

**Room Tax Commission
of the City of Onalaska**
Wednesday, May 30, 2018
1

1 The meeting of the Room Tax Commission of the City of Onalaska was called to order at 4:17
2 p.m. on Wednesday, May 30, 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, Jason Lund, Deb Carlson

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

10
11 **Item 2 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

12
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 – Approval of Minutes from the previous meeting**

17
18 Motion by Erik, second by Shawn, to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as printed
19 and on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

20
21 On voice vote, motion carried.

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 Erik, to nominate and elect Ald. Jim Binash as Chair of the Room
30 Tax Commission.

31
32 On voice vote, motion carried.

33
34 b. Vice Chair

35
36 Motion by Erik, second by Jason, to nominate and elect Shawn McAlister as Vice Chair of the
37 Room Tax Commission.

38
39 On voice vote, motion carried.

40
41 **Item 5 – Elect member to Great River Landing Committee (meets on call the 2nd Thursday**
42 **of the month at 5:15 P.M.) as the Room Tax Representative**

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

Wednesday, May 30, 2018

2

43

44 Ald. Binash noted that Erik already serves on the Great River Landing Committee.

45

46 Fred asked if Erik also may serve as the Room Tax Commission's representative.

47

48 Erik said he believes someone else would need to be assigned to the Great River Landing
49 Committee if he is elected to serve as the Room Tax Commission's representative.

50

51 Ald. Binash said he is willing to serve as the Room Tax Commission's representative if no one
52 else is willing to do so.

53

54 Erik reiterated he can serve as the Room Tax Commission's representative on the Great River
55 Landing Committee, but it then would be necessary to add another member to the commission
56 who would take his current position.

57

58 Fred expressed concern that there would be two alderpersons serving on Great River Landing
59 Committee (Ald. Kim Smith, Ald. Binash), if Ald. Binash is elected as the Room Tax
60 Commission's representative.

61

62 Ald. Binash noted two alderpersons – himself and Ald. Jim Olson – sit on the Community
63 Development Authority.

64

65 Shawn said he is willing to serve as the Room Tax Commission's representative.

66

67 Motion by Ald. Binash, second by Deb, to nominate and elect Shawn McAlister as the Room
68 Tax Commission's representative on the Great River Landing Committee.

69

70 On voice vote, motion carried.

71

72 **Item 6 – Financials:**

73

74 a. 2018 Financials

75

76 Fred addressed the revenue portion of the financials included in commission members' packets
77 and noted room tax revenue through the end of May totaled \$148,080.03. Fred addressed
78 expenses and noted other contractual services totaled \$60,889.05 (\$60,529.05 for the LCCVB,
79 and \$360 for an audit). Fred addressed "Transfers Out" and noted \$21,617.52 was transferred to
80 the Omni Center, and an additional \$3,625 was transferred out for a total of \$25,242.52. Fred
81 directed commission members to the "Room Tax Allocation" document included in their packets
82 and said the \$21,617.52 transferred to the Omni Center is 1 percent of the \$2,161,751.95 in first-
83 quarter sales. The \$3,625 represents additional funds to the contributed 1 percent. Fred reported
84 that \$172,940.14 in room tax was collected, and Tourism collected \$148,080 of this total. Fred

Reviewed 6/4/18 by Fred Buehler

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

Wednesday, May 30, 2018

3

85 said \$8,203.85 was transferred to the city's General Fund, and \$16,656.30 was transferred to the
86 Special Projects Fund. Fred noted that Dan receives a portion of the Special Projects Fund
87 dollars. Fred noted that the \$60,529.05 listed at the bottom of the document represents 2.8
88 percent of the room sales. Fred next addressed the graphs included in commission members'
89 packets that represent both first-quarter revenue and first-quarter sales since 2006, and also
90 referred to the "City of Onalaska Tourism Fund Information First Quarter Data" sheet. First-
91 quarter taxable sales in 2018 totaled \$2,161,751.95, and revenue totaled \$172,940.14. This
92 compares to \$2,142,820.44 in sales and \$171,425.66 in revenue for the first quarter of 2017.

93

94 Shawn asked how the City of Onalaska's statistics compare to those of the City of La Crosse.

95

96 A.J. referred to the LCCVB's 2017 Annual Report and told Shawn La Crosse County's ADR
97 (Average Daily Rate) for 2017 was \$93.73, compared to \$91.18 in 2016, and RevPar for 2017
98 was \$55.23, compared to \$54.60 in 2016. The report also states that from December 2016 to
99 December 2017 La Crosse County saw a 5-percent increase in the total number of sleeping
100 rooms available, including an 11.3-percent increase in the City of La Crosse.

101

102 Ald. Binash asked Fred about the available funds for waterfront projects.

103

104 Fred directed commission members to the balance sheet and told them Tourism's Equity Fund
105 Balance totals \$698,095.04. Fred said anticipated revenue for 2018, per the budget, was
106 \$734,355, and anticipated expenditures were \$575,659. This would leave a surplus of \$158,696.
107 Fred noted that the percentage of room sales sent to the LCCVB had decreased from 3.3 percent
108 to 2.8 percent.

109

110 Ald. Binash asked Fred if there is a limit as to the amount the Room Tax Commission may
111 possibly spend per budget.

112

113 Fred said, "If you wanted to do something with that we could do that through the budget,
114 because right now for the 2018 budget there is nothing allocated. If you wanted to do something,
115 between the revenues and the expenditures you already had some money [inaudible]. But you
116 didn't do that through the 2018 budget, so now it would be considered what I would call a
117 budget amendment, which I can tell you the Common Council frowns a little bit upon. But it's
118 something to think about for the 2019 budget because you can see where you stand."

119

120 Ald. Binash inquired about funds that could be utilized to improve the structure located to the
121 west of the railroad tracks at the Great River Landing.

122

123 Fred told Ald. Binash \$50,000 had been budgeted for that purpose and still is available.

124

125 Motion by Jason, second by Ald. Binash, to approve the 2018 Financials.

126

127 On voice vote, motion carried.

Reviewed 6/4/18 by Fred Buehler

128
129 b. Update regarding the WI-Department of Revenue form SL-304
130

131 Fred told commission members he had worked with both Dan and city legal counsel on the
132 report and that it had been filed. Fred said six different exhibits (Room Tax Revenue Allocation,
133 Omni Wage Allocation, OMNI Room Tax Tracking 2017, Budget Report 2017, Monthly Hotel
134 Summary, and LCCVB Expenses 2017) had been filed with the report, and both he and Dan
135 briefly described what was included in each one:
136

- 137 • **Room Tax Revenue Allocation (Exhibit A):** Fred noted this exhibit matches the
138 balance sheet.
- 139 • **Omni Wage Allocation (Exhibit B):** Documents Omni Center personnel's wages and
140 rollups as they relate to programs for "heads in beds." It also relates to advertising and
141 concessions personnel involved.
- 142 • **OMNI Room Tax Tracking 2017 (Exhibit C):** Dan said this exhibit documents
143 identifies all the staff employed at the Omni Center as well as what tasks each staff
144 member performed for events (booking, scheduling, working). The exhibit includes 24
145 pages of different events throughout 2017.
- 146 • **Budget Report 2017 (Exhibit D):** This exhibit represents the city's expenditures and
147 revenues.
- 148 • **Monthly Hotel Summary (Exhibit E):** This exhibit lists the total number of room
149 nights generated from the number of events held at the Omni Center. Dan told
150 commission members 2017 had been difficult due to staff turnover. However, Dan also
151 said, "We are ahead of schedule by a good number of rooms already because staff knows
152 they have to monitor as we go through the process."
- 153 • **LCCVB Expenses 2017 (Exhibit F):** Fred said the exhibit includes what transpired
154 after the laws were changed in 1994, and also that the City of Onalaska began room tax in
155 1987.
156

157 Fred addressed the report and said the \$837,919 represents room tax collected in 2017, and also
158 that there is an 8-percent room tax rate. Fred also noted that \$345,641 was transferred to the
159 LCCVB, and he read the following statement under the "Comments" section: "*The Omni Center
160 received \$119,239.82 from room tax revenue in 2017. The Omni Center maintains a survey
161 program for its tournaments and other events to determine the number of overnight rooms
162 generated per event. The total number of room stays created by the Omni Center was 1,614
163 (Exhibit E). The room tax dollars received from various lodging facilities in hereto as Exhibit A.
164 Exhibit B & C attached hereto represents a calculation reflecting the percentage of wages and
165 benefits relating to creating overnight rooms during 2017 and a statement of the advertising
166 related to creating overnight stays. In summary, the Omni spent \$164,954 to generate those
167 overnight rooms. The expenditures related to the overnight stays were related to advertising and
168 labor representing the events which generated the room stays. Exhibit D attached hereto*

169 *represents the revenue and expenses within the Tourism budget for the year 2017. Exhibit F*
170 *attached hereto represents the expenses from 2017 by the La Crosse County Convention and*
171 *Visitors Bureau.” Fred told commission members Dan would have had to pay back funds to the*
172 *Room Tax Commission had the Omni Center received \$164,954 from room tax revenue and*
173 *spent \$119,239.82 to generate overnight rooms.*
174

175 **Item 7 – La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau – A.J. Frels**
176

177 A.J. distributed to commission members a document ranking the total tourism impacts in 2017 in
178 each State of Wisconsin county; an eight-page publication that had been inserted in the La
179 Crosse Tribune (the LCCVB had produced the outside four pages, and the Wisconsin
180 Department of Tourism had produced the inside four pages); and the LCCVB’s 2017 Annual
181 Report. A.J. then shared the following information:
182

- 183 • La Crosse County ranked ninth out of 72 counties in direct visitor spending at \$263.8
184 million, an increase of \$15.7 million (6.34 percent) from 2016. Only Eau Claire County
185 (ranked 10th) enjoyed a bigger increase, going from \$228.4 million to \$257 million (12.53
186 percent). A.J. said Eau Claire County has been pursuing musical acts.
- 187 • Some of the events both he and LCCVB staff have worked at include the Wisconsin
188 Fishing Expo in Madison, the Milwaukee Outdoor Sports Show, the Eastern Iowa Travel
189 Show, and Canoecopia in Madison. A staff member also is assisting with Country Boom,
190 scheduled for July 13-14 in West Salem.
- 191 • The LCCVB received a \$5,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Tourism to
192 promote the Great River Road. The LCCVB also received a \$21,000 grant for the
193 Driftless Sports Convergence.
- 194 • Amy Gabay, Director of Membership and Grants, won the Governor’s Tourism Rising
195 Star Award for her work on the Great River Road.
- 196 • The Driftless Sports Convergence, which was held May 19 at the Omni Center, attracted
197 approximately 2,500 individuals. The individual representing Hobie Kayaks stated he
198 wants to add 20 feet to his booth for the 2019 event, which will be a two-day event (May
199 17-18). A.J. estimated the 2018 event generated 55 rooms, vendor-wise.
- 200 • The 2018 Cabela’s National Team Championship, held May 17-19, was relocated from
201 the Quad Cities to La Crosse due to high water. There were 200 teams (two anglers per
202 team). A.J. said he had received an email the Monday before the event, and he told
203 commission members that by Tuesday morning Jeremiah, a staff member, had reached
204 out to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the La Crosse Park and
205 Recreation Department, and a contact with the tournament. A.J. said tournament officials
206 contacted him Tuesday afternoon to inform him the tournament was moving to La
207 Crosse. A.J. also said the LCCVB had spent \$15,000 to land the tournament (\$25,000 is
208 a typical cost for the tournament). A.J. also expressed hope that the tournament would
209 return to La Crosse, telling commission members the economic impact to the area should

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

Wednesday, May 30, 2018

6

- 210 be approximately \$500,000.
- 211 • The FLW High School Fishing Tournament also was held the same weekend, and it
- 212 attracted approximately 30 boats. A kayak bass fishing tournament also was held that
- 213 weekend, and the awards ceremony was held at the Omni Center.
- 214 • The NCAA Division III Track and Field Championships were held May 24-26 at UW-La
- 215 Crosse. The WIAA State Track and Field Championship will be held Friday and
- 216 Saturday at UW-La Crosse.
- 217 • The LCCVB held its annual meeting, and the City of Onalaska's Parks and Recreation
- 218 Department was named Partner of the Year.
- 219 • The LCCVB is working with Rotary Rock 'n Ribs, an event which will be held in the JC
- 220 Penney parking lot at Valley View Mall. The event also is combined with the 2018
- 221 Bassmaster Elite weigh-in.
- 222 • The LCCVB met with MOSES (Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service),
- 223 which is holding its Organic Farming Conference February 21-23, 2019 at the La Crosse
- 224 Center. A.J. said MOSES' board wanted to ensure the La Crosse Center will be prepared
- 225 for the conference. There is a proposal to renovate and expand the La Crosse Center at a
- 226 cost of \$49 million.
- 227 • Matt Boshcka, owner of David Reay's and co-owner of Dublin Square, has joined the
- 228 LCCVB board.
- 229 • The American Legion Riders District 7 Legacy Run is scheduled for Saturday, June 16 at
- 230 American Legion Post 336.
- 231 • A new mobile visitors center arrived Tuesday, May 29. There also is a pickup truck
- 232 advertising the LCCVB's website (explorelacrosse.com). The modified cargo trailer
- 233 opens from the side, it has a monitor that runs video loops of the area, and it is handicap-
- 234 accessible. A.J. said it will make its debut Friday at the WIAA State Track and Field
- 235 Championships. A.J. also said the LCCVB will purchase its van, which is leased, from
- 236 Dahl Ford and told commission members the City of La Crosse Libraries wishes to
- 237 purchase the van and modify it as a mobile outreach for the libraries in La Crosse
- 238 County.
- 239 • The Between the Bluffs Beer, Wine and Cheese Festival was held April 27-29, and
- 240 approximately 3,800 people were served.
- 241 • La Crosse Area Day at Miller Park will be held Wednesday, June 27. The Milwaukee
- 242 Brewers host the Kansas City Royals. Sixteen buses are booked for the game.
- 243 • Jeffrey Worrell, Executive Director of the 7 Rivers Region Outdoor Recreation Alliance,
- 244 has resigned. LADCO Executive Director Jim Hill has retired.
- 245 • Kubota Tractor will hold a meeting at the Omni Center, and it is expected to generate 60
- 246 room nights.
- 247 • A.J. welcomed commission members to view the LCCVB's room located at the Great
- 248 River Landing trailhead. The LCCVB has signed the lease and begun moving in. A.J.
- 249 said the goal is to open the room the week of June 3-9. The room would be open 10 a.m.
- 250 to 4 p.m. seven days a week to begin with, and it will be staffed by volunteers. The

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

Wednesday, May 30, 2018

7

251 LCCVB will do an outreach to the City of Onalaska hotels in mid-June, and all the
252 hoteliers will be invited to an opening on a Tuesday to coincide with the summer concert
253 series scheduled at Dash-Park.

254

255 **Item 8 – Discussion and possible action regarding the funding of waterfront projects**

256

257 Ald. Binash said it will be possible to purchase insurance for the structure located to the west of
258 the railroad tracks at the Great River Landing. Ald. Binash also said there had been questions
259 regarding how the building would be utilized.

260

261 Dan said he plans to have the Parks and Recreation Board meet at and tour the structure to begin
262 its June 25 meeting. Dan said several ideas have been presented regarding the use of the
263 building, and he told board members an idea that has gained traction among staff is to convert
264 the building into a cottage that families could rent. Dan said, “I think ultimately we have to work
265 through the Parks and Recreation Board and get the opinions of the board to see what they want.
266 With the bike trail adjacent there, it could be another place that bikers planning their trips could
267 rent as they come through. Even adjacent to that area right there, with a little work you could
268 have some primitive campsites that could be available for people who are riding by.”

269

270 Fred told Dan to bring forward any other projects on the western side of State Trunk Highway 35
271 to the August 29 Room Tax Commission meeting as the commission will be discussing the 2019
272 budget at that time. Fred also reminded Dan they had had a discussion with city legal counsel
273 regarding utilizing Tourism funds and said it is his understanding that City Attorney Sean
274 O’Flaherty “has no problem, by following the requirements, as long as it’s on the right side of
275 Highway 35 and not the left.”

276

277 For clarification, Ald. Binash said the west side of STH 35. Ald. Binash also asked Dan if he
278 anticipates the building needing any immediate repairs.

279

280 Dan said, “When we requested the \$50,000 to the Parks and Recreation Board and then came to
281 the Room Tax Commission ... The roof needs work. A number of the windows are boarded up
282 because kids have thrown rocks through them and they’ve broken into the facility. We would
283 need to [make those repairs]. Being at the location where the building is, if we would let it go
284 much longer and if that building goes by the wayside I don’t think we’d ever be able to get
285 another building in down there. We don’t want it to be an eyesore. You have such a beautiful
286 building up above, and then you look down and [you see that] shingles are ripped off. We just
287 want to try to enhance it and then give people the opportunity to look at it. I’m excited for the
288 opportunities with the [La Crosse] Convention and Visitors Bureau coming. There is a lot of
289 traffic there right now, but I think you’re going to see even more. And I think the opportunity
290 for programming, if we use it for more programming of kayaking and fishing and things out of
291 that building, that’s another very useful opportunity.”

292

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

Wednesday, May 30, 2018

8

293 Dan said Lee Johnson, who works at the Great River Landing, served in the United States
294 Marine Corps for 20 years and runs programs at the site. Dan said the space will be utilized for
295 Lee to run programs such as navigation and knot-tying.

296
297 Erik inquired about the age of the building.

298
299 Dan said Fred had told him the building was not present when he began employment with the
300 City of Onalaska in the early 1980s.

301
302 Deb asked if the building has indoor plumbing.

303
304 Dan said there once was indoor plumbing in the building, and he told Deb there are bathrooms
305 outside. Dan noted there is a bathroom inside the building and said city employees drained the
306 water when the city assumed control of it. Dan also noted someone was utilizing the building as
307 his residence prior to the city assuming control of it.

308
309 Fred asked how the building obtains water.

310
311 Dan said the building currently does not obtain water because it is turned off beneath the
312 building. Dan also noted the bathroom facility is plumbed under.

313
314 Deb asked if the building is set up for businesses to hold conferences, retreats and small
315 meetings in it.

316
317 Dan said small meetings could be held inside, noting the building consists of several small
318 rooms. Dan said retreats consisting of six to eight people could be held inside.

319
320 Fred asked if the building could be ADA-compliant.

321
322 Dan said he believes it could be made ADA-compliant as there is only one small step to enter the
323 building. Dan also said there are individuals who have talked about constructing docks at the
324 site. There also are groups that might be willing to assist in fundraising efforts.

325
326 Ald. Binash asked Dan what he considers to be the immediate needs of the building if some
327 repairs are performed this year.

328
329 Dan said he would focus on the roof, windows, and siding, noting he and Parks Supervisor Mark
330 Hanson had obtained estimates on repairing the aforementioned items. Dan said he hopes to
331 begin the process following the June 25 Parks and Recreation Board meeting, noting that there is
332 funding in the account to proceed with repairs.

333
334 Ald. Binash noted he had spoken with Lee and said, "I'm not sure that the Room Tax

Reviewed 6/4/18 by Fred Buehler

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

Wednesday, May 30, 2018

9

335 Commission can really be a part of these things, but there were security cameras and a water
336 bottle fill, and his budget has run out of funds for the repairs that they need to do due to
337 vandalism or breakage of certain things. I am wondering if our room tax dollars can in any way
338 be used for those purposes.”

339

340 Fred said he believes the security cameras should qualify. Fred also noted there is a citizen who
341 is willing to donate \$5,000, if Dan wishes, to purchase a water bottle filling station.

342

343 Dan said the challenge is locating a water bottle fill station that will fit, noting the location where
344 one would be installed, by the restrooms, is “very narrow.” Dan also noted the smooth-faced
345 block transitions to decorative block and said it will be necessary to find a station that will fit
346 without having to remove block or perform additional masonry work.

347

348 Ald. Binash said it is his understanding Lee might have a cost estimate to install the security
349 cameras.

350

351 Dan said there is an estimate in hand to install two additional cameras, telling commission
352 members there are no cameras facing east toward STH 35. Dan said someone had vandalized
353 one of the drums, noting the equipment had come from Europe. Dan said the cost to return the
354 plastic top was approximately \$300, and he also said all of the tools at the bike fixit station have
355 needed to be replaced twice as they have been stolen twice. Dan said a couple of tools had
356 recently been stolen, and someone had twisted off the air hose. Dan said he hopes to install
357 cameras on that side of the trailhead.

358

359 Motion by Ald. Binash, second by Erik, to approve the purchase of two security cameras to be
360 installed at the Great River Landing at a cost not to exceed \$3,000.

361

362 Fred said it is his understanding that the motion calls for utilizing \$3,000 of the budgeted
363 \$50,000 for the purchase of the security cameras.

364

365 Ald. Binash told Fred he is correct, adding the intent of the motion is to purchase and install
366 security cameras now.

367

368 Erik asked if there is any signage indicating the area is under surveillance.

369

370 Dan told Erik the camera system is motion-based and said he is not certain if there is any
371 signage.

372

373 On voice vote, motion carried.

374

375 **Item 9 – Set future meeting date: August 29, 2018**

376

**Room Tax Commission
of the City of Onalaska**
Wednesday, May 30, 2018
10

377 A suggestion was made to move up the meeting to Wednesday, August 22.

378

379 Ald. Binash said the Room Tax Commission will meet again on August 22 instead of August 29.

380

381 **Adjournment**

382

383 Motion by Ald. Binash, second by Erik, to adjourn at 5:11 p.m.

384

385 On voice vote, motion carried.

386

387

388 Recorded by:

389

390 Kirk Bey