

Camp Nauvoo Viability Report

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Executive Summary

This report assesses the viability of Camp Nauvoo across three key dimensions: **Missional**, **Operational**, and **Financial**. Overall, Camp Nauvoo demonstrates strong potential but faces critical areas for improvement, particularly in financial systems, strategic planning, and utilization by Community of Christ.

Missional Viability: 5.5 / 14

Camp Nauvoo maintains a general spirit of hospitality aligned with Community of Christ's enduring principles, yet lacks formal vision, mission, and strategic goals. While current programming reflects mission values, greater connection with church leadership and intentional strategic alignment are needed to move beyond threshold viability.

Operational Viability: 10 / 16

Camp Nauvoo benefits from a deeply committed volunteer base and strong guest hospitality. However, it lacks a current master plan, robust governance clarity, and long-term planning for maintenance and leadership succession. Board and committee training are recommended.

Financial Viability: 7 / 14

While the campground generates steady revenue due to its proximity to Nauvoo historic sites and frequent LDS group bookings, its financial planning, bookkeeping, and reserve funding are underdeveloped. There is also a significant concern regarding debt and vulnerability to market competition.

Key Challenges

- Inadequate financial systems and planning
- Lack of formal strategy, vision, and mission
- Dependence on a single demographic for revenue
- Aging volunteer base and limited succession planning

Opportunities

- Develop a strategic partnership with the Historic Sites Foundation
- Increase Community of Christ utilization through mission-focused programming
- Recruit younger leadership and expand training
- Improve financial transparency and capital planning

Recommendations

Short-Term (12 months):

- Overhaul financial management and reporting
- Launch guest satisfaction surveys
- Establish collaborative planning with Mission Center and Historic Sites Foundation

Long-Term (2–3 years):

- Recruit and train next-generation leaders
- Strengthen maintenance systems and establish capital improvement planning
- Transition key roles (e.g., hospitality coordinator) through phased succession
- Require ongoing board and committee training

Camp Nauvoo remains a valued asset with high potential. With targeted improvements and increased alignment with Community of Christ mission and strategic oversight, it can continue to serve future generations effectively.

Camp Nauvoo

Viability Report

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Introduction

Greetings. I want to thank the many stakeholders of Camp Nauvoo who participated with me to complete this study. It was a privilege to get to know everyone and an honor that they entrusted me with their honesty and concern about the future and direction of their beloved spiritual home.

The ensuing report follows the outline of the “Viability Framework Tool,” and it should be read in tandem with that document so that the reader can fully understand the reasons for the scores that are given. In order to complete this study, I interviewed (in no particular order) . . .

- Evelyn Dustin, Mission Center President, Ex-Officio
- Kent LeVan, Former MCP/MCFO, Ex-Officio
- Brad Bengé, CN Treasurer
- Deb Batey, CN Chairperson
- Dawn Durkin, CN Manager
- Scott Gelande, Board Member and Camp Director

I also was able to meet the entire Operations Committee plus Todd Batey, chairman of the Board, when I visited the campground July 11. And I attempted to collect all the documentation in Appendix A.

Should any stakeholders wish to contact me with further questions, I remain available and would welcome conversation at dwelch@cofchrist.org.

In Christ's Peace



Missional Viability—5.5/14

1) Clarity of Vision—1, Threshold Viability

Camp Nauvoo does not have a formal Vision statement, but there is a general understanding held by the Operations Committee that the campground is already an expression of Community of Christ by serving as an example of the church's enduring principle "Blessings of Community."

2) Clarity of Mission—1, Threshold Viability

Like clarity of vision, there is no formal Mission statement either, but there is a general consensus among stake-holders that the campground exists to be a hospitable and safe location for all visitors to the historic sites so that they may grow together in family and/or religious fellowship.

3) Overall Strategy—1, Threshold Viability

Because Camp Nauvoo has users who readily flock to this location every year, it has been easy to overlook the need for strategy. However, there is a general sense expressed by some on the CN Operations Committee that there needs to be a tighter connection to the mission of Community of Christ.

4) Goals/Performance Targets—.5, Approaching Viability

Camp Nauvoo does have a 5-year plan in place, but that plan only pertains to improvements to the physical plant. There are no missional or strategic goals in place. The general consensus is that Camp Nauvoo has reached most of its goals and needs to focus on improving practices and maintaining the physical plant.

5) Synergistic Relationships—1, Threshold Viability

The Mission Center President and Financial officer regularly attend board meetings. But target viability is not yet reached. This is likely because any collaborative relationship and strategic planning that could occur with Mission Center leadership will also require involvement with Cedar Valley Grove. Navigating collaboration between leadership and both campgrounds could be sticky.

6) Utilization of Community of Christ—0, Approaching Viability

The Community of Christ does not use Camp Nauvoo very much. The church does not use the campground enough to meet the minimum required for threshold viability. However, I believe opportunity exists to use Camp Nauvoo more by Community of Christ, and I will address that opportunity in my conclusions.

7) Mission Focused Programming/Events—1, Threshold Viability

Though the campground is not used by Community of Christ very much, the programming that occurs there is aligned with Community of Christ enduring principles.

Operational Viability—10/16

1) Master Plan—1, Threshold Viability

No one could produce a master plan document when asked. However, it is clear that Camp Nauvoo put thought behind its design and layout. I was particularly impressed how the two halves of the campground were clearly separated between the R.V./Tiny Home side of the campground and what I would call the “Retreat Center” side of the campground.

2) Recruitment, Development, and Retention of Staff/Volunteers—2, Target Viability

Camp Nauvoo could certainly use some younger blood. At age 52, I was the youngest person at my in-person gathering of staff/volunteers in July. Nevertheless, I gave Camp Nauvoo a score of Target Viability here because of the tangible synergy I felt between the gathered volunteers. It was truly impressive. Their enthusiasm about their work was contagious, and there was a quality to their rapport with one another that exceeded the norm. Additionally, Camp Nauvoo has a close relationship with the Community of Christ R.V. association who comes nearly every year to supply volunteer labor for campground building projects and maintenance.

3) Governance—1, Threshold Viability

The Operations Committee meets regularly and often. They do follow a set of bylaws that have been reviewed by the Presiding Bishopric. However, there is some confusion about the responsibilities between the Operations Committee and the Campground Board of Directors. The Board of Directors does not meet as often as does the Operations Committee. Everybody needs training.

4) First Impression Areas—1, Threshold Viability

Overall, the campground was in good repair. However, the first things I noticed when coming onto the grounds were 1) the broken sign, 2) a pile of gravel in an odd spot, and 3) one of older buildings that needs a refresh—the bath house. All three could, nevertheless, be fixed with minimal effort. The wall of the bath house, for example, could be an excellent location for a mural that identifies one or more of the church’s Enduring Principles—like the Blessings of Community.

5) Guest Experience—2, Target Viability

Camp Nauvoo does not currently have a guest experience survey in place, but that could be easily remedied. And some of its facilities are not perfect. Nevertheless, I gave the target viability score in this category because of the exemplary work done by Dawn Durgin. She’s a natural at hospitality, and Camp Nauvoo will greatly miss her when she decides it is time to move on. Even if Dawn remains for many years, I suggest the Operations Committee should start planning now on how to replace her. It won’t be easy, given her knowledge about how the campground operates.

6) Business Services—1, Threshold Viability

Camp Nauvoo does not have a payroll nor does it need one currently because everything is done by volunteers. It does not have adequate bookkeeping. But it does employ user contracts and invoicing for its customers. The campground also collects fees and pays its bills in a timely manner.

7) Legal Compliance and Risk Management—1, Threshold Viability

Everything at Camp Nauvoo appears to comply with Community of Christ risk management policies.

8) Ongoing Maintenance and Stewardship of Grounds—1, Threshold Viability

Not every building at the campground is in perfect condition. The bath house needs to be refreshed. A handful of cabins need updating and mold remediation. Most everywhere you look one can see tidy places to stay, but almost all of those places could also be improved. The Operating Committee keeps a close eye on what needs to be fixed and improved, and there is a

list of items to be accomplished on their 5-year plan. But there is no financial plan in place to accomplish the items on that list.

Financial Viability 7/14

1) Financial Planning, Budgeting, and Monitoring—0, Approaching Viability

This is one of Camp Nauvoo's biggest weaknesses. It really needs better financial monitoring, reporting, and planning. See my conclusions.

2) Sources of Revenue—2, Target Viability

Nauvoo is blessed by being within walking distance to the Nauvoo historic site. Though no longer owned by Community of Christ the location means that the campground is booked solid for much of the year by families and by various LDS Wards and Stakes who plan trips here. This produces a great deal of revenue for the campground. One may say that the revenue sources are not very diverse since they are all from one denomination, and I will address that concern in my conclusions. But all groups are, indeed, groups that come from all over the country.

3) Net Revenue Generation—1, Threshold Viability

Camp Nauvoo is good at generating revenue, but it is not great at putting money aside for missional or capital expenditures. That is one of the primary reasons that the campground is in debt.

4) Operating Revenue—1, Threshold Viability

Camp Nauvoo does set aside money from its reservations to be used when the campground is not in use. This is a good practice given that I'm sure a good number of reservations get cancelled before they come to fruition. An even better practice would be to put in place an operational reserve fund.

5) Funded Depreciation—0, Approaching Viability

Camp Nauvoo does not fund depreciation nor does it have reserve funds set aside for capital projects.

6) Anticipated Major Capital Improvements—1, Threshold Viability

Camp Nauvoo doesn't have any money set aside for major capital improvements. Nor does it require any major capital improvements at this time. I believe it could raise the money it requires for the time being for any necessary maintenance projects.

7) Property Location—2, Target Viability

Location, location, location. It's not close to any urban areas but Camp Nauvoo draws people from all over the country to visit the town's historic sites.

Difficulties to Overcome

Debt

Between debt to the World Church, the Mission Center, and individuals, Camp Nauvoo is holding some risk. Because the campground has such a high potential to produce income this is not currently a problem. But the campground certainly should not be considering more debt at this time. Something like another pandemic or an unanticipated social upheaval could put Camp Nauvoo at risk of default.

Financial Tools and Planning

The financial reporting at Camp Nauvoo is insufficient. Financial decisions are generally made using the criteria of how much is in the bank account, not by any sort of fiscal schedule or plan. This problem is well known within the Mission Center. A re-boot of Camp Nauvoo's financial records may be in order. It's unclear if Camp Nauvoo can move forward with a reconstruction of the campground's current financial data. Indeed, most recent financial reporting was not available for me to inspect.

Competition

Of all the potential speedbumps this is the one that should keep the readers of this report up at night. Answer this . . . What would happen to Camp Nauvoo if the LDS church decided to build a lodging house or a hotel? Camp Nauvoo does not have a diversified clientele and in this remote location the LDS church could—if it chose—monopolize the local hospitality industry.

Opportunities to Explore

Missional Opportunity with Historic Sites Foundation

Camp Nauvoo is not utilized much by Community of Christ, but there may be a profound connection that can be made between the Historic Sites Foundation and the campground. Since the sale of the historic sites themselves, Community of Christ no longer has a location where its story can be told at Nauvoo. Camp Nauvoo could begin forging a partnership with Historic Sites and the partnership could include multiple outcomes. Certainly not limited to the following.

- a. A permanent location for all Camp Nauvoo visitors to hear the story of Community of Christ whenever they use the campground to visit the historic sites
- b. A stop and a place to stay on historic bus tours
- c. A site for events and retreats centered around church history

In other words, because Community of Christ no longer owns the historic sites, Camp Nauvoo has a great opportunity to fill a void.

Conclusion

Each viability report that I write always includes a path forward. In some cases, the path forward can be very difficult. In the case of Camp Nauvoo, however, I think there are several incremental improvements to be made; but there is nothing that is going to be overwhelming.

In the next twelve months, I recommend the following:

- In order to greatly increase the campground's financial viability score, I recommend a massive overhaul of its bookkeeping, reporting, and overall financial management. One of the primary functions of a board of directors is to be fiduciary agents for an organization, and it is impossible to do that job without a full understanding of an organization's financial position. The board of directors can't do its job until this is done.
- In order to increase the campground's operational viability score, I recommend a concerted effort to 1) start recruiting younger stake-holders, and 2) put a user satisfaction survey into place.
- In order to increase the campground's missional viability score, I recommend forging partnerships with 1) the Historic Sites Foundation, and 2) Mission Center Leadership so that a more cohesive strategic plan including goals and outcomes can be put into place.

In the next several years I recommend the following:

- Explore ways to better support and eventually replace Dawn Durgin. This may include hiring a professional campground manager and/or food service coordinator. A more complex pricing schedule may need to be put in place in order to pay for those additional services.
- Work on developing a more systematic approach to capital improvements and maintenance. I typically include a capital improvement plan in my viability studies (see the Cedar Valley Grove study for an example). However, Camp Nauvoo's financial picture is hard to pin down due to its poor reporting. Plus, Camp Nauvoo needs to focus almost exclusively on maintenance to what it currently has instead of on improvements that need to be made. This will require a more complex accounting system also; Camp Nauvoo will need to have several reserve funds established so that when needed maintenance is required at this large physical plant, the money will be readily available.
- Board and Committee Training. Encourage attendance at Community of Christ Campground Summits and direct board members to training materials that are already available. Require all current board/committee members to take trainings and once everyone is trained, require training of any new members elected into service.

Appendix A

Information Needed for Viability Study

A viability study requires opening the books—so to speak—not just financial books but a deep probing of institutional knowledge. Therefore, the below is a list of information needed in order to do a proper viability study. There may be many cases where the documents requested do not exist. That's ok. In those places where there is no documentation to offer, the holes can be filled with either conversation and/or written narratives.

For Missional Viability:

- Vision Statement
- Mission Statement
- Any Strategic Plans that have been written up
- Goals and Milestones
- Invoicing for the past two years
- Description of the relationship between Campground and Community of Christ

For Operational Viability:

- Master Plan
- Contact Sheet for Board of Directors
- Contact Sheet for Employees
- Contact Sheet for Key Volunteers
 - At least one camp director
 - At least one who helps maintain the grounds
- Contacts for any Business Services used and/or Legal Services
- Meeting Minutes for the past two years
- User Surveys—both blank and filled by previous users
- Sample of User Contract

For Financial Viability

- Budgets for the past two years
- Financial Reports for the past two years—I can get these myself from Shelby unless there are things I should know that are not recorded there. I will be pulling Balance Sheets, and Budgeted Income and Expense reports.
- AIP Fund Reports for the past two years
- Schedule of User Pricing
- Any Capital Improvement Plans
- A list of nearby congregations that support the campgrounds and pastor contacts
- A list of major donors—these will be held in strict confidence