

**COUNCIL MEETING
TOWN OF BOLIVAR
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES**
Thursday, April 19, 2018 @ 7:00p.m.
Bolivar Community Center

Helen Dettmer, Mayor
Sarah Gordon
John Paul Heafer-Mayor Pro-Tem
Stephen J. Paradis
Jerry Powell-Absent
Scott Whetsell
P. Jean Reed, Recorder

A special meeting of the Bolivar Town Council was called to order by Mayor Helen Dettmer on Thursday, April 19, 2018 @7:04p.m. This was a Public Hearing on the Proposed Hotel/Motel Occupancy Tax for Bolivar. Councilperson Jerry Powell was absent.

Several business owners signed up to speak concerning the Hotel/Motel Occupancy Tax.

A handout was given to Mayor and Town Council Members before the meeting started.

Rock Wheeler said he has been a business owner in Bolivar for years. They recently had a fire but have since rebuilt their business. They are concerned because this tax seems to affect lodging businesses. They also wanted to know if the Town Council considered a B & O Tax or an increase in the municipal tax. They are also asking if steps have been taken to identify unregistered and illegal businesses. Does this tax pertain to AirBnB's. Are they all licensed and do they pay State and Town taxes? Mr. Wheeler does not have anything against paying taxes as long as they are fair. He would like to put a little more money away for retirement for he and Mrs. Wheeler. They are glad they live in Bolivar and do not want it to change drastically.

Sandi Marra said she supports taxes but would like to ensure the revenue is spent wisely. Have you done an analysis of revenue? What are your plans for the use of this tax? She would like to see more support for small businesses. What can be done to bring in small businesses to help those we already have. We would like to see more Arts, Crafts and fairs in the community. Who will collect or oversee this tax?

Lisa Kovatch is thinking about starting an AirBnB and had concerns about the upcoming water rate increase and other expenses that might be passed on to her new customers. Would we consider not passing this tax right now?

Benjamin Shankman is most concerned about is why do we need to introduce this new tax. Where is it going?

Phil Hale said his tax has increased 6% to 12% in two years. We are in a sensitive business. Our occupancy has gone down considerably in the last couple of years. Where is this money going? Our expense costs are extremely high.

Mary Haynes is just interested in what is happening.

Laurel Drake owns property in Bolivar. The strongest of all the arguments she has heard is it appears that this tax applies to a few properties (6 businesses).

Yinching Lin-Chen is owner of the Quality Inn (Union Street). Her family has been in Business in Bolivar for 32 years. She has been here for 9 years. We have adjusted with time. We used to have 24% of NPS business and now we have 1%. Will any of this money go to more police for Bolivar?

Eric Lewis answered the questions everyone asked.

- Bolivar is the only Municipality that does not have this tax
- Every other Municipality charges 6% except Harpers Ferry and they charge 5%
- 50% will go to Jefferson County Convention & Visitors Bureau for Marketing Jefferson County and its Municipalities.
- The past four years they have spent a million dollars marketing Jefferson County
- Bolivar is not listed on any of the marketing advertisements.
- Bolivar has a 1% sales tax like every other place in Jefferson County
- State has completely gone away with Maps and Grants
- Jefferson County is 20% of the money spent on tourism
- We cannot increase the B & O Tax (This would be a Tax on your gross receipts).
- Most all municipalities are going away from B & O Tax
- This tax is passed on to visitors who are used to paying it

Councilperson Steve Paradis asked Mr. Lewis to give us a sense of what this will do for Bolivar? Mr. Lewis said this will give you a Representative on the Board, access to a Business Coach, Annual printing of 150,000 vacation guides, hotels, bed & breakfasts and AirBnB's that contribute to the occupancy tax receive listing in vacation guide and website, all shops and restaurants listed in vacation guide and website, and working closely with spending money in Bolivar, etc. Mr. Lewis said there is a problem with finding the AirBnB owners that are compliant. The State is working to clarify these. If you see something, say something. Everyone needs to pay their fair share.

Mr. Lewis said he is not sure on the collection of the money.

Mayor Dettmer said they have been in touch with the County Attorney and Sheriff Pete Dougherty and we are working up an Intergovernmental Agreement for Sheriff Dougherty to collect our tax.

Mr. Lewis said he has never met a client who wants to pay more taxes-my personal experience I do not believe it will have negative effect.

Mr. Shankman said with his business, he feels this tax will have a negative effect. This is mostly because his customers have to budget more money and spend more wisely or just sleep on the ground.

Sandi Marra said other doors open to do other things.

Laurel Drake said she disagrees with Sandi.

Laurel Drake said maybe the B & O Tax would be more fair to all businesses instead of just lodging businesses.

Councilperson Sarah Gordon manages properties and can see an advantage of getting into the pocket of CVB. The benefits of the CVB could be for everyone.

Mr. Shankman asked why 5%. Mr. Lewis said make it level with Harpers Ferry. I don't think there is an answer that will make you happy.

Mayor Dettmer said Bolivar is not very well thought of because we do not pay into the CVB for the benefits.

Laurel Drake asked why 5%.

Councilperson Sarah Gordon said it would not be enough money to benefit CVB or Bolivar.

Lisa Kovatch asked when this tax would start?

Accountant Eric Lewis said possibly July 1 with September being the end of the first quarter and possible Bolivar's first check would be in November.

Deb Hale said for many years, we have taken care of our own business, paid our taxes, kept our property in good shape, and beautified our home and business. It seems the State has let us down.

Yinching Lin-Chen said she only has in use about half the rooms they started with. As things change they have to make changes to keep people interested and coming back to their business.

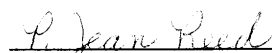
Mayor Dettmer said we know what we can do with the tax money but we do not have any definite plans as of now.

Benjamin Shankman said he would like to know what Bolivar will do with their portion of the Tax money and exactly how we will spend it. At this time he is not on board with this tax @ 5%.


Mayor Dettmer asked all Council members to review everything that was talked about tonight and come to the May 1 meeting prepared to move forward.

Mayor Dettmer adjourned the meeting @ 8:55p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



P. Jean Reed, Recorder



Helen Dettmer, Mayor