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GOVERNMENT

# Auburn is latest CNY municipality to eye tax on hotel stays, short-term rentals

Robert Harding

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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

The city of Auburn is taking the first step toward implementing a h revenue source that could be in place as early as 2025.



Auburn councilors agreed at a meeting Thursday to send a letter to the city's state representatives, Assemblyman John Lemondes and state Sen. Rachel May, to initiate the legislative process. If the state Legislature and Gov. Kathy Hochul approve the legislation, it would allow the city to charge an occupancy tax on hotel stays and short-term rentals.

The decision to explore a hotel tax followed a presentation by Auburn City Clerk Chuck Mason, who detailed the procedure and how the tax could benefit the city.

Several New York counties, including Cayuga, have hotel occupancy taxes. Cayuga County's 5% occupancy tax has been in place since the 1990s.

There are other local governments with hotel taxes. Mason said a few nearby cities, including Canandaigua, Geneva and Ithaca, have occupancy taxes.

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This year, Hochul **signed bills** allowing the village of Weedsport and the town and village of Skaneateles to impose hotel taxes.

"There are more and more villages, cities and towns taking this opportunity to create revenue through the hotel occupancy tax," Mason said.

A rough estimate based on data compiled by Mason suggests the city could generate \$500,000 in annual revenue with a 5% tax on hotel stays and short-term rentals. A bulk of that revenue (\$452,000) would come from hotels within the city, remaining funds would be from short-term rentals, such as Airbnbs.



Mason noted there isn't a lot of data on short-term rentals in Auburn, so the city will need to gather that information to develop a more accurate revenue estimate.

There have been early discussions with May's office about legislation to allow the city to impose a hotel tax, according to Mason. Lemondes, R-LaFayette, and May, D-Syracuse, would introduce the bills on the city's behalf. The city council would pass a resolution in support of the legislation. The state Assembly and Senate must pass the bills, then send them to Hochul for her review.

If Hochul signs the bill, the city council would need to pass a local law to establish the tax. If the state Legislature acts in the upcoming session, which runs from January through June, and Hochul signs the bill next year, the tax could take effect Jan. 1, 2025.

Mason explained that city officials have been advised to request an occupancy tax of no more than 5%. The city could choose to set it lower than the maximum, but it could not exceed the 5% threshold.

Auburn City Councilor Terry Cuddy thinks the tax is needed to cover costs, such as emergency services and infrastructure, associated with increasing tourism in the city.

"It makes total sense that we act upon this," he said on Thursday. "I would prefer to act on this sooner than later."

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