MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

First Impressions Tourism Assessment

City of Coldwater, MI



Executive Summary

October 2026

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I. Introduction

The First Impressions (FI) program was developed in 1991 by the University of Wisconsin Extension to help communities learn about their existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of first-time visitors. The FI program has been used to help communities across the U.S. and Canada inform economic initiatives or further develop community goals and has been modified over the years by various Extension services based on different needs. Michigan State University (MSU) Extension adapted this program via a multi-state grant provided by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development in 2014. MSU Extension's First Impressions Tourism Assessments (FIT) is a unique version of FI for our state and, since inception in 2016, has seen approximately 25 Michigan communities participate in the program.

What is FIT?

FIT is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community. FIT involves developing leaders, assessing the host community, sharing results in a forum open to all, and providing suggestions to advance community-driven tourism. Overall, FIT helps participating communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors. Since inception, FIT has empowered leaders and stakeholders to develop action plans to improve their communities based on new perspectives and suggestions from first-time visitors. These action plans are proven to be the catalysts needed to launch and expand a wide-range of initiatives to support community-driven tourism development across Michigan.

II. Summary of Results

Assessment Approach & Participant Profile

The Coldwater First Impressions Tourism (FIT) assessment was conducted by a team of five assessors who evaluated the community from the perspective of first-time visitors. The assessment included pre-visit research, an in-person visit that included an evaluation of tourism assets and visitor experiences, and follow-up assessment of Coldwater's strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. This report is a general summary of data collected highlighting the team's first impressions of Coldwater.

Pre-visit Assessment and Research:

All five assessors conducted internet research on the City of Coldwater before their visit.

- Assessors spent between 2-4 hours or more researching Coldwater before visiting.
- Assessors used Coldwater tourism and community websites, social media, Google Maps, and other online resources to identify things to do, places to eat, attractions, events, and potential itineraries.

- The digital pre-visit assessment reviewed online information for the purpose of generating a list of to-dos, get an understanding of what Coldwater has to offer visitors, and what assets are highlighted online.

When was the FIT assessment conducted?

- All five assessors visited Coldwater on separate days of the week between mid-July and late August.
- Thursday, Friday, and Saturday were the specific days of the week assessors spent majority of their 24-30 hour visits in the community.
- All five assessors spent one overnight stay in a hotel in the Coldwater vicinity.
- The assessment team experienced a variety of Coldwater's tourism offerings, including the historic downtown, restaurants, shops, cultural and entertainment attractions, parks, lakes and recreational resources, museums, events, lodging, and other community assets.

Participant Profile

Who was on the FIT assessment team?

- Two female assessors, three male assessors.
- Three assessors were Gen X, one Baby Boomer, and one Millennial.
- Two assessors brought their spouse along for their assessment; one spouse was physically handicapped. In total, Coldwater's FIT assessment included seven visitors, but only five of them had FIT assessment responsibilities.
- The five-person team are all residents of Michigan and MSU Extension employees.

Although assessors' personal interests had little bearing on the formation of the five-person team, the team brought a particularly relevant mix of outdoor and tourism interests including **local food and farm enthusiast**, **foodie, music lover, nature lover, history buff, canoe paddler, trail explorer, hiker(s), work traveler(s), antique/thrift shopper, arts and culture buff, biker, swimmer and more.**





Coldwater Community Overview

Coldwater has many of the ingredients needed to function as a distinctive tourism destination. The community combines a historic downtown, attractive architecture, Tibbits Opera House, unique nostalgic attractions such as the Capri Drive-In, railroad heritage, lakes and water-based recreation, outdoor activities, restaurants, shopping, events, and a strong sense of community.

Coldwater also benefits from a strategic location and accessibility through major transportation corridors. This creates an important opportunity to attract visitors who are already traveling through the region.

The assessment suggests that Coldwater's primary tourism challenge is not a lack of attractions. Instead, the larger opportunity is to better connect, package, interpret, and market the attractions and experiences that already exist.

Main Themes

1. Coldwater has more tourism assets than visitors may initially realize.

The community offers an unusually broad mix of historic, cultural, entertainment, recreational, and water-based experiences.

2. Historic Coldwater is a major strength.

The historic downtown, Victorian architecture, Tibbits Opera House, railroad heritage, and other resources create a strong sense of place and authenticity.

3. Tibbits Opera House is a signature tourism asset.

Tibbits repeatedly stood out as one of the community's strongest visitor experiences and has potential to anchor broader downtown tourism.

4. Water and outdoor recreation are underleveraged.

Coldwater's lakes, beaches, river, parks, trails, paddling, fishing, and other outdoor resources provide a significant tourism story, but are not always immediately associated with the community.

5. The challenge is connection, not necessarily a lack of attractions.

Coldwater has many individual assets. The opportunity is to connect those assets physically, digitally, and through visitor itineraries and packages.

6. Downtown needs more reasons for visitors to stay.

Limited business hours, closed attractions, limited shopping variety, and periods of low activity can shorten the visitor experience.

7. Coldwater has a strong foundation for tourism growth.

Hospitality, accessibility, historic character, attractions, events, and revitalization efforts provide a solid foundation for the next stage of tourism development.

Pre-Visit: Initial Visitor Impressions

What Visitors Found Before Arriving

Assessors generally visualized Coldwater as a small Midwestern community with a historic identity, attractive downtown, parks and trails, numerous lakes, and plenty to do. For some assessors, the image of Coldwater online was stronger than their actual first impression onsite visits.

Digital Presence

Coldwater's digital presence generally helped assessors identify attractions, restaurants, events, maps, and things to do.

Several helpful web-based resources identified by assessors included:

1. Coldwater Country
2. Coldwater Area Chamber of Commerce
3. City of Coldwater
4. Pure Michigan
5. Google Maps
6. Individual business websites
7. Facebook and other social media

The online presence helped visitors establish expectations and develop plans before arriving. Various attractions and/or events were linked to Coldwater and what they are known for, such as:

- Tibbits Opera House
- Wing House Museum
- Little River Railroad
- Capri Drive-in (See photo)
- Heritage Water Trail
- Strawberry Festival
- Hidden Ponds Horse Rescue
- The Coldwater Historic District



Printed visitor materials encountered after arrival were also viewed positively and helped establish a sense of what the community offered.

Digital Presence Assessment

Most Helpful Website(s) –Coldwater Country (https://coldwatercountry.com/) was the most useful as a visitor-planning resource, with information organized around staying, playing, eating and drinking, events, and trip ideas. It was repeatedly identified as the most helpful tourism resource by assessors.

Strengths

Coldwater has a strong digital foundation.



Visitors could find:

- Things to do
- Events
- Restaurants
- Businesses
- Maps
- Attractions
- Historic resources
- Trip-planning information
- Visitor guides
- Community information

Weaknesses

The primary digital issue was not the absence of information, but rather the **connection and consistency of information**.

Assessors noted that:

- Some information required searching across multiple websites.
- It was not always immediately obvious how individual attractions fit together.
- The online experience could create expectations that were not matched by the on-site experience for all assessors.
- The visitor experience could be more clearly packaged around themes or itineraries.
- The city website could more directly connect visitors to the Coldwater Country Official Visitor's Guide and other tourism resources.

One particularly important observation was that digital research could create expectations about Coldwater's history and railroad attractions that were not always reinforced by on-site interpretation.

The opportunity is therefore to create a stronger **digital-to-physical visitor journey**:

Research → Plan → Arrive → Find → Experience → Explore More → Stay Longer → Return

The Visit: What Coldwater Does Well



1. Historic Downtown and Architecture

Coldwater's historic downtown was one of its strongest tourism assets. Assessors noted the community's:

- Historic buildings
- Victorian architecture
- Downtown streetscape
- Historic character
- Authenticity
- Sense of place

The assessment ratings strongly reinforced this finding. Historic/heritage attractions received overwhelmingly positive ratings, with three assessors rating them Good and two rating them Excellent. Interesting architecture was similarly strong, with four Good ratings and one Excellent rating. (See pg. 12 for results)

Coldwater's historic character provides something that many communities cannot easily create: an authentic physical identity. The opportunity is to make that history even easier for visitors to experience through walking tours, interpretation, signage, QR codes, public art, storytelling, and packaged experiences.

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2. Tibbits Opera House and Entertainment



Tibbits Opera House emerged as one of Coldwater's most distinctive tourism assets. Assessors repeatedly viewed Tibbits as a high-quality cultural and entertainment experience, with potential to motivate return visitation. The theater provides Coldwater with an important tourism anchor because it can attract visitors for a specific event while also creating opportunities for dining, shopping, historic exploration, and overnight stays.

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3. Variety of Things to Do

Coldwater offers a broader range of experiences than visitors may initially expect.

The community includes:

- Historic attractions
- Cultural experiences
- Theater
- Restaurants
- Shopping
- Parks
- Lakes
- Water recreation
- Trails
- Events
- Railroad heritage
- Drive-in entertainment
- Family attractions
- Community activities

This diversity is an important competitive advantage. Visitors can come to Coldwater for one reason and potentially discover several more reasons to stay.

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4. Unique Nostalgic and Authentic Experiences

Coldwater has several tourism experiences that are difficult to replicate elsewhere. The Capri Drive-In was specifically identified as a memorable and nostalgic visitor experience. Little River Railroad and other railroad-related experiences also provide an opportunity to build on Coldwater's transportation and heritage story. These experiences have potential because they provide strong emotional connections, as noted by FIT assessors during their visits to Coldwater.

Rather than marketing them only as individual attractions, assessor noted Coldwater could package them around themes such as:

- Nostalgia
- Historic Coldwater
- Railroad heritage
- Classic Americana
- Family experiences
- Theater and entertainment





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5. Outdoor and Water-Based Recreation

Coldwater's lakes, river, parks, beaches, trails, swimming, fishing, paddling, and other recreational opportunities represent a significant but somewhat underdeveloped tourism asset.

Nature-based activities received generally positive ratings, while adventure-based activities received lower ratings. This suggests that Coldwater has a strong foundation in outdoor recreation but an opportunity to develop and communicate more complete outdoor experiences.

A particularly promising opportunity is to establish the **Coldwater chain of lakes and paddling resources** as a recognizable visitor attraction.



Potential products include:

- Paddling maps
- Kayak/Canoe/Stand-up Paddle Board launch information
- Rental opportunities
- Guided paddling and/or fishing experiences
- Lake-to-lake itineraries
- Trail and water combinations
- Waterfront recreation packages

6. Community Pride, Hospitality and Customer Service

Coldwater's people were one of its most consistently positive characteristics. Hospitality and friendliness of residents received the highest number of positive mentions in the assessment. Customer service also ranked extremely high. (See pg. 12 results)

Visitors described community members and business employees as friendly and welcoming. Positive interactions included visitors receiving helpful information and even an impromptu tour of a theater.

These experiences matter. A visitor may forgive a closed attraction or a confusing intersection, but a friendly interaction can significantly improve the overall perception of a community. Coldwater has an important tourism advantage in its people.

Downtown Business Area - Rankings are generated from individual assessor scores then aggregated and sorted from highest to lowest. Highest possible score is 15 and the lowest zero. High scores indicate where the host community is strongest, whereas low scores indicate weaknesses. These scores identify strengths and weaknesses in the host community's downtown/business area.

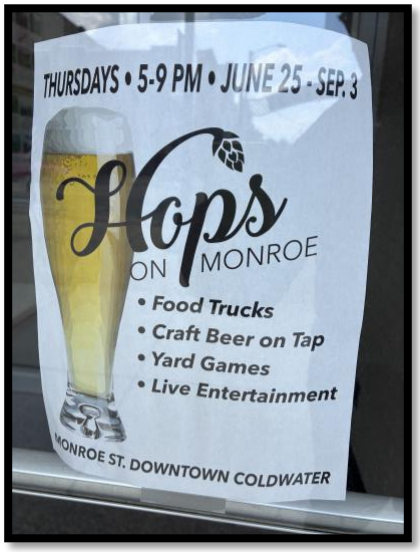
Parking is centrally located	15
The grounds have been landscaped with flowers, trees, shrubs, and bushes	14
Walking sidewalks are well maintained	14
Parking is secure	14
Business information is displayed on the exterior of businesses	13
Parking charges are reasonable	13
There is a gateway point to enter/leave town (piece of art, mural, sign, etc.)	13
There are areas of green space	12
Inviting signs are displayed on the exterior of businesses	11
The downtown business area is handicapped accessible	11
There is pedestrian traffic (foot and bike)	11
This is a welcoming downtown	11
There is a mix of ages	11
The main downtown business area feels distinct or special	11
The main downtown business area is a major tourists draw for the area	10
Vehicle traffic is managed to encourage pedestrian movement, via foot or bike	9
Additional walking paths are available	8
There are walker/biker friendly signs	8
There is a mix of ethnic groups	8
Bike lanes exist on roadways	7



I was glad to see some mural artwork in areas of the downtown. Of the murals on display, I wanted to know more of their message(s), the artists, and how to access the Walking Tour. – Coldwater FIT Assessor

Visitor Motives – Assessors were presented with a list of 15 motives and then asked to select the top three motives someone might have to visit this community and surrounding area.

Get entertained/for entertainment	3
Visit friends and family	3
Visit historical sites	3
In transit to somewhere else	2
Relax	2
Other Tibbits	1
Engage in business activities	1
Be in nature	1
Outdoor recreation (MTB, Hiking, etc.)	1
Other	0
Engage in religious activities	0
Agritourism	0
Shop	0
Experience a unique culture	0
Get away from people	0
Total	17

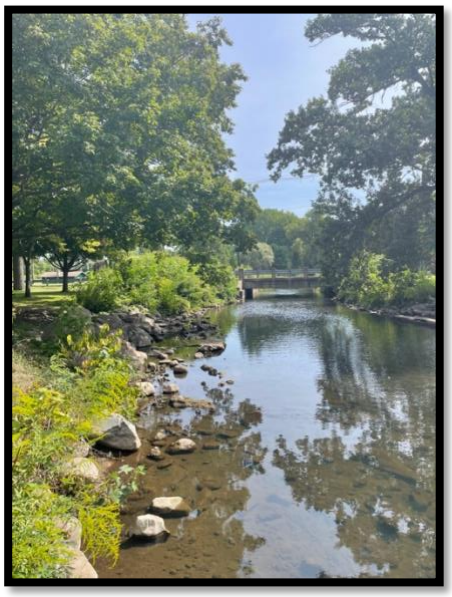




Key Takeaway - Entertainment, historical experiences, visiting friends and family, and transit-related visitation are important components of Coldwater's visitor market. The data also suggests an opportunity to strengthen the role of nature and outdoor recreation in the community's tourism story.

Destination Attributes - Rankings are generated from individual assessor scores then aggregated and sorted from highest to lowest. Highest possible score is 15 and the lowest zero. These scores identify strengths and weaknesses.

Hospitality and friendliness of residents	14
Customer service	13
Safety and security	12
Cleanliness	12
Conveniently located	12
Activities for children	12
Historic/heritage attractions	12
Authenticity of attractions	12
Community involvement	12
Accessibility of destination	11
Interesting architecture	11
Special events	11
Dedicated tourism attractions	10
Visitor accessibility to attractions	10
Well-marked roads/attractions	10
Pedestrian travel infrastructure	10
Variety of activities to do	9
Directional signage	9
Value for money in tourism experiences	9
Cultural attractions	9
Road conditions	8
Nature-based activities	8
Communication infrastructure	8
Variety and quality of accommodations	7
Variety and quality of restaurants	7
Shopping facilities	6
Variety and quality of shopping options	5
Well known landmarks	5
Adventure-based activities	4





Key takeaway – From a marketing standpoint they are already doing a lot to attract visitors. The regional focused promotion is a great effort with Coldwater serving as the main hub of activity and tourism services.

Post-Visit:

As part of a FIT assessment, participating communities receive first-time visitor identified challenges, strengths and opportunities.

Challenges

1. Coldwater Does Not Always Answer "Why Should I Stop?"

This is perhaps the most important strategic issue identified through the assessment. Coldwater has many attractions, but the visitor experience does not always immediately communicate how those attractions fit together.

A traveler approaching Coldwater may (or may not) know that there is a historic downtown, a theater, lakes, restaurants, a drive-in, railroad attractions, and events.

Assessors noted the community could do more to communicate:

"Here is why you should get off the highway and spend a few hours—or a night—in Coldwater."

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2. Limited Downtown Business Hours

One of the most consistent visitor frustrations was limited business and attraction hours.

Assessors encountered:

- Attractions that were closed
- Museums with limited hours
- Businesses closing early
- Limited Sunday availability
- Few evening options

For visitors, this can create a mismatch between expectation and experience. A visitor who has planned a trip around several attractions may arrive only to discover that one or more are unavailable.

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3. Downtown Vibrancy Is Inconsistent

Coldwater has attractive historic buildings and signs of revitalization, but assessors did encounter vacant storefronts or quiet areas that created the impression that little has changed in the community, they are struggling, and/or downtown is not a significant draw to visitors to the area.

The assessment therefore presents a mixed picture:

Strong historic character + revitalization activity + periods of low activity

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4. Heavy Through-Traffic

Heavy truck traffic through the downtown was one of the most negative visitor experiences. Assessors described the traffic as loud and distracting.



This creates challenges for:

- Walking
- Outdoor dining
- Downtown exploration
- Pedestrian comfort
- Historic streetscape experience

Traffic may be difficult to change substantially, but Coldwater can work to mitigate its visitor impact through pedestrian improvements, crossings, signage, streetscape design, and better connections between attractions.

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5. Downtown Shopping and Visitor Activity Could Be Expanded

Shopping options received some of the lower ratings in the destination assessment. While Coldwater has individual businesses that visitors enjoyed, the overall shopping experience could provide more reasons to browse, wander, and stay downtown.

It is to create a stronger **downtown experience**.

That could include:

- More specialty retail
- Local products
- Pop-up businesses
- Seasonal markets
- Historic interpretation
- Walkable itineraries
- Public art
- Outdoor dining
- Events



6. Connecting Downtown, Outdoor Recreation, and Wayfinding

Coldwater has water and outdoor recreation assets, but they appear to be disconnected from the same destination as the historic downtown. Assessors noted connecting the outdoor amenities to the downtown could encourage a better understanding of the destination.

Assessors also identified opportunities for improved wayfinding and pedestrian infrastructure. Crosswalk markings and pedestrian comfort were specifically noted as concerns by assessors with and without limited physical mobility. The assessment suggests that visitors would benefit from a more intuitive system directing them toward:

- Downtown
- Tibbits Opera House
- Parks
- Lakes
- Trails
- Museums
- Restaurants
- Public parking
- Other attractions

Coldwater has a large collection of lakes and water resources, yet a first-time visitor may not immediately associate the community with water recreation as the assets are not sufficiently visible or obvious. – Coldwater FIT Assessor

7. Visitor Information Does Not Always Carry Through to the On-Site Experience

Coldwater generally performs well online. However, visitors sometimes encountered a different experience once they arrived.

This included:

- Closed attractions
- Limited hours
- Lack of on-site interpretation
- Difficulty finding some experiences
- Inconsistent information

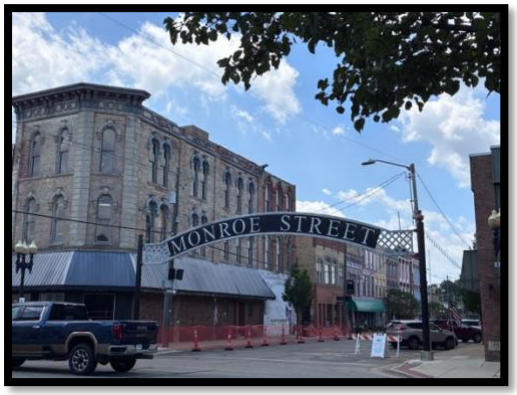
Unfortunately, what I will remember most six months from now is that the community/downtown just not matching up to the initial impression I gained during my research before visiting – FIT Coldwater Assessor

The community should strive for consistency between:

What visitors experience researching online *and* ***What visitors experience after arrival.***

Memorable Experiences

- Capri Drive-In
- Train Wreck restaurant
- Tibbits Opera House
- Hops on Monroe (See photo)
- Paddling and lake/river recreation
- Historic character and architecture
- Friendly community interactions



Most Negative Experiences

- Hotel parking charge.
- Construction
- Attractions closing early.
- Heavy truck traffic through downtown.
- Difficulty finding and reaching the walking trail
- Some storefronts appearing outdated and stagnant.

To me, Coldwater's history, as rich as it is supposed to be, didn't really shine while I was there. What is Coldwater known for? – Coldwater FIT Assessor

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Coldwater's Biggest Opportunity

Connect History, Water, Entertainment and Small-Town Character

Coldwater does not need to create an entirely new tourism identity. It already has a strong foundation. Assessors noted an opportunity is to connect its existing assets into a distinctive visitor story.

Coldwater can potentially position itself around the combination of:

- Historic downtown
- Tibbits Opera House
- Lakes and water recreation
- Railroad heritage
- Capri Drive-In
- Restaurants
- Events
- Outdoor recreation
- Small-town character



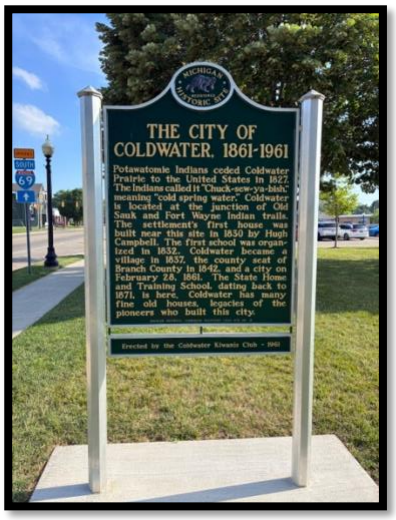
More public art highlighting community history, Tibbits Opera House, the Native American history, and local architecture would enhance their community identity. – Coldwater FIT Assessor

Rather than promoting dozens of individual attractions separately, Assessors provided suggestions for Coldwater to package them into experiences.

For example:

Experience	Potential Flow
A Day in Historic Coldwater	Coffee → historic downtown walk → shopping → Tibbits → lunch → public art → dinner
Historic Coldwater Weekend	Historic architecture → walking tour → local dining → Tibbits → overnight stay
Lakes & Paddling Adventure	Lake access → paddling → trail/recreation → local dining
Arts & Downtown Experience	Public art → downtown businesses → artist event → Tibbits → dinner
Railroad & Heritage Experience	Railroad attraction → historic downtown → heritage interpretation → restaurant
Theater & Drive-In Night	Downtown dinner → Tibbits → Capri Drive-In / evening entertainment







More Opportunities

1. Marketing, Branding & Visitor Experiences

- Enhance Coldwater's highway access and US-12 heritage connection part of its marketing strategy.
- Use gateway signage to clearly answer, "**Why should I stop in Coldwater**?"
- At the entrance, promote Coldwater's unique and distinctive assets, including
    - the historic downtown, Tibbits Opera House, drive-in theater, heritage railroad, and 100+ lakes.
- Connect historic assets, lodging, events, dining, and shopping into a more complete themed/visitor experiences.
    - Historic Coldwater Weekend
    - Lakes & Paddling Adventure
    - Arts & Downtown Experience
    - Railroad & Heritage Experience
    - Theater & Drive-In Night

Key Takeaway: Market what makes Coldwater different and use its accessibility to turn passing travelers into visitors.

2. Outdoor Recreation & Water Experiences

- Improve access to lakes, rivers, paddling launches, and trails.
- Develop better information about paddling routes, launches, and outdoor recreation.
- Connect water experience(s) in downtown and downtown experience(s) at the water'
- Expand and connect trails, including a continuous trail along the river.
- Explore entrepreneurial opportunities to encourage multi-day outdoor adventures
    - kayak, canoe, and SUP rentals and guided experiences.
    - paddle-up campsites or camping platforms

Key Takeaway: Build on Coldwater's lakes, rivers, and trails to create a stronger outdoor recreation destination.

3. Downtown Development and Historic Preservation

- Encourage development of downtown lodging, such as a historic hotel or bed-and-breakfast.
    - Does these exist now? What about Short-term Rentals, too?

- Develop guided walking tours using QR codes to help visitors understand Coldwater architectural heritage in more detail
    - focus on historic homes, architecture, and downtown and/or regional history
- Invest in preservation and restoration of historic buildings and Victorian homes.
    - Grants or incentives for restoring historic commercial buildings.
- Use historic preservation as a tourism strategy.
    - Well-maintained historic districts enhance visitors' perceptions of the community.

Key Takeaway: Strengthen Coldwater's historic character and downtown experience so visitors have more reasons to stay, explore, and spend time in the community.

4. Arts, Culture & Community Events

- Expand the number and variety of arts and cultural events and programs.
    - Artist receptions,
    - "Meet the Artist" events,
    - live painting, community art projects, and
    - art-focused street events.
- Enhance murals and public art to create a distinctive sense of place
    - Use QR codes to access artist profiles, mural stories, etc.
- Use arts and culture programming to encourage repeat visitation and regional participation.

Key Takeaway: Use arts, public spaces, and community events to create memorable experiences and give visitors another reason to return and share their experiences with others.







Overall Assessment

Coldwater has the raw ingredients for a distinctive Southern Michigan tourism destination. Its historic downtown, Tibbits Opera House, lakes, outdoor recreation, railroad heritage, nostalgic attractions, dining, events, and welcoming community provide a strong foundation.

As suggested by first-time visitors to Coldwater, the next phase could focus on connection. Visitors should be able to move easily from the gateway to downtown, from downtown to history and entertainment, and/or from there to lakes, trails, events, dining, and/or lodging.

Coldwater's greatest strength is the **breadth and authenticity of its tourism assets**.

Question	Definitely	Maybe	Unlikely
I would feel compelled to stop in this community if randomly passing by?	3	2	0
I would recommend the destination to my friends and family?	2	2	1
I would visit the destination on a pleasure trip in the future?	2	2	1



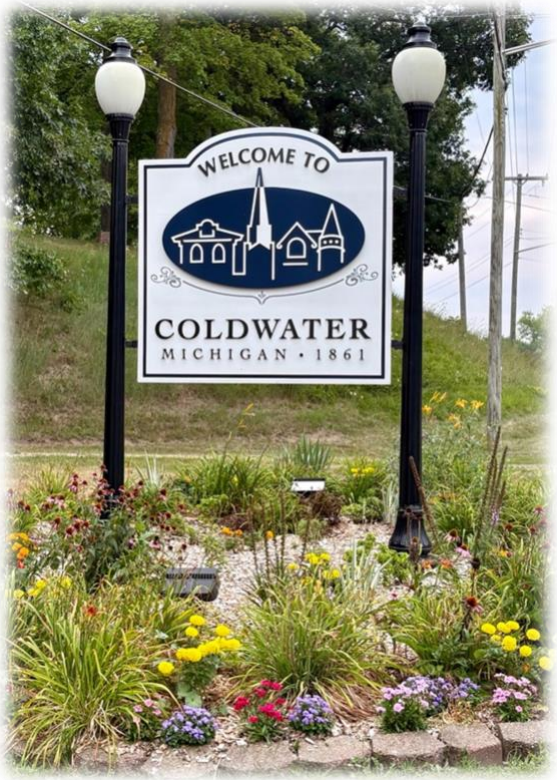
Assets Visited

Assessors intentionally experience a variety of public and private assets during FIT assessments. Along with a qualitative review, each asset is given a rating of poor, good, very good, and excellent. Some assets are visited multiple times by assessors separately resulting in several reviews. Reviews of assets are available. Contact the City of Coldwater for more information. Orange stars indicate which assets would inspire assessors to return to the host community and/or surrounding area.



City of Coldwater - FIT Community Leadership Team

Name	Title	Organization
Matt Biolchini	Marketing/Graphic Designer	Tibbits Opera House
Stephanie Burdick	Executive Director	Coldwater Country CVB
Michael Caywood	Owner/Partner	HaasCaywood PC
Kristen Johnson	DDA/ Main Street Director	Coldwater Main Street
TBD	Community Engagement Coordinator/Marketing	City of Coldwater/CBPU
Julie Santure	Community Enrichment Director (Parks & Recreation)	City of Coldwater



Next Steps for FIT Communities:

- Consult the FIT Community Next Steps manual provided to your Community Leadership Team (CLT).
- Learn from other FIT communities as to what is achievable by reviewing "FIT Successes Report-April 2021 Edition" - https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/fit-successes-report-april-2021-edition
- Consider exploring the raw data further and identifying parts of the results to act.
    - Facilitate discussions with private sector assets visited during the assessment and share asset reviews with each stakeholder and/or department.
- Schedule a public discussion meeting between the CLT, local leaders, and active citizens of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.
- Review your community's result and discuss strategies to work together.
- Search out low-hanging tourism-related projects from list of results, picking one or two items that can be accomplished immediately and ensure their completion.
- Schedule a follow-up discussion with MSU Extension Government and Community Vitality/Tourism educators to facilitate your next steps if you need assistance.
    - Contact MSU Extension Statewide Tourism Educator, Andy Northrop – northro5@msu.edu

Available Funding and Grants

- MI Economic Development Corporation – Public Spaces Community Places - https://www.miplace.org/programs/public-spaces-community-places/
- Match on Main - https://www.miplace.org/small-business/match-on-main/
- United States Department of Agriculture-Rural Development Grants https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs
- Michigan Arts and Humanities, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA)
- Arts Midwest (Touring Gig Fund), National Endowment for the Arts
- Community Foundations and/or individual Foundation funds (example: Dow in Midland)
- Business/Corporate sponsorships (example: MI Sugar Trails - http://www.sblc-mi.org/michigan-sugar-trails.html)
- Crowd Funding, Individual donations / sponsorships (Lions Club, Rotary Club, etc.)

Summary of MSU Extension tourism development programs:

The following programs are available statewide to guide decision making around tourism development and implementation.

Understanding Tourism for Michigan Communities (UTMC)

This interactive workshop highlights tourism industry statistics and exposes communities to trends and travelers' interests, as well as a number of niche tourism markets. UTMC is specifically designed to promote regional synergies, leadership, and tourism product development.

- https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism/programs/understanding-tourism-for-michigan-communities

Planning for Tourism-Preventing Destination Decline

This workshop walks communities through a planning process and uses life-cycle models to explore where communities may be in establishing themselves as tourism destinations. Additional tools will be employed to determine their readiness, identify next steps for action and explore engagement strategies for coalition building within the community.

- https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism/programs/planning-for-tourism

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- https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism_first_impressions/index

Custom Tourism Programs

MSU Extension tourism educators are equipped to meet the diverse needs and interests of Michigan communities. Specialized programs are available to communities with a specific interest in agri-tourism, eco-tourism and/or cultural/heritage tourism.

Learn more

Learn more about MSU Extension tourism programs by visiting http://msue.anr.msu.edu/topic/info/tourism.

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