

Meeting Notice

The Merrill Tourism Commission will meet on **Tuesday, May 3, 2022, at 12:00 p.m.**, at the Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce, 705 North Center Avenue, Merrill, WI 54452.

Voting members of Commission: Dan Wendorf, Jeremy Ratliff, Paul Russell, Sarah Gilbert, Sue Kunkel

The following items will be included on the agenda:

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Public Comment
4. Review/approve minutes from previous meeting
5. Introduction to new members
6. Discussion on purpose and scope on Tourism
7. New initiatives
8. Grant Application & procedure
9. Set date/time for next meeting
10. Adjournment

Submitted by,



Dan Wendorf
Chairperson – Tourism Commission
City of Merrill

Date and time agenda was posted: _____ Posted by: _____

The Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce is accessible to the physically disadvantaged. If special accommodations are required, please contact the Chamber at 715-536-9474.

Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes
November 2, 2021
Held at the Merrill Chamber of Commerce

Members Present: Ryan Schwartzman, Dan Wendorf, John Van Lieshout
Via Zoom: Becky Roberts

Staff Present: Clyde Nelson, Cheryl Skoug

Others Present: MP3

Called to order: 12:30pm by Dan Wendorf

Approval of Minutes from last meeting reviewed, and a motion to approve minutes from the November 5, 2020, meeting was made by Schwartzman, seconded by Roberts, voted, and carried.

Review of Budget for 2022

Reviewing of data that was provided. Pictures of handouts were sent via text message to Roberts.

Review of Applications of Grants:

Operations Budget:

Wendorf suggested the Commission discuss each request individually and make suggested award amounts during discussion. He suggested reviewing the total budget at the end of overall discussion to ensure it fits within the anticipated budget for 2022. This would allow for one motion at the end of all discussion to set the Tourism Budget for next year. Nelson suggested, that with a healthy budget heading into 2022, that we could consider full funding for each applicant.

Admin/Rent: The Chamber provided information showing what the cost of running Tourism out of our office. The Chamber would like a slight increase to help offset the cost to the Chamber.

Information was provided to show what each visitor that comes to Merrill spends. With the “rack” price increased, that means the Room Tax will slightly increase.

Room Tax for the surrounding areas was provided to see if we are on the right track at 6%.

Would we like to have two grant application periods per year? Have the budget for 6 months at a time instead of the year? Will investigate and decide at next meeting. It was mentioned that Rothschild utilizes the two per year grant cycle.

*** Welcome Clyde Nelson to Tourism Commission. Clyde is the new Executive Director at the Merrill Chamber.***

The Commission should consider helping the city with re-branding Merrill. The Commission is on board with helping them out.

With not knowing how COVID-19 was going to affect Tourism in Merrill in 2020-2021, we were cautious with funds. We have a nice amount in the checkbook, would we need to review each of the applications and adjust what they are asking for?

Savings Account – do we need one or do we just make sure we have funds in checkbook to be able to work with Discover Wisconsin when they come to us without taking a huge hit?

What is the budget for each event? Commission would like to see how each grantee uses the money for marketing and with what companies, to ensure they are creating overnight stays. Wendorf stated that it is important (and required) for each organization to provide a detailed budget for their events. This helps aid the Commission with their decisions.

Two of the major events, Fair and Rodeo are the two biggest events that bring overnight stays to Merrill. Will need to keep that in mind when reviewing.

Nelson suggested that we just grant the asking amount to all applicates. Let's help the events make some money.

Schwartzman suggested that if we give the Rodeo their asking amount, that we should think of bumping the Fair to the same amount. Would like to see that the fair advertises outside of the basic areas – Green Bay, Shawano, Eau Claire, etc.

A motion to approve the following amounts to events.

Merrill Winterfest Sled Dog Race: Asking: \$400, granted: \$400

Merrill Area Lion's Labor Day Car Show: Asking: \$1100, granted: \$1100

Lincoln County Fair: Asking 10,000, granted: \$12,500 – will need to use the extra money advertising outside their normal avenues.

Wisconsin River Pro Rodeo: Asking: \$12,500, granted: \$12,500

Central Wisconsin Concertina Festival Asking: \$300, granted: \$300

Merrill Ice Drags: Asking: \$5,000, granted: \$5,000

Lincoln County Barleyfest: Asking: \$2500, granted: \$2500

Pork in the Park: Asking; \$2500, granted: \$2500

Black Squirrel Scurry Asking: \$1000, granted: \$1000

Oktoberfest Asking: \$2500, granted: \$2500

Underdown Trail Ride: Asking: \$750, granted: \$750

Grants totaling \$41,050 was made by Ryan Schwartzman, seconded by Becky Roberts, voted, and carried unanimously.

A motion to approve the total budget for the Tourism Commission along with the grant award amount included, \$82,250, was made by Ryan Schwartzman, seconded by John VanLieshout, voted, and carried unanimously.

Discussion: (1) Why are people not applying for the funds? (2) Commission would like to see who the grantees are using for advertising. (3) Depending on when the event is, do we offer applications turned in at two different times of the year. (4) Do we move the date later September 30th of the year? (5) Dan will reach out to Rothschild to see how they do their application process twice a year. (6) Ironbull organization which is holding the Underdown Trail Ride. They are working with Dan to make this

“silent” sport heard. (7) Do we need to set aside money to help rebrand Merrill? (8) Use the money that is not used to help better the city with things that would help with tourism, example: signs throughout the city. (9) The chamber will be looking for other grants opportunities to the city. (10) We need to grow Merrill by advertising in the outside areas – Counties, State.

Next meeting: April 19, 2022, at noon – Chamber office.

A motion to adjourn at 1:29 pm was made by John Van Lieshout, seconded by Ryan Schwartzman, voted, and carried.

Cheryl Skoug
Recording Secretary

Merrill Tourism Report

For Year End 2021

Presented to

Merrill Common Council

Prepared by

Clyde R. Nelson

Executive Director

Merrill Chamber of Commerce

Administrator of Tourism Fund

Background:

Today, Merrill has three (3) Hotels that participate in the collection of room tax for the City of Merrill. AmericInn by Wyndham, which has rooms 51 and 14 kitchenettes/suites, Cobblestone Inn and Suites, which has 55 rooms, and 1 suite and Econo Lodge has 38 rooms, available to the public. All total Merrill has a total of 159 rooms available to the public. One hotel uses two rooms for employees. These hotels collect a 6% room tax, on behalf of the city and those tax revenues are distributed as follows.

* 0.1% is retained by the facility

* 5.9% is sent to the City of Merrill

Of the 5.9% collected, the city retains 1.27% or 21.5%, Tourism Commission retains 4.13% or 70% and the MARC retains 0.5% or 8.5% of the total funds collected.

The following represents the total collected since 2018.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Tax Collected</u>	<u>Variance</u>	<u>%Change</u>
2018	\$94,226.00	----	----
2019	\$99,918.56	\$5,692.56	6.04%
2020	\$58,600.97	(\$41,317.61)	(41.4%)
2021	\$99,328.20	\$40,727.23	69.5%

As you can see, the pandemic had a devastating impact on tourism in Merrill with the number of stays and revenue down 41% from 2019. The good news is that overnight visits to Merrill are at the pre pandemic levels of 2019. It is anticipated that the number of visitors will increase in 2022, thus the potential increase in room tax revenue.

2021 was a good year for tourism and travel thus, an increase in room tax revenue. When the Tourism Committee met in November 2021 and reviewed the projected year end revenues which were ~ \$88,200 in tax collections. As it turned out, the actual amount collected was \$99,328. This was good news in that Merrill had more room tax revenue collected in the last 6 months of the year than was projected.

Total tourism impacts for Lincoln County relating to Direct Visitor spending in 2019 was \$60.6M compared to \$52.1M in 2020 or a difference of -14.6%. (*from Tourism Economics data through WI Department of Tourism) The data for 2021 is not yet available.

Given the recent increase in fuel prices, a Longwoods International Travel Sentiment Study dated March 8, 2022 (used by the WI Department of Tourism) indicates that 59% of the people surveyed will be changing their travel plans. "They intend to take shorter trips in 2022." It is anticipated that these trips will range from 100 to 250-mile one-way trips. Given the above surveys, Merrill could see a larger boost in the revenue generated from the room tax. Recognize, however, that we are limited to the total number of rooms available with no indication of that increasing soon.

There are several variables that would increase the number of overnight stays and thus the increase in room tax revenue given the limited number of rooms and they are:

1. The occupancy rate of the hotels.
2. The rack rate charged for those rooms.
3. The room tax rate charged on those rooms.

Currently Merrill charges a 6% room tax on all 159 rooms available. A recent survey, conducted by the Merrill Chamber relating to room tax rates locally, revealed the following:

<u>City</u>	<u>Room tax charged</u>
Tomahawk	4%
Medford	4%
Rhineland	6%
Antigo	6%
Wausau Area	8%
Minocqua	4%

Specifically, the following are the expenditures of the Tourism Commission for Merrill in 2021. There will be an overlap with some of these expenditures as listed on Form SL-304 2021 Room Tax Report as the following references all expenditures for 2021 and not just those over \$1,000.00 as the report requires.

Advertising	\$12,656.97
Postage and Delivery	684.59
Administration Fees	10,000.00

Reimburse Chamber	
Phone	1,608.66 (½ phone bill)
Website fees	1,674.00 (½ web site maintenance)

<u>Grants</u>	<u>Used</u>	<u>Awarded</u>
Barleyfest	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00
Black Squirrel Scurry	500.00	500.00
Concertina Festival	220.36	300.00
Gleason Lions Heritage Days	400.00	400.00
Merrill Lions Labor Day Classic Car Show	398.63	1,000.00
Lincoln County Fair Association	2,000.00	2,000.00
Merrill Lions State Bowling Tourn	2,000.00	2,000.00
Pork In the Park	599.00	1,500.00
Wisconsin River Pro Rodeo	<u>4,000.00</u>	<u>4,000.00</u>
Totals Grants	\$12,298.35	\$14,200.00
Total Expenditures	\$38,922.57	

As a point of reference, the Grants awarded in 2020 totaled \$28,490.00. But, because of the global pandemic and the significant social changes that took place, only \$10,124.00 was spent on various events that were held PRIOR to the country shuttering for an extended period.

With the 2021 projected year end revenues, the Committee had approved over \$41,000 in grant applications for budgeted year 2022.

Those awards are as follows:

Oktoberfest	\$2,500.00
Merrill Ice Drags	5,000.00
Winterfest Dog Sled Race	400.00
Lincoln County Fair	12,500.00 *
Labor Day Classic Car Show	1,100.00
Concertina Festival	300.00

Lincoln Lager Barleyfest	2,500.00
Wisconsin River Pro Rodeo	12,500.00
Pork in the Park Ribfest	2,500.00
Black Squirrel Scurry	1,000.00
Underdown Trail Ride	<u>750.00</u>
Total Grants Awarded 2022	\$41,050.00

* \$2,500.00 must be spent outside the "normal" market area

Respectfully submitted,



Clyde R. Nelson
Fund Administrator

2021 Room Tax Report

Municipality

Co-muni code 35251	Municipality CITY OF MERRILL	County LINCOLN	Due date May 2, 2022	Report type ORIGINAL
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Section A: Room Tax Collection

1. Room tax collected in 2021	\$91,915
2. Room tax rate imposed as of December 31, 2021	6.00 %
3. Did your municipality change your room tax rate during 2021?	No
4. If yes above, provide your municipality's prior room tax rate	%

Section B: Room Tax Revenue Distributions

1. During 2021, did your municipality forward room tax revenues to a tourism entity or commission for tourism development?	Yes
2. List each tourism entity and commission that received room tax revenues from your municipality	
Tourism Entity or Commission	Revenues Distributed to Entity or Commission
1. Merrill Tourism Commission	\$64,270

Section C: Tourism Entity/Commission Members

For each tourism entity and commission reported in Section B, you must provide member information including any related business entities.

- For a tourism commission - list each member
- For a tourism entity - list each member of its governing body
- Related business entity - includes a business the member owns, operates or is employed by. Select "None" to indicate the member has no related business entity.

1. Merrill Tourism Commission

First Name	Last Name	Related Business Entity
Dan	Wendorf	Merrill Parks & Recreation Dept.
John	VanLieshout	None
Rebecca	Roberts	None
Ryan	Schwartzman	Ace Hardware

2021 Room Tax Report

Section D: Tourism Promotion/Development Expenditures

1. Of the room tax revenue forwarded for tourism promotion and tourism development, report all expenditures of \$1,000 or more made by a tourism commission and tourism entity.

To report your expenditures, you must:

- Attach an expenditure report as a PDF, and/or
- Enter each expenditure below

Note: These expenditures are provided to your municipality by a tourism entity and tourism commission.

Date	Recipient Name	Amount	Description (optional)
01/08/2021	Close Publications	\$4,400	Ads -\$1,000 - 1/8, \$2,400 - 7/10, & \$1,000 - 11/11
02/22/2021	Reeindl Printing	\$1,515	Publication Printing
04/22/2021	Merrill Chamber of Commerce	\$3,283	Website & Phone
08/06/2021	Lincoln County Rodeo	\$4,000	Rodeo Advertising
09/03/2021	Lincoln County Fair Association	\$2,000	Fair Advertising
10/28/2021	Merrill Chamber of Commerce	\$10,000	Administration Services Fees
11/11/2021	Lincoln Lager BarleyFest	\$1,500	BarleyFest Advertising
12/31/2021	JRVBR Inc. Outdoor Snowtrack	\$1,000	Marketing Ad

Attachments:

Section E: 1994 Documentation

1. Did your municipality collect room tax on May 13, 1994? No

2. You must attach (PDF files), unless provided in a prior year:

Room tax ordinance in effect on May 13, 1994

Municipality's financial statement closest to May 13, 1994 showing the percentage of room tax revenues retained by the municipality for purposes other than tourism promotion and development

Section F: Historical Room Taxes Retained

1. Did your municipality collect room tax on May 13, 1994 and retained more than 30 percent of the room tax collected for purposes other than tourism promotion and tourism development? No

2. Enter the room taxes retained by the municipality for the following years:

a. 2010	
b. 2011	
c. 2012	
d. 2013	
e. 2014	

2021 Room Tax Report

Contact Information

Contact name Kathy Unertl	Contact title Finance Director	Contact phone (715) 536-5594	Contact email Kathy.Unertl@ci.merrill.wi.us
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Comments