Assembly Denies Discover Kodiak's Additional Funding Request

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

The Kodiak Borough Assembly has decided not to provide extra funding to Discover Kodiak this year. The organization was requesting $18,000 from the assembly in addition to its annual $75,000 in borough funding. The money was to be put toward international marketing at trade shows across the globe.

Discover Kodiak Director Chastity Starrett said the hope was to travel to Berlin, Chicago and Iceland, in partnership with the Alaska Tourism Industry Association, and promote tourism in Kodiak. Having encountered some assembly skepticism toward funding the full $18,000 during the assembly’s December work session, Starrett offered an alternative during Thursday’s meeting.

“So tonight if you’re not willing to fund the $18,000 I’d like to make an additional request for $8,390 to attend ITB Berlin. This show is important so we’re reaching the consumers interested in us while Kodiak’s in the spotlight all over the globe and we just need to be there to provide them with the necessary resources for getting here.”

Assemblywoman Carol Austerman said she was not supportive of the $18,000 amount but moved to amend that amount to the $8,390 Starrett suggested.

“I do think that there is some work that needs to be done internationally for marketing and I think that it would be a good start for them to do the Berlin show this coming year. I think in my conversations with Chastity she made it very clear it was the biggest and best opportunity and part of the reasoning there is because of the co-marketing that is being done with the state of Alaska who is providing the interpreter and that makes it make a lot more sense plus that really cuts down the cost for them to attend.”

Austerman added that she thought there needs to be some sort of tracking for the work Discover Kodiak does internationally; to make sure they are getting something out of it.

Assemblyman Dave Kaplan had similar thoughts about making sure the trade shows are actually beneficial and said he was on the fence about supporting additional funding for them.

“The Berlin show was attended last year, I haven’t heard any outcomes from that show, at all. And two, I’d like to know the last time a grant was written and received by Discover Kodiak or formerly Kodiak Visitors Center. To my knowledge the last time there was a grant written when it was former

Mayor Selby who was doing it interim, and that was the last time they received a grant. My concern is that we are giving Discover Kodiak, which I totally support, $75,000. However at this point I would like to see some outcomes or at least some information from last year’s Berlin show and I would like to see Discover Kodiak not just rely on the municipalities for the bulk of their budget.”

Assemblyman Frank Peterson, thought the additional money was well worth the investment.

“We have to look at it as an opportunity for Kodiak, we’re pushing Kodiak. Discover Kodiak is our way of getting out to the rest of the world. It’s something for staff as well. If you want to look at it as a training opportunity you can do that. You know they’re going over there and interacting with other people throughout the world. These conventions are huge, they’re humongous, and you build relationships and that’s what it’s all about.”

Assemblyman Aaron Griffin reiterated that the money to fund Discover Kodiak’s additional request would come from the borough’s bed tax fund, which he thought was a reasonable source to draw from.

“That money that is in that bed tax fund, it’s not there to be saved for a rainy day. It is there to be spent on tourism development. And I think that we’re probably missing the destination development side of that.”)

In the end the motion to amend the funding to $8,390 failed, as did the original motion for $18,000. Discover Kodiak will still be fully funded at its annual amount of $75,000.