



## Center to boost tourism in Ithaca

By [JILLIAN BLEIER](#) October 24, 2022

**Ithaca Downtown Conference Center predicted to grow the local economy.**



*Visitors to downtown Ithaca can see construction progress for the new conference center.  
(Photo by: Jillian Bleier/Ithaca Week)*

Construction of the Ithaca Downtown Conference Center is currently underway downtown. The center will feature meeting rooms, ballrooms and a full-service kitchen.

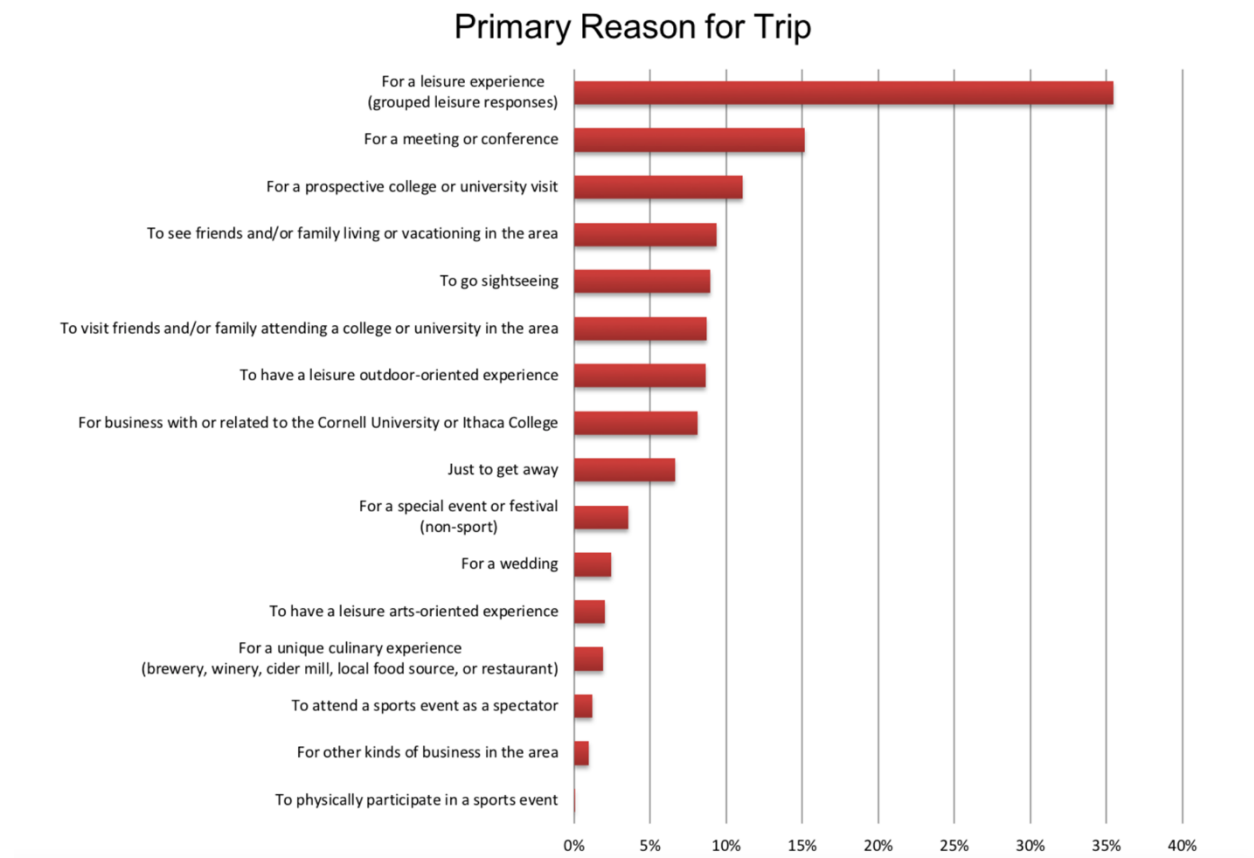
The **conference center** construction is next to the newly renovated Green Street parking garage. The center will support local tourism through drawing people to Ithaca during the week when hotels and businesses do not see as much traffic.

## Teamwork & tourism

Suzanne Smith Jablonski, executive director of the Downtown Ithaca [Local Development Corporation](#) (LDC), said the center will show off downtown and bring in new folks to the area.

The LDC is a nonprofit organization that will own and oversee the center. [ASM Global](#), a company specialized in conference center management, will be operating the center.

“I think of my own personal experiences, of having traveled to cities big and small for conferences, and know that I would personally love to have the opportunity if I didn’t already live here to come to downtown Ithaca for a conference experience,” Jablonski said.



*In a study conducted for Ithaca and Tompkins County, “For a meeting or conference” was found to be the second primary reason for a trip to the area. (Visitor Profile Report 2019 Ithaca and Tompkins County)*

The center's [website](#) showcases interactive floorplans and a [time lapse](#) camera of the construction progress.

**Ballroom Combined**  
LEVEL 2

+ Add Setup to Request

5 Setups Custom Setup

Click on a setup to display an expanded view.

Clear Setup X

 Banquet Rounds Capacity: 540	 Classroom Capacity: 540	 Maximum Capacity Capacity: 920
 Theater Capacity: 920	 U-shaped Capacity: 179	

*On the center's website, people can view different potential set ups and capacities for the meeting rooms and ballrooms.  
(Ithaca Downtown Conference Center Website)*

Several groups are supporting the center, including the Downtown Ithaca [Alliance](#), [Tompkins](#) County, the City of Ithaca and four Downtown Hotel Partners: [Canopy](#) by Hilton Ithaca Downtown, Ithaca [Marriott](#) Downtown on the Commons, [Hilton](#) Garden Inn and [Hotel Ithaca](#).

Teri Tarshus, regional director of operation for Baywood Hotel, the owner of Canopy by Hilton in Ithaca, said the center will allow new people to get a taste of the area.

"The goal is to have a larger meeting space, to bring more people in to support the overall room need nights in the market," Tarshus said.

## Local Impact

Based on a number of assumptions shown in the table below, the number of new daytrippers and overnighters to Tompkins County (and Ithaca) are shown below in the stabilized year.

**Table 21**

Metrics and Assumptions Used to Determine Net New Visitors to Ithaca at the New Conference Center								
	Percent of Visitors Non- Tompkins County	Percent of Non- County Visitors Who Stay Overnight	Percent of Total Visitors Staying Overnight	Percent of Non- County Visitors Making a Daytrip	Stabilized Number of Non-County Visitors Staying Overnight	Visitors per Room per Night	Stabilized Net New Room Nights to Tompkins County	Stabilized Net New Day Trips to Tompkins County
Conventions, Conferences	95%	90%	86%	10%	7,011	1.6	4,382	779
Consumer Shows	50%	15%	8%	85%	308	1.9	162	1,743
Corporate Events	90%	75%	68%	25%	2,565	1.2	2,138	855
Special Events	60%	40%	24%	60%	3,360	1.8	1,867	5,040
Banquets/Receptions	60%	80%	48%	70%	8,784	1.6	5,490	7,686
Meetings/Room Events	85%	80%	68%	20%	9,656	1.2	8,047	2,414
<b>Total</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>31,684</b>	<b>1.43</b>	<b>22,085</b>	<b>18,517</b>

Source: HSP

HSP expects a total of 22,000 new hotel room nights per year to be generated by the conference center.

*Table 21 includes a projected number for new room nights at hotels, showing how the conference center is predicted to increase business for hotels. (Hunden Strategic Partners Feasibility Study)*

Deirdre Kurzweil, owner of **Sunny Days** of Ithaca on the Commons, said Ithaca is a hard retail market because students are not in the area year-round.

“The conference center will help to stabilize [traffic]so that businesses can maintain a stable influx of sales that will enable them to then have a stable workforce, like be able to offer employment and then not have to lay folks off in the first quarter, so I’m very excited about that,” Kurzweil said.

## Funding & feasibility

The major sources of funding for the \$34 million project include a city bond, a state grant, hotel payments and the five percent room occupancy tax in the city.

The room tax was created to be a revenue source for the project.

To help combat risk for the project, feasibility studies for demand have been conducted over the past couple decades to show that the city is ready for the center.

**Table 3**

Meeting Sales Events, 2015 - 2019 - Total Lost Business					
Lead Name	Meeting Start Date	Room	Attendees	Room Nights	Economic Impact
2018 Summit	9/30/18	300		1,212	\$315,120
NY State Leadership Conference 2018 NY Slate Leadership Conference	4/6/18	50		100	\$26,000
Fall 2018 UIC Meeting	10/16/18	40		110	\$28,600
2019 Annual Conference	4/4/19	165		165	\$42,900
2018 Corporate Retreat	5/17/18	20		60	\$15,600
2019 Fall Meeting	10/19/19	90		180	\$46,800
28th Annual Conference - March 2019	3/13/19	40		135	\$35,100
GGM 2018 Conference	6/24/18	120		480	\$124,800
2018 Board of Directors Retreat	8/15/18	25		25	\$6,500
2019 Workshop	4/10/19	5		5	\$1,300
2019 Annual Conference	6/4/19	300		300	\$78,000
2019 Summer Conference	6/17/19	125		379	\$98,540
2019 Annual Conference	9/28/19	125		384	\$99,840
2018 Women's Basketball - Umass Lowell @ Cornell	11/16/18	23		13	\$3,250
2019 Honors Conference	11/1/19	80		84	\$21,840
2016 Conference, NYSAFP	1/8/15	--		320	\$83,200
Rotary International	1/21/15	--		400	\$104,000
Professional Development Conference	9/25/15	--		150	\$39,000
NYS DOH Regional Meeting	1/6/16	--		30	\$7,800
Fall 2016 Leadership Institute	2/29/16	--		90	\$23,400
2016 Learning "DOG" Conference	3/2/16	--		75	\$19,500
KFOCI National 2018 Convention	6/29/16	--		500	\$130,000
2017 LIFE Regional Meeting	10/12/16	--		10	\$2,600
NY Six Consortium Retreat	3/29/17	--		50	\$13,000
Upstate Masonry Institute	8/8/17	--		20	\$5,200
				<b>5,277</b>	<b>\$1,371,890</b>

Nearly 5,300 room nights were lost and \$1.4 million in estimated local spending. While this list does not include all events that could come to a conference center (the CVB and hotels are not chasing events they cannot accommodate), it is indicative of a market for groups that want to be in Ithaca.

*Table 3 shows lost business from 2015 to 2019 in terms of meetings and events that were not able to be hosted in Ithaca. The new conference center will provide a space for such events. (Hunden Strategic Partners Feasibility Study)*

## Fossil fuel free

The center will be the first [all-electric](#) conference center in North America, adhering to the city's plan to become carbon neutral by 2030 through the Ithaca [Green New Deal](#). Thomas Knipe, deputy director of economic development for the City of Ithaca, said it is exciting to be part of a unique project with sustainability as a selling point.

"Groups that value sustainability ... they're going to look at us a little bit differently because we have this," Knipe said. "I think that helps us with the overall financial success and achieve the goal of the conference center, which is to bring more people here to experience Ithaca."

The center will feature an all-electric kitchen and the [Vecino Asteri](#) apartments, affordable housing on the top floors of the building, are also carbon neutral.

[Construction](#) is scheduled for completion at the end of 2023, with booking starting in the beginning of 2024.



*Construction above ground is making progress. Elevator shafts are being built for the building, as well as other structural components. (Photo by: Jillian Bleier/Ithaca Week)*