

CITY OF ANTIGO
HOTEL MOTEL COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD
FEBRUARY 27, 2019

Hotel Motel Commission of the City of Antigo met in Regular Meeting on the above date at 8:30 AM in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Mayor Bill Brandt presiding.

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Tom Bauknecht	Ward 4	Present	
Bill Brandt	Mayor	Present	
Deena Grabowsky	Member	Present	
David West	Member	Absent	
Tom Quinlan	Member	Absent	
Cathy LeBrun	Member	Present	
Angie Close	Member	Present	

Others in attendance: Kaye Matucheski, Clerk-Treasurer/Finance Director; Lisa Haefs, Langlade County Historical Society; Sarah Repp, Park, Recreation and Cemetery Director; Drew Lundt, Langlade County Chamber of Commerce; and Jaime Horswill, Lead Office Assistant.

Discussion and Action May Occur on Any of the Following Agenda Items:

1. Location for Welcome Center

Mayor Brandt advised that the Historical Society is moving forward with their renovation. So, if the Welcome Center is going to be a part of that building, they will need to know shortly so that space can be designed. More importantly is the issue of tourism. Mayor Brandt has spoken with Langlade County and "we just do not have our act together on tourism."

Mayor Brandt advised that he respects that the Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) is a members only organization and that is all they are going to be. He cannot expect them to do more as they are a member driven organization. This is what they are designed for. He cannot expect them to be doing tourism for everyone. Mayor Brandt feels he is over stepping his bounds. He does feel the need to have a central tourism entity for the County. Before any of the money is spent, he would like to know what that is.

Mayor Brandt discussed the 2019 Visitor's Guide. He is disappointed with the lack of businesses in it. The guide shows one hotel in Antigo and several casinos around. He did contact the two hotels that are not in the guide. One hotel did not get back to him and the other advised they were not solicited to be in the guide. Mayor Brandt further commented that calls come in questioning if the City really only has one hotel.

Mayor Brandt noted that through the State of Wisconsin, the Chamber of Commerce is listed as the tourism entity for Langlade County and the City of Antigo. He expects that the tourism entity should represent everyone.

Mayor Brandt advised that he has spoken with other areas that have a tourism commission, which differs from what the City currently has.

Mayor Brandt has spoken with Langlade County and determined more needs to be done to do a better job to have a central tourism agency. It may be something developed and utilize the money to pay for a person, whether it is in a new building or space within another. That person could be there and develop a Visitor's Guide for 2020 that everyone has a chance to be a part of. Then, when people are out and about within the State and the guides are given out, people are not given inadequate information and being short changed on information with regards to what Langlade County has to offer.

Deena Grabowsky commented that she does not believe the current Visitor's Guide is short changing anyone. The guide is filled with recreation and what the County has to offer with regards to what to do here which is what the guide is about. This is something the Chamber has been doing for years. She does not believe the guide has been done poorly.

Mayor Brandt noted that the guide does look nice, however, there are a lot of other businesses that should be included. He advised that he is disappointed, especially in the lodging. The guide is encouraging people to leave Langlade County and stay at the casinos.

Ms. Grabowsky indicated that she reaches out to as many businesses as she possibly can. She starts in late fall and she gets it out as soon as she can so that it is ready for the trade shows. Ms. Grabowsky advised that it is the businesses choice to belong to the Chamber or not. Anyone is welcome to advertise in the publication. To be listed on the lodging page, the business would need to be a member of the Chamber. However, anyone can put an ad in there.

Mayor Brandt commented that the City is taking money that was raised by everyone and paying to have the book done for Chamber members.

Ms. Grabowsky advised that the room tax money is not used to pay for the guide. The advertisers pay for that publication. Most Chambers publish their guide that way, not through a County or City.

Angie Close commented that there are Discovery Guides that are published throughout counties for tourism and most Chambers then have their own chamber member book. The Discovery Guides do have the Chamber members published in the back of the books but then have all restaurants, hotels, etc. listed along with tourism activities.

Upon inquiry by Cathy LeBrun, Ms. Close advised that Oconto Economic Development does the guide for Oconto, an employee of Vilas County does their guide, a tourism council does the guide for Oneida County. Each County is a little different. There have been great strides made thus far, so moving forward with a more collaborative effort is better. There are still benefits to Chamber organizations/members.

Mayor Brandt explained again that the Chamber is a member driven organization and he understands that. He wants this Commission to find a way to do this better, put together a guide that is true to the area. The money raised is not raised for the Chamber, the money is raised for tourism for the County.

Alderperson Bauknecht questioned if a position is going to be created to handle tourism and where are they going to be located? If a position is created, how would they be paid?

Mayor Brandt explained that if a position is created, it can be funded by Hotel Motel funds. A change would need to be recorded with the state indicating that this person is now in charge of tourism for Langlade County. Any inquiries would be directed to this person who will show what the County and City has to offer. The Chamber would continue as a member driven organization.

Mayor Brandt commented that more needs to be done. We cannot sit back and just do what has always been done. He has been vocal for a while with regards to tourism not being marketed enough. The County feels the same way. They would also like to see something that represents the whole County not just Chamber members. He believes tourism in Langlade County needs to be more than Chamber membership.

Kaye Matucheski, Clerk-Treasurer/Finance Director, indicated that the Hotel Motel Room Tax Commission has to be concerned with the room tax dollars that are generated within the City of Antigo. The Visitor's Guide may not be funded by room tax dollars but it could affect the Chamber as the room tax dollars pay for a portion of a salary of a Chamber employee to do

tourism. If the Commission feels that there needs to be more for tourism beyond Chamber members than the decision can be made to not fund the Chamber's requests and can look at funding individual events if it generates overnight stays. The Chamber in return would not get as many dollars from the room tax and would have to rely more on their Chamber members.

Ms. Matucheski indicated that she has done research on how room tax money can be spent. The very first stipulation: Is the expenditure reasonably and likely to generate paid overnight stays in multiple lodging properties? Right now with the list only listing one Chamber member, it is not doing that. She understands that the guide is not funded by Hotel Motel dollars, but there are a lot of things that it does fund for the Chamber that might not necessarily go after all of the lodging properties. You have to look at this as a whole. It is her opinion that the City is now at the point where it needs to have somebody or a group or organization that is dedicated to tourism for the City of Antigo. Other municipalities within the County may decide to collect room tax dollars and chip in, but the Commission needs to start looking at tourism within the City and working on this specifically not geared towards Chamber members.

Ms. Matucheski indicated that the Chamber is a great organization for its members, but something different needs to happen for tourism.

Alderperson Bauknecht commented that now is a good time to make a decision if a new position will be created and if the Welcome Center will be housed in the Historical Society.

Ms. Grabowsky wanted to elaborate on Ms. Matucheski's statements. The publication is not funded by the room tax. The other money received for marketing is not only used to market Chamber members. When an advertisement is done in a publication, they are marketing the area's recreation. She is utilizing room tax dollars to market the area, not Chamber members.

Ms. Matucheski clarified by commenting that if the Commission decided to go in another direction, the Chamber will not be receiving room tax money as someone else will.

Ms. Grabowsky further commented that when the Chamber receives phone calls, yes they share member information first, but if someone asks what hotels are in the area, they promote the whole county.

Ms. Close noted that duplication of services may be reduced if there is a common entity such as a tourism bureau or council. There everyone could come together, such as the Economic Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, etc. Great strides have been made through collaboration such as Everbridge, the Community Calendar, etc. and it seems like a lot of duplication is happening with the tourism aspect. If our residents are confused, our visitors are confused. This is an opportunity to go forward and make things beneficial for our community.

Drew Lundt, Chamber of Commerce, commented that adding a third person and a third location would be moving in the wrong direction.

Mayor Brandt commented that something needs to be done to get the entire County involved.

Mr. Lundt advised that he agrees with that.

Lisa Haefs, Langlade County Historical Society, advised that the renovation at the Historical Society is going forward regardless if the Welcome Center will be housed there or not. The Welcome Center is invited to be housed within the building, but would need to know a time frame and how much space would be needed. The only financial commitment would be to retrofit the space in the design. They need to know something within the next few months as they are looking at a fall ground breaking.

Mayor Brandt spoke about the studies that have been completed regarding the downtown. The studies have all recommended a Welcome Center in the downtown area. The studies recommend something at the Welcome Center to do rather than run in and grab a pamphlet and

leave. This would allow the family coming to the area to pause and get lunch, hike the trail, attend the Farmer's Market, etc.

Alderperson Bauknecht advised that the timing is perfect as the downtown area is getting a face lift.

Ms. LeBrun questioned revitalizing the downtown and commented that it is embarrassing.

Mayor Brandt noted that grants are being sought to fix the infrastructure from Superior Street to Lincoln Street. The street scape will be then be completed to look something like Sixth Avenue with decorative lighting, pavers in the crosswalks, three lanes of traffic, etc. This will be more pedestrian friendly.

Mayor Brandt explained that the Historical Society is appealing to house the Welcome Center as there are things to do there. The museum itself is there, the train, the Deleglise House. This appeals to the adults and children. If people find this and like it, research shows they will look for it the next time they come through town.

Ms. Close noted that this is a good opportunity for a re-brand. We can go through the Department of Tourism and get re-branding dollars and come together so the perception is that the downtown is not a dump. There has been a lot of investment in the downtown recently.

Upon inquiry by Ms. LeBrun, Mayor Brandt indicated that he does not feel moving the Chamber to the Historical Society is viable as the Chamber is going to continue to do what they have always done. They are a member driven organization.

Mayor Brandt noted that a lot of money has been invested in the downtown. A winery is going in, a screen printing shop, an art shop, the Edison Club sold and will now be Game On, there are people trying to make downtown thrive and the City is part of that.

Mayor Brandt commented that the City had taken a lot of flak over the years with the park system. People did not agree with putting the Boardwalk in. Now we are finding (as we had hoped) those are big draws to our community. It has proven to be successful. The same thing can be said with downtown. Once the infrastructure is completed and the street scape is done, this may be a huge opportunity for businesses to develop in the downtown. There are a lot of things that work together.

Ms. Haefs noted if the Commission would decide to locate in the Historical Society, they would need to know square footage.

Mayor Brandt further suggested meeting twice a month for a while to get a plan and what will work best for promotion of tourism.

Ms. LeBrun commented about the Historical Society being on the wrong side of the road during holiday traffic. She is concerned people would not cross the street.

Mayor Brandt commented that he believes if people want to stop they will, they will cross the street. If they do not want to stop, they won't. You are better off having one group stop for ten minutes than five people run and grab a pamphlet.

Ms. Close commented that the idea should not be halted because of the side of the road. There may be opportunities to work with Killian's to obtain the parking lot.

Ms. Grabowsky indicated that when people stop at the Chamber for information, they do converse. Their current location is on the trails and they get a lot of snowmobilers that stop. They do more than just a grab and go.

Upon inquiry by Ms. LeBrun, Mayor Brandt explained some Welcome Centers that he has visited before and what drew him to those locations such as history of the area, displays, trails, etc. He has been to Welcome Centers that you can spend hours at.

DISCUSSION ONLY

RESULT:	INFORMATION ONLY
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Any Other Matters Authorized by Law to be Considered

None

Adjournment

1. **Motion to:** Adjourn at 9:37 am

RESULT:	CARRIED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Angie Close, Member
SECONDER:	Cathy LeBrun, Member
AYES:	Bauknecht, Brandt, Grabowsky, LeBrun, Close
ABSENT:	David West, Tom Quinlan

Bill Brandt, Chairperson

Date