

Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB) Meeting Minutes – September 2011

Date: September 21, 2011
Time: 3:00-4:45pm
Location: Cornell Plantations

Attendees:

Name	✓	Representation	Name	✓	Representation
Anne Kellerman	✓	At-Large	Stuart Stein	EXC	At-Large
Anthony Hopson	✓	Ithaca College, Vice-Chair	Sue Perlgut	EXC	Arts-Culture
Beverly Baker	✓	At-Large	Sue Stafford	✓	TC3
David Sparrow	✓	At-Large, Chair	Susie Monagan	✓	Arts-Culture
Gary Stewart	✓	Cornell	Tim Joseph	✓	At-Large
Jean McPheeters	✓	Chamber	Todd Miner	✓	At-Large
Jon Reis	✓	Arts-Culture	Brett Bossard	✓	CAP, Non-Voting
Ken Jupiter	✓	At-Large	Carol Chock	✓	Legislature, Non-Voting
Paul Tatar	EXC	Recreation	Fred Bonn	✓	CVB, Non-Voting
Rick Adie	✓	Lodging	Gary Ferguson	✓	DIA, Non-Voting
Scott Wiggins	✓	Lodging	Martha Armstrong	✓	TCAD, Non-Voting
			Tom Knipe	✓	Staff

Also in attendance: Don Rakow, Cornell Plantations; Ed Marx, Commissioner of Planning; Rita Rosenberg, Rosebarb Farm Cottage

Agenda

1. Plantations presentation – Don Rakow
2. August 2011 minutes
3. Chair's report – David Sparrow
4. Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan - schedule of activities
5. Nominating Committee report – Anthony Hopson
 - a. Recommendation for open arts & culture seat - ACTION
 - b. Open ag seat – please recruit
6. Update on fall grant cycle – Tom Knipe
7. Sustainability tourism – response to PDEQ
8. Finger Lakes Region Rural Revitalization Initiative - Ed Marx
9. CVB report – Fred Bonn

Discussion

1. Plantations presentation

Don Rakow gave a presentation about Cornell Plantations and welcomed STPB members to the Nevins Welcome Center. Following the presentation, David Sparrow asked about Plantations' capacity to track the number of visitors and where they are coming from. Plantations does not currently have this capacity but a new tracking system will help with this in the future. An STPB member asked about winter activities at Plantations. Mr. Rakow responded that they view Plantations as a 12-month facility. The Winter Garden is an example. There are also continuing education activities and family events throughout the winter – at the Nevins Center, and through winter tours (e.g. tree identification, animal tracking, Light in Winter). Susie M. asked Don whether he had any suggestions for STPB? Mr. Rakow responded by mentioning STPB's support for the Discovery Trail (DT), which has grown since its inception and of which Cornell Plantations is a member. Don expressed appreciation for DT support from STPB, and referenced an effort that is currently underway to expand the "Kids Discover the Trail" project County-wide. Don feels that by supporting a series of sites for cultural tourism, support for the DT expands cultural tourism in the County.

2. Approval of minutes for August, 2011 STPB meeting - August Minutes were approved unanimously with a small change relating to the grant amount that will be available through the competitive NYS regional economic development councils.

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3. Chair's report

David reported on a meeting that he and members of the STPB Executive Committee had with Joe Mareane, Ed Marx, and Tom Knipe about a memo distributed by Tom to PDEQ at their September meeting about possible mechanisms of support for sustainability tourism. The STPB Executive Committee raised concerns about the procedure followed in distributing the memo. The outcome of that meeting was to reaffirm the existing process. David S. then invited comment or questions from STPB members.

Rick A. expressed concern to Ed M. that the memo appeared to circumvent a long-standing process. Ed responded that the intent was to be responsive to the legislature's initiative on this subject. There was discussion by PDEQ at their August meeting about how there could be funding allocated in the near term. At this meeting, Ed made a suggestion that the idea should go back to STPB for consideration. When Ed realized that this had not been discussed at the August STPB meeting he asked Tom to put together a memo informing PDEQ of the context. His intent was to have it reviewed by David S before it went out. David did not have a chance to review it before it went out due to miscommunications during a compact timeframe. Ed took responsibility for the fact that it went out, and stated that there was no intent to circumvent the STPB process. Rick A. questioned how the process followed in distributing the memo fit with the strategic planning process and expressed concern that there had been no extensive discussion at STPB to date about sustainability tourism. He also referenced that sustainability tourism is not mentioned in the Chmura study, and questioned whether STPB has done an adequate job informing the legislature about this study. Ed responded that the issue was raised by PDEQ, and the Planning Department tried to be responsive to that. The intent of the memo was to say that it should fit within current programs. Regarding the memo's mention of the potential of moving funds, this was in response to the fact that at PDEQ an amount of \$10,000 to \$20,000 was mentioned by a Committee member and the memo partly responded to this, but the overarching theme of the memo was that it isn't necessary to do anything at this time, that there are avenues in existing programs if there is an interest in pursuing this. Ken Jupiter expressed that if there is a need in the future to respond to a request by the PDEQ committee, that it should be brought to the tourism board first.

Carol C. then spoke about the overarching sense that the Legislature brings to its relationship with STPB - that we are all moving forward with a common purpose. The Legislature has supported the continuation of tourism programs and this type of economic development. She applauded Ed and Tom for trying to work with everyone, and stated the need to respond quickly to PDEQ. She referenced that tourism is a top aim for the County in terms of economic development, and that tourism is an issue that is discussed in multiple venues, in many different ways, and that the Legislature tries to coordinate across boards. Carol then gave examples of instances of initiative coming from both directions – the Legislature and STPB.

Anthony H. thanked Ed M. for his acknowledgment and then reiterated Rick A's statements about the importance of maintaining STPB's role in support of the legislature and the need for STPB to have an opportunity to weigh in on issues moving forward.

In terms of drafting a response to the PDEQ committee, STPB agreed that conversation should take place at the STPB Planning & Evaluation Committee.

4. Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan

Tom K. requested input on a draft timeline of the process for the strategic tourism plan update. A discussion centering on the public outreach elements of the process took place. There is a choice between doing basic public outreach vs. seeking input into the plan. Several members expressed a preference for seeking feedback, especially from stakeholders. This is being done currently for several sectors around the plan's draft goals and actions. Anne K. asked about the format for the public meeting, and also suggested social media such as Facebook as a means of gathering input. Gary F. mentioned the importance of timing for public outreach, in particular whether the proposed timeline would allow time to incorporate community feedback into edits. Scott Wiggins stated that there are two communities - activist stakeholders and general public - and raised the question of whether we would want to hold two outreach sessions, one for each of these sets of groups. Tom stated that the meeting on 11/29 could be designed to allow working groups for different tourism sectors to break out by content area. Tim J. brought up the importance of reminding folks in the meeting that the tourism program is about economic development. Tom stated that the County will

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use all available resources to get the word out widely, including to potential new stakeholders. Tom will work with the STPB Planning and Evaluation Committee to update the timeline.

5. Nominating Committee report

Anthony H. gave the nominating committee's recommendation for a new STPB member.. There were nine (9) applicants and five (5) interviewees for the vacant Arts and Culture seat/ All were sensational. Recusals happened to make sure that the process went well. Ethan Ash was selected for his demonstrated skills, technological expertise, and commitment to the community. He also had significant recommendations from STPB members. David S. commented that while Ethan is not an artist or arts management professional, he is committed to the Arts as a volunteer. Jean endorsed Ethan for his potential to chair STPB in the future. The nominating committee agreed that Ethan has leadership potential. Todd M. asked if the nominating committee had an arts perspective. Tom stated that Sue P. joined the nominating committee and took part in the deliberations in order to provide such perspective. Tim J. suggested that the entire board should see all of the applications, too.

A discussion then took place about the recommendation process and the role of the nominating committee and the full board. Susie M. suggested that applications could be posted to a secure site so that members of the board could review at their leisure in advance of the STPB meeting. Tom agreed to look into it this option for the future. Others suggested that a rating system based on candidate attributes and other criteria could be established and the results shared with STPB members. Several members suggested that having the nominating committee manage the nomination process was not the same as turning over the decision to them. There were two outcomes to this discussion: 1) STPB members agreed that in the future all applicant materials should be available to all STPB members in advance of the meeting, and 2) copies of all candidates application materials were then distributed for STPB members to look over during the remainder of the meeting. The motion to recommend Ethan A. was tabled until the end of the meeting.

6. Update on fall grant cycle

Tom gave a brief report on the timeline for the fall grant cycle. Grant review committees will be meeting around the week of November 7th, in order to bring grant recommendations to the November STPB meeting.

7. Sustainability tourism

Scott W. briefly explained the sustainability tourism concept. An STPB member suggested that further study/exploration bears a look. Tom stated that sustainability tourism-related projects could apply under the current grant programs, but that to date, no such proposal has been brought forward. A motion was not raised at the September PDEQ meeting, but there is clear interest at the legislature about how to pursue this. There is an opportunity for STPB to consider how sustainability tourism might be pursued. The issue was referred for further discussion to the Planning & Evaluation Committee.

8. Finger Lakes Region Rural Revitalization Initiative

Ed Marx introduced this concept to STPB. A ten-county group with participants from agriculture, sustainability, forestry, recreation and tourism will work together on rurally focused sustainability efforts to revitalize the rural economy. The group is now reaching out to other tourism entities, including the FLTA. There are grant opportunities for the big picture of the initiative, opportunities to better brand the Finger Lakes region and opportunities for tourism. This initiative would provide a framework for rural development, with a goal of building a strong economy in rural communities. People come here because of unique attributes of the region. Sustainability is a component of this. Also, outdoor recreation fits into the rural landscape. David S. asked if this initiative would be ongoing. It will. The task force is to meet periodically. Fred B. offered to help with regional tourism politics.

9. CVB report

Fred B. gave the CVB report. The Tioga County CVB flooded. Tompkins County is housing Red Cross workers. The CVB and CAP worked on the integration of VisitIthaca.com with IthacaEvents.com. The GPS integration did not work, but may come with time. The integration is now launched without GPS integration. Rochester 30 second spots have been successful. The campaign will be expanded to Buffalo and Syracuse in September. Fred met with researchers on the conversion study. Mary R. made a trip to Chicago. The regional economic development council has developed recommendations. One is to support downtown revitalization programs. Grant applications aligning with the Council's recommendations will receive

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additional ranking points for grant projects. Projects recommended by the tourism working group include big signage programs such as roadside experiential signage supported with smart technologies and kiosks at welcome and info centers, and an eight-county customer service training. Facebook likes are up to almost 5,000 and grew in September.

Susie M. asked about IC reunion impacts. The CVB does not have the capacity to segment these out. This is because people are making reservations individually, not doing it as block business. But the weekend was sold out. Fred stated that October could surpass August.

Nominating Committee - redux

The board concluded the meeting by voting on the earlier motion to recommend Ethan Ash for STPB membership. STPB members voted unanimously in favor of the recommendation.

Next Meeting Scheduled

October 19th, 2011