

Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB) Final Meeting Minutes

1 **Date:** Aug. 16, 2023
 2 **Time:** 3:00-4:30
 3 **Location:** CVB/Chamber & via Zoom

4

5 **Attendees:**

Member		Representation	Member		Representation
Brett Bossard	P	Arts-Culture	Teri Tarshus	P	At-Large
Kelli Cartmill	P	Lodging	Marian Levy Ware	P	At-Large
Laura Winter Falk	P	At-Large	<i>Megan Barber</i>	P	<i>CAP, Non-Voting</i>
Josh Friedman	E	Arts-Culture	Peggy Coleman	P	Chamber, Non-Voting
Alexis Zaharis Grimm	P	Lodging	<i>Nan Rohrer</i>	P	<i>DIA, Non-Voting</i>
Vacant	N/A	Ithaca College	<i>Mike Sigler</i>	A	<i>TC Legislature, Non-Voting</i>
Ken Jupiter	P	At-Large	<i>Heather McDaniel</i>	E	<i>IAED, Non-Voting</i>
Doug Levine	P	Arts-Culture	<i>Jennifer Tavares</i>	P	<i>Chamber, Non-Voting</i>
Kelly Makosch	E	Recreation	<i>Patty Poist</i>	P	<i>Transportation, Non-Voting</i>
Rick Manning	P	At-Large	<i>Michael Miller</i>	P	<i>Associate Member</i>
Greg Mezey	E	At-Large	<i>Jon Reis</i>	E	<i>Associate Member</i>
Barbara Romano	A	Cornell University	<i>Wylie Schwartz</i>	P	<i>Associate Member</i>
Monika Roth	P	Agriculture	<i>Chuck Tauck</i>	P	<i>Associate Member</i>
Vacant	N/A	TC3	Nick Helmholdt	P	Tourism Program Director
Steven Stull	P	Arts-Culture	Kristin McCarthy	P	County Staff
Jeremiah Swain	E	At-Large			

6 **Guests:** Chris Sponn, Chris Stephany, Suzanne Smith Jablonski, Marissa Nolan, Janine Willis, Cayleigh
 7 Tomlinson, Holly Kane, Erin Rafalowski

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9 **Opening Remarks/Changes to the Agenda/Privilege of the Floor** –Chair Brett Bossard welcomed
 10 everyone to the meeting at 3:07pm. Nan Rohrer and Chris Sponn introduced themselves.

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12 **Action: Approval of June 2023 STPB Draft Minutes** – The draft June 2023 minutes were approved as
 13 submitted (moved by Monika Roth, seconded by Kelli Cartmill). Steven Stull abstained.

14

15 **Chair’s Report** – *Brett Bossard*

16 Brett took a moment to acknowledge the return of students and waning of summer. He then mentioned
 17 the “good news” room tax report, which members received in the agenda packet, handing things over to
 18 Nick to give his monthly updates.

19

20 **Staff Report & Q2 Room Tax Report** – *Nick Helmholdt*

21 Q2 set a record for total room tax collections in the second quarter, surpassing last year's figure by \$88,000,
 22 or 9%. Tax paid by larger lodging establishments, such as hotels and motels, which was up about 14% from
 23 Q2 of 2022. There was no growth in the tax paid by smaller lodging establishments, which was down about
 24 2% from Q2 of 2022. Tax delinquency is not a major concern at this time, and tax exemptions were at
 25 13.9%, which is about the long-term average. The next room tax report will be released in October. Nick
 26 reported on the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway Step Challenge, County Strategic Operations Plan, fall grant
 27 cycles and review committee meetings, revised County Advisory Board Policy (STPB will now need to follow
 28 Open Meetings Law; there is a grace period and staff is working with legislative clerks to implement), and
 29 pending TC3 representative appointment (Brett will look into Ithaca College vacancy). In addition, he shared
 30 that Arts and Culture Organization Development Stabilization and Recovery Fund (ACOD-SRF) grant

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31 contracts have been issued and payments are processing; nine proposals were received for the ACOD-SRF
32 mentorship program; and there are two pending Strategic Tourism Implementation grant letters of interest.
33 Last, he shared that the National Park Service has recommended the Finger Lakes National Heritage Area
34 for designation, which requires congressional approval. Peggy thanked Nick and Katie Borgella, the County's
35 commissioner of planning and sustainability, for their support on this issue.
36

Report/Action: Recommend 2023 Strategic Tourism Implementation Grant Award

37 Nick reviewed highlights from the STI grant application and letter of interest from Downtown Ithaca
38 Alliance to fund a retail attraction incentive program. Topics discussed included background on STI grant
39 program, proposed award amounts, proposal's alignment with Strategic Tourism Plan, eligible and ineligible
40 uses of funds, and budget implications.
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43 **Action:** Kelli Cartmill made a motion, seconded by Laura Winter Falk, to recommend the proposed Strategic
44 Tourism Implementation grant for the Downtown Ithaca Alliance retail attraction incentive program.
45 Motion carried.
46

Presentation: Community Beautification Program Update – *Marissa Nolan & Janine Willis*

47 Marissa and Janine reported on the work of the Community Beautification Program, which celebrated 21
48 years of operation in 2023, sharing successes and challenges encountered over the past 12 months. Their
49 presentation and the Q&A discussion covered several topics. These included staffing, volunteer hours,
50 rural grant awardees, funding, native species and increased biodiversity, dealing with trash and debris at
51 sites, unhoused populations, woodchucks, adopt a planter program, updating of beautification strategic
52 plan, the program's EV truck, collaboration with city forester on Ithaca Falls planting area, and the re-
53 installation of signs (with active QR codes) to highlight "triangle" plantings around town.
54
55

Presentation: VisitIthaca.com Post-Launch Analysis & SEO Review – *Peggy Coleman and Erin Rafalowski (CVB) and Cayleigh Tomlinson and Holly Kane (Simpleview)*

56 Peggy provided an overview of the visitithaca.com re-launch project and introduced Cayleigh and Holly
57 from Simpleview, the consulting firm working on search engine optimization for the website. She then
58 handed over the presentation to Erin from the CVB for details on website analytics (e.g. traffic
59 performance, average session duration, partner referrals, page views, bounce rates). The team from
60 Simpleview shared insights on SEO. The presentation and subsequent discussion covered multiple topics,
61 including industry comparisons with other DMOs, which channels are driving traffic to the website, which
62 devices users prefer for accessing the website, and how users from all sources are trending over time, in-
63 state and out-of-state traffic performance, and most popular landing pages. Additional questions raised
64 during the presentation included which queries showed the most year over year growth, how to increase
65 social media traffic and improve organic search performance, and whether other search topics should be
66 added to site FAQ.
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CVB Mid-Year Report – *Peggy Coleman*

71 Peggy shared highlights from the second quarter of activity at the CVB. These included updates on the
72 conference center; reports from the CVB's marketing, social media, public relations, and media teams; the
73 impact of Canadian wildfires on the Overlook at Taughannock Visitors Center and staff; news that Tompkins
74 County will host the Pennsylvania Bus Association conference in 2024; new multilingual staff members in
75 Visitor Experience, and more.
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2024 Tourism Promotion Agency Designation – *Peggy Coleman*

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79 Peggy presented a resolution requesting that the Tompkins County Legislature approve the Ithaca
80 Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau as the official Tourism Promotion Agency for Tompkins
81 County for 2024. She explained that the NYS Tourism Promotion Act requires the legislature of each county
82 to appoint such an agency as the applicant and recipient of state tourism matching funds.

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84 **Action:** Ken Jupiter made a motion, which Alexis Zaharis Grimm seconded, to recommend the Tompkins
85 County Legislature approve the designation of the Ithaca Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau
86 as the 2024 Tourism Promotion Agency for Tompkins County. Motion carried.

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88 **Member Announcements**

89 Members shared news and events of interest to the community. These included the Ithaca Farmers Market
90 50th Anniversary Party, concerts at Triphammer Arts, Ithaca Skate Jam, a fund-raiser for Community Arts
91 Partnership at Monks on the Commons, and more.

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93 **Adjournment** – Chair Brett Bossard adjourned the meeting at 4:35pm.