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Tompkins County kick starts Strategic Tourism Plan with implementation funding

Tompkins County is launching its 2020 Strategic Tourism Plan with a new grant funding opportunity.

The Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB), the County's official advisory board for tourism development, recently completed two years of work on the Plan with hundreds of diverse community members. The Plan establishes fifteen ambitious and inspiring goals for developing tourism in Tompkins County. The overarching goals of the plan - and the room-occupancy-tax-funded Tompkins County Tourism Program - are to promote economic development and enhance quality of life through tourism-related actions and investments, following a community-based model of tourism development. In 2011, tourism in Tompkins County generated more than \$166 million in local economic activity and \$11.2 million in local tax revenues, and accounted for 3,375 local jobs. The plan seeks to help grow visitor spending in the County to \$265 million by 2020. The Plan was formally accepted by the Tompkins County Legislature this fall.

Tompkins County Legislature Chair Martha Robertson offers context for the important role of the Plan. "It's clear that although we've accomplished so much with our tourism programs over the years, there are many more exciting opportunities to pursue. Living in Tompkins County, we enjoy the benefits of the vibrant and diverse culture that the STPB has fostered through its stewardship of the county's room tax revenue. We're grateful to the STPB and its many partners for helping to make Tompkins County a great place to visit, live, work, go to school, retire, and grow a business."

In introducing the Plan, STPB Chair David Sparrow writes, "we are pleased to present this plan to the community for its use in preparing applications for support of projects and programs in the tourism sector."

Now, the Tompkins County Tourism Program is launching a new one-time competitive grant funding opportunity to kick start implementation of the Strategic Tourism Plan. Not-for-profit organizations and municipalities are eligible to apply for projects that will directly implement one or more of thirty-seven "Critical Actions". A handful of Strategic Tourism Implementation Grant awards of between \$25,000 and \$75,000 will be made in early 2013 and will help make put key elements of the plan into action quickly.

Applications are due January 8th. Full grant application details and an electronic copy of the 2020 Strategic Tourism Plan are available on the Tourism Program website: www.tompkins-co.org/tourism.

This new grant funding opportunity does not replace existing tourism grant programs offered by the County. Those programs include grants for tourism-related capital projects, organizational development support for established arts and culture organizations that draw visitors, support for new and ongoing tourism projects and marketing and advertising support to bring in more visitors to experience our community. The County is planning another funding round in those programs again in early 2013. These will be another vital tool for implementing the County's tourism strategies.