

PINELLAS COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

November 14, 2018

The Pinellas County Tourist Development Council (TDC), as created under Pinellas County Ordinance 78-20 pursuant to Section 125.0104, Florida Statutes, met in regular session in the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Assembly Room, 315 Court Street, Fifth Floor, Clearwater, Florida, on this date at 9:01 A.M. with the following members present:

Members Present

Kenneth T. Welch, BCC Chairman, Chair  
Russ Kimball, Sheraton Sand Key Resort, Vice Chair  
Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor  
George Cretekos, City of Clearwater Mayor  
Charlie Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember  
Joanne “Cookie” Kennedy, City of Indian Rocks Beach Mayor  
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.  
Keith Overton, Tradewinds Resort  
Chuck Prather, The Birchwood Inn  
Anthony Satterfield, Alden Suites

Not Present

Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry

Others Present

David Downing, Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO  
Tim Ramsberger, Chief Operating Officer  
Leroy Bridges, Vice President, Digital and Communications  
Suzanne Hackman, Vice President, Business Development  
Teri Tuxhorn, Administrative Director  
Liz McCann, Executive Administrative Assistant  
Michael Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney  
Other Interested Individuals  
Jerry Gottlick, Board Reporter

Agenda

- I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL – Chair Kenneth T. Welch
- II. CHAIR COMMENTS

- III. APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – TDC Meeting from October 17, 2018
- IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS
- V. COUNTY ATTORNEY REPORT – Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
- VI. UPDATE ON PENNY FOR PINELLAS/FUNDING
- VII. DEPARTMENT REPORTS
  - A. Latin America – Ana Fernandez, Director
  - B. Activations – Craig Campbell, Sr. Event Productions Manager
  - C. Sports & Events – Sarah Kirchberg, Sr. Business Development Manager
  - D. Advertising & Promotions – Katie Bridges, Sr. Advertising Manager
  - E. Digital & Communications – Leroy Bridges, Vice President
  - F. Film, Arts & Culture – Tony Armer, Film Commissioner
  - G. Leisure Travel – Rosemarie Payne, Director
  - H. Meetings & Conventions – Suzanne Hackman, Vice President
- VIII. VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT – David Downing
  - A. Tourism Economics Snapshot – November
  - B. Pinellas County Bed Tax – September 2018
- IX. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS
- X. 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 Welch called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M. and welcomed the new members; whereupon, at his request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Noting that this is the final meeting of the year, Chair Welch indicated that it has been an honor to serve as Chair and thanked the members and staff for their efforts; whereupon, at his invitation, newly appointed County Administrator Barry Burton provided brief comments regarding his

efforts to familiarize himself with the county's communities and to understand the local economy and partnerships, noting that he looks forward to working with the TDC.

MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 17, 2018 MEETING – APPROVED

Upon motion by Councilmember Gerdes, seconded by Mayor Kennedy and carried unanimously, the minutes of the October 17, 2018 meeting were approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Upon the Chair's call for public comments, Visit Florida Regional Partnership Manager Jen Carlisle provided an update on recent promotional efforts following this year's red tide and hurricane, which included the following:

- A \$9 million marketing plan.
- Creation of an emergency grant program to assist local tourism development boards; expanding funding to \$1 million; and extending the application deadline to December 31.
- A complimentary marketing partnership with Visit Florida for businesses, extended through April 30.
- Relaunching the Florida Now section of Visitflorida.com for live beach updates.
- A new live webcam.

COUNTY ATTORNEY REPORT – NONE

Attorney Zas stated that he had no information to present.

PENNY FOR PINELLAS UPDATE

Pinellas County Safety and Emergency Services Director Jim Fogarty referred to a PowerPoint presentation, reporting that the three Redington beach communities have had to rely on nearby municipalities for their fire and emergency medical services, but under a proposal that uses Penny funds, a new multi-use facility will be constructed providing for the following:

- A permanent location for EMS.
- Relocation of fire services to the facility.
- Office space for the County Sheriff.
- Upgrade of the lift station.
- A 600-square-foot community room.

Mr. Fogarty reported that the land for the project has been donated by two municipalities and straddles the border of both; that the project is estimated to cost between \$2 million and \$2.5 million for the EMS facility using Penny funds, and about \$2.5 million for the lift station upgrade. Responding to query by the Chair, he estimated that EMS calls in the beach communities during the tourist season increase by about 10 to 12 percent, and having a local EMS station would decrease response time by about a minute, or 20 percent.

Later in the meeting in response to query by Mr. Downing, Mr. Fogarty stated that about one-third of the Penny for Pinellas tax is paid by visitors, including day visitors.

Engineering Section Manager Tom Washburn provided an update on the undergrounding of utility lines in the beach communities, which is being funded with Penny funds, stating that about 75 percent of the work has been completed. He related that both the Cities of Clearwater and Indian Shores have completed their sections, with eight cities remaining, estimating that \$38.2 million is needed to finish the project. Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, he showed how many lane miles are either completed or planned, and related that the County has come up with a proposed scope and framework for completing the project utilizing approximately \$35 million in Penny IV funding; that employing a *one project* approach should accelerate the timing and result in considerable savings; and that any remaining funds would be allocated to Indian Shores and Clearwater; whereupon, he reviewed next steps, noting that the Barrier Island Governmental Council (Big C) partners have passed a resolution in support of the proposal.

During discussion, Mayor Kennedy inquired as to the benefits of undergrounding from a safety standpoint, and responding to comments and queries by Mr. Overton, Mr. Washburn indicated that it is possible to require the contractor to phase the areas it is working in to certain times of the year in order to relieve congestion during peak tourist periods.

Mayor Cretkos referred to the resolution approved by the Big C at its October 31 meeting, indicating that it included a set amount of Penny IV funding to be distributed to Clearwater and Indian Shores. Chair Welch provided input and stated that he is glad an agreement has been reached to allow the project to move forward, noting that he and Mr. Downing were in London recently, and all power lines were undergrounded.

## DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Deviating from the agenda and at the request of Mr. Downing, newly appointed Council members Overton, Prather, Moore, and Bujalski provided information about their backgrounds and offered brief comments; whereupon, Mr. Downing thanked them for volunteering their time and expertise.

Mr. Downing stated that there will be a number of departmental reports, as follows:

### Latin America

Latin America Director Ana Fernandez referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Love The Beach*, noting that Latin America continues to be the biggest segment for Florida tourism; and that room nights from visitors from the region continue to show positive growth; whereupon, she outlined additional VSPC goals and efforts in the Latin American region which include:

- Maintaining a continuous presence within the travel industry with representatives in countries throughout the region.
- Creating brand awareness with travel trade and consumers. In 2018, VSPC representatives participated in 16 regional trade shows, met with many travel agents and local representatives in each city, and ran promotions including online promotions with companies such as Expedia.
- Working with other cities in west Florida to influence and change consumer preference from east to west coast.

Ms. Fernandez reported that more visitors come to the destination from Brazil than any other country in the region, and that VSPC's goal is to expand its reach in that nation; whereupon, Senior Sales Manager Andrea Gabel indicated that she represents VSPC in Brazil.

Ms. Gabel referred to a PowerPoint presentation and highlighted some of the 2018 VSPC campaigns that have appeared in Brazil. She related that she has recently returned from one of the largest trade shows in Brazil; that tourism to the destination does not appear to have been impacted by the election of a new president in Brazil; and that many Brazilian consumers still use and depend on travel agents and tour operators for travel packages, which remain popular in the region overall.

Mr. Downing indicated it takes a lot of work to meet with tour operators and put packages together; and that over several years there have been positive results.

In response to query by Councilmember Gerdes regarding whether U.S. immigration policy and its perception abroad might influence tourism to the destination, Ms. Fernandez related that her team has frequent contact with ambassadors in each country, educating them by holding events and giving presentations encouraging visitation, noting that the visa program is very strong.

### Sports & Events

Senior Event Productions Manager Craig Campbell referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Play The Beach* and outlined the Activation Team's mission statement; whereupon, he reviewed statistical information, noting that 105 events in 2018 have brought in over 1.3 million attendees to the destination; and that the brand engaged consumers 348 days in 2018. He stated that a major goal is to leverage the Elite Event Funding Program through VSPC's role in negotiating deal terms, event activations, and providing marketing and promotional assistance to event organizers; whereupon, he related that there were 10 Elite Events in 2018 that qualified for a total of \$627,900 in funding.

Mr. Campbell related that his department's goals include increasing the number of events in the destination, engaging consumers through the Brand Ambassador program, and supporting other VSPC departments; whereupon, he discussed primary promotional tools that are brought to events to engage consumers, including the Welcome Truss, the Powerboat Display, the Activations Van, and a new one, the Gulp Coast Beer Garden.

Senior Business Development Manager Sarah Kirchberg provided an update regarding recent events and goals related to sports tourism, highlighting the following:

- The steady influx of softball events held at the destination, including the Division 2 Softball Tournament held in Madeira Beach and the annual University of South Florida series held in Clearwater.
- Continued efforts to attract more international sports events, such as sailing and wind surfing, as well as sports that are not normally held at a beach venue.
- A water polo event hosted in Clearwater last summer.
- Ongoing efforts in partnership with local municipalities to evaluate and identify opportunities for either upgrading or developing new sport facilities that will attract additional program sports and special events.

- Continued efforts to attract sports association and industry meetings, as well as partnering on key client events out of market.

Ms. Kirchberg discussed the growth of softball tournaments being held at the destination and related that USA Softball holds their national team selection in the county every winter; and that in February a leading softball event will be televised on the ESPN cable channel for four days.

Discussion ensued, and Mayor Cretokos remarked that many of the sports teams coming to the county are former national champions; and that the presence of those teams promotes Pinellas County as a softball destination. He commented that some communities might need financial assistance from the TDC to improve the condition of existing facilities; whereupon, Mr. Overton added that he is an advocate for more sports facilities and the improvement of existing facilities, because tournaments produce more room nights than any professional sports team.

Mayor Bujalski related that in her personal experience she had to travel to sports events outside of Pinellas County; that parents will follow their children's teams without regard to the cost; and that a multi-purpose sports facility would provide the opportunity to attract youth sports events and activities such as major league softball training; whereupon, Mr. Kimball discussed the value of bringing sports events to the beach, and Mr. Downing provided input.

### Advertising & Promotions

Senior Advertising Manager Katie Bridges presented a video with highlights of recent commercials and advertisements promoting the destination; whereupon, she provided a PowerPoint presentation and summarized recent activities, including the following:

- A popular music video with country singer Chris Young that was filmed at the beach.
- Local and national media exposure from inviting journalists to the destination.
- Highway billboards, newspaper banners, and an outfield sign with the Tampa Bay Rays.
- Generation of almost \$500,000 in advertising revenue.
- Various advertising campaigns, including a successful campaign with radio network NPR.
- Campaigns at Tampa and Orlando Airports.
- Recent partnerships with the Home Shopping Network (HSN) and Valpac.

Responding to query by Mayor Bujalski, Ms. Bridges described a co-op program where media is created and then opportunities are sold to partners such as hotels and attractions.

In response to query by Mayor Kennedy, Mr. Downing indicated that HSN is the fourth largest cable network in the U.S.; that the partnership was negotiated over six years; and that the key enabling factor was that the studios and personalities are located in the county.

At the request of Mr. Downing, BVK Advertising Senior Vice President Mary DeLong provided input, noting that TV and radio are still strong mediums; that 75 percent of Google's budget is spent on TV because it is a high-impact medium; that the County has always had a presence on TV; that advertisers still need traditional media, including print; and that a mass medium can be used in a fashion similar to digital with much more pinpointed targeting; whereupon, Mr. Downing confirmed that TV will continue to remain an important advertising medium for the County.

### Digital & Communications

Digital & Communications Vice President Leroy Bridges referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Live The Beach* and related that his team currently consists of five members, and there are two open positions. He summarized the responsibilities of his department, and indicated that all digital tourism efforts are being increasingly consolidated; that most visitors to the destination book their rooms using the Internet; and that one of the benefits of digital advertising is that everything can be tracked; whereupon, he highlighted the results of the 2018 digital campaigns, as follows:

- Over 275 million impressions and over 11 million video views on the eight websites promoting St. Pete/Clearwater.
- \$1.8 million was spent on media advertising, including with Google, which resulted in close to \$8 million in hotel revenue.
- More than 300 international journalists were hosted this past fiscal year, which is equal to millions of dollars in advertising value.

Mr. Bridges related there are about 20 different campaigns, each divided into different themes with the ability to track the resulting bookings; and that the destination banner is targeted to appear prominently in search engine searches when key terms are entered; whereupon, he presented an online video and reported that VSPC's websites have been redesigned to provide a more immersive experience, highlighting aspects other than the beach, that will entice potential visitors to book a trip.



\* \* \* \*

Mayor Cretekos left the meeting at 10:54 A.M.

\* \* \* \*

Film, Arts & Culture

Film Commissioner Tony Armer referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Film The Beach* and provided an update regarding his department’s activities and goals. He related that unlike some other nearby states, Florida currently lacks a state incentive to attract large film productions; and that his department instead focuses on attracting commercials and feature films with budgets of \$2 million or less to the destination. He stated that he assists municipalities in dealing with the logistics of film production; and that currently over 200 film productions a year are shot in Pinellas County.

Mr. Armer presented the film trailer for “Bernie the Dolphin,” noting that it was specifically created to be filmed in the area, and related that the movie will be distributed in over 135 countries; and that it is scheduled to premiere in December, the same month that the production company plans to begin filming a sequel for release in the summer of 2019. He indicated that there is currently another film being shot at Clearwater Beach by a major studio and pointed out that events such as the Sunscreen Film Festival, the Dunedin International Film Festival in January, and various commercials filmed locally all bring in room nights.

Mayor Kennedy added that a documentary focusing on saving Indian Rocks Beach cottages is being shown locally, and Mr. Armer related that it will likely premier on PBS, with additional distribution possible.

Leisure Travel

Leisure Travel Director Rosemarie Payne conducted a PowerPoint presentation titled *Feel The Beach* and summarized her department’s goals and activities in 2018, highlighting the following:

- Attended seven domestic tour operator events. Conducted sales missions to 16 cities served by Allegiant Airlines and worked with Southwest Airlines Vacations and other tour operators.
- Attended 19 consumer shows throughout the U.S, including 8 new cities to be served by Allegiant.

November 14, 2018

- Participated in tour operator product launches across Canada, noting that several Canadian airlines have announced new routes to the Tampa Bay area.
- Executed 60 sales opportunities. Worked with 6,000 travel advocates; attended numerous trade shows with hotel and attraction partners; and hosted 40 inbound educational visits.

Ms. Payne related that 15 new sales opportunities have been identified for Fiscal Year 2019, including partners in the U.S. and Canada; whereupon, she thanked industry partners and team members for their support.

### Meetings & Conventions

Business Development Vice President Suzanne Hackman conducted a PowerPoint presentation titled *Own The Beach*, and discussed her department's goals and activities, stating that the most important goal is always room nights; that about 30 to 50 percent of local hotel business comes from meetings; and that last year, VSPC assisted hotel partners in booking 175,000 room nights, creating an economic impact of \$50 million. Activities included the following:

- Working with Ms. Fernandez and her team, participated in two trade shows in Latin America.
- Attended three events in Seattle, one in Park City, and an annual event in Arizona.
- Collaborated with the Sports & Events team to bring sports conferences to the destination.
- Participated in IMEX America, which has become the largest Meeting and Incentive trade show in the U.S.; conducted 110 pre-set appointments and received 13 Requests for Proposal.

Ms. Hackman discussed VSPC's partnerships with third-party meeting planners HelmsBriscoe, Conference Direct, and Hospitality Performance Network and provided information pertaining to the number of room nights generated and the resulting economic impact.

Mr. Kimball congratulated the speakers for their management and leadership skills and the growth in each department.

### VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tourism Economics Snapshot, November TDC Meeting*, Mr. Downing reviewed the market comparison and year-to-date data for rooms sold, average daily rate, and revenue per available room. He reported that the September numbers are down slightly from last year, likely due to Hurricane Michael; and that St. Pete/Clearwater

November 14, 2018

achieved a 2.7-percent increase in the number of rooms sold during Fiscal Year 2018, noting that it is greater than any comparison destination and the State of Florida as a whole.

Referring to the Tourist Development Tax, Mr. Downing related that there was a 0.2-percent decrease in September, compared to the same month last year; that the total tax for the year amounted to a record-breaking \$59.7 million, a 9-percent increase, representing nearly \$1 billion in hotel room sales; and that it is an extraordinary achievement for Visit St. Pete/Clearwater and its hundreds of hotel and industry partners in the county, across the state, and throughout the world.

Mr. Downing indicated that TourismX, the annual marketing meeting, will be held at the Wyndham Grand at Clearwater Beach on December 12; that it will take the place of an official TDC meeting; and that on January 30, VSPC will be sending out the Besties Awards survey in partnership with Visit Florida.

Following his closing comments, Mr. Downing thanked Chair Welch for his leadership and support and presented him with a gift of a framed print advertisement; whereupon, Chair Welch praised the members and staff for their efforts. He noted the value of his visit to the World Travel Market, indicating that it is important to be aware of the competition; whereupon, referring to the \$60 million Tourist Development Tax milestone, he urged the members to remain focused, work strategically, and protect the 60/40 tax split, preserving the majority of the revenue for marketing, and Messrs. Kimball and Satterfield and Councilmember Gerdes provided input.

#### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:29 A.M.