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GOVERNMENT

Auburn wants Cayuga County to share hotel tax revenue

Robert Harding

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The Inn at the Finger Lakes in Auburn.

Kevin Rivoli

Robert Harding



As the city of Auburn **seeks state support** to implement a **hotel tax**, it will ask Cayuga County for a cut of the county occupancy tax that has been in place since the 1990s.

The Auburn City Council will consider a resolution this week requesting the city and county split occupancy tax revenue collected from hotels within the city.

If the council passes the resolution, it will be submitted to the Cayuga County Legislature for review.

Cayuga County has a 5% occupancy tax on hotel stays, with the revenue funding the county Office of Tourism.

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The occupancy tax revenue from Auburn hotels has fluctuated over time, but the county collected \$452,506.25 in 2022, up from \$388,306.15 in 2021 and \$351,226.38 in 2019 — the year before the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the text of the resolution, city officials say it's time to "rethink the model of funding tourism in this county." If the county agrees to share the tax revenue collected within Auburn, the city would use the funds for its Historic and Cultural Sites Commission and to promote tourist attractions.

Auburn City Clerk Chuck Mason noted at a March 21 council meeting that the proposal is similar to how the city and county split sales tax revenue collected from Auburn businesses. The local share of the sales tax is 4%, with the city and county

each getting half that revenue.

The city's request comes as it **pursues its own hotel tax**.

The idea was floated at a **council meeting** in September after Gov. Kathy Hochul **signed legislation** allowing the village of Weedsport and the town and village of Skaneateles to implement hotel taxes.

In December, the council **agreed to send letters** asking Assemblyman John Lemondes and state Sen. Rachel May to introduce legislation that would authorize the city to institute a tax on hotel stays and short-term rentals. Before the city can proceed, the state Legislature must approve and Hochul must sign the bill.

May, D-Syracuse, has introduced the Auburn hotel tax legislation in the Senate. Lemondes, R-LaFayette, has not sponsored a similar bill in the Assembly. However, he attended a **public meeting** on March 21 to collect feedback on the proposed hotel tax.

If the state legislative process is completed this year, the Auburn City Council would take action to set the tax on hotel stays and short-term rentals. It could be as high as 5%, but they could choose a lower rate.

The city is aiming to have its hotel tax in place by Jan. 1, 2025.

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By Robert Harding

Online producer/politics reporter
