

**WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**COMMITTEE: TOURISM & OCCUPANCY TAX COORDINATION**

**DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 2021**

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**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  
MARK BEHAN, BEHAN COMMUNICATIONS, INC.  
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 DICKINSON  
DRISCOLL  
MAGOWAN  
SMITH  
TAMMIE DELORENZO, ASSISTANT TO THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR  
DON LEHMAN, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
JEREMY SCRIME, SENIOR COMPUTER SYSTEMS ANALYST/PROGRAMMER  
LESLIE LOVELACE, SECRETARY TO THE CLERK OF THE BOARD

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*Please note, the following contains a summarization of the February 22, 2021 meeting of the Tourism & Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee; the meeting in its entirety can be viewed on the Warren County website using the following link: <https://warrencountyny.gov/mma>*

***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”. All of the Committee members in attendance participated via video or teleconference, except for Supervisor Merlino who was physically present.***

Mr. Geraghty called the meeting of the Tourism & Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee to order at 2:41 p.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Beaty, seconded by Mr. Strough and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous 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 Joanne Conley, *Tourism Director*, who commenced the agenda review with a request to authorize an agreement with Adirondack Regional Tourism Council in an amount not to exceed \$10,000 for regional marketing services, which includes digital and social media, website, email marketing and mobile tracking.

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Motion was made by Ms. Hogan, seconded by Mr. Strough and carried unanimously to approve the request and the necessary resolution was authorized for the March 19<sup>th</sup> Board meeting. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes.*

Proceeding to the Items for Discussion portion of the agenda, the following was reviewed:

- c. Hospitality Task Force RFP - Mark Behan, *Behan Communications, Inc.*, stated he had submitted a Request for Proposals (*RFP*) on behalf of the Hospitality Task Force to generate relevant and reliable data to aid in a joint strategy to support year-round tourism for Warren County, Lake George and the Southern Adirondack areas. Ryan Moore, *County Administrator*, inquired if the intention was to forward the RFP to the Purchasing Department and Mr. Geraghty replied in the affirmative. Mr. Moore requested the intention require respondents to explain the process, provide a timeline, list the expected deliverables and require the RFP to specify what the evaluation criteria being used was if the lowest bid was not going to determine the award. A brief discussion ensued in regards to whether or not the results of the study would be made public, following which a motion was made by Mr. Wild, seconded by Mr. Strough and carried unanimously to approve the RFP and forward same to the Purchasing Department.
- a. Report on revenues by Treasurer, Mike Swan - Michael Swan, *County Treasurer*, provided a report on occupancy tax collections, stating \$4,174,846 had been collected for 2020, which was 15.3% below the collections last year or \$641,000. He noted collections were still being received and he expected them to continue through the middle of March, but he was unsure how much those would be. Mr. Wild requested Mr. Swan report on other Counties occupancy tax collections over the past year, such as Tompkins County & Finger Lakes County at the meeting next month for a comparison.
- b. Americade, Christian Dutcher - Christian Dutcher, *Director, Americade Inc.*, apprised a new date had been set for the Americade event in September. Mr. Strough expressed his concern with the new date, as it conflicted with the Adirondack Balloon Festival which already had an abundance of traffic and he was concerned the Sheriff's Office was already utilized to their full capacity for traffic enforcement for that event without an added event the same weekend. Mr. Dutcher replied he was in agreement with Mr. Strough which was why there were going to be changes made to the activities in an effort to reduce police intensive activities and he explained why that particular date was chosen rather than the months of June, July, August and October. A brief discussion ensued in regards to other police and traffic enforcement ideas, as well as EMS services. Mr. Dutcher apprised he would contact local police agencies outside of the Warren County Sheriff's Department, fire departments and local EMS agencies to determine if their services could be used for Americade or if there would be a conflict with the Adirondack the Balloon Festival. Mr. Geraghty asked Joanne Conley, *Director, Tourism*, to speak as to the room rental rate during the week of Balloon Festival. Ms. Conley stated she reviewed the Smith Trends Report (*STR*) which indicated the supply for September 2019 for branded properties that subscribed to STR was 6,860 and most weekends the demand was in the high 4,000's. She said for the weekend of the Adirondack Balloon Festival the numbers were 5,300 and 5,800 and that did not include the smaller motels, cottages and cabins. Mr. Geraghty congratulated Mr. Dutcher on the success of the Lake George Winterfest. Mr. Dutcher stated he would run a report by the end of the week to determine net proceeds from the Lake George Winterfest and the amount of proceeds to be returned to the County, noting an exact amount would not be available until all bills had been paid. Mr. Geraghty remarked he noticed over the past weekend there was good attendance for the event and thanked Mr. Dutcher.
- d. County Occupancy Tax Funding Application - Mr. Geraghty extended his appreciation to the Tourism Department and Leisa Grant, *Principal Account Clerk, Tourism*, for their help on the revised application and stated a copy was included in the agenda packet. A brief discussion ensued, following which a motion was made by Mr. Wild, seconded by Ms. Hogan and carried unanimously to approve the adoption of the revised application for Warren County Occupancy Tax funding.

- e. Tourism Development and Events Coordinator - Mr. Geraghty apprised there was a job description draft for the creation of the Tourism Development and Events Coordinator position included with the agenda and he welcomed questions and comments. Ms. Hogan inquired how the position intersected with the Lake George Chamber of Commerce and Convention Visitors Bureau (CVB). Ms. Conley replied the Lake George Chamber of Commerce & CVB focused on attracting meetings, conventions, small groups and the wedding market and the new position would develop a regional event strategy, work with current event organizers, work with towns on smaller events, put a public relation strategy behind all events taking place in the County, help smaller events with an economic impact, ensure the events were meeting public safety guidelines which did not fall under the contract with the CVB. A lengthy discussion ensued in regards to concerns about creating a position, following which a motion was made by Ms. Braymer and seconded by Ms. Hogan to approve creation of the position. An additional discussion ensued in regards to creating a position before funds were restored to the towns from the 2020 Occupancy Tax Spending Plan. Mr. Moore stated the occupancy tax collections were going to be significantly higher than what was projected and the position would allow for the assistance that had been talked about for the past three years to help make Warren County a year-round destination, as well as provide an event strategy, an analysis of events to generate additional revenue and public safety and COVID compliance. Chairwoman Seeber apprised the position would increase revenue, provide relief for Mr. Moore, who had been tirelessly working around the clock and provide an opportunity to show the community the County was ready and waiting for visitors in a safe, responsible way, as well as to help with coordination and calendar events; she voiced she was fully supportive of the Tourism Department. She apprised the position was Mr. Merlino's idea which she was grateful for and she thanked Mr. Geraghty for his support on the position. Mr. Geraghty explained the position creation was with the intent that the position would pay for itself and if after a year this did not occur changes would be made.

Following further discussion, Ms. Braymer amended her motion and Ms. Hogan amended her second to amend the Table of Organization and Salary Schedule to create the position of Tourism Development and Events Coordinator, *Grade 14, Annual Salary \$61,855*, effective April 1, 2021 and continuing on a temporary basis tied to revenues generated. Mr. Geraghty called the question and the motion was carried unanimously to approve the request and refer same to the Personnel, Administration & Higher Education Committee. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes.*

Proceeding to the Referrals/Pending Items portion of the agenda, the following was reviewed:

- 1) Ms. Conley provided an update on the short-term rental report for the month of January from the new vendor AirDNA. She explained All the Rooms reported Airbnb as one figure and Home Away Vrbo as another figures, but AirDNA combined both of those which showed rentals were up 53% comparing January 2020 to January 2021 with demand up 40% for the last 12 months.
- 2) Mr. Wild withdrew his request for the \$3,500 study due to action taken earlier in the meeting for the RFP from the Hospitality Task Force.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Wild, seconded by Mr. Strough and carried unanimously, Mr. Geraghty adjourned the meeting at 3:47 p.m.

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