

PINELLAS COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

August 19, 2020

The Pinellas County Tourist Development Council (TDC), as created under Pinellas County Ordinance 78-20 pursuant to Section 125.0104, Florida Statutes, met online in regular session using the Zoom virtual meeting platform at 10:00 A.M. on this date with the following members present:

Pat Gerard, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chair, Chair
Russ Kimball, Sheraton Sand Key Resort, Vice-Chair
Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor
Frank Hibbard, City of Clearwater Mayor
Joanne “Cookie” Kennedy, City of Indian Rocks Beach Mayor
Rick Kriseman, City of St. Petersburg Mayor
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Anthony Satterfield, Alden Suites
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises

Others Present

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Tim Ramsberger, Chief Operating Officer
Katie Bridges, Senior Advertising Manager
Leroy Bridges, Vice-President, Digital & Communications
Liz McCann, Executive Administrative Assistant
Teri Tuxhorn, Administrative Director
James Abernathy, Budget and Financial Management Analyst, Office of Management and Budget
Michael Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Other Interested Individuals
Jenny Masinovsky, Senior Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk

Agenda

- I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL – Chair Pat Gerard
- II. CHAIR COMMENTS
- III. APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – June 26 and July 15, 2020 TDC Meetings (not available)

- IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS
- V. SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS – FINANCE SUBCOMMITTEE – Steve Hayes
- VI. FY21 ELITE EVENT FUNDING PROGRAM – Tim Ramsberger
- VII. MARKETING UPDATE
 - A. Digital & Communications – Leroy Bridges
 - B. Advertising – Katie Bridges
- VIII. DEPARTMENT REPORTS
- IX. VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT – Steve Hayes
 - A. Tourism Economics Snapshot – June 2020
 - B. Pinellas County Bed Tax – June 2020
- X. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS
- XI. ADJOURNMENT

All documents and presentations provided to the Clerk’s Office have been made a part of the record.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Gerard called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M.

CHAIR COMMENTS – None.

MINUTES OF THE JUNE 26 AND JULY 15, 2020 MEETINGS – DEFERRED

Chair Gerard indicated that the minutes of the June 26 and July 15, 2020 meetings are not available at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Keep Saint Petersburg Local Executive Director Olga Bof stated that Localtopia, an applicant for the Fiscal Year 2021 Elite Event Funding Program, should receive the requested funding; whereupon, she characterized Localtopia as the largest community celebration of all things local, showcasing over 250 of St. Petersburg’s favorite independent businesses and community

organizations, and discussed the event's benefits to the community, its awards, popularity, and economic impact.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Finance Subcommittee

Mr. Abernathy referred to a report titled *Visit St. Pete Clearwater FY 2020 Budget July 2020* and indicated that it shows revenue collected through the month of May; that an additional \$4.3 million was collected in June; and that a total of \$38.3 million was collected through June, indicating that while that is approximately \$9.7 million below the revenue expected to be collected under normal circumstances, it is better than the updated projection that was made taking into consideration the COVID-19 impact on tourism. Responding to query by Mr. Prather, Mr. Abernathy provided further comparative information relating to pre- and post-COVID-19 revenue forecasts for the current fiscal year.

Mr. Hayes referred to the report and discussed the items included under Personal Services, Operational Expenses, and Promotional Expenses, noting that savings achieved in each category will help offset the drop in revenue; whereupon, he pointed out that the expense associated with Chambers Visitor Services Support was kept at almost the full amount.

FISCAL YEAR 21 ELITE EVENT FUNDING PROGRAM

Mr. Ramsberger referred to a document titled *FY21 Elite Event Funding Program TDC Committee Review 8-7-2020*, listing the elite events, scoring, and funding amounts recommended by the Elite Event Funding Subcommittee and related that the Enchant St. Petersburg event has been cancelled; that Localtopia did not obtain the required average score of 700; and that the St. Pete Run Fest and Martin Luther King Jr. Culture & Arts Festival events were not scored due to ineligibility. He indicated that the total "up to" funding recommendation by the subcommittee is \$975,000; and that upon approval by the TDC, it will be forwarded for consideration to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC); whereupon, Mayor Kennedy moved that the recommendation be approved.

Mayor Kriseman discussed the impact of Localtopia on the local business community, the City of St. Petersburg, and the county, inquiring whether the event could be funded in spite of not achieving the scoring threshold, and Mr. Ramsberger and Attorney Zas agreed that the Elite Event Funding Guidelines do not prevent the TDC from making a recommendation to include it in the

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program. Attorney Zas suggested that if the Council agrees to approve Localtopia for the funding request in the amount of up to \$25,000, the recommendation to the BCC should include a waiver of obtaining the 700 scoring threshold during the Subcommittee review. Mayor Kriseman made a motion to fund the event; whereupon, Mayor Kennedy withdrew her motion, and discussion ensued.

Responding to query by Mayor Hibbard, Attorney Zas indicated that being a member of the Pelican Golf Club does not present a conflict of interest with respect to the Women's Championship event.

Responding to queries by Mayor Bujalski, Mr. Ramsberger stated that Localtopia was considered in the category of elite events that does not have a room night minimum requirement; that it is the only event that did not qualify for funding on the basis of scoring; and that there was not a particular concern with the event; whereupon, Mayor Bujalski inquired about the possibility of adding a temporary category to the program, allowing other events supporting local businesses to apply for funding, noting that many businesses are financially suffering due to COVID-19. Attorney Zas indicated that in order to include such a category, the guidelines would need to be amended. Mr. Ramsberger pointed out that funding of Localtopia would bring the total funding amount up to the maximum of \$1 million allocated for the program, and Chair Gerard commented that she would not be in support of creating a new category for local events, as the program is intended to attract tourism.

During further discussion, Ms. Rodriguez shared that as a member of the Subcommittee, she gave a lower score to Localtopia based on the room nights factor; and that she would like to add 150 points to it. Attorney Zas advised that the correction would be appropriate, as the score was clearly based on an incorrect interpretation of category requirements; whereupon, Ms. Rodriguez requested that her score be modified by adding 150 points, and Chair Gerard indicated that the additional points would not be enough to bring Localtopia up to the 700 score.

Mr. Kimball moved, seconded by Mayor Kennedy, that the elite events list recommended by the subcommittee be amended to include Localtopia.

Mr. Williams related that he would abstain from voting on the matter due to a conflict of interest with respect to the Valspar Championship event, and a Memorandum of Voting Conflict has been submitted and made a part of the record in accordance with the provisions of the Standards of Conduct law.

Upon call for the vote, the motion carried 10 to 0, with Mr. Williams abstaining.

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Mayor Kennedy moved, seconded by Mr. Prather, that the amended elite events list be recommended to the BCC for approval. Attorney Zas clarified that the motion should include a request that the BCC waive the minimum scoring requirement for Localtopia, and no objections were noted. Mr. Kimball related that he is also a member of the Pelican Golf Club; and that he has been a member of Copperhead Charities, Inc.

Upon call for the vote, the motion carried 10 to 0, with Mr. Williams abstaining.

Mr. Satterfield provided comments regarding funding for the Gasparilla Bowl elite event, and Ms. Rodriguez remarked that the County is a leader in the elite event best practices and urged everyone to protect the environment by employing ocean-friendly practices.

MARKETING UPDATE

Digital and Communications/Advertising

Ms. Bridges and Mr. Bridges referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *August TDC* and provided an update regarding the current traditional and digital advertising programs and discussed the purpose, benefits, production, and timeline of the Visiting Safely and Responsibly campaign, highlighting the following:

- Marketing is still challenging as a result of traveler sentiment due to COVID-19; staff is focused on advancing the industry in a positive direction, as the slowest tourism months of September through November are approaching.
- Digital and traditional programs would run concurrently with the Visiting Safely and Responsibly campaign.
- The digital program has performed well since the second week of May, generating over 2.8 million video views, 9 million impressions, and \$342,120 in hotel revenue.
- Paid traditional advertising programs include television, magazines, billboards, advertising at local airports, and a promotion with the Tampa Bay Rays.
- The Visiting Safely and Responsibly campaign involved collaboration with the Chambers of Commerce, municipalities, and other partners, and is based on creative and uplifting messages,

such as “rise to shine” and “spread out, mask up,” emphasizing the safety of the destination, promoting a safe and responsible visitation experience, and providing tips regarding the same.

- The campaign is aimed to benefit visitors, local communities, business owners, tourism, and economic development.
- In-market engagement will include the campaign messaging presented on various materials which will be provided to partners, Chambers of Commerce, St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport, and popular tourist sites, and advertised to visitors through traditional and digital media.
- The campaign will run September 1 to December 15, at the cost of \$1.95 million for media and production, and will engage 2,000 businesses to amplify its messages.

Mr. Bridges indicated that the County approved Phase II Pinellas CARES Act funding that includes a program for financial assistance to businesses, noting that applicant eligibility has been expanded, as compared to the business assistance program under the Phase I of CARES Act funding distribution.

In response to queries and comments by the members, Mr. Bridges provided information regarding distribution of the campaign materials and explained the objectives and challenges behind the campaign’s poster illustration, and Ms. Bridges provided input. Messrs. Hayes and Bridges discussed the importance of continuing marketing efforts in order to establish the expectation of a safe destination and to target and attract individuals who are currently interested in travel, while preparing for a future broader campaign.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Mr. Hayes indicated that the reports can be found online at partners.visitstpeteclearwater.com.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT

Tourism Economics Snapshot and Pinellas County Bed Tax – June 2020

Mr. Hayes recognized staff for their efforts to position and sell the destination virtually, noting the challenges with regard to the current meetings and conventions component of tourism, and

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reiterated the importance of conveying the message concerning the destination's safety for the benefit of tourists and local residents.

Mr. Hayes referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tourism Economics Snapshot, August 2020 TDC Meeting* and reviewed the data for the month of June and/or year-to-date, including rooms sold, average daily rate, revenue per available room, market comparison, tax revenue year-to-date and a five-year comparison, and vacation rentals. He indicated that the area is doing well in relation to the rest of the state; that the June data shows a 25.6-percent revenue drop as compared to June of last year; that revenue has been slowly climbing up after the drops in March and April; and that the vacation rental market is faring better than the hotels, with the room nights sold numbers for June and year-to-date being flat, as compared to last year.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Mr. Hayes related that VSPC staff members worked with Economic Development and Creative Pinellas, assisting the local business and arts community with grants, noting the value of local businesses to tourism; whereupon, he indicated that VSPC is working with the three surrounding counties on a regional application for funding under the CARES Act that could be used for a recovery message.

Mr. Hayes also recognized staff members who worked at the Supervisor of Elections' Office for the Primary Election and plan to work there again for the General Election, and Chair Gerard thanked Mr. Hayes for doing so, noting that 183 County employees will be working at the polls in November.

Mr. Hayes indicated that VSPC's crisis communication plan will be emailed to the members.

Mr. Prather commended VSPC leadership and staff for their hard work in these challenging times, noting the efforts in redirecting the advertising strategies and operating under a reduced budget.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:24 A.M.