

Village room tax fund falls again

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Revenue from motel guests down significantly, so trustees must be more selective in distribution

Back in the “gravy days,” the Saukville Village Board had as much as \$65,000 of room tax money to dole out at the end of the year.

Last week’s distribution of anticipated room tax proceeds was a far cry from that bountiful windfall, as trustees debated how to divide \$33,000 among more than a dozen requests for funding.

The village collects a 7% tax from charges on guests at the Super 8 motel, the community’s only lodging option. According to the ordinance that created the tax, most of the proceeds are supposed to be used to provide tax relief and promote local tourism.

The sour economy has taken a significant hit on the number of guests staying at the motel, reducing the pool of money coming back to the village.

At the same time, non-profit groups and event organizers are scrambling to come up with funding alternatives.

Village officials knew they had a projected pool of \$33,127 from the room tax, \$3,000 less than was taken in last year when the economy had already shown signs of faltering.

Three funding requests took major hits because of the room tax shortfall.

The biggest reduction came when the Department of Public Works agreed to curtail the purchase of new seasonal decorations for the village.

Last year, the department received nearly \$2,000 for that purpose, but this year’s allocation was held to \$415.

Trustees also took a hard line on the funding request from the Saukville Area Historical Society, trimming its allocation in half — to \$1,000.

Society President Ann Kertscher noted that the group has made great strides in converting the century old firehouse on North Mill Street into the Saukville Crossroads Museum.

“Things have been coming along beautifully. Every dollar you gave us last year was spent on the building and stretched to the max,” Kertscher said.

She told trustees work on the gallery area, an interior room which will be used as a community meeting place, is almost complete. Two projects earmarked for the room tax allocation were the installation of new carpeting and the mounting of a series of enlarged photographs depicting life in early Saukville.

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Facing a limited amount of funding, Trustee Jen Schoenfeldt said the group may have to prioritize.

“To me, when I walk into a room I don’t look at the floor, I look at the walls. I think the photos would say a lot more about the history of Saukville,” Schoenfeldt said.

Village officials suggested the Society look to outside sponsors to come up with the money for the new flooring.

One other group, the Saukville Chamber of Commerce, took a \$1,000 funding hit, but it was by their own design.

Chamber Executive Director Stacey Frey said after flagging attendance in recent years, the group has decided to eliminate Family Fun Day.

Instead, it will put its attention on the fundraising run/walk which it started last year. The race attracted 140 entrants and made a net profit of \$3,100 for the Chamber despite cold, rainy weather.

Frey said a \$1,000 allocation from the tax will be used for prizes and to promote the race around the state.

A select few requests actually saw funding increases from last year.

Topping that list were \$1,200 approved for a new library sign, a \$500 increase for the Saukville Fire Department’s car show (raising the village allocation to \$4,500) and a \$500 boost for the village newsletter (which will have one printed version and two e-mailed versions).

Other allocations included: \$400 for Ozaukee Tourism Council; \$800 for River Fest; \$2,000 for July 4th parade; \$5,000 for July 4th fireworks; \$750 for National Night Out; \$1,000 for the 9/11 memorial ceremony; \$1,000 for Live at the Triangle concert series; and \$500 for marketing.

Room tax funding for the employee and volunteer recognition banquet was cut to \$2,550, with trustees deciding that any additional needed money should come from the contingency fund.

As in previous years, the largest allocation from the room tax was a general fund transfer of \$9,000.