

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

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

1

1 The meeting of the Room Tax Commission of the City of Onalaska was called to order at 4:08
2 p.m. on Wednesday, December 1, 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, Jay Patel

7
8 Also Present: City Administrator Eric Rindfleisch, Mayor Kim Smith, Financial Services
9 Director/Treasurer Sabrina Steger, Parks and Recreation Director Dan Wick, Omni Center
10 Manager Justin Swartling, Omni Center Sales & Marketing Coordinator Kourtnei Alcock, Ald.
11 Diane Wulf, Explore La Crosse Director A.J. Frels

12
13 Excused Absence: Jason Lund

14
15 **Item 2 – Consideration and action on minutes from the previous meeting**

16
17 Motion by Val, second by Jay, to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as printed and
18 on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

19
20 On voice vote, motion carried.

21
22 **Item 3 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

23
24 Ald. Stevens called three times for anyone wishing to provide public input and closed that
25 portion of the meeting.

26
27 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

28
29 **Item 4 – Financials:**

30
31 A. 2021 Financials

32
33 Sabrina’s report included the following information:

- 34
35
- 36 • Regarding revenues, 27.72 percent remained for Fiscal Year 2021 as of October 31.
 - 37 • Regarding expenditures, 28.53 percent remained for Fiscal Year 2021 as of October 31.
 - 38 • Per the “Room Tax Allocation” document, sales for the third quarter totaled
39 \$4,079,855.88. This was the first time that sales exceeded \$4 million (the data presented
40 to commission members goes back to 2006).
 - 41 • Revenue from taxable sales through the first three quarters of 2021 totaled \$642,533.88.
42 Revenue from taxable sales for all of 2020 totaled \$453,607.23. Sabrina said she
believes the city will exceed the 2019 revenue from taxable sales (\$807,952.72) once the

Reviewed 12/6/2021 by Sabrina Steger

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

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

2

43 fourth quarter data has been submitted.

44

45 Ald. Stevens asked if the third-quarter sales are an anomaly, or if they are an indicator that future
46 successful quarters.

47

48 Val said that while the increase can partially be attributed to individuals being eager to leave
49 home and travel, there are several contractors in this area – including at Fort McCoy, which is
50 hosting Afghan refugees – and this has led to a substantial increase in occupancy and demand.
51 Val said, “I believe they came into the area toward the end of August, and they should be here
52 through the end of February.”

53

54 Jay said there will be a substantial difference in revenue when high occupancy is combined with
55 high ADR.

56

57 Motion by Val, second by Peg, to accept and place on file the 2021 Financials.

58

59 B. 2022 Tourism Budget

60

61 Sabrina reported the following information:

62

- 63 • \$524,214 is being budgeted for total revenues for 2022.
- 64 • Regarding the room tax revenue (\$516,964 being budgeted), Sabrina said the city had
65 utilized an estimated supplied by the La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau
66 to estimate what the room tax revenue would be for 2022.
- 67 • \$617,527 has been estimated for total expenses. This will result in a deficit of \$93,313.
68 By comparison, a deficit of \$125,227 was budgeted for 2021, and a deficit of \$3,306 was
69 budgeted for 2020. Sabrina said, “With the market right now, we’re not 100 percent sure
70 where we’re going to be at in 2022, so I feel confident in how we budgeted for expenses
71 as well.”

72

73 Ald. Stevens asked, “If the current trends were to continue – there might be some reasons why it
74 might not – and we would think that these numbers could be conservative?”

75

76 Sabrina told Ald. Stevens that is correct and said depreciation, which is listed as an expense,
77 really does not have a cost associated to it other than the value of the city’s assets decreasing.
78 Sabrina said it is included as an expense even though there is no cash value to it, noting it is an
79 Enterprise Fund (\$119,109 has been budgeted for 2022).

80

81 Motion by Peg, second by Val, to accept the 2022 Tourism Budget.

82

83 On voice vote, motion carried.

84

Reviewed 12/6/2021 by Sabrina Steger

85 **Item 5 – Report from Omni Center Manager**

86
87 Justin noted he had distributed to commission members a list of events that had occurred since
88 the last Room Tax Commission meeting (August 25), and also a list of upcoming events. Justin
89 reported the following information:

- 90
- 91 • The Three Rivers Throwdown, an MMA event, had brought in approximately 45 room
92 nights.
 - 93 • The Fall Craft Show was held in October. There were approximately 15 vendors from
94 outside the area.
 - 95 • The facility changed over from dry floor season to hockey. Ice installation began
96 October 18.
 - 97 • Omni Center staff had worked with Explore La Crosse on securing tournaments through
98 MYHockey, a promoter based in the Chicago area. The first tournament was held in
99 November, which attracted four teams and totaled 81 room nights. Approximately 20
100 teams are expected to compete in a December tournament.
 - 101 • Boys and girls high school hockey games and Tornado Youth Hockey games also are
102 scheduled at the Omni Center. A majority of the TYH tournaments that will be held at
103 the facility are eight- and 16-team tournaments. Justin noted a majority of the TYH
104 tournaments will bring in anywhere from 16 to 30 room nights per team
 - 105 • Omni Center staff is working with Explore La Crosse on bringing in the American
106 Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) Central Regional to the Omni Center. The
107 regional would consist of 12 teams and 10 games, and the winner would advance to the
108 ACHA Championship.
- 109

110 Ald. Stevens asked Justin if the second page of the document he had distributed to commission
111 members shows the events that either have been booked or are planned for 2022, or if it shows
112 the events that had occurred in 2021.

113
114 Justin said it shows the facility's current year-to-date events.

115
116 Ald. Stevens inquired about the Milwaukee Admirals of the American Hockey League coming to
117 the Omni Center.

118
119 Justin said the teams from Milwaukee and Sioux Falls are two youth organizations that will be
120 playing three games at the Omni Center.

121
122 Kourtnei shared the following information:

- 123
- 124 • She has reached out to approximately 45 different sponsors, and slightly more than half
125 either have renewed or signed a new contract. Kourtnei said she is working with the

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

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

4

126 parties the city has worked with in the past, and she also is seeking out local businesses
127 and individuals who are seeking marketing opportunities. Kourtnei said she also is
128 working on a couple of larger sponsorship opportunities with local businesses.

- 129 • The Omni Center is preparing for a re-brand in an attempt to better market the facility
130 regionally. Requests for Proposals (RFPs) are being prepared to be sent to marketing
131 firms. The re-brand would include signage and marketing materials (font, color).

132

133 Ald. Stevens addressed the sponsorships that were introduced in 2020 and asked if the funds go
134 into the Omni Center's General Fund.

135

136 Dan told Ald. Stevens the funds go into the Omni Center's General Fund on an annual basis, and
137 he said, "Sometimes we do sponsorships. Sometimes we'll have vendors that will pay a three-
138 year commitment all up front. That will hit the first year that it does come in."

139

140 Ald. Stevens asked if it is pure revenue to the Omni Center.

141

142 Dan said it is.

143

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

145

146 A.J. told commission members the 2022 budget was based on 75 percent of the City of
147 Onalaska's 2019 revenue, and he said, "It should be conservative, yes." A.J. addressed the
148 graphs he had distributed to commission members prior to the meeting, and he said, "You take
149 into consideration how the year started and where we're sitting at the end of the year, it's been a
150 tremendous turnaround." A.J. complimented the lodging partners for the manner in which they
151 are managing their facilities.

152

153 A.J. reported the following:

154

- 155 • Sales for the Visitors Guide have been very strong, and it is expected to be released
156 within the next two to three weeks. A.J. said 90,000 copies will be distributed.
- 157 • Explore La Crosse's outdoor adventure prize package that is part of a sweepstake will run
158 through March 31. The value is \$2,000, and there has been a strong response. The fall
159 package drew 3,980 entries.
- 160 • The local municipalities were featured in many of Explore La Crosse's social media
161 efforts since the August Room Tax Commission meeting. Each municipality was
162 highlighted individually in addition to Explore La Crosse's umbrella look.
- 163 • WKBT-TV reported that tourism in the La Crosse region fared better than most in regard
164 to visitor spending, even in 2020. UW-La Crosse compiled the report.
- 165 • The fall photography contest was successful.
- 166 • Explore La Crosse produced 20,000 regional maps that have been distributed.

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

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

5

- 167 • Discover Wisconsin will highlight all six communities in this region for a show that will
168 be filmed in 2022 and air in 2023. Explore La Crosse will own the right to the footage,
169 and the footage will be utilized as Explore La Crosse sees fit.
- 170 • A.J. said he had attended the O-Cademy and complimented the City of Onalaska for
171 holding it.
- 172 • Explore La Crosse continues to work with Drift Bike. A.J. said he had worked as a
173 liaison for the Synergy Group, and he told commission members Explore La Crosse is
174 considering utilizing a different vendor that would be more familiar with Explore La
175 Crosse’s needs, and also would be more flexible. A.J. said he is aware that the City of
176 Onalaska has had conversations with Jacob Sciammas, Chairperson of the La Crosse
177 Community Bike Share Committee, about the bike share program potentially expanding
178 into the city in the future.
- 179 • Jeremiah Burish, Explore La Crosse’s Director of Sports Sales & Events, attended the
180 Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers Conference. The organization had held a
181 conference in this area. Approximately 150 to 170 journalists (print text, online, blogs)
182 write about outdoor-related activities – primarily hunting and fishing, but also activities
183 such as cycling and hiking. A.J. said Explore La Crosse hopes that the organization will
184 hold another conference in this area within the next couple years.
- 185 • Deb Carlson, Explore La Crosse’s Director of Membership & Grants, reported Explore
186 La Crosse’s membership has exceeded 400.
- 187 • The overnight sales promotion fliers done in conjunction with La Crosse County and
188 distributed to the county’s association convention and the child support group have been
189 sent. November was the first month the program was offered. The program asked that
190 individuals utilize the voucher from November through February to come back and stay
191 with Explore La Crosse’s lodging partners. Individuals receive \$100 off their two-night
192 stay, and the lodging partners are reimbursed for that full amount through Explore La
193 Crosse as a clearinghouse. La Crosse County pays the \$100.
- 194 • Carey Hegge is Explore La Crosse’s new Director of Tourism. Carey previously was
195 employed for 14 years by Gunderson Health System. She had been serving as a
196 scheduler for 17 different providers.
- 197 • The Wisconsin Fall Tourism Conference was held November 3-5, with 173 individuals
198 attending.
- 199 • A.J. said both he and Dave Ring, who is Kwik Trip’s Community Relations Manager and
200 a member of Explore La Crosse’s board, continue to have conversations regarding the
201 WIAA State Track and Field Championships. Sponsors are being sought to enhance the
202 event, and the goal is to secure a long-term contract with the WIAA. A.J. said he and
203 Dave have a meeting scheduled with the WIAA on December 13.
- 204 • A.J. noted he had attended the Craft Fair held in October at the Omni Center and said the
205 event had been well-run.
- 206 • Explore La Crosse is working with Omni Center on the 2022 Driftless Outdoors Show.
- 207 • Explore La Crosse’s board retreat will be held February 24 at the Omni Center.

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

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

6

- 208 • Explore La Crosse’s trolley program was within \$280 of breaking even.
- 209 • Explore La Crosse is working with UW-L Spanish Department on translating at the
- 210 lunker league fishing tournaments. It is possible there could be additional translations for
- 211 literature and online pieces. Per the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, fishing is the
- 212 third-highest reason the Hispanic market comes to Wisconsin.
- 213 • The Rotary Lights sweepstakes is garnering significant interest.
- 214 • Jeremiah attended the Sports ETA Conference in Kentucky and returned with excellent
- 215 leads.
- 216 • Explore La Crosse renewed its marketing efforts with Fort McCoy and added more
- 217 opportunities to help individuals find their way to La Crosse County.
- 218 • Haleigh Doyle, Explore La Crosse’s Director of Media & Marketing, participated in a
- 219 one-on-one interview with the Wisconsin Department of Tourism’s Marketing Director.
- 220 The two discussed ways in which the two departments can partner, and also to utilize
- 221 more of what the department is doing to ensure that there is a stronger link between the
- 222 state’s website and its marketing efforts and what Explore La Crosse is doing.
- 223 • Per the STR report, the City of Onalaska’s occupancy rate for October was 83.3 percent.
- 224 The next closest municipality was 73 percent, and the third-closest municipality was 62
- 225 percent. La Crosse County’s occupancy rate was 73 percent.
- 226 • La Crosse County’s revenue for 2021 is very strong compared to what it was in 2019.
- 227

228 Ald. Stevens asked from which areas the state is drawing the Hispanic community that fishes in
229 Wisconsin.

230
231 A.J. said the study was targeted out of the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

232
233 **Item 7 – Set future meeting date: February 23, 2022 at 4 P.M.**

234
235 The Room Tax Commission’s next meeting will be at 4 p.m. on February 23.

236
237 **Adjournment**

238
239 Motion by Val, second by Peg, to adjourn at 4:39 p.m.

240
241 On voice vote, motion carried.

242
243
244 Recorded by:

245
246 Kirk Bey