

Making room tax stretch a challenge

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Village officials balance requests from worthy causes with reality of reduced revenue from motel fee

After Village of Saukville officials spent much of last week's Finance Committee meeting entertaining requests for money, they came away from the session with a painful realization — room tax money doesn't stretch as far as it used to.

The village assesses a 7% tax on guests who stay at the Super 8 motel, the community's only lodging option.

According to the ordinance that created that tax, the proceeds are to be used to provide tax relief and promote local tourism.

The tax proceeds made a big impact in those areas in better economic times, when the village coffers were sweetened by as much as \$65,000.

At last week's committee meeting, officials were told they needed to restrict their disbursement of funds to \$34,500. That total includes projected room taxes collected in 2012 and a balance from last year's fund.

The pool of money was immediately reduced when village trustees backed a general fund transfer of \$9,000 — the tax relief allocation.

Representatives from more than a dozen groups or community events were then left to justify their requests for money from the account.

With room tax money in short supply, officials held the line on requests from two organizations that have their own revenue sources — the Saukville Chamber of Commerce and the Saukville Area Historical Society.

Chamber officials asked the village to cover their monthly rent of \$250 for their office at 101 N. Mill St.

"We like the visibility the office gives us and we have a lot of people stopping in, most from out of the area looking for directions," said Chamber Executive Director Sherri Yandry.

Instead of the full \$3,000, the village approved a \$2,000 allocation to the organization.

The Historical Society sought \$4,000, citing intended improvements being made to the Crossroads Museum.

Society President Anne Kertscher said the money would be used for a photo exhibit on Saukville schools, a recognition wall, bathroom work and painting.

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“As guardians of Saukville’s history, it is our promise to those who came before and made it their home to endure as an inheritance for those to come,” Kertscher said.

Trustees approved a \$2,500 allocation to the group.

The largest allocation was made to the community’s Fourth of July celebration, including \$5,000 for fireworks and \$1,000 for the parade.

Village President Barb Dickmann has been a major advocate of funding the Independence Day festivities, especially the fireworks display.

“The costs keep going up,” Dickmann said, although the allocation was kept the same as this year’s.

The next largest allocation, \$4,800, was for Christmas decorations the village intends to install on 15 new streetlights along Highway 33.

Public Works Supt. Ray de Bruijn said the decorations would be similar to the ones used elsewhere in the village and will be purchased at a discount after the holiday.

Plans for a large wreath to hang outside of the police station were dropped because of cost.

Allocations were also approved for two events that raise funds for the Saukville Fire Department. Trustees approved \$4,000 to support the annual car show and \$300 for the Summer Thunder poker run.

Funding was approved for several community events: \$2,500 for the village employee and volunteer recognition; \$1,000 for the Live at the Triangle concert series; \$800 for the River Fest cleanup; \$750 for the 9/11 observance; and \$500 for National Night Out.

Dickmann said she realizes the difficult economic times are stressful for community groups looking to raise money, but said the reduced number of stays at the motel result in less money in the room tax account.

“I know you all would have liked more but we only had so much money. If you can get more people to stay at the motel, that would be great,” Dickmann said.