

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM & OCCUPANCY TAX COORDINATION

DATE: JANUARY 19, 2021

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS: GERAGHTY
MERLINO
BRAYMER
WILD
HOGAN
BEATY
STROUGH

OTHERS PRESENT:

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:

JOANNE CONLEY, DIRECTOR
LEISA GRANT, PRINCIPAL ACCOUNT CLERK
MICHAEL R. SWAN, COUNTY TREASURER
CHRISTIAN DUTCHER, DIRECTOR, AMERICADE INC.
RACHEL E. SEEBER, CHAIRWOMAN OF THE BOARD
RYAN MOORE, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
MARY ELIZABETH KISSANE, COUNTY ATTORNEY
AMANDA ALLEN, CLERK OF THE BOARD
FRANK E. THOMAS, BUDGET OFFICER
SUPERVISORS DRISCOLL
FRASIER
LEGGETT
MAGOWAN
SHEPLER
SMITH
TAMMIE DELORENZO, ASSISTANT TO THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
RYAN DICKEY, SECOND ASSISTANT COUNTY ATTORNEY
DON LEHMAN, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
TOSHA BROWNELL, COMPUTER HELP DESK TECHNICIAN
LESLIE LOVELACE, SECRETARY TO THE CLERK OF THE BOARD

Please note, the following contains a summarization of the January 19, 2021 meeting of the Tourism Committee; the meeting in its entirety can be viewed on the Warren County website using the following link:

<https://warrencountyny.gov/gov/comm/Archive/2021/tourism>

Note: As per Governor Cuomo's Executive Order 202.1: "Article 7 of the Public Officers Law, to the extent necessary to permit any public body to meet and take such actions authorized by the law without permitting in public in-person access to meetings and authorizing such meetings to be held remotely by conference call or similar service, provided that the public has the ability to view or listen to such proceeding and that such meetings are recorded and later transcribed". Supervisors Geraghty, Merlino and Braymer who were physically present, while Supervisors Wild, Hogan, beaty and Strough participated virtually.

Mr. Geraghty called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 10:56 a.m.

Motion was made by Ms. Braymer, seconded by Ms. Hogan and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the October 26, 2020 Tourism Committee meeting and the December 14, 2020 Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Copies of the Tourism agenda were distributed to those in attendance and those participating virtually accessed the agenda via the Warren County website; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the meeting minutes.*

Privilege of the floor was extended to Michael Swan, *County Treasurer*, who provided a report on occupancy tax

revenues, stating collections were down \$612,726.53 through the end of 2020 compared to 2019; he commented this actual figure was approximately 15% lower than collections for 2019 and apprised the reduction was less than the 17% he had estimated in his December report. He noted he expected more collections through the end of March from the larger properties, but he was unsure how much those would be. He apprised as a result of registering the short-term rentals his staff was overworked and he may request more staff to handle this in the future.

Continuing to the agenda review, Mr. Geraghty stated the Discussion Item listed on the agenda entailed an update on the Lake George Winterfest; he advised there had been some concerns regarding attracting out-of-town visitors due to the rise of COVID-19 cases in the County. Privilege of the floor was extended to Christian Dutcher, *Director, Americade Inc.*, who apprised the event incorporated existing business partners/providers creating a package for tourists that consisted of socially distanced activities, most of which were held outdoors, and Safety Plans had been requested for each activity. He said the program was designed for flexibility and the promoters were fully aware the whole program could be halted. Mr. Dutcher said each vendor was required to submit attestations to be compliant with the State based on their business category and were required to have certificates of insurance. He assured the Committee he was working with Ryan Moore, *County Administrator*, to ensure all of the necessary steps were being taken. He said the website for the event had recently been launched and visitors had signed up.

Mr. Moore apprised he had distributed an update to the Board on Saturday that indicated the Safety Plans and Certificates of Insurance would be received by Mr. Dutcher who would be reviewing them first and would then forward them to the County; he said he anticipated receiving these by January 22nd.

Ms. Braymer inquired about the safety protocols in place for the skiing activities at Coles Woods which was a public facility. Mr. Dutcher replied the procedures in place for the Inside Edge/Coles Woods activity was from the provider of the equipment which was Inside Edge who had a limited amount of equipment inventory which would control the amount of participants in this activity. Ms. Braymer asked if he was working with the City of Glens Falls in regards to the activity, as Friends of Coles Woods maintained the trails, and she suggested he contact Amy Collins, *Tourism & Downtown Business Coordinator, City of Glens Falls*, regarding who to contact for use of the trails, as well as the safety aspect.

Mr. Magowan asked Mr. Dutcher how many visitors he anticipated the event to draw to the area. Mr. Dutcher replied 100 wrist bands had already been sold and he estimated 400 to 900 wrist bands would be sold in total. He added he would provide the sales data to the County.

Ms. Shepler inquired what area the sales of the wrist bands were coming from. Mr. Dutcher stated marketing efforts were focused on the zip codes with fewer COVID-19 cases and although he did not have the zip code locations currently, he would be happy to provide the information. Ms. Shepler indicated she was concerned with tourists coming to the area while restaurants were starting to close due to the presence of the new strain of COVID-19 and asked how he planned to meet the visitors needs should more restaurants close. Mr. Dutcher replied this was a valid concern and he intended on being transparent with the guests by updating the website list of what was open and would encourage visitors to visit the site regularly so they were aware of any changes. He stated although the visitors would most likely cancel and have their money refunded he believed it was in the best interest to be honest with them before they arrived and found many places were closed.

Mr. Geraghty requested Mr. Dutcher work closely with JoAnne Conley, *Director, Tourism Department*, and Mr. Moore to update the County given the uncertain circumstances, as it was in the best interest of Warren County.

Ms. Hogan asked if there would be walk up business for those who did not purchase wristbands and Mr. Dutcher replied affirmatively, as the businesses had customers other than the visitors from the Lake George Winterfest.

Mr. Beaty commended Mr. Dutcher and partners for adapting to the changing situation and being flexible as needed.

Mr. Driscoll requested vendors have signage to remind guests to social distance and wear masks at the events. Ms. Conley stated her Department had updated winter versions of safety signs used from the summer that she would share with Mr. Dutcher.

Mr. Wild remarked the goal of the event was to promote safe activities which the public was seeking as well as the opportunity to raise awareness of visitors about the winter assets Lake George has to offer. He reminded the Committee businesses were not opening for the event, rather existing businesses were being promoted and he felt Mr. Dutcher and his partners were doing the best they could to make the event safe.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Ms. Braymer, seconded by Mr. Beaty and carried unanimously, Mr. Geraghty adjourned the meeting at 11:24 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Leslie Lovelace, Secretary to the Clerk of the Board