



Accounts Receivable – Hotel Occupancy Tax Review No. P2025-01

Issued by the
Internal Audit Department
March 6, 2025



Internal Audit Department

MAYOR
Renard U. Johnson

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CITY MANAGER
Dionne Mack

DATE: March 6, 2025

TO: Margarita Marin – City Comptroller, Office of the Comptroller

FROM: Edmundo S. Calderon, CIA, CGAP, CRMA, Chief Internal Auditor

SUBJECT: Accounts Receivable – Hotel Occupancy Tax Review P2025-01

The Internal Audit Department has completed a review of the Office of the Comptroller's processes for monitoring and collecting Hotel Occupancy Tax Revenues owed to the City. This engagement was accepted based on the engagement's potential to support the evaluation and improvement of the organization's governance, risk management, and control processes (IIA 9.4). The work performed does not constitute an engagement conducted in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAS 1.16). The observations and conclusions that are reported in this Memorandum do not require Management Responses.

Background:

On August 18, 2015, the City of El Paso contracted with *Avenu Insights & Analytics, LLC*. (Avenu) to conduct audits of El Paso area hotels for Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) compliance. Every year, the Internal Audit Department selects 20 hotels to audit and coordinates the HOT Audits between Avenu and the hotels selected. A total of eight rounds of hotel audits have been completed. The eight rounds have audited 168 hotels, identifying a net total of \$1,860,582.55 in additional HOT Revenues for the City. Below is a summary of each round of audits and the HOT identified:

Audit Round #	HOT Audit Report Date	# of Hotels Audited	Additional HOT Identified *
1	April 18, 2016	20	\$ 264,354.11
2	June 28, 2017	30	\$ 148,520.10
3	March 26, 2018	20	\$ 89,076.04
4	April 16, 2019	20	\$ 45,007.27
5	May 29, 2020	19	\$ (21,279.83)
6	September 2, 2021	20	\$ 69,174.46
7	December 23, 2022	20	\$ 243,179.98
8	August 8, 2024	19	\$ 1,022,550.42
Totals:		168	\$ 1,860,582.55

* Data as of February 5, 2025

HOT Audit Findings	# of Hotels	Additional HOT Identified *
Hotels w/ Audit Findings	95	\$ 1,898,918.73
Hotels w/ no Audit Findings	70	\$ -
Hotels issued a Tax Refund	3	\$ (38,336.18)
Totals:	168	\$ 1,860,582.55

* Data as of February 5, 2025

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Objectives:

The objective of this review is to ensure that the Office of the Comptroller is properly collecting the Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) Revenues owed to the City and adhering to the *City of El Paso Accounts Receivable Policy*. To determine this, our review will consist of the following:

- Review if HOT Receivables are properly monitored and invoiced in a timely manner.
- Determine if delinquent accounts are collected in accordance with City procedures.
- Review if the HOT Receivable Balances provided to and reported to management are accurate.
- Identify discrepancies and document any areas where inefficiencies can be strengthened.

Scope and Methodology:

Our scope for Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025 will include:

- Obtain an understanding of the *Office of the Comptroller – Hotel Occupancy Tax Collection Procedure Policy dated 2024* and the *City of El Paso Accounts Receivable Policy dated November 2024*.
- Interview staff from the Office of the Comptroller to review the monitoring, invoicing, and collection process of Hotel Occupancy Tax Receivables.
- Obtain a copy the Office of the Comptroller's *Hotel Occupancy Tax and Audit Deficiency Report* to identify which hotels have not paid their HOT Audit Balances.
- Select a sample of Hotel Occupancy Tax Payments paid to the City to review accuracy and confirm payment collection.
- Analyze Hotel Occupancy Tax Receivable Balances.
- Document areas where inefficiencies exist with internal controls.

Results:

Based on our review, we identified one Observation concerning the outstanding payments of Hotel Occupancy Tax owed to the City of El Paso. The following is a description of the Observation.

OBSERVATION 1

Hotel Occupancy Tax Audit Balances

City of El Paso Strategic Plan:

- *Goal 6.6 Ensure continued financial stability and accountability through sound financial management, budgeting, and reporting.*

City of El Paso Accounts Receivable Policy dated November 2024 – “Structure of Accounts Receivable System” states:

- *Section 5.4 – Collection of revenue owed to the City is a core responsibility of each business unit and shall use its best efforts to collect any outstanding accounts receivable invoice.*

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DELIVERING EXCEPTIONAL SERVICES



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OBSERVATION 1 (cont.)

A review of the eight rounds of Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) Audits completed during the period of April 18, 2016 to August 8, 2024 was conducted. The 168 HOT Audits completed identified 95 hotels owing \$1,898,918.73 in additional HOT. Below is the current status of hotels who have paid or are past due on their HOT:

Payment Status as of February 5, 2025	# of Hotels	% of Hotels	HOT Paid or Owed by Hotels	% of HOT
Paid Hotels	85	89.47%	\$ 927,574.91	48.85%
Past Due Hotels	10	10.53%	\$ 971,343.82	51.15%
Totals:	95	100.00%	\$ 1,898,918.73	100.00%

As of February 5, 2025, a total of ten hotels have past due HOT owed. These hotels are accumulating penalties and daily interest fees. Below is a breakdown of the past due hotels:

Audit Round #	# of Hotels per Audit Round	Payment Due Date per Deficiency Letter Sent to Hotel	Days Late	HOT Owed by Hotel(s)	Plus: Penalties & Interest	Total Owed to City as of 2/5/2025
2	1	September 25, 2017	2,690	\$ 97,133.36	\$ 51,706.89	\$ 148,840.25
7	2	May 31, 2023	616	\$ 16,223.76	\$ 3,105.19	\$ 19,328.95
8	7	September 30, 2024	128	\$857,986.70	\$ 95,374.55	\$ 953,361.25
Total:	10			\$971,343.82	\$150,186.63	\$1,121,530.45

The following actions were taken by the Office of the Comptroller to collect the past due HOT balances:

- Nine out of ten (90%) past due hotels have been referred to Outside Legal Counsel to collect the past due balances.
- One out of ten (10%) past due hotels (from Round #8) is currently working with Office of the Comptroller to pay their past due balance.

RECOMMENDATION

The Office of Comptroller should continue monitoring and collecting the outstanding Hotel Occupancy Tax owed to the City. As of February 5, 2025, a total of \$1,121,530.45, including late penalties and interest, is owed to the City.

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Conclusion:

Based on our review of the Hotel Occupancy Taxes (HOT) owed to the City, we determined that the Office of the Comptroller is:

- Properly collecting and monitoring the HOT Revenues owed to the City.
- Properly invoicing HOT Receivables in a timely manner.
- Collecting HOT delinquent accounts according to the *Office of the Comptroller – Hotel Occupancy Tax Collection Procedure Policy* and the *City of El Paso Accounts Receivable Policy*.
- Accurately reporting HOT Receivable Balances to management.
- We did not identify any internal control weaknesses.

We would like to commend the Office of the Comptroller for their efforts in collecting Hotel Occupancy Tax Revenues.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at extension 21365.

cc: Financial Oversight Audit Committee

Dionne Mack, City Manager

Robert Cortinas, Deputy City Manager/Chief Financial Officer

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