



# Cayuga County Office of Tourism

## *Strategic Direction Destination 2020*

*Prepared for:*

- *Cayuga County Office of Tourism*

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# Strategic Direction – Destination 2020

## 2. Destination 2020 Overall Direction & Goals

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

The Cayuga County Office of Tourism (CCOT) staff and Board commissioned research to guide this strategic planning process. This strategic plan – Destination 2020 updates prior plans and is based on research and strategic planning conducted in 2015. Destination 2020 provides a strategic roadmap for the Cayuga County Office of Tourism for the five-year period 2016 – 2020. This document provides a framework from which more specific annual plans will be developed to deliver on the long range goals laid out herein. The CCOT staff will develop the annual plans and present them to the Board for input and approval. The annual plan and budget should be prepared and presented three months prior to the new fiscal year. This strategic Destination 2020 plan will be updated annually and the data stamp at the bottom left will indicate the document version.

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Annual reviews of this strategic plan take place in lieu of annual Board retreats. The annual review takes place at a regular Board meeting and includes staff and Board updates on each section of the strategic plan. There is no need for an annual retreat if the plan implementation is on track and there are no external factors that change the Destination 2020 strategies and goals. If significant changes are needed, the Board may schedule a retreat and/or planning process to adjust the plan.

- 2016 – Annual review
- 2017 – Annual review
- 2018 – Annual review
- 2019 – Annual review
- 2020 – Research and strategic planning

### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

The staff will prepare the annual plan using the following resources:

- Prior year plan.
- Response and tracking statistics from current year sales and marketing – ROI.
- Oxford Economics annual economic impact data.
- STR lodging market data – weekly room demand cycles.
- Current trends data obtained from TTRA, US Travel & conferences.
- Best practices in destination marketing obtained through industry contacts, New York state travel office, regional partners and DMAI.



# Strategic Direction – Destination 2020

## 3. Cayuga Office of Tourism Organization & Structure

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

The Cayuga County Office of Tourism founded in 1995, is well-managed with a solid base of research to guide strategic planning. The mission of CCOT is to promote, support and increase tourism and thereby stimulate economic growth and improve the quality of life for area residents. The Board of Directors is engaged in providing proper fiduciary oversight and guidance related to the staff direction in marketing Cayuga County as a preferred travel destination. The Board is comprised of a broad range of community and travel industry leaders who adhere to the organization’s By-Laws in providing effective oversight and guidance to the CCOT staff. The Board accomplishes its work through committees such as: Executive, Finance, Audit, Education, Advocacy, Outreach, Planning, etc. The Board could expand its Planning Committee efforts to include advocating with local development agencies for the research-identified, new visitor experiences, that would drive increased visitor spending.

The current CCOT staff structure is as follows:

- Executive Director
- Digital Marketing Manager
- Administrative & Project Coordinator
- Visitor Information Assistant

A new staff position may be required in the coming years to accommodate growth in the overall program of work. Peak season occupancy is high and efforts to drive the off-season (winter) may require a sales effort for small meetings and the off-season leisure market.

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- 2016 –Present Research & Strategic Plan update to local development agencies and government leadership, such as CEDA board, City Council & Cayuga County Legislature, enlist help of CCCVB Advocacy Committee
- 2017 –Evaluate group & leisure market sales efforts
- 2018 –Evaluate group & leisure market sales efforts
- 2019 – Evaluate group & leisure market sales efforts
- 2020 – Evaluate group & leisure market sales efforts



### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Monitor the need for an additional staff person who could make outside sales calls to group planners (corporate meetings, groups), attend leisure market consumer shows and call on AAA offices.

## 4. Tour Cayuga Brand & Unique Positioning

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

The CCOT team should continue marketing Cayuga County and the communities within the County using the “Tour Cayuga” identity that is currently used. However, the research confirms that CCOT has an opportunity to differentiate Cayuga County from the other Finger Lakes counties by focusing future message and imagery around the following unique Cayuga attributes:

- Live entertainment – wide variety throughout the year and evening entertainment which is rare in the region
- Auburn – a cool, vibrant “creative community” where Millennials and all generations love to hang out. The small town urban scene.
- Iconic Americans - Harriet Tubman and William Seward
- Aurora – scenic, shopping, unique luxury lodging, dining and its year-round.

The updated, expanded brand will be consistent throughout promotion efforts to provide visitors with a consistent message and experience from trip planning to departure. The research confirms national research that travelers are increasingly planning travel online and on mobile. The current website works effectively on smartphones as a resource tool (lists) but could be designed to be more effective visually to inspire. A new design for the website will be undertaken in 2016/17.

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- 2016 –update Tour Cayuga brand and begin new web site development project
- 2017 –Complete web site development and update collateral with new brand
- 2018 – Begin adding to reserve account for next travel market research study
- 2019 – Add to to reserves for next travel market research study initiative
- 2020-New Travel Market research study

### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

One of the most expensive areas of the CCOT program of work is found in the print and digital marketing materials. Regular updates to these is required. Typically a website is rebuilt and revised every 4-5 years.

- Retain agency to review research and suggest revisions to current positioning statement, logo and brand imagery.
- Retain firm to update website and mobile platform.
- Develop updated design for print materials.



# Strategic Direction – Destination 2020

## 5. Marketing - Traditional & Digital

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

CCOT will promote Cayuga County to a broad range of travel segments (leisure, group, business, etc.). Traditional advertising will continue to be the leading mechanism for building awareness of Cayuga County as a leisure destination attracting visitors from higher-populated regions in targeted opportunity states. The long-term strategy will be to expand marketing programs and build seasonal co-op advertising and publicity campaigns to drive year-round visits to Cayuga County. CCOT will also be an expert and leader in digital marketing to drive increased visitation to the County. All digital strategies will reinforce the brand and its core elements. Web-based technology will be the most cost-effective strategy for communicating regularly, effectively, efficiently and directly with consumers, travel trade and media. Marketing programs will have a market-specific, web-based component where applicable.

Target markets – Highway corridor drive markets (all within a six hour drive or less)

1. Interstate 90 West – New York (Buffalo, Rochester)
2. Interstates 81 & 87 – Eastern Pennsylvania: Philadelphia suburbs, Scranton, Allentown, Harrisburg, New York City suburbs (drivers with cars)
3. Interstate 90 East– Albany, Hartford, Providence, Boston suburbs

Demographics – Maintain interest from Boomers while targeting upscale GenXers and Millennials with publications, websites and promotions.

Travel Party – Adults without children are the primary target market. Adult couples are available to travel year-round and higher incomes travel more often.

Media – A mix of traditional and digital. Traditional lifestyle publications as well as digital advertising and social media in the platforms identified in the research. Trip Advisor and Facebook are among the most important.

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- 2016 – Annual marketing plan, with special focus on building new partnerships
- 2017 –Annual marketing plan
- 2018 –Annual marketing plan
- 2019 –Annual marketing Plan
- 2020 – Annual marketing Plan

### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Protect and maintain leisure volume in core New York market, while extending reach into opportunity markets (Eastern PA & Massachusetts).

- Drive year-round visitation with focus on shoulder and off-season ads & promotions.
- Ad placement in lifestyle publications, newspaper inserts, radio and travel guides.
- Inquiry fulfillment through print visitor guides (less), website/digital media (more).
- Build partnership co-op ad/marketing program (digital, print, etc.).

# Strategic Direction – Destination 2020

## 6. Public Relations – Travel & Local Media

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

Editorial coverage in travel and lifestyle publications is invaluable when building awareness of Cayuga County as a destination. CCOT will dedicate staff time (Executive Director) to reach targeted media in key domestic markets and international markets to promote the Cayuga County destination travel experience. Partnership within the Finger Lakes and New York state is critical to success to make sure Cayuga remains appropriately visible within travel publications touting New York as a destination.

Maintaining visibility and support for CCOT programs within Cayuga County is critical toward the long-term goal of building awareness of a Cayuga County as a destination. The CCOT E.D. has primary responsibility for the organization’s image within the County. It is a worthy task to gain civic buy-in by educating local leaders that travel promotion is sustainable and green economic development. Developing partnerships with governing bodies and economic development groups is critical to the success of this plan led by the E.D. and supported by committees of the Board. CCOT partnership within the local travel industry plays a critical role in this process.

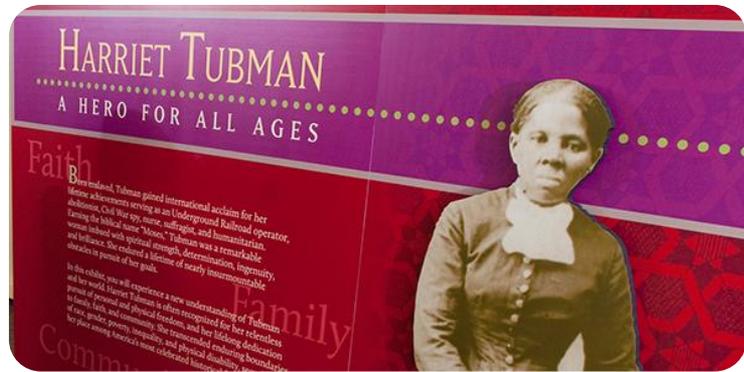
Partner with and support the PR efforts of FLRTC and the State with a focus on the unique Cayuga County story ideas that capture the attention of travel writers and bloggers. Unique angles on Harriet Tubman, William Seward, The Inns of Aurora, MacKenzie-Childs, urban hip Auburn, theatrical productions, the Erie Canal, scenic drives, brew pubs and unique waterfront communities and experiences.

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- 2016 – Continued partnership with FLRTC & State for PR
- 2017 – Continued partnership with FLRTC & State for PR
- 2018 – Continued partnership with FLRTC & State for PR
- 2019 – Continued partnership with FLRTC & State for PR
- 2020 – Continued partnership with FLRTC & State for PR

### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Maintain partnership with FLRTC & State.
- Participate in regional partnership for access to press
- Host travel writer FAM tours.
- Creative story placement promotions.
- Partnership with State and regional travel related PR efforts.



## 7. Sales - Leisure & Group

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

CCOT has a group sales effort focused on recruiting groups to Cayuga County that are not currently being pursued by existing entities within the County. The primary target market will be group tour, utilizing the current contract agreement with Break The Ice Media, to represent Cayuga County at shows and call on group planners. Growth markets include small corporate meetings, non-profits and social events. Cayuga County has two full-service lodging properties with meeting space and a luxury Inn that has limited group sales efforts. CCOT will focus on supplementing those sales efforts and driving groups into the limited and select service lodging properties that have limited sales staff.

CCOT will expand its promotion and sales of Cayuga County as a leisure destination. Encourage the development of leisure product within the County to drive longer lengths of stay and increased demand. Think of Cayuga County as the creative arts cool destination in upstate/Central New York. CCOT can expand its reach and brand awareness beyond New York into Eastern Pennsylvania and Massachusetts by implementing a sales program targeting AAA offices, travel agencies, consumer leisure travel shows and co-op sales missions with regional partners.

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- 2016 – Develop product & partnerships with Visit Syracuse & CNY counties to drive winter demand and expand geographical reach, monitor group program
- 2017 – Launch winter promotion & expand geographical reach, monitor group program
- 2018 – Continue to develop winter promotions and geographic reach, monitor group program
- 2019 – Continue to develop winter promotions and geographic reach, monitor group program
- 2020 – Continue to develop winter promotions and geographic reach, monitor group program



### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Out-of-market promotion and sales to drive visitation into Cayuga County.

- Attend group tour shows (ABA & Canada, sales blitzes to AAA offices).
- Participation in consumer lifestyle shows.
- Partner with Syracuse & Central to extend reach beyond NY into eastern PA and drive winter visitation.
- Promote targeted leisure travel packages developed around research identified consumer demographic audiences and the desired experiences of each.

## 8. Visitor Services

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

CCOT will focus on a long term strategy that drives increases in visitor engagement and spending once travelers arrive within Cayuga County. Connecting travelers with experiences in Cayuga County will be the theme of the program. The CCOT office / Visitor Center in Auburn will serve as a destination sales center; a dynamic showroom to sell the County at its best. In the ensuing years, visitor services and expanded front-line training will be revitalized throughout the County. Additionally, CCOT will audit the online apps and mobile sites that travelers use to find their way and make plans while traveling. Training sessions with local travel industry partners will maximize the use of mobile planning devices. Frequent “lunch and learn” free training sessions will help the local travel industry partners become better marketing partners.

Training will focus on methods to deliver accurate information while upselling in a hospitable manner. A primary information location will be identified in each community and county-wide cross-training will facilitate increased visitor engagement as travelers are encouraged to visit other areas of the County.

An online hospitality training program will be explored as a cost-effective and time sensitive method of keeping the ever-changing (high turnover & seasonal) frontline well informed. A mobile information vehicle should also be explored as a way to connect with visitors throughout the County.

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- 2016 –develop training programs for online platforms and hospitality training, looking to regional and state partnerships. Maintain and/or create visitor information hubs. Resubmit wayfinding CFA, possibly with regional partners
- 2017 – 2019 – continue to develop training programs
- 2020 – Look at mobile information center options

### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Maps & guides.
- Mobile audit and training sessions.
- Visitor centers in three activity hubs – Auburn, Aurora and Fair Haven.
- Online hospitality training program.
- Mobile information center.
- Wayfinding signage.



## 9. Visitor Hubs – Three Core Attractor Areas

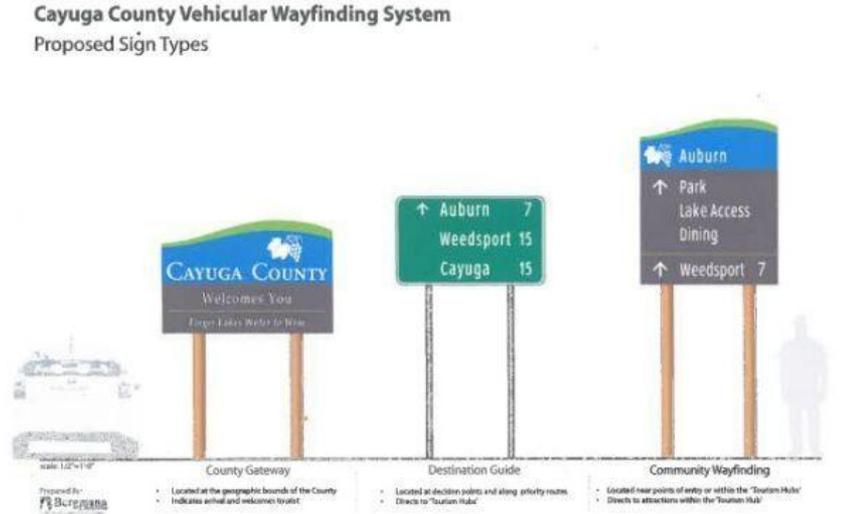
### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

There are two primary current visitor “attractor” hubs and a growth destination in Cayuga County. CCOT will share market research, participate in planning and provide broad encouragement for the development of research identified experiences throughout the County. The hub communities will be primary gathering spots where visitors are greeted and encouraged to visit other areas throughout the County.

1. Auburn is the central visitor point within the County and acts as a hub for travelers who travel out to points all over the County as part of their visit. Auburn has come a long way in recent years in terms of its overall visitor appeal. It is emerging as a hip small-urban center that captures the essence of the creative economy with ample unique dining, hip brew-pubs and clubs as well as theater, evening entertainment and heritage activities. Unique shopping is a growth area in which Auburn can become a more engaging destination. Auburn has great appeal with GenX and Millennial travelers.
2. Aurora is the high-end visitor hub in southern Cayuga County. Aurora is a remarkable small town with luxury lodging, shopping, dining and spectacular scenery in its historic lakefront small-town setting.
3. Fair Haven can be the next great lakefront/harbor destination in Central New York with its location at the far north end of Cayuga County. A new winery demonstrates the ability for Fair Haven to revitalize and offer engaging activities to attract more visitors. A lakefront upscale lodging and dining experience would be a significant addition to the area.

**IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE**  
 2016 – 2020 - encourage development of visitors experiences identified in research study, especially in the three core attractor areas.

- MATERIALS AND RESOURCES**
- Research provided by CCOT helps local businesses plan for the future.
  - CCOT serves as a catalyst for the redevelopment of existing experiences.



## 10. Staying on Trend with Existing Experiences

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

Trends and traveler behavior are in a constant state of evolution. Someone once quipped, the only constant is change. Cayuga County has evolved over the last decade in a way that continues to fit with the Finger Lakes and yet differentiates the County as a unique place to visit. Every destination faces product life cycle issues and Cayuga must continue addressing the lifecycle issues that will keep propelling you forward.

Core focus areas for continued success are:

- Theater, arts and the creative economy
- Micro-breweries
- Outdoor activities
- Wineries and farm-to-table dining
- New unique shopping

Niche marketing opportunities for growth:

- Weddings
- Reunions
- Social groups
- Millennials – Auburn
- GenX & Boomers – Aurora
- Outdoor lake & canal experiences - fishing, boating, kayaks, paddle boards, winter ice fishing, etc.
- Port Byron heritage site

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

2016 –2020 –share research and serve as a catalyst for future development and redevelopment

### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Research provided by CCOT helps local businesses plan for the future.
- CCOT serves as a catalyst for the redevelopment of existing experiences.



# Strategic Direction – Destination 2020

## 11. New experiences to extend the appeal

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

A great place to live is a great place to visit. CCOT is not a development organization but should be a catalyst for growth by sharing research with other development groups and encouraging the development of those activities that rated highly in the research study.

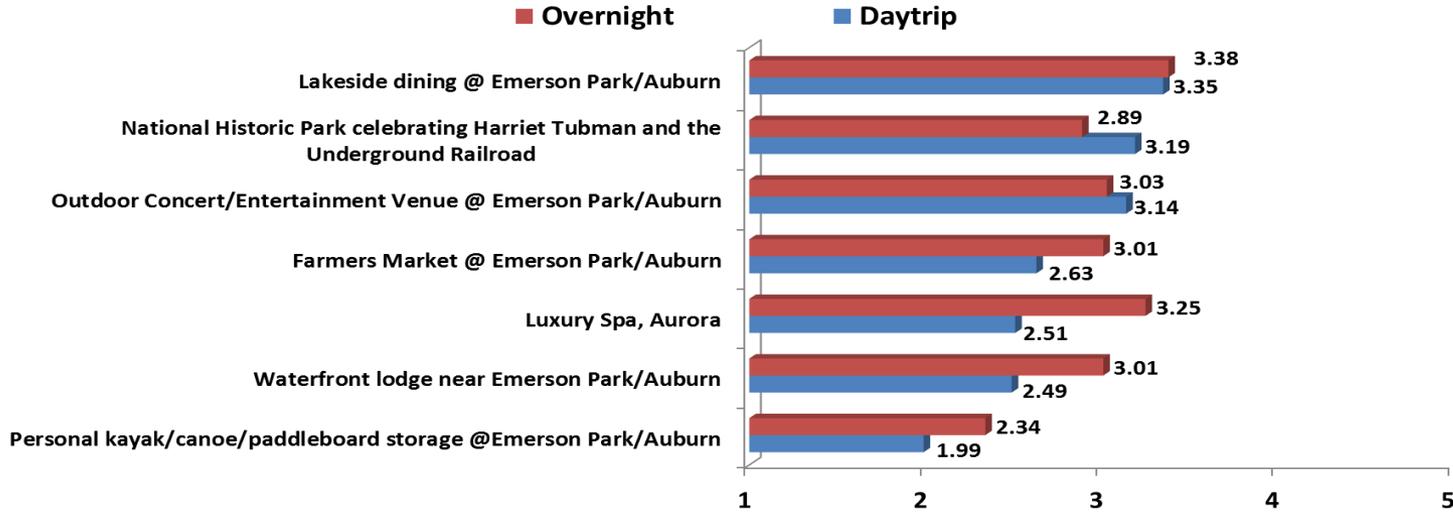
The new/potential activities that generated the most interest from survey respondents involved the following characteristics: lakeside/scenic; unique history/heritage; entertainment and outdoor activities. In recent years Cayuga has experienced growth through the development of unique evening entertainment, dining and farm-to-table experiences that differentiate Cayuga County within the Finger Lakes and Central NY as a unique destination. Growth will come from unique experiences.

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

2016 –2020 – Outreach to community leaders and developers the data that supports smart future development plans

### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Make research accessible to other County development agencies and provide interpretation and suggestions for growth.
- Offer to fund focus groups (need co-op funding) to market-test development ideas.



February 2016

# Strategic Direction – Destination 2020

## 12. Tracking & Accountability

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND GOALS

CCOT is a research-based, strategic destination marketing & management organization. Progress on accomplishing the goals set out in this long range destination plan will be tracked annually. Annual progress reports will be presented to the CCOT Board of Directors, elected officials and economic development agencies within the County.

CCOT should continue conducting online research to monitor changes in traveler behavior. Future marketing and inquiry collection should emphasize the increased collection of email addresses which can be monitored by the percentage of email addresses in data base contacts. YSI will support CCOT in the editing and distribution of the surveys to match the questions included in this research study.

Annual review of economic impact data provided by the State of New York will reveal the success of CCOT's goal to grow their market share of travel spending within the Finger Lakes region.

### IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

- 2016-2020 – Track CCCVB progress through annual inquiry conversion sampling, CEDA's 'positive signs' tracking (update annually), use current tracking tools- STR reports, Oxford economics, room tax receipts, review strategic plan annually
- 2019 – Retain firm for research update
- 2020 – Develop new strategic plan

### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- The Executive Director will have primary oversight of on-going tracking, accountability and reporting.
- Retain independent research firms to conduct (every 4-5 years) regular research updates and benchmark research to guide future planning.
- Conduct annual in-house review as part of planning process to track progress and economic impact of CCOT program of work.
- Investigate tracking software and economic impact models as necessary.
- Annual simple Inquiry Conversion studies – send online survey (10 questions) out to track conversion.



## Strategic Direction 2020 -Table of Metrics

| Metric               | Source    | 2014        | 2015    |
|----------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|
| Visitor Spending     | Oxford    | \$100.95 mm |         |
| State & Local Taxes  | Oxford    | \$12.05 mm  |         |
| Employment           | Oxford    | 1847 ppl    |         |
| Tax Relief           | Oxford    | \$388       |         |
| Room Revenue (gross) | CC Treas. | \$552,483   |         |
| Occupancy            | STR       | 52.9%       | 52.4%   |
| Average Daily Rate   | STR       | \$96.82     | \$99.69 |
| RevPar               | STR       | \$51.17     | \$52.27 |