MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE HOTEL/MOTEL TAX ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF THE VILLAGE OF WILLOWBROOK HELD ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2016, AT THE VILLAGE OF WILLOWBROOK, 835 MIDWAY DRIVE, WILLOWBROOK, ILLINOIS.

1.   CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Gayle Neal called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

2.   ROLL CALL

Those present at roll call were Chairman Gayle Neal, Village Trustee Sue Berglund, Village Administrator Tim Halik, Director of Finance Carrie Dittman, Administrative Intern Tiffany Kolodziej, Roswitha Korpas (La Quinta), Frank Fishella (Chamber of Commerce), Beth Marchetti & Miriam Blumenthal (DuPage Convention and Visitors Bureau (DCVB)).

ABSENT: Member Rashmi Patel (Econo Lodge), Member Tasha Clark (Red Roof Inn Plus) and Member Willowbrook Inn (hotel is closed). There was no quorum.

3.   VISITOR'S BUSINESS

There were no visitors present.

4.   APPROVAL OF MINUTES – March 16, 2016, May 24, 2016, & July 18, 2016

There was no quorum so the minutes could not be approved.

5.   MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORT – October 31, 2016

Director Dittman presented the financial report of the Hotel/Motel Tax Fund as of October 31, 2016 as included in the packet.

6.   DISCUSSION – WB/BR Chamber of Commerce Request for Funding FY 17/18

Director Dittman presented the annual request from the Chamber of Commerce dated October 4, 2016. The Chamber requests $3,000 for the annual directory and $2,500 to host the annual business expo. The amounts are the same as the prior request. Director Dittman noted that these would be included in the Village Board discussion of the annual budget for the Hotel/Motel Fund for FY 17/18.

7.   MARKETING REPORT/ADVERTISING PROGRAM

Miriam from DCVB presented a handout on the Willowbrook Hotels website statistics. There was a 291% increase from July 1 to October 30, including 307 new users. The website has been updated for the Park. Sleep. Fly. program, the pet friendly package and the zoo package. Various other website enhancements have also been made. Additional website re-vamping is being considered for a future budget as it will cost between $6,000-$8,700. Miriam and Beth also discussed the online marketing campaign and gave additional statistics on web users and # of hits. The DCVB did a billboard campaign this year which included a billboard on I-55 near Midway airport heading towards Chicago. A billboard near Southern Illinois in the future is also being considered. Finally, print ads appeared in Midwest Living magazine Holiday 2016 and will appear in the Illinois Travel Guide 2017 spring/summer edition. Discussion about using AAA for marketing followed, however only 2 hotels qualify under AAA and we need 3 to participate.

Discussion ensued about the Willowbrook mobile phone app and whether icons can be added or updated monthly (such as for featuring restaurants). Administrator Halik replied that he believed the icons could not be changed monthly but that existing icons could be renamed so as to make it clearer that they included restaurants. He commented that he would check with Village staff on what could be changed.

8.   DISCUSSION – Trolley Program

Director Dittman presented a performance synopsis of the trolley program, which began July 1, 2016 and concluded September 11, 2016. Based on ridership figures provided by the Trolley Car and Bus Company, over the 2.5-month program there were 151 total riders. The cost of the program, which was adjusted for bus substitution days and one trolley no-show day, was $31,939. At a cost per rider, this amounted to $211.52/ride.

Discussion ensued about the program, and it was noted that this was the first ever attempt at such a program in the Village and that promotion by some of the hotels was poor, which led to low usage. Additionally, the Village's largest hotel has been closed all year and thus did not utilize the program, which they previously requested before they closed. Another hotel had 3 manager changes during the duration of the program. The Village's program differs from the City of Elmhurst, which also offers a trolley, in that ours is open to hotel guests only as the revenue source funding it is restricted for tourism (overnight hotel guests), as opposed to Elmhurst's trolley being open to the general public.

Chairman Neal noted that Village staff and herself spent many hours getting this program off the ground and monitoring it during the duration, and we were all frustrated by the results. The highest ridership usage occurred during a weekend the Village really pushed the hotels for participation, and they responded and it showed great results. Signage in the hotel lobbies was discussed, printing trolley passes or printing info directly on the plastic hotel key cards, goodie bags and local restaurant participation was also discussed as ways to help spur the program. Ms. Korpas commented that she felt the program was positive for her hotel, and that returning guests are still asking about the trolley service. Village staff has not received any feedback from the other hotels. If the program is attempted again, some changes will need to be made to make it more effective.

9.   DISCUSSION – Future Spending

Chairman Neal noted that Village is investigating what hotel/motel tax funds can be applied to.
Ms. Korpas commented that the flower pots were a good idea. Chairman Neal noted that the Village will remove them this winter when the mums have died.

10.   COMMUNICATIONS

Administrator Halik discussed the Village police department's $4 million renovation project and that the parking around the police station will be closed off for a long time. Ms. Korpas inquired about the status of the Willowbrook Inn renovation, however Administrator Halik couldn't currently comment on their progress and it will be announced when we have more information. Beth noted that the numbers of hotel stays in Chicago are down, and projections for future years are down too. Staff gave updates on various Village projects including Guntry, Compass, and the private garage for car storage.

11.   ADJOURNMENT
The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Neal, seconded by Ms. Korpas, at 5:13 p.m.

Minutes transcribed by Carrie Dittman, 11/3/16