

Cayuga County Convention & Visitors Bureau
Board of Directors Annual Meeting Minutes
June 23, 2025, Via Zoom – Special session Re: Visit Syracuse merger proposal

Present: Erin Katzker, Jacob Hamilton, Amber Gansert-Dagnesi, Kari Terwilliger, Laura Hahn, Doug Dello Stritto, Kate Pelkey, Meg Goloub, Ahna Wilson, AnnaMarie Vukmanovic, Stephen Selvek, Meg Goloub, Diana Plue.

Arrived Late: Kristen Lunkenheimer-Slocum

Staff: Karen Kuhl

Absent: Brian DiBernardo, Ryan Marx, Kelly King, Jackie Schnurr

Excused: Mike Riley, Aileen McNabb-Coleman, Kate Grindstaff, Ahna Wilson

Presiding Officer: E. Katzker

Secretary: K. Lunkenheimer-Slocum

The meeting was called to order at 12:08 by E. Katzker

The special meeting was called to order to discuss a letter from Visit Syracuse sent to various board members expressing an interest in merging Visit Syracuse with Tour Cayuga. The letter from Visit Syracuse is below the meeting minutes.

E Katzker opened the meeting to discuss the merger proposal.

- A. Gansert-Dagnesi stated that she's heard from acquaintances that Visit Syracuse that Cayuga County has more and stronger attractions than Syracuse and this might be one of the reasons they are proposing a merger.
- J. Hamilton asked how Visit Syracuse's office is funded. K. Kuhl stated that they are mostly funded by the county occupancy tax, but they do have other funding sources. They are also the lead in New York State lobbying for legislature to permit Tourism Improvement Districts (TID).
- E. Katzker asked K. Kuhl if Visit Syracuse participated in regional programing. K. Kuhl stated that although they are part of the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council, they participated in very few, if any regional programs. They pulled out of Brave Women FLX in 2024. K. Kuhl also stated that even as part of the Central Regional Economic Development region they don't normally work as a team in tourism promotional initiatives.
- J. Hamilton asked if Visit Syracuse was the official Tourism Promotion Agent for all of Onondaga or just Syracuse. K. Kuhl clarified that they represent all of Onondaga County.
- S. Selvek and seconded by D. Dello Stritto stated that operationally a merger isn't possible as it is a county local law that establishes the Cayuga County Tourism Office.

J. Hamilton made a motion seconded by A. Gansert-Dagnesi to thank Visit Syracuse for their interest, but the CCCVB (Tour Cayuga) board of directors isn't interested in a merger. All were in favor, and the motion was approved.

The letter will be signed by the chair of the board.

K. Grindstaff and M. Riley voted in opposition of a merger via email as they couldn't join the meeting.

Approved by E. Katzker

Recorded by K. Kuhl



VISIT SYRACUSE

June 11, 2025

Michael Riley

Old Mentz Heritage Center

97 South Main Street, Port Byron, NY

Dear Mr. Michael Riley

I write to you today not just with a proposal, but with a **vision**—a bold and strategic opportunity to redefine how we market our region to the world.

With the current vacancy in the Executive Director position at Cayuga County Tourism, we believe now is the perfect time to explore a forward-thinking **merger between Cayuga County Tourism and Visit Syracuse**. Our organizations already share more than just a border—we are partners in promoting one of the most culturally rich and naturally beautiful regions in New York State, nestled in the Finger Lakes tourism district. From the legacy of the Women's Rights Movement to powerful African American history, from lakefront charm to vibrant urban attractions, our stories are intertwined. It's time our strategies were too.

A Bold, Regional Model

At Visit Syracuse, we believe in being **trendsetters, not followers**. We've built our success by embracing innovation, capturing momentum, and making bold moves when opportunity calls. This is one of those moments.

A unified regional marketing model under the Visit Syracuse umbrella would retain and integrate Cayuga's current talented staff, while leveraging our deep bench of expertise, award-winning campaigns, and highly developed infrastructure. We strongly believe that no one knows Cayuga County better than those already on the ground, and we would **lean heavily on your employees for their local insight, community connections, and destination knowledge**. Their perspective will be invaluable in ensuring Cayuga's identity remains distinct and celebrated.

Doing More with More

We understand that **every dollar counts**, especially in smaller markets. A merger would stretch Cayuga's limited marketing budget significantly further by combining it with Onondaga County's resources and scale. Together, we can unlock greater impact across media buys, digital marketing, and public relations. Rather than working in parallel, we would move in sync—eliminating duplication, enhancing visibility, and building a stronger, shared tourism economy.

Your team would also benefit from the extensive training, tools, and development opportunities we provide at Visit Syracuse. We **invest heavily in our staff**—ensuring they stay ahead of tourism trends, technologies, and best practices. Those same resources would be made available to Cayuga's team, empowering them to grow and thrive.

Momentum Backed by Results

In 2024, **Onondaga County surpassed \$1.3 billion in visitor spending**, marking two consecutive years of record-breaking tourism growth. And this isn't a recent trend—**since 2018, Visit Syracuse has experienced one of the highest growth rates in the state outside of New York City**, with major gains in visitor spending, average daily hotel rates, and revenue per available room (RevPAR). These achievements underscore our commitment to tourism as an economic driver—and our ability to deliver results.

Expanding Regional Film Opportunities

Another compelling opportunity lies in **film and media production**. Through **Visit Syracuse Film**, we actively support film and television projects in Central New York, generating economic activity and exposure for our region. A merger would allow us to **expand these efforts into Cayuga County**, showcasing its incredible assets—from picturesque lakescapes to historic landmarks—to producers, directors, and location scouts. Together, we can develop a stronger, more diverse regional filming destination.

Let's Lead the Way

A Cayuga–Onondaga merger would be a true regional alliance in tourism marketing that others would look to replicate. It would make our counties a model for collaboration, innovation, and shared success.

We would welcome the opportunity to present this vision in more detail and discuss how we might chart this exciting path forward together. Please let us know a convenient time for further conversation.



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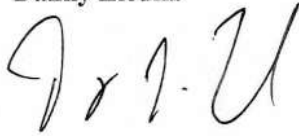


109 South Warren Street, Suite 10
Syracuse, NY 13202

Thank you for your dedication to all that makes Cayuga County exceptional. We look forward to the opportunity to build something even greater—**together**.

Warm regards,

Danny Liedka



President & CEO
Visit Syracuse



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