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# Hotel tax in Auburn? City may follow Skaneateles, Weedsport with extra charge

Robert Harding

Sep 12, 2023



The Hilton Garden Inn in Auburn. The city may pursue a hotel tax, similar the one approved for the village of Weedsport, that would be in addition to other taxes, including the county's occupancy tax.

Kevin Rivoli

Robert Harding

After Gov. Kathy Hochul **signed bills** allowing the village of Weedsport and the town and village of Skaneateles to institute hotel taxes, the city of Auburn may seek to impose a similar tax.

The topic was raised at the Auburn City Council meeting Thursday. City Manager Jeff Dygert asked councilors for feedback to determine whether his office should explore the idea.

Councilor Jimmy Giannettino, a Democrat who is running for mayor this year, thinks the city should consider a local occupancy tax because of increased fire and police calls emanating from hotels.

"Our friends at the county continue to house individuals due to the fact that there is no adequate shelter here in the county," Giannettino said. "I think it's important for us to look into and I applaud their efforts, but the reality is we have limited resources."



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Several counties, including Cayuga, have an occupancy tax. In Cayuga County, most of the revenue from the 5% tax is used to fund the local tourism office.



The Holiday Inn in Auburn.

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But the new hotel taxes for other local municipalities would not support tourism. Weedsport Mayor Tom Winslow **told The Citizen** the additional revenue from the 7% tax would offset costs associated with responding to fire and police calls at the village's lone hotel, Rodeway Inn & Suites. The call volume has increased, Winslow said, which strains the village's fire and police departments.

However, the tax would increase the price of a hotel room. For a \$100-a-night stay, a guest would pay an additional \$20 in taxes — the 8% sales tax, 7% village hotel tax and 5% county occupancy tax. That does not include any additional fees charged by the hotel.

To institute a local hotel tax, it must be approved by the state Legislature and signed by the governor. Assemblyman John Lemondes, a Republican, and state Sen. Rachel May, a Democrat, introduced separate bills for the proposed taxes in Skaneateles and Weedsport. For Skaneateles, the legislation imposes a 5% tax on hotel stays and short-term rentals.



The state Legislature approved the measures in June. Before they were delivered to Hochul's desk, the New York State Hospitality and Tourism Association urged her to veto the bills.



The Inn at the Finger Lakes in Auburn.

Kevin Rivoli

Eric Ridley, who chairs the association's board of directors, criticized the new taxes. He told *The Citizen* "it's disappointing that municipalities who mismanaged budgets throughout the pandemic seem to now want to glom onto shoring up their general funds on the backs of tourists."

Ridley works in the hotel industry — he was previously the director of hospitality management for Pioneer Companies, a Syracuse-based firm that spearheaded the Hilton Garden Inn project in Auburn.

With the city of Auburn floating an occupancy tax, Ridley warned that businesses needing hotel rooms for employees or visitors will look at other communities where there isn't an additional tax. He also thinks the tax, when combined with existing taxes, will discourage families from visiting the city.

"It will have the unwanted effect of driving tourism out of the area in favor of these less expensive municipalities," Ridley said. "That has a ripple effect, not only to hotels, but to our restaurants and our attractions. It's a very short-sighted fad that is being undertaken."

Although nothing has been formally proposed by the city, there is support among members of the council. Auburn Mayor Michael Quill told *The Citizen* he thinks an occupancy tax could help cover the costs of responding to calls at local hotels.

If Auburn decides to pursue a local hotel tax, it's unlikely that it will be instituted this year. The state Legislature is not in session and bills would have to be introduced for votes in the Assembly and Senate. Lawmakers aren't scheduled to return to Albany until January 2024.

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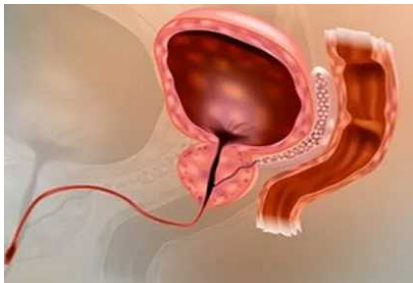
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