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All-Electric Ithaca Downtown Conference Center celebrates official opening

ITHACA, N.Y. – A project a decade in the making is officially completed.

The Ithaca Downtown Conference Center celebrated its opening with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Tuesday afternoon, marking the culmination of years of collaboration between government and public interest agencies to bring a project with the ability to enhance the economic growth in Tompkins County for decades to come.

"After ten years of creative and innovative collaboration amongst community partners, we are excited to celebrate the grand opening of the Ithaca Downtown Conference Center this week," said Suzanne Smith Jablonski, executive director of the Downtown Ithaca Local Development Corporation. "We are grateful to the local, state, and Federal officials and agencies who understood our vision for this important tourism economic development project, which is expected to drive nearly $150 million in new direct and induced spending in our community over the next twenty years."

"On behalf of the LDC, I would like to express gratitude for all the individuals, businesses, and organizational partners who worked over the last decade to make this project a reality – it truly took our entire 'village'," said Jennifer Tavares, president of Tompkins Chamber, Chamber Foundation, and the DILDC. "In particular, I want to thank the downtown hotel partners for entrusting the Chamber Foundation to represent their capital investment and long-term support for this project. The Conference Center and our industry partners are ready to welcome new guests to our community."

Annually, the Ithaca Downtown Conference Center anticipates generating more than 2,800 room nights and 6,500 conference attendees annually. The project is expected to provide economic benefit to the greater Tompkins County area, attracting visitors during the slower months and during off-peak days of Sunday through Thursday. It is anticipated the conference center will generate more than $9 million in new state and local taxes, and more than $50 million in economic impact over 20 years.

"The Visit Ithaca team has been generating excitement for the Ithaca Downtown Community Conference Center from the very start, and event planners are eager to host their events in this dynamic space," said Peggy Coleman, Tompkins Chamber vice president and Visit Ithaca director. "Every hard hat tour and site visit has elevated Ithaca and

Tompkins County on the consideration list. The economic impact from conference center attendees will drive growth in Tompkins County for years to come."
In addition to the economic benefits, the energy efficient aspects of the conference center and accompanying apartment units meet climate and housing goals in the community. The conference center is the first all-electric one of its kind in the United States, including its commercial kitchen. The 181 energy-efficient Asteri Ithaca apartment units are affordable to households earning up to 80% or less of the area median income, with 40 units for unhoused people that include on-site support services.

"The opening of the Asteri Ithaca will serve as a significant economic development driver, bolstering Ithaca's economy through attracting events both locally and outside of the region, all while providing essential affordable and supportive housing to vulnerable New Yorkers furthering upward mobility and economic growth," said Lieutenant Governor Antonio Delgado, who was on hand for the ribbon-cutting event. "This all-electric project demonstrates how mixed-use development can advance New York's clean energy goals, ensuring more sustainable, healthier, and vibrant local communities."

In addition to Delgado, other speakers at the event included Tavares, Ithaca Mayor Robert Cantelmo, state Assemblyperson Anna Kelles, state Senator Lea Webb, state Home and Community Renewal Commissioner RuthAnne Visnauskas, Ithaca Area Economic Development President Heather McDaniel and Vecino Group President Rick Manzardo.

"Thank you to the Vecino Group, the City of Ithaca, Tompkins County, the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency, and the Downtown Ithaca Alliance for all of your outstanding work in bringing the Asteri Ithaca affordable housing and conference center to life," said Webb. "Your vision and commitment to sustainability and inclusivity are truly commendable, and we are grateful for your contribution to Ithaca."

"The Conference Center fills a community gap in convening space and will significantly increase midweek tourism to boost our local daytime and nighttime downtown economies providing much needed stability for workers in the hospitality industry. The energy-efficient, all-electric building will also help bring us closer to the goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act of carbon neutrality by 2050," added Kelles. "It's been a long journey to this finish line, and I'm so delighted to be able to celebrate its completion and opening with the whole community."

Funding for the conference center included a $5 million capital grant from Empire State Development and $2 million in Community Project Funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development delivered by U.S. senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, as well as significant financial support from the City of Ithaca, Tompkins County Tourism Program, the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency, four downtown Ithaca hotels (Ithaca Marriott on the Commons, the Canopy Hotel, Hilton Garden Inn, and Hotel Ithaca) via the Tompkins Chamber Foundation, and the Downtown Ithaca Alliance.

"This unique partnership brings affordable housing to the heart of our community, highlighting our City's deep commitment to equity and inclusion," added Ithaca Mayor Robert Cantelmo. "This project is anchored by North America's first all-electric conference center, a testament to this community's investment in a green, sustainable, and welcoming future."

Empire State Development Vice President and Executive Director of Tourism Ross D. Levi said, "The new Conference Center at the Asteri Ithaca complex will support the efforts of I LOVE NY and our local partners to promote the continued recovery and growth of business tourism. When trade show and event planners consider downtown Ithaca as a meeting destination, attendees will have an opportunity to explore all the great opportunities available throughout the community and the region, from incredible farm-to-table dining and world-class wineries to picturesque camping and hiking, to family-friendly museums and rich history. New venues like the Ithaca Downtown Conference Center welcome new travelers and make it so easy for even more people to love New York."

Those interested in learning more about the Ithaca Downtown Conference Center, or booking a meeting or conference in Ithaca, should visit www.meetinithaca.com to learn more.

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