

**STEBEN COUNTY AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRY AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**

*Wednesday, September 6, 2023*

*10:35 a.m.*

*Legislative Chambers, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Annex Building  
Bath, New York*

**\*\*MINUTES\*\***

**COMMITTEE:** Aaron I. Mullen, Chair                      Hilda T. Lando, Vice Chair                      Carol A. Ferratella  
Paul E. Van Caesele

**STAFF:** Jack K. Wheeler                                      Christopher Brewer                                      Jennifer Prossick  
Marie Myers Shearing

**LEGISLATORS:** Scott J. Van Etten                                      Kelly H. Fitzpatrick                                      Wendy Lozo  
John V. Malter    Nicholas D. Pelham                                      Frederick G. Potter  
Gary D. Swackhamer

**ABSENT:** James Kuhl

**OTHERS:** Kevin Peterson, Executive Director, Steuben County Conference & Visitors' Bureau  
Laury Ellen Ward, President, Finger Lakes Wine Country  
Meghan Lawton, President, Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance  
Mary Perham  
Joe Tobia

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Mullen called the meeting to order at 10:35 a.m.

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOTION: APPROVING THE MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 2, 2023, MEETING MADE BY MRS. LANDO. SECONDED BY MRS. FERRATELLA. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 4-0.**

**III. DEPARTMENT REQUESTS**

A. Planning

1. **Department Update** – Ms. Myers Shearing provided a quick review of activities including CDBG Grant work, transportation and the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Van Etten asked will there be an official review of the Comprehensive Plan findings? Ms. Myers Shearing replied yes and then the Legislature will adopt the enactment.

2. **Staffing** – Mr. Wheeler stated that Ms. Myers Shearing had posted the Senior Planner position, however, the candidate pool was not as deep as they had hoped. They will advertise this position again, along with a Planner. Ms. Myers Shearing will interview applicants for both positions and if there is a viable candidate for Planner, she will be coming to committee to request a downgrade of the Senior Planner position.

Ms. Fitzpatrick asked since we are investing money for a contract with a headhunter for nurses, is that worth doing for the Senior Planner position? Mr. Wheeler stated we have talked about that. There are some headhunters that will recruit for any title, but many are field specific. We could contract with GovHR and they are paid 30 percent of the salary. We are trying everything before we would look at that. More and more communities are looking at headhunter services. It is not necessary at this time, but is something we will keep in mind.

B. County Manager

1. **Three Rivers Request** – Mr. Wheeler stated last week he received an email from Three Rivers regarding the remaining County allocation of \$58,000 for workforce investment from 2018. Three Rivers has applied for grant for a Workforce Navigator and they would like to get that project rolling and would like to use the remaining County funds for that. The individual they hire will have interactions with CSS Workforce NY and will help to leverage State and Federal training dollars. Their focus will be on 18-24 year olds to help them find job opportunities. Three Rivers is looking for authorization to utilize the remaining county funds for this purpose and are also making the same request of Chemung and Schuylers.

Mrs. Lando commented isn't this what Fred Arcurie was supposed to do? Mr. Wheeler replied that position did do some targeted things with Fort Drum. This new position will be working directly with job candidates. Mr. Van Etten asked is this County funding that is only going to be used once? If Chemung and Schuylers are not willing to participate, then we should not do it either. Mr. Wheeler stated the initial feedback from Chemung and Schuylers seems positive.

Mr. Malter asked what was the original allocation that we made to Three Rivers? Mr. Wheeler replied it was between \$75,000 - \$85,000. They only spent a portion of that funding as Mr. Arcurie went to another organization.

Ms. Fitzpatrick asked is there a specific plan for Three Rivers to use that money? The colleges are really focused on creating employees for Corning, Inc. and not for anyone else. I would like to see a more specific job description and give them guidelines to meet to try to engage more people. Mr. Van Etten asked what is their goal; to get young people into the workforce or to get a workforce resource of young people? Mr. Wheeler replied communication with CSS Workforce is important. They are focused on skill training and there is a large focus on smaller businesses and individual job applicants.

**MOTION: AUTHORIZING THREE RIVERS TO UTILIZE THE COUNTY'S REMAINING WORKFORCE ALLOCATION OF \$58,000 TO BE USED TOWARD THE NEW WORKFORCE NAVIGATOR POSITION, CONTINGENT UPON CHEMUNG AND SCHUYLER COUNTIES AUTHORIZING THE SAME USE OF THEIR REMAINING ALLOCATION MADE BY MRS. LANDO. SECONDED BY MRS. FERRATELLA. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 4-0.**

V. OTHER BUSINESS

A. *Cornell Cooperative Extension* – Mr. Malter stated we had previously asked what amount Ms. McKinley was using for the space costs when applying for grants and that is \$41,976. Does that include utilities, insurance, etc.? Mr. Wheeler replied in working with Mr. Johnson to obtain the average amount, that is the triple net and factors all of that in.

VI. OUTSIDE AGENCIES

A. Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance

1. **2024 budget Presentation** - Ms. Lawton stated in March 2023, she became the President of the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance. We are the oldest regional destination marketing agency in the United States and we will be switching our focus to lean more into destination marketing. We are right on the cusp of being named a National Heritage Area Designation. The feasibility study has been approved by the U.S. Department of the Interior and received yes votes on all ten areas. Senator Gillibrand will be introducing a bill to officially name the Finger Lakes as a National Heritage Area. She stated this has been a long process and was started back in 2014.

Ms. Lawton stated she will also be focusing on rebranding and creating a consumer brand. We have hired a company to research our visitors to develop a consumer brand. My goal is to create cohesiveness across all fourteen counties. She stated our website had 2.2 million visits last year and so far this year we have had 1.5 million visits. We will be looking to update the website as it is vastly outdated and the last update was 2011. Additionally, we will be redoing our travel guide to turn it into an actual experiential travel guide, rather than a directory. This new guide will showcase the entire region.

Ms. Lawton stated for 2024 she is requesting \$29,500 which is the same as 2023. With our new initiatives, we will be doing things in a different way to maximize our dollars and attract new tourists. By January 1, 2024, we hope to be a National Heritage Area and at that time we will be the management partner. As part of that, we will be looking to create a visitors center and a one-stop destination. There will be federal funds available and that will give us the ability to hire two full-time staff who will work under the umbrella of the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance, but their focus will be on the National Heritage Area piece.

Mr. Van Etten asked where will the new visitor center be located? Ms. Lawton replied the new visitor center has to be located in Yates County. We are looking at a couple of options; one is across from The Windmill and the other option is to put it on the same campus as the Finger Lakes Museum located in Branchport.

Ms. Lawton stated the Finger Lakes consumer brand will be the heart and soul of everything we do moving forward. We will be rebranding all of our materials, as well as our website, and there will be more of a regional focus. We will be printing 100,000 travel guides and will be happy to continue to feature Steuben County on the back as we have been doing. She stated on BookDirect.com, every accommodation for all of the fourteen counties is listed. We had 2,931 direct referrals through June 30, 2023. We have hired a content creator for our social media marketing initiative and will be launching our digital brochures. Three of those digital brochures will be coming out by the end of this year; “Winter”, “Sustainable Tourism” and “Outdoor activities”. Ms. Lawton stated with regard to international tourism, they are a founding partner of Wine, Waters & Wonder. We have a \$250,000 grant that we will be partnering on, and our focus for next year will be to bring in tourists from England and Ireland.

**B. Finger Lakes Wine Country**

1. **2024 Budget Presentation** – Ms. Ward stated Finger Lakes Wine Country is the regional branding organization for the five-county area of Chemung, Schuyler, Steuben, Tioga and Yates counties, as well as the Cayuga, Seneca and Keuka Lake wine trails. We are often asked what the difference between the agencies is and she likens it to a funnel, and together we all position the Finger Lakes as the place to be. We are marketing to, and reaching, those aspirational visitors that have the propensity to come visit. Ms. Ward requested \$105,000, which remains flat from 2023. She reviewed her presentation outlining revenue sources, investments and web tracking.

**C. Steuben County Conference & Visitors’ Bureau**

1. **2024 Budget Request** – Mr. Peterson requested \$845,000 in room tax dollars for 2024. This request reflects a 5 percent operating cost increase plus funds to maintain public relations and research investments. He noted his request is based upon the estimated 2024 room tax collection amount which is based on 2023 trend data and occupancy estimates. In 2023 we were allocated \$780,000 in room tax and we leveraged our regional allocations through NYS Matching Funds Grant Program and received the maximum award of \$81,307.

Mr. Peterson noted that 2022 ended very strong and we saw a 13.5 percent increase in website sessions, 134 percent increase in social media reach, 24 percent increase in occupancy and \$33.9 million in revenue. In 2023 we saw a 72 percent increase in website sessions, a social media reach of 6.6 million to-date, and an increase of 1.4 percent in room occupancy. Occupancy revenue was up 2.8 percent year-to-date at \$19.4 million. Short-term rental occupancy revenue is \$15.4 million to-date. We have also seen a huge growth in shared rental properties from 200 to 650 properties.

Mr. Peterson stated that during 2022-2023, they assisted with the Wineglass Marathon, Glassfest and the Keuka Gravel Classic. They also led a collaborative effort branded as Finger Lakes Farm Country with five counties to promote agritourism, which has experienced successes through longer stays, increased visitation and expenditures. They also led efforts as part of a six-county core leadership team in the development of the Southern Tier Water Trail Project, which received a \$250,000 New York State EDA Tourism Partner Sub-Awards Grant for branding and marketing. Additionally, they submitted and won the 2024 conference bid for the International Food, Wine and Travel Writers Conference to be held in Corning.

Mr. Peterson stated with the expected return to full capacity of the room supply, with the Radisson Hotel currently under renovations to become the Double Tree by Hilton and the new Hampton Inn in Hornell, and the continued increase in Steuben County as a travel destination, he believes the County has the potential to experience an estimated 5 percent increase or \$1,424,000 in room tax revenue in 2024. We will continue our strong marketing and advertising campaigns to reach future key visitor markets; we will launch our new website in January 2024, we will continue to build on our public relations efforts and we will collaborate on regional campaigns and product development to position Steuben County as a top destination within the Finger Lakes.

2. **2024 Digital Kiosk Special Project Funding Request** – Mr. Peterson requested a \$75,000 appropriation from the 2024 room tax reserve to purchase and install six (6) digital kiosks throughout Steuben County. These kiosks would be maintained and managed by the Conference & Visitors’ Bureau and will provide real time information and content to users. We are proposing that these kiosks be located at the Corning Chamber of Commerce, Hammondsport Chamber of Commerce, the Corning Museum of Glass, the Glenn H. Curtiss Museum, a site to be determined in the City of Hornell and one other additional site to be determined. Of the six kiosks, four will be placed inside and the other two will be exterior kiosks that will have graffiti protection. Mr. Peterson stated Metroclick is the vendor that our Visit Widget software works with and would provide these kiosks. The cost will be \$12,000 per kiosk for a total project cost of \$75,000. Mr. Malter asked is that cost for one year? Mr. Peterson replied that cost will be for three years. There will also be a yearly maintenance fee that we will be absorbed in our budget.

Mrs. Lando commented this is something that has been talked about for the last ten years. Mr. Peterson commented these have become more affordable. By using these, we could see a reduction in our print and distribution costs. This would complement our print pieces and visitors could take those printed materials with them.

3. **Destination Development Grant Program** – Mrs. Lando asked for an update on this program which is based on occupancy tax collections? Mr. Peterson replied they are in the process of forming the committee. Application for this grant funding will be submitted to the grant committee, go to the Conference & Visitors’ Bureau and then be brought to the AIP Committee for approval. We are looking for one more committee member and we plan to have the program in place this fall. Mr. Van Caesele asked how often will your committee meet? Mr. Peterson replied we have talked about having quarterly meetings, although there may be additional meetings. Mr. Van Caesele stated he wouldn’t mind entertaining the idea of joining that committee and he will contact Mr. Peterson.

Ms. Fitzpatrick asked with regard to the kiosks, what factors will you use for determining the location for the final kiosk? Mr. Peterson replied we would ideally like to place it in a location where people are going to frequently and a location where there is a willingness to host the kiosk. If we cannot find a suitable location, we could adjust the contract with the vendor if necessary. Mr. Van Etten stated I think it is a good idea to try this with the technology that is now available.

**MOTION: TO ADJOURN REGULAR SESSION AND RECONVENE IN EXECUTIVE SESSION PURSUANT TO PUBLIC OFFICERS’ LAW, ARTICLE 7§ 105.1.F. THE MEDICAL, FINANCIAL, CREDIT OR EMPLOYMENT HISTORY OF A PARTICULAR PERSON OR CORPORATION, OR MATTERS LEADING TO THE APPOINTMENT, EMPLOYMENT, PROMOTION, DEMOTION, DISCIPLINE, SUSPENSION, DISMISSAL OR REMOVAL OF A PARTICULAR PERSON OR CORPORATION MADE BY MRS. LANDO. SECONDED BY MR. VAN CAESELEE. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 4-0.**

**MOTION: TO ADJOURN EXECUTIVE SESSION AND RECONVENE IN REGULAR SESSION MADE BY MR. VAN CAESELEE. SECONDED BY MRS. LANDO. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 4-0.**

**MOTION: TO ADJOURN MADE BY MRS. LANDO. SECONDED BY MR. VAN CAESEELE. ALL BEING IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIES 4-0.**

Respectfully Submitted by

Amanda L. Chapman  
Deputy Clerk  
Steuben County Legislature

**\*\*NEXT MEETING SCHEDULED FOR\*\***

**Wednesday, October 4, 2023**

**9:30 a.m.**

**Please send agenda items to the Clerk of the Legislature's Office**

**NO LATER THAN NOON**

**Wednesday, September 27, 2023**