

Cayuga County Convention & Visitors Bureau
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Sept 1, 2026
Via Zoom

Present: Jacob Hamilton, Kari Terwilliger, Doug Dello Stritto, Amber Gansert-Dagnesi, Mike Riley, Jessica Schneider, Stephen Selvek, Meg Goloub, Kate Pelkey, Kate Grindstaff, Brian DiBernardo, Lisa Chase, Ahna Wilson

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

Absent: Aileen McNabb-Coleman, Diana Plue, Taryn Mullenix

Excused: Jackie Schnurr

Presiding Officer: Jacob Hamilton

Secretary: Kate Grindstaff

The meeting was called to order at 8:33 a.m. by J. Hamilton

I. Approval of August Minutes

The August meeting minutes were presented to the Board.

A motion to approve the August 2026 meeting minutes was made by D. Dello Stritto and seconded by A. Gansert- Dagnesi. All were in favor and the motion was approved.

II. Treasurer's Report (D. Dello Stritto)

D. Dello Stritto reported that all financial reports are aligned with expectations. Courtney will provide more detail on our finances in her report. Additionally, we are beginning the budget process with the county.

A motion to approve the Treasurer's Report was made by K. Terwilliger and seconded by A. Gansert-Dagnesi. All were in favor and the motion was approved.

III. Committee Reports

None of the committees met in August, no reports were given.

IV. Staff Reports

(a): Public Relations (N. Howard)

N. Howard reported on several upcoming group FAM trips. He is especially excited about the Wine Region of the Year FAM beginning September 21, which will bring four members of the wine press to Cayuga County through IFWTWA (International Food, Wine & Travel Writers Association), of which the organization is a member. He has been coordinating with Susan Lanier-Graham of IFWTWA to arrange the visiting group. She has also been in direct contact with the journalists, who are enthusiastic about the trip, and noted that hosting media guests will be her primary focus over the next month.

N. Howard then provided updates on additional FAM trips coordinated through the Finger Lakes Regional Tourism Council (FLRTC) and I Love New York, including two group FAMs and an individual FAM with a foreign press writer from Germany. Several of these groups, including the Wine FAM, will be staying at the Inns of Aurora. Noah noted ongoing coordination with FLRTC and Tipping Point Media to improve these experiences and shared that content submitted by him and Hilary was recently highlighted as a model example during a regional media call with other Finger Lakes. Noah also confirmed that Ventris Gibson, former U.S. Mint Director under President Biden, is now Executive Director of the Harriet Tubman Home, and is coordinating with the office on Underground Railroad Month events, including hosting the group FAM.

(b): Marketing & Executive Director (C. Kasper):

C. Kasper reported in Hilary's absence, including the Reddit marketing campaign, which is tracking above the goals and metrics originally set. She noted that advertising on platforms like Reddit reflects a broader trend discussed at the Destinations International Conference, where travelers increasingly seek peer recommendations rather than relying solely on brand websites. C. Kasper asked D. Lubaszewski for an update on the Sweet Treat Trail, reporting approximately 140 entries this year — an increase over recent years — along with strong social media and website engagement. The giveaway drawing will take place next week. D. Lubaszewski also noted that America 250 coloring books distributed through the region were very well received and are now nearly out of stock, and that the new visitor guides have become one of the top 10 most-visited pages on the website. She added that the partners page on the website has been redesigned for easier navigation and welcomed feedback for further improvements. A future addition will include a funding-resources page for partners. C. Kasper reported that the final reimbursement for the Market NY grant supporting the Go Beyond campaign was received, closing out the \$50,000 grant for the fiscal year. She also reviewed Q3 occupancy tax collections, noting the office is in a good financial position, though spending will remain conservative heading into the next budget cycle, particularly with county budget discussions beginning soon. C. Kasper provided an extensive update on the Harriet Tubman Byway route approval process. Following public meetings, the Town of Aurelius proposed an alternate route, requiring additional approval from the Towns of Springport and Fleming, both of which had previously declined in 2025. Following renewed outreach — including coordination between Aurelius officials and the two towns' supervisors — both towns indicated no anticipated issues with approval. Public hearings are scheduled for September 14, and the office is coordinating advocacy efforts, including letters of support and speakers, with Ventris Gibson also planning to speak given the Harriet Tubman Home's ties to the Town of Fleming. Courtney noted that Albany County approval remains outstanding, and that the corridor management plan was submitted to DOT by the end of August; routes approved by September 14 will be included in Phase Two, while others will move to Phase Three. The Town of Aurelius held a special early-morning session and passed the route unanimously, following strong community turnout and testimony from local partners, including representatives from Izzo's White Barn Winery, Morgan's Half Acre, Reese's Dairy Bar, and County Historian Ruth Bradley. A Byway welcome/soft-launch party will be held Thursday, September 10, from 6–8 p.m. at Melody's, featuring food, drinks, music, and Byway merchandise, with a larger official kickoff planned for next year. The board also reviewed the newly approved official Byway signage and logo, designed by the Descendants Council. C. Kasper reviewed recent Zartico data, noting a rising trend in outdoor recreation activity, potentially prompting a reactivation of the Go Beyond campaign promoting parks and trails this fall. In response to a board question about correlating

marketing campaigns with visitation data, C. Kasper explained that Zartico data is based on a limited sample size (credit card and geolocation data) and should be viewed as a general trend indicator rather than an exact visitation count. She noted that this data is useful for identifying visitor movement patterns and building itineraries and regional marketing partnerships. Courtney asked K. Grindstaff to report on the successful closeout of the incubator program, including a graduation event featuring a presentation from Charlene Tarver. While turnout for the awards was lower than expected, feedback was positive. K. Grindstaff noted that partner organizations such as Catalyst Cayuga and possibly the Chamber may take over aspects of this programming going forward, while the tourism office will continue supporting nonprofits through its grant program and advocacy committee. Participant feedback is being collected and will be reviewed at the next advocacy committee meeting, along with a final written report from Charlene.

A motion to approve the staff reports was made by K. Terwilliger and seconded by K. Grindstaff. All were in favor and the motion was approved.

V. Unfinished Business (J. Hamilton)

None

VI. Announcements

- **M. Riley:** suggested offering a class for local historic societies, groups, and organizations on social media use — specifically, which platforms are most effective to target. A general familiarization session covering best practices and target audiences was proposed as potentially helpful.
- **J. Hamilton:** announced that the Fillmore Auto Show will take place this coming Sunday at Fillmore Glen, for any members interested in attending.
- **A. Gansert -Dagnesi:** reported having two classes coming up this month and a few more in October, including a charcuterie class in the "Grace's in the Country" series, an autumn class benefiting the Skaneateles Historical Society and another autumn class. In October and November, she will also be teaching charcuterie classes again at MacKenzie-Childs. She also noted that Quarry Ridge may be of interest for tourism purposes, as they are seeing increasing numbers of out-of-state and New York City destination weddings. Quarry Ridge is planning to build a permanent outdoor tent and has opened a café as part of an effort to attract more destination events. This growth is expected to help drive visitor stays in Auburn and Aurora. Quarry Ridge is also working to get their wines placed in more local restaurants, supporting the broader "buy local" effort.
- **C. Kasper:** responded that this is great news, noting that funding had previously been directed toward a luxury-focused regional marketing campaign in partnership with Ontario County, which performed well within the region. She added that she and Hilary had discussed making future luxury campaigns more wedding-focused, and that this update supports that direction.
- **K. Grindstaff:** reported that on September 12, Equal Rights Heritage Center will host an Underground Railroad Today Fest., in partnership with Frontenac Historical Society and the National Park Service. The event will be a cultural heritage celebration exploring the history of local community support through the lens of the Underground Railroad and will be free and open to the public. The festival will

feature free ethnic food samples from Lavish Lounge, Taqueria Simon, and With Love and Soul Catering, along with music from Alteños del Cerro and SingTrece. There will also be presentations from various organizations on the event's theme, including Tourism and the Cayuga Scenic Byway, as well as a discussion of the Freedom 2027 initiative, and keynote speakers. The event will run from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and coincides with other events in Auburn that day, including Italian Fest at Wally's and TomatoFest later in the evening.

- **C. Kasper:** reported that despite Google Maps' recent renaming, the organization's stance — shared by others in the region — is to continue referring to it as Lake Ontario. She noted that a contact at the Bridge and Tunnel Association's international office in Jefferson County indicated that their executive director dismissed the renaming in a single news interview and does not plan to give it further attention. Additionally, Rochester has passed a resolution to continue using "Lake Ontario." In line with this regional consensus, the organization will not be rebranding any marketing materials that currently reference Lake Ontario. C. Kasper noted that the topic will likely come up at next month's Lake Ontario Sport Fishing Council call but confirmed that no name changes are planned for any regional or marketing efforts going forward.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 9:20 a.m. by M. Riley and seconded by L. Chase. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned.

Approved by: Kate Grindstaff

Recorded by: Lynne Sweet