

Tourism stimulated by county lodging tax

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Anderson: Legislation won't change what visitor committee doing

State legislation that restricts how the County Visitors Lodging Tax funds are spent will not change how local dollars are used for tourism promotion or improvements

Under LB215, governing bodies must use the funds to promote, encourage and attract visitors to their counties.

Anderson, Community Development Office director, said the Dawson County Visitor's Committee has always spent a percentage of the money first on improvement requests.

The money is collected through a tax on lodging facilities in the county.

What is left is spent on promotions as mandated by the new state legislation if non-profit organizations don't first request money for improvements, she said.

A tax on lodging throughout counties in Nebraska first goes to the state department of revenue and is then sent to county treasurers, Anderson explained.

Of the 5% collected from lodging tax in Dawson County, Anderson said 2% goes into a fund for improvements, 2% is put into promotions fund and 1% is kept by the state for Nebraska tourism.

The Dawson County treasurer then divides the funds and gives 60% to Lexington and 20% to both Gothenburg and Cozad.

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Anderson said the seven-member Dawson County Visitor's Committee decides how dollars will be spent, based on requests from non-profit organizations, and provides county commissioners with a budget for accountability.

Anderson and local resident Barry McDiarmid are both members of the county visitor's committee.

Locally, Anderson said improvement funds have helped Cindermates with upgrades to high school track and field equipment which has enabled them to host the Nebraska Junior High State Track meet and for playground equipment in Ehmen Park.

"The track meet brings in a large number of visitors to our county," she said.

Last year, she said Gothenburg received \$13,900 that was used toward Gothenburg Historical Museum renovations, a bronze Pony Express sculpture in progress for Ehmen Park and repairs to the fire truck used in parades.

In 2013, she said Gothenburg received \$13,982 to spend on brochures and other advertising to promote local attractions.

Typically, Anderson said Gothenburg doesn't save funds for long-term projects but spends it for what is needed at the time.

"We use it judiciously," she said.

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