

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – AUGUST 28, 2019

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS  
PRESENT: Skellie, Campbell, Idleman, Hicks, Fedler, Shaw, Rozell

AGRICULTURE, PLANNING, TOURISM & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS  
ABSENT: None

SUPERVISORS: O'Brien

Debra Prehoda, Clerk of the Board

Al Nolette, County Treasurer

Laura Chadwick, Director RPTS

Roger Wickes, County Attorney

Laura Oswald, Economic Development Director

Public

AGENDA AS PRESENTED IN COMMITTEE NOTICE:

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Accept Minutes – July 23, 2019
- 3) Discuss Amending Occupancy Tax Law for Airbnb
- 4) Other Business
- 5) Adjournment

Chairman Skellie called the meeting to order at 1:02 P.M.

A motion to accept the minutes of the July 23, 2019 was moved by Mrs. Fedler, seconded by Mr. Rozell and adopted.

DISCUSS AMENDING OCCUPANCY TAX LAW FOR Airbnb – Chairman Skellie stated the County is not getting any occupancy tax from these Airbnbs and the occupancy local law needs to be changed to define what is eligible. Roger Wickes, County Attorney, stated the State statute not the County defined what is eligible. He stated the occupancy local law needs to be modified to state any place that provides overnight lodging and noted that also some counties have negotiated agreements with Airbnb. The Treasurer was concerned about the four or more units in our local law. The County Attorney stated the occupancy law needs to be changed because it wasn't done in a time, original law for bed tax, when we have the things we have now; i.e. Airbnb. Need to approach our Legislators to change the law. Laura Oswald, Economic Development Director, stated there have been conversations with Airbnb and they have expressed a willingness to enter into an agreement with the County but the four-unit wording is stopping them. Mr. Campbell stated the revenue from the occupancy tax is to help tourism efforts in the County. The County Attorney stated the funds collected are to promote tourism in, preserve the heritage of and celebrate the agricultural community in the County of Washington through the promotion of tourist activities, conventions, trade shows, special events and other directly related and supporting activities. Glamping is exempt per sales tax law. The County Attorney suggested working with NYSAC to get a comprehensive list of what types of lodging are available out there now. Most counties have an occupancy tax law. The Treasurer stated he currently has people not complying with the occupancy law and he is spending time trying to collect. Mr. Hicks recommends moving forward with amending the occupancy law and our tourism consultants stated increased revenue by incorporating Airbnb, etc. Occupancy tax collected on Airbnb lodging would come to the County directly through Airbnb. Discussion ensued. The County would need to approach our legislators get this law changed; Home Rule request. The County Attorney will compile information on other counties occupancy tax local laws and present to the committee.

The current occupancy tax expires this year and needs to be renewed while we continue to discuss changing it. A motion to set a public hearing on renewing the occupancy tax law was moved by Mr. Hicks, seconded by Mrs. Fedler and adopted.

OTHER BUSINESS:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – Laura Oswald, Economic Development Director, addressed the following items with the committee:

- Tourism:
  - Submitted the initial submission into the State for I Love NY funding. She is expecting the I Love NY matching money is going to be down between \$4,000 and \$6,000. The exact number will not be known until January. The entire tourism budget is less than \$145,000 so that reduction is significant.
  - To avail the County of the I Love NY funding, the County is required to fund the Saratoga Capital District TPA. The minimum funding amount is 3%. Washington County funds less than the other regions at about 3%. Other counties are funding at a level of 8% to 15% and we have a funding request to increase our level. She has looked at changing from 3% to 5% and that would give \$4,500 more to Capital Saratoga District but that would mean \$3,500 less for us to spend which is 2.5% of our entire tourism budget. She stated the County just does not have the additional money to contribute. The TPA is about promoting the region as a whole and Washington County will probably be in the advertising a little less. The State aligns us with the Saratoga Capital Region TPA and if funding allowed, we could join another region.
  - Warren County has expressed an interest in promoting Washington County, i.e. day trips. Chairman Skellie stated a meeting to exchange information would be beneficial and will work on setting that meeting up.
  - Through tourism she is keeping three websites updated. The I Love NY website has decided that all entries on the website that do not generate ten hits a year will be eliminated.
- Miscellaneous:
  - Machine tool training class put on by the Workforce Investment Board is going to have an open house at BOCES sometime in September.
  - CFA – About twenty projects around the County submitted with a total request for funding of \$3M to \$4M. Will hear in December what was funded.
  - Census – She stated we need to have a conversation about how active the County wants to be in promoting the need to fill out the census. About \$900B in federal funding is allocated based on the census. On the 2010 census, New York State had about a 76% return rate on the census and Washington County return rate was about 83.5% which put us in the top 14%. An accurate count is very important and allows us to get the funding the County is entitled to. The census has press kits, tools, committees that can be formed, etc. and should this be discussed at this committee and is it something the County should proactively be addressing? The collection process will be mostly on line or dial in with your response. Think about how to promote if we want to be proactive and it effects funding. Mr. Hicks suggested putting something on the website to encourage resident to respond to the census. We want everyone counted.
  - Washington County is now eligible for Northern Borders Commission funding. The Sewer District was funded \$500,000. Another project funded is HVADC for the Blueprint Project which is to create technical and educational assistance to agricultural businesses. Because we fund HVADC, we have up to \$25,000 through HVADC available for agricultural businesses that are looking for technical assistance. Let her know if anyone has any ideas or suggestions. Suggested sending information out about this opportunity through Cornell Cooperative Extension. The County can access to \$25,000 at no cost.

- Broadband – The rural digital opportunity fund which was created by the FCC council and provides \$20.4B in funding across the United States to get broadband to unserved areas started this year. NYS was awarded \$39.2M out of that funding for statewide projects which impacted the County with Slick Network getting an additional 2800 homes that they are able to provide service to and Verizon an additional 690 homes. More FCC funding will continue to help pick away at getting broadband to as many houses as we can. There is a public hearing at Legislative Building scheduled for September 17th to discuss rural broadband needs and how to use this FCC money.
- Reminder – USDA funding – community facilities program - \$2.8B nationwide for 2019 can be used towards all kinds of projects like police stations, purchase a dump truck, build a senior center and use it to work on municipal buildings. The County is not eligible for USDA funding due to the population number but the individual municipalities within the County are eligible. This funding is a combination loan and grant and the grants will be between 15% and 57%. This is a low interest loan with some portion a grant for community needs. It pairs poverty rate with population.

The meeting adjourned at 1:57 P.M.

*Debra Prehoda, Clerk*  
*Washington County Board of Supervisors*