2022-2025	(OS) E.4. Participate in or develop community-based events/programs throughout the year that encompass the sites.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	Existing staff time	Site Managers, Senior Staff, Volunteer Committees
2023-2027	(OS) E.5. Market the sites comprehensively year-round as part of the "History Loop" and as part of the "Dreamsville USA" route.	Senior staff, Marketing Consultant	\$10,000	Staff, Marketing Consultant
Year	Priority: Action Item	Lead / Responsible Party	Cost	Support
	Community Support (CS)			
2023	(CS) A. Create an annual engagement plan and implement.	Executive Director, Director of Museums, Marketing Coordinator	Existing staff time	Senior Staff
2023-2027	(CS) B. Expand the Dennison Railroad Depot campus.	Executive Director, Director of Museums		
2023	(CS) B.1. Accept resignation of current restaurant operator and transition the space to make room for other priorities in the Depot building.	Executive Director	\$0	Board
2023	(CS) B.2. Expand the gift shop with railroad, WWII, and local history-	Director of Museums	\$15,000	Senior Staff, Board

	themed merchandise.			
2026	(CS) B.3. Include a "lunch stand" service for refreshments.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	\$20,000	Senior Staff, Staff, Board
2023-2027	(CS) C. Identify community needs that can be filled by the Streetside Center.	Streetside Manager, Marketing Coordinator	Existing staff time	Senior Staff
2025	(CS) D. Connect to emergency services for planning purposes, and determine/prepare roles each site can play in the case of a disaster in the community.	Safety/Security Team to be developed	Existing staff time	Polar Express Manager, Senior Staff, Tusc Emergency, Mayors, Commissioners
2022-2027	(CS) E. Strengthen and promote the Dreamsville, USA Tourism Corridor.	Senior Staff, Historic Dreamsville Association	Staff and committee time	Mayors, Clay Museum
Year	Priority: Action Item	Lead / Responsible Party	Cost	Support
	History and Interpretation (HI)			
2023	(HI) A. Successfully open the Clay Capital Heritage Center.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	\$450,000 (Clay Museum Budget)	Clay Advisory Committee, Depot Board
2023-2026	(HI) B. Expand and revise select areas at Dennison Railroad Depot:	Director of Museums		
2023	(HI) B.1. Develop a new welcome and orientation area to serve as the waiting area for train rides.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	\$15,000	
2023	(HI) B.2. Create a railroad history video to augment the new welcome/orientation/waiting area.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	\$15,000	

2025	(HI) B.3. Revise the lower level, original exhibit spaces	Executive Director, Director of Museums	\$25,000	
2024	(HI) B.4. Bring the platform alive as an outdoor exhibit and experience.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	\$25,000	City of Dennison
2022 - 2027	(HI) B.5. Brand and market the site as all four corners, "streetside to trackside."	Executive Director, Director of Museums	Existing marketing budget	Board
2024	(HI) C. Add train rides between Dennison and Newcomerstown from Memorial to Labor Day.	Senior Staff, Genesee & Wyoming	Appalachia Grant	Village, Mayor, Board
Year	Priority: Action Item	Lead / Responsible Party	Cost	Support
	Excellence and Leadership (EL)			
2023	(EL) A. Establish National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) designation for the Clay Capital Heritage Center.	Director of Museums	\$5,000	Ohio Historic Preservation Office
2026	(EL) B. Complete the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) accreditation submission.	Executive Director, Director of Museums	\$5,000	Senior Staff, Staff
	(EL) C. Improve collections.			
2024-2026	(EL) C.1. Establish new collections storage in the Clay Capital Heritage Center (Phase 10).	Director of Museums	\$575,000	Senior Staff, Staff
2023-2027	(EL) C.2. Actively collect items to fill gaps in collections based on "wish list."	Curator/ Registrar, Director of Museums	Collections acquisitions	Senior Staff, Board
2023-2024	(EL) C.3. Create a plan to handle artifact backlog.	Curator/ Registrar,	Existing staff time	AmeriCorps Program

		Director of Museums		
2023-2024	(EL) C.4. Create a moving plan to move artifacts from current storage to new storage.	Curator/ Registrar, Executive Director, Director of Museums	Existing staff time	
2024-2025	(EL) C.5. Actively expand our collections database.	Curator/ Registrar	Existing staff time, volunteer time	
2022-2024	(EL) D. Develop a strategy for addressing the maintenance backlog over time.	Executive Director, Director of Museums, Board Facilities Committee	Priorities w/ estimates identified each year	Village of Dennison (Depot); Ohio History Connection (Schoenbrunn),
	(EL) E. Create a culture of appreciation.			
2023 - 2027	(EL) E.1. Communicate the outcomes and benefits of major projects in public forums.	Senior Staff	\$0	Board Members
2023 - 2027	(EL) E.2. Conduct regular appreciation get-togethers and/or acknowledgements.	Marketing Coordinator	\$250	Staff
2022 - 2027	(EL) E.3. Make sincere expressions of appreciation a regular part of board, staff, and volunteer interaction.	Executive Director, Board Members	\$0	Board Members, Staff

Concluding the Partnership at Historic Schoenbrunn Village

Historic Schoenbrunn Village in New Philadelphia is owned by the Ohio History Connection and has been operated by the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum organization as a partnership site for 15 years (2008-2023). During this time, the partnership built relationships, expanded audience, improved the physical state of the site, and undertook important programming initiatives. The institution takes considerable pride in what has been accomplished and cares deeply for the Schoenbrunn and New Philadelphia communities.

The following are a few examples of the progress made at Schoenbrunn Historic Village during the 15-year partnership agreement with Dennison Railroad Depot Museum, the Ohio History Connection, and other partners:

- Created a plan to rebuild 4 missing cabins. Completed rebuild on **American Indian** Cabin 17 and Schebosh Cabin. Created ghost wire house to begin fundraising for Wilhelm Cabin.
- Planned 2 phases to update exhibitions with additional perspectives, especially the Delaware Tribe. Completed Phase 1 implementation.
- Added a sculpture of the 3 Delaware Clan (turkey, wolf, turtle) to welcome visitors in 3 languages: English, Delaware, German.
- Celebrated the 250th Anniversary of the site.
- Created or enhanced Signature programs and fundraisers: Sleepy Hollow, Pumpkin Glow, Colonial Trade Faire, Homeschool Day, Food Truck Fest and more.
- Developed new branding, new logos, new marketing, new commercials, and social media messaging.
- Completed archeology and repairs to all the structures, the Visitor Center, and the park.
- Improved the landscape: cutting and planting of trees and decorative and historic gardens.
- Undertook a reburial with a tribal partner.
- Rebuilt the volunteer program, instated museum hopper volunteer program, and built a membership program.

At the same time, ownership of a site conveys authority that operations alone can never do, and with the responsibilities facing the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum organization in 2023 and beyond—including opening a new museum, expanding railroad excursions across the region, and operating multiple community-based revenue ventures to support the museums—operating a site on behalf of another entity is no longer practical. While the organization is proud of its service to the state, to Historic Schoenbrunn Village and those who care about its story, and to the community of New Philadelphia, Schoenbrunn and its partners will be better served by the site returning to the Ohio History Connection. This will allow for a reassessment of how needs such as ongoing maintenance concerns, staffing challenges to meet programming needs, and stakeholder relations, including American Indian consultation, can best be met. At the end of March 2023, according to the contract agreements, the Dennison Depot will transition the management of Historic Schoenbrunn Village back to the Ohio History Connection.

Planning Process

The Dennison Railroad Depot organization's strategic planning process spanned six months and was overseen by a Planning Committee:

- Adria Bergeron, Board Member and Director of Marketing and Communications at Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District
- Becky Clough, Clay Heritage Museum Manager, Volunteer Coordinator
- Bill Huss, Board Member and Babson College and Law-Reed-Huss Farm Foundation
- Jacob Masters, Director of Museums
- Julie Levengood, Board Member and Group Tour Manager at the Tuscarawas County Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Lori Jackson, Membership Coordinator
- Taylur Cunningham, Marketing Coordinator
- Wendy Zucal, Executive Director



The Strategic Plan process was facilitated by

Jackie Barton, Principal,

Birch Wood Planning, LLC

Gatherings included the following:

- February, April 2022- Kickoff Meetings with Depot leadership to finalize goals and scope, set schedule, and prepare for Planning Committee Meetings and Focus Groups
- April 2022- Planning Committee Meeting
- April 2022- Staff Professional Development
- May 2022- Interviews and Focus Groups with Stakeholders of the organization and community leaders
- May 2022- Planning Committee Meeting
- May 2022- Staff Professional Development

Thank you to interview and focus group participants:

- Adria Bergeron
- Bill Huss
- Blair Hillyer
- Brad Bielski
- Bruce James
- Commissioner Chris Abbuhl
- Councilwoman Vicki O'Hara
- Diane Lautenschleger
- Ethan Zucal
- Heath Manbeck
- Ian Wamboldt
- Julie Levensgood
- Kathy Spring
- Katie Rodriguez
- Kelsey Golec
- Mayor Greg DiDonato
- Mike Clark
- Molly Miller
- Nathan Douglas
- Scott Robinson
- Tracy Stevens