

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

Wednesday, August 25, 2021

1

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, August 25, 2021. 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, Val Erickson, Peg
6 Binash, Jason Lund, Jay Patel

7
8 Also Present: Financial Services Director/Treasurer Sabrina Steger, Deputy City Clerk Stacy
9 Wilk, Parks and Recreation Director Dan Wick, Omni Center Event Coordinator Justin
10 Swartling, Explore La Crosse Director A.J. Frels

11
12 **Item 2 – Consideration and action on minutes from the previous meeting**

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

16
17 On voice vote, motion carried.

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

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

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

25
26 **Item 4 – Financials:**

27
28 A. 2021 Financials

29
30 Sabrina’s report included the following information:

- 31
- 32 • Taxable sales for the first quarter of 2021 totaled \$1,264,582.41, and revenue totaled
33 \$101,166.59. By comparison, taxable sales for the first quarter of 2020 totaled
34 \$1,627,742.33, and revenue totaled \$130,219.38.
 - 35 • Taxable sales for the second quarter of 2021 totaled \$2,687,235.46, and revenue totaled
36 \$214,978.82. By comparison, taxable sales for the second quarter of 2020 totaled
37 \$935,809.80, and revenue totaled \$74,864.76.
 - 38 • The city budgeted \$423,673 for room tax revenue in 2021, and it has collected
39 \$270,699.51. The city budgeted \$555,500 in expenses for 2021, and thus far it has
40 expended \$212,056.98.

41
42 Ald. Stevens said he believes that in the past Tourism funds had funded the Sales Manager
Reviewed 8/27/2021 by Sabrina Steger

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43 position, and he noted there since has been a vacancy as well as a reorganization. Ald. Stevens
44 asked, "What will that look like? Will funds also be coming from Tourism to cover the new
45 position?"

46
47 Dan told Ald. Stevens a new Sales and Marketing Coordinator will begin employment with the
48 city on Monday, August 30. Dan explained that different responsibilities have been split, and
49 100 percent of the Sales and Marketing Coordinator position will be coming from Tourism. Dan
50 also said, "We're actually taking 10 percent of the Omni Center Manager's wages out of the
51 Tourism, also, with the amount of work they're doing with generating 'heads in beds.' ... I will
52 just state in the current year budget our Sales Manager left in April, so that position has been
53 vacant since April. We'll see a windfall in that position from that time through effective on
54 Monday when the new position starts."

55
56 Ald. Stevens asked if those funds may be utilized for other tourism.

57
58 Dan said, "We're not anticipating anything. It depends on what we come up ... different groups
59 that are coming in, if there's anything that we need to do to try to maybe sweeten the pot to get
60 them here. We know that we have some resources here in that budget because of that windfall
61 that we have."

62
63 Motion by Jason, second by Peg, to approve the 2021 Financials.

64
65 On voice vote, motion carried.

66
67 B. 2022 Tourism Budget

68
69 Sabrina noted she and Dan had worked together on preparing the 2022 budget, and she also
70 noted the city works with the LCCVB on what percentage of sales it is thinking for 2022.
71 Sabrina said, "We use the \$7.5 million to calculate what the sales would be for 2022." The city
72 retains 8 percent of that, and Sabrina said the city receives \$603,754.24. The city then pays the
73 Omni Center 1 percent, and the LCCVB receives 2.8 percent. Sabrina noted \$6,185,000 in
74 revenue had been budgeted for 2021, and she said, "We are considering that sales would
75 continue to go up in 2022 for revenue." Sabrina said City Administrator Eric Rindfleisch is still
76 determining salaries, and this is why there are no dollar amounts listed in the full-time salaries.
77 Step changes, changes in COLA, and health insurance increases are factors that first must be
78 taken into consideration.

79
80 Dan addressed the equipment replacement portion of the budget and said there is a request to
81 purchase the following two items:

- 82
83
 - Backless benches for the Great River Landing Plaza. Dan has inserted a placeholder sum
84 of \$3,000, and he said the number of benches is to be determined.

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- 85 • Two hand dryers for the Great River Landing at a total cost of \$3,000. This would be to
86 try to reduce the ongoing cost of paper.

87
88 Peg noted she had seen an item regarding the replacement of the cameras at the Great River
89 Landing, and she said she believes this is important as she serves as a volunteer there and she has
90 noticed individuals who were acting suspiciously.

91
92 Dan told Peg the city is working with MCS, which is contracted to assist the city with IT items.
93 Dan said the cameras will record movement for a few seconds, but the cameras will stop
94 recording if activity is lost. Dan said, “We’re trying to figure out how we can keep more
95 constant motion. ... Right now, we have, like, 10 days of recorded data on the camera so that we
96 can go back if something comes up. But usually, we know something within a couple of days. If
97 something happens, we can go back in a shorter period of time and get it.”

98
99 Ald. Stevens noted there are community groups that had expressed an interest in doing
100 something with benches, and he asked what the process would be if a community group wanted
101 to collaborate with the city. Ald. Stevens said the groups could assist with fundraising, and they
102 might want to have some influence.

103
104 Dan told Ald. Stevens that city staff would work with a group that came forward, and they would
105 work together to create different ideas and thought processes. The benches first would go before
106 either the Room Tax Commission or the Parks, Recreation and Library Board, and the Common
107 Council ultimately would have final approval. Dan said, “If we wouldn’t have to spend the
108 \$3,000 on the benches, we wouldn’t, especially if we have some groups that would want to come
109 in and partner to look at what we could do to enhance that area.”

110
111 Peg inquired about the possibility of someone who wanted to dedicate a bench in memory of
112 someone.

113
114 Dan told Peg that memorial benches are put out through the Parks system, and he said he works
115 with individuals on a one-to-one basis. Dan said someone’s name can be put on the back of a
116 bench, noting that two have been installed two in 2021, and also that there are two such benches
117 currently at the Park Shop that will be installed at different parks. Dan asked if commission
118 members would want to have the same type of style of wood bench for the Great River Landing,
119 and he said staff could look into different options once the funds have been allocated.

120
121 Ald. Stevens noted there had been an initiative within the Omni Center to either have individual
122 or corporate sponsorships, and he said, “Would there be a methodology to maybe expand that if,
123 say, Festival Foods or something like that wanted to have a bench and we let them have a little
124 plaque? If they pay for the bench, is that something we would like to approach?”

125
126 Dan told Ald. Stevens he would be fully supportive of doing that and said he believes 23 3-inch

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127 letters could fit on a memorial bench. Dan estimated there are nearly a dozen benches located
128 around the city, and he shared the example of an individual who had spent a significant amount
129 of time at the skate park before passing away in 2020. Dan said the man’s family approached
130 him and told him they had found an individual who was willing to create a custom bench. The
131 bench included a photograph of the man on his scooter, and Dan said, “We worked with them to
132 make that happen. I think we’re very open to try to make that accommodating.”

133

134 The following are revenues that are budgeted for 2022:

135

- 136 • **Room tax revenue:** \$516,964
- 137 • **Vending machine revenue:** \$500
- 138 • **Bike passes:** \$5,000
- 139 • **Interest income:** \$250
- 140 • **Rent/support payments:** \$1,500
- 141 • **Total:** \$524,214

142

143 The personnel justification for 2022 is as follows:

144

	<u>Part-Time Personnel</u>	
Job Title	2021 Gross	2022 Prop.
GRL Laborer	\$20,326	\$23,394

148

149 Expenses budgeted for 2022 are as follows:

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- 151 • \$2,797 for water/sewer/storm water
- 152 • \$6,000 for electric and gas
- 153 • \$2,100 for phone/internet
- 154 • \$400 for software maintenance contractual
- 155 • \$211,984 for other contractual services (\$211,314 for LCCVB, \$420 for audit, \$250 for
156 miscellaneous)
- 157 • \$25 for sales tax
- 158 • \$50 for office supplies
- 159 • \$25 for postage
- 160 • \$100 for copy usage and paper
- 161 • \$250 for subscriptions and dues
- 162 • \$50 for recruitment
- 163 • \$1,500 for operating supplies
- 164 • \$1,200 for cleaning and sanitary supplies
- 165 • \$2,500 for building and grounds maintenance and repair
- 166 • \$100 for vehicle and maintenance repair

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- 167 • \$360 for regular fuel
- 168 • \$300 for insurance – workers comp
- 169 • \$300 for insurance – fire, comp/coll., boiler
- 170 • \$50 for insurance – vehicles
- 171 • \$119,109 for depreciation
- 172 • \$38,886 for interest on a \$400,000 loan (Omni payment)
- 173 • \$475 for other debt service-paying agent fees
- 174 • \$89,969 for transfers out (\$75,469 for the Omni Center, per city ordinance; \$14,500
- 175 additional transfer request)
- 176 • \$478,530 total

177

178 The budget summary is as follows:

179

- 180 • Total revenue is -\$524,214
- 181 • \$211,314 for the LCCVB
- 182 • \$102,152 for total principal on the debt
- 183 • \$38,886 for total interest on the debt
- 184 • \$89,969 for total transfers out
- 185 • \$18,58 for other expenses
- 186 • \$6,000 for capital outlay
- 187 • \$119,109 for building depreciation
- 188 • Subtotal is \$586,012
- 189 • Total is \$61,798 deficit before considering wages

190

191 Motion by Jason, second by Jay, to approve the 2022 Tourism Budget.

192

193 On voice vote, motion carried.

194

195 **Item 5 – Omni Center Sales Manager**

196

197 A. Statistics from Omni Center regarding hotel usage

198

199 Justin noted he had distributed the 2021 data to commission members, and he also noted there
200 have been 1,491 room nights. Justin estimated that the Great River Sprawl Volleyball
201 Tournament, which runs through Thursday, will generate 150 room nights.

202

203 B. Update on events

204

205 Justin reported the following:

206

- 207 • The Coulee Rock and Gem Show, the eight-team Girls Meltdown Hockey Tournament,
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- 208 the 10-team Boys Meltdown Hockey Tournament, a powerskating clinic, a wedding, a
209 bridal shower, the junior varsity portion of the Great River Sprawl Volleyball
210 Tournament, and the varsity portion of the tournament have been at the Omni Center
211 since the Room Tax Commission's last meeting May 26.
- 212 • There has been significant ice usage, as well as significant usage of the SportCourt in
213 Arena No. 1 for both basketball and volleyball.
 - 214 • Celebrate Onalaska attracted a respectable turnout in June despite a significant amount of
215 rainfall on the day of the event. The band (Vic Ferrari) was moved inside the Omni
216 Center.
 - 217 • The second Market in the Park of the year is scheduled for Saturday. Approximately 32
218 vendors have signed up to participate.
 - 219 • Other upcoming events include the RE/MAX company picnic; a MMA (September 11);
220 the Coulee Region Job Fair; the Auto Parts Headquarters Trade Show; the Fall Gift and
221 Craft Show (October 9-10), which will have approximately 100 vendors; and multiple
222 other events such as company meetings, picnics, and private events such as bridal
223 showers.
 - 224 • Ice will go back into Arena No. 1 at the end of October.
 - 225 • Contracts have been signed for two, three-day hockey tournaments that will be held in
226 November and December. Several of the participating teams will be coming from the
227 Twin Cities and the Chicago areas.
 - 228 • A contract was signed to hold the AAU Gymnastics Meet in May 2022. More than 650
229 gymnasts are expected to participate. Jay Fanta, the LCCVB's Director of Convention
230 Sales, assisted in securing the event.
 - 231 • Omni Center staff is working with an event promoter on hosting a large billiards
232 tournament in the fall of 2022.
 - 233 • Mike Severson began serving as Building Supervisor in July. Kourtnei Alcock will begin
234 her duties as the new Sales and Marketing Coordinator on Monday, August 30.
 - 235 • A new three-year sponsorship agreement was signed for a large sponsor in the arena.
236 Justin said he expects it to be put up within the next month before the ice goes in.
 - 237 • Staff is working to renew all the sponsorships on the same renewal cycle rather than
238 multiple dates throughout the year.
 - 239 • Staff is continuing to meet with the Explore La Crosse team every two weeks and discuss
240 ideas regarding different events. Justin said Kourtnei will meet with the hoteliers once she
241 has settled into her new position.

242
243 Jay asked Justin if he would be able to send out the approximate number of attendees at each
244 event.

245
246 Justin said yes.

247
248 **Item 6 – La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau – A.J. Frels**

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249

250 A.J. noted he had distributed to commission members a copy of the events that will be held in the
251 region over the next 90 days. A.J. reported the following:

252

253 • The Great River Road has been designated as an All-American Road – one of 14 in the
254 entire nation. A.J. said he believes the designation will bring more visitors to this area,
255 both domestically and internationally.

256 • The LCCVB shared a booth with the Wisconsin Department of Tourism at the Wisconsin
257 State Fair. The LCCVB assisted with promoting the Great River Road, and it also was
258 part of La Crosse County Day.

259 • The LCCVB is working with the WIAA to secure a long-term contract. A.J. noted he
260 had just received an email from WIAA representatives to inform him they will meet with
261 UW-La Crosse representatives Friday. LCCVB representatives will meet with WIAA
262 representatives either on August 30 or 31.

263 • The LCCVB is working with La Crosse County Administrator Steve O'Malley and his
264 team through the American Rescue Plan funding and attempting to develop a program
265 that will allow overnight stays to be built during the slower months (November through
266 February) for the lodging partners. The LCCVB will attempt a trial, with a certificate, to
267 generate more stays during that time. This will be done during the county's association
268 meeting, which will be held in late September. A child-care convention also is
269 scheduled. A.J. said the county's finance committee has granted its approval.

270 • Destinations Wisconsin (formerly the Wisconsin Association of Convention and Visitors
271 Bureaus) held a two-week public education program explaining and promoting the
272 importance of tourism for the state. The LCCVB was a contributor and a supporter of the
273 program. The LCCVB is still working with Luke Palmer with the videos. There will be
274 eight additional videos.

275 • The LCCVB printed 60,000 visitors guides (90,000 are typically printed). An additional
276 15,000 guides were printed, and they are being sent out. Sales are underway for the 2022
277 visitors guide.

278 • The LCCVB has reinstated its grant program for local festivals and events, and it put
279 \$25,000 into the program. All the funding has been secured, and applications are being
280 submitted.

281 • A.J. noted he had been contacted by WLUK-TV, a Fox affiliate based in Green Bay, and
282 participated in a seven-minute interview about the festivals and events occurring in the
283 La Crosse region.

284 • Deb Carlson (LCCVB Director of Membership & Grants) and Haleigh Doyle (LCCVB
285 Director of Media & Marketing) were featured in the latest issue of Coulee Women's
286 Magazine. Deb, a City of Onalaska resident, appeared on the magazine cover.

287 • The LCCVB has reached out to Fort McCoy regarding how it may assist with the Afghan
288 refugees. A.J. said Fort McCoy officials do not have any answers at this time, but the
289 LCCVB has reached out to determine if there is a mutual agreement and a mutual benefit

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- 290 for both sides regarding a need for employment at hotels and restaurants.
- 291 • Both Deb Carlson and Explore La Crosse were recognized for receiving an annual award
- 292 that helped Fort McCoy with family morale, welfare, and recreation.
- 293 • The trolley is once again running. There are both historic and dark tours.
- 294 • There soon will be a new sweepstakes program. There will be prizes valued at
- 295 approximately \$2,000, including a fishing kayak. The program begins September 1 and
- 296 will run through March.
- 297 • A.J. said he had attended the Meeting and Convention Committee, of which he serves as
- 298 Chair, and he reported the Department of Tourism will contribute \$1 million to the
- 299 budget line to help promote conventions and meetings for the state. The committee
- 300 typically receives between \$200,000 to \$250,000 a year total, and it will receive \$1
- 301 million in addition to that total. The committee will review firms and select one to work
- 302 with. The LCCVB utilizes the services Madden Media, one of the firms, to take care of
- 303 its website.
- 304 • Janet Dahl (Tourism and Volunteer Services) has accepted a position with Hobby Lobby,
- 305 and Jay Fanta is leaving his employment with the LCCVB. The LCCVB had a second
- 306 interview with a candidate earlier Wednesday for Janet's position, and it is taking
- 307 applications for Jay's position. Ben Morgan (Director of Group Sales & Sports
- 308 Services), who works with the Omni Center, will be assuming Jay's duties.
- 309 • The LCCVB came in at 75 percent of its budget, meaning 2019's numbers.
- 310 • According to the STAR reports from June and July, Onalaska properties saw an
- 311 occupancy rate of 59.4 percent in 2019. The percentage for 2021 was 63.9 percent.
- 312 Occupancy in July 2019 was 70 percent, and occupancy in July 2021 was 66.6 percent.
- 313 However, ADR and RevPAR were extremely comparable in July, and there was an
- 314 increase in ADR from 2019, and the RevPAR exceeded 2019 by 22 cents.
- 315

316 **Item 7 – Set future meeting date: November 17, 2021 at 4 P.M.**

317

318 The Room Tax Commission's next meeting will be at 4 p.m. on November 17.

319

320 **Adjournment**

321

322 Motion by Jason, second by Peg, to adjourn at 4:35 p.m.

323

324 On voice vote, motion carried.

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326

327 Recorded by:

328

329 Kirk Bey