

Cayuga County Convention & Visitors Bureau

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

August 4, 2026

Northville Arts Center

King Ferry, NY

Present: Doug Dello Stritto, Amber Gansert-Dagnesi, Mike Riley, Jessica Schneider, Stephen Selvek, Meg Goloub, Jacob Hamilton, Kate Pelkey, Jackie Schnurr, Kate Grindstaff, Brian DiBernardo, Taryn Mullenix, Lisa Chase

Staff: Courtney Kasper, Hilary Fenner, Dawn Lubaszewski, Noah Howard, Lynne Sweet

Absent: Laura Hahn, Aileen McNabb-Coleman, Diana Plue

Excused: Kristen Lunkenheimer-Slocum, Kari Terwilliger, Ahna Wilson

Presiding Officer: Jacob Hamilton

Secretary: K. Grindstaff

The meeting was called to order at 10:18 a.m by J. Hamilton

J. Hamilton welcomed Lisa Chase as a new board member. All present introduced themselves.

I. TAP & LaLew Report

TAP & LaLew gave the Q2 report covering content creation, press trips, media outreach and key placements.

A motion to approve the TAP & LaLew report was made by J. Schnurr and seconded by A. Gansert-Dagnesi. All were in favor and the motion was approved.

II. Approval of June Minutes and July Board Packet

The June meeting minutes and July reports packet (sent digitally in lieu of no July meeting) were presented to the Board.

A motion to approve the June 2026 meeting minutes and the July 2026 reports packet was made by J. Schnurr and seconded by A. Gansert-Dagnesi. All were in favor and the motion was approved.

III. Treasurer's Report (D. Dello Stritto):

There were no surprises in the financials, no new data is available for analysis, and at this time there are no concerns.

A motion to approve the Treasurer's Report was made by M. Riley and seconded by K. Pelkey. All were in favor and the motion was approved.

IV. Committee Reports

(a) Executive (J. Hamilton):

J. Hamilton reported the discussion at the executive committee meeting that included concerns on the Q3 occupancy tax due to a state contract at a key lodging partner; occupancy tax is not collected on such contracts. Also discussed were the Harriet Tubman Byway and strategies for gaining support from the Town of Aurelius.

(b) Education (M. Riley):

M. Riley reported that the education committee discussed the Leadership Cayuga sponsorships for two selected participants, feedback on the June 17th luncheon and plans for the 2027 event, resident engagement, and the next frontline FAM tour.

(c) Advocacy (K. Grindstaff):

K. Grindstaff reported that the committee discussed the fund development incubator program, the tourism support grant funding going forward, and the timing of rolling out the grant program. The committee also discussed combining the Pride of Place campaign with Auburn's Passport to History student program and possibly expanding this program to other school districts in the county if funding allows.

C. Kasper added that the incubator program participants will be surveyed, and the feedback documented. The FDI closing ceremony will be held at the Seward House Museum event center on August 20th from 3 to 5 p.m. L. Chase will serve as the new committee chair.

(d) Planning (S. Selvek):

S. Selvek reported that the committee discussed getting an estimate for the lodging feasibility study for the 2027 budget. The Harriet Tubman Byway was also discussed, with Aurelius being the only remaining township to pass the resolution. Our PR firm, TAP was hired to specifically focus on Harriet Tubman. Our recommendation is to continue with them through 2027 but to RFP to broaden the scope to all of Cayuga County. Discussions are underway to incorporate the Harriet Tubman Byway and additional Cayuga County items with Tour Cayuga branding into the exhibits during the process of the Equal Rights Heritage Center making exhibit updates.

(e) HR (A. Gansert- Dagnesi) :

A. Gansert-Dagnesi reported that the committee discussed expanding and diversifying the board. C. Kasper added that we have an empty ex-officio seat for the Cayuga County Chamber of Commerce, noting outreach to Moravia-Locke and Fair Haven Chambers to fill this board seat. The committee also stressed the need to solicit board members from the northern region of the county and adding language on the website about board interest. J. Schneider will serve as the new committee chair.

A motion to approve the committee reports was made by J. Schnurr and seconded by K. Pelkey. All were in favor and the motion was approved.

V. Staff Reports

(a): Sales & Marketing (H. Fenner):

H. Fenner reported on the following sales activities: she met with BLK Dog regarding small/medium-sized groups and approved three new meetings/groups pages for the website. She attended TAP Dance in El Paso, including 19 25-minute appointments with TAP Tour Operators from around the country, networking events with attendees, and relationship-building with the presenter "pod," which included a representative from I Love NY; CCCVB won the "First Registrant" Award. She also participated in the Ontario Motor Coach Association onboarding call, sent the Q2 Groups Email (which achieved a 52% open rate and 3% click rate), held a phone meeting with a bus group from Canastota planning 2027 day trips to Cayuga County and sent information and links to the group guide and Sweet Treat Trail, and met with J. Schneider from the Hilton to share marketing materials for the Empire State Society of Association Executives (ESSAE). H.

Fenner reported on the following upcoming sales projects: reviewing proposed social media marketing with BLK Dog, the ESSAE review with the Hilton, finishing personalized letters to tour operators from TAP Dance, and sending a Groups Email announcing the 2027 Rev Season. H. Fenner reported on the following marketing activities: she attended meetings with BLK Dog, Travel Alliance Partnership, Dominic and Lorraine Maggio (Bus Tour), Making Memories Bus Tour, NYSTIA Membership Call, the Culturist, Zartico, Reddit Marketing, and Madden and IOA (to coordinate October press trip details), as well as ITI Digital. She also attended the Skaneateles Chamber Business After Hours, Cayuga County Chamber Business After Five, and Where Tourism Meets Community Luncheon, and tabled at the Owasco Farmer's Market three times. Additionally, she attended the TAP webinar, "Strengthening Tourism Advocacy." Advertising for the Sweet Treat Trail included WGRZ digital advertising. Two added pop-up locations were also scheduled: August 1st at Northville Arts Center from 12–3 PM, and August 14th at Owen Orchards from 3–5 PM. The Visitor's Guide is complete and now listed on the website. Print copies are being delivered throughout the county. The updated digital guide was also submitted to the Free Travel Guides website, so anyone downloading it there now receives the 2026 edition.

(b): Public Relations (N. Howard):

N. Howard provided an update on media and communications activity. Planning is underway for three upcoming FAM trips: a September group FAM tied to International Underground Railroad Month, bringing journalists and writers to Cayuga County to explore Harriet Tubman's legacy and the region's Underground Railroad history; an early-stage group FAM with the International Food and Wine Travel Writers Association (IFWTWA) showcasing Cayuga County wineries and culinary experiences in light of the Finger Lakes' Wine Enthusiast "American Wine Region of the Year" designation; and an individual hosted visit with travel influencer Pustika Samaddar, scheduled October 15–18, themed around "Markets and Main Streets" to generate lifestyle content for Philadelphia, New Jersey, and New York audiences. On the media relations front, N. Howard negotiated budgets and travel arrangements for content creators on the Underground Railroad FAM, distributed proactive pitches on topics including the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway, America 250, and the Larry Poncho Brown "Harriet: A Taste of Freedom" exhibit, and began coordinating a visit for freelance writer Jordan Simon. On other projects, N. Howard met with author and filmmaker Dr. Sistrunk Robinson to discuss her planned November visit for Journey to Freedom, a documentary on Harriet Tubman and other Underground Railroad freedom seekers, with the Tourism Office to assist with local coordination and itinerary support for her production team of approximately 20 guests. Placements through the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council include: Conde Nast Traveler "The Best Way to Explore the Finger Lakes Region Might Just Be by Canoe" – Betsy Andrews 40-mile paddle on the New York State Canalway Water Trail; Travel + Leisure, "21 Best Places to Visit in Upstate New York, From Scenic Waterfalls to Charming Small Towns"; Travel + Leisure "The Most Beautiful Place in Every State—From Arizona's Grand Canyon to Maine's Acadia National Park" — Finger Lakes named for New York

(c): Executive Director (C. Kasper):

C. Kasper reported Tour Cayuga won a NYSTIA award for "Where You Go Matters. Make It Count." Excellence in Tourism Marketing Campaigns, Projects & Programs: Creative for Tourism Marketing. C. Kasper invited all board members to join in the awards dinner on September 17th, 2026. C. Kasper will be attending the NYSTIA annual

meeting and will give a presentation on the marketing campaign on behalf of the office. C. Kasper served on a panel for the statewide I Love New York Tourism Promotion Agency Digital Communications meeting on Targeting Diverse Audiences with a focus on honoring Harriet Tubman's legacy and sharing the steps made to achieve the award-winning "Where You Go Matters" campaign. Attended the Destinations International Annual Convention in Portland, OR with a professional development track for leaders of destination organizations gaining insight into building community engagement and partnering with economic development agencies. Our Zartico representative shared unique data about short-term rentals in Cayuga County. We are seeing planning with interest to travel with a 90-day booking, compared to other destinations with a shorter booking time frame. And the average stay is four days. The trend is heavily leaning toward outdoor tourism outpacing food and beverage. Occupancy tax is tracking a bit better than last year; however, we are still spending conservatively until we have a better picture of summer occupancy. On June 13, 2026, Governor Kathy Hochul signed the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway into law at the Buffalo Juneteenth Parade. The legislation was passed unanimously by both chambers of the New York State Legislature. The byway is now official in New York State. Phase two for Cayuga County requires a resolution from the town of Aurelius by August 17th with the next town board meeting on August 14th to place the resolution on the agenda for the new proposed West Genesee Street Road route instead of Route 20. Ally Spongr DeGon, the Executive Director of the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway, and other byway team members will be in Cayuga County to help with outreach, along with the Tour Cayuga staff to garner support. We are asking for letters of support from the board to show support. C. Kasper distributed letters of support for the Aurelius meeting and were signed by all present. C. Kasper announced that Ventris C. Gibson was appointed the new President and CEO of the Harriet Tubman Home Inc. She is the former director of the United States Mint under President Biden.

A motion was made to approve the staff reports by D. Dello Stritto and seconded by M. Riley. All were in favor and the motion was approved.

VI. Unfinished Business (J. Hamilton)
None

VII. Announcements:

- M. Goloub: Gave a brief history of Northville Arts Center
- A. Gansert-Dagnesi: Gave details of upcoming charcuterie classes: Quarry Ridge on August 8 from 1pm – 4pm. There is a MacKenzie-Childs Warehouse sale August 14-16th,
- J. Hamilton: The Bathtub Races are this upcoming Saturday, August 8th at Fillmore Glen from 10am-4pm. It will be \$8 to park and \$1 to enter. Tour Cayuga will also be tabling at this event. The Fillmore Auto Show will take place on Labor Day weekend at Fillmore Glen State Park. J. Hamilton will have a book club on the second Tuesday of the month; 6:30pm – 8pm. There is no required reading.
- K. Grindstaff: Reported on Summer Homecoming this upcoming weekend, August 7-9. The weekend starts off with First Friday
On Saturday The Market will feature Bob Piorun 9:30-12:30am, Sydney Irving solo 1pm-3:30pm, Jeff the Magic Man, Princess 'from Royal Promise Productions 11am-4pm, face painting with Riley, and Summer Rec Fun Zones from 10am-1pm. Willard Chappel will have "Afternoon at Tiffanys" Open House & Grand Reopening from

11am-4pm and the Cayuga Museum of History and Art and Schweinfurth Art Center will have “A Taste of Freedom” exhibition celebrating Harriet Tubman and the Sa:gwáyo’ Gayogohó:nq’ / Cayuga People, We Returned exhibition. Live music with the Purple Lancers (12 PM to 1 PM) A free Shuttle will run from each location from 10am-4pm. And on Sunday The Great Race will take place at Emerson Park.

- T. Mullinex: Reported on the Chambers’ Cocktails and Connections on Cayuga at the Inns of Aurora on Wednesday August 5th from 5pm – 8pm.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 11:50am by S. Selvek and seconded by A. Gansert-Dagnesi. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned.

Approved by: Kate Grindstaff

Recorded by Lynne Sweet