

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

1 **Date:** Oct. 18, 2023  
 2 **Time:** 3:00-4:30  
 3 **Location:** Old Jail Conference Room/Via Zoom

4

5 **Attendees:**

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

6 **Guests:** Lisa Conarton, Suzanne Smith Jablonski

7

8 **Opening Remarks/Changes to the Agenda/Privilege of the Floor** –Chair Brett Bossard welcomed  
 9 everyone to the meeting at 3:05pm.

10

11 **Action: Approval of September 2023 STPB Draft Minutes** – The draft Sept. 2023 minutes were approved as  
 12 submitted (moved by Josh Friedman, seconded by Laura Winter Falk).

13

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

15 No report.

16

17 **Staff Report/Q3 2023 Report** – *Nick Helmholdt*

18 Nick welcomed new board members Jeff Golden and Richard Floyd. He also announced the departure of  
 19 Josh Friedman and Kelli Cartmill from the board in 2024 and the ongoing recruitment for their seats. In  
 20 addition, Nick reported that Q3 room tax collections reached \$1.47 million, bringing the year-to-date total  
 21 to \$3.12 million, representing 94% of the 2023 budgeted revenue. It’s likely fourth quarter collections will  
 22 lead to surpassing annual projected revenues. Tax delinquencies are going down, occupancy is slightly  
 23 down, and rates remain roughly the same. Members raised questions about tax delinquencies and short-  
 24 term rentals. Brett shared that plans are in the works to invite the County Attorney’s Office to a future  
 25 STPB meeting to discuss room tax collection procedures.

26

27 **Q3 CVB Report** – *Peggy Coleman*

28 Peggy provided an overview of her team’s work over the third quarter. Sarah Imes is going on an ILOVENY  
 29 sales mission to the U.K., Germany, among other locales. Also, thanks to a connection made by Marian Levy  
 30 Ware, Visit Ithaca has a full-page print ad in National Geographic Traveller UK, which will complement

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

31 Sarah's work in-market. There is a digital support as well. Sarah will be representing Tompkins County while  
32 in the U.K., and the Wines, Waters, and Wonders collaborative while in Germany. Other highlights from her  
33 report and the Q&A covered Ithaca Waterfalls Challenge, Taughannock Overlook Visitor Center, Dalai Lama  
34 Monastery Library, new TikTok channel, grants received, conference center opening, and departure of long-  
35 time staff member Rachael Atkins-Walpole.

### 36 37 **Conference Center Sales Update** – *Lisa Conarton*

38 Lisa, the CVB's conference sales manager, provided an update on the Ithaca Downtown Conference Center.  
39 She emphasized the importance of determining the return on investment and shared positive results to  
40 date. A fact sheet was passed out to attendees that is used for promotion at trade shows and for digital  
41 distribution. Lisa highlighted collaborative efforts between the CVB, ASM Global, and the LDC to promote  
42 the center and support marketing efforts. Her report and the subsequent discussion covered multiple  
43 topics, including promoting the conference center to state associations and partnering with Statler and  
44 Ithaca College to reach meeting planners, the availability of free sale periods when space is available, but  
45 hotels are not, the importance of creating a symbiotic relationship with other hospitality partners, and the  
46 need for adequate transportation options. Last, she highlighted the fact that the facility is fully electric and  
47 fossil-free, generating national buzz.

### 48 49 **Update on Wayfinding** – *Jennifer Tavares*

50 Jennifer provided an update on the Wayfinding initiative. The project is being rescoped and is expected to  
51 begin next year. The TC Chamber Foundation has received IDA funding to support the project. An RFP has  
52 been issued, and the team is contracting with Whitham Planning & Design. The focus of the project will be  
53 on branding, scoping, logo, and shape. Jennifer shared that the advisory committee meets monthly and has  
54 made significant progress. A member of the Whitham team has inventoried all the signs or proposed signs.  
55 NYSDOT does not keep records of signs, so the consultant has created a digital map to track the project.  
56 The advisory committee has also reviewed phasing, tourism assets (new vs. old), pedestrian wayfinding,  
57 and discussions with the original funders of the project. They have expressed concern about the financial  
58 support for installing the signs and the challenges of workforce shortages and rising costs. A letter of  
59 interest has been submitted for a Strategic Tourism Initiative grant and has been approved. A full  
60 application will be submitted soon. Q&A touched on the initial Wayfinding plan, which was done in 2013-  
61 2014 and did not have a lot of funding support, and how Tompkins County compares with other peer  
62 destinations in terms of placemaking. Jennifer stated that she would be happy to return in a few months to  
63 share more about the project.

### 64 65 **P&E Committee: Approve Revisions to Tourism Advancement Grant Guidelines**

66 On behalf of the Planning & Evaluation Committee, Nick provided an overview of proposed changes to the  
67 Tourism Advancement grant guidelines. The motivation for undertaking these revisions was to find ways to  
68 open up the program to more potential grantees. Highlights include bumping the maximum award to  
69 \$20,000 and decreasing the financial match to 50 percent.

70  
71 **Action:** A motion was submitted by the Planning & Evaluation Committee, with a second by Marian Levy  
72 Ware, to approve revisions to the Tourism Advancement grant guidelines. Motion carried.

### 73 74 **Convention and Visitors Bureau Operating Agreement** – *Nick Helmholdt & Peggy Coleman*

75 Group reviewed a resolution to authorize the County Administrator to execute a memorandum of  
76 understanding with the Chamber of Commerce for the operation of the Convention and Visitors Bureau.  
77 The new agreement, which would last for five years versus needing to be negotiated annually as happened  
78 in the past, contains substantial changes to fit with current County fiscal policy. The report and discussion

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

79 covered various topics, including budget committee process, CVB and chamber staff opinions on the new  
80 agreement, over target requests, long-term marketing and budgeting, reporting requirements, and more.

81

82 **Action:** Kelli Cartmill made a motion, which Doug Levine seconded, to approve a resolution for Tompkins  
83 County to enter into a five-year agreement with the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce to operate  
84 the Convention and Visitors Bureau (Visit Ithaca). Motion carried.

85

### **Member Announcements**

87 Members shared news and events of interest to the community. These included the Ithaca Art Trail, NY  
88 Harvest Festival & Freedom Fair, Support Your Local Chamber of Commerce Day and annual TC Chamber of  
89 Commerce Auction, Napoleon Dynamite event at the State Theatre, Cortaca, and more. In addition, Laura  
90 shared that she was contracted by Fodors Travel Guide to contribute to a “best wineries and distilleries”  
91 chapter and will be writing about New York State, with a focus on Ithaca. Peggy reported that the CVB is  
92 working with Swartout to complement bus service to Ithaca Airport before and after standard TCAT runs.

93

94 **Adjournment** – Chair Brett Bossard adjourned the meeting at 4:30pm.