

**Room Tax Commission
of the City of Onalaska**
Wednesday, February 27, 2019

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1 The meeting of the Room Tax Commission of the City of Onalaska was called to order at 4:00
2 p.m. on Wednesday, February 27, 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. Jim Binash, Jason Lund, Peter
6 Boese, Shawn McAlister. Erik Sjolander participated via telephone.

7
8 Also Present: Financial Services Director/Treasurer Fred Buehler, Parks and Recreation Director
9 Dan Wick, IT Systems Administrator Chris Babcock, Explore La Crosse Director A.J. Frels

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11 **Item 2 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

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13 Ald. Binash called three times for anyone wishing to provide public input and closed that portion
14 of the meeting.

15
16 **Item 3 – Introduction of Room Tax Commission member Peter J. Boese**

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18 Peter expressed gratitude for his membership and said he looks forward to being an active
19 participant. Peter told commission members he serves as General Manager of the Radisson
20 Hotel La Crosse, and also that he has been a City of Onalaska resident for approximately six
21 years. Peter said he also has resided in Cleveland, Chicago, Boston, San Antonio, Dallas,
22 Philadelphia, Phoenix, Tucson, New York, and Saint Martin.

23
24 **Item 4 – Approval of Minutes from the previous meeting**

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

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29 On voice vote, motion carried.

30
31 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

32
33 **Item 5 – Financials:**

34
35 a. 2018 Financials

36
37 Fred shared the following data found in the six graphs included in commission members’
38 packets:

- 39
40 • Graph “A” represents the fourth quarter taxable sales. Fourth quarter taxable sales in
41 2018 totaled \$2,261,079.39, compared to \$2,177,688.77 in 2017.
42 • Graph “B” represents fourth quarter revenue, which totaled \$180,886.35 in 2018. By

Reviewed 3/1/19 by Fred Buehler

**Room Tax Commission
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Wednesday, February 27, 2019

2

- 43 comparison, fourth quarter revenue in 2017 totaled \$174,215.10.
- 44 • Graph “C” represents third quarter taxable sales. Third quarter taxable sales in 2018
- 45 totaled \$2,966,286.47, compared to \$3,272,082.71 in 2017.
- 46 • Graph “D” represents third quarter revenue, which totaled \$237,302.92 in 2018. By
- 47 comparison, third quarter revenue in 2017 totaled \$261,766.62.
- 48 • Graph “E” represents annual taxable sales. Fred said he had calculated that
- 49 approximately \$283,308 in sales was lost due to the fire at Stoney Creek Hotel &
- 50 Conference Center in April 2018. Coupled with an additional shortage of \$215,531
- 51 (\$10,550,000 was budgeted for sales), there was \$498,839 in lost sales. Multiplying
- 52 \$498,839 by 8 percent room tax equals \$39,907 that would not have been taken in.
- 53 • Graph “F” represents annual revenue, which totaled \$804,092.91 in 2018. By
- 54 comparison, total revenue in 2017 was \$837,918.52.
- 55

56 Ald. Binash said the city would have been “very, very close” to reaching \$10,550,000 in sales

57 had it not been for the fire at Stoney Creek Hotel & Conference Center.

58

59 Fred next directed commission members’ attention to the balance sheet and said the Room Tax

60 Commission’s financials are bearing the \$1,785,000 in debt for the Great River Landing. Fred

61 next directed commission members’ attention to the budget report and said the \$688,504.61 in

62 room tax revenue. One percent of that total is directed to the Omni Center. Regarding the

63 expenditures, Fred noted there is an expense of \$118,200.35 for depreciation of general

64 equipment. Fred also reported Tourism finished 2018 with an \$87,339.79 surplus.

65

66 Shawn asked if the depreciation will change from year to year.

67

68 Fred said no.

69

70 Fred next addressed the room tax allocation document, noting the city had collected

71 \$10,051,161.42 in total sales in 2018. Of that total, \$100,511.61 is directed toward the Omni

72 Center. Tourism collects \$688,504.61 and keeps \$587,992.94. The city’s portion for the

73 General Fund is \$38,144.16, and \$77,444.20 is directed toward the Special Projects Fund – Fund

74 204. Fred noted approximately \$67,000 is coming from the Special Projects Fund and being

75 directed to the Omni Center.

76

77 Peter asked how the Room Tax Commission typically utilizes a surplus.

78

79 Fred told Peter that Tourism is an Enterprise Fund, and any surplus goes into the interfund

80 balance. Fred referred to Account No. 650-34100 and said Tourism’s fund balance totals

81 \$698,095.04.

82

83 Motion by Jason, second by Shawn, to accept the 2018 Financials.

84

85 On voice vote, motion carried.

86

87 b. Statistics from Omni Center regarding hotel usage

88

89 Dan said staff is in the process of compiling all the 2018 data that must be submitted to the State
90 of Wisconsin. Dan promised to present a more detailed report at the May Room Tax
91 Commission meeting.

92

93 Ald. Binash asked that Item 7 be addressed next.

94

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

96

97 Ald. Binash noted there had been past discussions regarding the installation of Wi-Fi at the Great
98 River Landing. However, the present system is incompatible with the European-made light
99 poles. Therefore, it is necessary for the city to redo its Wi-Fi at the Great River Landing. Ald.
100 Binash told commission members he had invited Chris to give them an idea of what might be
101 necessary to install Wi-Fi and a rough estimation of the cost.

102

103 Chris said the equipment would have to be weatherproof, which means it would cost more.
104 Chris estimated the cost to be \$2,500 per access point, including installation. The cost of the
105 access point itself would be approximately \$1,000. Chris said the larger part of the project
106 would involve running cabling to the poles from the switch in order to obtain network access.
107 Chris also said the desired Wi-Fi coverage area also would need to be determined, telling
108 commission members either four or five access points likely would be satisfactory at the Great
109 River Landing.

110

111 Ald. Binash asked Chris where the main control would be located.

112

113 Chris the trailhead facility would house a switch that would power network access to the access
114 points.

115

116 Fred asked Chris how far out the Wi-Fi signal would reach.

117

118 Chris said it depends on how far the city wants to go, and he estimated 35 to 40 meters (50
119 yards) per access point – less if heavy usage is not expected, or farther if it is not expected to be
120 heavily utilized by a large number of people simultaneously.

121

122 Erik asked if it would assist with potential surveillance in the future if the city wanted add
123 cameras to the light poles.

124

125 Chris said it could be extended to do that as well, telling Erik the city would want to utilize
126 network-attached cameras “because it simplifies everything.” Chris said it would be necessary to

127 run an extra cable to each location where there is an access point.

128

129 Ald. Binash noted there had been discussions regarding installing security cameras that would
130 cover the sculpture that might be located at the Great River Landing as well as any vandalism
131 that might occur in the area.

132

133 Chris noted there currently are some cameras at the Great River Landing and said he needs more
134 specifics to get a better estimate on cost.

135

136 Peter asked if the Wi-Fi connectivity is restricted, meaning visitors at the Great River Landing
137 receive a passcode when they enter the trailhead facility, or if it is available at all times to
138 visitors.

139

140 Chris said it is public Wi-Fi and told Peter it is possible to set each access point to broadcast
141 multiple wireless networks. Chris said this can be adjusted “on the fly,” given enough lead time.

142

143 Shawn asked if the public Wi-Fi captures individual users, and also if there is a concern
144 regarding users having inappropriate material on their devices.

145

146 Chris said the Wi-Fi can be filtered, and he told Shawn it is possible to set up tracking that will
147 determine how individuals are utilizing the Wi-Fi.

148

149 Jason asked if there is limited range because the poles are outside.

150

151 Chris said yes, also noting the broadcast power is limited as well. Chris said while it is possible
152 to purchase antennas that would extend the range, the cost per access point increases.

153

154 Jason asked Chris what he envisions as far as the area Wi-Fi would cover at the Great River
155 Landing.

156

157 Ald. Binash said there have not been any discussions regarding the range of the Wi-Fi. Ald.
158 Binash also said there is a desire to have Wi-Fi there as people have been requesting it, adding it
159 would be helpful to have it there due to the plans for the downtown district. Ald. Binash told
160 commission members the project would have to be bid out and said funds are available for it.

161

162 Chris it is possible to have access points on hand and set them up for certain events so they are
163 not permanent infrastructure.

164

165 Ald. Binash asked Dan if he would like to discuss any Parks and Recreation Department projects
166 at the Great River Landing.

167

168 Dan said he has been talking with Chris about installing a landline telephone at the trailhead

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

Wednesday, February 27, 2019

5

169 facility. Dan told commission members there would be a monthly fee with a landline and said
170 La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau volunteers working at the Great River
171 Landing trailhead facility would have a means of communication if they do not have a cell
172 phone. Dan also told commission members the Parks and Recreation Board on Monday had
173 approved the purchase of docks that would be installed at the Great River Landing, pending
174 Common Council approval on March 12. The docks, which will cost approximately \$26,000,
175 were funded through the Room Tax Commission for this spring. There will be a kayak launch
176 attached to the docks.

177

178 Jason inquired about the number of docks.

179

180 Dan said there will be a 20-foot long gangplank, three docks that will go straight out, five or six
181 docks in a “T” formation with a kayak launch off to the side, and four benches for fishermen at
182 the end.

183

184 Ald. Binash referred to the structure at the Great River Landing that is located west of the
185 railroad tracks, telling commission members the feasibility of refurbishing the building “is not
186 good” and razing it is a possibility. Another smaller structure would replace it, and it could be
187 utilized for storage or events. Ald. Binash said the Parks and Recreation Board will be
188 discussing this topic further, and that it then would come before the Room Tax Commission
189 might assist with the funding of a new structure.

190

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

192

193 A.J. reported the following:

194

- 195 • Amy Gabay and Brent Hanifl are no longer with the LCCVB. Former Room Tax
196 Commission member Deb Carlson has joined the LCCVB as Grants and Membership
197 Director, and Megan Kirking is Director of Media and Marketing.
- 198 • Two-hundred and fifty of Hot-Line Freight System’s trailers will have graphics from
199 around the area by the end of 2019, and also the LCCVB website.
- 200 • Each breezeway at the La Crosse Regional Airport will have two Explore La Crosse
201 graphics, and the area above the baggage claim area along the breezeway also will have
202 Explore La Crosse on it. There is a video promoting the area that is playing on the wall
203 by the luggage claim, and the LCCVB will change the video seasonally. The video will
204 play 10 times an hour.
- 205 • The Wisconsin High School Ice Fishing Tournament Championship drew 800 high
206 school students to the area for three days in mid-February, and they also were in the area
207 for pre-fishing. A.J. noted there only are four areas in the state that can accommodate the
208 necessary sleeping rooms and water for fishing. A.J. also noted more than 1,100
209 individuals attended the opening night ceremony.

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6

- 210 • The Alpine Ski Challenge held in mid-February attracted 400 high school students.
- 211 • The MOSES Organic Farming Conference was held last weekend.
- 212 • The National High School Fishing Tournament will be held in the La Crosse area both in
- 213 2020 and 2023. A.J. said there will be a significant economic impact associated with the
- 214 tournament, noting it lasts an entire week.
- 215 • The LCCVB is doing a canoe giveaway as an online promotion. The canoe can be seen
- 216 at the Welcome Center, and it will be in the Omni Center lobby as part of the Driftless
- 217 Outdoor Show in May.
- 218 • A.J. has been appointed to the Wisconsin Association of Convention and Visitors
- 219 Bureaus. A.J. will chair the Marketing Committee, and he also will sit on the Executive
- 220 Committee.
- 221 • Video monitors have been installed at Piggy's, the La Crosse Center, and the Omni
- 222 Center.
- 223 • The Driftless Outdoor Show will feature the DockDogs on May 17-18.
- 224 • A.J. has been asked to join Western Technical College's Hospitality Advisory
- 225 Committee.
- 226 • A Major League Fishing tournament will be held August 19-25. The Wisconsin
- 227 Department of Tourism has given the LCCVB a \$15,000 grant for the tournament, and
- 228 also \$13,000 for the Driftless Outdoor Show.
- 229 • The LCCVB has been doing promotion via Facebook Live. A.J. noted there has been a
- 230 900-percent increase.
- 231 • The new Visitors Guides have been completed. The cover includes the words "Explore
- 232 La Crosse County."
- 233 • The City of La Crescent still is interested in joining the LCCVB. A.J. said he and
- 234 LCCVB Board President Laurie Pfaff will meet Thursday with the La Crescent Chamber
- 235 of Commerce Director and the La Crescent City Administrator. La Crescent has filed an
- 236 application with the State of Minnesota to increase its room tax from 3 percent to 6
- 237 percent. The increase would allow La Crescent to pay the same percentage the other
- 238 municipalities in the LCCVB pay. A.J. said each Wisconsin municipality will have to
- 239 give its approval to La Crescent becoming a member of the LCCVB.
- 240 • Sara Meaney is the State of Wisconsin's new Secretary of the Department of Tourism,
- 241 replacing Stephanie Klett. A.J. said Sara wants to see how Wisconsin, which has a
- 242 tourism budget of \$15.5 million, compares to Minnesota (\$30 million tourism budget),
- 243 Illinois (\$30 million tourism budget), and Michigan (\$35 million tourism budget). A.J.
- 244 said Sara also told him Wisconsin lags behind attracting tourists aged 18 to 40.
- 245 • Six-hundred thirty-eight items were collected as part of the "Bundle Up" Program.
- 246 • One thousand fifty pounds of food were collected during the Holiday Train visit, and
- 247 \$5,000 was collected for the Hunger Task Force.
- 248 • Double-sided LCCVB billboards are located at La Crosse Area Harley-Davidson and the
- 249 Village of West Salem.
- 250 • The LCCVB is in the early stages of creating a craft beverage trail.

Reviewed 3/1/19 by Fred Buehler

- 251 • The Wisconsin Association of Convention and Visitors Bureau Board of Directors will
252 meet July 19 at Stoney Creek Hotel & Conference Center.
253 • The Wisconsin Governor’s Conference on Tourism will be held March 17-19 in
254 Wisconsin Dells.

255
256 Ald. Binash said he, A.J., and Peter had talked with City of La Crosse Mayor Tim Kabat about
257 an increase in the room tax, and he told commission members the LCCVB has not yet taken a
258 stance on this.

259
260 A.J. said there had been a recommendation at the last LCCVB board meeting to conduct a survey
261 with its members. The survey was sent out earlier Wednesday, and it is due back Monday,
262 March 4.

263
264 **Item 8 – Set future meeting date: May 29, 2019**

265
266 The Room Tax Commission will meet again at 4 p.m. Wednesday, May 29.

267
268 **Adjournment**

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270 Motion by Erik, second by Shawn, to adjourn at 4:40 p.m.

271
272 On voice vote, motion carried.

273
274
275 Recorded by:

276 Kirk Bey
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