

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
January 20, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

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 on this date at 1:08 PM in the Magnolia Room at the Pinellas County Cooperative Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo, Florida.

Present

Charlie Justice, Chairman, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chairman
Russ Kimball, Vice-Chairman, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor
Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Frank Hibbard, City of Clearwater Mayor
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Melinda Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Kenneth T. Welch, City of St. Petersburg Mayor

Others Present

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Jim Abernathy, Sr. Financial Management and Budget Analyst
Shirley Westfall, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chairman Justice called the meeting to order at 1:08 PM; whereupon, at his request, the members introduced themselves.

CHAIRMAN COMMENTS

Chairman Justice related that he is looking forward to serving on the Board and thanked the members for their time and efforts, noting the importance of tourism to Pinellas County.

WELCOME NEW TDC MEMBER

Chairman Justice indicated that newly elected Mayor Kenneth T. Welch may be attending a press conference currently being held in St. Petersburg regarding the Tampa Bay Rays.

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 15, 2021 REGULAR MEETING

Mayor Hibbard made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Williams and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the December 15 meeting be approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No one responded to the Chairman's call for public comment.

INDUSTRY PRESENTATION

St. Pete-Clearwater International (PIE) Airport

Following opening comments by Mr. Hayes, the Airport's Director of Air Service Development and Marketing Jeff Clauss referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tourism Development Council, January 20, 2022* and provided updates regarding the past year. He noted that prior to the pandemic in 2020, PIE had eight consecutive years of setting all-time passenger records; and that in 2021, it has had significant growth in passenger and airline service; whereupon, he highlighted the following successes:

- July 2021 was the biggest month in PIE history with 260,000 passengers
- December 2021 was the biggest December in history
- Eleven new cities have been added for a total of 65 non-stop destinations
- Two new airlines – Swoop (Canadian carrier) and Sun Country

Mr. Clauss provided information about the top Allegiant Air markets; whereupon, he reviewed the 2022 Capital Improvement Program, to include the following projects:

- New Parallel General Aviation Taxiway (Airco Connectivity; \$9.2M)
- Terminal Apron Rehabilitation & Runway/Taxiway Conversion (\$10M)

- New Airfield Electrical Vault (\$4.2M)
- Replacement of Gates 7-11 Exit Lane Technology (\$900K)
- New Cell Phone Lot Restrooms (\$300K)
- Future Terminal Expansion (\$75M)

Mr. Clauss introduced the President of Starmark International Jacqui Hartnett and called her to the podium. Ms. Harnett related that as the agency of record for PIE since February 2021, the first three marketing initiatives included making PIE famous in the local market, making PIE famous in the airline industry, and expanding the business-to-business travel to Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean.

Ms. Harnett played a video capturing the “*PIE. Go Easy.*” Campaign, highlighting the features of the airport while showcasing the area attractions. She shared the results of a multi-channel social media campaign and local brand awareness efforts promoting non-stop flights and easygoing air travel and noted that the campaign was successful; and that billboards, banners, and trade shows were utilized to increase the local awareness.

Ms. Harnett noted the recent celebrations of the 15th Anniversary of the partnership between PIE and Allegiant Air, and Allegiant’s Key West and Swoop’s Toronto inaugural flights; whereupon, she played a second promotional video developed with help from Allegiant Air to create Super Bowl brand buzz and discussed the media impressions resulting from the efforts.

Responding to queries by Mr. Williams, Mr. Clauss indicated that PIE does have the ability to add more flights; that \$75 million have been earmarked in the 2022 Capital Improvement Plan for terminal development and expansion; that the funds have been secured via stimulus and other federal government funding; that there are additional airlines and destinations being targeted for expansion; and that PIE appreciates TDC and VSPC efforts and will reach out for assistance as needed.

During discussion and in response to queries by the members, Mr. Clauss stated that PIE is the second largest airport serviced by Allegiant Air in terms of passenger numbers, yielding only to Orlando Sanford International Airport; and that the biggest obstacle to getting additional airlines at PIE is risk aversion by the airlines.

Mr. Clauss expressed his satisfaction with Starmark’s efforts in the first year of a five-year contract; whereupon, Mr. Hayes expressed his enjoyment of working with the team at PIE and elaborated on the hard work that goes into recruiting an airline, adding that he is thrilled with having a Canadian carrier again.

ELITE EVENT GUIDELINES REVIEW

Noting that the redlined guidelines draft is included in the agenda packet, Mr. Hayes referred to a document titled *Notes/Major Changes to Elite Event Guidelines* and summarized the prior discussions and decisions relating to the revisions of the *Funding Categories & Eligibility* and *Application Process & Review* sections of the guidelines. He stated that the last item that needs to be addressed is on attendance and room nights metrics, which the Board requested him to review at the last meeting; whereupon, he discussed the history and data analysis utilized in formulating the following suggested metrics in the respective categories:

- Category I – attendance 50,000 or generates 15,000 room nights
- Category II – attendance over 15,000 or generates over 4,500 room nights
- Category III – attendance over 10,000 and generates 3,000 room nights
- Category IV – attendance over 7,500, with maximum funding eligibility up to \$15,000
- Category V – new event with maximum funding eligibility of up to \$15,000

The members praised Mr. Hayes for his efforts with regard to the revised guidelines, noting the added clarity and elimination of politics from the review process. Responding to a query by Ms. Rodriguez, discussion ensued, with input by Attorney Zas, regarding the reasoning for including both the attendance and room nights requirements under the above-referenced Category III, rather than either one or the other, as in Categories I and II, specified by the word “and” versus “or”, respectively; whereupon, Mr. Williams made a motion to change the word “and” under Category III to “or” for consistency. The motion was seconded by Mayor Bujalski and carried unanimously.

Following discussion, Mr. Hayes indicated that he will present the final revised guidelines document at the next TDC meeting for approval; and that the Board’s recommendation will subsequently be forwarded to the BCC; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding the application process timeline, the Elite Event Program funding, and related matters.

VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT

FY 2023 Budget Timeline

Mr. Hayes referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Pinellas County Tourist Development Council Meeting* and provided information regarding the following FY 2023 budget timeline:

- February 28 – Budget due to Office of Management and Budget
- April 19 – Budget review with County Administrator
- April 20 – TDC Budget Workshop

- June 15-17 – Budget presentation to BCC
- September – BCC action on the County Budget

Strategic Plan Update

Responding to a query by Mayor Bujalski, Mr. Hayes indicated that three workshops regarding the strategic plan have been tentatively scheduled as follows; and that he will send out the invitations to the members:

- January 31, afternoon, at Innisbrook Golf Resort
- February 1, morning, at the Epi Center
- February 1, afternoon, at the Sirata Beach Resort

Mr. Hayes expressed his excitement about the plan development, noting the discussions regarding tourism and its impact on the community, particularly, the role of the VSPC in the matter.

Mr. Hayes discussed the financial statement for December, indicating that normal operations and less cancellations appear to be trending.

Destination Metrics

Continuing the PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Hayes reviewed statistical data regarding tourist development tax collection, lodging, average daily rate (ADR), occupancy, and visitor profile, indicating that the collections greatly exceeded the numbers as compared to the prior fiscal year; and that the jump in the metrics is seen across the state. At the request of Mr. Williams, Mr. Hayes indicated that he will confirm the data relating to the Inland ADR at a future meeting, and discussion concerning the current state of meetings and conventions side of business travel ensued.

Location Change for Future TDC Meetings

Mr. Hayes related that starting in February, the TDC meetings will be held in the County Communications Building, Palm Room, 333 Chestnut Street, in Clearwater.

General Comments

Mr. Hayes indicated that two Visit Florida trade shows were held at the Tampa Convention Center, Florida Huddle and Florida Encounter; and that staff held a pre-FAM and reached customers from Latin America, United Kingdom and other European countries, Canada, and the U.S.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Mr. Hayes introduced BVK Vice President Carmen Boyce, who shared information regarding recent promotions, brand campaigns, and media plans along with data and statistics on engagement and the return on investment. She discussed the new successful partnerships, including with Southwest Airlines for promoting a key market, iHeart Radio, and Adventure Cities program; the efforts to develop a new brand campaign with the VSPC staff; and the media plans with Miles Partnership; whereupon, she indicated that based on a sentiment survey by the Destination Analysts, 73% of the surveyed were excited about traveling in the next 12 months.

Mr. Hayes related that he received information from TripAdvisor that Clearwater was named the number six Trending Destination on the Traveler's Choice Best of the Best list for the United States in 2022; whereupon, he congratulated Mayor Hibbard on this outstanding community honor and expressed that he looks forward to the Best Beaches list for 2022.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Mr. Williams indicated that he and Mr. Prather attended Florida Tourism Day in Tallahassee; that they met with several legislators from the House and the Senate regarding support for the reauthorization of Visit Florida through 2028; and that hopefully, there will not be a need for continued reauthorizations.

Mr. Prather further indicated that the reauthorization bill passed in the House Committee, and it appears that Representative Liz Cheney's bill will be reconciled with Senator Ed Hooper's bill regarding the matter, resulting in the 2028 authorized extension of Visit Florida, with the possibility of continued annual \$75 million tourism funding for the state.

Chairman Justice introduced his Executive Aide Courtney Vandenberg and reiterated that the next meeting will be held in the Palm Room across from the Pinellas County Courthouse, which can be accessed from Palm and Chestnut Street. He announced that official news was just released that Major League Baseball has rejected the Tampa Bay Rays proposal for a split season in two different cities.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 PM.