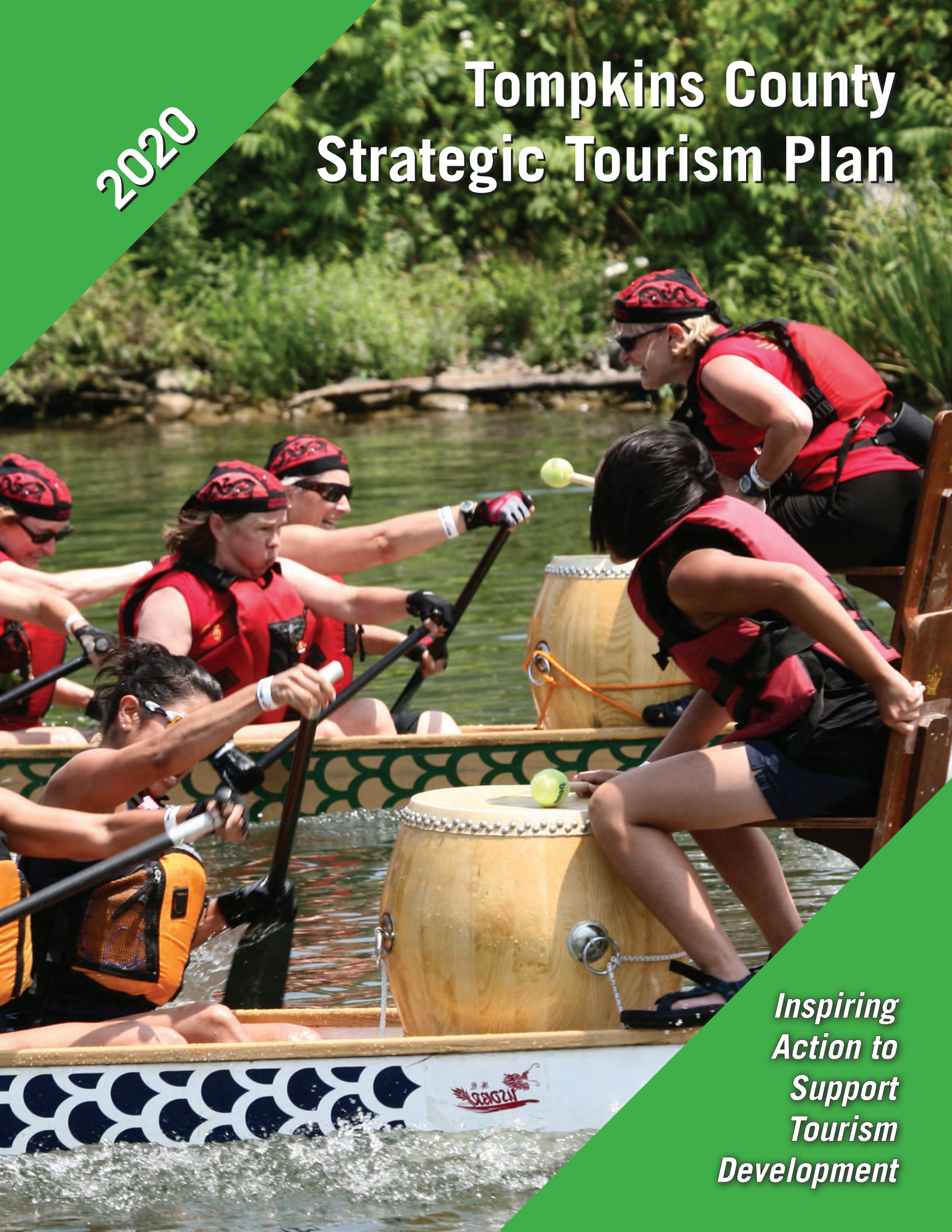


2020

Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan



*Inspiring
Action to
Support
Tourism
Development*

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Will Burbank	Ex-Officio Legislature
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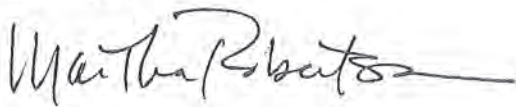


Photo by Jon Reis

With great pleasure I invite you to read the 2020 Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan. Whether you are “in the business,” a local taxpayer and observer of county government, or a past or potential visitor to our community, I believe you will find much to enjoy and learn from in this document.

I congratulate the Strategic Tourism Planning Board, the STPB’s Planning and Evaluation Committee, and Tompkins County Senior Planner Tom Knipe on this report’s depth and breadth, originality, readability, and beauty. The vision presented here is inspiring as well as accessible. The data presented are fascinating and meaningful in guiding the choices made by the STPB. And it is clear that, although we have accomplished much with our tourism programs over the years, there are many more exciting ideas to pursue. I hope readers of this report will not only enjoy it, but will reflect and comment on it as we work continually to improve our service to our visitors.

We who live in Tompkins County enjoy the benefits of the vibrant and diverse culture that the STPB has fostered through its stewardship of the county’s room tax income. I extend our gratitude to STPB and its many partners in the community for their work which – to quote this report - “also makes Tompkins County a great place to live, work, go to school, retire and grow a business.”



Martha Robertson, Chair
Tompkins County Legislature



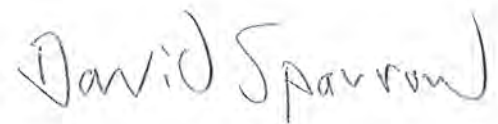
OUR MISSION:

The Strategic Tourism Planning Board is charged by the Tompkins County Legislature with providing oversight and strategic direction for tourism initiatives that *promote economic development* and *enhance the quality of life* in Tompkins County.

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 of our local economy. Further, we hope that the plan will help community members understand this vital part of our economy by providing a framework for projecting its possible change and development. I wish to express the Board’s gratitude to Tom Knipe and the Tompkins County Planning Department, through whose work this plan is a more comprehensive and better scheme than it would have been otherwise, to Brett Bossard and Jon Reis for their extra contributions, and to Ithaca College for printing the plan. Many others made valuable contributions, especially earlier this year through a process of outreach to the community.

This plan supersedes and expands upon the 2005-2010 Strategic Tourism Plan. The programmatic structure of the tourism sector constituted by cultural, natural and recreational resources is much the same in the two plans, although explored more thoroughly in this new document. Elaboration and refinement of policies, performance indicators, focus areas, goals and actions in this plan for 2012-2020 go well beyond discussions in the 2005-2010 document.

Understanding that a static plan is quickly outdated, the STPB intends to revise this one, gathering new data to assess the tourism economy and adapt the plan to address significant changes measured there. Given the span of years that this plan is conceived to address, we have tried to envision how the tourism sector will change. We would like very much to hear from you about what you think of this plan, how you use it, what you think it addresses well, and what you believe it overlooks.



David E. Sparrow, Chair
Tompkins County
Strategic Tourism Planning Board

Acknowledgements

The Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB) extends thanks to all of the individuals who invested their time and energy in researching, compiling, writing, analyzing, editing and designing materials to make this plan possible.

In addition, thank you to the hundreds of tourism partners and community members who contributed ideas through interviews, committee meetings, the tourism plan survey and the tourism plan workshop that took place at the Tompkins County Public Library in January, 2012.

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Vicki Taylor-Brous, Downtown Ithaca Alliance and Festivals Program Coordinator

Brett Bossard, Community Arts Partnership, layout and design

Photo Credits

On the Cover: Teams compete at the annual Finger Lakes International Dragon Boat Festival, held on Cayuga Lake. *Photo by Jon Reis.*

Unless noted below, all photos courtesy Jon Reis Photography.

p. 6, A stroll along the Cayuga Waterfront Trail, courtesy Simon Wheeler

p. 15, Ithaca Festival, courtesy Kris Reynolds

p. 16, Apple Fest on the Ithaca Commons, photo by Samantha Constant, courtesy of Ithaca College

p. 17, Six Circle Farm at the Ithaca Farmers Market, courtesy Aaron Munzer

p. 18, The view from Six Mile Creek, courtesy Six Mile Creek Winery

p. 19, Concert at the State Theatre, photo by Jody Gianni, courtesy State Theatre of Ithaca

*p. 20, Hangar Theatre Company production of *The Rocky Horror Show*, courtesy Tom Hoebbel Photography*

p. 23, Taughannock Falls in winter, courtesy Kris Reynolds

p. 26, Ecovillage at Ithaca, courtesy Tim Allen

p. 27, Bird watchers at the Lab of Ornithology, photo by Susan Spear, courtesy of the Lab of Ornithology

p. 29, Winter festival, courtesy Dave Burbank Photography

p. 30, Conference goes at the Museum of the Earth, courtesy Paleontological Research Institution

Introduction

The Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan advances tourism as a means of promoting economic development and enhancing quality of life. The Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB) set out to update the County's Strategic Tourism Plan that identifies a set of goals and measurable objectives for the future of tourism promotion and development.

The plan is designed to create a basis for future action and investment, on a community-based model of tourism development in which our attraction as a destination is the combination of unique experiences and offerings that also makes Tompkins County a great place to live, work, go to school, retire and grow a business.

The STPB, as part of the two-year process of updating the County's Strategic Tourism Plan¹:

- Examined prior tourism-related plans to place the current effort in **Historical Perspective** and reviewed progress towards implementation of strategic actions of the 2005-2010 strategic tourism plan.
- Identified **Achievements** in tourism development between 2005 and 2010.
- Commissioned and analyzed a **Profile of Visitors to Tompkins County** report based on 2009 survey-based research by Chmura Economics & Analytics.
- Confirmed the validity of the overarching **Aims** of the Tompkins County Tourism Program. These Aims were first established in 2002 by the STPB, adopted as part of the 2005-2010 Strategic Tourism Plan and are included unaltered in this plan.
- Developed fourteen **Policies** to guide future decision-making related to funding, operations and evaluation. These replace and expand upon the Overarching Strategies identified in the 2005-2010 Strategic Tourism Plan.
- Described a set of **Performance Indicators** that will be used to monitor the performance of the tourism industry.
- Identified fifteen **Focus Areas** for local tourism development. Each focus area fits

into one of three categories - Established Tourism Types, Emerging Tourism Types, and Tourism Foundation.

- Developed a framework for describing **Goals, Measurable Objectives and Actions**, and developed a detailed and creative set of possible goals, measurable objectives and actions for consideration.
- Conducted a **Community Workshop** in early 2012 where 100 participants contributed ideas to this list of possible goals and actions.
- Evaluated results of an online survey in which 170 respondents scored possible goals and actions on their **Importance** and **Feasibility**. Importance was defined by relationship to the Aims of the plan, and feasibility was defined as the relative ease of implementation by 2020.



Photo by Jon Reis



Photo by Jon Reis

- Identified **one Overarching Goal** relating to each focus area, and up to three **Critical Actions** for each focus area.

Upon adoption of the Strategic Tourism Plan, the STPB intends to:

- Validate possible **Measurable Objectives** related to the achievement of goals.
- Compile baseline data to track our progress in meeting the **Measurable Objectives**.
- Maintain the list of **Possible Actions** identified during the planning process as a working/ living document for the County's Tourism Program and tourism partners to use in supporting implementation of the plan.
- Develop **Program Assessment Criteria** - metrics used to assess the return on investment or value of investment of individual tourism programs and projects – for each program funded by the Tompkins County Tourism Program.



Photo by Jon Reis

What We Value Most

Aims

These Aims, drawn from the 2005-2010 Strategic Tourism Plan, are the highest-level description of values that advance the mission of the STPB and the Tompkins County Tourism Program. All policies, goals, objectives, and actions in this plan must further these overarching Aims. The Aims are shown in a circle because none has priority over any others.



Provide memorable experiences and legendary service that will educate, delight, and relax visitors, compel them to tell others, and motivate repeat visits.

Create demand through excellent marketing of appropriate tourism sites and services, and cultural and recreational assets in Tompkins County.

Present this unique place by building on special characteristics of its people, culture, history, geography, environment, economic activity, and institutions.

Tompkins County Tourism Aims

Improve and never harm the quality of life for local residents, businesses, and institutions. Tourism programs should enrich the lives of all who live here.

Improve economic climate through a vibrant tourism program that builds jobs, raises tax revenues, and helps make our county a great place to live, work, and invest.

Encourage development of strong programs and facilities to serve as the tourism “infrastructure” upon which future projects can be developed.

Policies

The Policies listed below are established to maintain excellence in tourism development and to guide the use of Tompkins County tourism resources for the next nine years. They provide guidance for future decision-making related to funding, operations and evaluation. These replace and expand upon the Overarching Strategies identified in the 2005-2010 Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan.

FUNDING

It is the policy of the Tompkins County Tourism Program to:

- ***Use reserves for tourism.*** Reinvest reserve funds that may become available in a given year due to larger than anticipated revenues to “enhance the general economy of Tompkins County, its cities, towns and villages, through promotion of tourist activities, conventions, trade shows, special events and other directly related and supporting activities”.²
- ***Maintain a 60/40 split for now.*** Continue to invest hotel room occupancy tax funds in tourism marketing and tourism product development as specified by state enabling legislation and local law. In the short term a ratio of 60% for marketing and 40% for product development, as specified by policy³ of the Tompkins County Legislature, should be maintained. After a certain threshold of overall program funding is reached, additional funds beyond this should be allocated for tourism related activities according to a new flexible formula. The new formula should be established by no later than 2014.
- ***Maintain funding for existing programs while also allowing room for new strategic initiatives.*** Continue to fund existing tourism

programs and products to strengthen their attraction and improve their quality. Those programs and products that have received funding in the past will be given priority for future funding, if they meet certain qualifications.⁴ Simultaneously, proactively identify strategic opportunities for new tourism initiatives, whether marketing or product development, and align new investments⁵ with these strategic opportunities.⁶

- ***Increase overnight stays.*** Prioritize funding support for marketing and product development initiatives that create overnight visitor stays, especially at times when there is excess lodging supply such as in the winter, on certain slow weekends during the “shoulder” season, and mid-week during months other than July and August.
- ***Go after additional spending, too.*** Also support marketing and product development initiatives that hold potential to increase visitor spending more broadly, including by day-trippers and visitors staying with friends and family.
- ***Build our brand.*** Fund tourism programs and projects that build long-term destination brand value, by “presenting this unique place”.



Photo by Jon Reis

OPERATIONS

It is the policy of the Tompkins County Tourism Program to:

- **Collaborate.** Support qualifying initiatives that demonstrate broad community support and meaningful collaboration with other partners of the Tompkins County Tourism Program.
- **Inspire sustainability.** Inspire environmentally sustainable practices by partners in the local tourism industry to reflect our green community values.
- **Promote diversity.** Actively pursue diverse STPB membership and partnerships, such as with representation from diverse generations, local communities, and ethnicities, and with diverse competencies.
- **Coordinate across programs.** Invest in tourism product development in a manner that coordinates directly with tourism marketing strategy, and align marketing with product development strategy.

EVALUATION

It is the policy of the Tompkins County Tourism Program to:

- **Be data-driven.** Measure the performance of tourism programs, as well as each funded project, using data-driven program evaluation practices, and modify programs as needed to respond to findings. Also, track the Tompkins County tourism industry using performance indicators.
- **Proactively communicate priorities.** Proactively establish and communicate strategic priorities and assessment criteria for product development funding.⁷
- **Evaluate marketing investments.** Review, evaluate and update tourism marketing investment strategies on an annual basis to align with industry best practices and lessons learned from evaluation of the previous year's ROMI (return on marketing investment).
- **Use multi-year agreements.** Establish multi-year funding agreements for projects in certain program categories.⁸ Agreements should be contingent on annual evaluation of achievement of established goals and availability of Tourism Program funds.



Tompkins County Tourism Program

This section contains a summary of the Tompkins County hotel room occupancy tax, a description of current room tax funded programs, and a summary of 2005-2010 expenditures by program. A list of 2005-2010 Tourism Program achievements is provided at the end of this document.

Hotel Room Occupancy Tax

The activities of the Tompkins County Tourism Program are funded entirely by a local hotel room occupancy tax. By law, room tax revenues are dedicated to local tourism development. The Tompkins County Legislature first implemented a room occupancy tax in 1986 and since 1989 has created a series of boards to provide advice on issues related to tourism development and to guide the allocation of proceeds from the room tax. Between 1989 and 2002, funds from a room tax of 3 percent were allocated thus: 76.5 percent to the Convention and Visitors Bureau, 8.5 percent to the Finger Lakes Association, 15 percent to a competitive Development Grants Program, and a maximum of 10 percent for administration.

In 2001, the County Legislature approved an increase in the room tax, which was phased in until it reached the current rate of 5 percent in June of 2003. By policy of the Legislature, the income from

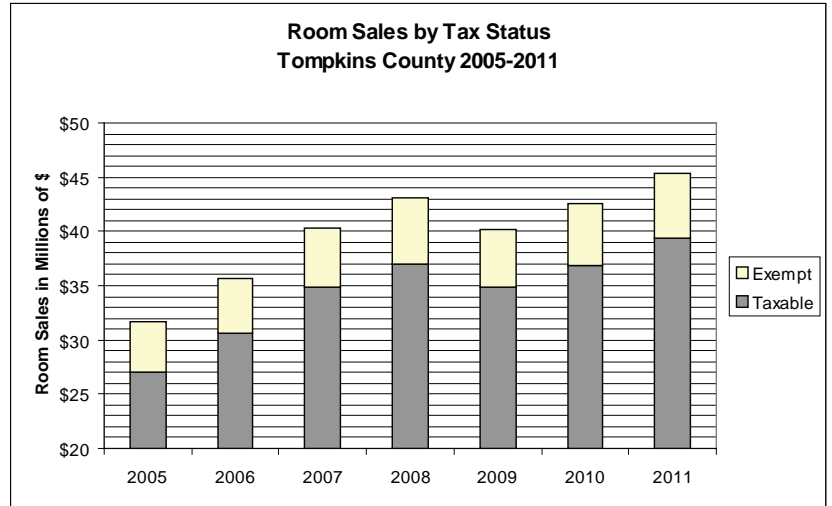


Figure 1 –Tompkins County Annual Room Sales, Source: Tompkins County Department of Finance. Non-profit and government related room sales are tax exempt, along with permanent residents staying longer than 30 days. Sales at establishments with fewer than 11 rooms are charged a 3% room tax instead of 5%.

this tax is divided into two parts: a) the 3 percent tax (60%), which is used primarily for marketing, although some of these monies are used for small grants to assist new programs and events to get started; and b) the 2 percent tax (40%), which is used for product development and tourism capital purposes, especially: the development and stabilization of the County’s arts and cultural resources and facilities, support for local festivals, and beautification of the County. Also, in 2011, the Tourism Program established a new full-time staff position in Tompkins County to support strategic planning, grant management, evaluation and tourism product development.

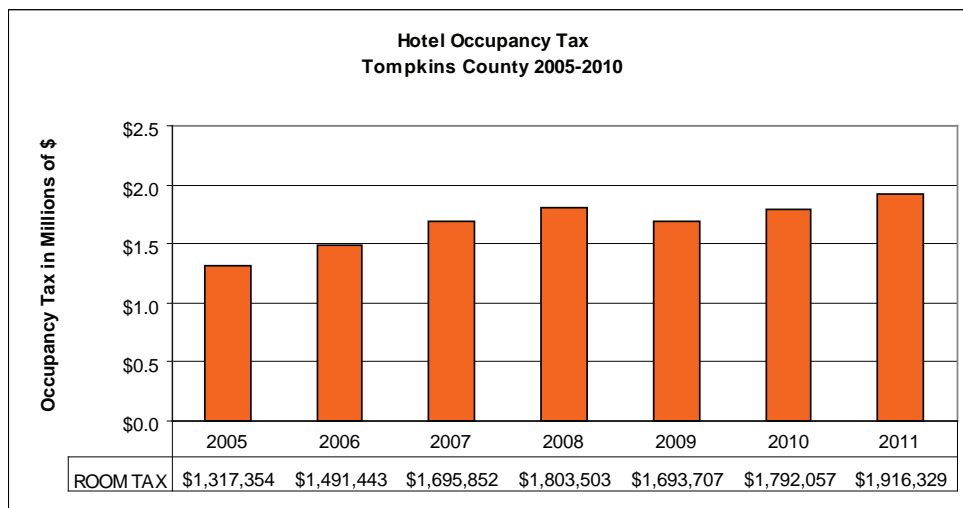


Figure 2 - Tompkins County Hotel Occupancy Tax Revenues; Source: Tompkins County Department of Finance

Room tax revenues grew, on average, 6% per year between 2005 and 2010, from \$1.32 million to \$1.79 million in 2010. 2011 revenues grew 7.7% over 2010, registering \$1.92 million.

Current Programs

The Tompkins County Tourism Program currently funds the following programs.

Product Development (known as the 40%)

- **Beautification, Signage & Public Art** improve way finding signage to direct travelers to key destinations and beautify communities to welcome visitors, especially at gateways.
- **Arts & Culture Organizational Development Grants** strengthen large existing arts and culture organizations with long term financial planning and development tools.
- **Community Celebrations Grants** support observances, commemorations, jubileations, inaugurations, presentations, or other “red letter days” or salutes that have meaning for the community.
- **Community Arts Partnership (CAP) - Downtown Ticket Center** supports a joint ticketing venue for major performing arts venues.
- **Community Arts Partnership – Assistance with CAP Operating Expenses** strengthens the visibility of Tompkins County’s thriving arts community.
- **Festivals Program** provides technical assistance, coordination, and resource sharing for local festivals at a macro level to enhance their effectiveness.
- **Tourism Project Grants** support tourism-generating single projects.
- **County Historian** provides a historical connection to today’s tourism events and projects.
- **Strategic Planning and Staffing** maximizes tourism program effectiveness and reduces volunteer STPB workload on program administration through sustainable staffing, leadership and research.
- **Tourism Capital Grants** expand major visitor-generating facilities, and fund feasibility studies for potential projects.
- **Workforce Development/TC3 Customer Service** creates a career ladder for entry-level jobs in the tourism industry and provides training to improve the visitors’ experience.

Marketing (known as the 60%)

- **Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB)** enhances economic development through promotion of local activities and assets to visitors as well as residents. The CVB is the County’s designated Tourism Promotion Agency.
- **Tourism Marketing and Advertising Grants** help promote events and projects likely to attract visitors in a manner consistent with the CVB’s marketing strategy.
- **Discovery Trail** provides collective marketing for eight local organizations that have a dual mission of education and tourism promotion: PRI- Museum of the Earth, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Cornell Plantations, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cayuga Nature Center, Sciencenter, The History Center, and Tompkins County Public Library.
- **Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance (FLTA)** provides regional destination marketing across 14 counties in the Finger Lakes region. The CVB participates in many of FLTA’s cooperative marketing publications and programs to increase the strength and effectiveness of marketing dollars.
- **New Tourism Initiative Grants** support significant new tourism generating initiatives that flow from and are consistent with the Strategic Tourism Plan.
- **Market the Arts** collectively markets Tompkins County’s artists and features them on one website to allow them to sell their work; includes but is not limited to the members of the Greater Ithaca Art Trail.
- **Tompkins Tourism Partner Award** recognizes volunteer efforts to attract large groups, meetings or conventions to Tompkins County.

Government Tax Administration

- **County 10% NYS law** permits the County to retain 10% of room tax collections for administration and auditing of room tax funds.

Program Expenditures 2005-2010

Grant Programs	Total Award Dollars 2005-2010	Number of Grants 2005-2010	Average Grant Amount	Entities that Received Funds 2005-2010
Arts & Culture Organizational Stabilization/Development	\$1,051,950	43	\$24,464	9
Tourism Capital ^a	\$811,800	20	\$40,590	12
Tourism Projects	\$375,822	48	\$7,830	22
Tourism Marketing and Advertising	\$205,167	62	\$3,309	25
Community Celebrations ^b	\$143,411	114	\$1,258	12
New Tourism Initiatives ^c	\$124,370	7	\$17,767	5
Town Beautification	\$67,000			9

Other Tourism Programs - Product Development	Total Dollars 2005-2010	Number of Years Funded 2005-2010	Average Annual Program Allocation
Beautification, Signage & Public Art ^d	\$551,516	6	\$91,919
Workforce Development/TC3 Customer Service	\$75,000	2	\$37,500
CAP - Operating Assistance	\$178,080	6	\$29,680
CAP - Ticket Center	\$172,455	6	\$28,743
Festivals Program	\$40,000	2	\$20,000
County Historian	\$15,000	3	\$5,000
Other Tourism Programs - Marketing			
Market Tompkins County - CVB	\$4,681,969	6	\$780,328
Discovery Trail	\$198,349	6	\$33,058
Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance	\$70,400	6	\$11,733
Market the Arts	\$10,000	1	\$10,000
Government Administration			
10% of Room Tax Revenues	\$979,392	6	\$163,232

^aIncludes award values of multi-year awards

^bCommunity Celebrations Grants are distributed to a wide variety of entities through municipalities in Tompkins County. Between 2005 and 2010 these municipalities included the City of Ithaca; Villages of Dryden, Groton and Trumansburg; and Towns of Dryden, Caroline, Danby, Enfield, Groton, Ithaca, Lansing, and Newfield.

^cThe New Tourism Initiatives Grant Program started in 2007.

^dNot including Town Beautification Grants

Setting the Baseline

This section provides a profile of visitors and the tourism industry in Tompkins County from 2005 to 2010, proposes a set of performance indicators to use in monitoring the tourism industry for the term of this plan, establishes overarching tourism industry objectives and provides an overview of strategic limitations and opportunities for tourism development in Tompkins County.

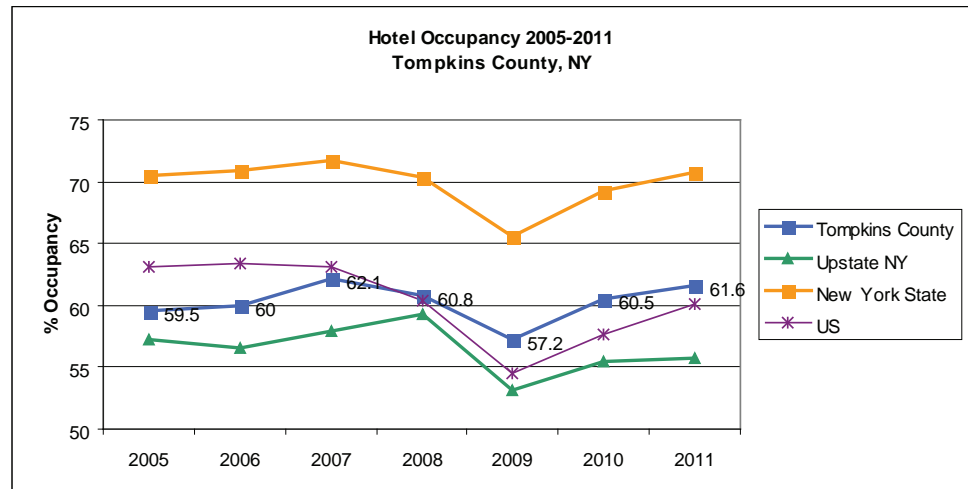


Figure 3: Tompkins County Hotel Occupancy; Source: Smith Travel Research

This Place We Love

For 20 million residents of the Metro Northeast, Tompkins County is the gateway to the Finger Lakes Region. Situated in the region's southeast corner, at the southern end of Cayuga Lake, the rural county's 465-square-miles hold a population of just over 100,000. At its center, Ithaca is the county's commercial and cultural hub. It is home to Cornell University, Ithaca College, and roughly half the county's households. Higher education dominates the local economy, each year bringing over 28,000 students to the area, along with top faculty and researchers. Diverse manufacturing, technology, service, retail, health

care, and agricultural businesses also contribute to economic vibrancy. With four State Parks and dozens of gorges and waterfalls within 12 miles of downtown, natural beauty is one of the area's strongest assets—hence the slogan, "Ithaca is Gorges."

Tompkins County Visitor Profile

The 2009 Tompkins County Visitor Profile Study, conducted by Chmura Economics and Analytics⁹, provides a comprehensive overview of volume, motivation, satisfaction, and economic impact of tourists and travelers to Ithaca and Tompkins County. Designed as a baseline study that will be repeated every three to five years by the Tourism Program, findings provide valuable data to the local tourism community including local restaurant owners, specialty retailers as well as accommodations, attractions, natural areas, and arts and cultural institutions.

Among the report's findings, the County attracted more than 840,000 visitors in 2009, generating \$156 million

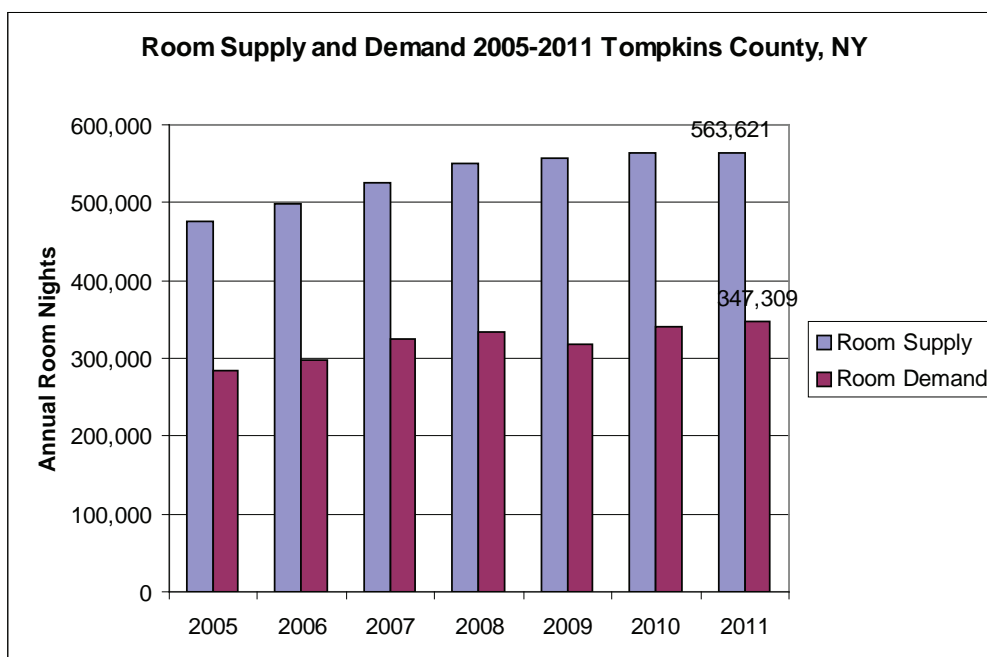


Figure 4: Tompkins County Room Supply and Demand; Source: Smith Travel Research

in associated spending and supporting more than 2,300 jobs. Visitors spent on average \$185 per person, per trip in 2009 with 35% of their spending going to food and drink, 28% to lodging, and 25% to shopping. Visitors tended to be highly educated with high household incomes. After Cornell and Ithaca College; the county's gorges and state parks, The Ithaca Commons, and the local dining scene ranked as the top motivations for travel. Other motivators included: Cayuga Lake, local wineries, Discovery Trail sites, and lodging establishments. Once visitors are here, their top activities (by order of importance) were Cornell, Downtown Ithaca, parks and waterfalls, the wineries, Ithaca College, and Cayuga Lake. Other activities that registered in surveys were the Farmer's Market, Johnson Art Museum, Moosewood Restaurant, and Cornell Plantations.

Other findings include:

- Tourism generated over \$12.5 million in local and state sales tax in 2009 providing a tax benefit of \$597 per local household.
- 37% of visitors are day-trippers, 33% stay in hotels/B&Bs, and 19% stay with friends/family.
- 75% of visitors are leisure travelers.
- The top market for overnight visitors to Tompkins County is New York City, followed by Rochester, Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington D.C.
- Visitors leave Ithaca impressed, with 88% saying they were satisfied by their experience and 69% promising repeat visits. They rank natural beauty, Cornell University, the dining, the people, and the peaceful ambiance as the best aspects of the area.

Value of the Tourism Sector

The Tompkins County Tourism Program will utilize several sources and methods of measurement to assess the strength of the Tompkins County tourism economy. In addition to providing historical context, these performance indicators, drawn from multiple sources, will help gauge the effectiveness of long-term strategies that the Tourism Program employs to grow the local tourism economy. The table below details sources, types of measurements, frequency and management responsibility. Appendix B of this plan contains detailed data tables for these indicators.

Performance Indicator Data Sources

Source	Measures	Frequency	Management
Chmura Economics	Tompkins County Visitor Profiles	3-5 years	STPB
Tourism Economics	Economic/ Fiscal Impact	Annual	CVB
NYS Department of Labor	Employment, Wages	Annual	County
Tompkins County Government	Room Occupancy Tax Revenues	Quarterly	County
STR (Smith Travel Research)	Lodging Industry Tompkins County, Finger Lakes, Comparable Communities, and NYS/US	Monthly (Comparable Communities – Quarterly)	CVB

In addition to providing direct economic benefits in the tourism sector (lodging, attractions, restaurants, visitor retail, etc), tourism plays an important place-making role in promoting local economic vitality.

“For many people – recent graduates, families, retirees, and, in particular, creative people who launch or work for fast-growing companies driven by innovation, productivity and talent – the selling points describing why a location makes sense as a place to run a business parallel its advantages as a place to live and a destination to visit. Pleasant neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown, accessible recreational opportunities, beautiful natural settings, architectural character, diverse cultural offerings – all of these quality of life amenities support growth by attracting place-based investments by new residents, businesses and tourists.”¹⁰

In this way, our local tourism investments support economic development in both broad and specific senses.

Overarching Tompkins County Tourism Industry Objectives

- 1.5 million visitors annually by 2020
- Annual visitor spending exceeds \$265 million by 2020
- \$1000 per household tax benefit from local and state sales tax generated by tourism by 2020

Strategic Limitations and Opportunities

We must be strategic if we wish to grow while also maintaining local quality of life. In developing strategies for local tourism development, initiatives must respond to limitations and opportunities related to the local tourism industry. Tourism is already at or near capacity in certain categories of activity and during certain times of the year, and there are certain activities or times of year in which we have slack supply.

This is especially apparent for the lodging industry. Our current hotel stock is booked nearly solid during July and August and during certain weekends at other times of the year, but there is room to grow overnight stays in the winter and during mid-week. There is also excess lodging supply on certain weekends in the spring and fall. As such, a policy has been established to prioritize funding for initiatives that hold the potential to expand activity at times when we have this slack supply.

Also, recent and planned additions to our inventory of local event venues such as the new Ithaca College Athletics and Events Center, and the addition of conference facilities at the downtown Holiday Inn will provide opportunities to expand certain types of event and conference activity.

New York State is currently considering lifting a moratorium on high-volume hydraulic fracturing,

an intensive method of natural gas drilling. While Tompkins County is outside of the “sweet spot” of the Marcellus Shale where drilling may be most intense if fracking is permitted to proceed, several of our neighboring counties immediately to the south¹¹ would be likely to experience intense drilling. The effects from this on our local tourism industry could be significant, and would need to be monitored closely. These potential impacts related to the tourism industry include but are not limited to large increases in lodging prices, a pinch on lodging supply for tourists, effects of an industrialized landscape on our regional brand identity, increased traffic congestion, and short-term increases in hotel occupancy tax revenues. The Tompkins County Tourism Program should prepare to mitigate any potential negative effects on leisure travel that drilling would bring should it come to New York State, in order to maintain a vibrant tourism economy long into the future.

An uncertain future for gasoline prices, demographic shifts and related changes in travel preferences, and fiscal strain on local governments may also play important roles in how our tourism development strategy evolves. These factors and their potential impacts on tourism should be monitored closely during the course of this plan.

Finally, while the plan strives to identify the most valuable strategies to promote economic development and enhance quality of life through local tourism investments, we must also be responsive to emergent issues. We wish to maintain adequate flexibility to act upon serendipity, opportunity, and unforeseen challenges.

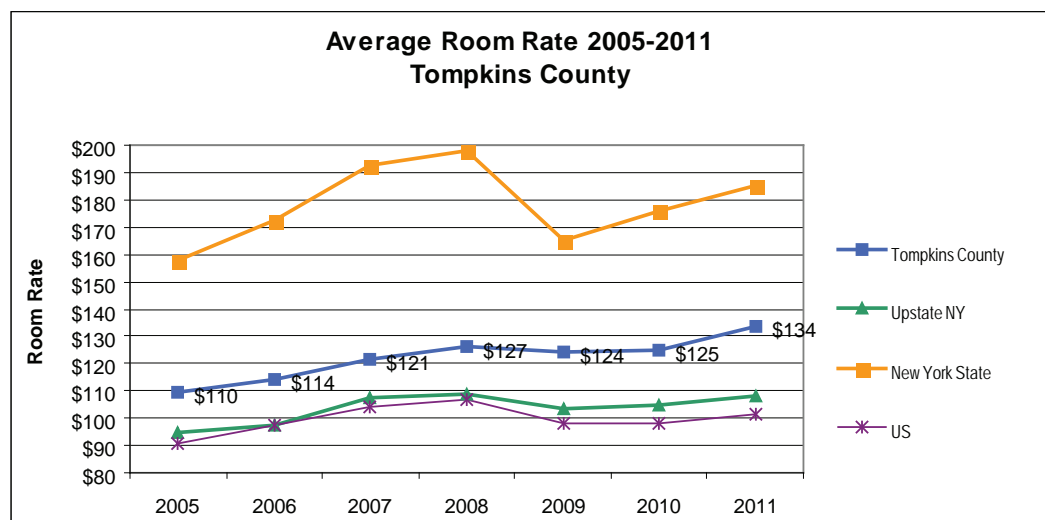


Figure 5: Tompkins County Average Annual Room Rate; Source: Smith Travel Research

Goals, Measurable Objectives and Actions



The STPB took a variety of steps to update this action section of the Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan. We reviewed progress towards implementation of Strategic Actions identified by the 2005-2010 Strategic Tourism Plan; developed an initial list of possible goals, measurable objectives and actions for the new plan with extensive input from tourism partners; and identified focus areas into which these ideas were categorized. We next engaged with partners and community members on this draft list of ideas through a public workshop where many creative ideas were generated for expanding winter and mid-week tourism, extending college and university-related stays, and tapping into local treasures. Following this, we eliminated redundancies in the list and lumped some actions into higher-order categories. Next, the STPB surveyed partners and community members on the importance and feasibility of all of the possible goals and actions. This information was used to finalize the goals and to help identify critical actions.

Goals, measurable objectives and critical actions for tourism development in Tompkins County between 2012 and 2020 follow in this section.

Definitions

Goals are descriptions of what the plan will attempt to accomplish. One overarching goal is identified for each of fifteen focus areas.

Measurable Objectives are time-based, quantifiable metrics against which the Tompkins County Tourism Program will examine progress towards goals. Each goal has one or more possible measurable objectives associated with it. Following adoption of this plan, these possible measurable objectives will be validated and baseline figures will be established, in order to track our progress.

Actions are activities that tourism partners, STPB, or Tompkins County government can undertake to achieve the goals and measurable objectives.

They are the “how” leading to goal attainment.

Provided with each Action are:

1. Timeframe (short, medium or long-term)¹²
2. Lead organizations for implementation

Critical Actions are the top priority actions for the Tompkins County Tourism Program. There are up to three critical actions identified for each of the fifteen focus areas, and they are listed in the main part of this plan, below.

Possible Actions are other potential steps that STPB and community partners also rated as relatively important and/or feasible that STPB, community partners, and others may undertake to support accomplishment of the goals identified in this strategic plan. There are many important, creative, and achievable ideas on the list of possible actions. The STPB intends to maintain this list as a living document that stakeholders can use to inspire the development of detailed implementation strategies around the focus areas identified by this plan. The most current list of possible actions is provided in the appendix of this plan, which is available online at www.tompkins-co.org/tourism/.

Focus Areas

This plan identifies fifteen focus areas for tourism development in Tompkins County. Each fits within one of three categories: established tourism types, emerging tourism types, and tourism foundation.

ESTABLISHED TOURISM TYPES

Protect and continue to grow the core

Established tourism types currently define our County for the purposes of marketing to leisure travelers. They represent the most significant current travel motivators and visitor attractions¹³ and are historic priorities of the Tompkins County Tourism Program. Goals and Actions related to established tourism types will allow tourism partners to draw upon and expand what we do well and will continue to provide opportunities to align tourism product development priorities with the County's destination marketing strategy:

- Agricultural and Culinary Tourism
- Arts, Culture and Heritage Tourism
- Downtown Ithaca¹⁴
- Educational Tourism
- Lakes, Trails, Parks and Gorges

EMERGING TOURISM TYPES

Tap into our unique assets to grow new types of tourism

This plan identifies several additional emerging tourism types for Tompkins County. These types of tourism are not yet as developed as *established* types but may hold important opportunities for new tourism development:

- Sports Tourism
- Sustainability Tourism
- Undertapped Niche Markets



Photo by Samantha Constant

TOURISM FOUNDATION

Enable the success of all tourism types

Tourism foundation focus areas enhance the tourism economy by enabling the success of all tourism types.

- Beautification, Signage and Public Art
- Festivals
- Groups
- Marketing & Advertising
- Town Gown
- Transportation
- Visitor Services

Established Focus Area: Agricultural and Culinary Tourism

Photo by Aaron Munzer



Six Circles is one of many local farms that set up shop at the famed Ithaca Farmers Market.

Goal: *Develop Ithaca and Tompkins County as a regional hub of culinary and agritourism.*

Agritourism in Tompkins County currently consists of several parts: visits to the Farmers Markets and area orchards and vineyards, participation in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprises, or staying overnight at rural B&Bs.

The biggest engine of agritourism in the region is the Finger Lakes wine industry, which lies little in Tompkins County. The Finger Lakes Wine Center in downtown Ithaca is working to establish itself as a fulcrum of wine tourism activity here, and 17% of surveyed visitors to Ithaca said that they visited a winery while in the area. Culinary tourism is very closely linked to agritourism, and food and drink rank high in importance to Tompkins County visitors. In fact, in motivating travel to Ithaca “dining and restaurants” ranked #3 behind ‘gorges and state parks’ and ‘downtown Ithaca and the Commons’.¹⁵

Possible Measurable Objective #1:

Increase the percentage of visitors who visit a winery during their trip to Ithaca from 17% to 20% by 2016.

Possible Measurable Objective #2:

Receive recognition in five or more major national culinary or agritourism related media outlets by 2020.

Possible Measurable Objective #3:

Increase Finger Lakes Wine Center visits year over year.

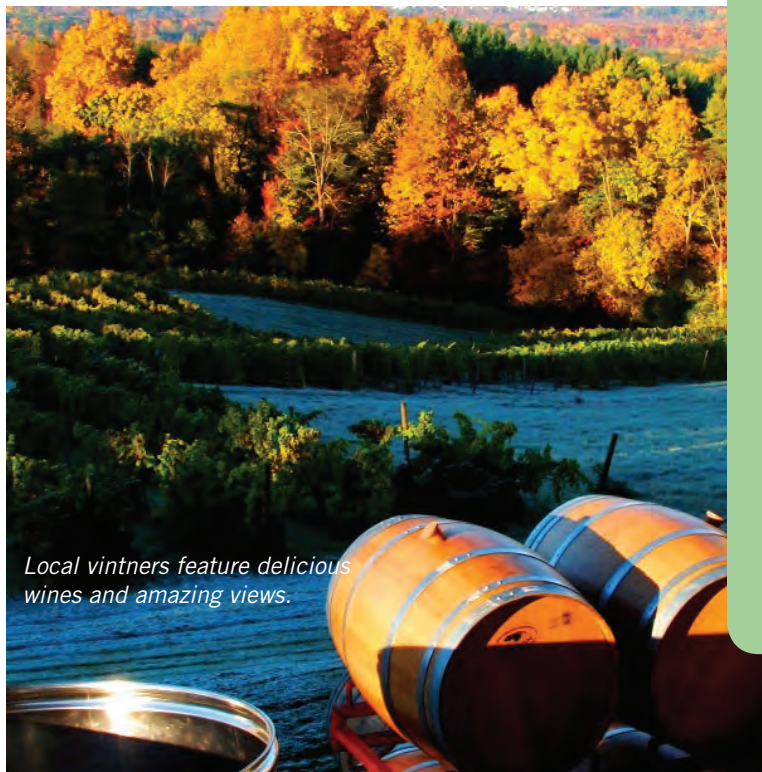
The marketplace puts a high value on food-related tourism products and experiences, and Tompkins County has a number of current agricultural and culinary products that can be further promoted to tourists, as well as new product opportunities. In addition to the assets mentioned above we have renowned chefs and restaurants; a growing sustainable food movement;

nascent events and festivals including a restaurant week, maple festivals, cookoffs, and high-end farm dinners linked with other area attractions; u-pick farms; and several agritourism “trails”. The opportunity to further distinguish our community as a gastri- and agri-tourism destination lies with continuing to grow and creatively and collectively market these assets.



Photo by Jon Reis

There are more than fifty purveyors of food and drink in the immediate vicinity of Downtown Ithaca.



Local vintners feature delicious wines and amazing views.

Critical Actions:

- In cooperation with current animators of culinary tourism, inventory local culinary tourism assets, assess best practices for encouraging and marketing culinary tourism, and develop a five-year culinary tourism strategy and implementation plan.
- Support existing collaborative agri- and culinary tourism marketing partnerships, such as the wine trails and the Finger Lakes Cheese Trail and develop new collaborative marketing platforms and programs for agricultural and culinary tourism (beer, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), foodie tours, you-pick/farm experience, Farmers Markets).
- Support and develop the Finger Lakes Wine Center as a gateway to the Finger Lakes Wine Country.

Established Focus Area: Arts, Culture and Heritage Tourism

Photo by Jody Gianni

Ithaca's historic State Theatre hosts top talent from around the globe, featuring more than seventy concerts, comedy acts, and community shows each year.



Goal: *Develop Ithaca and Tompkins County as a central arts, cultural and heritage tourism destination in the Finger Lakes.*

The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines Heritage Tourism as: “traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes historic, cultural and natural resources.” Tompkins County has a wealth of cultural heritage resources that could be enhanced, expanded and marketed to attract tourists. While some historical and architectural sites and events are currently featured by local organizations, the full opportunity to create a heritage tourism program has not been developed. This strategic plan proposes that this type of tourism be strengthened to bring more people here and to enrich the tourist’s experience if they came here for other purposes. An enriched heritage tourism program will also educate County residents, especially school children, about their local history and culture.

There are a number of individuals and long-established organizations in Tompkins County that already have these concerns as their primary

Possible Measurable Objective #1:

Increase visitation to heritage tourism sites by 50% by 2020.

Possible Measurable Objective #2:

By 2017, increase out of county ticket purchases at Ticket Center Ithaca by 50% over 2012 sales.

Possible Measurable Objective #3:

By 2017, increase sales of art at Artist Markets, Art Trail, and First Friday Gallery Night by 50%

Drawing on Broadway talents, the Hangar Theatre Company produces three seasons of live performances each year. The newly remodeled theater makes its home in an historic airplane hangar on the West side of Cayuga Lake.



Photo by Tom Hoebbel

responsibility (The History Center, Historic Ithaca, the County and Local Historians, as well as the Preservation League of NYS). The STPB could partner with them to expand existing programs or build new ones that are aimed specifically at attracting tourists. However, in order to be successful these organizations must also develop partnerships with other organizations not typically aligned with cultural organizations such as businesses, universities and colleges, arts groups, hotel and B & B groups, and restaurant groups.

Tompkins County also stands out in Upstate New York for its vibrant arts and cultural community. One out of every five leisure travelers to Ithaca lists the arts as the motivation for their trip, ranking the sector alongside wineries as one of the industry's most important assets. The many grant programs of the Tompkins County Tourism Program, especially the Arts and Culture Organizational Development (ACOD) grants, have bolstered and encouraged excellence and growth in this sector.

As our outdoor attractions rely on the care and support of natural resources, so the arts and culture sector requires adequate human resources and funds to ensure the quality of product that has come to define our reputation as a cultural destination. Looking ahead to 2020, this plan seeks to capitalize on local and regional arts assets to develop Ithaca and Tompkins County as a central arts and cultural destination in the Finger Lakes.

Through support of existing institutions as well as enhancement of programs that aggregate a variety of arts and culture resources, the Tourism Program will promote increased visitation, visibility, hands-on learning opportunities, and sales for the visual and performing arts as well as our unique cultural and heritage sites.

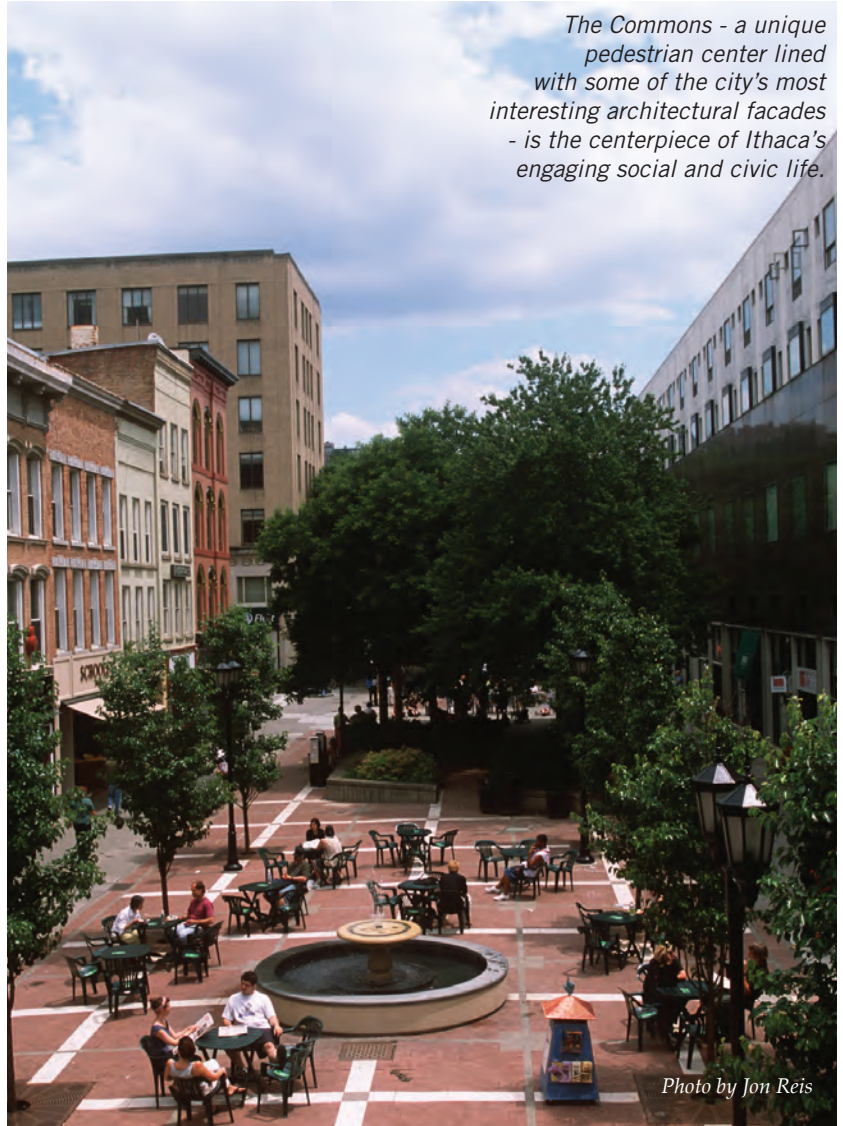
Critical Actions:

- Develop walking, cycling and driving tours across multiple media (brochures, online maps, apps, audio tours, etc) of historic sites; historic architecture; local and academic black history sites (including the Underground Railroad/Freedom Trail in Ithaca); Native American archaeological sites; local industrial history sites (airplanes, guns, typewriters, etc.); homes of local authors (e.g., Nabokov), artists, playwrights; etc.
- Support existing collaborative arts marketing vehicles, and develop new collaborative marketing platforms and programs for arts and cultural institutions.
- Inventory established but underutilized cultural assets such as the region's cinema (historical and contemporary), specialty festivals, and music, and develop targeted programs to expand and promote these.

Established Focus Area: Downtown Ithaca

Downtown Ithaca is the physical core of our community and a big part of Tompkins County's identity to the visitor. This is clear from our destination marketing, in which we encourage people to come to "Ithaca." For example, we direct people to VisitIthaca.com and remind them that, "Ithaca is Gorges." Study after study shows that The Ithaca Commons and its surroundings are one of the top two or three places that people visit when here. The Commons is an important part of what makes us unique, along with our institutions of higher education and natural and cultural amenities. It is what gives visitors a sense of who we are as a community and that is what people look for when they are on a trip.

Downtown-related projects often work on many levels and fit multiple goals of the Tompkins County Tourism Program. A healthy pedestrian environment; clustering a variety of experiences, including visitor-oriented retail; and enhanced transit are green initiatives while also improving the visitor experience. Downtown initiatives that move several goals forward simultaneously while strengthening the community for residents will be important.



The Commons - a unique pedestrian center lined with some of the city's most interesting architectural facades - is the centerpiece of Ithaca's engaging social and civic life.

Photo by Jon Reis

Goal: Enhance downtown Ithaca as a hub of visitor activity.

Possible Measurable Objective #1:

Increase visitor satisfaction with downtown year over year as measured by annual surveys.

Possible Measurable Objective #2:

Increase downtown visitor foot traffic year over year.

Critical Actions:

- Provide advocacy, collaboration, and funding to help rebuild The Ithaca Commons with feature elements serving visitors.

Established Focus Area: Educational Tourism



Photo by Jon Reis

The Sciencenter is one of the flagship attractions on Tompkins County's Discovery Trail. This group of educational organizations promotes awareness and understanding of the connections among art, history, literature, science, and the natural world.

Goal: Increase educational tourism.

Educational tourism or edutourism is any program in which people travel to a location with the primary purpose of engaging in a learning experience directly related to the location. Ithaca is first and foremost a college town that is blessed with numerous affordable and extraordinarily varied educational activities. These range from open public lectures at Cornell, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College to classes and workshops at community based schools, a nationally known quilting store, and activities at our Discovery Trail sites. Much of the business travel here is either directly or indirectly related to education. Developing and promoting increased opportunities for edutourism is a natural extension of the #1 reason why people come here.

With higher education as the primary business of this county and the primary driver of our rich cultural environment, we have an opportunity to feature edutourism as something that is unusually rich here. This involves capitalizing both on opportunities to market existing tourism products and to develop new edutourism products. Edutourism is a type of tourism that holds potential to grow visitor activity in the winter and mid-week. Winter Recess Teachers Week and the Winter Village Bluegrass Festival are examples of current winter edutourism activities. These and other existing templates can be adapted and expanded upon.

Possible Measurable Objective #1:

By 2017, increase Discovery Trail visitation by 25%

Possible Measurable Objective #2:

Develop two new edutourism products by 2020

Critical Actions:

- Coordinate edutourism offerings with large conferences at our institutions of higher education, featuring stay-the-weekend opportunities.

Established Focus Area: Lakes, Trails, Parks and Gorges

Tompkins County has effectively promoted our spectacular gorges and waterfalls. Indeed, in 2009 39% of all visitors to Tompkins County visited the parks, waterfalls and gorges. These are part of our brand identity and are not going away. Beyond our iconic gorges and state parks lie additional opportunities to focus efforts around Cayuga Lake, our hills, public parks, natural areas, and many trails. Our outstanding natural resources, combined with our central location to major Eastern cities could position Tompkins County as a notable outdoor tourism destination of the Mid-Atlantic.

A list of existing assets includes:

- being named one of the country's top ten mountain biking towns by *Bicycling* magazine;
- major icefalls that are uniquely accessible and could be developed for ice climbing;
- the most scenic sections of the 500+ mile long Finger Lakes Trail;
- nascent multi-use trails;
- Cayuga Lake with untapped potential for a water trail for kayakers and canoeists and for organized sport fishing, as well as waters for paddle boarding, kite boarding, dragon boating, sailing, and wind surfing;
- state lands with trails for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, winter camping, and snowmachining in the winter, and hiking, biking, and equestrian use in the summer; and



As t-shirts, bumper stickers, and posters remind us, "Ithaca IS Gorges." A visit to Taughannock Falls is just one of dozens of year round opportunities to enjoy Tompkins County's unique natural beauty.

Goal: Expand outdoor recreation and other tourism related to our outstanding natural amenities: Cayuga Lake, gorges and waterfalls, trails, parks, and natural areas.

- the valleys and hills, rural settings and quiet byways that provide beautiful bicycle touring with wonderful vistas, interesting terrain, and fascinating destinations.

Enhancing waterfront access to Cayuga Lake would create an outstanding opportunity to increase tourism activity, and future efforts to develop access sites for visitors (particularly in the Cayuga Inlet) should include commercial development that adds to the tax base.

Possible Measurable Objective #1

By 2020, quadruple the number of miles of connected multi-use trails in the County.

Possible Measurable Objective #2

By 2020, develop or formalize at least two new Cayuga Lake/Inlet access points in Tompkins County.



Photo by Jon Reis

In addition to its titular waterfall, Taughannock Falls State Park also features public access to Cayuga Lake for swimmers and boaters.

Ithaca has a chance to position itself as the place to go for outdoor adventure tourism between Asheville and Burlington. What's required is a consistent strategic direction, relatively modest enhanced infrastructure and amenities, and a strong marketing and branding campaign. Outdoor adventure tourism is the fastest growing segment of the travel and tourism industry."¹⁶ Those who enjoy these activities are well educated and have increasing disposable incomes; they are the kind of visitor we want to attract. In addition, the enhanced infrastructure and amenities that will lead to a successful positioning of Ithaca as an outdoor adventure destination will also enhance the quality of life of residents and allow employers to attract and recruit a growing and dynamic workforce.

Critical Actions:

- Support the completion of priority multi-use trails and connections between these and existing foot path systems, and support tourism-enhancing features for priority trails (Black Diamond Trail, Cayuga Waterfront Trail/Urban Connections, South Hill Recreation Way, Finger Lakes Trail, Ithaca-Dryden Rail Trail).
- Complete and support implementation of the Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail Plan, to include enhanced maps and signage to waterfront access points, and targeted site development for enhanced waterfront access.
- Support the Stewart Park Rehabilitation Plan.

Emerging Focus Area: Sports Tourism

Photo by Jon Reis



The Cayuga Lake Triathlon has grown to become one of the region's premiere sports attractions.

Between athletic facilities at Cornell, IC and Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3); several large indoor community sports facilities; and extensive public fields, Tompkins County has the facilities and community infrastructure to support additional visitor activity through sports tourism.

Success in this area will require a systematic and coordinated approach to attracting new athletic tournaments and events: local inventory analysis, best practices research, and targeted recruitment and nurturing of sports tourism products that hold the greatest potential for positive economic impact. There may also be significant mutual benefits to forming a regional partnership on sports tourism with Cortland County.

Goal: Increase sports tourism.

Possible Measurable Objective:

Attract at least four new annual sports tournaments or athletic events that generate at least 100 new room nights each by 2015; eight by 2020.

Critical Actions:

- Create a comprehensive feasibility study and implementation strategy for attracting new sporting events and tournaments, including recruitment best practices, cost/benefit of different types of tournaments, financial requirements, inventory of sites, and inventory of ideal weekends.
- Create a Sports Council comprised of representatives from local athletic facilities, departments, leagues, and organizations¹⁷ to develop a coordinated program to create and grow sports tourism.

Emerging Focus Area: Sustainability Tourism

Photo by Tim Allen



Ecovillage at Ithaca—a beautiful 175 acre residential community featuring a CSA vegetable farm, an organic CSA/U-Pick berry farm, office spaces for cottage industry, a neighborhood root cellar, community gardens and varied natural areas—offers regular tours for the sustainability minded visitor.

Goal: *Develop Ithaca and Tompkins County as the preeminent Sustainability Tourism destination in New York State.*

Sustainability Tourism attracts visitors interested in green lifestyles and learning about environmentally sustainable practices and programs, while enjoying all that Tompkins County has to offer, including green hotels, B & Bs, restaurants, and attractions. Sustainability tourism is a new concept that provides a unique opportunity to link our tourism offerings with our green community values.

A successful strategy to develop this emerging tourism type will consist of three overarching elements. First, sustainability-related attractions - some of which exist and some of which are under development - will be formally identified and enhanced. In addition, new visitor programming can be developed around these attractions.

Possible Measurable Objective #1:

Receive regional and national recognition by 2015 for innovative green tourism product initiatives.

Possible Measurable Objective #2:

Sustainability tourism initiatives are responsible for \$2,000,000 in tourism spending annually, by 2020.

Second, working with hotels, B&Bs, restaurants and other tourism venues and businesses, green the operations of our existing tourism product, and in doing so provide a community wide green destination for visitors. Finally, promote Tompkins County's sustainable initiatives to attract visitors.

Critical Actions:

- Inventory Sustainability Tourism attractors and attractions and develop platforms to connect visitors to those entities, potentially including a tourist-oriented sustainability trail.
- Develop a tourist-oriented green business map.
- Provide education, coordination and marketing assistance to hotels and other tourism businesses to embrace green business practices and promote themselves as green businesses, such as through the New York State green hotels program.

Emerging Focus Area: Undertapped Niche Markets



Goal: Grow under-tapped niche visitor markets and experiences.

Undertapped niche markets are defined as highly focused demographic and interest-based visitor markets for which Tompkins County holds a strategic advantage because of unique local attributes. A focus on growing niche visitor markets and experiences will support our aim "presenting this unique place." Almost by definition, a niche market focus will also support efficient use of tourism development investments by attracting highly networked target customers. We have begun the work to identify our local treasures and niche market opportunities, and this Strategic Tourism Plan seeks to encourage new ideas for festivals, attractions, venues, tours, packages, campaigns and itineraries related to attracting additional visitors based on their association with undertapped niche markets.

Possible Measurable Objective:

Develop two distinct new tourism product offerings and/or coordinated marketing campaigns that tap into undertapped niche markets by 2014, four by 2016, and six by 2020.

Ideas include encouraging pet tourism, healing arts and yoga-based tourism, ethnically-based tourism, birding, unique indoor tournaments, specialty music, and same-sex weddings. These just touch on the list of potential ideas that are ripe for further development in Tompkins County.

Critical Actions:

- Support the expansion and development of specialty indoor festivals in the winter.
- Develop and promote Tompkins County as an LGBTQ destination, including for weddings.

Foundation Focus Area: Beautification, Signage and Public Art



Photo by Jon Reis

Beautification Brigade volunteers put in countless hours each year to put a fresh face on gateways to our community.

Goal: *Increase the perception of Ithaca and Tompkins County as an outstandingly beautiful community that is simple for visitors to navigate and as a place to visit for the overall beauty of the area.*

The overarching aims to “present this unique place” and “provide memorable experiences” guide the work of the Beautification Committee and its program administrators. They work to

- 1) improve the visual quality of the County,
 - 2) improve the appearance of business and residential districts,
 - 3) increase pride resulting from volunteer involvement and beautiful plantings, and
 - 4) improve way finding to area attractions.
- The program focuses on the gateway areas into Tompkins County and main routes within the urbanized area that are likely to be traveled by visitors.

Possible Measurable Objective:

Benchmark our community against others on an annual basis by choosing a cohort of communities that we aspire to be like and improving ourselves compared to them.

Critical Actions:

- Write and implement a Tompkins County Beautification Plan for 2012-2020, to include the square footage, location and type of gardens maintained by the program, maintenance and infrastructure requirements, design standards, and prioritized actions.
- Create a wayfinding signage plan/system that includes physical signage as well as new technological wayfinding platforms and that points to major destinations including Discovery Trail venues, downtown Ithaca and the Commons, trailheads, parks, theatres, waterfront access sites, arts and heritage destinations, and natural areas.
- Formalize a public art grant component of the Beautification Program to encourage public art installations throughout Tompkins County.

Foundation Focus Area: Festivals

The Tompkins County Tourism Program has made many grant awards to events and festivals over the past decade. In an effort to enhance the overall quality of events and increase the tourism benefits that can accrue from them, the STPB engaged the Downtown Ithaca Alliance (DIA) to provide leadership and staff support in this area. The DIA has been one of the region's premier event planning and promotion organizations and has a track record of providing technical assistance to other City and County organizations and groups interested in event planning and implementation.

The Tompkins County Tourism Program has an opportunity to make events and festivals an even more fundamental part of the local visitor experience. Potential grant recipients will be asked to demonstrate how their events will engage visitors and how event participants can be encouraged to stay overnight and shop, dine, or partake in other visitor experiences. The Tourism Program will work to make events and festivals more cost effective by sharing equipment and resources and by providing technical assistance that is intended to



Downtown Ithaca's Winter Festival and Ice Wars Competition is one of dozens of annual events that are beloved by visitors and residents alike.

Photo by Dave Burbank

Goal: *Grow the visitor attraction and positive impacts of vibrant festivals and events.*

Possible Measurable Objective #1:

Add two major tourism-generating events (producing 400+ bed nights annually) to Tompkins County in the shoulder or off-season by 2015; four by 2020.

Possible Measurable Objective #2:

Increase overnight stays directly associated with events by 75% between 2012 and 2020.

Possible Measurable Objective #3:

Increase additional spending directly associated with events by 50% by 2020.

improve both the product and event management. Evaluation metrics for events and festivals will be broadened and evaluation will become a key component of the event planning process, as well as the STPB grant making process. Communications will be enhanced and modern tools utilized to ensure that event planners will be able to share both their successes and their challenges. In the upcoming years, festivals and events will become both experiences for visitors as well as demand generators for tourists. Ithaca and Tompkins County will be known for their varied events that will serve as reasons for tourists to plan to visit and stay in our County.

Critical Actions:

- Assist existing large festivals and events on succession planning, financial sustainability, and enhancing their tourism impact.
- Enhance visitor-oriented capabilities of IthacaEvents.com.

Foundation Focus Area: Groups

Photo by PRI Staff



Unique meeting spaces like the Museum of the Earth give groups and conferences opportunities to think outside the box.

Goal: Expand meetings, conferences and group tours.

Meetings, conferences and group tours are market segments that can build our local tourism economy by bringing business to hotels, restaurants and attractions during off peak periods. By maintaining memberships in state and national associations and by exhibiting at meeting and conference and group tour trade shows, the CVB is able to build demand for overnight stays that will take place during the middle of the week and shoulder season.

Given recently announced expansions of meeting facilities coupled with an expected increase in the

total number of hotel rooms in Tompkins County, a priority on mid-week business is necessary to make the most of our new capacity. In the next nine years, the Group Sales department at the CVB should continue to promote Ithaca as a vibrant and dynamic destination to meeting, event and conference planners, capitalizing on assets at our institutions of higher education that enhance programs. They will also develop and promote themed-based tours to motorcoach tour companies looking to use our community as a base of operations for larger Finger Lakes experiences.

Possible Measurable Objective #1:

By 2013, expand the number of bed nights from meetings and conferences by 15%.

Possible Measurable Objective #2:

By 2013, expand the number of bed nights from group tours by 15% over 2010.

Critical Actions:

- Conduct bi-annual Familiarization Tours for Albany, New York City, and other targeted markets.
- Develop a new project to recruit higher education meetings and conferences with campus assistance.
- Market themed international group travel.

Foundation Focus Area: Marketing & Advertising

Effective destination marketing and advertising is another core function of the CVB. This work ranges from managing promotions across all formats, utilizing traditional media and emerging social and digital media vehicles. The CVB also produces the county's primary destination marketing and wayfinding collateral materials and engages in strategic public relations efforts for earned media. An emphasis is also placed on measured analysis of current and future market conditions to demonstrate the value and economic benefit of a strong travel and tourism economy.

Strategic opportunities in the next nine years related to marketing and advertising are likely to be varied. We must at once be strategic in our investments, and opportunistic to take advantage of new openings as they may arise. Strategies are: 1) targeting specific geographic markets that are likely to generate overnight stays and visitor



Goal: Maximize the effectiveness of destination marketing, advertising, and public relations.

spending, 2) working to reach specific interest and demographic-based market segments that align with our unique local assets and tourism products, and 3) taking advantage of new media platforms as they emerge. Earned media will continue to be an important means of generating awareness of Ithaca as a destination and regional partnerships will persist as important means of attracting visitors based on association with regional brands and products.

Possible Measurable Objective #1:

Increase or maintain Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI) from advertising investments year over year.

Possible Measurable Objective #2:

Achieve three destination features by 2020 in cable, lifestyle TV, and/or broadcast TV.

Possible Measurable Objective #3:

Secure at least one outside grant for tourism marketing by 2013, two by 2014, three by 2016.

Critical Actions:

- Promote marketing coordination to facilitate innovative marketing partnerships between tourism attractions and venues.
- Develop integrated (digital, social media, cable) geo-targeted niche campaigns (wine, waterfalls, locavore, music, green/sustainability, family, “dink-donut (dual income, no kids)”, recent empty nest, low-cost, etc).
- Target alumni media for editorial content.

Foundation Focus Area: Town Gown



Photo by Jon Reiss

Students, faculty, and staff come "off the hills" for opportunities in the community, like lake tours on the MV Columbia.

Goal: *Enhance collaboration and partnership on tourism related initiatives between tourism partners and our institutions of higher education.*

Achieving enhanced collaboration on tourism initiatives between our institutions of higher education and the Tompkins County Tourism Program and tourism partners will enhance the local tourism industry, just as it will support key strategic goals of Cornell and Ithaca College (IC). Cornell and IC, combined, are the largest single driver of tourism in Tompkins County. 47% of visits are generated by college or university activities. In addition, college and university related visitors are more likely to stay in hotels and B & Bs, and spend more money in the local economy once they are here.

The Tompkins County Tourism Program invests in beautification, festivals and attractions, arts and culture offerings, visitor amenities, and marketing and promotion of Ithaca and Tompkins County as a visitor destination. These investments support strategic goals of Cornell and IC to attract and retain faculty, as well as enhance student and staff satisfaction. This plan promotes a vision of renewed and concerted focus on collaborative efforts between Cornell, IC, Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) and the Tompkins County Tourism Program.

Possible Measurable Objective:

Establish three collaborative higher education / community initiatives around tourism development by 2013, six by 2016.

Critical Actions:

- Enhance cross-promotion of Cornell, IC and TC3 based events that would be of interest to general visitors and community-based events that would be of interest to college and university visitors.
- Develop a tourism-higher education working group to meet periodically to share information and explore ideas for enhanced collaboration.

Foundation Focus Area: Transportation

Ithaca is primarily a “drive destination,” with 86% of visitors traveling here by car, 12% traveling by air, and 5% by bus.¹⁸ There is no passenger train transportation to Ithaca, and, while there are inspiring long-range visions of returning such service to Ithaca, this is outside the timeframe and feasibility of this nine-year strategic plan. Because the mix of modes that visitors take to get here is unlikely to shift a great deal before 2020, this plan aims to focus visitor transportation-related efforts primarily on how people get around once they have arrived and how their experience may be enhanced by providing comfortable, easy, and enjoyable transportation options. This is not just about enhancing visitor satisfaction, but also about enhancing our draw by becoming a model for sustainable local transportation for visitors. The kinds of enhanced infrastructure and amenities that will lead to a successful positioning of Ithaca as a sustainable transportation destination will also enhance the quality of life of residents and allow employers to attract and recruit a growing and vibrant workforce.

While room tax funds are not appropriate for fixing potholes or buying busses, the Tompkins County Tourism Program can provide catalytic and supportive investments and advocacy. These can support such initiatives as linking transportation services between hotels and common visitor destinations, bundling smart visitor transportation services and information with hotels and across modes, and developing safe cycling routes.

Possible Measurable Objective:

Enhance visitor bus ridership by 100% by 2017



Photo by Jon Reis

Innovative solutions like Ithaca CarShare are a hallmark of our community's commitment to sustainable transportation.

Goal: *Develop Ithaca as a model of sustainable transportation for tourists*

Sustainable visitor transportation is about providing reliable and pleasant options to park the car at the hotel and walk, bike and/or take the bus or shuttle between destinations.

Critical Actions:

- Articulate and develop a system of tourist-oriented shuttles, with possibilities for linking event participants to attractions, Cornell and IC parents to community shopping, winter sports enthusiasts to venues, hotel guests to theatres and other venues, etc.
- Plan and implement a visitor communications strategy - to include use of digital technology such as “apps” - for local transportation options to encourage parking and then using the bus, cycling and walking.
- Bundle TCAT bus access for tourists with hotels and offer tourist oriented bus passes.

Foundation Focus Area: Visitor Services



Unique tour services add personality and quality to a Tompkins County visit.

Goal: Provide effective visitor services and customer service at points of visitor contact.

Formal visitor services in Tompkins County are currently provided by the CVB through two visitor center locations and information referral services via phone, email, US Mail and social media websites. Visitor services also encompasses the work of the Workforce Investment Board of Tompkins County, in partnership with others, to provide training for front-line staff in the hospitality industry through the Hospitality Star program. The overarching function of visitor

services is to enhance diverse, even multilingual, visitors' stays with expert and highly personalized advice once they are already here, and to respond to inquiries from potential travelers, providing a seamless connection to visitor experiences.

Possible Measurable Objective #1:

Increase or maintain visitor exchanges year over year for visitor services of the CVB.

Possible Measurable Objective #2:

Increase the percentage of visitors who say that they are "very satisfied" with their visit to the area from 88% to 90% by 2016, and to 92% by 2020¹⁹

Critical Actions:

- Develop a comprehensive, coordinated strategy for providing more visitor information to campus visitors, including parents, alumni, prospective students and their families and conference attendees.
- Expand the presence of visitor and ticketing information at key IC and Cornell locations, the airport and high-traffic retail locations possibly by installing rich media kiosks.
- Develop our hospitality workforce through trainings for front-line staff and tourism business operators.

Implementation of Critical Actions

The Strategic Tourism Plan identifies 37 Critical Actions to be initiated within the next nine years. Very few action items on this list can be undertaken and successfully completed by just one organization or agency, and successful implementation will require public-private partnerships, inter-municipal efforts, or inter-organizational coordination and cooperation. The Lead Organizations that are identified in the tables on the following pages are those groups that agree to take the major responsibility for ensuring that an action is implemented. In some cases, more than one entity will need to take the lead, and as new ideas are developed, new lead or participating agencies may emerge.

Resources for implementing the plan will come from a number of sources. Room occupancy tax dollars will likely be employed in moving forward many of the critical actions identified by this plan,

but other sources including government grant funding, in-kind support from existing partners, and private foundations should also play role. Also, many of the critical actions may fit within existing program structures and may not require special allocation of funds to be achieved, but focused alignment of existing funds. Allocation of room tax dollars will continue to be subject to review and recommendation by the Strategic Tourism Planning Board and approval by the Tompkins County Legislature through the tourism grant programs and the Tourism Program budget process.

A timeframe for implementation of each critical action is also identified. Short term means that this action will be completed within two years (2012-2013); medium-term means within three to five years (2014-2016); and long-term means within six to nine years (2017-2020).

(Endnotes)

- 1 Background materials are available from the Tompkins County Planning Department, 121 E. Court St, Ithaca, NY or online: <http://www.tompkins-co.org/tourism/>
- 2 From the Intent section of Tompkins County 1989 Local Law #4 aka Tompkins County Hotel Room Occupancy Tax Law, section 2.
- 3 The policy in question is laid out in the 2001 white paper adopted by the Tompkins County Legislature entitled *Background and Intended use of Revenues Generated by the 2% Increase in Room Tax*.
- 4 Qualifications for receiving ongoing funding currently include but are not limited to: 1) having a plan for future growth; 2) having adequate governance; 3) having used tourism funds successfully; 4) having gathered adequate data to show results of Tourism Program funding, 5) demonstrating need, and 6) consistency with the Strategic Tourism Plan
- 5 Such as new investments made possible by a growth in tourism program funds.
- 6 This policy does not mean that new strategic initiatives are ineligible for tourism program funding in the absence of new revenues. They may fit within existing competitive grant programs even if tourism funding is flat. Competitive programs currently are: Capital Grants, Project Grants, Marketing & Advertising Grants, New Tourism Initiative Grants, and Community Celebrations Grants.
- 7 Program or project assessment criteria may include, but are not limited to: 1) having a clear business or strategic plan; 2) adequate staff, leadership and governance; 3) adequate funding for non-tourism-program share of the project; 4) ability to gather and share data on the impact on tourism from the project; and 5) improvement the quality of life for those living and working in the county.
- 8 Program categories in which multi-year funding agreements have been established as of 2011 are the Tourism Capital Grant Program, the Arts and Culture Organizational Development Program, and the County's contract with the Chamber of Commerce for operation of the Convention and Visitor's Bureau. Upon adoption of the plan, the Tourism Program will undertake an evaluation of which additional grant and program categories should incorporate multi-year agreements.
- 9 The full report from the 2009 Tompkins County Visitor Profile Study is available in the Appendix of this plan, or online at: www.tompkins-co.org/tourism/
- 10 Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Plan
- 11 Counties identified as being in the "sweet spot" for expanded natural gas drilling include Chemung, Broome, Tioga and Steuben.
- 12 Short term means within two years (2012-2013), medium-term means within three to five years (2014-2016), long-term means within six to nine years (2017-2020).
- 13 From the *Profile of Tompkins County Visitors* report by Chmura Economics, 2010.
- 14 Downtown Ithaca is listed under "established tourism types", but the Downtown Ithaca focus area may also be thought of as fitting with "tourism foundation".
- 15 *Profile of Visitors to Tompkins County*, Chmura Economics and Analytics, 2010.
- 16 *Travel & Tourism Market Research Handbook*, 2008, p. 238.
- 17 Council members might include: Athletic Departments at Cornell, Ithaca College, TC3, The RINK, the YMCA, local school districts, City of Ithaca Parks Department and other local facilities and Ithaca amateur athletic leagues and associations (ie. soccer, swimming, lacrosse, hockey, wrestling, cycling, indoor track, basketball, volleyball, figure skating, roller skating, golf, tennis).
- 18 The percentages do not sum to 100% because survey respondents were allowed to list more than one mode of travel.
- 19 Measurement to be done by repeating survey-based research.

Established Tourism Types

	Critical Action Description	Lead	Time Frame
1	In cooperation with Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the Tompkins County Restaurant Association, inventory local culinary tourism assets, assess best practices for encouraging and marketing culinary tourism, and develop a five-year culinary tourism strategy and implementation plan.	CCETC, Restaurant Association, Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty, TCPD	Short
2	Support existing collaborative agri- and culinary tourism marketing partnerships, such as the wine trails and the Finger Lakes Cheese Trail and develop new collaborative marketing platforms and programs for agricultural and culinary tourism (beer, CSAs, foodie tours, you-pick/farm experience, Farmers Markets).	CVB, TCPD	Medium
3	Support the Finger Lakes Wine Center.	FLWC	Short
4	Develop walking, cycling and driving tours across multiple media (brochures, online maps, apps, audio tours, etc) of historic sites; historic architecture; local and academic black history sites (including the Underground Railroad/Freedom Trail in Ithaca); Native American archaeological sites; local industrial history sites (airplanes, guns, typewriters, etc.); homes of local authors (e.g. Nabokov), artists, playwrights; etc.	History Center, Historic Ithaca, CVB, CAP, City of Ithaca, DIA	Medium
5	Support existing collaborative arts marketing vehicles, and develop new collaborative marketing platforms and programs for arts & cultural institutions.	CVB, CAP	Long
6	Inventory established but underutilized cultural assets such as the region's cinema (historical and contemporary), specialty festivals, and music and develop targeted programs to expand and promote these.	CAP, CVB, DIA, TCPD	Short
7	Support the rebuilding of The Ithaca Commons with feature elements serving visitors.	City of Ithaca, DIA	Medium
8	Coordinate edutourism offerings with large conferences at our institutions of higher education, featuring stay-the-weekend opportunities.	CVB, IC, Cornell	Medium
9	Support the completion of priority multi-use trails and connections between these and existing foot path systems, and support tourism-enhancing features for priority trails (BDT, CWT/Urban Connections, S. Hill Rec Way, Finger Lakes Trail, Ithaca-Dryden Rail Trail).	TCPD	Long
10	Complete and support implementation of the Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail Plan, to include enhanced maps and signage to waterfront access points, and targeted site development for enhanced waterfront access.	TCPD	Medium
11	Support the Stewart Park Rehabilitation Action Plan.	City of Ithaca, FOSP	Long

Emerging Tourism Types

	Critical Action Description	Lead	Time Frame
12	Create a comprehensive feasibility study and implementation strategy for attracting new sporting events and tournaments, including recruitment best practices, cost/benefit of different types of tournaments, financial requirements, inventory of sites, inventory of ideal weekends, and possibility of partnership with Cortland County.	CVB	Short
13	Create a Sports Council comprised of reps from Athletic Departments at Cornell, Ithaca College, TC3, The RINK, the YMCA, local school districts, City of Ithaca Parks Department and other local facilities and Ithaca amateur athletic leagues and associations (ie. soccer, swimming, lacrosse, hockey, wrestling, cycling, indoor track, basketball, volleyball, figure skating, roller skating, golf, tennis).	CVB	Medium
14	Inventory Sustainability Tourism attractors and attractions and develop platforms to connect visitors to those entities potentially including a tourist-oriented sustainability trail.	TCPD	Medium
15	Develop a tourist oriented green business map	TCPD, CVB	Medium
16	Provide education, coordination and marketing assistance to hotels and other tourism businesses to embrace green business practices and promote themselves as green businesses, such as through the New York State green hotels program.	CVB, WIB	Medium
17	Support the expansion and development of specialty festivals in the indoors in the winter.	DIA, TCPD, DIA	Short
18	Develop and promote Tompkins County as an LGBTQ destination, including for weddings.	CVB	Short

The Tourism Foundation

	Critical Action Description	Lead	Time Frame
19	Write and implement a Tompkins County Beautification Plan for 2012-2020, to include the square footage, location and type of gardens maintained by the program, maintenance and infrastructure requirements, design standards, and prioritized actions.	Chamber, CCETC	Short
20	Create a wayfinding signage plan/system that includes physical signage as well as new technological wayfinding platforms and that points to major destinations including Discovery Trail venues, downtown Ithaca and the Commons, trailheads, parks, theatres, waterfront access sites, arts and heritage destinations and natural areas.	Chamber, TCPD	Short
21	Formalize a public art grant component of the Beautification Program to encourage public art installations throughout Tompkins County.	Chamber, TCPD	Short
22	Assist existing large festivals and events on succession planning, financial sustainability, and enhancing their tourism impact.	DIA, TCPD	Short
23	Enhance visitor-oriented capabilities of IthacaEvents.com.	CAP, CVB	Short
24	Conduct bi-annual familiarization tour for Albany, NYC and targeted markets.	CVB	Short
25	Develop a new project to recruit higher education meetings & conferences with campus assistance.	CVB, Cornell, IC, TC3	Short
26	Market themed international group travel.	CVB	Short
27	Promote marketing coordination to facilitate innovative marketing partnerships between tourism attractions and venues.	CVB	Short
28	Develop integrated (digital, social media, cable) geo-targeted niche campaigns (wine, waterfalls, locavore, music, green/sustainability, family, Double Income No Kids ", recent empty nest, low-cost, etc).	CVB	Medium
29	Target alumni media for editorial content.	CVB	Short
30	Enhance cross-promotion of Cornell, IC and TC3 based events that would be of interest to general visitors and community-based events that would be of interest to college and university visitors.	CVB, Cornell, IC, TC3	Short
31	Develop a tourism-higher ed working group to meet periodically to share information and explore ideas for enhanced collaboration.	CVB, TCPD, Cornell, IC, TC3	Short
32	Articulate and develop a system of tourist-oriented shuttles, with possibilities for linking event participants to attractions, Cornell and IC parents to community shopping, winter sports enthusiasts to venues, hotel guests to theatres and other venues, etc.	CVB, TCPD, TCAT, Cornell, IC, TC3, DIA	Medium
33	Plan and implement a visitor communications strategy - to include use of digital technology such as "apps" - for local transportation options to encourage parking and then using the bus, cycling and walking.	CVB, TCPD, ITCTC	Medium
34	Bundle TCAT bus access for tourists with hotels and offer tourist oriented bus passes.	CVB, TCAT, TCPD	Short
35	Develop a comprehensive, coordinated strategy for providing more visitor information to campus visitors, including parents, alumni, prospective students and their families and conference attendees.	CVB, Cornell, IC, TC3	Short
36	Expand the presence of visitor and ticketing information at key IC and CU locations, the airport and high-traffic retail locations, to possibly include rich media kiosks.	CVB, CAP	Medium
37	Develop our hospitality workforce through trainings for front-line staff and tourism business operators.	WIB	Short

Key – Lead Organizations

CCETC – Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County
CAP – Community Arts Partnership
Cornell – Cornell University
Creating Healthy Places – a program of the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County
CVB – Ithaca Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau
CWTI – Cayuga Waterfront Trail Initiative
DIA – Downtown Ithaca Alliance
FLLT – Finger Lakes Land Trust
FLWC – Finger Lakes Wine Center
FOSP – Friends of Stewart Park
GIA - Greater Ithaca Innkeepers Association
History Center – The History Center in Tompkins County
IC – Ithaca College
ITCTC – Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council
Restaurant Association – Tompkins County Restaurant Association
State Parks – NYS Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation, Finger Lakes Region
TC3 – Tompkins Cortland Community College
TCAT – Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit
TCPD – Tompkins County Planning Department
WIB – Tompkins County Workforce Investment Board

Tourism Partners *(Including but not limited to):*

Black Diamond Trail Enthusiasts Network	Ithaca Farmers Market
Cayuga Chamber Orchestra	Ithaca Motion Picture Project
Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway	Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council
Cayuga Lake Wine Trail	Kitchen Theatre
Cayuga Nature Center	Local / Regional Media
Cayuga Waterfront Trail Initiative	New York State - I Love NY Program
Central Fingerlakes	New York State Canal Corporation
City of Ithaca	New York State Destination Marketing Organizations
Community Arts Partnership	New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Community School of Music and Arts	New York State Tourism and Hospitality Association
Cornell / Ithaca Partnership	New York State Travel and Vacation Association
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County	Outdoor Recreation Partners and Athletic Groups
Cornell Outdoor Education	Past Tourism Grant Recipients
Cornell University	PRI / Museum of the Earth
Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty	Regional Tourism Marketing Companies
Destination Marketing Association International	Restaurants and Retailers
Discovery Trail Members	Sciencenter
Dorothy Cotton Institute	Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council
Downtown Ithaca Alliance	State Theatre of Ithaca, Inc.
Empire State Society of Association Executives	Strategic Tourism Planning Board
Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor	The History Center in Tompkins County
Finger Lakes Cycling Club	Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT)
Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance	Tompkins Cortland Community College
Finger Lakes Tourism Promotion Agencies	Tompkins County Antique Dealers Association
Finger Lakes Trail Conference	Tompkins County Area Development (TCAD)
Finger Lakes Wine Center	Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce
Friends of Stewart Park	Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce Foundation
Greater Ithaca ArtTrail	Tompkins County Government
Greater Ithaca Bed and Breakfast Association	Tompkins County Historian
Greater Ithaca Innkeepers Association	Tompkins County Legislature
Hangar Theatre	Tompkins County Restaurant Association
Heritage / Social / Cultural Tourism Groups	Tour Operators - Water and Land
Historic Ithaca	Tourism Promotion Agencies of New York State
Ithaca / Tompkins County Regional Airport	Town and Villages in Tompkins County
Ithaca College	Workforce Investment Board of Tompkins County

Program Achievements

Guided by the previous Strategic Tourism Plan, from 2005 to 2010 the Tompkins County Tourism Program invested in tourism marketing and product development that promoted economic development and enhanced the quality of life for local residents. This section provides a sample of tangible achievements, sorted by the four guiding categories of the former plan. These categories were:

Provide Gateway - Infrastructure

Develop the physical and intangible pipelines that increase access to and experience of the tourism product

Offer Experience - Product Development

Create and improve attractions

Create Demand - Marketing

Motivate travelers to experience Tompkins County as a destination

Enable Action - Government Initiatives

Facilitate enhanced support for tourism through the suite of marketing and the product development programs of the Tompkins County Tourism Program

Provide Gateway - Infrastructure

1. Supported centralized box office services of the Ticket Center which averaged 80,000 tickets (\$1.1 million) sold annually.
2. Created a “how to” manual for event planners.
3. Enhanced existing tourism attractions through physical improvements.
4. Enhanced quality of events through technical assistance & workshops.
5. Supported amenities along the Cayuga Waterfront Trail.
6. Improved visitors’ access to information with purchase of a brochure cart on The Commons.
7. Relocated the Downtown Visitor Center to a more accessible location increasing Visitor Center traffic.
8. Improved front-line customer service through TC3- Workforce Training program.
9. Purchased van to support the Beautification Program’s transporting, planting and watering efforts throughout Tompkins County.
10. Provided financial assistance to refurbish Veterans Memorials at Dewitt Park.
11. Endorsed the physical expansion of the Visitor Center at the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce building.
12. Provided an inviting environment downtown through support for the Downtown Ambassadors program.
13. Contributed to the creation and maintenance of beautification projects in all nine towns.
14. Created a volunteer corps to help maintain the Beautification Program’s gardens with 375 volunteers contributing over 4,000 volunteer hours.
15. Supported the Art in the Heart program of the Downtown Ithaca Alliance (DIA).
16. Planted and maintained flowerbeds at 30 strategic locations in the City of Ithaca through the Beautification Program at Cooperative Extension and the Downtown Ithaca Alliance.

Offer Experience - Product Development

17. Supported the creation of the Finger Lakes Wine Center.
18. Invested in and helped to stabilize the State Theatre, Hangar Theatre and Kitchen Theatre for year-round performances.
19. Invested in and helped to stabilize the finances of the Museum of the Earth, the Sciencenter, the Cayuga Nature Center, and The History Center.
20. Helped to stabilize the finances of the Cayuga Chamber Orchestra.
21. Supported the expansion and improvement of outdoor venues: The Farmers Market, the Cayuga Waterfront Trail, Stewart Park, the Ithaca Children's Garden, and the Ithaca Skate Park.
22. Supported the creation of an annual Literary Arts Festival.
23. Supported Cayuga Lake based events, such as the Dragonboat Festival, Lansing Harbor Festival, Brew Festival, Cayuga Lake Triathlon and Rhiner Festival.
24. Sponsored winter festivals – Light in Winter, ice sculpture fests, holiday events.
25. Supported our County Historian in receiving national recognition as “Historian of the Year”.
26. Sponsored a nationally recognized triathlon.
27. Sponsored dozens of dance, theatre, and musical events; food, wine, and beer showcase events; and ethnic events.
28. Supported 114 community celebrations to honor residents and create a sense of place.
29. Created a Tompkins Tourism Partner Award program to recognize Tompkins County residents who plan events or conferences which bring in large numbers of overnight visitors.
30. Supported the creation of seven new events or attractions through the New Tourism Initiatives grant program.
31. Supported the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway.

Create Demand - Marketing

32. Celebrated our communities' 'best of' and 'top 10' listings in 33 nationally recognized media outlets, ten times at #1, and 88% of mentions within the top 10.
33. Supported the creation of an online artist and performer directory.
34. Supported the creation and upgrade of IthacaEvents.com, an online cultural event directory.
35. Supported the creation of the CVB's “Winter Recess – Ithaca Loves Teachers” campaign.
36. Conducted comprehensive survey-based research of Tompkins County visitors to understand their motivations (Chmura Study).
37. Supported promotion of the Greater Ithaca Art Trail, growing visitation to more than 6,000 studio visits and average art sales of more than \$50,000 on open studio weekends in October.
38. Supported the development and marketing of the Ithaca Theatre Collective.
39. Celebrated the CVB's initiative to position Ithaca as “Home of the Ice Cream Sundae”.
40. Collaborated with towns and villages to create brochures and websites highlighting local points of interest.
41. Enhanced Tompkins County's image as “Ithaca is Gorges”.
42. Supported Discovery Trail marketing.

Enable Action - Government Initiatives

43. Developed the Tompkins County Tourism Program - the suite of marketing and product development programs enabling all of this work.
44. Hired a full time Tourism Coordinator and utilized County government staff for legal, financial, and administrative oversight.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Short term

Within two years, 2012-2013

Medium-term

Within three to five years, 2014-2016

Long-term

Within six to nine years, 2017-2020

Aim

A highest-level description of values that aligns with the mission of the STPB and the Tompkins County Tourism Program.

Policy

A guiding statement for the Tompkins County Tourism Program that provides a framework for future decision-making related to funding, operations and evaluation.

Goal

A specific description of what the plan will attempt to accomplish.

Measurable Objective

A time-based, quantifiable metric by which the Tompkins County Tourism Program will examine progress towards a goal.

Action

An activity that community partners, STPB, or Tompkins County government can undertake to achieve a goal. A critical action is a top priority of the plan. A possible action is a step that STPB, community partners, and others may undertake to support accomplishment of the goals identified in the plan.

Performance Indicator

A statistic that will be gathered periodically to measure the performance of the overall tourism industry in Tompkins County.

Assessment Criteria

A set of program-specific metrics used to evaluate individual tourism projects. These are to be updated periodically by STPB and the Tompkins County Tourism Program and are not included in the plan.

Focus Area

A theme by which potential goals and actions are organized in the plan.

Winter

For the purposes of this plan, winter is the period between mid-November through March during which there is currently ample weekend hotel room capacity in Tompkins County.

ROMI

ROMI or return on marketing investment is a metric used to measure the overall effectiveness of a marketing campaign to help the CVB and the STPB make smart decisions about allocating future investments..

Tourism Product

The tourism product consists of the attractions, amenities, services, venues, events, physical character and hospitality that draw visitors.

Tourism Marketing

Tourism marketing encompasses all of the work to entice visitors to come and experience the local tourism product. This includes activities to identify and reach out to target visitor markets; market research; placing advertising; public relations; web and print collateral development; group and conference sales; and visitors center staffing.

Tourism Program

A budget category of the Tompkins County Tourism Program. A full list of Tourism Programs is in the section of the plan that describes the Tompkins County Tourism Program. They include but are not limited to Beautification, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Festivals program, the Discovery Trail, Community Arts Partnership (CAP), Workforce Development, Market the Arts, and the seven tourism grant programs.

Tourism Project

A focused, usually time-bounded undertaking, such as a particular tourism grant award, event, installation, capital project, or advertising campaign.

Tourism Project Grant Program

The name of a tourism grant program administered by the Tompkins County Tourism Program.

Tompkins County Tourism Program

The official name of the overall tourism program funded by the Tompkins County hotel occupancy tax.

STPB

The Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB) is the formal advisory board charged by the Tompkins County Legislature with providing oversight and strategic direction for tourism initiatives that promote economic development and enhance the quality of life in Tompkins County.

PDEQ

The Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee of the Tompkins County Legislature. The STPB reports to PDEQ, which then makes recommendations to the full Legislature. Over time, the legislative committee responsible for overseeing the tourism program may change.

CVB

Ithaca / Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau is a division of the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce and is the official Tourism Promotion Agency of Tompkins County.

Hotel Occupancy Tax

Also known by the interchangeable terms: room tax, room occupancy tax, hotel tax, bed tax and lodging tax. An ad valorem tax charged to non-exempt overnight guests in lodging establishments. The rate in Tompkins County is 5% for establishments with 11 or more rooms, and 3% for establishments of 10 rooms or fewer. Permanent residents (those staying more than 30 days) are exempt from paying hotel occupancy tax, as are guests staying for certain government or non-profit uses.

Appendix Table of Contents

Please view appendices online at: www.tompkins-co.org/tourism/

- A. Possible Actions: Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan 2012-2020
- B. Performance Indicators for the Tompkins County Tourism Industry
- C. Profile of Tompkins County Visitors, Chmura Economics, 2010
- D. 2005-2010 Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Plan



OUR MISSION:

The Strategic Tourism Planning Board is charged by the Tompkins County Legislature with providing oversight and strategic direction for tourism initiatives that *promote economic development* and *enhance the quality of life* in Tompkins County.