

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM

DATE: MARCH 26, 2010

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: OTHERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS MERLINO
KENNY
BELDEN
STRAINER
CONOVER

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:
KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR
PETER GIRARD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
TANYA BRAND, GROUP TOUR PROMOTER
PAUL DUSEK, COUNTY ATTORNEY
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

SUPERVISORS GOODSPEED
McCOY

KEVIN GERAGHTY, BUDGET OFFICER

SUPERVISORS LOEB
SOKOL
STEC
THOMAS

REPRESENTING THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION:

LEN FOSBROOK, PRESIDENT
JOHN DAVIDSON, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
MIKE BORGOS, VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
JACK BIENIEK, MEMBER OF THE BOARD
ALICE GREYER, DIRECTOR OF TOURISM, CITY OF GLENS FALLS
LUISA CRAIG-SHERMAN, WARREN COUNTY COUNCIL OF CHAMBERS
DON LEHMAN, *THE POST STAR*
TOM RANDALL, *THE ADIRONDACK JOURNAL*
CHARLENE DIRESTA, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Merlino called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 11:45 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Kate Johnson, Tourism Director, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.

Ms. Johnson stated her office currently had a vacant position of Senior Tourism Specialist due to an employee who had transferred to a position in the Treasurer's Office. She said she had begun the interview process but had decided not to fill the vacant position at this time due to the possibility of a decrease in revenues from State funding and occupancy tax collections. She noted the vacancy would result in an excess workload for the remaining employees but she felt it was necessary to attempt to proceed without the position. Mr. Merlino and Mr. Belden expressed their appreciation to Ms. Johnson for her willingness to leave the position vacant. Mr. Merlino suggested the position remain vacant for six months and the need be re-evaluated. Mr. Kenny advised the additional workload would be a burden but he believed it was possible. He added with the reduction in the I Love NY matching funds grant and a decrease in occupancy tax collections the only other choice besides a reduction in work force was to reduce

the amount expended on promotion.

Ms. Johnson apprised that Louis Tessier, former Chairman of the Tourism Committee, had been adamant that no employees should travel to the consumer or trade shows alone. She continued by saying with the vacant position this would become more difficult to accommodate; however, she added, they would co-op booth space at the shows to participating properties which should eliminate the issue.

Ms. Johnson said the Governor had reduced the line item in his budget for the New York State Division of Tourism and the I Love NY matching funds grants by \$3.5 million. She added the Governor wanted both Programs combined into one line item. She noted both the Senate and the Assembly wanted the line items to remain separate and the Assembly wanted the \$3.5 million decrease to come directly from the New York State Division of Tourism budget. She apprised the total amount budgeted for the combined line item was \$10 million and the Assembly had stipulated that the I Love NY matching funds grants remain budgeted at \$4.4 million. She reported the Governor had eliminated funding to both the Binghamton and Beekmantown Welcome Centers and the Senate had as well. The Assembly had funding for both locations, she continued, but at a reduced level of \$147,000 as compared to the previous \$196,000, a decrease of \$49,000.

Ms. Johnson stated the New York State TPA (Tourism Promotion Agency) Council predicted the State budget would not be finalized until mid-June. She advised she had budgeted for a decrease in the I Love NY matching funds grant; however, she added, if the current reduction in the Governor's budget was adopted, she would have a deficit of approximately \$72,000 that she would need to transfer from elsewhere in her budget. She noted that not filling the vacant position would allow her to transfer some of the necessary funds from the Salaries-Regular Code.

Ms. Johnson apprised the seasonal advertising campaigns had begun and the first print advertisements released were the travel brochure ads. She displayed a sampling of ads produced by the Department to the Committee members. She noted leads were received on a daily basis and all of the ads had online components on the Warren County Tourism website. Reviewing the past performances of previous ads, she said, the *Great Vacation Getaways* ad received 4,300 responses, the *People Magazine* ad received in excess of 2,000 responses and the *Reader's Digest* ad received 4,600 responses. She added the ads placed in the Canadian magazines typically received approximately 3,000 responses each. She advised ad placements were based on editorial content or programming, as well as trends and niche markets.

Ms. Johnson said the consumer and trade shows for the year had begun and she displayed pictures taken at shows, such as the New York Times Travel Show. She added the shows were always a positive experience. She stated they had plastic bags for the consumers to place the information pamphlets in and new bags had been ordered which were made from recycled plastic that was biodegradable.

Ms. Johnson apprised that given the current economy, travelers were looking for values and reasonable prices. She said there were two successful campaigns in 2009 that would continue in 2010; the Midweek Filler Up Program and the Summer Coupon Program. She explained the Midweek Filler Up Program involved local properties participating in offering a reduced rate or

extra value for rooms booked Sundays through Thursdays from May 1, 2010 to July 31, 2010. She noted there were 28 properties participating for 2010 and there was a link on the homepage of the website for the program. She added there were links in place that would lead to the websites of the individual properties. She apprised there was a cost of \$150 to participate in the Summer Coupon Program and there were 42 participants for 2010. She reported that last year 45,000 sets of coupons had been printed and distributed and 7,370 had been directly downloaded from the website. She added there would be a separate email blast sent out for each of the programs and there were currently an excess of 103,000 subscribers.

Ms. Johnson stated the electronic Spring Newsletter had been sent out in February; a copy of which is on file with the minutes. She added there had been 745 recipients and 654 had opened the email. She noted the topics which had received the greatest amount of interest were the Midweek Filler Up Program, the Velo Quebec Grand Tour, and the Summer Coupon Program.

Ms. Johnson explained the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council used to produce an Adirondack attractions television campaign but had not done so for some time. Some of the northern attractions, she continued, had requested the campaign be reinstated. She said in an effort to join forces, the Tourism Department would host a meeting in Lake Placid, New York next month with representatives from some of the larger Adirondack attractions in attendance.

Ms. Johnson displayed the Summer Placemat to the Committee members; a copy of which is on file with the minutes. She advised the Placemat was given free of charge to all area restaurants and listed local activities and events from April through September.

Mr. Merlino thanked Tanya Brand, Group Tour Promoter, for attending the last Warren County Council of Chambers dinner and giving a presentation.

Ms. Brand stated the 2009 Group Tour Survey had been mailed last month to 113 properties in order to receive feedback on the group tour traffic to the area. She added only 12 surveys were completed and returned. Results of the survey showed, she continued, that the Queensbury Hotel had accommodated 31 buses in 2009 which was a decrease from 2008; however, she added, the Tiki Resort had reported 20 buses in 2009 which was an increase from 2008.

Ms. Brand explained the Meeting & Convention Site Planner had been renamed the Unique Spaces Meeting & Event Planning Guide, due to the fact that Warren County did not have any convention centers. She added there were nine new properties who had joined to be part of the Planner which she listed as: The Blue Water Manor; The Inn at Erlowest; The Log Jam Restaurant; The Docksider Restaurant; Dusty's Restaurant, The Algonquin Restaurant; The Boathouse Restaurant; The Wiawaka Holiday House; and The Fun Spot. Mr. Kenny stated the Planner was a useful tool for those planning an event as it listed the properties in categories such as theater, banquet and reception and stated the capacity levels and services available. Ms. Brand noted the Planner listed gathering spaces of any kind.

Ms. Brand reviewed the list of groups she was currently assisting, as follows:

- ▶ the 2012 Military Reunion for the USS Conway Veterans Association with 120 attendees for a 4 day event;

- ▶ the Ohio Hikers Club with 40 to 50 attendees for a 4 day event to be held September 24-27, 2010;
- ▶ the October Fall Foliage Tour with 40 attendees from Honolulu, Hawaii for a tour that would include Boston, Massachusetts; New Hampshire; Burlington, Vermont; Lake Placid, New York; Lake George, New York and Corning, New York;
- ▶ the Model T Ford Event who were considering Warren County for their 2010 event and were currently negotiating room rates with local hotels;
- ▶ the Outdoor Writer's Association Spring Safari who were considering Warren County for their 2011 conference; and
- ▶ the Northern Regional War Camp who were considering Wild West Ranch for their 2011 event as the future of the Warren County Fairgrounds was uncertain.

Ms. Brand stated she had submitted the Warrensburg World's Largest Garage Sale to the American Bus Association for consideration as a Top 100 Event for 2011. She added the Adirondack Balloon Festival had been highlighted as a Top 100 Event several times in the past. She noted she had contacted representatives from the National Ice Carving Association to determine their interest in hosting a future event in Warren County. She reported a Request for Proposals (RFP) had been distributed to local hotels for room rates for 50 people for a college sorority reunion; 100 people for the Adventist Care Centers Corporate Meeting; and 90 people for a wedding.

Ms. Brand apprised that she and Ms. Johnson had toured the Troy Shirt Makers Building in the City of Glens Falls to determine possible use for future event itineraries and she displayed pictures of the site to the Committee members. She said they had also toured the First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls and a group tour itinerary including both properties would be written and entitled "Legacy of Glens Falls Church and Organ Tour".

Ms. Brand advised that she continued to work with representatives of the Velo Quebec Grand Tour. She added they had met with the Facilities Director of Adirondack Community College (ACC) to discuss a breakfast menu, food and beverage costs and staffing and equipment requirements for the event. At this point, she continued, it would be up to ACC to present proposals for food options. She said she was working on transportation issues for the event. She explained that she had spoken to representatives from all of the counties on the tour route to determine ways to assist with promotion and traffic control. She added each community would have a sub-committee to welcome the cyclists and promote what their community had to offer. She noted they would have similar signage for all the communities involved. Ms. Brand reported she had sent out three RFP's for the possible production of a souvenir lapel pin for the cyclists which would be offered at the Tourism Information booth at the departure site to those that provide contact information. She added some of the other communities would also produce a souvenir lapel pin. She noted there were maps of the routes for the Grand Tour included in the agenda packet. She apprised she had spoken with Robert Blais, Mayor of the Village of Lake George, and the Village would provide 13 street entertainers, 2 bands to perform at Shepard's Park, vendors located in the park and was considering an evening fireworks display. She added the Mayor had ordered Canadian flags to line the streets.

Ms. Brand informed that Wade Tours had booked a Rachel Ray Day Trip for July 2010 which resulted from an itinerary contained in the 2010 Group Tour Planner. She added The Tiki Enthusiast Weekend would return for a week long event in June 2010. She reported the New

York State Council of Probation Administrators Annual Conference would be held at The Georgian Resort in June 2010 and would have approximately 120 attendees.

Mr. Kenny voiced his opinion that pursuing the bus group tour market was a worthy effort. Mr. Merlino stated he wished more of the public was aware of the work completed by the Tourism Department.

Peter Girard, Creative Director of the Tourism Department, displayed the current printed media of the Warren County Tourism Department to the Committee. He circulated the printer's proof of the 2010 Rates & Dates Brochure. He displayed the Warren County Tourism Facebook page which he said had been active for two and a half weeks and already had obtained approximately 900 fans. He added through the Facebook page they had partnered with The Adirondack Phantoms and some of the area businesses. He advised upcoming activities and events could be posted on the Facebook page as an additional media for advertising.

Mr. Girard displayed the recent email blasts to the Committee members noting that the names on the subscriber list were obtained from sources, such as the consumer and trade shows. In answer to a question pertaining to the number of subscribers, Mr. Girard responded the number fluctuated but was at approximately 101,000 for the last email blast. Ms. Johnson apprised the average length of visit to the website as a result of the email blasts was in excess of four minutes. Mr. Girard stated the Warren County Tourism logo file had been updated on the internet so that partners would have access to the logo to add to their printed materials and to their websites to create a link to the Warren County Tourism website. Ms. Johnson noted the tool also worked well for events that were awarded occupancy tax funding as they were required to include the Warren County Tourism logo on printed material.

Mr. Girard said they were working with Ad Workshop on a flash drive sign-up for the consumer and trade shows. He explained that currently consumers at the shows signed-up with their contact information for giveaways but the new program would allow the information to be entered directly into a laptop computer which would automatically enter the consumers into the Tourism Department database. Ad Workshop was also assisting with a television specific homepage, he continued, at lakegeorgeny.com which would allow the Department to determine which subscribers were encouraged to visit the website from viewing of the television commercials.

Mr. Merlino stated there was a referral from the Planning & Community Development Committee pertaining to the Economic Development Corporation's (EDC) proposal to contract with ConsultEcon, Inc. to prepare a Tourism Strategy for Warren County. Len Fosbrook, President of the EDC, introduced himself and members of the EDC Board. Mr. Fosbrook stated the reason that Chairman Monroe and Mr. Goodspeed were not in attendance was because they were attending a press conference in Albany, New York in support of retention of ORDA (Olympic Regional Development Authority) funding.

Ms. Fosbrook said the EDC proposed that the County look at ways to increase tourism, which was 25% of the local economy. He advised tourism generated \$500 million in revenue in Warren County annually. He added in Warren County the labor income of tourism was in excess of \$254 million per year and in excess of 9,000 people were employed directly and indirectly by the industry. He apprised approximately \$34,000 a year in taxes were generated

by tourism.

Mr. Fosbrook expounded the EDC had a history of financing reports to determine new ways to improve the economy of Warren County. He added one of the first reports the EDC had financed pertained to the Gore Mountain Ski Bowl to determine a way to interconnect Gore Mountain with the Ski Bowl. He noted the EDC had also financed a study pertaining to the Warren County Airport to compare it to other county airports. That report, he continued, had shown that other airports were completing land leases and resulted in the construction of four jet hangers at the Warren County Airport. He advised the EDC had also financed an analysis of the Glens Falls Civic Center which resulted in the hiring of a management group for the Civic Center which decreased the operational costs paid by the City and increased the number of events that were held.

Mr. Fosbrook said the concept for a tourism study had resulted from a Gaslight Village Management Group meeting discussing how best to determine possible future uses for the property. He advised he had offered to find a consultant to complete the tourism study and ConsultEcon, Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts was the company the EDC had chosen. He noted the ConsultEcon, Inc. proposal contained four steps which would result in several possible uses for the Gaslight Village property, as well as data that would be helpful in developing a long-term strategic plan for Warren County tourism. He apprised he had presented the proposal to the Planning & Community Development Committee who had approved of the proposal and referred the issue to the Tourism Committee. He added the proposal was also presented to the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce who passed a resolution of support. He advised the study would take 12 to 16 weeks to complete and ConsultEcon, Inc. had stated they could commence in the next 2 to 3 weeks.

Mr. Merlino asked if the EDC would fund the cost of the study and Mr. Fosbrook replied affirmatively and added the cost of the study was \$38,000 plus expenses. Mr. Fosbrook mentioned the cost was a significant portion of the EDC budget but they felt strongly that the study would be helpful in increasing revenue from tourism.

Mr. Kenny apprised the concept had come from a Gaslight Village Management Group meeting and the original intent had been to determine possible uses of the Gaslight Village property. He stated the concept of the study had changed to include an overall tourism strategy. He said he was in favor of the Tourism Strategy study; however, he added, he wanted to ensure an emphasis would be placed on possible uses for the Gaslight Village property. Mr. Fosbrook responded that the EDC could reiterate the importance of including possible uses of the Gaslight Village property in the project initiation while discussing the scope of the study.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously to support the EDC in entering into an agreement with ConsultEcon, Inc. to prepare a Tourism Strategy study for Warren County with an emphasis on possible uses of the Gaslight Village property. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes and the necessary resolution was authorized for the April 16, 2010 Board meeting.*

Mr. Merlino suggested the issue of opposing the State's elimination of \$6.6 million in funding to ORDA be referred to the Legislative & Rules Committee.

Motion was made by Mr. Conover, seconded by Mr. Belden and carried unanimously to refer the issue of opposing the State's elimination of \$6.6 million in funding to ORDA to the Legislative & Rules Committee for further discussion and consideration.

Luisa Craige-Sherman of the Warren County Council of Chambers reported the last meeting had been held at the Wells House in Pottersville, New York and was hosted by the North Warren Chamber of Commerce. She thanked Chairman Monroe, and Messrs. Belden, Merlino and Thomas for their attendance. She advised Chairman Monroe gave a presentation on the Adirondack Park Legislative Initiatives and how they effected economic development. She added Ms. Brand had presented an update on group tours to the area. She said the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce would host the May 20, 2010 Council dinner at the Gristmill Restaurant. She added the April 22, 2010 dinner would be hosted by the Lake Luzerne Chamber of Commerce at Mollie's Mason Jar and the June 17, 2010 dinner would be hosted by the Hague Chamber of Commerce at a restaurant to be determined.

Mr. Merlino stated the Committee would need to enter into an executive session to discuss the employment history of a particular person.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Conover and carried unanimously that executive session be declared pursuant to Section 105 (f) of the Public Officers Law.

Executive session was declared from 12:43 p.m. to 12:50 p.m.

Committee reconvened.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Belden and carried unanimously to send a letter to the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce supporting the continuation of the contract in relation to the Special Events Coordinator position and stipulating that the position be that of a subcontractor and not an employee of the Chamber.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mr. Belden, Mr. Merlino adjourned the meeting at 12:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlene DiResta, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist