

**Finger Lakes Visitors Connection, Ontario County, NY
Board of Directors Meeting – November 6, 2019 8:00 a.m.
New York Kitchen, Canandaigua, NY 14424**

Mission: To drive increased visitation and economic vitality by marketing and developing the assets of Ontario County as a premier leisure and meetings destination.

Board Member Attendance:	Present	Excused	Absent
Bob Bennett, Homewood Suites by Hilton Victor - Chair of the Board	X		
David Hutchings, Sonnenberg Gardens – Vice Chair of the Board	X		
Lenore Friend, Finger Lakes Community College - Board Secretary	X		
Steven Laros, Fairfield Inn & Suites Geneva - Board Treasurer	X		
Mike Kauffman, Eastview - Immediate Past Chair of the Board	X		
Mike Roeder, Ravenwood Golf	X		
Sheryl Mordini, 1795 Acorn Inn Bed and Breakfast	X		
Suzanne Farley, Artizanns	X		
Carl Carlson, Cheerful Valley Campgrounds			X
Frank Riccio, Cobblestone Creek Country Club	X		
Meg Joseph, Ganondagan State Historic Site	X		
Russ Kenyon, Kenyon & Kenyon	X		
Mark Gilbride, Lazy Acre Alpacas	X		
Dan Marshall, Ontario County Board of Supervisors, Town of South Bristol		X	
Lori Proper, The Inn on the Lake (The Lake House at Canandaigua)	X		
Krista Johns, The Ramada Geneva Lakefront	X		
Charles Parker, Lyons National Bank	X		

In Attendance:

Staff: Valerie Knoblauch, Christen Smith, David Lee, Kendall Knaak, Melissa Knoblauch, Tracey Burkey, Julie Maslyn

Guests: New York Kitchen, Bethany DiSanto

Call to Order – Bob Bennett called the meeting to order at 8:08 a.m. Introductions were said all around for the benefit of our new board members Krista Johns and Charles Parkhurst, as well as our guest and Tracey Burkey at her first board meeting.

Bethany DiSanto welcomed the group to the New York Kitchen. She outlined their programming and the changes that they have had over the years.

President’s Report – Valerie opened with the president’s report. She indicated that Senator Nozzolio had been “excused” this a.m. as the Governor was scheduled at the last minute to be in Seneca Falls today. The reason for the Governor’s visit is probably an announcement about the DRI being awarded to Seneca Falls. The Senator wants to attend that and will come to a future meeting.

As part of a communications/correspondence report, she referred to the handout which outlined the marketing team’s top activities since the last board meeting. She invited any questions with regard to the projects, especially if anyone wanted more detail. She congratulated and thanked the team for their hard work in her recent absences.

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President’s Report, continued.

Valerie shared with the board that she had been dealing with a personal medical situation with her father – and that the team had really stepped in to make sure things ran smoothly.

Valerie commented on open ended items from the last meeting. She confirmed that all the transfers had been made and new accounts opened to keep within the FDIC limits. The two new bank accounts: Key Bank and USNY Bank of the Finger Lakes were approved at the last meeting and will be used for NYS Matching Funds and Savings respectively. Valerie also mentioned that we are in the middle of the Audit this week, and things are going well.

She shared that she is honored to have been recommended by Brian Kolb (for his nomination as Assembly Minority Leader) to be on the Governors Tourism Advisory Council. This is an honor and contingent upon approval from the Governor’s office and background checks.

Valerie shared an article from the Rochester Business Journal about the Saunders School of Business and Mr. Saunders donation of \$7.5 million to the school which is set to “include space for hospitality and tourism programs, provide collaborative workspaces and provide an auditorium and event space.” She also shared from the November 1st edition that “last summer the university folded programs in hospitality and tourism, service leadership, and human resources into the business college.” This practice has also been done in a similar manner at Cornell and at an introductory level at FLCC. It was noted that workforce development is a key area for our future and closer ties to the colleges would be essential.

Valerie overviewed the elections, congratulating board member, Russ Kenyon on his reelection to the Bloomfield judgeship. She indicated that both Canandaigua and Geneva would have a new mayor in the next year. She noted that Jack Marren had won his reelection handily. Incumbent Honeoye Supervisor (Town of Richmond) was behind by about 16 votes. Other positions were stable in Ontario County.

Special Presentation: Meetings and Conference Marketing and Sales Update

Bob Bennett welcomed Tracey Burkey to the floor. Tracey has been hired as FLVC’s Director of Sales. As the board enters this new world of meetings and conference sales, based on our new product, it is important that it acts as an extension of our efforts to maximize outreach.

Valerie introduced Tracey and asked her to talk about herself and let everyone know why her impressive experience and connections are good for Finger Lakes Visitors Connection’s goals in this new market. Tracey shared that she grew up in Canastota and went to Niagara University for Travel and Tourism. She then went to work for Syracuse Convention and Visitors Bureau, starting as a sales manager, and finishing after 32 years as Vice President of sales and services. Tracey talked about how much she loved “selling a destination.”

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FLVC Meetings and Conference Marketing and Sales Update, continued.

Valerie touched upon Tracey's resume and how she saw within it tentacles of other projects she had touched and how those experiences will also strengthen our efforts. Tracey went on to touch upon her experience opening a Welcome Center in Syracuse, also traveling to other cities to bid on sporting contracts, then coming home to work with hotels and businesses to make sure the meeting attendees were having a fulfilling experience when they were there.

Valerie talked about our area being different from Syracuse – especially as we are developing an upscale unique product. Our audience is more likely to be high end groups, and Tracey followed up with observations on the strengths found in each of the communities within Ontario County and how each one has good things to offer groups.

In measuring the success of this new project, in the past Tracey was measured only by room nights, but in Ontario County we don't just measure room nights, we want restaurants and entertainment venues to also benefit. How do we set the metrics up to encompass all? Tracey is looking at other destinations similar to ours to see how they have set their measurements up.

Valerie went on to talk about Tracey already picking up leads from the office that were set aside for lack of time, or expertise, and running with them. Tracey told the story of the Eastern Apiculture association (Beekeepers), and their desire to meet here in 2022. She is working with Lenore Friend to meet the requirements that this group needs.

Part of Tracey's very long job description is concentrating on the meeting services side. We need to compete against other big cities/destinations across the country. Tracey feels that we need a Business Development Fund. Destinations have been built on "buying" business, often sponsoring receptions, or providing travel accommodations. Tracey would like to look into the creation of a fund that could be used for these purposes. Valerie noted that this aligned with Steve Powell's recommendations as well.

Lori Proper and Sheryl Mordini both expressed/asked what a plan would be for the shoulder season. Tracey would like to start with putting out a survey – asking what the meeting spaces (especially hotels) needs are, what market sectors are working and what ones hold high prospect. MINT (meetings and groups database) is something that we will be working through, which shows you all groups, sizes, times of year they meet, and that should be helpful in targeting groups that we would be suited for.

Valerie and Tracey concluded that we will be refining our marketing and sales plan as we go, and keeping the board up to date on how that is progressing.

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Official Business

Russ made a motion to accept the minutes of the October 2, 2019 annual meeting; Mike Roeder seconded the motion. All present voted in favor of the motion.

Russ made a motion to accept the minutes of the October 2, 2019 regular meeting; David Hutchings seconded the motion. All present voted in favor of the motion.

Valerie shared that no financial reports had been delivered to the board. The transfers were waiting for auditor and accountant approval and these would affect the accuracy of the reports. We did not want to interrupt the audit process for this.

Executive Committee

Valerie referred to the President's Report which is a brief "top 3 projects" that the FLVC team has been working on since the last board meeting.

Valerie talked about adding site visits to our "off" board meeting months to explore the area and remind ourselves what our county has to offer. She will publish a new calendar.

Valerie talked about the Occupancy Tax, and her conversations with the County Administrator. There needs to be a renewal of the occupancy law in some form in January. She shared the description below which held potential for language changes broadening the potential use of the funds. She noted that the desire is also to remove the 4 or more rooms clause to level the playing field. This was our position 3 years ago when asked.

From the Occupancy Tax Document Draft - "All revenues resulting from the imposition of the tax under the local laws shall be paid into the treasury of Ontario county and shall be credited to and deposited in the general fund of such county and shall be available thereafter for the promotion of tourism and tourist attractions in Ontario county *and other directly related and supporting activities including, but not limited to, programs to improve infrastructures related to tourism; to develop, operate and maintain public parks and recreational facilities; to maintain and enhance the water resources of Ontario County, including lakes and tributary streams; and for environmental conservation;* and that not more than five percent of such revenue shall be used for the cost of administering such tax. Such promotion may be carried out by an appropriate organization or organizations as designated by the Ontario county board of supervisors."

Discussion ensued and multiple board members suggested different ideas for the potential increased collections. Concerns were raised about stability of funding and the importance of earnings resulting from positive tourism marketing and sales should be reinvested in activities which foster further growth. The board felt that they understood the county's needs but to be cautious in stepping away from a system that has worked. In other areas it might be the first step down the road of doing something other than tourism. We have to be advisory to the county to maintain the focus on endeavors which are directly tied to tourism, important to tourism. We need to make sure that members of the Board are informed when they are ready to make these decisions.

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Russ Kenyon suggested that an Ad hoc committee be formed to take a deeper look into the current law and the options going forward. Bob Bennett asked for volunteers to be part of this committee. Russ Kenyon and Sheryl Mordini volunteered.

Nominating Committee – Mike Roeder reported that the committee had not met. It needs to work on the vacancy created by Suzanne Farley leaving. There had been outreach, but no specific recommendations at this point.

Governance Committee – Meg Joseph reminded everyone to turn in their self-evaluation form. These need to be posted in December to PARIS.

Strategic Planning Committee – Valerie reported on behalf of Carl Carlson. She indicated that we would be receiving a proposal from Berkeley Young in the spring for Destination Next. The goal will be to have a strategic update in place for Fiscal Year 2021. She also reported that David is finishing up the Cultural Study. While we were a little disappointed in the participation by the cultural attractions, we have enough of a resource base to make the results valid and applicable.

Old Business: The Visitor Experience Fund application is out – we had 2 information sessions, and applications are due back to the office by November 19th. Valerie noted that we were pleased with the attendance and anticipated some quality applications that were in line with our program vision. There were a couple of questions brought up during these sessions. Valerie asked the board if their vision was different than our answers. Specifically, the concept of economic accessibility (inability to afford admissions) could be under the accessibility umbrella description that we had. No board members spoke to changing the program at this point and were in favor of moving forward with the materials and making adjustments after our year of experience with the fund.

New Business: David Hutchings was excused early from the meeting so Bob Bennett updated the board on Sonnenberg and the changes that will be happening due to Sonnenberg being deeded adjoining property. They will begin by changing the new entrance area and getting the area ready to move the offices. Additional changes will include a new parking lot.

Adjourn: Sheryl Mordini made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Meg Joseph seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, December 11th, 8:00 am at the Ontario County Municipal Building 2nd floor
Priority Business: Visitor Experience Fund application approval; Occupancy Tax Recommendations; Audit

FLVC Holiday Party anticipated date is December 19th at the office.