

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM & OCCUPANCY TAX COORDINATION

DATE: JUNE 3, 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
KRISTEN HANIFIN, DEVELOPMENT/EVENT COORDINATOR
RACHEL E. SEEBER, CHAIRWOMAN OF THE BOARD
RYAN MOORE, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
AMANDA ALLEN, CLERK OF THE BOARD
ROBERT TERWILLIGER, ACTING COUNTY ATTORNEY
FRANK E. THOMAS BUDGET OFFICER

SUPERVISORS CONOVER

BRUNO
DIAMOND
DRISCOLL
LEGGETT
MAGOWAN
MCDEVITT

MICHAEL SWAN, COUNTY TREASURER

TAMMIE DELORENZO, ASSISTANT TO THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

MICHAEL COLVIN, DIRECTOR, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

TOSHA BROWNELL, HELP DESK TECHNICIAN

MOLLY GANOTES-GLEASON, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Please note, the following contains a summarization of the June 3, 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 were physically present aside from Supervisor Strough who participated remotely.

Mr. Geraghty called the meeting of the Tourism & Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee to order at 9:02 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Merlino, seconded by Mr. Wild 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 & Occupancy Tax Coordination 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.

Commencing the agenda review, Mr. Geraghty indicated the first item was to discuss the Special Event Funding

Scoring sheet. He said he would take questions from the Committee members and the public, but noted they would not be adopting it today. Ms. Braymer suggested changing the increments for scoring from \$34,000 to \$30,000 for the 40-45 category, adding a 46-50 category for \$35,000 and a category of 51+ points for up to \$50,000. Mr. Geraghty questioned if the Committee accepted Ms. Braymer changes and consensus of the Committee was to move forward with them. Ms. Seeber asked to hear from Kristen Hanifin, *Development/Event Coordinator*, regarding how the event calculator related to the Special Event Funding Scoring sheet and Ms. Hanifin replied the Economic Impact Calculator was something they needed to evaluate moving forward. She indicated she was working with the other staff within the Tourism Department on an overall strategy for accountability of their investments and the evaluation of the return on that investment. She apprised that process would be using the Economic Impact Calculator, advising they were creating a new event funding application along with guidelines and different criteria. She suggested looking at it with a strategic objective and not just heads in beds, and consider the marketing influence of that application as well as whether it made a difference and give back to the community. Ms. Hanifin provided different examples. She remarked they should look at occupancy tax funding as investments, apprising they were creating an occupancy tax process that would benefit everyone and keep growing. Mr. Geraghty commented that this process would not be rushed. Ms. Seeber informed the scoring sheet was the most important document that guided them within the law. Ms. Hogan voiced it could be a powerful development tool and she questioned how to utilize the Capital Improvement Plan within occupancy tax spending, noting that the Towns no longer received supplemental funds so it was necessary to use some of that money for development in some of the smaller towns and for tourism related infrastructure. Mr. Merlino remarked that a small group should be created to update the plan from 20 years prior to investigate what the County should be doing regarding occupancy tax spending.

Mr. Strough left the meeting at 9:30 a.m.

Continuing the discussion, Ms. Braymer suggested reviewing the Appendix A, as well. Ms. Hanifin advised the new packet would be comprehensive so the applicant would not have any questions. Mr. Wild inquired if it would be a guideline for the Towns and Mr. Geraghty replied it did not apply to the Towns. Ms. Seeber commented the Appendix A Spending Guidelines had never been passed by this legislative body, informing it was a recommendation by the County Administrator for municipalities, reporting the County Attorney was specific that it was meant to be a guide for the Towns. She mentioned there were two Appendix A's, one of which was the Spending Guidelines while the other was a list of Approved Expenses for Municipalities. She stated the County should prove a list of expenses to event holders because it was for tourism generated events that was regulated by the County. Ms. Seeber asked that discussion regarding the Appendix A be added to the agenda for further discussion and Mr. Geraghty replied affirmatively, adding it would be discussed when they had conversations regarding the spending for the Towns. He indicated they had tried to adhere to the Appendix A regardless if it was adopted or not. Ms. Hogan suggested to include annual training on the Occupancy Tax calendar. Mr. Magowan inquired where he could view financial Town information and Mr. Geraghty replied they could be viewed at the County Attorney's office. Mr. Merlino informed the Spending Plan was funded through sales tax and not occupancy tax. Mr. Wild inquired if he could obtain information regarding where else an occupancy tax applicant might be getting additional support over the past few years. Mr. Geraghty notified Leisa Grant, *Principal Account Clerk*, audited the reports to verify that the "same expenses" did not come from both the Towns and the County for the same event. Mr. Thomas recalled that the supplemental money the Towns received was distributed because the balance of the Occupancy Tax reserve grew to large and needed to be spent.

Joanne Conley, *Director, Tourism*, spoke regarding when coordinating with the Towns on small events they had a comprehensive event calendar. She invited the Committee to follow their social media. She explained they had a tiered system for signature events, while other events were promoted organically.

Ms. Braymer inquired if there was a total amount that was already allocated and Ryan Moore, *County Administrator*, advised at the previous meeting there was a budget amendment in the amount of \$300,000 due to additional revenue that was not anticipated in 2020 that went into the Town allocations and the remaining revenue was distributed into different funds, adding the Committee earmarked the funds for occupancy tax funding applications that had already been submitted. He said 2021 was budgeted for \$4.33 million in revenue, apprising the County would gain more than that. He said this year there was additional room to amend the budget to increase appropriations for additional event applications and additional applications that may be received from municipalities. Ms. Braymer inquired if there was an amount that could be allocated and Mr. Moore replied a budget amendment of \$250,000 could be made, but he anticipated more than that.

Motion was made by Ms. Braymer and seconded by Ms. Hogan to amend the budget in the amount of \$200,000; however the motion failed due to a lack of majority vote with Messrs. Geraghty, Merlino and Wild voting in opposition.

Ms. Hogan spoke regarding the Town of Johnsbury application for occupancy tax funding, explaining she was not in favor of allocating money that was not in the budget, informing she would explain the request, but she did not want a vote called. She said the Town of Johnsbury developed a marketing plan in 2018 and moved forward with a marketing website, adding with the loss of the supplemental funds available they no longer had the funds to maintain the website and social media presence. She indicated the request was for \$15,000 per year for five years, but she did not want to ask for the funds.

Ms. Braymer suggested allocating \$100,000. Ms. Seeber stated they should address the request from the Town of Johnsbury to support her municipality, noting they had supported the Town of Horicon's request. She recommended that someone make a motion to support the minimum request for her to support her municipality. Mr. Thomas recommended the Tourism & Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee did not support the Towns and had not fully funded their requests, adding those should be a priority.

Motion was made by Mr. Geraghty, seconded by Mr. Merlino and carried by majority vote with Supervisor Wild voting in opposition, to approve the budget amendment in the amount of \$100,000 and refer the same to the Finance Committee.

After a brief discussion, motion was made by Ms. Braymer, seconded by Mr. Merlino and carried unanimously to allocate \$15,000 to the Town of Johnsbury for the first year of their request and the necessary resolution was authorized for the June 16th Board Meeting.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism & Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee, on motion made by Ms. Hogan, seconded by Mr. Wild and carried unanimously, Mr. Geraghty adjourned the meeting at 10:08 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Molly Ganotes-Gleason, Legislative Office Specialist