

**Room Tax Commission
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, May 29, 2019

1

1 The meeting of the Room Tax Commission of the City of Onalaska was called to order at 4:09
2 p.m. on Wednesday, May 29, 2019. It was noted that the meeting had been announced and a
3 notice posted at City Hall.

4

5 Roll call was taken, with the following members present: Ald. Dan Stevens, Shawn McAlister,
6 Jason Lund, Peter Boese. Erik Sjolander arrived with the meeting in progress (4:15 p.m.).

7

8 Also Present: City Administrator Eric Rindfleisch, Financial Services Director/Treasurer Fred
9 Buehler, Parks and Recreation Director Dan Wick, Explore La Crosse Director A.J. Frels

10

11 **Item 2 – Approval of Minutes from the previous meeting**

12

13 Motion by Shawn, second by Peter, to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as printed
14 and on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

15

16 On voice vote, motion carried.

17

18 **Item 3 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

19

20 Ald. Stevens called three times for anyone wishing to provide public input and closed that
21 portion of the meeting.

22

23 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

24

25 **Item 4 – Election of:**

26

27 A. Chair

28

29 Motion by Jason, second by Shawn, to nominate and elect Ald. Dan Stevens as Chair of the
30 Room Tax Commission.

31

32 Ald. Stevens asked if there are any other nominations for Chair.

33

34 On voice vote, motion carried, 3-0, with one abstention (Ald. Stevens).

35

36 B. Vice Chair

37

38 Motion by Shawn, second by Jason, to nominate and elect Peter Boese as Vice Chair of the
39 Room Tax Commission.

40

41 Ald. Stevens asked if there are any nominations for Vice Chair.

42

43 On voice vote, motion carried.

Reviewed 6/3/19 by Fred Buehler

44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84

Item 5 – Financials:

A. 2019 Financials

Fred shared the following data:

- Account No. 650-27100 (“Advance from Municipality”), the debt incurred by the room tax, totals \$1,785,000.
- Room tax revenue totals \$142,397.65.
- The LCCVB received \$58,206.34 (\$32,896.47 plus \$25,309.87 for the month of March), and the cost of an audit was \$360, meaning expenditures for “Other Contractual Services” totaled \$33,256.47.
- The City of Onalaska collected \$166,303.82 in room tax revenue. A total of \$142,397.65 is available to the Tourism Fund, with \$20,787.98 of that being routed to the Omni Center. The city’s General Fund received \$7,889.04 for the first quarter, and the Special Projects Fund received \$16,017.14. Fred noted the Omni Center receives funding via the Special Projects Fund during the course of the year to offset some of Dan’s costs.

Motion by Shawn, second by Erik, to accept the 2019 Financials and place them on file.

On voice vote, motion carried.

B. Statistics from Omni Center regarding hotel usage

Dan presented the following data for the first quarter of 2019:

January

- A Tornado Youth Hockey Bantam Tournament held January 5-6 generated 48 total room nights.
- A Tornado Youth Hockey Bantam B Tournament held January 12-13 generated 115 total room nights.
- A Tornado Youth Hockey event held January 19-20 generated 180 total room nights.
- A Tornado Youth Hockey event held January 26-27 generated 378 total room nights.
- **Total:** 721

February

- A Jimmy Olson event held February 4 generated one total room night.
- An event held February 8-10 generated 332 total room nights.
- An event held February 16-17 generated 368 total room nights.
- **Total:** 701

**Room Tax Commission
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, May 29, 2019

3

85

86 **March**

- 87 • A LABA event held March 8-10 generated 12 total room nights.
- 88 • A railroad show held March 15-17 generated 63 total room nights.
- 89 • An Advance Auto Parts event generated 13 total room nights.
- 90 • A cornhole tournament held March 23 generated 13 total room nights.
- 91 • A gun show held March 29-31 generated 26 total room nights.
- 92 • **Total:** 127
- 93 • **Total room nights generated, first quarter:** 1,549 (986 total room nights generated the
- 94 first quarter of 2018).

95

96 Ald. Stevens asked Dan if there are a significant number of bookings the remainder of 2019.

97

98 Dan said, "We are booking strong," noting there is an "extremely busy summer ice season." The
99 chillers in Arena No. 2 will be reactivated June 1, and the arena will be ready for skating June 6.
100 Dan said he anticipates having the busiest summer he's experienced in recent years based on ice
101 rental and other events scheduled at the facility.

102

103 Motion by Peter, second by Shawn, to accept the statistics from the Omni Center regarding hotel
104 usage and place them on file.

105

106 On voice vote, motion carried.

107

108 C. Approve the 2018 State Room Tax report and methodology to be used on future reporting

109

110 Fred said this is the second year in which the City of Onalaska had to file with the State of
111 Wisconsin Department of Revenue an SL-304 no later than May 1 of each year. Fred directed
112 commission members to the "Comments" section on the final page of the report, which reads as
113 follows: "*The Omni Center received \$115,011.61 from room tax revenue in 2018. The Omni
114 Center generated 1,865 room nights over 88 days of events. They are open 363 days out of the
115 year. Eighty-eight divided by 363 days equals 24.24 percent of the days generated room nights.
116 Total Omni expenses (less general advertising, [which totaled] \$17,199.16) equals \$604,958.47.
117 That total [\$604,958.47] times 24.24 percent equals \$146,641.93. That total [\$146,641.93] plus
118 advertising [\$17,199.16] equals \$163,841.09.*" Fred said he and Dan believe this is a "very
119 strong, defensible method," adding he believes Dan's job will become easier, and also that he is
120 comfortable that the city is defensive in the methodology it is utilizing.

121

122 Fred directed commission members to the first two pages of the report and noted the following:

123

- 124 • The city collected \$804,092 in room tax in 2018, with a rate of 8 percent.
- 125 • The LCCVB received \$281,433.

**Room Tax Commission
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, May 29, 2019

4

- 126 • Attachments include the LCCVB officers, the City of Onalaska’s 2018 budget report, the
127 city’s 2018 hotel information, and the 2018 Expense LCCVB list for municipalities.
128

129 Peter asked Fred if he had been able to determine year-over-year changes in the methodology,
130 noting that 24.24 percent of the days in 2018 had generated room nights, and asking if that
131 number had been larger in 2017.
132

133 Dan told Peter the number would have been much less in 2017, noting that there had been staff
134 turnover in 2017 and as a result the hotel room data was not as thorough as it was in 2018. Dan
135 said staff is continuing to improve on how it collects that data and estimated there only were
136 1,200 room nights. Dan said, “Based on the events that came into the building, it was a much
137 less number.” Dan told commission members staff now has an online calendar and keeps a
138 rolling monthly total of room nights.
139

140 Ald. Stevens said the percentage theoretically should increase if Omni Center staff books more
141 events, but the percentage would need to be revised downward if the number of bookings
142 decreased. Ald. Stevens asked, “Should we look at this over a three- or a five-year period? Do
143 we have it set up where we will review this in the future to make sure it’s appropriate?”
144

145 Fred said the 2018 data is a bit skewed as it is not as complete as the 2019 data, and he told Ald.
146 Stevens he believes the data will be very accurate from 2019 going forward. Fred said the Omni
147 Center cannot receive more funds than what it spends as this is illegal.
148

149 Peter asked if this follows the State of Wisconsin Department of Revenue guidelines.
150

151 Fred said it is acceptable.
152

153 Motion by Peter, second by Shawn, to approve the 2018 State Room Tax report and
154 methodology to be used on future reporting.
155

156 On voice vote, motion carried.
157

158 **Item 6 – La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau – A.J. Frels**
159

160 A.J. reported the following:
161

- 162 • La Crosse County was ranked ninth out of the 72 counties in the state in direct visitor
163 spending at \$279 million for 2018. By comparison, La Crosse County was ranked ninth
164 in 2017 at \$263.7 million. By comparison, Eau Claire County was ranked 10th in 2018 at
165 \$255.8 million. By comparison, Eau Claire County brought in \$256.9 million in 2017.
166 Milwaukee County was ranked first in 2018 at \$2,105,300,000.

- 167 • Director of Sports Sales & Events Jeremiah Burish worked the Wisconsin Fishing Expo,
168

Reviewed 6/3/19 by Fred Buehler

**Room Tax Commission
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, May 29, 2019

5

- 168 which was held in February in Madison.
- 169 • There has been a 61-percent increase over the last four years in non-resident boat permits
170 to launch.
- 171 • The high school fishing tournament drew 1,100 individuals for 400 fishermen last winter.
- 172 • Director of Finance & Human Resources Michelle Hoch and Manager of Events &
173 Servicing Anna Baughman worked the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Outdoor Sports Show
174 in early March. Anna worked the Eastern Iowa Sports Show, and the Northwest Sports
175 Show in Minneapolis, both of which also occurred in March.
- 176 • The LCCVB staff attended the Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism, which
177 was held this past spring at the Kalahari Resort Dells in Wisconsin Dells. The Kalahari
178 will have 52,000 square feet of additional ballroom space as part of a renovation project.
179 However, A.J. said a large portion of this ballroom space is pre-function, including a
180 lobby area to the ballroom, and this will not allow the Kalahari to handle the numbers it
181 hopes to.
- 182 • Both Jeremiah and Director of Group Sales & Sports Services Ben Morgan attended the
183 National Association of Sports Commissions in April in Knoxville, Tennessee. This is
184 part of Sports Wisconsin, and A.J. said every DMO throughout the state that wants to
185 participate works together to bring sporting events to Wisconsin. A.J. said it is typical to
186 come out of the event with three to six strong leads, and the LCCVB is able to capitalize
187 on one or two of them.
- 188 • LCCVB staff attended the Onalaska Area Business Association annual dinner, and also
189 completed a craft beverage trail brochure and an online application.
- 190 • The City of La Crescent continues to express interest in joining the LCCVB. A.J. noted
191 La Crescent may only charge 3 percent room tax and said the city would be required to
192 pay the LCCVB 2.8 percent. A.J. said city officials spoke to the Minnesota State
193 Legislature and asked if the city may levy a 5 percent room tax.
- 194 • LCCVB staff visited La Crescent's new event center. A.J. said it likely is best suited for
195 weddings and told commission members 14 weddings have been booked, sight unseen, at
196 the facility.
- 197 • La Crosse Area Day at Miller Park is scheduled for June 27 when the Milwaukee
198 Brewers face the Seattle Mariners. Currently, either 19 or 20 buses will be utilized to
199 transport fans to the game. A.J. noted this is the longest-running area day with the
200 Brewers (22nd year). Michelle recorded a video with the Brewers that may be seen on the
201 team's website.
- 202 • The Driftless Outdoor Show was held May 17-18 at the Omni Center. A.J.
203 complimented Dan and his staff for their work on the event. Between 3,800 and 4,000
204 people attended the event. There were 73 vendors. Island Outdoors reported \$8,000 in
205 sales at its booth, and has requested a larger booth, as has Hobie. Charlie Berens
206 performed Friday evening, and A.J. said the performance was utilized to market and
207 promote the event.
- 208 • The Vietnam Moving Wall came to Holmen High School in early May.

**Room Tax Commission
of the City of Onalaska**

Wednesday, May 29, 2019

6

- 209 • The Department of Tourism held one of its four strategic planning sessions in the Coulee
210 Region.
- 211 • Ald. Stevens, Patrick Barlow (Village of Holmen), Scott Neumeister (City of La Crosse),
212 Troy Sargent (Duluth Trading Company), and Michel Gabbud (Charmant Hotel) all are
213 new LCCVB board members.
- 214 • The MOSES Organic Farming Conference was held in late February in La Crosse, and
215 A.J. said it appears MOSES will return in 2020.
- 216 • The Between the Bluffs Beer Wine & Cheese Festival was held April 26 and was
217 successful despite below-normal temperatures.
- 218 • The inaugural Major League Fishing Bass Pro Tour Redcrest event will be held August
219 19-25 in La Crosse.
- 220 • Robotics is booked for 2020.
- 221 • The LCCVB's annual dinner will be held Wednesday evening.
- 222 • The League of Municipalities is signed up for 2020, with approximately 500 attendees.
223 The International Fair Association also signed a contract for 2020 (more than 200
224 attendees). The archaeological conference (approximately 500 attendees) also has
225 committed for 2020.
- 226 • Grassroots to Champions is scheduled for August 24-25 at the Omni Center. The
227 LCCVB also is working with the Omni Center on an event with the Mississippi Valley
228 Mayhem roller derby, and also is assisting with lodging rates for softball and volleyball
229 tournaments.
- 230 • Ben is the LCCVB's liaison to the Omni Center and attends Tuesday staff meetings at the
231 facility.

232
233 **Item 7 – Discussion and possible action regarding the funding of waterfront projects**

234
235 Fred said this is an ongoing topic that appears on the agenda.

236
237 Peter said that at its February 27 meeting the Room Tax Commission had discussed increasing
238 the bandwidth at the Great River Landing, and also increasing the amount of touchpoints for the
239 internet hotspots.

240
241 Dan said staff is working with IT on those projects, and he told commission members another
242 topic that was discussed was installing a telephone at the Great River Landing trailhead, where
243 the LCCVB has an office. Dan said he has submitted tickets to IT, but has not followed up to
244 find out the status.

245
246 Ald. Stevens asked if it would be appropriate to table this item until the August 28 meeting.

247
248 Dan said peak season has arrived at the Great River Landing, noting there were 18 annual
249 bicycle passes were in the dropbox over the Memorial Day weekend.

Reviewed 6/3/19 by Fred Buehler

250
251
252
253
254
255
256
257
258
259
260
261
262
263
264
265
266
267
268
269
270
271
272
273
274
275
276
277
278
279
280
281
282
283
284
285
286
287
288
289
290

Fred asked if a drinking fountain has been installed at the Great River Landing.

Dan said the drinking fountain is in the process of being installed.

A.J. noted the LCCVB had served 3,000 people at the Great River Landing trailhead in 2018.

Shawn inquired about graffiti and vandalism at the Great River Landing, and also if the security cameras have been installed.

Dan said there are cameras at the facility and told Shawn there had been a theft at the bike fix-it station. However, Dan said overall there have been few issues.

Fred inquired about an issue regarding electricity at the Great River Landing.

Dan said there were heating-related issues in the trailhead building and that he believes in the future the city will have to determine how it heats the building. Dan said that while he believes a garage heater would be more efficient, the situation has improved.

Motion by Peter, second by Jason, to table until the August 28 Room Tax Commission meeting discussion and possible action regarding the funding of waterfront projects.

On voice vote, motion carried.

Item 8 – Set future meeting date: August 28, 2019

Motion by Ald. Stevens, second by Peter, to set the next Room Tax Commission meeting for Wednesday, August 28, 2019.

On voice vote, motion carried.

Adjournment

Motion by Erik, second by Peter, to adjourn at 4:52 p.m.

On voice vote, motion carried.

Recorded by:

Kirk Bey