

A Finger Lakes Visitors Connection, Ontario County, NY
Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, September 26, 2018 – 8:00 – 9:30 a.m.
Finger Lakes Welcome Center, 35 Lakefront Drive, Geneva, NY

Present

Bob Bennett
Carl Carlson
Suzanne Farley
Lenore Friend
David Hutchings
Meg Joseph
Mike Kauffman
Steve Laros
David Linger
Dan Marshall
Sheryl Mordini
Mike Roeder

Excused

John Brahm
Russ Kenyon
Frank Riccio
Audrey Carrier
Alexa Gifford

Absent

Guests

Heather Tuttle, Finger Lakes
Welcome Center
Paula Knight, FLCC
Jackie Lee, Mengel Metzger
Barr

Staff

Valerie Knoblauch
Carol Hicks
Christen Smith
David Lee

Welcome – Mike Kauffman called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Introductions were made around the room.

Guest Presentations – Heather Tuttle, General Manager of the Finger Lakes Welcome Center and Taste NY Market, presented on the new center, which opened on May 30, 2018. Since this date, there has been more than 152,000 visitors that have come through the doors. The center has a tracking system for visitors and they report back to New York State. 90% of the vendors that supply the Taste NY Market are based in the Finger Lakes and 100% of the vendors are based in New York. The FL Welcome Center is owned by the City of Geneva, setting it apart from the other 10 centers, which are owned by NYS. NYS Agriculture and Markets leases the majority of the building and have contracted with New York Kitchen to operate the Taste NY Market. The Terazzo floor map is the most popular item in the center, followed by the Taste NY Market. The center is only allowed to have 2 brochures – the Top 50 things in the Finger Lakes and the I Love NY guide. Visitors to the center are encouraged to use the kiosks to search for attractions, restaurants, accommodations, etc.

Paula Knight, Program Coordinator, Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC) Tourism and Hospitality Program, presented on the new format of the program at the college. Valerie noted that Paula is an FLVC Scholarship Recipient, one of the first. Paula shared that the 2018 curriculum falls under the business program and includes the following: tourism, hotel management, culinary arts, hotel management, food & beverage management. The goal is to build participation and experiences for the students. Paula has been reaching out to the tourism industry, familiarizing the industry with the program.

2018 Audit Parameters – Jackie Lee, Mengel Metzger Barr (MMB), provided board members a handout and reviewed the Communications of Planning Matters for the audit ending Fiscal Year 2018. MMB auditors focus their attention on higher risk areas such as Internal Controls, cash and cash equivalents, grants and revenue recognition relating to those grants, board designated funds, in-kind, payroll expense and allocation of expenses. Jackie reviewed new developments, which do not go into effect until fiscal year ending 2019 and do not have an impact on fiscal year ending 2018. Beginning fiscal year ending 2020, U.S. accounting standards will align with international accounting standards. The audit service team remains the same from last year and the field work is scheduled for October 29 – 31, 2018. Jackie asked the board if they would like an executive session to discuss any matters. Mike Kauffman asked around the room. Hearing no call for one, he thanked Jackie for their past work.

Valerie reviewed the quote that MMB provided FLVC for future audits. This was previously reviewed by the FLVC audit and finance committee. Valerie distinguished why FLVC needed a full audit each year, as opposed to a review every so many years, including Ontario County's requirement for this as part of our contract. Valerie reviewed the history with MMB, leading to the FLVC board practice of reassessing the auditing firm every 5 years. A year ago, the board agreed to remain with MMB, as long as rates remain competitive. Valerie received three informal estimates from Genesee County Chamber, Cayuga County Office of Tourism, and Dutchess County Tourism and compared these to the MMB informal quote. Small adjustments were made by Jackie Lee. Dan Marshall made a *motion to approve of Mengel Metzger Barr as the Auditor for 2019 – 2023; per the proposal presented, option #2, gradual increase over 5 years. Audit Fees will be: \$7,000 in 2019; \$7,200 in 2020; \$7,400 in 2021; \$7,600 in 2022; and \$7,975 in 2023. The motion was seconded by Mike Roeder.* All present voted in favor and the motion passed.

2019 – 2020 Budget Considerations. Valerie reviewed the timing processes noting that the lodging properties are required to report occupancy tax collections by the 20th of the month and we expected the final quarter numbers by September 25, but we were informed that there were several outstanding as of yesterday. Therefore, the budget could not be finalized with any degree of accuracy, however, she felt it was close. Valerie met with Mike Kauffman and they agreed to philosophically present a budget with line items, and get feedback from the board. Valerie reviewed the 2019 budget, noting that she created this budget by looking at the 2018 predicted budget. Marketing is a major part of our budget.

Valerie highlighted three key areas of the expense side of the budget: Website and Social Media Marketing; Economic Development; and Gateways/Visitor Services.

Simpleview is coming up in May for a 3- year renewal in May, expecting a small increase of 3%. David Lee explained that the pros outweigh the cons in remaining with Simpleview after he talked with a half a dozen other tourism agencies who had used them over the years. He noted that Simpleview is the purveyor for the state as well and integration with the state website is key to efficiency and quality information. David presented a report which compared the board's original evaluative metrics with the current status. He noted that 2017 vs. 2018 organic (non-paid) search is #1 and Social Media is #2 for engagement. He credited our efforts on search engine optimization with Dixon Schwabl and the FLVC content team as having produced strong organic search results. Therefore, content management remains the largest part of the budget. He also noted that "Friend" conversions / opt-ins are up 233%.

Visitor Services / Gateways - \$100,000 was budgeted for Gateways in 2018, including the contracts with Naples, Victor, Canandaigua. Each community has experienced roadblocks in fulfilling Gateway commitments, but our Strategic Plan emphasizes the need for a Gateway program. Naples is the furthest along, currently waiting on the Department of Transportation. Valerie wants to extend the contracts, which will expire 9/30/2018, and renegotiate in 2019 with Canandaigua, Geneva and Victor; and extend the contract with Naples. Board member David Linger asked for clarification on this line item asking why only \$60,000 was budgeted while \$30,000 was spent in last year. Valerie indicated that it is her intention to reduce this line item, given the current resources, and that efficiencies in design and product purchases could be achieved with FLVC taking over more direct management of finishing gateways. With further questioning about locations and Geneva's status, she indicated that she has commitments from the Ramada and is working on a contract with the Smith that will include some space. She also received an inquiry from the Geneva BID and will address that after the existing plans are solidified into 2019. Some of the BID proposal was duplicative of efforts already underway by FLVC in Geneva.

Economic Development / Product Development – A \$30,000 budget is in place to set up a fund for not-for-profits to access project money (\$25,000) upon board approval of a plan for this new program.

Official Business - Mike Kauffman requested a motion to move all the items under official business. *Dan Marshall made a motion to approve the following:*

- a. *Minutes of the June 14, 2018 meeting*
- b. *Financial reports: June Budget vs. Actual; July Budget vs. Actual; August Budget vs. Actual; Balance Sheet as of 8/31/18*

The motion was seconded by Meg Joseph. All present voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Committee Reports -

- a) **Executive Committee** – Mike Kauffman reported that the committee discussed the budget and Valerie covered this in her budget presentation.
- b) **Governance Committee** – No report
- c) **Nominating Committee** – Suzanne Farley reported that Carl Carlson, David Linger and John Brahm have agreed to stay on for another 3 years. Alexa Gifford and Audrey Carrier are not renewing their terms. Possible replacements are being explored with a definite need to look to the west in replacing Audrey.
- d) **Finance / Audit Committee** – Covered in Executive Committee and President's Budget Report

Strategic Planning / Research Committee – Carl Carlson introduced the work of the committee, which is being led on the research side by David Lee. David reported that the meeting / conference space study is moving forward. Next steps will be addressing the planning side, contacting meeting planners and working with Ontario County Economic Development. Board members should expect a survey as well.

David also reported that a second Cultural Survey, a cultural tourism impact study, has gone out to the industry, asking for participation. FLVC will combine these confidential results to determine the economic impact of this niche market. The results will be shared with the participants so that they will have more localized data for their grant applications.

Old Business - As a background for new board members, Valerie informed the board that Ontario County is receiving requests for funding from not-for-profit organizations. Mary Krause, County Administrator, has reached out to FLVC to consider meeting some of these needs. While FLVC needs to carefully plan for the future, and thus the implementation of an economic development fund, there are some requests that can be met in this year and aligned with our goals. The first request was from the Smith Opera House for \$10,000, plus out of pocket expenses. Valerie is working on a specific contract which will outline the deliverables to FLVC (which will include research data participation and sharing, gateway presence, hospitality training and engagement). The Finance/Audit Committee agreed to commit the \$10,000 to the Smith Opera House in fiscal year 2018, as we are underbudget due to not spending the money on the Gateways.

Ontario County's participation in the amount of \$5,000 will filter through the Town of Geneva, on behalf of the entire county, to participate in the Nine-Element Watershed Plan for the Seneca Lake Watershed. Each county that touches Seneca Lake is contributing \$5,000 to match a grant from NYS, to provide education and resources on nine elements to preserve Seneca Lake. This fits with our Strategic Plan item that deals with water quality and sustainability.

Valerie had committed two years ago for a match from the Town of Manchester for \$3,500 to conduct a historical, cultural survey of the assets of Port Gibson, on the Erie Canal. Port Gibson is Ontario County's only direct connection to the historically significant Erie Canal. Supporting this research fits in with our Strategic Plan items that address preservation of historical and cultural resources, water sustainability, and supporting our local communities. The first grant failed and the second grant was successful. This was through the Preservation League of NYS.

Valerie has a request from the Ontario County Planning Department, asking if anyone from tourism would like to be on the Ontario County Planning Board. She will forward this request to all board members to gauge their interest and to seek recommendations.

OC Planning Board asked for someone to speak at one of their meetings, to see what tourism needs from the Planning Office. Valerie and Linda Frasca, Senior Clerk, have agreed to conduct a joint forum in February 2019, to discuss what tourism needs from planning and zoning offices across the county, to make it easier to grow our tourism-related businesses.

Valerie and David attended a Millennial Forum with Mike Manikowski and Economic Development. \$5,000 of the \$30,000 budget line item for Economic/Product Development, is slated for Lifestyle and Economic Development marketing in tandem with this effort.

New Business – No new business was brought before the board. Mike reminded everyone that the facility is open for touring if they would like to take a closer look.

Adjourn – *David Hutchings made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Dan Marshall. All members voted in favor of the motion.* Mike Kauffman adjourned the meeting at 9:53 a.m.

Next Meeting – Wednesday, October 17, 8:00 a.m.
Annual Meeting and Regular Meeting
Ontario County Municipal Building, Canandaigua, NY 14424

Minutes submitted by Carol Hicks