

Revenue from room tax squeezed to a trickle

Written by MARK JAEGER

Wednesday, 14 December 2011 18:27

Village trustees feel the pinch when distributing funds for community causes

In years past, members of the Saukville Village Board enjoyed the task of divvying up room tax proceeds to various nonprofit groups and community causes.

How times have changed.

The board's Finance Committee spent more than an hour last week listening to requests from groups seeking a share of the 7% tax charged to 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.

At its peak, the room tax contributed as much as \$65,000 to the village's coffers.

As the economy soured, that tally has fallen dramatically, with hotel officials projecting this year's take will be about \$32,000.

Running contrary to that trend, the requests submitted by the various groups hoping to tap into the room tax pool topped the projected total by more than \$7,000.

Justifications for the funding appeals were presented to trustees during the committee meeting, resulting in an uncharacteristically forlorn summary comment from Village President Barb Dickmann.

"Thank you all for coming. This has been a hideously ugly process," Dickmann said.

In accordance with the room-tax ordinance, the largest allocation went to the general fund for tax relief — \$9,000.

Representatives of the local groups then jockeyed for position to gain shares of the remaining money.

Two groups were especially hopeful of finding a financial windfall in the room tax proceeds — the Saukville Chamber of Commerce and the Saukville Area Historical Society.

The Chamber recently opened an office at the corner of Mill and Dekora streets, and Chamber President Russ Lund asked whether village officials would cover the cost of the \$250 monthly rent.

Weighing the host of other funding requests, trustees decided to offer the Chamber \$2,000 from

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the fund.

The Historical Society has regularly turned to the room tax funding to pay for individual projects, especially in upgrading the Crossroads Museum.

Society President Anne Kertscher renewed that appeal, asking for \$3,500. Kertscher said that money would be used to pay for a recognition wall for donors, additions to the museum's photo display, rest room improvements, installation of a reproduction tin ceiling and the creation of more interactive displays.

Village trustees agreed to offer the Society \$2,500 in funding.

The allocation process was made slightly easier when three accounts received no funding this year — Christmas decorations, marketing and the village newsletter. The village has converted all of its newsletters to digital documents, delivered via e-mail.

The Fourth of July fireworks display has become Dickmann's pet project, and the allocation was held at \$5,000.

Trustees also set aside \$1,400 for half of the anticipated cost of erecting a new sign at the Oscar Grady Library.

Other allocations include: \$4,000 for the Saukville Fire Department car show; \$2,100 for the village employee and volunteer banquet; \$1,000 to be a lead sponsor of the Live at the Triangle concert series; \$1,000 for the 9/11 memorial program; \$1,000 for the Fourth of July parade; \$800 for the Riverfest cleanup program; \$500 for National Night Out; \$400 for membership in the Ozaukee County Tourism Council; and \$300 to support a poker run held to raise funds for the fire department.

Trustees also agreed to set \$778 in reserve, in case room tax revenues fall short of projections.

Dickmann was reflective in talking about the winnowing process of deciding how much money should be shared with the various worthy local causes.

"This isn't as much fun as it use to be," she said.