

Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board

Wednesday January 17th, 2018; 3:00pm – 5:00pm

Hilton Garden Inn, Lower Level - 130 E Seneca St

RECEPTION TO FOLLOW BUSINESS MEETING

AGENDA	Start
1. STPB Meeting Minutes	3:00
• ACTION – Approve December Meeting Minutes	
2. Privilege of the Floor	
• Limit of 3 minutes per person for members of the public to address the board	
3. 2018 Officer Election – STPB Nominating Committee	3:05
4. Chair’s REPORT	3:10
5. Heritage Tourism Implementation Update	3:15
• PRESENTATION – Rod Howe, Sharon Bowman	
6. Membership & Bylaws Committee	3:40
• ACTION – Recommend new board member appointments	
7. STPB Communications Committee – logo and annual report update – Josh Friedman	3:45
8. Planning & Evaluation Committee Updates – Ken Jupiter	3:55
9. Outdoor Recreation Tourism Task Force	4:00
• PRESENTATION of draft plan – Andy Zepp, Tom Knipe	
10. CVB Monthly Report - Peggy Coleman	4:25
11. Staff REPORT – Tom Knipe	4:40
• DISCUSSION of exit letter	

SEND OFF PARTY TO FOLLOW at 5:00 PM AT KILPATRICK’S – all are invited

Agenda Packet

1. December 2017 draft STPB meeting minutes
2. Draft STPB Diversity Statement
3. Draft Outdoor Recreation Tourism Implementation Plan
4. CVB Monthly Report
5. Tourism Program Director Exit Letter



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

**Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB)
Draft Meeting Minutes – December 20, 2017**

1 **Date:** December 20, 2017
 2 **Time:** 3:00-4:30pm
 3 **Location:** Ithaca Tompkins County Convention and Visitors Bureau, 904 E. Shore Drive, Ithaca, NY 14850
 4

5 **Attendees:**

Name	✓	Representation
David Blake	P	At-Large
Brett Bossard	P	Arts-Culture
Kelli Cartmill	P	Lodging
Josh Friedman	B	Arts-Culture
VACANT	N/A	Recreation
Anne Gossen	P	Arts-Culture
Steve Hugo	E	At-Large
Ken Jupiter	E	At-Large
Anne Kellerman	P	At-Large
Doug Levine	E	Arts-Culture
Mike Mellor	P	At-Large
Cara Nichols	P	Ithaca College
Stephen Nunley	P	At-Large
Barbara Romano	P	Cornell University
Sue Stafford	E	TC3
Julie Swigart	E	Lodging
Andy Zepp	E	At-Large
VACANT	N/A	Agriculture

Name	✓	Representation
<i>Martha Armstrong</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>TCAD, Non-Voting</i>
<i>Peggy Coleman</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Chamber, Non-Voting</i>
<i>Gary Ferguson</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>DIA, Non-Voting</i>
<i>Dan Klein</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>TC Legislature, Non-Voting</i>
<i>Dwight Mengel</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Transportation, Non-Voting</i>
<i>John Spence</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>CAP, Non-Voting</i>
<i>Jennifer Tavares</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Chamber, Non-Voting</i>
<i>Ethan Ash</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>Associate Member</i>
<i>Jim Brophy</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Associate Member</i>
<i>Carol Kammen</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Associate Member</i>
<i>Jon Reis</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>Associate Member</i>
<i>Mary Kate Wheeler</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>Associate Member</i>
<i>Tom Knipe</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Staff</i>
<i>Kristin McCarthy</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Staff</i>

7 **Guests:** Ronda Roaring

8
 9 Chair Anne Gossen called the meeting to order at 3:01 pm.

11 **Opening Remarks**

12 Anne G. welcomed new associate member Baruch Whitehead, who spoke for a few minutes
 13 about his work in the local arts and culture community.

15 **October 18, 2017 STPB Meeting Minutes**

16 **ACTION:** David Blake **moved** to approve the October minutes. Cara Nichols seconded. The motion
 17 passed.

19 **Privilege of the Floor** -- Ronda Roaring congratulated the Finger Lakes Land Trust (FLLT) on its
 20 receipt of \$2 million in state grant funding through New York State's Water Quality Improvement
 21 Project. The grant, which includes \$641,000 to place perpetual conservation easements and
 22 restore streamside buffers on three parcels in the Six Mile Creek watershed, was announced at
 23 the Regional Economic Development Council Awards (REDC) ceremony on December 13th.

25 **Changes to the Agenda** -- None

27 **Chair's Report**

28

Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB)
Draft Meeting Minutes – December 20, 2017

29 Following up on Ronda’s comment, Anne G. announced that the Downtown Ithaca Alliance, FLLT,
30 Kitchen Theatre, Tompkins Center for History and Culture, and The History Center all received
31 grants as part of the REDC Awards. Jennifer Tavares gave some brief background information on
32 the grant application process for the Tompkins Center award, which the Chamber of Commerce
33 was involved in.

34
35 Peggy Coleman relayed that Tom Knipe will receive the Howard Cogan Tourism Award at the
36 Chamber’s annual dinner, to be held Thursday, January 25, at Emerson Suites. Howard’s wife,
37 Helen, will be there to present the award. Everyone is invited; more details are to follow.

38
39 Anne G. said the Planning & Evaluation, Membership & Nominating, Outdoor Recreation, and
40 Communications Committees are scheduled to give a report at today’s meeting. She thanked the
41 committee members for all their help in 2017.

42

43 **Staff Report**

44

45 Tom is very grateful and honored to be receiving the Cogan Award.

46

47 He hopes to give a presentation on the Tourism Program to the full Legislature on January 16th.

48

49 The 2017 Annual Report is scheduled for release in late January.

50

51 The deadline for the Spring 2018 Tourism Grant Round is March 19th. The grant workshop will
52 take place January 16th at the Convention and Visitors Bureau. Peggy and Kristin McCarthy will be
53 available to answer inquiries after Tom’s departure until a new tourism program director is hired.
54 Kelsey Rossbach at the United Way can assist with issues related to the Apricot Grant
55 Management System.

56

57 The Planning & Evaluation Committee will meet January 3rd. Tom is expecting Three Letters of
58 Interest for the Strategic Tourism Implementation Grant program.

59

60 A Hiring Committee has been established to find Tom’s successor, and the notice of employment
61 has gone out. Dan Klein, Kelli Cartmill, Ken Jupiter, and Tom are serving on the committee. The
62 deadline to apply is January 8th. Tom asked everyone to help get the word out.

63

64 Katie Borgella is officially the new Commissioner of Planning and Sustainability. In addition, the
65 County has hired a new administrator, Jason Molino. Coincidentally, Jason hails from Tom’s
66 hometown of Batavia, NY, and his wife was a good friend of Tom’s in high school.

67

68 **2018 Tourism Program Budget Adjustments – Tom Knipe**

69

70 Tom requested that the Board members consider recommending funds remaining from FY2017
71 be rolled over to the 2018 Tourism Program Budget. He hopes to have a resolution with these

**Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB)
Draft Meeting Minutes – December 20, 2017**

72 recommendations before the legislative Budget Committee for a vote before the committee's
73 meeting on January 2, 2018. The 2018 Tourism Program budget adjustments are as follows:
74

Program	Amount	Explanation/Source Original	2018 Budget	New 2018 Budget
Tourism Capital Grants	\$49,874	\$4,947 released encumbrance from Downtown Conference Center Feasibility Study; \$1,447 in previous year allocated but unspent; \$43,480 roll forward for Blueway Trail in 2018	\$213,260	\$263,134
Tourism Marketing & Advertising Grants	\$3,135	\$2,135 previous year allocated but unspent, \$1,000 returned fall grant (March Shakespeare production cancelled)	\$50,000	\$53,135
Community Celebrations Grants	\$1,090	Previous year allocated but unspent	\$35,500	\$36,590
New Tourism Initiative Grants	\$6,900	Ice Climbing Feasibility Study remaining half payment released released (project to be completed with less funds)	\$74,000	\$80,900
Tourism Project Grants	\$23,373	\$12,373 previous year allocated but unspent, \$11,000 returned fall grant (March Shakespeare production cancelled)	\$84,000	\$107,373
Arts & Culture Organizational Development Grants	\$7,523	Previous year allocated but unspent	\$222,347	\$229,870

75
76 **Action:** A motion was made by Martha Armstrong, and seconded by Brett Bossard, to recommend
77 the 2018 Tourism Program budget adjustments. Motion carried.

78
79 **Strategic Tourism Implementation (STI) Grant Panel – Martha Armstrong**

80
81 Martha brought before for the Board a joint proposal from Historic Ithaca/The History Center to
82 continue funding for a Community Engagement and Heritage Tourism Coordinator staff position,
83 marketing, and other expenses. The request was originally for two years (\$55,000 per year for a
84 total of \$110,000); however, the STI grant review committee recommended funding for one year
85 only at this time.

86
87 **Action:** A report by Martha Armstrong, seconded by David Blake, served as the motion to
88 recommend a one-year STI grant award of \$55,000 to the Joint Tourism Heritage Program of
89 Historic Ithaca and The History Center. Discussion followed. Motion carried.

**Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB)
Draft Meeting Minutes – December 20, 2017**

90 In addition, Tom asked the board to vote on the recommended budget adjustment to the 2018
91 STI grant program.

92

93 **Action:** Stephen Nunley moved, and Kelli Cartmill seconded, to recommend the 2018 STI Grant
94 Budget be adjusted by \$268,000 to \$403,000. The motion was approved by the members present.

95

96

97 **Membership & Bylaws Committee Report – Kelli Cartmill**

98

99 The members present voted to recommend the following individuals for appointment and re-
100 appointment to the STPB:

101

- 102 • Baruch Whitehead — Anne Gossen moved and David Blake seconded
- 103 • Andy Zepp — Anne Gossen moved and Josh Friedman seconded
- 104 • Scott Wiggins — Brett Bossard moved and Stephen Nunley and Jennifer Tavares
105 seconded (both raised hands at the same time)
- 106 • Josh Friedman — Anne Gossen moved and Stephen Nunley seconded
- 107 • Kelli—Brett Bossard moved and Stephen Nunley seconded

108

109 The recommendations were approved unanimously. Motions carried.

110

111 **STPB Communications Committee – present logo drafts – Josh Friedman, Brett Bossard**

112

113 Josh Friedman provided the members with an overview of the committee’s work on developing
114 an annual report and logo for the Tourism Program. He then invited the members to review the
115 two logo finalists and share their reactions and feedback. Josh will take their comments back to
116 the designer, with the hopes of having the final version ready to share at the January meeting.

117

118 **Outdoor Recreation Tourism Task Force Update – Andy Zepp, Tom Knipe**

119

120 There was no update. The draft plan will be discussed at the next meeting.

121

122 **CVB Monthly Report – Peggy Coleman**

123

124 Peggy gave a brief overview of the report and asked for questions. For more information, consult
125 the agenda packet for a copy of the report.

126

127 She also reported that the CVB plans to launch the Visitor Profile Study in January and have the
128 report in hand by early 2019.

129

130 The meeting was adjourned at 4:25 by Chair Anne Gossen.

Draft

**Diversity & Inclusion Assessment
by the Tompkins County Tourism Program
and the Strategic Tourism Planning Board**

For Discussion by the STPB, 10/18/17

With STPB group feedback added 10/20/17

With WDIC feedback added 12/13/17

DRAFT

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Demographic profile of board members	3
Current and potential actions supporting diversity and inclusion	6

Introduction

On March 15, 2017 the Strategic Tourism Planning Board STPB voted to adopt goals for the year, including “Write a statement on STPB commitment to diversity and steps that we as a program commit to take to achieving diversity goals.” This document is in furtherance of that goal.

The Tompkins County Tourism Program (TCTP) and the Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB) fully support all aspects of the Tompkins County Diversity and Inclusion Policy.¹ The policy requires the County government to “assess organizational culture routinely and consistently, utilizing best practices in regard to valuing diversity and inclusion.” As an appointed Advisory Board, the Strategic Tourism Planning Board, with help from the Tompkins County Tourism Program, is assessing its current and potential diversity efforts.

The Tourism Program and Strategic Tourism Planning Board are subject to and fully support the Diversity Statement adopted by the Tompkins County Legislature July 5, 2005:

“Tompkins County government is committed to creating a diverse and fully inclusive workplace that strengthens our organization and enhances our ability to adapt to change by developing and maintaining:

- *An organization-wide understanding and acceptance of the purpose and reasons for diversity;*
- *Recruitment and retention policies that assure a diverse workforce;*
- *A workplace environment that is welcoming and supportive of all;*
- *Awareness, understanding, and education regarding diversity issues;*
- *Zero tolerance for expressions of discrimination, bias, harassment, stereotyping, or disrespect toward any person or group;*
- *a workforce ethic that embraces diversity and makes it the norm for all interactions, including delivery of services to the public.”*

The Tompkins County Tourism Program and the Strategic Tourism Planning Board intend to use this document as a tool to achieve and assess progress.

¹ Adopted by Tompkins County December 2013 <http://tompkinscountyny.gov/files/ctyadmin/policy/01-43.pdf>

**Demographic Profile
of the Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board**

Per the STPB bylaws, the STPB has 18 voting members with sectoral representation as follows:

- Two Lodging representatives
- One Recreation representative
- One Agriculture representative
- Four Arts/Culture representatives
- One Cornell University representative
- One Ithaca College representative
- One Tompkins Cortland Community College representative
- Seven At-large representatives

The purpose of these seats is to balance representation from sectors that contribute to local tourism. In addition, the board has seven non-voting members who represent organizations involved in service delivery.

The STPB participated in two surveys, facilitated by TCTP staff, assessing internal board diversity. The October 2014 survey had 22 respondents including STPB voting members, non-voting members and associate members. The November 2016 survey had 23 respondents. Results are as follows:

Role

	2014	2016
Voting	14	16
2014: Non-Voting/ Ex-Officio 2016: Ex-Officio	7	5
Associate	1	2

Gender

	2014	2016
Male	11	12
Female	11	11
Other	N/A	0

Age

	2014	2016
2016: 25 or younger	0	0
2014: 21-35 2016: 26-35	2	3
2014: 36-50 2016: 36-45	4	4

2016: 46-55	0	6
2014: 51-65 2016: 56-65	11	5
65 or older	5	5

Race / Ethnicity (optional)*

	2014	2016
Caucasian/ White	7	21
African-American	1	1 (with some other ethnicities)
Did not answer	14	1

Note: question was phrased as open-ended, "Please describe your race/ethnicity."

LGBTQ – "Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ community?"

	2016
Yes	3
No, but I am an Ally	10
No	10

Level of expertise in professional skills

- A: I have professional expertise in this area.
- B: I am very knowledgeable about this, even if I'm not a pro.
- C: I know enough to contribute a little in this area.
- D: I know what its about, but not enough to really contribute.
- E: I don't know anything about this.

	2014 (listed A,B,C,D,E)	2016 (listed A,B,C,D,E)
Marketing and Communications	9, 6, 7, 0, 0	10, 5, 7, 1, 0
2014: Tourism Industry 2016: Hospitality Industry	7, 2, 10, 3, 0	7, 4, 7, 3, 2
Grant-making	8, 5, 5, 4, 0	10, 2, 4, 7, 0
Fundraising and Development	5, 6, 9, 2, 0	8, 4, 4, 7, 0
Business or Non-profit Management	12, 7, 2, 1, 0	16, 1, 3, 3, 0
Law	0, 0, 6, 13, 3	1, 0, 4, 12, 6
Project Budgeting and Financing	7, 5, 6, 3, 0	10, 4, 7, 2, 0
Strategic Planning	10, 5, 7, 0, 0	9, 5, 7, 2, 0
Government Administration	3, 1, 7, 9, 2	2, 4, 6, 5, 6
2014: Other	1, 0, 0, 0, 0 (responses: economic/community development, management, project management, technology, AAR, evaluation and assessment, board development)	N/A

2016: Program Evaluation	N/A	2, 8, 11, 1, 1
2016: Economic Development	N/A	5, 6, 8, 4, 0
2016: Diversity and Inclusion	N/A	0, 7, 9, 6, 1

Length of time living in Tompkins County

	2014	2016
Less than 5 years	3	4
5-10 years	3	3
10-20 years	6	5
More than 20 years	7	6
Born and raised	3	5

Assess how well the STPB is currently doing in supporting the County's diversity and inclusion goals.

	2016
Very well	6
Well	8
Neither well nor poorly	9
Not very well	0
Poorly	0

Current Activities and New Actions Supporting Diversity and Inclusion

The following two pages describe current activities of the Tourism Program and STPB in support of our Diversity and Inclusion goals, as well as new actions proposed by this document. These activities are categorized be: 1) people, 2) messaging, and 3) policy & planning.

People

Current Activities: The TCTP and STPB actively work together to recruit diverse candidates for STPB membership and service on program committees. We proactively reach out to diverse organizations and individuals to encourage applications for open seats and committee service. We recognize that it is not enough to passively put out a call for applications and volunteers; rather, we must be proactive in recruiting diverse individuals to join the board and participate on committees. Because of term limits, there tend to be several board seat openings annually. While the board is currently fairly well balanced in terms of gender and also has LGBTQ representation, ethnic and age diversity are areas of opportunity for expanding our demographic diversity. Specifically, we currently hope to attract more people of color and more young people to serve.

New Actions:

1. STPB
 - a. Formalize diverse outreach for member recruitment and appointment by utilizing the list of affinity groups in the Tompkins County Diversity Recruitment Resource Guide. http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/DiversityRecruitment%20ResourceGuide_%20RevSept2014.pdf
 - b. Actively seek new board members representing categories not well represented according to the STPB demographic survey. Ask board members to recruit diverse candidates from their networks. Ask CU/IC/TC3 representatives for suggestions for candidates within their organizations.
 - c. Consider looking at accessibility as a long-term goal for tourism (part of strategic plan); recruiting a person with this background/interest to add this perspective to the board.
 - d. Review County Diversity and Inclusion policy and resources at new member orientation and at the board level every January to create an organizational culture of acceptance. <http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/workforcedi>
2. Committees
 - a. Seek diversity in committees. Committee members are appointed by the board chair and do not need to be STPB members, creating an opportunity for additional enhancement of diversity.

Messaging

Current Activities: The TCTP and STPB work together to reach diverse groups in Tourism Program communications. The TCTP notifies and provides direct assistance to diverse groups and individuals regarding tourism-funded programs (ACOD, Celebrations, TMA, NTI, TPG, Beautification, Public Art). Channels include the tourism program email list, grant workshops, public presentations, press releases, one-on-one meetings and the Tourism Program website. The Tourism Program encourages funded programs and grant recipients to reach diverse audiences with their own programming and messaging.

Potential Actions:

1. Add contacts in Diversity Resource Recruitment Guide and other organizations as appropriate to the Tourism Program email list:
[http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/DiversityRecruitment%20ResourceGuide %20RevSept 2014.pdf](http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/files/DiversityRecruitment%20ResourceGuide%20RevSept2014.pdf).
2. Leverage the TCTP's new Communications and Branding effort to reach diverse audiences. The Annual Report will create a new opportunity to communicate to broader audience about our programs and goals, including contributions to economic development and quality of life, and support for diverse organizations and institutions. Consider outreach through presentations to different groups. Need to define which groups; perhaps use the County Diversity Resource Recruitment Guide and set a goal of x per year

Policy & Planning

Current Activities: The TCTP follows the Tompkins County Diversity and Inclusion Policy. Its current 2010-2020 Strategic Plan is designed to reach a maximum diversity of people and interests, and includes a diversity policy within the plan:

"It is the policy of the Tompkins County Tourism Program to promote diversity. Actively pursue diverse STPB membership and partnerships, such as with representation from diverse generations, local communities, and ethnicities, and with diverse competencies".

New Actions:

1. Embed diversity policy and County D&I resources in grant guidelines and evaluation criteria, asking applicants how they plan to include D&I in their project, and asking or requiring applicants to provide their organization's diversity policy / statement as a part of their application.
2. Set a goal for the STPB to assess its diversity and inclusion profile, activities, and goals every January.
3. Pursue board training on D&I. Consider the Office of Human Rights (OHR) as a resource. OHR offers complimentary D&I training.
4. Embed D&I statement in tourism contracts.
5. Encourage best practice education and collaboration among grant recipients– e.g. ACOD group shares best practices and advises each other on how to best infuse their organizations with Diversity and Inclusion best practices. Another possibility is reporting how different organizations do D&I based on their application responses, and using this as a baseline to assess progress, potential, and/or best practices, as appropriate.
6. On the board survey:
 - a. Add categories for disability, veteran, cultural identity, geographic location in Tompkins County, socio-economic status, and other board/professional/social/cultural group affiliations to the annual board demographic survey.
 - b. Add a blank box to the gender question rather than "other".
 - c. If LGBTQ ally, consider asking a follow up question about what that means to them.



1/9/18 DRAFT

Tompkins County Outdoor Recreation Tourism Implementation Plan 2018

Adopted by the Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board on March X, 2018

LETTER FROM THE OUTDOOR RECREATION TOURISM TASK FORCE

Natural beauty. Accessible hiking and biking. Outstanding parks and natural areas. Cayuga Lake. Waterfalls and gorges. We're known for these. Indeed, "Ithaca is Gorges" and our community has received a number of outdoor recreation accolades as a result. As a Tourism Board, a County Tourism Program, and set of partner organizations, we have been working collectively over the past several years to build upon this strength to enhance outdoor recreation experiences by supporting initiatives such as the Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail, the Tompkins Priority Trails Strategy, the Cayuga Waterfront Trail, and several other trail and natural area enhancements.

Yet, we can do more to fully live up to the image of Tompkins County as an outstanding destination for experiencing outdoor recreation by identifying and then investing strategically in key priorities. By doing so, we stand to reap significant economic return through more visitation, longer stays, higher spending, and above all more inspiring experiences of the natural world right out the back door of elite global institutions of higher education and a vibrant downtown.

One of the unique challenges related to supporting outdoor recreation tourism compared to other local tourism sectors is that there is no partner organization or set of established groups that have the capacity to independently push forward an outdoor recreation tourism agenda. Contrast this with other tourism focus areas like the arts or downtown Ithaca, which do have these actors in place, partly thanks to long-standing investments by the Tourism Program. In addition, unlike a performance, event or gated attraction, all of which have fairly straightforward methods for gaining a picture of return on investment, investment in outdoor recreation tourism requires an understanding that improving our outdoor recreation assets is a long-term strategy in the overall attraction of the community as a destination. A third unique aspect is that the places where visitors access these experiences and where the experiences occur are either publicly owned parks, trails, and roads or a patchwork of public, quasi-public or privately owned areas like the Finger Lakes Trail. This adds a challenge to advance outdoor recreation tourism; because most of the lands are publicly owned, they are less nimble to have private businesses invest in making the resource better. Developing and improving these public assets as destination-quality attractions will take commitment over time, coordination, planning, and investment from a wide variety of sources.

In light of the above, a targeted approach for developing outdoor recreation is needed. In addition to identifying six key actions in the five activity areas prioritized by the plan – water-based recreation, hiking and running, bicycling, kids and nature, and adventure/niche – this plan proposes the establishment of new funding mechanisms specifically in support of outdoor recreation tourism by the Tompkins County Tourism Program. First, investing strategically in growing the organizational capacity of partners who can push forward the outdoor recreation tourism agenda is critical. Second, targeted investment in key physical outdoor recreation infrastructure will improve the experience and expand the overall draw to our area.

We are pleased to present this vision for outdoor recreation tourism to the community. Thank you to all of the partners who contributed to the development of this plan, and we look forward to working with you on implementing it.

Andrew Zepp, Chair, STPB Outdoor Recreation Tourism Task Force

Thomas Knipe, Principal Planner & Tourism Program Director

Executive Summary

Goal: The goal of this plan is to leverage our outstanding assets and address existing challenges to expand outdoor recreation and other tourism related to our outstanding natural amenities: Cayuga Lake, gorges and waterfalls, trails, parks, and natural areas.

Vision: We have the potential to become recognized as one of the truly premier outdoor recreation towns of the mid-Atlantic, a place that is widely known as the #1 Outdoor Recreation Community in Central NY and the Finger Lakes.

Tourism Program Investment

This plan proposes two new structural changes to the Tompkins County Tourism Program investments, along with six other key actions which the Program will work to advance or support partners in advancing along with a variety of additional supportive actions categorized by five specific areas of opportunity:

Water-Based Recreation, Hiking and Running, Bicycling, Kids in Nature, and Adventure / Niche Outdoor Recreation

Two New Structural Changes

Outdoor Recreation Tourism Capacity Building Grants - Establish a new grant fund using room tax dollars to grow the capacity of local organizations to advance outdoor recreation tourism development at key physical areas and critical outdoor recreation tourism infrastructure opportunity sites. Capacity support could include funding for staff resources to move outdoor recreation projects forward that are sorely lacking at this time.

Outdoor Recreation Tourism Capital Reserve Fund - Use room tax to A) create a new County capital reserve fund for outdoor recreation tourism, B) expand the funding sources and eligibility criteria of the existing Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic, and Recreational Resource Protection to support outdoor recreation tourism infrastructure improvements or C) increase support for the existing Tourism Capital Grant (TCG) program while modifying TCG grant guidelines to encourage more of these types of projects to come forward under that grant. Infrastructure support could include trail easement acquisitions, parking improvements, trailhead signage, and other types of projects to develop and improve our outdoor recreation amenities. Further discussion by the STPB will help determine which of the options for increasing investment in physical outdoor recreation tourism infrastructure is the best fit.

Six Key Actions

Blueprint for Better Bicycling - Improve street bicycle infrastructure in Ithaca's urban core to create safe, comfortable on-street connections between the downtown and waterfront, between multi-use trails, and between visitor attractions.

ACTION FRAMEWORK:

2 New Structural Changes

6 Key Actions

26 Supportive Actions

Key Actions and Supportive Actions are listed under 5 thematic areas of opportunity:

- Water-Based
- Hiking & Running
- Bicycling
- Kids in Nature
- Niche & Adventure

Priority Trails Strategy¹- Support the expansion of the Tompkins County network of multi-use trails.

Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail²- Actively develop and implement the water trail.

Planning and development for a key underdeveloped public lands - Create clear plans for outdoor recreation enhancing physical improvements in key underinvested areas such as the Six Mile Creek Natural Area and Hammond Hill State Forest, among others. For important trail access points, identify a clear set of priority capital improvements involving trail enhancement and expansion, trailhead signage, mapping, interpretation and parking.

Kids in Nature Attractions and Organizations - Continue to partner and invest through existing grant programs in attractions and organizations supporting kids in nature such as Ithaca Children's Garden, Cayuga Nature Center, and others.

Cayuga Lake Birding Trail - Develop a new Cayuga Lake Birding Trail with a dozen or more sites in proximity to Cayuga Lake with anchor sites at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge to include marketing and signage and interactive website.

Total new investment = \$100,000 to \$150,000 through two new grant programs funded by room tax. Other key actions to be supported by existing tourism grant programs, outside grant funds, and partners.

¹ The Tompkins Priority Trails Strategy is accessible online at:

<http://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/tourism/tourism/plan>

² The Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail Plan is available online at: <http://cayugablueway.weebly.com/>

Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to identify steps we can take collectively as a community in the next several years to develop and promote Ithaca and Tompkins County as a premier regional destination for outdoor recreation.

The Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB) is charged by the Tompkins County Legislature with providing oversight and strategic direction for use of the County's hotel room occupancy tax funds. In performance of its policy-making role for tourism, the STPB established a 2020 Strategic Plan for Tourism in 2012. Outdoor Recreation Tourism was highlighted as a focus area, and in early 2016 the STPB established the Outdoor Recreation Tourism Task Force and charged this group with coming up with a more fine-grained set of strategies for this sector. Core Task Force members were Andrew Zepp, Ian Golden, Peggy Coleman, and Tom Knipe.

Our goal: "To expand outdoor recreation and other tourism related to our outstanding natural amenities: Cayuga Lake, gorges and waterfalls, trails, parks, and natural areas."

The Task Force conducted a number of interviews with key stakeholders and extensive research to establish the scope and focus for this work. A focus group was convened in spring 2016 to perform a formal SWOT analysis exercise, and in January, 2017 the Task Force hosted a large workshop with more than 60 industry stakeholders at The Space at Greenstar. The Task Force drew extensively from the collective wisdom coming out of this workshop as well as other research and industry knowledge to develop this plan which sets the stage to significantly advance investment and action in support of outdoor recreation tourism in the next three to five years.

Notably, the scope of this plan does not include sports tourism, which has its own set of unique challenges, actors, and opportunities and therefore deserves separate treatment. In addition, the Task Force determined early on that while the area hosts excellent fishing, hunting and camping opportunities, those opportunities would not be the focus of this plan because, simply, these activities, while a valuable part of the mix, do not represent a competitive advantage for our community relative to other nearby communities in Upstate New York and Northeast Pennsylvania.

Context for Outdoor Recreation Tourism in Tompkins County

Tourism is an important sector of our local economy, accounting for approximately \$200 million in economic activity, 3,500 jobs, and also greatly enhances our local quality of life by investing in the attractions and amenities that also make this a great place to live, work, go to school, grow a business and retire. The STPB has identified outdoor recreation tourism as one of several key focus areas for tourism development between now and 2020. The Tompkins County 2020 Strategic Tourism Plan establishes the

Outdoor Recreation Accolades:

Bronze-level Bicycle Friendly Community – League of American Bicyclists

Best Swimming Spot in New York State – (Robert H. Treman State Park – Weather.com

America's Five Best Mountain Biking Towns – Bike Magazine

Healthiest City in New York State – Wall Street Journal

Best River Town – America (top 25) – Outside Magazine 2012

#5 Best Place to Live – Outside Magazine Reader Poll 2014

Road Runners Club of America – Runner Friendly Community 2017

goal for this implementation plan and the 2020 Plan also has three “critical actions” which are currently being implemented: 1) supporting the completion of priority multi-use trails and the Finger Lakes Trail, 2) implementing the Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail, and 3) supporting the Stewart Park Rehabilitation Action Plan.

Outdoor recreation tourism is already the single most important draw for visitors to our area after Cornell and Ithaca College.

The Tompkins County Tourism Program reinvests local hotel room occupancy tax funds in a variety of ways to support both product development and marketing. Annual room tax revenues topped \$2.75 million in 2017. In the past several years, the Program has supported a number of outdoor recreation tourism related projects, including the Cayuga

Waterfront Trail, Stewart Park, the Ithaca Children’s Garden, the Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail, IthacaTrails.org and GoFingerLakes.org websites, and a variety of outdoor recreation related events including the Cayuga Lake SUP Cup and Cayuga Trails 50. A full list of outdoor recreation related investments through grants totaling \$X can be found in the appendix of this plan.

Audience

According to the 2010 Tompkins County Visitor Profile Study report, 45% of leisure visitors ranked “Gorges and State Parks” as an important motivator for their trip to Tompkins County. This was by far the top ranked reason for leisure visitors. In addition, 26% of leisure visitors ranked “Cayuga Lake” as an important reason for their visit. What this means is that outdoor recreation tourism is already the single most important draw for visitors to our area after Cornell and Ithaca College.

<u>Percent of Tourism Grant Funds Invested by Sector 2004-2016^{3,4}</u>
64% - Arts & Culture
41% - Downtown Ithaca
27% - Edutourism
10% - Outdoor Recreation
6% - Agriculinary

In contrast, support from the Tompkins County Tourism towards outdoor recreation tourism has not been commensurate with its top ranking as a motivator for visitation. A 2017 study³ conducted by a graduate student in the Cornell Department of City and Regional Planning in partnership with the Tompkins County Tourism Program looking into the nature of investments by the Program between 2004 and 2016 found that among Established and Emerging Tourism Types (as defined in the 2020 Strategic Tourism Plan), Arts, Culture & Heritage Tourism saw the most investment, followed by Educational Tourism and Downtown Ithaca. All other tourism types saw substantially

less investment, including Outdoor Recreation. Specifically, around 10% of all flexible investments outside of core tourism infrastructure investments like the Convention and Visitors Bureau were tied to Outdoor Recreation Tourism, while 64% of investments were linked to Arts & Culture, 41% to Downtown Ithaca, and 27% to Edutourism⁴.

Outdoor Recreation is big business and we gain by tapping more aggressively into this established audience and industry. 52% of New York State residents engage in outdoor recreation activities every

³ Tompkins County Room Tax Investments, 2004-2016; a report prepared by Dylan Tuttle, Cornell Department of City and Regional Planning, for the Strategic Tourism Planning Board, Winter 2017.

⁴ Inclusive of overlapping primarily, secondary and tertiary focus areas, hence the total figure adding to greater than 100%.

year. According to a recent Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) report, “The outdoor recreation economy in New York State generates 313,000 direct jobs, \$41.8 billion in consumer spending, \$14 billion in wages and salaries and \$3.6 billion in state and local tax revenue. Outdoor recreation is a powerful economic engine that contributes to businesses and healthy communities and is a vital and sustainable sector that relies on investing in and protecting our area’s public lands and waters.”⁵ Outdoor Recreation further supports communities in achieving other important goals, especially health and quality of life.

While Tompkins County holds some limited potential to further develop adventure activities like ice climbing, kite-boarding, advanced whitewater kayaking, and wilderness backpacking, these activities have smaller overall market potential than activities like running, hiking, flatwater paddling, and bicycling. And competitive destinations with stronger natural assets to support adventure activities, like Lake Placid, exist in the region. Our competitive advantage therefore lies in developing outdoor recreation tourism around our existing land, water, and organizational assets to attract more generalists, families, HENRY (High Earning Not Rich Yet) visitors, and people coming for the experience of visiting Ithaca as a whole. The strongest strategic approach is to improve and develop new infrastructure that aims at a broad audience of people who are interested in having outdoor experiences as part of a larger set of trip purposes. This fits with our overall strength as a destination of having a lot of interesting things to do in a comfortable, distinct, attractive setting. To use the example of trails, more miles of trail and better trails will lead to more visitation and increased visitor spending over time.

Challenges

Set against outstanding assets and advantages to build upon for further developing outdoor recreation tourism are several important challenges.

Declining water quality

Local water-based outdoor recreation and indeed the overall image of the Finger Lakes as an attractive destination rely on clean water in our gorges and Cayuga Lake. Swimming areas at Taughannock Falls State Park, Buttermilk Falls State Park, and Robert Treman State Park have all experienced closures due to the presence of e-coli and/or turbidity. In addition, the emergence of blue-green algae as a vital threat to outdoor recreation tourism cannot be overstated.

⁵ OIA report 2017. Access online at: https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/OIA_RecEconomy_FINAL_Single.pdf

Outdoor Recreation’s Many Community Benefits

“Studies demonstrate that, in addition to economic prosperity, outdoor recreation delivers personal and social benefits on which healthy, happy communities thrive. Investment in outdoor recreation may also help ease financial and social burdens.

Investments in outdoor recreation programming and infrastructure have also been shown to reduce crime rates, improve educational outcomes for elementary, secondary and post-secondary students, including attention and test scores, retention and high school graduation rates, lower long-term individual and public health care costs by reducing stress and obesity rates, improving physical fitness and strengthening social bonds with family and friends. Communities across the US recognize that outdoor recreation supports healthy communities, contributes to a high quality of life and—perhaps most importantly— attracts and sustains businesses and families.”

- Outdoor Industry Association Report 2017

“It's bad and it's everywhere: Harmful algal blooms plague Owasco, Skaneateles, Cayuga lakes”

- September, 2017 Auburnpub.com headline

Addressing this threat will require a sustained commitment by a variety of actors over time. Governor Andrew M. Cuomo’s December 2017 announcement of a proposal to implement a \$65 million 4-point initiative to aggressively combat harmful algal blooms in Upstate New York, including for Cayuga Lake, is an encouraging development that local tourism groups should watch closely and look for opportunities to support.

Slow progress on multi-use trail development

As shown in the Tompkins Priority Trails Strategy, tremendous opportunities exist to expand and connect a multi-use trail network in Tompkins County. But progress has been slow and has occurred in fits and starts. The Black Diamond Trail was first envisioned in the 1970s, and the eight-mile Northern Section between Cass Park and Taughannock Falls State Park finally opened in late 2016, more than 40 years later. The Cayuga Waterfront Trail in the City of Ithaca is now complete, more than a decade after work first began. Extending the South Hill Recreation Way would seem straightforward as NYSEG owns the entire corridor and has expressed willingness to allow for its use as a trail, but progress has been slow because of bureaucratic and political complexity. The so-called ‘bridge to nowhere’ over Route 13 in Southwest Ithaca will have been in place for too many years before it finally connects to a trail, as expected in 2018.

Some of this is the inherent complexity of trail development, but with increased capacity and sustained effort, progress can advance more quickly, as recent successful efforts of the Dryden Rail Trail Task Force attest. This plan seeks to increase the capacity of local trail expansion and improvement efforts to support speeded progress. Increasing capacity for this work will further assist partner agencies, including local governments, to prioritize these multi-beneficial projects.

Loss of Finger Lakes Trail Access

The Emerald Necklace, a 50,000 acre swath of public forest and open space across the Southern portion of Tompkins County and adjacent counties – Schuyler, Seneca and Tioga – hosts a 78 mile section of the 563-mile Finger Lakes Trail. Only 40 percent of the trail is on publicly owned land and the remaining 60 percent is hosted by 58 private landowners. Development pressures and other factors have already displaced the trail from private lands to onto the sides of roads for several miles in some sections, which degrades the hiking experience. In addition, limited trailhead access makes it more difficult than desirable to access the trail from key state route crossings. Meanwhile, local and regional trail groups lack adequate capacity to keep up with and address these issues. Increased capacity for Finger Lakes Trail protection and trailhead development could help address these challenges.

Many of our public lands are not primarily managed for recreation

Unlike City and State Parks, many of our local public lands are not managed and/or developed for outdoor recreation. Examples include the Six Mile Creek and Ithaca Falls Natural Areas in the City of

Ithaca; Hammond Hill State Forest, Shindagin Hollow State Forest, and Salt Point, managed by the New York State DEC; and other municipal parks like Danby Town Park. Tremendous opportunities exist for enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities in these areas, particularly Six Mile Creek with its beautiful natural area and trail network so close to downtown Ithaca. To take advantage of such opportunities would require a renewed approach and increased capacity for planning and implementation.

Lack of Inherent Institutional Capacity to Advance Outdoor Recreation Tourism Initiatives

Outdoor recreation tourism lacks the same level of supportive organizational and physical frameworks which are inherent to other sectors. For example, arts & culture tourism has well established local not-for-profit organizations with missions that include tourism and direct control over bricks and mortar physical attractions, like theatres and museums. In the case of outdoor recreation tourism, the major physical assets which can be developed in support of outdoor recreation tourism are primarily under public state and municipal ownership, which are less likely to have outdoor recreation tourism as a core element of their mission.

Vision

Our vision for the future development of outdoor recreation tourism is to expand and grow the quality of our existing natural assets in a way that fits with our community's overall mix of attractions, while also aspiring to become recognized as a premier outdoor recreation town of the mid-Atlantic, a place that is widely known as the #1 "Outdoor Recreation Town" in Central NY and the Finger Lakes.

We have the potential to become recognized as a premier outdoor recreation town of the mid-Atlantic, a place that is widely known as the #1 Outdoor Recreation Community in Central NY and the Finger Lakes.

Actions

This plan recommends that the Tompkins County Tourism Program and its partners commit resources and energy to advance two structural changes and six key actions to achieve our vision and goal for outdoor recreation tourism. In addition, a number of “supportive actions” are identified which can be advanced as timing, willing partners, capacity, and opportunities allow.

The actions are categorized under one key “Structural Support” category, along with five topical categories that were identified as priorities by the STPB Outdoor Recreation Tourism Task Force and stakeholders: Bicycling, Water-Based Recreation, Hiking and Running, Kids in Nature, and Adventure / Niche Outdoor Recreation.

Structural Support for Outdoor Recreation Tourism

As the successful Tourism Program’s Arts & Culture Organizational Development (ACOD) Grant program has done for increasing the capacity of local arts organizations to advance tourism goals, this plan recommends two significant new structural changes to the Tompkins County Tourism Program and several other possible supportive actions to increase the level of structural support to advance outdoor recreation tourism.

Two New Structural Changes

The creation of two new targeted funding opportunities for outdoor recreation tourism would significantly increase our collective capacity to improve and expand upon our natural outdoor recreation assets.

Outdoor Recreation Tourism Capacity Building Grants

Establish a new grant fund using room tax dollars to grow the capacity of local organizations to enhance advance outdoor recreation tourism development in at key physical areas and critical outdoor recreation tourism infrastructure opportunity sites.

Critical areas for investment as identified by this plan include Stewart Park and Cass Park, Six Mile Creek gorge, Multi-Use Trails that are part of the Tompkins Priority Trails Strategy, the Finger Lakes Trail, the Ithaca Falls area, State Forests, and public lake access sites.

This fund is proposed to be structured much like the existing ACOD Grant program - as an organizational development and capacity-building fund which will serve to advance planning activities and provide other types of structural support including staffing to significantly push forward the development of key assets.

Initial pilot funding in 2018 to set up a program could be established through the Tourism Program’s Strategic Tourism Implementation Fund, and in 2019 and beyond through the STPB’s annual budgeting process. The STPB and Legislature would then respond to proposals from applicants to possibly include ‘friends’ groups like the Friends of Stewart Park and Cayuga Trails Club, local governments like the City of Ithaca or Dryden Rail Trail Task Force, and not-for profit groups like the Finger Lakes Land Trust and Finger Lakes Trail Conference.

ACTION FRAMEWORK:

2 New Structural Changes

6 Key Actions

26 Supportive Actions

Key Actions and Supportive Actions are listed under thematic areas of opportunity:

- Structural Support
- Water-Based
- Hiking & Running
- Bicycling
- Kids in Nature
- Niche & Adventure

Initial proposed room tax investment: \$75,000 - \$100,000

Outdoor Recreation Tourism Capital Reserve Fund. Use room tax to A) create a new County capital reserve fund for outdoor recreation, B) expand the funding sources and eligibility criteria of the existing Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic, and Recreational Resource Protection to support outdoor recreation tourism infrastructure improvements or C) increase support for the existing Tourism Capital Grant (TCG) program while modifying TCG grant guidelines to encourage more of these types of projects to come forward under that grant.

Although it has supported some investments in park and trail amenities, the existing Tourism Capital Grant program is currently primarily set up to consider proposals for bricks and mortar capital projects, not investments in outdoor recreation tourism. Meanwhile, the County has an existing program supported by the general fund to support investment in conservation projects, including trails and outdoor recreation tourism assets in certain specific areas including the County’s established Natural Features Focus Areas. In the past, this program has been used for recreational resources including: 1) support for Finger Lakes Land Trust acquisition of the key conservation lands on and around the Cayuga Inlet in the Towns of Ithaca and Newfield, protecting a popular stretch of Finger Lakes Trail and providing protected buffers to the Black Diamond Trail and Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway, and 2) a recent grant to acquire a key parcel in the West Hill Wildway that includes a proposed trail that would extend from Robert Treman State Park to the northern end of the Town of Ithaca across West Hill. This program could be expanded by room tax. Yet a third option would be to create a new separate County capital reserve fund for outdoor recreation to be administered by the Tompkins County Tourism Program.

This plan is proposing to invest \$50,000 in room tax to either create a new fund or modify and expand one of the two existing capital funds to increase targeted investment in outdoor recreation tourism infrastructure. Example project proposals could include: Finger Lakes Trail enhancement, protection, and/or access, Six Mile Creek access improvements, trail development to connect the Six Mile Creek Creekwalk in downtown Ithaca into Six Mile Creek Gorge, priority multi-use trail access and enhancement, priority multi-use trail development, establishing new lake access on Cayuga Lake (e.g. Bells Station’s 3,000 ft of natural lakeshore), implementation of physical improvements identified in current related plans (Priority Trails Strategy, Blueway Trail), or future plans.

Further discussion by the STPB will help determine which of the three options described above for increasing investment in physical outdoor recreation tourism infrastructure is the best fit.

Proposed room tax investment: \$50,000

Supportive Actions – Structural Support

Other potential supportive actions for ‘structural support’ include the following:

Action Title	Action Description	Lead Organization(s)
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Incentivize Outdoor Rec Investments through Tourism Grant Programs	Modify Tompkins County Tourism Grant program guidelines to prioritize outdoor recreation tourism investments in a subset of elevated projects	Tompkins County Tourism Program ⁶
Marketing Integration	Annually update Outdoor Recreation promotional efforts through VisitIthaca.com based on new developments and products.	CVB
Outdoor Recreation Tourism Network	Convene an outdoor recreation tourism network to coordinate implementation of this plan and build partner and B2B relationships, leading to stronger plan implementation and cross-sector partnerships.	Tompkins County Tourism Program

Water-Based Recreation

Current Landscape

Tompkins County is a land of lakes, creeks and waterfalls. Whether cooling off in one of “America’s Best Swimming Holes” at Robert H. Treman State Park, renting a kayak from Taughannock Falls State Park, setting off on the Blueway Trail from Cass Park, paddle-boarding from Myer’s Point, or taking in one of the City’s many waterfalls with family, there are plentiful opportunities. Organizations providing support to water-based locals and visitors include Puddledockers, Cascadilla Boat Club, Paddle’n’More, the Merrill Family Sailing Center, and several marinas. Cornell Outdoor Education, the Cayuga Outrigger Canoe Club, the Cornell Outing Club, Plastic Tides, SUPCayuga, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, and Ithaca Dragonboat Club also host outings and events that regularly get people out on the water, and Tompkins County plays host to two races that attract out of County participation – the Cayuga SUP Cup and the Finger Lakes International Dragonboat Festival.

Possible areas for improvement include expanding access for swimming in natural waterways, watershed protection to ensure high water quality, further development to support private-hire boating options, and expansion of slips for private and commercial use.

Challenges and Assets

The Tompkins County Tourism Program and its partners will look for opportunities to address structural barriers related to water-based recreation where possible.

- a. Limited lake/shore access
- b. Lack of rental vendors for boating
- c. Lack of slips for bringing boats
- d. Water quality threats including plant growth and toxic algae

Our Water-Based Recreation Tourism Assets

⁶ Where listed as a lead organization, the “Tompkins County Tourism Program” means the combination of STPB, County Legislature, and Tourism Program Staff resources in the Tompkins County Department of Planning & Sustainability.

- Marinas and Parks with Access: Myers Point, Finger Lakes Marina, Ithaca Yacht Club, Alan H. Treman State Marine Park, Ithaca Boating Center, Taughannock Falls State Park, Cornell’s Merrill Family Sailing Center / East Shore Park, Puddledockers, Paddle-N-More
- Water! Cayuga Lake, Six Mile Creek, Fall Creek (particularly upper)
- The Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway organization is interested in partnering on the Blueway Trail.
- Robert Treman and Buttermilk Falls State Parks for publically accessible swimming in natural gorges.
- Taughannock Falls State Park and Myers Point Park (Lansing Town Park) for lake swimming
- Active local groups focused on water recreation.

Key Action

Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail - Continued development and implementation of the water trail.

With its partners in Seneca and Cayuga County, the Tompkins County Planning Department has secured a \$100,000 grant from the Department of State Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, as well as local Tourism Capital Grant support and in-kind support, to implement the first phase of Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail Plan, which was completed in 2013. The project aims to promote Cayuga Lake as a destination for paddling (kayaking, canoeing and stand-up paddleboarding) and consists of several types of signage identifying launch sites from both the road and the water, as well as interpretive signage; physical improvements such as new docks and ramps designed for paddlecraft in Stewart and Cass Parks; and marketing including a new interactive website, a user map, and promotional collateral. The project will focus on establishing launches of water trail “trailheads” at 15 locations around the lake and also establish a partner program to encourage up to 30 additional private sites around the lake such as restaurants or wineries with lake access to join the trail program. A long-term management partnership is also being pursued with the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway.

Supportive Actions – Water Based Recreation

Other potential supportive actions include the following:

Action Title	Action Description	Lead Organization(s)
Recruit partners to fill product gaps in water-based recreation	Boat-sharing and rental: Encourage local use of emergent peer-to-peer boat sharing platforms - boatsetter, boatbound, getmyboat. Boat tours: Work with local partners like the Floating Classroom to expand boat tours on Cayuga Lake. Kite-board rental. Aquabike rental. Transient slips: work with partners to address the lack of transient slips for short term docking. Kayak Livery service.	Tompkins County Tourism Program Staff
Treman Marina Partnership	Work with State Parks to establish an informational resource at Treman Marina such as a kiosk for educational information on water-based recreation opportunities, water access, boat rental opportunities, boat tours, etc.	Tompkins County Tourism Program Staff, CVB
City of Ithaca Water Recreation Committee	Work with the City of Ithaca on an ongoing basis improving water access through its Water Recreation Committee. Initiatives include adding seasonal boat storage racks in proximity to put-ins, discussions about swimming in natural water areas, and establishing a paddling concession in the City with rentals and tours.	City of Ithaca, Tompkins County Tourism Program Staff

Water-Based Recreation Events	Expand existing water based recreation events such as paddling competitions and establish new events to improve tourism potential as well as support resource development.	Private Event Organizers
Watershed Protection to Protect Water Quality	Engage in state funding and municipal and intermunicipal planning activities to protect and enhance water quality.	Municipal Planning Departments

Hiking and Running

Current Landscape:

With a multitude of City and State Parks, Forests, and nature preserves, some which are highlights of the Finger Lakes, our combined natural areas and the trails they keep may serve as the largest tourism draws in the County. With singular assets such as the Finger Lakes Trail corridor, private investment from entities such as the Finger Lakes Land Trust and Cornell Botanic Gardens, via public and State work projects to expand resources available to hikers and runners such as the Cayuga Waterfront Trail, Black Diamond Trail and other emerging rail trails, and information resources such as the recently launched ithacatrails.org and gofingerlakes.org websites, much progress has been made in expanding resources available to locals and tourists alike. Additionally, groups such as the Cayuga Trails Club, Finger Lakes Land Trust, Finger Lakes Runners Club, the New York State Parks, and private vendors such as Finger Lakes Running Company, Eastern Mountain Sports, and Old Goat Gear are organizations providing support to locals and visitors alike interested in hiking and running. Combined, these efforts have led to Ithaca recently being awarded "Runner Friendly Community" status by the Road Runners Club of America.

Possible areas for improvement include re-routing of "on-road" sections of Finger Lakes Trail (FLT) to "off-road"; extension and connection of trails to create longer hiking/running options and to connect trails to areas with services; better maps, parking, and signage; project funding and ongoing maintenance of natural areas; and aligning involved entities and policy making.

Challenges and Assets

The Tompkins County Tourism Program and its partners will look for opportunities to address structural barriers and build upon assets related to hiking and running where possible.

Structural barriers/weaknesses

- Disconnected groups and networks
- Lack of maps/signage
- Inadequate parking/facilities
- On-road sections of FLT

TESTIMONIAL

Mike Ostrand

Syracuse, NY

Age Range: (45-65)

Reason for Visit: Camping at Taughannock Falls Taughannock Visitor Center

"Our family has been coming to Ithaca to enjoy the parks for years. We always make it a point to at least do a weekend away here with the family- hike the trails, check out the water falls... eat some good food! My dad use to take me here (Taughannock) as a kid every year, and I intend to do the same for my grandkids."

Our Hiking and Running Tourism Assets

- 3 State Parks within 5 miles of downtown
- 240 miles of public trails, including:
 - i. Finger Lakes Trail
 - ii. Many trails within close proximity of downtown including Cascadilla Gorge, Fall Creek Gorge, Six Mile Creek watershed
 - iii. 100+ miles of additional trails on lands held by NYSDEC, Finger Lakes Land Trust, and Cornell.
 - iv. Accessible and popular multi-use trails.
 - v. A number of trails that are also suitable for cross country skiing and snowshoeing in the winter.
- IthacaTrails.org and GoFingerLakes.org promotional trails websites.
- A number of local running events and active local running and hiking communities.

Key Action

Planning and implementation of improvements for key underdeveloped areas

At existing but underdeveloped public and non-profit lands, work to identify a clear set of priority capital improvements including trail enhancement and expansion, trailhead signage, interpretation and parking. Work with the NYSDEC, City of Ithaca, other municipalities, not for profits, and/or friends groups to implement specific improvements in key underdeveloped areas. Underdeveloped areas may include Finger Lakes Trail trailheads, key trail access points in State Forests including Hammond Hill, Shindagin Hollow, and Danby State Forests, and Six Mile Creek gorge.

Supportive Actions - Hiking & Running

Other potential supportive actions include the following:

TESTIMONIAL

Tory Valiano
 Cortland, NY
 Age Range: (18-25)
 Reason for Visit: Hiking/State Parks
 Taughannock Visitor Center

“I come to Ithaca to hike and trail run often. There are so many trails to take advantage of, and the scenery never gets old. It’s not too far from Cortland either- which is a plus.”

Action Title	Action Description	Lead Organization(s)
Establish a formal "Trail Town" network for businesses and organizations	Explore the use of the Trail Towns Program’s proven assessment, network, and business development tools to link trail with local tourism and business development opportunities.	Tompkins County Tourism Program Staff
Take the Finger Lakes Trail to the next level	Provide direct financial support through the new capacity building program proposed by this plan to trails group(s) to implement trailhead, signage and access improvements and secure additional public lands needed to eliminate lengthy on-road sections to make the Tompkins County section of the Finger Lakes Trail regionally recognized as top-notch.	Cayuga Trails Club, Finger Lakes Trails Conference, Finger Lakes Land Trust

Invest in the Completion of the Priority Trails Strategy	Complete expansion projects. Connect existing trails! Provide appropriate support through the capital program proposed by this plan.	City of Ithaca, NYS Parks, Towns of Ithaca, Dryden, Ulysses, Danby, Caroline
Support Hiking Amenities	Encourage supportive amenities for families, short hikes like additional services, interpretation, benches, overlooks, etc.	Municipalities, Tompkins County Tourism Program Staff, NYCDEC, NYS Parks
Enhance access to existing public lands	Investment, access/parking, trails	City of Ithaca, NYSDEC, municipalities, others.

Bicycling

Current Landscape

With miles of rolling wide-shouldered paved roads with beautiful vistas and enough available singletrack in Shindagin Hollow and Hammond Hill State Forests and trail culture to have been named one of America’s top Mountain Biking destinations, Tompkins County has much to offer both road cyclists and mountain bikers. The recent completion of the Cayuga Waterfront Trail and northern section of the Black Diamond Trail between Cass Park and Taughannock Falls State Park significantly expands the opportunity to promote safe off street trail biking experiences to families and casual cyclists. This will grow as rail trail extensions and connections are added, the vision put forth in the Tompkins Priority Trails Strategy for a 51-mile inter-connected network of multi-use paths.

Meanwhile, the City of Ithaca has made progress with on-street bike infrastructure including establishing an initial bike boulevard network and on-street bike lanes on several key corridors. This was an important reason why Ithaca was named in November 2016 as a Bicycle Friendly Community for the first time by the League of American Bicyclists, at the Bronze Level. These efforts will be bolstered in 2018 by a new project being led by Bike Walk Tompkins to develop a “Blueprint for Better Bicycling” for Ithaca and Tompkins County. Additionally several bike shops, two bike rental locations, active local clubs - both road and mountain bike oriented – and biking programs through the Cornell and IC campuses are available to serve locals and visitors alike. A new bike sharing service was established in 2017 on the Cornell University campus, and a grant-funded pilot project will expand bike sharing to the larger community in 2018.

TESTIMONIAL

Joe Kilmer

Tigard, Oregon

Age Range: 45-65

Reason for Visit: Visiting
Friend

Taughannock Visitor Center

“The biking is just phenomenal. We’ve gone 30 miles today and been to three different state parks and seen 4 different waterfalls all from our bikes- now that’s something special... and the black diamond trail... what a gem!”

Areas for improvement include creating a complete bicycle infrastructure network through the Ithaca urban core, not yet fully realized connections and mileage of recreation-ways to make them visitor draws, and limited capacity and funding to make MTB destinations fully accessible and sustainable.

Challenges and Assets

The Tourism Program will look for opportunities to address structure barriers related to bike tourism where possible.

- a. Disconnected groups and networks
- b. Lack of maps/signage
- c. Inadequate parking/facilities
- d. Seasonal status

Our Bicycle Tourism Assets

- Rolling hills with scenic vistas, quiet country roads, and state highways with wide shoulders
- Several established rail trails
- Finger Lakes reputation as an overall destination
- Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway organization is supportive of bicycle tourism
- Active local cycling groups focus on recreation (Finger Lakes Cycling Club), mountain biking (Cycle CNY), and transportation/advocacy (Bike Walk Tompkins)

Key Actions

Blueprint for Better Bicycling Improve on-street street bicycle infrastructure in Ithaca's urban core.

Work with the City and Town of Ithaca and Bike Walk Tompkins to create and implement a shared vision for infrastructure improvements in the urban core to make cycling comfortable and accessible for all types of visitors. As we build and expand the County's multi-use trails network – a key asset to continue supporting and leveraging - the most impactful way to grow our reputation as a bicycle friendly community and expand bike-related tourism, it to make it so that people of all cycling abilities including casual cyclists and families feel comfortable and safe riding on city streets through the urban core and downtown core as they navigate between the trails, downtown hotels and restaurants, and other attractions and destinations.

Priority Trails Strategy Support the expansion of the Tompkins County network of multi-use trails.

Tompkins County is on its way to having a truly outstanding network of off-street multi-use trails which are ideal for families, beginning bicyclists, and casual cyclists. Five additional sections are currently under various stages of planning and development: the City section and Southern section of the Black Diamond Trail (BDT) which will eventually create a trail link between all four state parks in Tompkins County, the Gateway Trail which will connect Buttermilk Falls State Park and the BDT to the South Hill Recreation Way, an extension of the South Hill Recreation Way to Brooktondale and the Dryden Trail which envisions linking up the Jim Schug Trail with the East Hill Recreation Way through Dryden, Freeville, Etna and Varna. The Tompkins Priority Trails Strategy was written by Tourism Program staff and adopted by the STPB in 2014.

Supportive Actions – Bicycling

Other potential supportive actions include the following:

Action Title	Action Description	Lead Organization(s)
Local Bicycle Friendly Business Program	Work with New York Bicycling Coalition, League of American Bicyclists, Parks and Trail NY, Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce, and local groups to promote the expansion of bicycle friendly business practices through training and a recognition program.	Tompkins County Tourism Program
Finger Lakes Cycling Promotion	Work with partners in the region to establish a promotional website and program to promote bicycling in the Finger Lakes (with ride routes, maps, itineraries, resources, events, guided tour options, etc)	Finger Lakes Cycling Club
Adventure Cycling Route	Work with NYBC and Adventure Cycling to establish an official Adventure Cycling route through Ithaca and the Finger Lakes.	New York Bicycling Coalition
New Mountain Biking Trails	Work with Cycle CNY to develop new trails in areas of the County outside of the established trail systems in Shindagin Hollow and Hammond Hill. Develop a "Blueprint to enhance mountain/trail infrastructure". Include a "beginning area" for MTB development for kids, elders, newbies.	Cycle CNY
Partner with Bike Tour Companies with Concierge Support	Partner with Bike Tour companies to support the development of Ithaca and Finger Lakes guided tour packages	CVB Group Sales
Support the Establishment of new Bicycle Events	Mt. Bike Series, Downtown Criterium race, Single Day road ride, etc	Private Event Organizers
Youth Mt. Bike Skills Park	Work with a public land owner to establish a Youth Skills Park for mountain biking, with associated rentals and programming	

Kids In Nature

Current Landscape:

Tompkins County families know that with so many child-supportive organizations and so many accessible and safe parks, natural areas, open space, and outdoor family-friendly events, Tompkins County is a place where kids need not suffer from childhood “nature-deficit disorder”. Local groups like the Ithaca Children’s Garden, Cayuga Nature Center, YMCA, Primitive Pursuits, Cornell Botanic Gardens, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca Youth Bureau 4-H, and many others provide myriad rich opportunities for kids to experience and learn about the natural environment of the Finger Lakes region. Further leveraging our child-friendly reputation is *Just Play Ithaca!* This initiative is The Just Play Project’s first on-the-ground model, which seeks to coordinate cross-sector collaborations to design child-centered communities – developing people, places, and policies for child-directed play. Ithaca is also home to one of the few United States Adventure Playgrounds, The Hands-On Nature Anarchy Zone at The Ithaca Children’s Garden.

Key Actions:

Continue to Provide Investments in Attractions and Organizations Supporting Kids in Nature

Through its existing grant programs, the Tompkins County Tourism Program has supported a number of investments in the Ithaca Children’s Garden, Cayuga Nature Center and other projects supporting kids in nature. There is tremendous value in continuing to support these initiatives to grow the ability of these

organizations to attract visiting families and provide them with unforgettable experiences in and learning about nature.

Supportive Actions - Kids In Nature

Other potential supportive actions include the following:

Action Title	Action Description	Lead Organization(s)
Stake the claim as the United States' #1 community for Kids in Nature	Support a PR effort to claim the title in national news media of Ithaca and Tompkins County as the nation's best community for Kids in Nature.	Tompkins County Tourism Program
Discovery Trail program integration	Continue to develop Discovery Trail programming & events that spans across all trail sites	Discovery Trail
Create "nature play spots"	At a variety of places) nature ctrs, schools, parks, trailheads, etc. Create a "map of nature play".	Just Play Project
Support / cultivate Child In Nature related events	Using Mud Day, Fire & Ice, Migration Celebration, Botanical Garden, Play Symposium, Kid's/Judy's Day as just a few existing examples, grow existing and add new child in nature related events	Event Organizers

Adventure / Niche Outdoor Recreation Tourism

Current Landscape:

Located within the Atlantic Flyway, Tompkins County and the Finger Lakes Region sits on a key migratory route for North American birds. Cayuga Lake hosts the largest population of Osprey in the region with over 50 nesting pairs identified in recent years. With the world-renowned Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and very active local groups including the Cayuga Bird Club, Tompkins County is a destination as well as launching point for a region prolific in birding opportunities, including the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge on the Northern end of Cayuga Lake.

Tompkins County hosts gorges with winter icefalls that are uniquely accessible and could be opened up for seasonal ice climbing and spring flows that local whitewater kayaking enthusiasts love to paddle. A number of small local enthusiast communities to tap into these and other adventure-related outdoor recreation, including wind-surfing, kite-boarding. There may be significant public relations value in pursuing development of some of these as opportunities and willing partners may surface, and anything we can do to grow tourism in the coldest months of the year is good, but it is unlikely that outdoor adventure activities locally will grow into major visitor draws like they are in other places that are known for these. Said another way, while some people do enjoy these activities here, Ithaca is unlikely to be another Ouray, Colorado for ice climbing, or Hood River, Oregon for kite-boarding, nor does it want to be.

Key Action

Cayuga Lake Birding Trail

Work with the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, New York Audubon, Montezuma National Wildlife Visitors Center, Cayuga Bird Club, Cayuga and Seneca Counties, and other

organizations to develop a new Cayuga Lake Birding Trail to include marketing and signage and interactive website. Coordinate signage with the Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail Project. Respond to tourism grant proposals and other opportunities for Birding Trail investment that may come forward.

Supportive Actions – Adventure / Niche

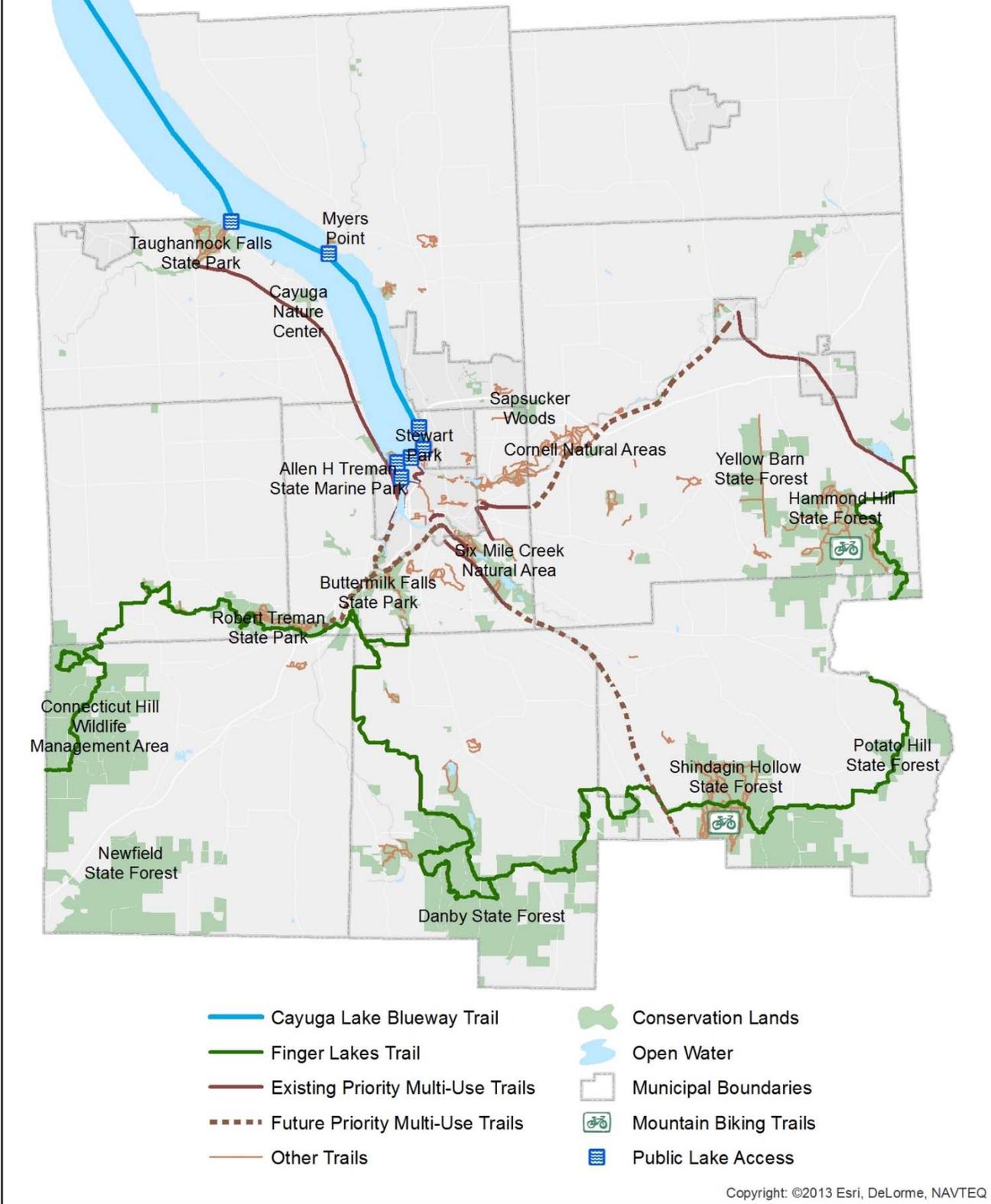
Other potential supportive actions include the following:

Healing Arts promotional campaign	Partner with local businesses (Firelight, Body Mind Restoration, Yoga Farm, etc.) on continuing to amplify Ithaca’s already prominent status as a “healing retreat location in upstate NY”	Business Groups
Ice climbing	Complete the Ice Climbing Feasitiliy study and work to implement in partnership with State Parks, City of Ithaca. Open initially in Buttermilk and Robert Treman.	NYS Parks

Appendix –

- A. Map – Tompkins County Outdoor Recreation Tourism Assets
- B. Tompkins County Outdoor Recreation Related Tourism Grant Investments
- C. SWOT Analysis Results (to be added...available upon request)
- D. January 2016 Stakeholder Workshop Summary of Feedback (to be added...available upon request)

Tompkins County Outdoor Recreation Tourism Assets



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Appendix B

Tompkins County Outdoor Recreation Related Tourism Grant Investments 2005-2017

Year(s)	Recipient	Use / Project
2005	Tompkins County Chamber Foundation	Cayuga Waterfront Trail Phase 2
2006	Tompkins County Chamber Foundation	Hike and Bike Brochure & Digital Map
2006	Tompkins County Chamber Foundation	Waterfront Trail Panels
2008	Cayuga Waterfront Trail Initiative	Feasibility Study- Stewart Park Rehabilitation Action Plan
2010	Cayuga Lake Watershed Network	Cayuga Eco-Cruise Pilot
2010	Tompkins County Chamber Foundation	Stewart Park Building Study
2012	Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway	Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway Geocache Trail
2012	Tompkins County Chamber Foundation	Stewart Park Landscape Rehabilitation Feasibility Study
2014	Natural Heritage Trust	Ice Climbing Tourism Development
2015	City of Ithaca	Lake Street Public Park Enhancement Project
2015	Finger Lakes Land Trust	Gofingerlakes.org: Connecting Finger Lakes Visitors to Outdoor Recreation Opportunities
2015	Tompkins County Chamber Foundation	Stewart Park Buildings – Five Year Priority Plan
2015	Town of Ulysses	Tompkins County Trail Users Information Website
2016	Cayuga Lake Watershed Network	Can You Canoe Cayuga? 2016
2016	City of Ithaca	Lake Street Public Park Enhancement Project
2016	Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County	Regional Marketing for Overnight Camp
2005-2014	Ithaca Triathlon Club	Cayuga Lake Triathlon
2009-2016	Ithaca Children's Garden	Various Children's Garden Improvements
2012-2013	Finger Lakes Land Trust	Emerald Necklace/Roy H. Park Preserve Access Enhancement Project
2012-2016	Cayuga Lake Watershed Network	Canyou Canoe Cayuga
2013-2014	The History Center in Tompkins County	Cayuga Trails 50
2013-2016	Friends of Stewart Park	Phase I Building Improvements
2014-2016	Cayuga Lake Watershed Network	Cayuga Lake SUP Cup 2016
2015-2016	Tompkins County Planning Department	Cayuga Lake Blueway Trail: Design Study & Capital Improvements
2015-2017	Ithaca Youth Bureau	Ithaca Bike Rental
2016-2015	Social Ventures - Dragon Boat	Finger Lakes International Dragon Boat Festival

Amounts and total investment to be added



January 2018 CVB Report to the Board

Marketing:

In December, the CVB highlighted New Year’s happenings on the homepage of VisitIthaca.com. This promotion resulted in 622 unique views, of which approximately 38% were from within Tompkins County and 62% from outside. Overall, website pageviews were up 31% in December over December 2016. Winter 2018 messaging continues to focus on Ithaca is Arts as well as winter learning opportunities (workshops, classes, Winter Recess, etc.) Erin is creating a content calendar for 2018 and identifying opportunities to utilize short videos.

Website analytics, Instagram, and Facebook demonstrate that waterfalls still receive top engagement.

Website and Social Media Overview – December 2017

	Nov	Dec	Total
Website VisitIthaca.com			
Unique Users 2017	20,422	19,434	362,902
Unique Users 2016	20,789	19,445	355,162
Sessions 2017	25,261	23,488	494,505
Sessions 2016	26,123	23,553	470,870
Pageviews 2017	87,491	78,331	1,664,110
Pageviews 2016	66,541	59,456	1,347,450
Facebook Visit Ithaca			
Page Likes	39,997	40,017	
Total Reach	89,350	106,184	
<i>Engagement for top post</i>	<i>IC 125 video</i>	<i>Ithaca Falls Video</i>	
Organic Reach	6,823	29,300	
Clicks		2,185	
Reactions, Comments, Shares	103	1890	
Instagram VisitIthaca			
Followers 2017	5680	5782	
Followers 2016	3340	3542	
Travel Guide Digital (Uberflip)			
Unique Visitors 2017	417	304	
Unique Visitors 2016			
Flipbook views 2017	701	482	
Flipbook views 2016			

Key Website Metrics – December 2017:

YTD Unique Website Visitors 2017 (vs. 2016): 362,902 (355,709 in 2016) 73% are new visitors

New email sign-ups: 328

Travel Guide hardcopy requests: 2,683

Media Placements:

In December the CVB secured media placements for Tompkins County partners such as August Moon Spa's Maple Scrub in [Brit & Co](#); [Shape](#) featured Firelight Camps as the best yoga Retreat in NYS; *The Miami Herald* article about the history and wine of the Finger Lakes region included the Suspension Bridge at Cornell University, Herbert F Johnson Museum, and Taughannock Falls State Park; a Finger Lakes regional article in the *Lexington Herald Leader* included Argos Inn, Taughannock Falls State Park, Cornell University Suspension Bridge and the story was syndicated in the [Atlanta Journal Constitution](#), [Palm Beach Post](#), [Sentinel Source](#), [Dayton Daily News](#), and the [Austin American Statesman](#). **Tompkins County-Specific Media Reach for December 2017: 31,567,969.**

Agriculinary Highlights:

Eight Farm to Fork Microgrants have been awarded, and projects are underway. We are working to improve the Farm to Fork section of VisitIthaca.com This section has been difficult to find for consumers and farmers alike, so we are working on some solutions to raise the profile of our Agriculinary offerings. We continue to add more visitor-ready partners such as Liquid State Brewing Company and Grisamore Cider Works to the Farm to Fork directory. Work to close out the USDA grant is underway as well as a mid-period STI grant report.

The next Open Farm Days Networking is scheduled for February 2, 2018. Information and invitations will be sent to past Open Farm Days hosts and those who may be interested in participating this year. Farmers will speak on their experiences this past year roundtable style, followed by networking and lunch.

F2F Facebook Stats are up for the last 30 days: 235 new likes; 10,710 people reached; and 1,761 post engagements. Total likes up to 2,243 which is up 19% over November. The top performing posts were:

- Farm to Fork Ithaca Story – Moore Tree Farm: 1.2K reach, 34 link clicks, 65 engagements
- Press Bay Holiday December Market: 950 reach, 45 link clicks, 20 engagements
- "Just spreading a sweets story & some holiday cheer": 850 reach, 25 link clicks, 75 engagements

Sales:

In the month of December, seven new leads were generated, with \$92,366 in economic impact. The sales team was engaged with tourism partners and on-campus, with seven visits and four networking and community events. Extensive time was spent prospecting and creating bids for Destination Finger Lakes and Gus Macker 3 on 3. Work was done on the sales pages of the Visit Ithaca website, and the first steps in the plan to engage the meetings market through LinkedIn were taken.



Leads and Assists:

- 7 new leads (282 room nights, \$92,366 projected economic impact)
 - 1 booked (22 room nights, \$5,236 projected economic impact)
- Previous/existing leads:
 - 4 lost (935 room nights, \$254,260 projected EIC)
 - 40+ Riders, Masonry Institute (140 rm nights, \$47,560), NYS Election Commissioners (403 rms, \$104,780), NYS Assoc. of Magistrates (392, \$101,920)
 - 13 remain in “lead” status, oldest one dating back to June (1173 room nights)
- 3 groups assisted

Visitor Experience:

Retail at the Tompkins Center for History & Culture

The Visitor Experience team has begun meeting with partners of the Tompkins Center for History & Culture to research partner interest in the project retail operation. This information will help the team to develop a business plan and guidelines for the operation of the new location in 2019.

2018 Winter Recess Teacher Festival

By the end of December, the Visitor Experience team had secured \$5,895 towards the total goal of \$8,500 in sponsorship to produce a wonderful Winter Recess Teacher Festival. Just over 100 deals have been recruited and 20+ events have already been submitted.

By the Numbers:

	Dec 2017	Dec 2016	YOY % Change	YTD 2017	YTD 2016	YOY % Change
Phone	81	88	-7.9	1,709	1,850	-7.6
ESD Traffic	80	60	33.3	4,543	7,649	-40.61
DVC Traffic	210	151	39.1	6,520	9,932	-34.4
Taug. Traffic	0	0	-	32,146	25,908	24.1
Chats	168	99	69.7	4,024	3,096	29.97
TG Requests	143	444	-67.8	3,756	4,376	-14.2
Off-site Events	0	0	-	24,950	20,227	23.3
Total	682	842	-19	77,648	73,038	6.31

MEMORANDUM

TO: Tompkins County Strategic Tourism Planning Board (STPB)
FROM: Tom Knipe, Tompkins County Principal Planner / Tourism Program Director
CC: Katie Borgella, Tompkins County Commissioner of Planning & Sustainability
DATE: January 2, 2018
RE: **Parting Thoughts**

A few of you have suggested that as I leave my position as the Tourism Program Director for Tompkins County later this month it would be useful for me to take a step back and ponder the question:

“What should the Tourism Board be thinking about?”

I’ve done this work with a deep sense of mission for six and a half years. I hope that you will give these thoughts and recommendations some consideration. They are not meant to be overly formal or comprehensive. Just some parting thoughts: some bigger, some smaller.

BOARD VISION

Don’t let short term pressures supersede long-range strategy. Or as our founder Stu Stein would have said, “Don’t just pick the low-hanging fruit; grow orchards”. There will always be a strong demand for more marketing and for more product investments that create short-term returns, such as events. But the unique strength of our program is the long-term commitment to building up key sectors, institutions, assets, infrastructure, and attractions over time. The best marketing we could ever have is one fantastic visitor experience after another, and these types of strategic investments help create positive visitor experiences while also maximizing community benefits and buy-in.

BOARD CULTURE

Pursue a ‘culture of evaluation’ within funded tourism programs. Each program has goals and methods of measurement that are established by the annual budgeting process, and a few have developed more in-depth evaluation plans. I suggest that the board work with the next Tourism Program Director to improve the system for reporting on these goals and measures of success with an eye towards maximizing transparency and shared commitment to improvement. Having a ‘culture of evaluation’ should not discourage innovation and strategic risk-taking; rather, it’s about having clarity around outcomes and continuous learning and improvement by everyone involved.

Be mindful of the potential pitfalls of group decision-making, including cheerleading and groupthink. I think the board has been doing a good job of this the past few years, but do continue to stay watchful. Insist that the board ask hard questions. Focus on maintaining robust processes for reviewing funding proposals. Continually cultivate a board culture that encourages questioning, and above-all remain committed to standards-based decision making.

BOARD PROCESS

Keep setting annual board goals. I think it has worked well the past few years. It also helps the board focus on its role as a policy, planning and oversight body which is distinct from the role of staff and contractors in providing administrative leadership, and implementing the board's vision.

Encourage and empower staff to proactively develop proposals for programmatic changes or improvements for board consideration. A strong staff member supported in being an entrepreneurial leader for the Tourism Program will make a stronger County Tourism Program and a more effective Tourism Board.

Consider establishing more direct connections to County and Municipal economic development activities. This could be through enhanced community board and committee service by the Tourism Director, e.g. direct representation on the County ED Collaborative, TCAD board of directors, etc. The investments made by the Tourism Program play a very important role in local economic development; I think that the Tourism Program Director should be at the table.

Consider advocating for STPB to report to the committee of the Legislature that deals with Economic Development (PEEQ, PDEQ, or EDC). I think that the sets of issues that the Planning and Economic Development Committee has dealt with are more in alignment with the sets of issues that we work on as a Program than the issues covered by the Budget, Personnel, and Finance Committee. In addition, since the rest of the Planning Department mostly reports to the PDEQ committee, it would create opportunities for increased internal connection between staff in the Planning Department.

Proactively seek regular opportunities to get in front of the full Legislature in order to enhance awareness and appreciation of the STPB, Tourism Program and all its components.

Board development activities are important; keep doing them. Focus on diversity.

Keep in mind that the STPB can engage in policy discussions around issues that impact tourism. At times, the board's activities have been focused exclusively on issues related to the local room tax. Its influence could be expanded by engaging more deeply in other local, regional, and state policy discussions impacting tourism.

FUNDING-RELATED

Continue funding large established partners as long as those investments continue to hold potential to yield strong return on investment. This is a policy in the 2020 Strategic Tourism Plan, but from time to time a suggestion will be made that limits be put on the amount of funding that any one major organization should receive. That could be an approach that is at odds with this policy as well as with our desire to maximize return on investment. As organizations grow and their impact grows, their need for funding tends to increase, not decrease.

Increase targeted investment in Outdoor Recreation Tourism. It is a key opportunity sector that clearly fits the program's established 'Aims', but the level of investment historically has not been commensurate with its potential positive return.

Consider establishing new budget line items or increasing the budgets of established programs to support priorities that received initial funding through STI grants. An example for the 2019 budget would be Agriculinary Tourism. Successful initiatives for which the board wishes to make a sustained commitment could be rolled into the annual budgeting process rather than being required to go through the grant process exclusively.

Maintain a consistent base of funding for the Arts & Culture Organizational Development Grant Program, but be careful about opening this fund up so broadly in the future that it dilutes the funding impact. The purpose of the fund since its inception has been to shore up our large, established, tourism-generating museums and performing arts organizations.

Continue to invest in Tourism Program staffing. The return on investment through increased revenues (through room tax and through outside grants), operational effectiveness, better decision-making and stronger overall outcomes is evident. Staffing shouldn't been seen in a pejorative sense as a 'necessary administrative burden'; rather, the real benefits to the program should be articulated and celebrated. Understand that one of the realities of having a complex, diverse program that includes grant-making, strategic planning, 100+ annual contracts, and direct implementation of strategic priorities is the need for staffing to support the program at a high level.

Support the CVB. We are fortunate as a community to have a nimble, professional, effective tourism promotion agency with dedicated, experienced staff in the Chamber/CVB. The internal structural changes to staffing currently being undertaken by the leadership are exciting and potentially transformative for their work. In addition to providing valuable marketing, visitor services and group sales programs, a strong CVB adds value to everything that we do as a Tourism Program. Make sure that the CVB has what it needs to retain high-performing staff and achieve success at the highest levels. Opportunities for growth should be available to staff at the CVB, so that they can grow with the organization.

Don't be afraid to return to multi-year payments from the Tourism Capital Grant program if necessary to fully fund priority, high-value projects. The demand for this program varies from year to year, which is to be expected because of the time it takes to incubate large capital projects. If there are high-value projects that will need payments to be spread out over more than one year to be funded in full, the Program has the flexibility to do that. The Tourism Program did that a lot in the past, but currently has no multi-year obligations. The latter allows for more flexibility in a given year, which is good, but I think that the board should support a return to multi-year payments if necessary to fully fund high-value projects. If the board agrees, make sure that the Tourism Capital Grant administrator and review committee have this guidance in hand before the 2018 grant deadline (March 12, 2018).

Consider drawing a line in the sand on funding for events. The STPB Planning & Evaluation Committee has discussed the idea of limiting project funding for tourism events to no more than three years. Excluding Community Celebrations, I think that this makes a lot of sense. I would also add that I think that the board should consider formally establishing "blackout" periods, such as July and August, and certain busy weekends, for which it will not consider any new funding for an event. Exhibits and performances which extend over a period longer than a few consecutive days should likely be considered exempt from this eligibility restriction.

OTHER PROGRAM AND PLANNING IDEAS

With the Wayfinding Signage Project, be careful about a piecemeal approach. Pursue state funding through a URI application one more time. If state funding continues to be elusive, consider a local only approach. If necessary to reduce costs to get the project done, I recommend focusing exclusively on the community wayfinding signs, and reduce cost by eliminating the kiosks, interpretive elements, and possibly even gateway signs. Confirm in-kind installation support from the County and City, financial support from the various partners, and value-engineer the actual signs and sign-posts.

Focus on transformative opportunities and continue to maximize the room tax budget available to support initiatives that significantly advance strategic priorities. I think that the Strategic Tourism Implementation fund has been an effective tool, and it will become even more important as new opportunities like a downtown conference center, targeted investment in agricutinary and outdoor recreation tourism, and the new Tompkins Center for History and Culture continue to emerge.

Pursue regional partnerships. Visitors don't care about County borders, and our local tourism product and marketing can be strengthened in the long term by an approach that views other destinations in the Finger Lakes region as partners, rather than as competitors. Current regional opportunities that have Cayuga Lake as a focal point include the Scenic Byway, Blueway, and Birding Trail. Another idea is to revisit the Cortland Sports Council partnership. Maintaining a direct connection with the Southern Tier REDC is important.

A few considerations for the next Strategic Tourism Plan:

- The current plan goes through 2020. Start the development of the new plan by early 2019 upon completion of the new Visitor Profile Study and assume that the new Strategic Plan will probably take a year to 18 months to complete.
- Get serious about our target markets. In addition to articulating general target markets, which niche audiences should we work to attract? And what are the integrated community-wide steps we could take to attract and serve these audiences, e.g. travelers with disabilities, Chinese visitors, African-American visitors, LGBTQ visitors, etc.
- Get serious about sustainability. Not a sustainability 'trail' as an experience, but as a brand and as part of a shared community-wide commitment to being a sustainable destination. The lens should be two-way: what can sustainability contribute to tourism, but also what can tourism authentically contribute to sustainability. Strive to be a national leader in destination sustainability; it clearly fits our market. Other sustainability ideas:
 - Develop partner resources on how to develop and promote their sustainable practices
 - Work on getting ourselves or one of our partners an award.
 - Global Sustainable Tourism Council destinations Program is interesting and may have some value: <https://www.gstcouncil.org/en/programs/gstc-destinations-program.html>
 - Looking regionally, we could work on developing a Geotourism MapGuide for the Finger Lakes region with NatGeo: <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/geotourism/geotourism-mapguides/> .
 - Consider formally signing on to the geotourism charter principals and promoting this: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/maps/geotourism/geotourism-principles/>

- If we are serious about the commitment to the “aim” to improve and never harm quality of life, the next plan should consider measures of visitor carrying capacity for our market. Hypothetically, at what point would an additional marginal increase in tourism begin to degrade the visitor experience and quality of life for residents in our market? At that hypothetical inflection point, should we be more strategic about the types of visitors that we are focused on attracting vs. assuming that any growth is good growth? Consider what a higher-value, lower-impact type of tourism/visitor might look like.
- Consider including physical/landscape elements in the next Strategic Tourism Plan. What makes us distinct and attractive as a destination in terms of the landscape and built environment? Are there types of development that detract from our distinctiveness and attractiveness that should be discouraged? Use the plan to amplify the importance of agriculture and natural area conservation, smart growth, watershed protection, watershed protection, increasing public lake access and recreational opportunities, etc. to tourism.

OUTSIDE OF THE BOX IDEAS

Consider establishing a new destination stewardship fund to solicit voluntary contributions by visitors focused on increasing investment in community attractions, amenities, and local arts & culture. Consider the Community Foundation of Tompkins County as a partner.

Work across local tourism, community and economic development organizations to establish a shared community brand and promotional program. Currently multiple entities work to attract employers, talent, investors, and visitors to Ithaca and Tompkins County. TCAD, the City of Ithaca and other municipalities, The Chamber of Commerce, the CVB, the Downtown Ithaca Alliance, not to mention individual local businesses and attractions, each work in different ways to do this, and each has their own brand. There is no single unifying place brand for greater Ithaca. For many reasons, this would not be easy. But if it could be wrangled, a project to develop a shared community brand and promotional program could have a huge positive impact for tourism and economic development.

In closing, thank you for considering these ideas. Thank you for your valuable contributions to making Tompkins County a better place to live and to visit as members of the Strategic Tourism Planning Board. And thank you for helping make my position as Principal Planner / Tourism Program Director with Tompkins County one of the most rewarding professional experiences of my life.

