

**Room Tax Commission
of the City of Onalaska**
Wednesday, February 28, 2018
1

1 The meeting of the Room Tax Commission of the City of Onalaska was called to order at 4:01
2 p.m. on Wednesday, February 28, 2018. 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, Erik Sjolander,
6 Shawn McAlister, Deb Carlson

7
8 Also Present: City Administrator Eric Rindfleisch, Financial Services Director/Treasurer Fred
9 Buehler, Parks and Recreation Director Dan Wick, La Crosse County Convention & Visitors
10 Bureau Director A.J. Frels

11
12 Excused Absence: Jason Lund

13
14 **Item 2 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

15
16 Ald. Binash called for anyone wishing to provide public input.

17
18 **Joe Etten**
19 **1017 Parkridge Drive**
20 **Onalaska**

21
22 Joe identified himself as a member of both the Great River Landing Committee and the Long
23 Range Planning Committee, as well as a candidate for First District Alderperson in the April
24 2018 election. Joe addressed Item No. 7 on the agenda and said, “I greatly support any measure
25 that could be discussed or come up with. Being part of the Great River Landing Committee,
26 we’ve been trying to figure out different ways for funding some things that I think would be
27 good to see down there. I think it’s a good asset for any community. I think Onalaska has done
28 a great job with the waterfront redevelopment. It would be good to see support on the part of the
29 city – the Room Tax Commission [or] however it could work – [and] possibly [have] some sort
30 of funding to help with things down there. Being that I’m kind of a newer community member
31 and I will be raising kids here soon, I think it’s really cool to see some investment on the city’s
32 part in parks or community gathering areas or activities – anything that can help bring the
33 community together and give people and families options. I just wanted to have it on the record
34 that I support that and speak in favor of any possible action you can do.”

35
36 Ald. Binash called three times for anyone else wishing to provide public input and closed that
37 portion of the meeting.

38
39 **Item 3 – Introduction of Room Tax Commission member Deb Carlson**

40
41 Deb said she is “pleased and honored” to be a member of the Room Tax Commission.

42
Reviewed 3/2/18 by Fred Buehler

43 **Item 4 – Approval of Minutes from the previous Room Tax Commission meeting**

44
45 Motion by Erik, second by Shawn, to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as printed
46 and on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

47
48 On voice vote, motion carried.

49
50 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

51
52 **Item 5 – Financials:**

53
54 a. 2017 Financials

55
56 Fred first addressed the document titled “Room Tax Allocation: Year-To-Date 2017,” reminding
57 commission members that \$10,550,000 had been budgeted and telling them that taxable sales
58 totaled \$10,473,981.54. The city collected \$837,918.52 in room tax in 2017. Fred told
59 commission members the \$104,739.82 due to the Omni Center and the \$717,467.73 for Tourism
60 are deposited into the Room Tax Account as revenue. Fred said the City of Onalaska’s portion
61 of non-room tax revenue is \$39,748.76 and noted it went directly into the General Fund. Fred
62 said the Special Projects Fund portion of room tax revenue is \$80,702.03.

63
64 Fred addressed the 2017 Fourth Quarter Taxable Sales graph, which shows data pertaining to the
65 sales at city hotels and motels, that was included in commission members’ packets. Fourth
66 quarter taxable sales were \$2,177,688.77. The 2017 Fourth Quarter Revenue graph shows that
67 revenue (sales multiplied by room tax rate) totaled \$174,215.10.

68
69 Shawn asked how the City of Onalaska’s data compares to that of the City of La Crosse.

70
71 A.J. told Shawn there has seen a slight increase among La Crosse County hoteliers. A.J. also
72 said there was an increase of sales among La Crosse County hoteliers in January, noting that one
73 City of Onalaska establishment enjoyed a considerable increase in occupancy, ADR, and overall
74 revenue in January.

75
76 Fred referred to SL-304 (The Wisconsin Department of Revenue’s Room Tax Report) and said
77 he needs both the LCCVB and the Omni Center to report all expenditures of \$1,000 or more
78 made by the Tourism Commission or the tourism entity for room tax revenue forwarded to
79 tourism promotion and tourism development. This report is mandatory.

80
81 Fred addressed the Draft Final Balance Sheet and said there might be a change in the surplus due
82 to a new rule by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) related to the State of
83 Wisconsin Retirement Pension. Fred pointed out the following:

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- 85 • Accumulated Employee Benefit/Vacation (\$1,540.61) and Accumulated Employee
86 Benefit/Sick Leave (\$11,585.15) represent the percentages of individuals being charged
87 within Tourism.
88 • The current portion of the long-term debt is \$98,625.
89 • The \$1,875,000 under “Advance from Municipality” is the balance of the responsibility
90 of the Room Tax Commission for the Great River Landing Project.
91 • The \$37,023 under “Long-Term Obligations” is the balance from an earlier loan.
92 • Revenues total \$720,492.95, and expenditures total \$680,282.22 for a surplus of
93 \$40,210.73.
94

95 Fred next addressed the budget report and pointed out the following:
96

- 97 • \$717,467.73 in room tax revenue was collected, and \$2,180.20 in interest income was
98 collected.
99 • “Salaries – Regular” totaled \$12,731.37 and includes City Administrator Rindfleisch,
100 Fred, and Mayor Joe Chilsen. “Wages – Permanent Part-Time,” which represents a Parks
101 and Recreation Department employee, totaled \$14,810.75.
102 • A majority of the \$346,025.89 under “Other Contractual Services” (\$345,641) was
103 directed toward the LCCVB.
104

105 Dan asked to address gas and electrical expenses at the Great River Landing, noting he had
106 distributed to commission members a handout showing these expenses for 2017. Dan noted the
107 combined gas and electrical expenses for February 2017 were \$1,327.14, \$1,044.23 for March
108 2017, and \$633.85 for April 2017. By comparison, the combined expenses for November 2017
109 and December 2017 were \$545.65 and \$412.56, respectively. Dan said, “We’ve done a lot of
110 work to try to better understand the system and then function it so that it’s not costing us or
111 we’re wasting money down there with it.”
112

113 Fred addressed the expenditures and noted the \$119,239.80 listed under “Transfers Out”
114 represents the \$104,000 for the Omni Center, plus an additional \$15,000 the Room Tax
115 Commission had approved at an earlier meeting.
116

117 Ald. Binash reminded commission members that the Room Tax Commission has \$40,210.73 in
118 revenue with which to work.
119

120 Motion by Ald. Binash, second by Shawn, to accept the 2017 Financials.
121

122 On voice vote, motion carried.
123

124 b. Statistics from Omni Center regarding hotel usage
125

126 Dan noted he had distributed a document showing the following hotel usage data for 2017:
127

- 128 • **First quarter room nights:** 1,299 (542 in January, 683 in February, 74 in March)
- 129 • **Second quarter room nights:** 91 (31 in April, 10 in May, 50 in June)
- 130 • **Third quarter room nights:** 84 (all in July)
- 131 • **Fourth quarter room nights:** 140 (all in October)
- 132 • **Total room nights for 2017:** 1,614

133
134 Dan noted the majority of room nights occur in the first quarter when the Omni Center hosts
135 hockey tournaments on the weekends. Dan said he is struggling to obtain hotel data from the
136 weekends when the facility hosts events such as weddings and retirement parties. Dan told
137 commission members there had been a staffing change in mid-2017 and said the data from the
138 second half of the year is incomplete as the new employee was becoming accustomed to the job.

139
140 Dan distributed to commission members a document showing entrances to the Omni Center by
141 event and noted that Scanalytics, sensors inside the front doors that track every entrance, was
142 installed January 11, 2017. According to the document, 73,368 individuals entered the Omni
143 Center. Dan said not every event was recorded, but rather several weekend events and larger
144 weekday events. Dan noted that the ice will be removed from Arena No. 1 on March 2 and said
145 trade shows or events are booked the next eight weekends at the Omni Center.

146
147 Shawn inquired about concessions revenue.

148
149 Dan said concessions have been “very good.” Dan noted that one staff member resigned over
150 the winter, and another suffered a serious injury. As a result, Dan said there was only one full-
151 time employee working out of the Omni Center (2½ full-time employees is normal). Dan said
152 the vacant position was filled and the new employee began working February 19.

153
154 Fred noted that 2017 was the first year the Omni Center had shown a profit since it opened in the
155 early 1990s.

156
157 Dan thanked the LCCVB for its assistance in attracting visitors to the city, and for the line of
158 communication the LCCVB has established with the city regarding events.

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

161
162 A.J. complimented Dan for his work, noting that Dan co-chairs the LCCVB’s Convention
163 Committee.

164
165 A.J. and Ald. Binash reported the following:
166

- 167 • West Salem native and UW-La Crosse graduate Ben Morgan is the LCCVB's new
168 Director of Group Sales & Sports Services. Ben also is serving as the point person for
169 the Omni Center.
- 170 • The Driftless Sports Convergence will be held Saturday, May 19 at the Omni Center.
171 A.J. said there will be a "fantastic lineup" of speakers and presenters, including Chad
172 Hoover of Kayak Bass Fishing. A climbing wall might be brought in for the event. The
173 LCCVB will spend approximately \$40,000 to promote the event.
- 174 • The Association of Great Lake Outdoor Writers held its board meeting in the area the
175 week of February 18-24. AGLOW will return to the area Wednesday, September 19 for
176 its fall conference. Several AGLOW travel writers will attend the Driftless Sports
177 Convergence on May 19.
- 178 • Gander Outdoors, which recently opened in Onalaska, is committing 3,500 to 5,000
179 square feet of every store for the silent sports aspect of kayaks. A.J. said Chad Hoover is
180 working on a deal to be Gander Outdoors' spokesperson. A.J. also said Chad will hold a
181 tournament in conjunction with the Driftless Sports Convergence.
- 182 • The American Legion Riders District 7 Legacy Run is tentatively scheduled for August
183 22. Ald. Binash said between 350 and 400 motorcyclists – veterans from around the
184 nation – could participate. Denise Rohan, who resides in Wisconsin and was elected
185 American Legion National Commander, will be in attendance.
- 186 • An effort is underway to bring in an X-Games event. A.J. said events would be held in
187 Onalaska, including the Omni Center.
- 188 • The United States Australian Football League has shown an interest in competing in this
189 area.
- 190 • The new Visitors' Guide is now available.
- 191 • There have been discussions regarding the LCCVB utilizing a room in the Great River
192 Landing trailhead as a welcome center.
- 193 • There were discussions about moving the Native American lacrosse players statue
194 currently located in the City of La Crosse to the eagle viewing center located at Rose and
195 George streets in La Crosse. The North La Crosse Business Association ultimately
196 decided to leave the statue where it is. An eagle statue will be erected at the eagle
197 viewing center.
- 198 • Explore La Crosse is working with La Crosse County on the Bluffland Trail Project. The
199 trail would start in southern La Crosse County, go through the City of Onalaska and into
200 Trempealeau County. Land must be acquired for the project. The LCCVB will help
201 develop a logo and also assist with branding, marketing, creating a video and developing
202 a website.
- 203 • The Gran Fondo Series, which is based out of Mexico City, will be part of the La Crosse
204 Area Bicycle Festival. This is an attempt to engage more individuals from outside the
205 area. The series is a timed event that is not a race. Gran Fondo will do approximately six
206 different events in 2018, and it will cap at 12 events across the nation. A.J. said the
207 LCCVB has a "hard verbal" agreement and will receive a written agreement that another

- 208 Gran Fondo Series event will not be held in cities such as Minneapolis, St. Paul, Chicago,
209 Madison or Milwaukee. The closest event will be held in Columbia, Missouri.
- 210 • Efforts are underway to attract a national table tennis tournament to the Omni Center.
 - 211 • A.J. attended the Wisconsin Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus on January
212 30 in Madison. A.J. said the Premier Resort Area Tax (PRAT) was discussed and
213 cautioned it could be reintroduced at future legislative sessions. A.J. also said there have
214 been discussions regarding taxation for restaurants and hotels only.
 - 215 • The LCCVB has had a presence at the Wisconsin Fishing Expo, the Duluth Travel Show,
216 the Chicago Travel and Adventure Show. The LCCVB will have a presence at the
217 upcoming Milwaukee Sports Show and the Governor's Conference on Tourism.
- 218

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

220

221 Ald. Binash referred to a discussion the commission had had at its December 13 meeting
222 regarding the building located to the west of the railroad tracks. The structure is in need of
223 repair, and Ald. Binash said there are two reasons why the Room Tax Commission would fund
224 the building: it would require purchasing insurance, and it would have to be a fundable project,
225 meaning it possibly could generate revenue for the city.

226

227 Dan said Fred has been working with the insurance, and the city has been working with its
228 building inspectors. Dan said the building inspectors had sent an email earlier this week trying
229 to find the designation of where the elevation that the building is in. Dan said Commercial
230 Building Inspector Calvin King had contacted Parks Maintenance Supervisor Mark Hanson and
231 noted Mark had met with Calvin and discussed the permit for the building. Calvin has been in
232 contact with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources regarding the request to repair the
233 building, and Calvin was told the DNR would have no regulations if the elevation is above
234 642.26. However, it would be necessary to contact a DNR representative if the elevation is
235 below that level. Dan said a question was raised as to whether there is a flood elevation
236 certificate recorded with the property. If there is and the building is below 642.26, it would need
237 to be copied along with the permit if the city decides to proceed. Dan said Mark has been
238 working with GIS Technician Joe Barstow, and he told commission members both Mark and Joe
239 believe the building is above 642.26. However, Dan noted there is no certification and said there
240 have been inquiries as to whether anything was noted on the deed.

241

242 Ald. Binash said, "If we can't get it, then it looks like that building would have to come down."

243

244 Deb asked how the building would be utilized.

245

246 Dan said currently kayaks are stored in the building and told Deb it previously was utilized as the
247 cottage for the campground. Dan said the individual who purchased the structure before the city
248 bought it utilized it as his living quarters. Dan noted the city purchased the building in 2007 and
249 said Three Rivers Roleo also utilizes it. Dan said the city could use the building as programming

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250 space when activities are held at the Great River Landing. Dan told Deb that several years ago
251 the Parks and Recreation Board had considered repairing the structure and renting it out. Dan
252 said, "We have a lot of people who request it that could come in, take their vehicle there, park it
253 there, and spend a week down there. There were some questions from the protected services at
254 the time about, do they want that? Now, with the enhancement to the Great River State Bike
255 Trail, would you want everyone to have an opportunity for somebody to rent it, or what else
256 could we do down there? It would be a location where we could do more programming down on
257 the water and have an opportunity with it."

258

259 Ald. Binash said it is his understanding that there is no running water in the building.

260

261 Dan told Ald. Binash he is correct, but he also noted the restroom facilities outside the building
262 have running water and flushable toilets. Dan also noted there is a storage shed present in
263 addition to the cottage and the restroom facilities.

264

265 Ald. Binash said, "What we also need to find out is if we are going to go with this, what kind of
266 repairs are we going to make to it, as well as the cost."

267

268 Dan said it will be necessary to repair the roof, windows, and siding.

269

270 Ald. Binash said it might be necessary to perform the repairs in stages.

271

272 Dan said estimates for all the repairs already are in hand.

273

274 Ald. Binash asked commission members if they want to proceed with the repairs, but he also said
275 it is necessary to find out if the building is within the elevation as well as how the building will
276 be utilized.

277

278 Dan said it will be necessary to send someone out to the site and perform a survey to determine
279 where the building lays. Dan said according to the city's GIS maps the building appears to be
280 out of that zone. Dan noted there has not been any water in the building since the city purchased
281 it in 2007, and he said he believes the electrical panel likely has been set at the 100-year flood
282 level.

283

284 Ald. Binash asked A.J. if the LCCVB still is interested in placing an interactive device in the
285 space it would be utilizing at the Great River Landing trailhead.

286

287 A.J. said yes and told Ald. Binash the LCCVB would have both an interactive device with a
288 touchscreen for the map and an employee with a laptop working in that space.

289

290 Ald. Binash noted an area auto body shop had a television monitor that not only displayed
291 weather patterns, but also showed advertisements. Ald. Binash said he hopes such a monitor

292 could be installed in the Great River Landing trailhead.

293

294 A.J. suggested placing a monitor where the corkboards are at the trailhead facility and behind
295 glass to protect it from the elements.

296

297 Erik said he envisions placing a monitor on the exterior of the building, adding that the monitor
298 could show a radar and prepare individuals planning to ride bicycles on the Great River State
299 Trail. Erik addressed the structure west of the railroad tracks and said it appears to him there is a
300 need for a facility at this location. Erik said it is his understanding that the city cannot replace
301 the building, but only repair it, if possible. Erik said, "It sounds to me like there is a value for
302 having that facility there. At what cost, I'm not entirely sure. But I think we have to get through
303 some hurdles before we can make decisions on what we want to spend and then obviously get
304 estimates on what it would take."

305

306 Deb suggested that organizations could utilize the facility for retreats or picnics.

307

308 Ald. Binash asked City Administrator Rindfleisch how to proceed with installing a television
309 monitor at the Great River Landing.

310

311 City Administrator Rindfleisch said that while installing a television would be simple, he also
312 said the city is not in the production business and told Ald. Binash the city likely would have to
313 find someone to sell advertising for it.

314

315 City Administrator Rindfleisch addressed the seating for the Great River Landing that was
316 approved in the 2018 Capital Improvements Budget, telling commission members the Great
317 River Landing Committee is requesting that funds from the Room Tax Commission be utilized
318 for the project. City Administrator Rindfleisch told commission members the city did not
319 receive an \$18,000 grant for interpretive signage for the Great River Landing, which also was
320 approved in the 2018 CIB, and said there is an opportunity to possibly utilize funds for
321 interpretive signage.

322

323 Fred said he had been approached last fall by someone who is willing to donate funds to install a
324 water bottle filling station at the Great River Landing.

325

326 Dan said staff was trying to find an exterior station that is frost-free and could be operational
327 year-round. However, Dan also said it has been difficult to locate one.

328

329 **Item 8 – Set future meeting date**

330

331 The Room Tax Commission will meet again at 4 p.m. on Wednesday, May 30.

332

333

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334 **Adjournment**

335

336 Motion by Erik, second by Shawn, to adjourn at 4:57 p.m.

337

338 On voice vote, motion carried.

339

340

341 Recorded by:

342

343 Kirk Bey