

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

1 **Date:** April 15, 2026
 2 **Time:** 3:00-4:30pm
 3 **Location:** CAP Gallery, Tompkins Center for History and Culture

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 5 **Attendees:**

Member		Representation	Member		Representation
Sarah Barden	P	At-Large	Steve Selin	P	At-Large
Amanda Bisson	A	TC3	Teri Tarshus	E	Lodging
Laura Winter Falk	P	Agriculinary	Marian Levy Ware	E	At-Large
Jeff Golden	E	Ithaca College	Vacant		Recreation
Alexis Zaharis Grimm	P	Lodging	<i>Kurt Foreman</i>	P	<i>IAED, Non-voting</i>
Ken Jupiter	P	At-Large	<i>Megan Barber</i>	P	<i>CAP, Non-voting</i>
Michelle Kortenaar	E	At-Large	<i>Peggy Coleman</i>	E	<i>CVB, Non-voting</i>
Doug Levine	P	At-Large	<i>Frank Doldo</i>	P	<i>Transportation, Non-voting</i>
Kelly Makosch	E	Recreation	<i>Suzanne Smith Jablonski</i>	E	<i>IDCC, Non-voting</i>
Michael Miller	P	At-Large	<i>Rob Montana</i>	P	<i>Chamber, Non-voting</i>
Megan Omohundro	P	At-Large	<i>Nan Rohrer</i>	A	<i>DIA, Non-voting</i>
Bethany Parisi	P	Arts-Culture	<i>Greg Mezey</i>	A	<i>TC Legislature, Non-voting</i>
Barbara Romano	E	Cornell University	Nick Helmholdt	P	Tourism Program Director
Monika Roth	P	Agriculinary	Kristin McCarthy	P	County Staff

6 **Guests:** Jodi LaPierre, Katie Phelps, Erin Rafawloski, Chris Stephany, Alex Thornton

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8 **Opening Remarks/Changes to the Agenda/Privilege of the Floor** – Chair Doug Levine called the meeting to
 9 order at 3:07pm. There were no changes to the agenda and no public comments.

10 **Action: Approval of March 2026 STPB Draft Minutes** – The March meeting minutes were approved (motion
 11 by Laura Winter Falk, second by Michael Miller) as submitted.

12 **Chair's Report** – *Doug Levine*

13 Doug thanked everyone for his support while he was out. He briefly reintroduced the topic of revising the
 14 room tax policy to support the airport, indicating it would be addressed in more detail later in the meeting.

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16 **Staff Report** – *Nick Helmholdt*

17 Nick reported that the Notice of Funding Availability for the 2027 budget was still accepting submissions
 18 through April 21, after which the Budget Committee would begin its review. He also noted that Opera
 19 Ithaca, a previous ACOD recipient, is in the process of dissolving and is no longer eligible for funding. Nick
 20 and Megan B. have been in conversations about a potential pathway to redirect those funds toward the
 21 public sculpture project in the Town of Enfield. He also noted that the first quarter room tax report had not
 22 yet been received from Finance and would be shared with the board when available.

23 **Presentation: Visit Ithaca 2025 Annual Report** – *Jodi LaPierre, Rob Montana, Katie Phelps, Erin Rafalowski*

24 The Visit Ithaca team presented highlights from the 2025 annual report, covering visitor experience,
 25 marketing, and sales. A major win for the year was a CNN feature on the Ithaca area that Visit Ithaca helped
 26 shape, resulting in coverage of 38 local attractions and sustained pickup by other outlets. Jodi reported that
 27 Visit Ithaca received the New York State Tourism Industry Association's Tourism Excellence Award, and that
 28 the Ithaca Loves Teachers program celebrated its 20th anniversary with an estimated \$181,000 in economic
 29 impact. Erin highlighted strong digital and earned media performance, including placements in Travel +
 30 Leisure and National Geographic, a YouTube campaign with over 750,000 views, and a growing partnership

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31 with Wheel the World, an accessibility-focused travel platform. Katie outlined the sales team's focus on
32 meetings, sports, and international markets, noting that conferences hosted in Tompkins County generated
33 a combined economic impact exceeding \$1 million in 2025. Discussion touched on the property tax savings
34 methodology, accessibility assessment practices through Wheel the World and how grant language might
35 support that work, and the decline in Canadian visitation. The CNN coverage also prompted conversation
36 about measurable impact, with the presenters noting it was difficult to fully quantify but that anecdotal
37 feedback suggested it was meaningfully influencing visitor decisions.

38 **Action: Revise the Room Tax Reserve and Surplus Policy**– *Doug Levine, Ad Hoc Committee*
39 Doug and Nick presented the work of the ad hoc committee, which had evaluated various funding
40 scenarios for providing financial support to the airport. The committee's preferred approach would draw
41 down funds from the Tourism Program's reserves over three years beginning in 2027 while preserving
42 existing grant programs, with the airport required to provide quarterly reporting on metrics as a condition
43 of each annual allocation. Discussion covered a range of related concerns, including feedback from a
44 County legislator who expressed reservations about depleting the board's reserves, the history of the
45 County Legislature redirecting room tax funds to the airport in prior budget cycles, and questions about
46 whether a reserve replenishment plan should accompany any policy revision. Members also noted the
47 broader community conversation that may be warranted around how airport funding is prioritized relative
48 to other public investments. Chris Stephany of the airport provided additional context on flight data
49 toward the end of the discussion. No action was taken, and the board agreed that additional conversations
50 with legislators were needed before moving toward a vote, with the goal of reaching a recommendation by
51 the June meeting, ahead of the late-June budget submission deadline.

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53 **Member Announcements** – Members shared items of interest. TCAT now accepts tap-to-pay and is
54 launching a dedicated route to county parks this summer. Community happenings include the Spring Writes
55 Literary Festival, the reopening of the Ithaca Farmers Market on Saturdays, a roots reggae dance party to
56 celebrate the 22nd anniversary of the Reggae Explosions radio show, and the Chamber's annual meeting
57 celebration where the Howard Cogan Award will be presented to Doug Levine. Members also gave updates
58 on the Overlook at Taughannock Visitors Center, Community School of Music and Arts, Community Arts
59 Partnership funding, South Hill Cider, and Dryden Rail Trail.

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