

Visitors staying in Monroe County hotels and motels after July 1 will be collectively contributing about \$250,000 a year to a proposed convention center in downtown Bloomington.

The Monroe County Council on Tuesday unanimously voted to raise the county's **sinnkeeper's** tax from 3 to 5 percent, with the additional 2 percent going for the "establishment, promotion and operation" of a convention center.

The council voted for raising the tax after hearing messages of support from representatives from the Bloomington/Monroe County Convention and Visitors Bureau and local hotel and motel owners.

But the council's action was only "step one" in the process, council President Carl Harrington and other council members said. Step two will be creating a plan and budget for the convention center.

Until such a plan is in place, the money raised by the 2 percent increase will be set aside, Harrington said. No money can be spent until a budget has been submitted by the visitors commission for council approval.

And that's just fine, say Dan Norzinskay, general manager at the Fireside Inn who represented local hoteliers at the Tuesday's meeting, and Perry Metz, president of the convention and visitors bureau.

"We endorse these proposals," Norzinskay said. But the hoteliers want three areas of concern addressed before the money can be spent, he added.

There should be careful planning, he said. The council should not rush into any financial commitments until a full business plan has been prepared.

And noting that it takes about \$1 million per year to fund a center and the tax will raise only one-fourth that much, Norzinskay said the council should make sure there will be adequate funding before approving any expenditures.

Finally, he said there should be "strong involvement" in the process by the convention and visitors bureau.

The tax money is actually budgeted and spent by the Bloomington/Monroe County Convention and Visitors Commission, a five-member appointed board that promotes tourism in the county and city.

But the commission contracts with the Bloomington/Monroe Convention and Visitors Bureau, a non-profit agency that runs the county visitors center and does the day-to-day work of promoting tourism.

Several council members made it clear the money raised by the increase cannot be used for operating expenses or any other uses by the commission or bureau.

And Metz said that too is the way it should be, saying the bureau "has no designs" on money from the 2 percent increase and agrees it should be placed in a special fund.

Local tourism officials and elected officials for several years have been discussing increasing the tax to fund a convention center capable of handling conventions of up to 1,000 people. Such a facility, they have said, will boost tourism in the downtown area.

A new law passed by the Legislature this year gave the council authority to pass the increase. Exempted from the increase will be local campgrounds.

What the money will be used for - construction, promotion or operations of a center - will be the subject of the planning and budgeting processes, Harrington said. Other discussions also will be on how the money will be used if the convention center plans fall through.

He and other council members said that if that were to happen, the money should be used to pay commission debts on construction of the new visitors center on North Walnut Street.

In other business, the council:

Approved terms for a \$250,000 loan for the county welfare department to pay overdue bills.

Approved a \$16,000 loan from the reassessment fund to the Bloomington Township poor relief fund to meet the township's bills.

**CITATION (AGLC STYLE)**

Steven Higgs, 'Council OKs hotel tax increase', *Herald-Times* (online), 2 May 1990 <<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.monroe.lib.in.us/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/144EABAE3455F300>>

© Copyright 1990 Herald-Times. All rights reserved.