

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: OCCUPANCY TAX COORDINATION

DATE: AUGUST 15, 2011

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS KENNY  
MERLINO  
BENTLEY  
GOODSPEED  
MCCOY  
CONOVER

OTHERS PRESENT:

LEISA GRANT, PRINCIPAL ACCOUNT CLERK  
DANIEL G. STEC, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD  
PAUL DUSEK, COUNTY ATTORNEY/ADMINISTRATOR  
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD  
KEVIN GERAGHTY, BUDGET OFFICER  
SUPERVISORS LOEB

COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:

SUPERVISOR CHAMPAGNE

MONROE  
STRAINER  
TAYLOR  
THOMAS  
WOOD

KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR, TOURISM DEPARTMENT  
WALT LENDER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LAKE GEORGE ASSOCIATION  
LUISA CRAIGE-SHERMAN, EXPLORE HISTORY TOURS  
MICHAEL CONSUELO, SPECIAL EVENTS COORDINATOR  
DON LEHMAN, *THE POST STAR*  
THOM RANDALL, *ADIRONDACK JOURNAL*  
AMANDA ALLEN, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Kenny called the meeting of the Occupancy Tax Coordination Committee to order at 11:17 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Merlino, seconded by Mr. Conover and carried unanimously to approve the minutes from the prior meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Copies of the meeting agenda were distributed to the Committee members, and a copy is also on file with the minutes.

Mr. Kenny announced that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposed use of additional monies from the occupancy tax reserve fund to assist with efforts to eradicate the Asian Clam infestation in Lake George. He said that while he agreed Warren County should lead the efforts, he did not feel they should do so blindly or without assistance, as many area organizations and businesses relied upon the Lake to sustain their functions.

Referring to a recent newspaper article, Mr. Merlino apprised that contrary to information reported, the funding contributed by Warren County to assist with the Asian Clam effort had come from the occupancy tax reserve fund and not from the County Budget. Mr. Kenny confirmed this statement, explaining that visitors paid a tax to their lodging facility which was then collected by the County and placed in the occupancy tax fund. Mr. Merlino continued that while he was supportive of using a portion of the occupancy tax reserve for the eradication of the Asian Clam in Lake George, he felt they should be conservative in their use of the fund to ensure that it was not depleted.

Motion was made by Mr. Bentley and seconded by Mr. Conover to amend the inter-municipal agreement with the Village of Lake George to include an additional donation of \$100,000 to the Asian Clam eradication effort, with the source of funding being the occupancy tax reserve fund.

Mr. Conover commended the efforts of the eradication task force and the goals they hoped to accomplish. He noted that, as requested, the County had previously contributed \$30,000 in occupancy tax funding to the effort and said he hoped the State and Federal Government would join in the effort to remove this invasive species from Lake George. Mr. Conover further noted that he was very proud of the prompt attention given by the Finance and Occupancy Tax Committees to this matter.

Mr. Loeb questioned whether the \$100,000 contribution would allow for the eradication efforts planned for September to be maximized and Walt Lender, Executive Director for the Lake George Association, replied affirmatively. Mr. Lender advised they were currently lacking \$200,000 to complete the work scheduled to begin in September, which would be reduced by half once the County's additional contribution was received. He said that they had been fairly successful in garnering contributions thus far and was confident that the remaining \$100,000 could be raised. Mr. Kenny asked if the Village of Lake George had pledged funding for this effort and Mr. Lender replied that the Village had indicated they would determine a funding source within their budget, but had not specified the amount to be contributed.

Mr. Taylor apprised that during prior discussions on this issue he had questioned whether property owners around the Lake had been approached for donations, at which time they had not. He said that while he was not opposed to donating occupancy reserve funding, he felt that area residents should be canvassed as many would likely provide funds in an effort to prevent a situation that could negatively affect their property values.

Mr. Monroe stated that a \$100,000 donation from the County would send a strong message to other stakeholders who might be prompted to provide funding which could be used to offset the remaining costs anticipated for the September work.

Responding to a question posed by Mr. Kenny, Mr. Lender explained that the Fund for Lake George was the permit holder for the clam eradication at the Lake George Village site; therefore, he said, he would designate that organization as the lead agency for the project. Mr. Kenny then asked who was providing the eradication work and Mr. Lender advised there were a number of different organizations doing the work, including two commercial dive teams providing maintenance work and another from Vermont that would be coming in the fall to help with the removal work. Mr. Lender said this was a multi-organizational effort which accepted any assistance offered due to the expensive nature of the project which was stretching local resources, and he noted that volunteers from all over the Adirondacks and Vermont were traveling to the area to provide assistance. Mr. Kenny opined that the Asian Clam removal effort would likely be an extensive process which would require future discussions as to the County's long-term plans for involvement in the effort, at which point evidence of alternate organization involvement would be necessary.

Mr. Goodspeed said he supported the initiative and agreed with Mr. Kenny's statements; he then suggested the matter be included on the meeting agenda a few months into the future to report on any funding donated by other stakeholders, as well as long range plans to contact property owners for financial assistance. Mr. McCoy stated that a multi-pronged approach was necessary to address the issue, including seeking State and Federal financial assistance. He said the \$100,000 donation would support the immediate demands of the effort and he thanked the Committee for their support. Mr. Kenny noted there were many property owners surrounding the Lake who would like to be part of the eradication efforts and would provide financial support. Mr. Lender pointed out that many were already supporting these efforts through their donations to non-profit organizations, such as the Lake George Association, who were redirecting funds for this project.

Mr. Bentley suggested setting up an account at a local bank where donations to the eradication effort could be made

by anyone seeking to assist. Mr. Lender advised that no specific public appeal had been made to seek funding for this effort and Mr. Bentley replied this might be an idea to consider for the future.

Mr. Monroe stated he was concerned that the Asian Clam infestation might be transferred to other bodies of water in Warren County and he questioned whether the Lake Stewards were monitoring the boats leaving Lake George to ensure the Clams were not being transferred to other waterways. Mr. Lender replied affirmatively, noting that they did not want Lake George to be responsible for transferring the Clam to other bodies of water.

There being no further discussion on the matter, Mr. Kenny called the question and the motion to amend the inter-municipal agreement with the Village of Lake George to include an additional donation of \$100,000 to the Asian Clam eradication effort was carried unanimously, with the source of funding being the occupancy tax reserve fund, and the necessary resolution was authorized for the August 19<sup>th</sup> Board meeting. *A copy of the request is on file with the minutes.*

Mr. Bentley announced that he had recently spoken with former Town of Johnsbury Supervisor William Thomas who was now working for the Saratoga North Creek Railroad (SNCR). He said Mr. W. Thomas had advised that over 100 visitors had ridden the train from the Saratoga Station to the North Creek Station during the prior weekend, which was very good news for the County.

Luisa Craige-Sherman, representing Explore History Tours, advised that the Last of the Mohicans production in Lake George had only four shows remaining and she said she hoped any Committee members who had not seen it would attend to view the production that occupancy tax contributions had helped to fund. She advised an extended stage had been introduced to provide an improved theatrical production which was receiving terrific reviews. Ms. Craige-Sherman announced the attendance levels were slightly higher than they had been for the prior year, and noted that as per a posting on Facebook, one visitor had booked their entire summer vacation around the production and traveled all the way from Virginia. Mr. McCoy said he had attended a showing and advised that it was quite different, and much better, than the prior year.

Returning to the topic of the train, Mr. Goodspeed said he had seen a considerable number of visitors in North Creek disembarking from the train during the prior weekend. He said the North Creek Farmer's Market opened at 3:00 p.m. and between local people and visitors from the train, there had been 115 people in the Market within the first 10 minutes of opening; he added that from the Farmer's Market, visitors had then continued up Main Street to the business district. He advised that although the SNCR had not initially intended to hire a lot of locals to work on the train, they had since employed a fair number to facilitate their train and deck projects, as well as some other facets of their operation. Mr. Goodspeed stated the Town of Johnsbury was now considering ways in which to institute interconnections with the train operation, especially during the winter months, to transport visitors from the Station to other areas of the Town, specifically to Gore Mountain for the ski train which was projected to bring 900 skiers to the area, exceeding the capacity of shuttle bus transportation. Additionally, he noted that SNCR was aggressively marketing their ability to provide freight operations and he anticipated that good news would be received on the future of that facet of their operations in the near future.

As there was no further business to come before the Committee, on motion made by Mr. McCoy and seconded by Mr. Goodspeed, Mr. Kenny adjourned the meeting at 11:35 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Amanda Allen, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist