

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

1 **Date:** July 16, 2025
 2 **Time:** 3:00-5:00pm
 3 **Location:** Ithaca Farmers Market

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 5 **Attendees:**

Member		Representation	Member		Representation
Amanda Bisson	P	TC3	Teri Tarshus	P	Lodging
Brett Bossard	E	At-Large	Marian Levy Ware	E	At-Large
Laura Winter Falk	A	Agriculinary	Vacant		At-Large
Jeff Golden	P	Ithaca College	<i>Megan Barber</i>	E	<i>CAP, Non-voting</i>
Alexis Zaharis Grimm	E	Lodging	<i>Peggy Coleman</i>	P	<i>Chamber, Non-voting</i>
Ken Jupiter	E	At-Large	<i>Frank Doldo</i>	P	<i>Transportation, Non-voting</i>
Doug Levine	P	At-Large	<i>Suzanne Smith Jablonski</i>	A	<i>IDCC, Non-voting</i>
Kelly Makosch	P	Recreation	<i>Kurt Anderson</i>	A	<i>IAED, Non-voting</i>
Rick Manning	E	Recreation	<i>Nan Rohrer</i>	A	<i>DIA, Non-voting</i>
Greg Mezey	A	At-Large	<i>Mike Sigler</i>	A	<i>TC Legislature, Non-voting</i>
Bethany Parisi	P	Arts-Culture	<i>Vacant</i>		<i>CVB, Non-voting</i>
Barbara Romano	P	Cornell University	<i>Michael Miller</i>	A	<i>Associate Member</i>
Monika Roth	P	Agriculinary	Nick Helmholdt	P	Tourism Program Director
Jason Sidle	E	At-Large	Kristin McCarthy	P	County Staff
Steven Stull	P	Arts-Culture			

6 **Guests:** Chris Stephany, Jacob von Mechow, Scott Whitham

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 8 **Opening Remarks/Changes to the Agenda/Privilege of the Floor** – Chair Doug Levine opened the 3:07pm
 9 meeting. With no agenda changes or privilege of the floor requests, Doug shared thoughts on CNN's media
 10 coverage naming Ithaca the best town in America.

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 12 **Action: Approval of June 2025 STPB Draft Minutes** – Due to lack of quorum, the vote was deferred to the
 13 next STPB meeting.

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 15 **Chair's Report** – *Doug Levine*

16 Doug reported that membership interviews are scheduled for next week with two promising candidates for
 17 potential board positions.

18 **Ithaca Farmers Market Update** – *Monika Roth and IFM Reps*

19 Monika reported on several key topics related to the Ithaca Farmers Market. Notably, the market has a rich
 20 history, dating back to 1973, and maintains a unique requirement for vendors to operate within a 30-mile
 21 radius. Meanwhile, Scott Whitham and Jacob von Mechow from Whitham Planning and Design provided
 22 an update on the \$3.8 million parking lot renovation project, which is nearing completion with a ribbon-
 23 cutting ceremony scheduled for Aug. 2. Board members asked about vendor agreements and project
 24 completion dates. Additionally, the market's membership structure was explained, including annual fees
 25 and a vendor ratio of 60% agriculture, 20% food, and 20% craft vendors. Furthermore, the market serves
 26 approximately 100,000 visitors annually and generates an estimated \$5 million in gross sales. Recently, the
 27 market was voted the number one farmers market in the country by Newsweek Readers Choice Awards for
 28 2025. Moving forward, the market plans to advocate for municipal support in future lease negotiations, as
 29 it currently receives no financial contribution from the City of Ithaca. Future priorities include pavilion roof
 30 improvements, electrical updates, and expanded restroom facilities.

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Final Meeting Minutes

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Staff Report & Q2 2025 Room Tax Report – Nick Helmholdt

Nick reported that the County Legislature approved the minimum revenue guarantee with United Airlines, following Cornell's agreement to participate. He updated the group on a STPB diversity survey, Ithaca Trails website updates, and the fall tourism grant cycle. The second-quarter room tax report showed revenue near budget, though delinquencies rose slightly most likely due to VRBO host confusion about occupancy taxes. Members were encouraged that revenue figures remain on track for annual projections.

Hospitality Employment Training Program Update – Lonnie Jenkins, Greater Ithaca Activities Center

Lonnie reported on the Hospitality Employment Training Program, an 11-year-old initiative that has expanded its scope to provide comprehensive workforce development services. The program offers wraparound services, including mental health support and life skills development, to address barriers to employment. Currently, eight participants are preparing to graduate on Aug. 29. The program is funded by grants, including \$95,000 from the Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency and support from the Tourism Program. Approximately 40 individuals are participating in the program under a new flexible system. Program features include tours, knife skills training with Cornell Dining, and tourism education sessions, with participants receiving paid internships funded by grants.

Mid-Year Report: Convention & Visitors Bureau – Peggy Coleman

Peggy shared highlights from the CVB's first six months of 2025, noting a CNN story recognizing Ithaca as the top U.S. town to visit had significant impact. However, Canadian visitation declined 80% due to political climate concerns. The new Washington DC flight service is driving increased metro area visitation. The Overlook at Taughannock Visitors Center reopened despite weather challenges causing over 15 closure days. Peggy reported staffing departures including social media specialist Jay Richardson and sales director Lisa Conarton. Website statistics show decreased sessions and page views, consistent with industry-wide AI search impacts, though performing better than industry averages.

Report/Action: Vote to Recommend Tourism Promotion Agency Designation – Peggy Coleman

Due to lack of quorum, the vote was deferred to the next STPB meeting.

Planning & Evaluation Committee: Hotel Room Occupancy Tax Law

Nick outlined upcoming steps for proposed modifications to the existing Hotel Room Occupancy Tax Law, including presentations to the County Legislature's Budget Capital and Personnel Committee in mid-August, public hearings, and a potential adoption vote in early September. Board members asked about the reason for the changes, with Nick explaining that the primary purpose is regulatory compliance to ensure proper language, along with additional housekeeping items. The modifications also address compliance requirements and clarify enforcement procedures for unregistered operators.

Action: Vote to Recommend Modifications to Existing Local Hotel Room Occupancy Tax Law

Due to lack of quorum, the vote was deferred to the next STPB meeting.

Member Announcements – Members shared events including Tripphammer Arts concerts, WaterMusic/Dancing on the Trail, GrassRoots, State Theatre updates, and Women Swimmin' for Hospicare. Peggy reported that the New York State Tourism Industry Association recognized Visit Ithaca's Visitor Experience team with an award, while Discover Cayuga Lake received recognition for excellence in sustainable tourism. Both organizations will be honored in September in Lake George.

Adjournment – Chair Doug Levine adjourned the meeting at 4:20pm.