

**Finger Lakes Visitors Connection, Ontario County, NY
Board of Directors Meeting - Wednesday, March 5, 2025
Ontario County Building at 74 Ontario Street,
Canandaigua, NY 14424**

Board Member Attendance:	Present	Excused	Absent
David Hutchings, Sonnenberg Gardens - Chair of the Board	X		
Steve Fuller, Bristol Mountain – Board Treasurer	X		
Charles Parkhurst, Lyons National Bank - Board Secretary	X		
Lisa FitzGerald, Finger Lakes Winery Tours, Chalet Bed and Breakfast, Vice Chair of the Board		X	
Mike Kauffman, Eastview	X		
Mike Roeder, Caledonia Country Club		X	
Sheryl Mordini, 1795 Acorn Inn Bed and Breakfast	X		
Lenore Friend, Finger Lakes Community College	X		
Russ Kenyon, Boylan Code	X		
Mark Gilbride, Lazy Acre Alpacas	X		
Chris Vastola, Ontario County Board of Supervisors, Town of Canadice	X		
Lori Proper, The Lake House at Canandaigua	X		
Sherry Brahm-French, Arbor Hill Grapery & Winery		X	
Mike Darling, Crafty Ales and Lagers		X	
Todd Plouffe, Indus Hospitality Group		X	
Jim Cecere, The Speakeasy at VINIFERA, FLX Group, FLX Goods	X		
Naved Amed, Geneva on The Lake	Z		

Staff: Valerie Knoblauch, Tracey Burkey, Jessica VanDeMar, Carolina Taylor, Chloe Davis. Guest: Mark Dorr, New York State Hospitality and Tourism Association.

Call to Order and Welcome. David Hutchings called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. and declared a quorum. He asked for introductions around and included a welcome to our guest, Mark Dorr from the NYS Hospitality and Tourism Association. NYSHTA is a membership organization representing the largest destination marketing organizations (DMOs) across NYS.

Consent Agenda. David asked for a motion to accept the minutes of the February 5, 2025 meeting. *The motion was made by Russ Kenyon and seconded by Charles Parkhurst. All present voted in favor of the motion.* The financial reports ending January 2025 were provided by Bowers and presented as part of the consent agenda. There were no questions. A motion was made to accept the financials as reported by Steve Fuller, and seconded by Jim Cecere. All present voted in favor of the motion.

President's Report. Valerie brought the board up to date on the process of inviting people to our 2025 Tourism Advocacy Summit. She showed them the We Build Community Together cups and Legos with the invitation. Each board member will reach out with three Lego invites and the cups will be at the event.

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Mission:

To curate, distinguish, and develop Ontario County's destination brand to inspire travel that creates economic vitality for our stakeholders and communities, and provides quality of life benefits for our residents.

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Several questions were asked about invitations and list coordination. Valerie made a commitment to resend the excel sheet out of all the names so that each member could look them over and reconnect with at least their top 3. The goal is to get about 60 people there who are leaders in the community. Valerie reminded people that the format of the meeting on March 18th is a presentation from Josiah, followed by a state of the tourism industry from Valerie, followed by a work session about the priorities for tourism and community development.

Presentation: Mark Dorr, NYSTHA, was invited to help clarify the short-term rental law and impacts. Valerie had provided the board with the packet of the power point presented at the state level. This power point had deadlines for a county to opt-in or a county to opt-out. Board members recapped a meeting that had been held immediately preceding this one. That meeting involved several county officials so that Mark could answer their questions as well. Ontario County is in a particular "situation" because of the restriction within our law about any lodging under 4 rooms not being subject to occupancy tax. The county does have a registration process in place; this does not include those properties. Valerie shared the amount of revenue that was anticipated, according to two different studies by ROVE and See Transparent. Both had come close to predicting that there would be a 1.5 million revenue stream if these air b and bs were subject to the same tax as regular B and B's and hotels. It was noted that the impact is sales tax, as well as occupancy tax, which is not being collected.

Mark reminded everyone of the legislative process for occupancy tax that would require a local Senate sponsor and Assembly sponsor. In our case that would be Pam Helming and Jeff Gallahan. Both of them were former county supervisors who at the state level were unwilling, in the past, to support what they considered to be a new tax.

Different comments were made around the room by board members indicating general support for this tax to be applied to all. These comments came from across all segments of our board. There was further discussion about the loss of competitive edge for us, as other counties can grow this as a share to reinvest in further promotion. Valerie noted to remember that in the future if there are collections, there would also be an expectation of service from the FLVC team. Right now, the capacity to perform such services is not there.

A question was asked about other county budgets and structures. The discussion followed about the amount of tax dedicated and the budget and expenses of the different bureaus across the state. Mark indicated that as the administrator of the DMO group he would try to get those comparisons to us. He advised caution in sharing without interpretation because the structures for different counties could be misleading in terms of expenses that were not included within some budgets. For instance, some have no overhead because they are part of county government.

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Mark's presentation continued with notes on the following:

- County to have registration enabled for STR taxes by November through the platform
- STR Law allows the STRs to be included in the pool of the local Occupancy Tax Law. The local law designates the definition of the unit numbers (4 and more, currently) and what is included.
- There should also be consideration of the city collections both in Canandaigua and Geneva.

Mark left the meeting at this time. Discussion continued. A question arose about the importance of clarifying with key players to understand the tourism economics and the visitor economy, as well as the potential with partnership and more investment. Related to that, another member asked if funding is one of the topics on the March 18th agenda. The answer is "yes" as it will be woven into potential future projects. There was mention of dedication of the occupancy tax to such things as environmental issue.

Several members contributed show what was going well in our endeavors, and to provide some aspirational insights and projects that, given more resources, we could tackle. It was reiterated that a destination vision plan or master plan is of utmost importance to get everyone on the same page. This would articulate "projects" or a "priority areas" that would be beneficial for investment of potentially increased revenues. Engagement with our business-minded board would result in a win-win-win scenario.

Further suggestions came out: 1) we need to make sure that we share our knowledge and make sure we get a seat at the table to do that. 2) it was suggested that we need to publish a position statement that might include – Our definition of a lodging unit and again an inventory of potential and 3) how do we, the tourism professionals, recommend future revenues be invested to result in the largest return on investment. Is that, for instance – on environmental, housing near attractions, sustainability. A statement should prioritize investments. And reinvestments with the revenue generated from tourism businesses. People concluded by indicating that these are important things that can be elaborated on – on March 18th.

Old Business. No old business was brought before the Board.

New Business. No new business was brought before the Board.

Adjournment.

Russ cast the motion for adjournment, and it was seconded by Charles. All voted in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Next Meeting:

Thursday, April 10, 2025 at 8:30 a.m. FLCC Wine and Viticulture Center, Geneva. NY

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