

**Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB)
Meeting Minutes – March 2014**

1 **Date:** March 19, 2014
 2 **Time:** 3:00-5:00pm
 3 **Location:** CVB / Chamber of Commerce
 4
 5

Attendees:

Name	✓	Representation	Name	✓	Representation
Anne Kellerman	E	At-Large	Sue Perlgut	✓	Arts-Culture
Anthony Hopson	A	Ithaca College	Susie Monagan	✓	Arts-Culture
Ian Golden	✓	Recreation	<i>John Spence</i>	✓	<i>CAP, Non-Voting</i>
Ethan Ash	✓	Arts-Culture	<i>Bruce Stoff</i>	✓	<i>CVB, Non-Voting</i>
John Gutenberger	E	Cornell	<i>Dwight Mengel</i>	✓	<i>Transportation, Non-Voting</i>
Lynette Scofield	✓	Lodging	<i>Gary Ferguson</i>	A	<i>DIA, Non-Voting</i>
Rick Adie	✓	Lodging	<i>Jean McPheeters</i>	✓	<i>Chamber, Non-Voting</i>
Rita Rosenberg	✓	Agriculture	<i>Martha Armstrong</i>	✓	<i>TCAD, Non-Voting</i>
Andy Zepp	✓	At-Large	<i>Will Burbank</i>	✓	<i>TC Legislature, Non-Voting</i>
Stephen Nunley	✓	At-Large	<i>Beverly Baker</i>	A	<i>Associate Member</i>
Steve Hugo	✓	At-Large	<i>Carol Kammen</i>	A	<i>Associate Member</i>
Ken Jupiter	✓	At-Large	<i>Jon Reis</i>	✓	<i>Associate Member</i>
Mike Mellor	✓	At-Large	<i>Stuart Stein</i>	A	<i>Associate Member</i>
Anne Gossen	✓	At-Large	Tom Knipe	✓	Staff
Sue Stafford	✓	TC3	Jennifer Turner	✓	Staff
Christy Agnese	✓	At-Large			

9 **Also in attendance: Ronda Roaring**

10
 11 **Agenda**

- 12 February Meeting Minutes
- 13 Chair's Report
- 14 Staff Report
- 15 Wayfinding Plan Presentation
 - 16 Presentation and Discussion – Laurene Gilbert, Jean McPheeters, Tom Knipe
- 17 CVB 2014 Revised Work plan
 - 18 Presentation and Discussion
- 19 Spring 2014 Tourism Grant Review and Recommendations
 - 20 Action – Recommend Community Celebrations Grants – Carol Kammen
 - 21 Action – Recommend Tourism marketing & Advertising Grants – Ethan Ash
 - 22 Action – Recommend New Tourism Initiatives Grants – Anne Gossen
 - 23 Action – Recommend Tourism Project Grants – Steve Hugo
- 24 2014 Arts and Culture Organizational Development (ACOD) Grants
 - 25 Action – Recommend 2014 ACOD grants awards – John Spence
- 26 Ag & Culinary Tourism Working Group Report – Rita Rosenberg

27
 28 **Discussion**

29
 30 **The meeting was called to order** at 3:03 PM.

31
 32 **March 2014 STPB meeting minutes** were approved with no changes

33
 34 **Chair's Report:** Rick Adie reported on STPB Budget Committee activity. Actual 2013 revenues came
 35 within \$4,000 of the 2 million dollar budget. A final reconciliation of expenses and revenues will be available
 36 in April. The Budget Committee has decided not to make a recommendation regarding the \$21,755
 37 originally allocated for the Ticket Center that will not be used for the Ticket Center this year. Rick mentioned
 38 that unlike last year, the amount of money in reserves will be smaller at \$6,000 for the year. Although
 39 weather has impacted hotel business for the winter season, and that new inventory in town has helped
 40 increase the February weekend hotel stays. Rick Adie noted the schedule for developing the 2015 budget.

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41 There will be a Horizons meeting on April 4th to discuss trends and projections. Topics will include an
42 exploration of a zero based budgeting approach and finding ways to finance strategic priorities. The Ag &
43 Culinary Tourism Working Group had its first meeting a few weeks ago, and the Heritage Tourism Working
44 Group is getting underway. The anticipated start date for the Higher Education Tourism Working Group will
45 be early summer. Rick emphasized all the hard work that went into the grant application review process and
46 thanked members for their hard work. He went on to note the new electronic application, thanking Tom
47 Knipe for streamlining the process. Andy Zepp was introduced as the newest At- Large Member who will be
48 filling the position of Miriam Musco, who resigned earlier this year. Andy introduced himself as the
49 Executive Director of the Finger Lakes Land Trust. They are an organization that works cooperatively to
50 help protect land and open space across the twelve counties in the Finger Lakes region.
51

52 **Staff Report** – Tom Knipe gave a brief tutorial on the new grant application and review website. Reviewers
53 are able to access a number of reports (including about return on investment), based on attendance and
54 other information the applicants provide. The database-backed system allows reviewers to exchange
55 questions and comments online as they are reviewing applications. Tom also posted applicant answers to
56 some of the reviewer's questions. Tom also reported on the most recent EDC meeting where he and Bruce
57 Stoff presented information relating to Air BnB. EDC's feedback was that the CVB should list the Air BnB
58 operators that are registered to pay the room tax but should not otherwise promote AirBnB as a booking
59 site. Tom also reported to the EDC on the status of implementation of the Strategic Tourism Plan. He
60 focused on the areas identified for special STPB action. EDC members expressed a desire to consider
61 ACOD or other sources of funding as means of advancing implementation of the Plan. Tom has been
62 sharing the Priority Trails Strategy with other groups in the County including TCCOG and is starting to get
63 invites from towns. Tom has been working with Seneca and Cayuga counties on early preparation for a
64 CFA application to the state to develop the Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail.
65

66 **Wayfinding Plan Presentation and Discussion** – Jean McPheeters opened by explaining the origin of the
67 Wayfinding Strategy. Wayfinding has long been a priority of the Tourism Program and a Strategic Tourism
68 Implementation Grant was approved in early 2013. The funds cover the hiring of the project manager and
69 consultant to do a comprehensive Wayfinding Plan. There is little money for implementing the signs in the
70 project. Jean listed members of the Steering Committee and praised them for their contributions.
71

72 Laurene Gilbert introduced herself as the project manager. She is a former employee of Cornell University
73 with a background in landscape architecture. The goal for the wayfinding strategy is to create a system that
74 would be adopted across the board for motor vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists and would be located on
75 major highways and roads. Tom Knipe gave more background on the reasons that the project was funded
76 by the Tourism Program: 1) feedback from visitors about the difficulty of locating areas of interest or known
77 landmarks; 2) presence of signage on state highways which requires special approvals; 3) disjointed nature
78 of existing wayfinding signage systems due to the lack of a comprehensive plan for wayfinding signage; and
79 4) existing gaps in the system.
80

81 The consultants that were hired are PJ Smith. There were chosen for their experience and proximity
82 (Buffalo); their group is made up of planners and architects with ties to Cornell and they also worked on the
83 Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway. The study process started with information-gathering using the city sign
84 inventory and a study developed by Cornell planning students. Around 100 partners, including highway
85 superintendents, leaders from different municipalities, and a number of different venues were convened for
86 vision sessions and focus groups prior to the first of two public meetings. Originally the number of possible
87 attractions was 435. It was narrowed down to about 30. Rochester, Syracuse, Seneca Falls and Cayuga
88 County's wayfinding systems were helpful to use as case studies. A hierarchy of signs was created with
89 interpretive information that includes vehicular information along with pedestrian and bicycle kiosks. Phase
90 Two of the consultant's work will include design specifications: the design and details of the actual signs. A
91 draft plan will be reviewed and finalized by the end of April (the end of Phase One of the project).
92

93 Jean McPheeters noted some of the debated items of what landmarks will be named, what signs would be
94 removed and which signs will be replaced. She described several different types of signs, from gateway
95 signs to inter-community signs and district (community wayfinding) signs. Ithaca districts would include
96 waterfront, downtown, South Hill/Ithaca College and East Hill/Cornell which would be designated by
97 different colors. In the downtown areas there would be non-vehicular signs that would estimate a timeframe

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98 for travel to different locations. There are also goals in place to add interpretive kiosks. The sizes, colors
99 and size of letters have been approved by the NY State DOT. The Steering Committee continues to meet to
100 give feedback to the consultant on the draft. Still to be included in the draft are cost estimates and more
101 details about phasing and implementation. Possible outside funding sources to explore include the State
102 Department of Transportation, the federal Transportation Alternatives Program, Regional Economic
103 Development Councils, TIGER and the City of Ithaca. She anticipates applying for a REDC grant in
104 conjunction with another region. The project is scheduled to be completed before the end of July. Jean will
105 see the Wayfinding Plan through to completion even if she leaves the Chamber before July. Tom Knipe
106 anticipates the utilization of a number of funding sources to bring this project forward.
107

108 **Monthly CVB Report and CVB 2014 Revised Work Plan** – The new STR Report shows that having 6.8%
109 more hotel rooms available has helped increase revenue by 8% in February. Teachers Winter Recess did
110 not generate the amount of anticipated hotel stays. Because of the time spent to produce the event it will
111 not be included in the CVB's budget request next year. The new smaller travel guide came out last week.
112 The Taughannock Falls overlook will be repaired in the next 2 years and will include a visitor's center, which
113 the CVB has been asked to help staff. Bruce referenced travel guide savings and the Director transition as
114 the two primary reasons for the \$57,000 carry over from last year. He plans on carrying the funds over to
115 different departments for more marketing and group sales. Some of his focuses are \$20,000 will be
116 allocated for trade shows. 2014 will also bring new focus on motor-coach, sports marketing and also
117 enhancing Chinese group tours. The Cortland Sports Council had a plan to do marketing for the CVB,
118 which will not be carried out this year. Bruce also discussed declining Visitor's Center foot traffic in this
119 digital world; and a need to focus on developing a new model for visitors centers in 2015. Bruce is planning
120 a \$110,000 digital marketing campaign in the next couple of weeks which for the first time will include a call
121 to action to visit during the mid-week. The Farm to Fork program advertising will start tomorrow focusing on
122 social media. There was discussion of the high cost of rooms and whether or not there will be price breaks.
123 Bruce's thoughts were that we will first need to give visitors reasons to want to visit Ithaca on the weekdays,
124 so that will be the focus of the marketing effort. He mentioned discussions that have taken place with the
125 innkeepers and notes the cooperative responses. Rick Adie noted that there will be no STPB action today
126 regarding the rollover of the budget and or budget changes. Tom Knipe will further investigate the
127 appropriate formal process with County Administration and get back to the STPB.
128

129 **Spring 2013 Tourism Grant Review**

130 **Celebrations** – Carol Kammen (Chair) reported the recommendation of \$11,000 to five projects within the
131 City of Ithaca. She noted that there was \$12,857 recommended to nine projects in communities outside the
132 City (Danby, Enfield, Groton, Newfield, Ulysses and 3 in Lansing). She noted the number of old projects that
133 applied and had revamped their format to fit the community's needs. One application was rejected because it
134 was a repeat from the following year, and two applications were rejected because they lacked focus or
135 capacity. The groups will be encouraged to work on their projects and to re-apply next year. Carol Kammen
136 moved to accept the committee recommendations, seconded by Sue Perlgut. **Vote:** passed by unanimous
137 vote.
138

139 **Tourism Marketing & Advertising** – Christy Agnese thanked Tom for the online application in the ease in
140 the application process. She recommended all 11 grant submissions for some level of funding and
141 mentioned that the only cuts were strategic. She provided the example that Tourism Marketing and
142 Advertising did not approve one applicant's request for brochures to be handed out to attendees because
143 this was not a qualifying out-of-county marketing expense. Christy voiced her enthusiasm in having a fall
144 round with available funds of \$23,211. Christy Agnese moved to accept the committee recommendations,
145 seconded by Rita Rosenberg. **Vote:** Yes 12; No 0; Abstentions 2 (Susie Monaghan, Sue Perlgut).
146

147 **New Tourism Initiatives** – Anne Gossen opened by thanking Tom Knipe for the useful online application.
148 She reported that there were four applications that requested \$42,400 and that they were recommending
149 awards totaling \$38,800, leaving \$36,500 for a fall round. Anne commented on the application for a feasibility
150 study for ice climbing, which is not a typical project. The project would work to identify and address safety
151 and risk management issues, along with funding and marketing opportunities, and would provide an
152 economic impact study and negotiations to secure permission to pursue ice climbing as a new winter visitor
153 activity in Ithaca. **Vote** on motion: Yes 12; No 0; Abstentions 2 (Ethan Ash, Sue Perlgut).
154

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155 **Tourism Project Grants** – Anne Gossen reported that the applicant's requests were double the amount of
156 funding available and that all the recommended awards fell between 33-80% of the requested amounts, with
157 one exception for a project which is not recommended for funding. Anne noted the stand outs this year were
158 Winter Festival and Winter Village Music because they align well with the off season and the re-opening of
159 the Commons. Recommended funding levels for the Dragon Boat Festival and Scottish Games was less
160 than in order to promote financial independence/sustainability. Anne Gossen moved to accept the committee
161 recommendations, seconded by Ken Jupiter. **Vote** on Motion: Yes 12; No 0; Abstentions 2 (Susie Monagan,
162 Sue Perlgut)
163

164 **2014 Arts & Culture Organizational Development Grants** – John Spence opened by thanking the panel.
165 In addition to the STPB Arts & Culture reps, the panel included Leslie Ackerman, Director of the Business
166 Sense Program at Alternatives Federal Credit Union. Six organizations were previously been approved for
167 ACOD funding and were given three year contracts. 2014 is the second year on their three year contracts.
168 They are required to submit a year-end report for review and the committee determined that all six
169 organizations met their eligibility requirements and were making progress towards their stated objectives.
170 The Kitchen Theatre, Hangar Theatre, PRI (jointly for MOE and CNC), Sciencenter, History Center, and
171 Cayuga Chamber Orchestra are being recommended to continue with the amounts in their original awards.
172 The only difference was that Kitchen Theatre lost money in 2013 when they did not participate with the Ticket
173 Center and due to the results of the negotiated agreement to space out the reduction over two payments; it
174 was recommended that they be awarded \$23,000 of the originally awarded amount of \$27,000. The State
175 Theatre submitted a new application. John noted that the State Theatre has been funded previously through
176 ACOD and re-applied after their contract expired. He went on to say that their hiring of a marketing director
177 has been successful in recognizing the kind of shows they can sell. He also mentioned that four bands from
178 Ithaca have decided to kick off their national tours from Ithaca. The committee recommends that the State
179 Theatre be funded with a two-year award at \$27,000 per year. An application from Friends of Stewart Park
180 was deemed ineligible under the current guidelines due to a lack of 501c3 certification from the IRS, lack of
181 permanent space for the public or staff. Ken Jupiter moved to accept the committee recommendations,
182 seconded by Rita Rosenberg. **Vote** on motion: Yes 12; No 0 Abstentions 2 (Christy Agnese, Susie Monagan)
183

184 **Ag & Culinary Tourism Task Force Report** – Rita Rosenberg and Ethan Ash (co-chairs) met with Tom
185 Knipe and Rick Adie to identify the first steps and goals for the group. A meeting is scheduled for early April
186 to which the CVB, CCE, DIA, restaurant and hotel owners, chefs, winery personnel, and tour operators will
187 be invited. The meeting will serve to identify challenges as well as potential assets and opportunities.
188 Research of best practices from other communities will also be conducted. The taskforce plans to produce a
189 five year Ag & Culinary Tourism Implementation Plan by the end of the 2014.
190

191 **Announcements** - Rick Adie mentioned upcoming events that will take place after the next Strategic
192 Tourism Planning Board meeting. He encouraged members to attend the events and provide feedback. He
193 went on to thank the group in all their efforts and progress that was made.
194

195 With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:01pm.
196

197 Respectfully Submitted,
198 Jennifer Turner, Administrative Assistant
199 Tompkins County Planning Department
200

201 **Next Meeting Scheduled**
202 Wednesday, April 16, 2014