

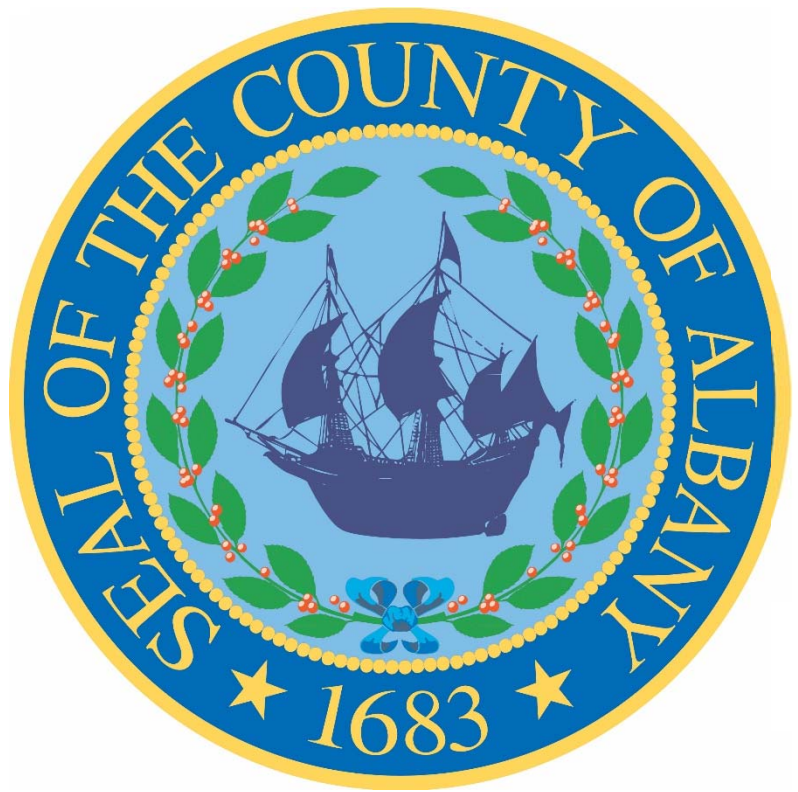
ALBANY COUNTY

# Department of Audit and Control

## Final Report

Hotel Occupancy Tax Audit

Spring 2023



August 2023

Susan Rizzo, Comptroller

## Table of Contents

<b>Background</b> .....	3
<b>Objectives</b> .....	4
<b>Scope</b> .....	4
<b>Approach</b> .....	4
<b>Observations</b> .....	5
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	5

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**Background**

The Albany County Comptroller’s Office performed an audit of Occupancy Tax records related to tax collected by hotels and motels within the County. New York State and Local Laws<sup>1</sup> grant Albany County the authority<sup>2</sup> to impose and collect taxes on occupancy of hotel and motel rooms in Albany County and provides for the structure for the distribution of the funds collected. Occupancy tax collected equals six percent (6%) of the per diem rental rate charged to occupants for each hotel or motel room. The whole of the monies collected are distributed as follows:

- Albany Convention Center Authority Fund – 50%
- Times Union Center (Civic Center) Debt Service Fund. – 33%
- Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau – 17%
  - Up to ten percent of this amount is retained by Albany County to offset the administrative expenses related to the occupancy tax.

The table below details occupancy tax collections for the first two quarters.

<b>Collections Q1 &amp; Q2 2022 / 2023</b>				
	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>Variance</b>	
1st Quarter Collections	\$ 1,309,232	\$ 1,706,929	\$ 397,698	30%
Late Payments	\$ 5,441	\$ 0	\$ -5,441	
2nd Quarter Collections	\$ 1,974,563	\$ 2,243,636	\$ 269,073	50%
Late Payments	\$ 4,131	\$ 677	\$ -3,454	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 3,293,366</b>	<b>\$ 3,951,242</b>	<b>\$ 657,876</b>	<b>20%</b>

Hotel and motel operators are required to keep current and accurate records of exempt and non-exempt revenue. Additionally, quarterly returns with payment in full must be filed in a timely manner through the Albany County Department of Finance. A penalty is imposed for the late filing of a quarterly return in the amount of five percent of the total amount owed for the first month past due. An additional one percent of the original amount due at the start of each additional month past due. During the second month past due, a notice will be delivered stating that the operator must file the past due return (with payment) within 30 days to avoid the

<sup>1</sup> Local Law No. 3 for 1980 as amended by Local Law No. 8 for 1981, Local Law No. 3 for 1986, Local Law No. 3 for 2005, Local Law No. 11 for 2006, Local Law No. 8 for 2009, Local Law No. 10 for 2010, Local Law No. 2 for 2012, Local Law No. 4 for 2014 and Local Law No.8 for 2016 pursuant to Chapter 693 of the Laws of 1980 of the State of New York, Chapter 375 of the Laws of 1985 of the State of New York, Chapter 531 of the Laws of 2005 of the State of New York, Chapter 194 of the Laws of 2006 of the State of New York, Chapter 105 of the Laws of 2009 of the State of New York, Chapter 401 of the Laws of 2010 of the State of New York, Chapter 312 of the Laws of 2012 of the State of New York, Chapter 228 of the Laws of 2014 of the State of New York, Chapter 452 of the Laws of 2016 of the State of New York and Chapter 134 of the Laws of the State of New York and Chapter 58 of the Laws of the State of New York.

<sup>2</sup> Authority is granted for a term of two years and must be renewed by resolution through the Albany County Legislature.

issuance of a warrant and lien against the property. Additional penalties are imposed for misclassification of exempt revenue in the amount of five percent of the amount owed as a result of the misclassification and one percent per month charged back to the date the original return and payment was due. Specific and flat rate fines are imposed in the amount of one thousand dollars for the following issues as observed during the audit process:

- Non-compliance with audit in terms of scheduling and participation with auditors
- Failure to have tax certificate displayed in the appropriate manner as required by law
- Operating an unregistered hotel or motel

### **Objectives**

- Confirm that the hotel or motel is registered and is in compliance with tax certificate display requirements;
- Determine whether operator has accurately classified exempt and non-exempt revenue;
- Ensure that records provided related to exempt revenue are substantiated with appropriate documentation; and
- Determine amount of late fees, penalties and fines to be assessed, if any.

### **Scope**

The scope of this audit includes all hotels and motels located and operating in Albany County that have 25 or more rooms. The Occupancy Tax Audit is performed twice annually and in total generally reviews between 20 and 40 of the existing locations. Locations are selected for audit on a two year rotating basis. Any location observed to be in noncompliance is reviewed as part of subsequent audits continuously until compliance is established and verified, as such the total number of locations audited varies from year to year.

Audit work was substantially completed on June 26, 2023.

### **Approach**

To accomplish these objectives the DAC performed the following:

- Schedule site visit with hotel or motel operators;
- Perform reconciliation of physical records provided against quarterly returns filed with the Albany County Department of Finance;
- Review sample of documentation provided to support exempt revenue;
- Issue an invoice for any and all late fees, penalties and fines imposed.

**Observations**

No observations were noted during this audit.

**Conclusion**

The DAC performed the hotel occupancy tax audit at a total of 24 locations. The auditors reviewed records for taxable room sales of \$37,793,472 which generated \$2,267,608 in Occupancy Tax.

One hotel that was scheduled to be reviewed has remained closed since 2020 due to COVID. As a result, this hotel was not available for audit and was added to the list for the spring 2023; however, it was revealed that this hotel is permanently closed.

I would like to thank all participating hotels for their cooperation with our audit team in performing this review.



Susan Rizzo,  
County Comptroller



Stephanie Slominski CIA CFE,  
Chief Auditor

cc: Edward Dott, Executive Deputy Comptroller