

CITY OF TWO RIVERS  
ROOM TAX COMMISSION  
PROCEEDINGS  
January 11, 2022  
Committee Room - City Hall  
10:00 AM

**Call to Order**

In the absence of Chairman Mark Bittner, the meeting was called to order by Greg Buckley at 10:08 AM.

**Roll Call**

Commission members present: Curt Andrews, Greg Buckley, Bill LeClair and Jim VanLanen Jr.  
Commission members absent: Mark Bittner. (Note: Mr. Bittner arrived at approximately 10:30 AM; his arrival is noted in the body of these minutes.)

Also present: Elizabeth Runge, Community Development Director and Jeff Dawson, Library Director.

**Election of Acting Chair**

Mr. LeClair moved, supported by Mr. Buckley, to elect Mr. Andrews to chair the meeting in Mr. Bittner's absence. The motion was approved by voice vote, without dissent.

**Budget Update—Status of 2021 Budget at Year-End**

Mr. Buckley noted that room tax collections for 2021 totaled \$240,849, which was \$85,849 over 2021 budget and about 68 percent over 2020 actual. 52.4 percent of all room tax revenues for 2021 are payable to the Manitowoc Area Visitor and Convention Bureau, per the Tourism Services Agreement that expired on December 31, 2021.

Mr. Buckley distributed a 2021 year-end report for Fund 258, the Community Tourism Fund. The report showed 2021 revenues totaling \$97,947 and expenditures totaling \$80,042, for net operating income of \$17,905. Given that Fund 258 ended 2020 with a modest deficit balance of \$87, the projected 2021 year-end fund balance is \$17,818.

Mr. Buckley also reviewed the approved 2022 Budget for Fund 258, which anticipates revenues of \$183,049, including \$161,049 from room taxes. (Total room tax revenues are budgeted at \$200,000 with \$38,951 going to the City's General Fund and the balance to Fund 258.)

He noted that the budget anticipates spending \$195,000 in 2022, with \$155,000 of that available for tourism services—the other \$40,000 is made up of \$20,000 for maintenance of the Woodland Drive wayside and \$20,000 for logo wear purchases (that latter amount to be offset by logo wear sales revenue).

Mr. Bittner joined the meeting near the end of this budget discussion.

**Consider Limited Term Employment Agreement or Contract for Services with Amy James**

Ms. Runge distributed both a proposed professional services contract and job description for limited term employment, as alternatives for engaging the services of Amy James of Neenah to assist in developing and implementing a plan for Two Rivers' tourism future.

Mr. Buckley expressed a preference for engaging Ms. James under a professional services contract for such short-term services, even though it would carry a higher hourly cost.

Following discussion, Mr. Andrews moved, supported by Mr. Bittner, to affirm that the Room Tax Commission prefers that the engagement of Ms. James' services for helping develop and implement a transition strategy be on a contractual basis. The motion was approved by voice vote, without dissent.

Ms. Runge noted that services to be provided by Ms. James would include, in the near-term:

- Developing a marketing budget for 2022
- Identifying tourism assets for marketing
- Conducting focus groups to gather information from the local hospitality industry

Longer-term activities would include:

- Working with the Room Tax Commission and City staff to include define the structure, budget and employment needs of a new tourism entity for Two Rivers
- Creating a strategic action plan for the City's tourism entity
- Introducing the new Two Rivers Tourism effort to the region and to State tourism entities
- Leading in the development of the organizational structure for a new local tourism entity, including the development of a Tourism Advisory Board, a new 501(c)6, and writing job descriptions to fulfill staffing needs.
- Other services as requested by the Room Tax Commission

Mr. VanLanen asked for more background information on Ms. James. Ms. Runge and Mr. Buckley noted that Ms. James had addressed her professional background during a Zoom discussion at the last Room Tax Commission meeting, but Mr. VanLanen missed part of that meeting due to another commitment. They went on to address her experience as Tourism Director for the Waupaca Area Chamber, 2007-2010 and as Executive Director of Future Neenah, 2010-2018, along with other relevant experience. Ms. James is currently a principal in Vision Architecture of Neenah.

There was discussion as to whether Ms. James would herself engage in tourism marketing activities on behalf of Two Rivers. It was the consensus that such work is outside the scope of the proposed contract and should be handled at this time by the City's Branding and Marketing Committee and by the MAVCB, which has represented that it is continuing to carry out that function.

Following discussion, Mr. LeClair moved, supported by Mr. Bittner, to authorize the proposed professional services agreement with Amy James Consulting, LLC, at an hourly rate of \$125, not to exceed \$30,000 in total costs, with the understanding that direction for her activities under the agreement would be through the City Manager and Community Development Director, with periodic reports to the Room Tax Commission.

The motion was approved by voice vote, 4-1, with Mr. VanLanen voting no.

**Discuss Status of Manitowoc Area Visitor and Convention Bureau.**

Mr. VanLanen reported that the MAVCB is now operating from its new, leased offices on Dewey Street in Manitowoc. He further reported that, as Treasurer for that organization, he has been working with MAVCB Director Jason Ring on the 2022 operating budget.

He stated that their goal is to continue providing full tourism services as in the past, with the hope that the cities of Manitowoc and Two Rivers will re-join the organization. Other Commission members expressed skepticism that this could ever happen, given statements and actions by the Manitowoc Room Tax Commission in recent months. Mr. VanLanen stated that he expects for the MAVCB Board to be presented with a somewhat pared-back annual budget of \$400,000 (down from \$520,000 in 2021), which would still allow it to retain current staffing and would leave available the \$250,000 in state grant funds recently awarded the organization.

Mr. Bittner asked if there was a meeting of the full MAVCB Board scheduled. Mr. VanLanen stated that he expected such a meeting would be held sometime in January.

Mr. Buckley stated that he had recently spoken with Manitowoc Mayor Justin Nickels about Manitowoc's tourism efforts, and that he expects there will be continued dialogue and cooperation between the two cities on tourism matters, even post-MAVCB.

**Next meeting Date and Time**

Mr. Buckley stated that he would like to update the City Council on the City's tourism activities at the monthly work session on January 31. Based on that, there was consensus to hold the next Commission meeting at 10:00 AM on that date.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Buckley moved, supported by Mr. LeClair, to adjourn the meeting at 11:28 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,



Gregory E. Buckley  
City Manager/Room Tax Commission Member