Email from the North Lake Travis Chamber of Commerce, Oct. 26, 2026

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From: Allison Sargent, Executive Director, North Lake Travis Chamber of Commerce
To: tips@lagovistawatchdog.com
Received: Oct. 26, 2026, 3:12 p.m. Central
Subject: Article context

Jack,

Thank you for sharing the article before publication. Below are facts that answer several items in your "What we could not find" section, along with the record of the Chamber's efforts with the City. Supporting documents are attached.

ANSWERS TO "WHAT WE COULD NOT FIND"

- **Who organized the class, and where:** The Chamber did. I asked Justin Bragiel, General Counsel of the Texas Hotel & Lodging Association, to come to Lago Vista immediately after the Oct. 15 Council meeting. The class was held at the North Lake Travis Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Center, 20624 FM 1431, Ste. 6.
- **How the class was announced, and the notice:** On Oct. 16, the Chamber sent a calendar invitation to all Council members and relevant City staff. We notified the City Secretary of a possible Council quorum so notice could be posted. The City did not post a notice. Most invited Council members and staff declined.
- **How many Council members attended:** Two. Council Member Adam Benefield and Mayor Pro Tem Norma Owen.
- **A written return standard for the Chamber:** None exists because no agreement has been finalized. On Sept. 3, Council voted 6–1 directing the City Attorney to negotiate a formal agreement with the Chamber's counsel, with an update by Sept. 17 and an agreement by Oct. 1. No meeting occurred, and the Oct. 1 deadline passed without an agreement. City legal has not returned contact with Chamber legal counsel after efforsts have been made.

KEY FACTS

- In September 2025, Council unanimously approved up to $100,000 in HOT funding for FY2025–26. The Chamber has received $38,237.37, in response to its October–December 2025 reimbursement request of $66,742.49. No reimbursement has been paid for January 2026 onward.
- A formal service agreement was expected following the September 2025 budget approval. The Chamber did not receive even a draft agreement until April 2026, seven months later.

- The Chamber's attorney requested a meeting with the City Attorney eight times in September 2026: Sept. 4, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 18, and 28. No meeting occurred.
- The City's 2026–27 budget includes $0 for the Chamber in the hotel fund, while the fund holds approximately $1.3 million.
- The $30,531 approved Oct. 15 will come from the General Fund. The Chamber's submitted financial documentation was not discussed or reviewed at that meeting.
- Visitor information centers are an expressly authorized use of HOT funds under Texas Tax Code §351.101(a)(1). Mr. Bragiel confirmed state law sets no fixed ROI or overnight-stay threshold for visitor center operations.
- As your article reports, Mayor Pro Tem Owen said the City has historically left tourism planning to the Chamber and has not yet completed its own tourism strategic plan.

THE CHAMBER'S EFFORTS TO REACH AN AGREEMENT

- **Sept. 25, 2025:** Council approves FY2025–26 funding.
- **Sept. 30, 2025:** Met with the Economic Development Director to begin a working agreement.
- **Oct. 14, 2025:** Met with the City Manager about administering the approved funding.
- **Jan. 6, 2026:** With no agreement provided, formally requested a meeting within two weeks to draft an agreement, reporting requirements, and payment timelines.
- **Feb. 2, 2026:** Met with City leadership and Council members.
- **March 5, 2026:** Submitted a detailed reimbursement request for October–December 2025.
- **April 2026:** Received the City's first draft agreement, the first draft of any kind.
- **April 14, 2026:** Met with the City Manager, Economic Development Director, and Mayor.
- **June 23, 2026:** Met with City staff and a Council member to review proposed revisions.
- **July 29, 2026:** City Manager Charles West resigned before the agreement and the remaining reimbursements were resolved. The process passed to Acting City Manager/Police Chief Ron Joy.
- **Aug. 11, 2026:** The Chamber was told the City Attorney would not meet with the THLA attorney unless directed by Council.
- **Aug. 19, 2026:** Mayor, Council, City staff, and City Attorney, and requested a meeting.
- **Sept. 3, 2026:** Council voted unanimously that the outstanding $61,762.63 be reimbursed based solely on qualifying event expenditures, excluding Visitors Center operating costs the original intent and purpose and Chamber had already incurred. Council then voted 6–1 directing the City Attorney to negotiate an agreement by Oct. 1.
- **Sept. 4–28, 2026:** Our attorney emailed the City Attorney eight times requesting a meeting. The first response came Oct. 1, the deadline itself, stating that no revisions would be considered pending Council strategy/planning meetings.
- **Oct. 15, 2026:** Council voted 6–1 to fund the Chamber up to $30,531 ($10,177 per month for three months) from the General Fund rather than HOT, and asked the Chamber to show as much of its work as possible as HOT-eligible. The Chamber's submitted financial

documentation was not discussed or reviewed at the meeting. The item returns to Council in January.

- **Oct. 16, 2026:** Invited all Council members and City staff to the Oct. 22 HOT class.

The Chamber has met with City staff many times. Those meetings have not produced an agreement or a submission standard, and the Chamber has never been given an opportunity to review its documentation with the City Attorney.

THE CHAMBER'S RECORD

- Before current leadership, the Chamber's reserves fell from approximately $140,000 to about $10,000. Under current leadership, the Chamber has had no operating losses in 2026 and carries no debt. These losses were from events and offsetting visitors center costs from not reporting actual numbers for visitor center operations.
- The Chamber hired a professional bookkeeper and CPA, restructured its accounting to align with HOT reporting, and separated visitor center and tourism expenses from general Chamber operations.
- The Chamber has operated the Visitors Center without interruption, covering costs beyond what the City has given.
- The Chamber serves the full North Lake Travis region, including Lago Vista, Jonestown, and Point Venture. If Lago Vista removes support the Chamber may go away fro the entire region.

ON ACCOUNTABILITY

The Chamber supports clear, written, reasonable reporting standards. Mr. Bragiel recommended exactly that at the class: that the City state its expectations and reporting requirements in writing. The Chamber has asked for that tirelessly since September 2025.

We also believe standards should apply consistently. When the Chamber asked how Lago Fest reported its HOT expenses, we received a Word document with no supporting data or receipts, which the City accepted. In June 2026, the City confirmed Lago Fest did not go through the City's HOT application and review process. We have filed an open records request for the full records.

The Chamber strongly disagrees with suggestions made at previous Council meetings that it misused funds or sought reimbursement for ineligible expenses. There has never been an established submission process. The Chamber voluntarily shared all bank expenditures in the interest of transparency.

ON THE FUTURE OF HOT

As your article notes, any statement attributed to the Mayor about the hotel tax ending should be verified with him. Mr. Bragiel said he was unaware of any statewide elimination, and that individual cities have the authority to repeal their own local tax. Point Venture does not collect or distribute HOT tax.

THE CITY'S PROPOSED INTERIM AGREEMENT

On Oct. 19, 2026, the City sent the Chamber a proposed three-month agreement for $10,177 per month (not to exceed $30,531), paid initially from the General Fund. It has not been signed, and the Chamber's attorney is reviewing it. Key terms as drafted:

- **The City's own agreement recognizes the Chamber's value.** It states that the City "does not maintain an internal tourism or marketing department," that contracting this work out is "an efficient and cost-effective means" of doing it, and that the Chamber has "the experience, personnel, and local knowledge necessary" to perform it (Recitals).
- **The Visitors Center is required, but HOT funding for it is not guaranteed.** The Chamber must operate the Visitors Center out of the flat monthly amount (Sec. 8.1–8.2). Texas law expressly lists visitor information centers as an authorized use of HOT funds (Tax Code §351.101(a)(1)). Under this agreement, those costs would be paid from the General Fund unless the Chamber shows they attract or are likely to attract overnight visitors, and the City's decision is final (Sec. 5.5–5.6, Exhibit D).
- **One flat amount must cover everything.** The monthly amount must pay for all staff, the Visitors Center facility, overhead, advertising, printing, digital platforms and research, and any unspent money would be returned (Sec. 5.1, 5.13).
- **Approved HOT money would go back to the General Fund.** If the City approves an expense for HOT, it issues a HOT check, and the Chamber must write an equal check back to the General Fund within five business days (Sec. 5.7).
- **Promotion of Jonestown and Point Venture would be limited.** Services must focus primarily on Lago Vista's city limits, and City funds could not promote another city except incidentally to regional promotion (Sec. 6.5).
- **The agreement plans for a successor.** It "does not renew" unless Council approves an extension. Website content, photography and subscriber lists created for the services would become City property, and the Chamber would cooperate with "any successor provider" for 60 days after it ends (Sec. 2.2, 10.1, 10.5).

The Chamber wants to keep serving visitors and our community without interruption. It is asking for an agreement with clear written standards, terms both parties can meet, and a fair opportunity to show the tourism value of its work.

The Chamber's attorney is reviewing the proposal. The Chamber wants to keep serving visitors and our community without interruption. It is asking for an agreement with clear written standards, terms both parties can meet, and a fair opportunity to show the tourism value of its work.

I appreciate your willingness to include these facts before publication.

Let me know what attachments you might need to confirm any of this.

Allison Sargent
Executive Director

North Lake Travis Chamber of Commerce