

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: OCCUPANCY TAX COORDINATION

DATE: JULY 2, 2014

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS KENNY
MERLINO
CONOVER
FRASIER
SIMPSON
STROUGH

OTHERS PRESENT:

MICHAEL R. SWAN, COUNTY TREASURER
KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR OF TOURISM
LEISA GRANT, PRINCIPAL ACCOUNT CLERK, TOURISM
KEVIN B. GERAGHTY, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
PAUL DUSEK, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD
FRANK E. THOMAS, BUDGET OFFICER

COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:

SUPERVISOR DICKINSON

SUPERVISORS BEATY

BROCK

SEEBER

TAYLOR

WESTCOTT

MICHAEL CONSUELO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LAKE GEORGE REGIONAL
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & CVB

ROBERT BLAIS, MAYOR FOR THE VILLAGE OF LAKE GEORGE

LUISA CRAIGE-SHERMAN, EXPLORE HISTORY WALKING TOURS

RONALD MONTESI, DEPUTY SUPERVISOR FOR THE TOWN OF QUEENSBURY

DON LEHMAN, *THE POST STAR*

SARAH MCLENITHAN, SECRETARY TO THE CLERK OF THE BOARD

Mr. Kenny called the meeting of the Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee to order at 9:32 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Strough, seconded by Mr. Simpson and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Copies of the agenda packet were distributed to the Committee members; *a copy of same is on file with the minutes.*

Commencing the Agenda review, Mr. Kenny advised the first item pertained to a Report on Occupancy Tax Collections. Michael Swan, County Treasurer, distributed copies of the Report to the Committee members; *a copy of same is on file with the minutes.* Mr. Swan apprised the total occupancy tax revenues collected through June 25, 2014 totaled \$681,995.47, reflecting an increase of \$33,588.10 (4.92%) compared to the same time period in 2013. He stated the available balance in the Occupancy Tax Reserve Fund was \$170,564.98 following the allocation of \$7,440 to cover the auditing fees incurred by the Charles R. Wood Park Project and the allocation of \$4,000 to the Sister Cities Committee of Glens Falls/Warren County to cover the cost of mailing the hot air balloon to Japan.

Mr. Kenny said the next item on the agenda pertained to a review of the revisions to the Municipal Accounting Form for Occupancy Tax Special Event Funding. Paul Dusek, County Administrator, recalled there had been concerns voiced at the previous Committee Meeting relating to the Municipal Accounting Form and the fact that some of the Towns were not accounting for the funds during the County's fiscal year (January 1st through December 31st). He explained he had met with Supervisor Conover in order to work on revisions to the Municipal Accounting Form. He noted the proposed revised form was included in the agenda packet and he pointed out the back of the proposed form

contained a box in which the municipality would indicate whether their standard practice was to account for revenues and expenditures during the fiscal year (January through December) or a different time period. He added there was a line requesting the municipality to specify the time period if it was not the fiscal year (ex. October through September). Regardless of how each individual municipality reported their revenues and expenditures, he continued, the front of the proposed form requested them to report from January 1st through December 31st in order to allow the County a valid comparison. He stated he hoped the proposed revisions addressed the concerns but if they did not, he could continue to work on further revisions. Mr. Kenny opined the proposed revised form looked suitable to him and Mr. Dusek mentioned a resolution would be necessary to approve the revised form. Chairman Geraghty asked if this form would be available as an electronic fillable form and Mr. Dusek replied affirmatively noting it was an Excel document. Mr. Dusek stated if anyone needed assistance with filling out the form they could contact Wanda Smith, Confidential Secretary to the County Administrator.

Motion was made by Mr. Merlino, seconded by Mr. Simpson and carried unanimously to approve the revised Local Tourism and Convention Development Agreement Municipal Accounting Form as outlined above. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes and the necessary resolution was authorized for the July 18, 2014 Board Meeting.*

Mr. Kenny stated the next item on the agenda was a request to appropriate \$41,846 from the Occupancy Tax Reserve Fund (A.881) for payment of the distribution of 2014 Occupancy Tax Collections to the municipalities. Leisa Grant, Principal Account Clerk for the Tourism Department, explained that \$885,000 had been budgeted for the distributions based on the collections from 2012. She said collections had been higher than anticipated for 2013 and the amount needed for total distributions equaled \$926,845.64, resulting in a shortfall of \$41,845.64.

Motion was made by Mr. Conover, seconded by Mr. Strough and carried unanimously to approve the request to appropriate funds from the Occupancy Tax Reserve Fund as outlined above and to forward same to the Finance Committee. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes.*

Mr. Kenny said the next item on the agenda pertained to continued discussion on the proposal from Robert Blais, Mayor of the Village of Lake George, for a consolidated Special Event Funding process. Mayor Blais explained that last year the County had awarded funding to 48 events, 22 of which had applied to 2 municipalities and 11 of which applied to 3 municipalities. He apprised the current process was cumbersome and confusing to the applicants, as it was necessary to fill out several applications and attend several meetings in order to receive funding. He stated the proposal would include a consolidated application in which the applicant would indicate which municipalities they were applying to receive funding from. He said the applicants would only be required to fill out one application and provide one presentation at the December Occupancy Tax Coordination Meeting. He commented that representatives from the municipalities would also attend the December meeting, in order to make funding determinations for their individual municipality. Mayor Blais stated one benefit of the consolidated process would be that representatives from the municipalities would be present to verify that previous years events had been as successful as the event promoters were indicating. He advised the process would be relatively simple and the current County Special Event Funding application could be utilized with some minor revisions.

Mayor Blais indicated the proposed consolidated process would eliminate the possibility of "double dipping". He mentioned there had been instances where the event budget presented to the Village of Lake George was different than the budget presented to the County. He added the proposed

consolidated process would ensure that the same invoices were not submitted to the County and municipalities for reimbursement. He noted the Village of Lake George only funded not-for-profit events and therefore events such as Americade were not eligible for funding. He mentioned the proposed consolidated process would ensure that municipalities which reaped the benefits of a particular event would be given the opportunity to assist in funding the event instead of all of the funding coming from the County. He mentioned that if a small event only applied to one municipality, such as the Village of Lake George, the application would not be presented at the December Committee Meeting; however, he continued, if the applicant intended to apply to multiple sources including the County, then the application would be handled at the December Meeting.

Mr. Kenny asked if the municipalities would make funding determinations at the December Meeting and Mayor Blais replied affirmatively. Mr. Kenny noted the meeting would be substantially longer than in prior years if that was the case. Mayor Blais commented that the County could not always award the amount of funding requested and the municipalities would have the opportunity to make up the difference. He noted the event promoters would leave the meeting knowing exactly how much funding had been awarded by all sources.

Mr. Strough said he liked the concept of a consolidated application but the process might need some revisions. He informed the Town of Queensbury was currently developing a new process for Occupancy Tax Special Event Funding. He noted one of the questions asked on the Town of Queensbury application was if funding had been sought from other sources. He said if the applicant indicated they had applied to the County, the Town of Queensbury would contact the County to determine the amount of funding awarded. Mr. Strough advised the Town of Queensbury accepted funding applications through May and would distribute the funding they received from the County in May by July. He asked how the funding for an event could be tracked if the event applied to the County in December and applied to the Town of Queensbury in May. Mayor Blais pointed out one issue was that the guidelines for the County differed from the guidelines for some of the municipalities. He noted that for the consolidated process to work, it would be necessary to have one set deadline for all of the municipalities.

Mr. Conover apprised the discussion primarily applied to the Town and Village of Lake George more than the other municipalities in Warren County. He said he would welcome Mayor Blais' participation in the County's Special Event Funding process. He suggested the multiple municipality applications could be identified prior to the December Meeting and a portion of the meeting could be dedicated to determining the funding sources for those events.

Mrs. Frasier asked if there was an intention to notify the applicants of the change in the Special Event Funding process if the decision was made to consolidate and Mr. Kenny replied affirmatively. Mrs. Frasier presented a scenario in which an event requested \$10,000 and the Town of Hague awarded \$7,000. She noted that when that event requested funding from the County, they should only be asking for \$3,000. Mr. Kenny questioned if the current application asked if funding had been sought from another municipality and Ms. Grant replied affirmatively. Mr. Kenny asked if invoices were requested for the funds expended and Ms. Grant replied affirmatively.

Mr. Merlino opined the consolidated application was a great idea but would require all of the Supervisors to attend the December Occupancy Tax Coordination Meeting. He said he would rather have the events apply to the Towns first with the County supplementing the amount awarded. He presented the example of Americade and said if the Village and Town of Lake George each awarded Americade \$10,000, then the County would award \$30,000 to total the requested \$50,000. Mayor Blais acknowledged that scenario would work; however, he added, some events applied to the

County first, then applied to the Towns for the un-awarded amount of the request. In order to initiate Mr. Merlino's suggestion, Mayor Blais continued, it would be necessary to insist that all events apply to the County first which would be appropriate as the County had the greatest amount of funding available. A brief discussion ensued.

Mr. Conover said the current process for the County involved the Chairmen of the Tourism and Occupancy Tax Coordination Committees completing a pre-screening review of the applications and he suggested the addition of an initial step which would include input from Mayor Blais. He noted that by the time the applications were presented to the Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee they would be reviewed and accuracy would be ensured. Mr. Merlino explained he and Mr. Kenny reviewed each application with Ms. Grant and Kate Johnson, Director of Tourism. He further explained that by the time the applications were reviewed in the December Meeting, there was already a rough idea of how much funding would be awarded to each event. Mr. Conover suggested Mayor Blais could be included in the review process with Ms. Grant, Ms. Johnson, Mr. Merlino and Mr. Kenny. Mayor Blais commented he had no need to review applications which did not pertain to the Village of Lake George. He opined that each Supervisor/Mayor should have some input for funding to events in their municipality. He predicted there would be an increase in funding applications once the Festival Space was fully operational. He mentioned his intent was to streamline the process and include input from the municipalities as to the actual impact of the events.

Chairman Geraghty asked if events were reimbursed following the submission of invoices and Ms. Grant replied affirmatively. He asked if there was a comparison of the amounts requested versus the amounts expended and Mr. Kenny responded the events were only reimbursed for the amount expended. Ms. Johnson stated that during last year's pre-screening, Mr. Kenny had suggested that all of the applicants be required to apply to other sources prior to submitting an application to the County. She added the County would then receive in writing from the municipalities by November 1st notification of the amounts awarded to each event. Mr. Kenny advised the matter would need to be discussed further at the next Committee meeting.

As there was no further business to come before the Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee, on motion made by Mrs. Frasier and seconded by Mr. Strough, Mr. Kenny adjourned the meeting at 10:03 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah McLenithan, Secretary to the Clerk of the Board
(As typed by Charlene DiResta, Senior Legislative Office Specialist)