

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

1 **Date:** June 12, 2024
 2 **Time:** 3:00-4:30pm
 3 **Location:** Old Jail, 125 E. Court Street, Ithaca/Via Zoom

4

5 **Attendees:**

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

6 **Guests:** Robert Lewis, Jeannie O’Neill, Andrew Pierce, Chris Stephany

7

8 **Opening Remarks/Changes to the Agenda/Privilege of the Floor** – Chair Brett Bossard opened the
 9 meeting at 3:06pm. During privilege of the floor, Jeannie O’Neill, executive director of Yoga Farm in Ithaca,
 10 shared an update on her organization’s evolution since the pandemic, transitioning from a small studio to a
 11 virtual yoga teacher training school with thousands of students worldwide. O’Neill expressed her
 12 enthusiasm for collaborating with local organizations to promote tourism in Tompkins County.

13

14 **Action: Approval of May 2024 STPB Draft Minutes** – The draft May 2024 minutes were approved (moved
 15 by Steven Stull, seconded by Alexis Zaharis Grimm) as submitted.

16

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

18 Brett thanked all the committees for their hard work, acknowledging the challenging budget season faced
 19 by local municipalities. In particular, he expressed appreciation for the budget committee’s efforts to find
 20 creative solutions to support stakeholders and partners.

21

22 **Staff Report** – *Nick Helmholdt*

23 Nick provided updates on board member recruitment, preparations for the fall grant round, and County
 24 Legislature conversations regarding a possible 1 percent increase to the hotel room occupancy tax. He also
 25 shared information about harmful algal blooms, the conference center, and the Cayuga Shores Wildlife
 26 Management Area. A newly passed state law regarding short-term rental registration was announced, with
 27 details still pending. Peggy shared a link to information about the short-term rental bill.

28

29 **Update: Conference Center** – *Suzanne Smith Jablonski*

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30 Suzanne reported that the center has obtained its temporary certificate of occupancy, with the first events
31 scheduled for July. She also mentioned that the adjacent residential project has received its temporary
32 certificate of occupancy and welcomed its first tenants, Additionally, Monika inquired about the
33 landscaping, noting its progress, and Suzanne confirmed that the exterior work is nearing completion, with
34 a retail space called "Green on the Go" set to open in the conference center.
35

Presentation: Visitor Profile Study – *Jamie Tokuno, et al, Future Partners*

37 Jamie Tokuno, lead research director at Future Partners, presented findings from the ongoing Visitor
38 Profile Study for Tompkins County. The year-long project, initiated in late 2023, aims to understand visitor
39 demographics, behaviors, and perceptions. A dashboard showcasing preliminary data from the first
40 quarter of 2024 was shared. The presentation highlighted key findings such as visitor origin, with New York
41 City as the top metro and New York state as the leading origin state. However, when examining those who
42 had never visited Tompkins County, Texas emerged as the top origin state. The dashboard also explored
43 visitor motivations, revealing a strong emphasis on outdoor activities and scenic beauty. A gap was
44 identified between the importance of easy access to activities and the perceived availability of such
45 offerings in Ithaca. Attendees expressed keen interest in understanding how different visitor segments,
46 such as age groups, consume media and plan their trips. Jamie demonstrated how the dashboard can be
47 filtered by various demographics to provide tailored insights. Questions arose about sample size, data
48 collection methods, and opportunities for partner involvement. The presentation concluded with a
49 discussion on the potential for benchmarking Tompkins County against similar destinations and the
50 possibility of expanding the study to include international visitors in the future. Attendees expressed
51 appreciation for the preliminary data and eagerly anticipated future updates as the study progresses.
52

Budget Committee: Proposed 2025 Tourism Program Budget

54 The budget committee reported on its efforts since the last meeting to review and adjust the draft budget
55 for fiscal year 2025. Funding for the Downtown Ithaca Alliance Festivals program and the Tompkins County
56 Workforce Development program was reduced due to concerns about managing the programs and a lack
57 of measurable results in tourism respectively. The committee allocated \$100,000 for marketing and
58 operations to the Ithaca Tompkins International Airport, marking the first year it has received funding from
59 room tax revenue. Debate arose regarding advocating for a room tax increase to support the airport, with
60 some members highlighting its importance to tourism and others expressing concerns about cost and
61 effectiveness. The possibility of using room tax revenue for intermodal transportation hubs was also
62 discussed. The committee ultimately voted to approve the revised budget proposal.
63

Action: Vote to Recommend 2025 Tourism Program Budget

65 Marian Levy Ware made a motion, which Kelly Makosch seconded, to recommend the draft 2025 Tourism
66 Program Budget for approval by the Tompkins County Legislature. Motion carried.
67

Member Announcements

69 Members shared news about various community events, including concerts at Triphammer Arts, Ithaca
70 College alumni weekend, NYS Special Olympics, Juneteenth, Ithaca Reggae Fest, Historic Ithaca Walk and
71 Talks, the Tompkins Food Future exhibit at the CAP ArtSpace, and the Sims-Jennings Preserve at Cayuga
72 Cliffs. Additionally, the group discussed the cancellation of Water Music, which was attributed to delays in
73 the statewide community regrants program administered by the New York State Council on the Arts.
74

75 **Adjournment** – Chair Brett Bossard adjourned the meeting at 4:37pm.