

**CITY OF ANTIGO**  
**HOTEL MOTEL COMMISSION**  
**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD**  
**APRIL 09, 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 | Present |         |
| Tom Quinlan     | Member | Present |         |
| Cathy LeBrun    | Member | Present |         |
| Angie Close     | Member | Present |         |

Others in attendance: Alderperson Rick LeBrun; Sarah Repp, Park, Recreation and Cemetery Director; Barb Klansky and Drew Lundt, Langlade County Chamber of Commerce; Kaye Matucheski, Clerk-Treasurer/Finance Director; and Jaime Horswill, Lead Office Assistant.

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

1. Location for a Welcome Center

Mayor Brandt re-capped the last meeting advising that he asked the Langlade County Chamber of Commerce (Chamber), Langlade County Economic Development Corporation (EDC), and the Park and Recreation Department to get together and discuss a proposal that would best serve the entire county. He advised the Commission did receive two proposals so togetherness did not work.

Angie Close, Langlade County Economic Development Corporation, advised that they did meet as a group and have come to some conclusions such as a Tourism Council. They were unable to agree upon the location of a Welcome Center and who the lead entity would be. Sarah Repp, Park and Recreation Department, and Deena Grabowsky, Langlade County Chamber of Commerce, agreed.

Upon inquiry by Mayor Brandt, Ms. Close noted that the Hotel/Motel Commission would remain as is.

Mayor Brandt asked how he could get a Langlade County Visitors Guide that is all inclusive for next year. Ms. Close noted that it would be the responsibility of the Tourism Council.

Ms. Grabowsky provided a Visitor/Welcome Center proposal. Her proposal noted that the Chamber as a board would like to retain the Visitor/Welcome Center at its current location with tourism staff dedicated to promoting the community. The tourism staff responsibility would be operating the Visitor/Welcome Center which will also be the home of the Chamber, which would be manned by the Chamber.

The Chamber would request funds from the Hotel/Motel Commission for either Option A or B.

A. New Visitor/Welcome Center (see architectural plans) with the funds that have been allocated for a Visitor/Welcome Center since 2006 and continue to set aside \$5,000 per quarter to cover additional monthly costs of the new building as per Hotel/Motel Room Tax Commission minutes dated September 27, 2017.

B. Renovate existing Visitor/Welcome Center with the same funds as mentioned above in the amount of \$125,000 for renovations and \$6,000 for new Visitor/Welcome Center sign and

additional funds annually for staffing and operational expenses.

The Chamber's proposal advised that they are the hub of Antigo, serving a population of close to 20,000 within a thirty mile radius. They have a huge opportunity to promote the area's attractions, amenities, and events. Continuing their interaction with visitors will lead to visitors staying longer, attending more events, and increasing their spending. This, in turn, increases room tax funds used to promote and grow the community.

The Chamber's location is the perfect location. The property is situated along Highway 45 South, which greatly increases the visibility of the Visitor/Welcome Center and the services they provide. Averaging over 11,000 cars driving by per day, they will be better able to direct people to Downtown Antigo, Northcentral Technical College (NTC), North Towne Center, and other businesses and landmarks within the community.

The Chamber acknowledges there are varying opinions in the community on the location of the Visitor/Welcome Center. They believe strongly that not only have they brought forth a fair proposal, but that it provides the best visible location. They are asking the Commission to consider the long term benefits of housing the Chamber within the Visitor/Welcome Center located at the south entrance of Antigo. They believe it provides an incredible opportunity for the Commission to invest back into Antigo, and the organizations who work alongside them to grow and improve the community.

They envision the Visitor/Welcome Center as a one-stop center for visitors, businesses, and citizens by co-locating the offices of the Visitor/Welcome Center, EDC, and the Chamber. This will allow for stronger communication, increased coordination of efforts, and costs savings between multiple organizations. The EDC would be responsible for business retention and attraction, business financial assistance, entrepreneurship and education programs as well as workforce development. The Chamber would be responsible for promotion and support of member investors, network events and programs, educational workshops, and business resources. The Museum could be a satellite space for visitor and citizen tourism information supplied by the Visitor/Welcome Center. A Tourism Council would be created to be responsible for marketing and promoting Langlade County with the contributors being the Chamber, City of Antigo, Clubs/Organizations, Langlade County Forestry, Pickerel-Pearson Business Association, Wisconsin Department of Tourism, and Wolf River Territory.

The Chamber's proposal listed main advantages and disadvantages moving forward with the Visitor/Welcome Center.

The advantages include:

- Established location to past visitors and citizens

- Renovate or build new center at the current location will present a warm welcoming to the community.

- Further compliment the enhancement of the south end of Antigo-Quinlan's, Brown Mug, Cutlass, and Antigo Yamaha

- Currently located on the snowmobile trail

- Currently own the building/property which won't create another vacant building

- Location-as entering our community versus midway through

- Current staff has years of expertise and knowledge

- Eliminate duplication of tourism marketing and promotion efforts

- Chamber and EDC housed in Visitor/Welcome Center at the current location for better visibility

Eliminate duplication of tourism marketing and promotion efforts

Chamber has been in existence for over 100 years, well established and well known for promoting tourism, a location to stop to gather tourism information, and call for information about our county

The disadvantages include:

Separating Chamber and Visitor/Welcome Center which is commonly joined

Relocating the current location-changing people's habits can be difficult

Proposed Museum location halfway into town-many businesses may be missed

Parking and re-routing travelers with larger vehicles, campers and trailers

NTC location not ideal for Chamber

If the current building is vacant, the Chamber will continue to incur expenses

A vacant building on the south end of town

After meeting and touring the museum-lack of storage space, conference room, parking and office space

A new Visitor/Welcome Center location may create confusion for our visitors and citizens

Upon inquiry by Mayor Brandt, Ms. Close noted that it would not be economical for the EDC to move into the Chamber. The EDC has another office along with a conference room and kitchen that the Chamber could use if they moved out to NTC. The part time staff would be the face of the Welcome Center and she and Ms. Grabowsky would not be housed at the Welcome Center.

Upon inquiry by Mayor Brandt, Ms. Close indicated that she is no longer contracted to be housed at NTC because of the EDA grant. There is an on-going contract.

Upon inquiry by Mayor Brandt, Ms. Grabowsky indicated that they will still be a Chamber housed in a Welcome Center. There would be designated staff for the Welcome Center that would focus on tourism.

Upon inquiry by Dave West, Ms. Grabowsky advised that her current employee would continue with her current job which is tourism and Chamber related functions. The other staff member would focus strictly on tourism.

Upon inquiry by Mayor Brandt, Ms. Grabowsky indicated that under her proposal the Chamber board would be responsible for oversight of the Welcome Center as the funding would just be to put the building up. There would still be a connection with the Commission to let them know what is going on and how it is moving forward.

Mayor Brandt questioned if he had a complaint with the Visitor's Guide, who would be responsible? Ms. Grabowsky indicated that it depends where the Welcome Center is going to be and how the funding is going to fit before they can figure out the Visitor's Guide.

Mayor Brandt commented again that he does not want things to continue the way that they have. He is questioning how he can be assured things will be different if the Chamber proposal is accepted.

Dave West commented that the Chamber is always going to have a conflict of interest.

Ms. Grabowsky noted that Chambers and Welcome Centers are commonly joined. Tourism follows the Chamber.

Drew Lundt, Chamber, advised that it is always a conflict of interest because of the double edged sword. Like with the guide, the Mayor wants to include everyone and the Chamber's

hands are tied as they have paying members. That will always be a thing. Having the Tourism Council focus on the big picture would be the balance.

Mayor Brandt indicated if he had a complaint, it would be up to the Chamber board to validate the complaint.

Upon inquiry by Kathy LeBrun, Ms. Close advised that she pays \$2,400 a year for everything so it would not make any sense economically for her to move to the Chamber.

Ms. Close of EDC provided a proposal as well advising that both the EDC and Chamber are promoting tourism separately and not sharing a streamlined and unified vision for tourism marketing. Therefore, expending money that could be shared and better utilized for the common purpose.

The EDC believes it should be the lead entity as tourism is economic development. Destination promotion can raise a communities profile opening the door to enhanced opportunities for traditional business relocations, expansion, and new startups to occur. Destination promotion also can contribute substantially to highlighting the quality of life issues critical to the relocation decision as well as resident's attitude about where they live.

The EDC noted the Langlade County Historical Society Museum (Museum) is currently in the process of fundraising, so their building can be ADA accessible on all levels with restroom facilities on all levels. They are currently in the design phase and have hired an architect to draft plans. The possibility of partnering with other organizations within the community to potentially provide the community with a non-member based Welcome Center, that is housed within the Museum, has been discussed with EDC, the City of Antigo, and the Chamber. Our community currently has a shared Community Calendar and Website, which shares community information and provides valuable resources to our residents and visitors through desktop and mobile applications. In addition, organizations and entities work collaboratively to provide our community with consolidated activity/program information through print and radio media. Through these collaborative efforts groups and organizations have reduced or eliminated duplication of some services and programs, have leveraged existing resources and funding for community programs and events, and created easier access to our community information. However, there is still a gap and confusion regarding our community information especially for new residents and visitors to our area.

The EDC's proposal further advised that a Welcome Center facility is a logical location for people to go to find community inclusive information. Because the Welcome Center would not be member based there is inclusion for the entire community, and promotion of all our assets, which can directly impact economic development, employee recruitment and retention, and satisfaction of our residents.

The EDC is envisioning a space for information and resources, which would be accessible 24 hours a day/7 days a week. Potentially electronic information boards/screens, brochure holders/information racks, and a unique display showcasing the community and what it has to offer. A shared counter where staff could have a computer for accessing Historical Society and Community information and a printer, so information could be distributed to visitors, or those inquiring. A part-time staff member that would act as the welcome counter person providing staffing for the Historical Society as well as simultaneously providing information about our community and providing visitors and residents more accessible hours of operation including evenings and weekends.

The EDC's proposal recommends the Hotel/Motel Commission designate EDC as the Tourism Bureau and be the responsible entity for the Welcome Center located within the Museum then known as the Langlade County Welcome Center. Fund a 28 hour per week employee under EDC. Use the current building funds to accommodate space and staffing at the Welcome

Center housed in the Museum. Annually, funds could be used for general operations for the Welcome Center.

A Tourism Council would need to be organized and would be overseen by EDC. The Tourism Council will consist of county wide stakeholders that will oversee development and implementation of a consistent and targeted county wide tourism marketing campaign. A county wide Discover Guide will be created to include all attractions and lodging opportunities; potential partnership with Antigo Times Langlade County Resources Guide.

The EDC further recommends implementing a county wide tax revenue for hotels/motels, so additional revenues could be generated.

The EDC would become Langlade County Economic Development Corporation and Tourism Bureau and would be responsible for Economic Development, the Welcome Center (housed in the Museum), and the Tourism Council.

Mayor Brandt inquired that if the Chamber was housed at EDC if they could continue Chamber business. Ms. Close advised yes. The Welcome Center would be housed at a place that has no ties to the EDC or the Chamber, it would be run by the Tourism Council.

Aldersperson LeBrun advised that he is there as a Council member and businessman. He is for the Tourism Council and believes that business is tied to tourism. He advised as a Council member that the Welcome Center should be at the Museum as it is better for the City and downtown. As a business owner that survives on tourism he does not believe it is the best fit as he has data to prove it.

Aldersperson LeBrun noted a survey completed in 2003 that noted the best place for his business would be on the south end Highway 45 on the east side of the road as the bulk of traffic was headed north.

Upon inquiry by Mayor Brandt, Aldersperson LeBrun advised that the Chamber being where it is has affected him minimally.

Aldersperson LeBrun commented that the Museum is on the wrong traffic pattern, difficult to reach and out of the way. 30% of traffic is towing something.

Aldersperson LeBrun further noted that when traveling to other communities, he relies on Google. If you Google, Antigo, Wisconsin the first thing that appears is the Chamber like it is in most cities.

Dave West disagreed advising that after you Google something you hit directions. You go to the Chamber or Visitor's Center because you want to go to the Chamber or Visitor's Center, not because of what side of the road it is on.

Angie Close commented that the City has not marketed itself correctly and it has not been unified. Regardless who is the entity with regards to where to find the information as long as they have a complete marketing plan it does not matter which entity does it.

Aldersperson LeBrun noted that he is speaking about the brick and mortar. The bulk of the traffic is coming from the south and is more inclined to stop on the way to their destination.

Aldersperson LeBrun advised he is against the Museum as a businessman and for it as a Council member.

Sarah Repp, Park, Recreation and Cemetery Director, noted that Culver's is relying on the revenue so it matters what side of the road they are on. The Welcome Center is not relying on revenue, they are looking at getting information out to people coming through the community. Most of which can be done on a website.

Kaye Matucheski, Clerk-Treasurer/Finance Director, commented that as the Clerk-

Treasurer/Finance Director she is in support of locating the Welcome Center downtown. She agrees that Antigo is never going to be a destination, but we can be more than a pass-thru. Tourists can see what Antigo has to offer instead of just stopping on the south side of town. She feels this would help the City and the people that stay at the local motels are the ones who pay the room tax, but how do you think we got those motels here? The City invested in the infrastructure and formed the TIFs and whatever had to be done so that businesses would build motels. There is a legitimate reason to have it downtown and help the City.

Ms. Matucheski further commented that she believes the Chamber is missing a huge opportunity. They could be visiting new businesses, encouraging new members, etc. There are a number of people that stop at City Hall for work permits and are unaware of where the Chamber is located. If the Chamber focuses more on tourism, they may lose more of their Chamber identity.

Alderperson LeBrun commented that the Commissions job is not to embellish the City but to increase tourism and stays in motels. That is the singular mission of the board.

Mayor Brandt noted that the Commission is suppose to fund entities that promote all hotels within the taxing district, not just Chamber member hotels.

Mayor Brandt commented that the reason the Commission is here is that doing business the way it has always been done is not working. He understands that there are Welcome Centers with Chambers and Chambers that do economic development type work beyond Chamber membership, but we do not. Our Chamber is member driven.

Barb Klansky, Chamber of Commerce, noted that if the Chamber and EDC were to partner into one location than each entity could provide 50% leaving no need for another person to hire. There is no need for another governing body other than the Tourism Council who would work with the Hotel Motel Room Tax Commission to achieve their goals. She believes the way information is accessed has changed, but that if the Commission is deciding on a location for the Welcome Center, it needs to stay where it is with the Chamber.

Upon inquiry by Ms. LeBrun, Mayor Brandt advised that a year ago members were questioning the financial ability of the Museum to be able to maintain themselves. He believes since that time the Museum has shown themselves to be very resilient and has the ability to raise money. However, since they are going to remodel, now is the time to decide if the Welcome Center will be at that location.

Upon inquiry by Ms. LeBrun, Mayor Brandt explained that the previous letter written by the Historical Society was in response to the Chamber's requests. They did not feel they would be able to provide a kitchen and the space requested in their facility to house the Chamber.

Mr. Lundt commented that if EDC and Park and Recreation are not interested in relocating to the Chamber, some of the plans could be scaled back.

Upon inquiry by Mayor Brandt, Ms. Grabowsky indicated that the plans for the new building would cost approximately \$325,000.

Mr. Lundt and Ms. Klansky noted that the EDC proposal would separate the Chamber and the EDC from the Welcome Center.

Alderperson LeBrun noted that the job of the Commission is not the sustainability of the Welcome Center once it is built or decided upon location.

Mayor Brandt disagreed noting that the Commission is not going to put up a building and not care what happens in the future.

Mayor Brandt requested numbers as to the cost of each proposal from each entity including cost of new employees, buildings, remodels, etc. as well as cost of sustainability.

Upon inquiry by Alderperson Bauknecht, Mayor Brandt advised that the \$5,000 that has been put away quarterly would be used for sustainability.

Mayor Brandt further advised that he would like a Langlade County Visitor's Guide and not just a Chamber's Visitor's Guide by next year. During the next meeting he would like to know how this will happen.

Ms. Grabowsky indicated that she advised during the last meeting that they are willing to compromise on the Visitor's Guide and include all hotels but she wanted it noted that the Guide is not funded by room tax. The advertisements fund the guide.

Mayor Brandt advised that in her yearly breakdown of requested funding the Visitor's Guide and distribution is included.

Ms. Grabowsky indicated that the room tax pays to distribute the guide but not create it.

Alderperson Bauknecht advised that the EDC has evolved into a much bigger entity than what it used to be and is considered a player in business retention, training, and downtown economics. The Chamber has been present for over 100 years but has not evolved very much. Things are being done the same way every year. He does not believe adding tourism on to their duties is necessarily fair to the Chamber.

Ms. Grabowsky indicated that the Chamber already does tourism and is part of their make-up.

Mayor Brandt commented that if the Chamber is going to continue to do tourism, it needs to be for the whole County not just members.

Ms. Grabowsky noted that Mayor Brandt is focusing on one page in the Visitor's Guide but that they do promote the whole county including recreation and events. She further noted they are willing to discuss including all businesses.

Mayor Brandt noted that his biggest fear with going with the Chamber is that nothing will change. He has brought attention to the guide before and nothing has been changed. Ms. Grabowsky indicated that this is the first time she has heard about this.

Mayor Brandt indicated that he has brought other issues to the Chamber's attention and it does not seem to matter.

Ms. Grabowsky assured the Commission that going forward the Chamber is open to making changes and including the hotels that are not Chamber members.

The Commission discussed a date of May 8, 2019 at 8:30 am for the next meeting.

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| <b>RESULT: NO ACTION</b> |
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### **Any Other Matters Authorized by Law to be Considered**

### **Adjournment**

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Bill Brandt, Chairperson

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date