

Northern Light Region

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City, county split over fate of lodging tax, Tourism Bureau

Robert Hopwood
Reporter

The City of Baudette and Lake of the Woods County are at odds over the fate of a joint powers agreement that imposed a lodging tax and created Lake of the Woods Tourism, leaving the fate of both unknown.

The city says it has terminated the agreement, thereby dissolving the local tourism bureau effective Jan. 1, but the county says the city never notified it that it was ending the contact. Therefore, the county says, the agreement has not changed.

And Lake of the Woods Tourism, which was established by the joint powers agreement that is now in question, told its members last week in an email that "Lake of the Woods Tourism is still in full operation."

The county and city appear to be at an impasse over the issue and no one seems to know how to break it.

Lake of the Woods Tourism is funded by a 3% lodging tax, which the county began collecting in 1989 when they entered into a joint powers agreement with the city that established both the bureau and the tax.

Tax receipts have steadily grown over the past decade, dipping only during the pandemic years.

In 2020, the lodging tax—now collected by the Minnesota Department of Revenue—generated \$473,359.72 from out-of-town guests, according to the Lake of

the Woods County Auditor/Treasurer's office.

The tourism bureau uses that money to promote Lake of the Woods County, attract tourism and related businesses, and contribute to the economic stability of the region, according to their mission statement.

They add more than \$100 million to the local economy every year, generate employment and are a key driver of economic development, director Joe Henry said in a report he presented at the group's annual meeting in October.

The stalemate between the city and county over the future of the joint powers agreement threatens to create ripple effects through the local economy, hitting everything from Main Avenue's cash registers to the number of fisherman dropping lines into Lake of the Woods.

No one knows when the current impasse between the city and county began. Its roots seem to stretch back to the World Ploughing Contest the city hosted in 2019, but that's just a guess.

The disagreement involves strong personalities in two local governments and the private sector; allegations of illegal behav-

ior; ultimatums; misunderstandings; contentious meetings that did not provide anyone with clarity; and more.

The years of rancor between the city and county has resulted in today's mess. No one seems to know the status of the joint powers agreement or how to untangle everything and move forward.

And just like a divorce, the city and county decide how to split and divide the assets.

The breaking point for the city came at the end of 2020, when Lake of the Woods Tourism closed the Tourism Information Center, which was located in the Baudette-Lake of the Woods Chamber of Commerce building on the west side of Baudette.

The city wanted it to remain open, Mayor Rick Rone said.

The city council responded by voting 4-0 at its Dec. 31, 2020, work session to dissolve the joint powers agreement.

Mayor Rick Rone said the city was getting out of the contract, which established the lodging tax that funds the tourism bureau.

Without the joint powers agreement, the taxing authority it created would end Dec. 31, 2021, he said.

"We've told them we're done, we're done this year," he said in November.

Most recently, the city council unanimously voted to repeal the city's lodging tax on Jan. 10.

The joint powers agreement stipulates that whichever party wants to end the agreement must pass a resolution terminating the contract and deliver a "certified copy of the Resolution to the other party no later than October 1st of that year."

The city didn't provide a certified copy of the resolution to the county, City Clerk/Treasurer Tina Rennemo said.

When the city council voted at the end of 2020 to dissolve the joint powers agreement, County Attorney Jim Austad was on the phone attending the meeting remotely.

He told the City Council he would accept the council members' vote as notice that the city was withdrawing from the joint powers agreement, Rennemo said.

Austad does not dispute that. He said he told the city council "let's stop talking about this, it's fine, we'll take it as notice." And he thought that was it.

More meetings were held last year, which led to more misunderstandings between the city and county about whether or not the city would withdraw from the agreement.

As a result, today there is a lot of confusion about the status of the joint powers agreement, County Commissioner Edward Arnesen said.

The biggest issue right now seems to be whether or not the city notified the county that it was ending the joint powers agreement.

The city says it did provide notice to the county, but the county doesn't agree.

"We never got official notice," said County Commissioner Edward Arnesen. "I mean a lot of people said something on the street — or somebody would say something to somebody — that is not official notice."

County Board Chair James "Buck" Nordlof sent a letter to the Baudette City Council on Jan. 10, 2022, that said the county was "interested in your intentions in regards to the Lake of the Woods Lodging Tax."

He asked the council to "Please remit a formal letter stating your intentions."

"It's clear as mud," Commissioner Jon Waibel said at a recent board meeting in a comment about the city's intentions.

The city council hasn't replied, yet, but they did put it on the agenda for their next work session.



Hospice provider coming soon to Lake of the Woods, Roseau counties

Robert Hopwood
Reporter

Lake of the Woods County residents who need hospice care will soon be able to turn to a local provider for the first time in more than ten years.

Hospice of the Red River Valley, a non-profit, community-owned provider based in Fargo, N.D., will expand its coverage area to serve residents of Roseau and Lake of the Woods counties starting in April, said Brenda Iverson, the provider's director of development and marketing.

This is good news for residents who have not been able to get hospice care for themselves or loved ones since 2011, when CHI LakeWood Health stopped providing hospice care, said Amy Ballard, Lake of the Woods County Social Services director.

"It's a good thing, no matter how you put it, that we have hospice coming into our community," she said. "It's been long overdue."

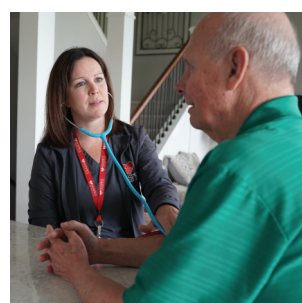
Hospice provides care for the terminally ill, Iverson said. It is intended to aid and comfort people who are expected to live six months or less.

please see **HOSPICE/**
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(Briann Sandholm/Hospice of the Red River Valley)

Hospice of the Red River Valley's medical director, Dr. Tracie Mallberg, and the patient's physician oversee the plan of care and work collaboratively with hospice nurse practitioners.



(Hospice of the Red River Valley) Hospice staff nurses, like Terra Fennern, who is a registered nurse, provide expertise in pain and symptom management; visit as often as necessary to assess medical needs; offer support 24 hours a day, seven days a week to respond to a crisis or medical emergency; and assist the family in a caregiver role.

Serious crimes mar week in Lake of the Woods County

Kidnapping, assault charges filed against Baudette man

Sarah Hull
Reporter

A Baudette man is facing second degree assault, kidnapping and threats of violence charges, all felonies, stemming from an incident that happened last week.

According to the official complaint, the Lake of the Woods County Sheriff's Office was contacted on February 3 by a deputy in Beltrami County, who informed them that an individual had reported an assault that had occurred in Lake of the Woods County the day before.

The victim, who had been in an intimate relationship with the Defendant, Michael Rory Lucek, 32, of Baudette, reported that Lucek was hiding in her apartment when she arrived there on February 2.



Michael Lucek

According to the victim, Lucek struck her before ordering her into the bathtub, where he allegedly held a razor to her wrist and claimed he was going to kill her and "make it look like a suicide."

The Defendant then placed a rag in the victim's mouth and made her hold her hands up while he struck her in the stomach and chest.

The victim also stated that he choked her into unconsciousness twice, telling her that "It had taken her 15 seconds to pass out, but it usually takes 11 seconds."

He also allegedly said "Isn't it scary that I have to count the seconds to make sure I don't kill you, because I'm not done with you yet."

The victim explained that she traveled to Beltrami County to file the complaint, as Lucek had said that he had the cops in Lake of the Woods County "in his back pocket."

Upon the Lake of the Woods Sheriff's Office meeting with the victim, they learned that on February 3, the Defendant informed the victim that he wanted his personal property from her apartment. She stated that she would bring it to his place of employment. When the victim arrived in her vehicle, Lucek requested that she roll the window all the way down. He then reached into the vehicle, opened the door and entered the vehicle, demanding that they go to her apartment, where the Defendant assaulted the victim and repeatedly stated that he was going to kill her.

Lucek is facing charges of second degree assault, kidnapping and threats of violence.

He made his first appearance in court on Monday, February 7.

Baudette man arrested on felony assault charges

Sarah Hull
Reporter

A man from rural Baudette was arrested on three felony charges in the early morning hours of Friday, January 28.

According to the official complaint, Lake of the Woods County Sheriff's Office responded to a domestic violence call in rural Lake of the Woods County. The phone call had come from the residence of Jessie Joel Peterson, 45, of Baudette.

Peterson's significant other explained to the officers that Peterson believed she was cheating on him. A verbal and physical dispute ensued, which resulted in Peterson sitting on top of the victim and holding her down as he struck her. The victim believed Peterson had dislocated her jaw from the blow.

After the victim was struck, she called out for



Jessie Peterson

help from her 13-year-old son, who subsequently came to her aid holding a shotgun.

At this point, Peterson grabbed the shotgun from the child and struck him with the stock of the gun multiple times, stating to the child that "If he was going to pick up a gun, he better be ready to pull the trigger."

Both the victim and the child's injuries were apparent and photographed by law enforcement.

Peterson acknowledged the dispute and the statement he made to the child, and was arrested on January 29.

He is facing two charges of felony domestic assault, with each charge carrying a maximum sentence of five years imprisonment and/or a \$10,000 fine. He is also charged with felon in possession of a firearm, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years imprisonment and/or a \$30,000 fine.

Peterson made his first appearance in court for the charges on January 31.