

Tourism Entities (Destination Marketing Organizations) in Wisconsin

Municipalities contracting with a Tourism Entity was created to address concerns that municipalities were “making money” from the lodging industry in the state. As room taxes are meant to benefit local lodging establishments by aiding in marketing and tourism development which in turn, increase “heads in beds”. Some establishments felt that they would benefit more if a 3rd party were performing tourism duties rather than the municipalities. The law was changed in the 2015-2017 state budget legislation to manage how room tax revenues are handled beginning January 2017.

There is no clear deadline or punishment for a municipality. However, most municipalities that collect room tax either individually or as a group (referred to as a zone) contract with a tourism entity/destination marketing organization or some other non-profit organization such as a chamber of commerce.

Local:

- Sun Prairie has a Tourism Commission, but partners with the Madison Area Sports Commission and meets “as needed”.
- Beaver Dam does not have a Tourism Commission, but the Council acts as a Tourism Commission and directly contracts with the Beaver Dam Chamber and Visitor Center for Tourism.
- Watertown has a Tourism Commission that works with the Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce to provide tourism services.

Similar Size:

- Berlin utilizes the Green Lake Area Chamber of Commerce for both its Chamber and designated tourism activities. Berlin has a Travel and Tourism Commission that meets “as needed”.
- Ripon utilizes a combination of organizations despite designating the Ripon Chamber of Commerce for tourism activities. Ripon Main Street, Green Lake Area Chamber of Commerce are involved as well. Ripon’s Council acts as the Tourism Commission.
- Dodgeville has a Tourism Zone Commission where it partners with the Town of Dodgeville and like us, has not designated a tourism entity yet, but it regularly partners with the Chamber of Commerce for tourism activities.

Other Communities:

- Marshfield directly contracts with Visit Marshfield who runs the day-to-day Tourism and the City's Council acts as the Tourism Commission. Marshfield Main Street and the Recreation Department receive some room tax funding for tourism events.
- Port Washington does not have a Tourism Commission, with the role fulfilled by the Council who contracts with Visit Port Washington for Tourism efforts.
- Fox Valley communities (Appleton, Kaukauna, Grand Chute, etc.) work jointly as the Fox Cities Area Room Tax Commission and appoint the Fox Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau to perform tourism duties.
- The Town of Rome designates Visit Rome Wisconsin as its Destination Marketing Organization.
- Bayfield formed a Tourism Commission and uses its room tax contribution to make payments the Bayfield Chamber & Visitors Bureau. The Tourism Commission oversees the tourism fund, allocates a portion to the BCVB, but oversees tourism-related development projects.
- Mount Pleasant has a Tourism Commission that had its contract expire in 2020 with its tourism entity and has instead developed an internal tourism department, expanded special event grant programs, and engaged in regional partnerships. It is a unique case in Wisconsin as its partnership with Visit Racine County includes funding support and board representation, but not as a formal tourism entity contract.