

**Room Tax Commission  
of the City of Onalaska**  
Wednesday, May 26, 2021  
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1 The meeting of the Room Tax Commission of the City of Onalaska was called to order on  
2 Wednesday, May 26, 2021. It was noted that the meeting had been announced and a notice  
3 posted at City Hall.

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5 Roll call was taken, with the following members present: Ald. Dan Stevens, Peg Binash, Jason  
6 Lund, Valerie Erickson, Jay Patel

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8 Also Present (either in person or remotely): Mayor Kim Smith, Financial Services  
9 Director/Treasurer Fred Buehler, Parks and Recreation Director Dan Wick, Ald. Jim Olson, Ald.  
10 Diane Wulf, Explore La Crosse Director A.J. Frels

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12 **Item 2 – Approval of minutes from the previous meeting (August 26, 2020)**

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

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17 On voice vote, motion carried.

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

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

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

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26 **Item 4 – Election of Officers:**

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28 A. Chairperson

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30 Motion by Valerie Erickson, second by Jason Lund, to nominate and elect Ald. Dan Stevens to  
31 serve as Chairperson of the Room Tax Commission.

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33 On voice vote, motion carried.

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35 B. Vice Chairperson

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37 Motion by Jay Patel, second by Ald. Stevens, to nominate and elect Jason Lund as Vice  
38 Chairperson of the Room Tax Commission.

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40 On voice vote, motion carried.

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42 **Item 5 – Financials:**

Reviewed 05/28/2021 by Fred Buehler

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A. 2020 Financials

Fred told commission members they had the audited 2020 financials in front of them, and he reported the following:

- Room tax revenue totaled \$388,401.20. Expenditures in the “Other Contractual Services” account totaled \$159,373.49. The LCCVB received \$158,762.56. The cost of the audit totaled \$392, and miscellaneous contractual services totaled \$218.93.
- The Omni Center received 1 percent of the sales, meaning \$56,700.91 of \$5,670,090.98. The Omni Center also received \$14,500 in additional funding from the Room Tax Commission. The total of \$71,200.91 is reflected under “Transfers Out.”
- The city collected \$453,607.28, which is 8 percent of the sales. The Omni Center received \$56,700.91. A total of \$388,401.23 remains with Tourism. The City of Onalaska’s General Fund received \$21,518. The Special Projects Fund (Fund 204) received \$43,688.05. The \$158,762.56 the city paid the LCCVB is derived from multiplying the \$5,670,090.98 in sales by 2.8 percent.
- Fourth quarter revenue totaled \$101,149.58, and fourth quarter taxable sales totaled \$1,264,369.95.
- Third quarter taxable sales totaled \$1,842,168.90.

Motion by Jason Lund, second by Jay Patel, to accept and place on file the 2020 Financials.

On voice vote, motion carried.

B. 2021 Financials

Fred reported the following:

- The city collected \$86,623.90 in room tax revenue during the first quarter.
- The LCCVB received \$35,408.31 in the first quarter (first quarter sales of \$1,264,582.41 multiplied by 2.8 percent).
- The Omni Center received 1 percent of the first quarter sales (\$12,645.82) and an additional \$3,625. This accounts for the sum of \$16,270.82 under “Transfers Out.”
- First quarter sales totaled \$1,264,582.41. Room tax funds (8 percent of the sales) totaled \$101,166.59.

Motion by Valerie Erickson, second by Peg Binash, to approve and place on file the 2021 Financials.

On voice vote, motion carried.

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C. Update on WI-Department of Revenue SL-304 Room Tax Report

Fred said the SL-304 Room Tax Report was due May 3 and noted it included the following information:

- The amount of room tax collected in 2020 (\$453,608), the room tax rate imposed (8 percent), and the amount the LCCVB had collected (\$158,763).
- Members of the LCCVB Board (Exhibit A), the LCCVB financial report (Exhibit D), 2020 hotel room nights (Exhibit C), and the 2020 financial report (Exhibit B).
- The Omni Center received \$71,201 in room tax revenue in 2020.
- The Omni Center generated 1,317 room nights in 37 days of events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Omni Center was open 255 days in 2020. The percentage of days that generated room nights was 14.51 percent (37 divided by 255).
- The city could have expensed \$90,154.16 for the Omni Center. This total is calculated by multiplying total expenses (\$573,372.47, less \$6,957.81 for general advertising) by 14.51 percent (\$83,196.35) and adding the \$6,957.81 for general advertising. Fred reiterated the Omni Center had received \$71,200.91 and noted the city cannot pay more out of the Omni Center than is acceptable.

Ald. Stevens noted a full-time Sales Manager had been employed at the Omni Center in 2020, and he asked Fred if, per the collected data, that position had had an impact on increasing the room rate stay on a per capita basis.

Fred noted Tony Meyers is no longer serving as the Omni Center Sales Manager and said that while Tony and the Omni Center staff had worked diligently, they also had faced many challenges in 2020. However, Fred also noted the Omni Center recently has hosted several well-attended events.

Ald. Stevens said it had appeared to him that Tony was doing positive things and making the best of a challenging situation every time he visited the Omni Center, and he suggested that perhaps the city either could reimagine the Sales Manager’s role now that that position is currently vacant, or “double down on it.”

Motion by Valerie Erickson, second by Jason Lund, to accept the WI-Department of Revenue SL-304 Room Tax Report.

On voice vote, motion carried.

Ald. Stevens said the commission will address Item 7 next.

**Item 7 – La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau – A.J. Frels**

A.J. reported the following:

- The State of Wisconsin saw a 28.2 percent decrease in director visitor spending in 2020 compared to 2019. Outagamie County (Fox Valley) saw a 38 percent reduction (\$145 million). Milwaukee saw a 39 percent reduction (\$863 million), and Dane County (Madison) saw a 42 percent reduction (\$579 million). La Crosse County saw a 30 percent reduction (\$85 million).
- La Crosse County hotels earned \$27 million in revenue in 2019. There was a 51 percent reduction in 2020, meaning the county's hotels earned \$13 million.
- While some had anticipated it would take three to five years before 2019's statistics would be achieved once again, A.J. said hoteliers and restaurateurs are seeking employees because patrons are once again traveling and returning to their establishments. La Crosse County's hotel occupancy in April 2021 was 59.5 percent. The county's hotel occupancy in April 2019 was 57 percent.
- A.J. cautioned that hoteliers are not charging what they had been in 2019, and thus the revenue has not yet returned. A.J. stressed the need to attract visitors to this region as people are eager to travel. People are traveling with larger numbers in their parties, and they are seeking drive-in destinations. A.J. said this area is a drive-in destination due to the number of outdoor activities and communities that are easy to navigate. A.J. cited a report in which 87 percent of United States citizens indicated they are ready to travel in the next six months, and he said this area's hotels, restaurants, and stores need immediate assistance with finding employees.
- The LCCVB is working closely with Travel Wisconsin, and it is working to bring several influencers to the area to talk about this region. LCCVB Director of Media and Marketing Haleigh Doyle is working with the Wisconsin Department of Tourism marketing department. The state has expanded its efforts to attract visitors to its drive-in destinations, including spending funds in the Des Moines, Iowa market.
- The LCCVB staff participated in the three-day Governor's Council on Tourism, which was held virtually.
- The LCCVB launched its Lunker League, which is an online fishing tournament. Individuals come to the area to fish and send the LCCVB pictures of what they caught. Some destinations that have similar leagues have 10,000 participants.
- The LCCVB is working with UW-La Crosse on its third survey for travel trends that deal with COVID-19. UW-L is analyzing that survey today, and the results will be ready soon.
- The Drift Cycle Program, which is a shared bicycle program being utilized in the City of La Crosse, is going well. The goal is to extend the program into other communities, perhaps including the City of Onalaska.
- A.J. attended the Riverside Levy Expansion meeting with the City of La Crosse Parks

- 166 and Recreation Department and listened to the plans for accommodating Viking Cruise.  
167 • A countywide session for festivals was held with the La Crosse County Health  
168 Department and the City of La Crosse. Thirty-three different festivals were represented.  
169 Another meeting likely will be held in the near future.
- 170 • A.J. and LCCVB Director of Finance and Human Resources Michelle Hoch a La Crosse  
171 County discussion on the distribution of funds from the American Rescue Plan. A.J. said  
172 the LCCVB will consult with La Crosse County Administrator Steve O'Malley, noting it  
173 appears the funds Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers has allocated to assist with tourism  
174 will come through the county associations.
  - 175 • The LCCVB has moved into its new location at 123 7<sup>th</sup> Street in the City of La Crosse.
  - 176 • A.J. said he had signed a contract earlier Wednesday for the LCCVB to do a full show  
177 with "Discover Wisconsin." The show will be filmed in 2022, and it will air in 2023.  
178 The show will feature the entire region, including the City of Onalaska and the City of La  
179 Crescent.
  - 180 • The Wisconsin Department of Tourism informed the LCCVB that a study conducted by  
181 ownely.com revealed that this region is listed in the top 25 areas (No. 14) in which  
182 remote workers enjoy living.
  - 183 • The LCCVB will not be holding a La Crosse Area Day with the Milwaukee Brewers in  
184 2021.
  - 185 • The LCCVB hopes to bring back the trolley in late summer with limited capacity.
  - 186 • The LCCVB reengaged its local grant program, and it has committed \$25,000 for 2021.  
187 Fourteen festivals have already applied. A second run will be conducted during the  
188 fourth quarter. A.J. said \$85,000 was returned to event and festival operators in 2019.
  - 189 • The LCCVB will film eight new videos to promote this region. One has already been  
190 filmed.
  - 191 • The LCCVB received a \$20,000 grant for the Tackle Warehouse Title Pro Circuit  
192 Championship Fishing Tournament. Eighteen fishing tournaments are scheduled for  
193 2021, breaking the previous record of 12. One tournament has already occurred.
  - 194 • The La Crosse Center was the host site of the WIAA boys and girls state basketball  
195 championships for Divisions 2, 4, and 5. The economic impact was approximately \$1  
196 million. The inaugural WIAA girls wrestling state tournament is slated for January 29,  
197 2022 at the La Crosse Center.
  - 198 • A.J. announced he has been reelected as the Vice Chair of the Governor's Council on  
199 Tourism.

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201 Jason noted there is a jobs posting webpage on [explorelacrosse.com](http://explorelacrosse.com), and he asked if it has  
202 launched.

203  
204 A.J. said it had just gone out and told Jason the LCCVB will be pushing it out to universities.  
205 A.J. said that while this is something the LCCVB normally would not do, it is willing to assist its  
206 partners because they are in need of staffing.

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**Item 6 – Omni Center Sales Manager**

A. Update on events

Dan reported the following:

- In the last two months, the Omni Center has hosted four youth volleyball tournaments, one adult volleyball tournament, two cornhole tournaments, the La Crosse Area Builders Association Home Show, Onalaska High School prom, and two COVID-19 vaccine clinics.
- The Omni Center currently is down two staff members.
- The Omni Center hosted three separate events simultaneously two of the last three weekends.

Fred asked Dan how he plans to proceed regarding the vacant Sales Manager position.

Dan said Parks and Recreation Department staff has looked at a new organizational structure, and he told Fred the plan is to fill the position with a Sales and Marketing Coordinator. Dan said the goal is to fill the position within the next 30 days.

**Item 8 – Set future meeting date: August 25, 2021 at 4 P.M.**

Motion by Ald. Stevens, second by Valerie Erickson, to set the next Room Tax Commission meeting for 4 p.m. on August 25, 2021.

On voice vote, motion carried.

**Adjournment**

Motion by Valerie Erickson, second by Jason Lund, to adjourn at 4:47 p.m.

On voice vote, motion carried.

Recorded by:

Kirk Bey