

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – MARCH 14, 2016

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

PRESENT: Fedler, Idleman, Shay, Haff, Armstrong, Moore, Skellie

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

ABSENT: None

SUPERVISORS: Henke, Hicks, Shaw, O'Brien, Campbell, Hogan

Debra Prehoda, Clerk of the Board

Al Nolette, Treasurer

Roger Wickes, County Attorney

Chris DeBolt, County Administrator

Laura Oswald, Economic Dev. Director

Public & Media

AGENDA AS PRESENTED IN COMMITTEE NOTICE:

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Roundtable Discussion on Tourism
- 3) Other Business
- 4) Adjournment

Chairwoman Fedler called the meeting to order at 1:00 P.M.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON TOURISM – Chairwoman Fedler stated several broad questions have been developed for discussion. Looking for open opinions as the committee moves through the process of deciding what the County is going to do regarding tourism. The panel participants included: Mary Jean Packer – works with Maple Producers and promotes Fiber Tour/Festivals, Janet Kennedy – Director Lakes to Locks Passage, Marge Mohn – Trustee Village of Whitehall and past Tourism Director, Serena Kovalosky – Vagabond creative projects that support the arts and Open Studios of Washington County arts tour, Bob Dillon, Deputy Town Supervisor of the Town of Hartford and founder of Adirondack Strategic Marketing, Chic Wilson – owner/operator of Willard Mountain, Tom Lloyd – owner of Adirondack Studios and Kathy Bain – entertainer and involved in tourism in the 90's. The panel discussed the attached list of questions.

WHY IS TOURISM IMPORTANT?

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| Mary Jean Packer | New net dollars. Tourism brings people to our community. |
| Janet Kennedy | Working on projects to stimulate tourism and also engage the community. |
| Marge Mohn | Tourism is an industry and that is why it is important to Washington County and it should be treated as an industry. |
| Serena Kovalosky | Tourism is basically economics/commerce. Businesses rely on it and the only way to make money is to get people in from outside region. Economic survival. |
| Bob Dillon | Best way to introduce people to our county. |
| Chic Wilson | Tourism is a chance to explain what you are looking at for a county; drawing people in for different reasons, economic value. Primarily having a message and getting it out but first defining what you are. |
| Tom Lloyd | Tourism is what brought him here to the area in the early 60's. Wanting to be here is a big part of it. He moved his business here and began to realize what was here. Involved in the creative economy studies for the region and Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce board member. Agri-tourism is a hot button issue and if the communities could come together possibly find a pathway to a very successful tourism effort. |

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| Kathy Bain | Tourism is many dollars and proud that Washington County has survived all titles it has been given over the years; limited by titles. She would like to see a redefinition of Washington County. |
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WHAT SHOULD THE COUNTY SUPPORT?

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| Kathy Bain | Support getting local people involved; find volunteers. She used the Boy Scouts to get data. |
| Tom Lloyd | Identified 30,000 jobs in the creative economy regional study and involved in workforce development to increase that number. He would support a program to map our assets. |
| Chic Wilson | He does not know what Washington County is and would like a clear well defined message of what Washington County is; clear well defined message. |
| Bob Dillon | Wealth of small businesses and artist but no coordination. The County should support a complete in depth analysis of the assets in the County and how we can bring them all together. Need centralized data collection and from there build a plan. Never really had a true vision and a detailed plan. |
| Serena Kovalosky | Not one asset to point at to say this is what we are. People come here because Washington County is beautiful. People love that ride in the country but if you don't know that the studios are there, need a list of what is available. |
| Marge Mohn | Washington County is very diverse. Cannot focus on one thing. Needs to be worked on and promoted well but most important is getting people to cooperate and work together. People still need brochures. She mentioned the County has the canal, a major waterway. Need a presence at tourism related state meetings. She stated you need partnerships, you cannot do it yourself. |
| Janet Kennedy | Authenticity of reality that Washington County has that she loves. She stated we cannot follow the same tourism model as the surrounding area. Need to think outside the box. Great assets to build on are farm products, arts/culture and recreation. Create a product/experience that can be marketed to small group tourism; like bike, motorcycle, classic car rides/tours. |
| Mary Jean Packer | Central idea is how to collect and brand the assets in a way that will reach the audience. The County should develop a brand – what is the Washington County experience. There is an amazing collection of assets in the County and then link them to the markets you are trying to attract and then promote them. |

HOW DO WE MEASURE THE VALUE OF TOURISM?

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| Janet Kennedy | Promote verses protect paradox when dealing with community life. Benefit in expression of pride and community engagement. Concern with multipliers used to measure monetary value of tourism. |
| Mary Jean Packer | Important to have a sense of the economic impact. Measure the investment by the businesses and community. The assets can provide for a higher quality of life for the residents but also find a way to measure the economic impact. |

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| Kathy Bain | What do people take home for their experience in the County? Stop thinking of tourism in dollars and focus more on value that it is not all monetary and sell that. |
| Tom Lloyd | Best non-monitory value you can place on tourism would be a measurement of how fast your kids run away after they finish school. |
| Chic Wilson | No sales tax is collected on lift tickets but it is collected on merchandise and food. So as far as a ski area goes, you cannot look at just sales tax. Suggested taking tourism businesses and cut the amount of taxes they pay in half gives you an evaluation of the tourism. |
| Bob Dillon | Goals should be measurable; number of bike riders, people at the fair, cheese/fiber tours and dollars spent. He stated this is an industry and an economic development arm. We offer a very authentic experience and have a lot of opportunities. Need to start focusing and gathering data. Vision, goals, strategies and then tactical. |
| Serena Kovalosky | Museums, etc. do track who comes through the doors and where they come from; businesses keep lists. The internet is at your disposal and honing in on that to get your message out to a larger area. |
| Marge Mohn | Partnering and working together. Need figures and need them for grants. |

WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS THE GREATEST ASSET IN THE COUNTY?

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| Chic Wilson | Location |
| Bob Dillon | Location and quality of life. |
| Selena Kovalosky | Location, stunning and beautiful |
| Marge Mohn | Where you live you think is your greatest asset. The journey is important. |
| Janet Kennedy | Authenticity. Your access to real people; an emotional connection. |
| Mary Jean Packer | Authenticity, partnerships and journey. |
| Kathy Bain | You cannot drive around without seeing something gorgeous and the people are our greatest asset. |
| Tom Lloyd | Water, corn and cultural heritage. |

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE/NEGATIVE IN THE COUNTY?

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| Bob Dillon | Infrastructure, not a single hotel, no first class motels or meeting spaces, road issues, broadband, and a lack of centralized vision and plan. Resistance to change. It is a digital, social media world. There is a divide between the north and south. Need to figure out how to cooperate and work together. Need to figure out how to measure especially for grants. |
| Serena Kovalosky | Scattered nature on a whole lot of levels. Find a way to get people and various assets pulled together. Take a look at everything that is here. Getting a good grip on what we have and how does everyone get promoted. |
| Marge Mohn | Uniting the County and working together. Thinks is should be part of the County not a consulting job. |
| Janet Kennedy | Lack of time, staff or volunteers. Getting businesses to take the time to complete information on website. |
| Mary Jean Packer | Need leadership, coordination and it takes time to pull together the diverse resources. The cluster of coordination, leadership and activity. |
| Kathy Bain | Look at ethnic aspect; who is here, looking at census data. |

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| Tom Lloyd | Lack of collaboration, brain drain and lack of entrepreneurial spirit in our youth. Reaching out and forming something else that is larger than the sum of the parts. |
| Chic Wilson | Being able to come up with a unified message that is four or five words long that defines what we are. |

IN A PERFECT WORLD, HOW SHOULD TOURISM MOVE FORWARD AND WHAT SHOULD IT LOOK LIKE:

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| Serena Kovalosky | Need to look beyond what has already been done. Looking outside the box at what some other people are doing mentioning Schoharie County – now have a Schoharie County Chamber of Commerce that links the commerce that works with tourism and a not-for-profit initiative called the Behold New Lebanon – developed a museum without walls; redefining rural tourism. |
| Marge Mohn | Lack of a successful information center. New York State and the surrounding counties do not take Washington County seriously for tourism. They see us as a rural county and that is it. |
| Janet Kennedy | Make sure the County knows that Lakes to Locks is a resource available. Willing to help as we move forward. |
| Mary Jean Packer | Need to explore working with other counties, look at a broader area. We don't lack assets but lack resources to get the word out and lodging. Need to partner with communities that have those resources but they don't have our authenticity. This is not a quick fix. |
| Kathy Bain | Signage and knowing where you are and what happened here. Reach out to our own people to visit different towns. |
| Tom Lloyd | Keep talking about it. This is probably a ten year program. He mentioned how his son is driving around Napa Valley and Sonoma, California looking at what they have; scenery, food, small businesses, and he stated we have it all right here. |
| Chic Wilson | He would like to see a uniform definition of what we are. Some sort of catch phrase that the County, towns and business can all stand behind and use collectively to make an impact on our tourism dollars . |
| Bob Dillon | Major branding campaign; authenticity and quality of life. Need to start at the top looking at the vision, mission, goals, strategy and then budget. Thinks this should be an independent job and need RFP for a consultant and need data. Need a foundation of information, analyze and write a plan. This takes money and time. This region in the Adirondacks is still one of the best deals in the United States; four seasons, quality of life. Just have to work together. |

QUESTIONS BY SUPERVISORS:

Mr. Campbell stated that Mary Jean Packer had a good idea of exploring regional tourism and that has been mentioned before and Tom Lloyd mentioned the sum of the parts has to be equal to more and asked Mary Jean Packer if that is where she was going with regional. Mary Jean Packer stated it is and mentioned how she has worked in rural tourism in other parts of the country and has an idea of

what things work and as a small county trying to go in on its own and reach a market and communicate in that market, it is a very expensive proposition to go it alone. We do need a branding of our assets. Joining with others to reach into markets and providing what more and more visitors want but don't give up our identity.

Janet Kennedy stated Lakes to Locks was created to address this issue of crossing borders; breaking down boundaries for tourism. People come to places not to counties. They have helped Washington County making that cross border connection. There can be a good collaboration between counties.

Marge Mohn stated collaboration has been done on a regional basis and mentioned we are part of the Capital/Saratoga region. She stated they do not take us seriously. She also mentioned partnering with Americade. She stated the biggest/main reason people visit is because they are visiting friends and family. She praised the tourism website. Build on what we have.

Mr. Henke stated there has been talk on the regionalization but then there was also talk about the north/south divide. How do we solve that divide? Marge Mohn stated unite the chambers.

Chairwoman Fedler stated there has been discussion on asset mapping and asked Janet Kennedy, Lakes to Locks Program, how do they keep their website updated. Janet Kennedy stated the business information is nearly impossible. They have the not-for-profit and public attractions and resources. The business information has to be done at the local level by the chambers is the only way to do it. It is a real challenge to have the businesses take the time to complete information. Bob Dillon stated the information has to be unified if we are going to be able to build a foundation and data base to move forward.

Mr. Haff feels data collection of our assets is very important but an absolute waste of money if it is not updated. The Tourism website is a wonderful site but the problem there is it is self-populating. One of our main assets to this county is day trippers. He mentioned how he read an article on the Virginia slogan of Virginia is for lovers; very successful branding. He feels the chambers and signage are very important. He is not interested in hiring an employee full time that will do everyone's work for them but if you have an event and want help promoting that he believes that is where the county comes in; we can help you help yourself.

Mr. Skellie stated data collection is important but how do we measure using taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. O'Brien asked how do we tap into the people coming to the lakes and people coming to ski.

Mr. Hicks offered Washington County Genuinely Authentic as a branding slogan.

Ted Berndt, public, asked why does it have to stop at the state line. Washington County has just as much in common with Bennington and Rutland Counties as it does with Saratoga County. Expand and work with those folks. Mary Jean Packer related from a prior employment of how she had difficulties with funding trying to work between states and Marge Mohn and Janet Kennedy agreed.

Mr. Armstrong stated the discussion has been good and getting the data is good but he believes we need somebody in charge of coordinating all this stuff and establish those relationships. Work with the chambers of commerce on developing new programs. He is upset we decided this year not to do

anything; would have loved to continue what we were doing until we figured things out. Kathy Bain recommended having the Supervisors fill out the questionnaire.

Ms. Idleman appreciated hearing today from people in the tourism field.

Mr. O'Brien suggested for data collection reaching out to the schools, colleges and other organizations that have interns. They could also help with populating the website.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Laura Oswald, Economic Development Coordinator, stated the County is in the process of developing an agricultural economic development plan. She stated they clearly recognize there are strong ties between agriculture and tourism so for those interested in input into this plan she has a short survey that can be completed and emailed back to her.

Chairwoman Fedler thanked all the participants for coming today and giving their time and advice. It was appreciated.

The meeting adjourned at 3:02 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Debra Prehoda, Clerk
Washington County Board of Supervisors