

**Tourist Development Council  
Pinellas County  
March 16, 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 9:05 AM in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, 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.  
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn  
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort  
Kenneth T. Welch, City of St. Petersburg Mayor

**Not Present**

Melinda Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry  
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

**Others Present**

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO  
Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney  
Katie Poviones, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk  
Other interested individuals

**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Chairman Justice called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM; whereupon, at his request, the members introduced themselves.

## **CHAIR COMMENTS – NONE**

## **MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 16, 2022 REGULAR MEETING**

Mayor Hibbard made a motion, which was seconded by Mayor Welch and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the February 16 meeting be approved.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

## **CAPITAL FUNDING PROGRAM GUIDELINES DISCUSSION**

Deviating from the agenda, Chairman Justice directed that the Council would discuss the Capital Funding Program guidelines at this time.

### Previously Discussed Changes from October 2021 Meeting, Discussion on Additional changes/additions for consideration, and Next Steps

Mr. Hayes, with input from Attorney Zas, related that the members were provided with a document detailing some administrative changes to the guidelines following discussion at the TDC meeting in October; that the purpose of today's discussion is to provide feedback to staff regarding areas in the guidelines that may require revisions; and that the most salient points for today's discussion are policy considerations; whereupon, lengthy discussion ensued on the following topics and other matters:

- Beach renourishment funding
- Funding standards, measurables, and exceptions
- Changes to the application evaluation process
- Geographic distribution of funding criterion
- Project payment schedules and timing of the program's cycle
- Potential for expanded uses of the Tourist Development Tax (TDT) dollars

Responding to queries by the members, Budget and Financial Management Analyst Jim Abernathy provided information regarding the Capital Fund balance and outstanding funding commitments, noting that capital reserves are projected to reach \$49.5 million at the end of this fiscal year; and that currently, the only allocations scheduled for projects are for the annual commitment to beach renourishment and for the Florida Holocaust Museum; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding anticipated requests relating to the Tampa Bay Rays and Philadelphia Phillies and other projects.

In response to a query by Mayor Welch, Mr. Hayes indicated that strategic priorities are currently being developed; that HCP Associates will be conducting a presentation at a BCC workshop on April 21 to provide an update on the status of the strategic plan following conversations they had with community leaders; and that the members are invited to attend the workshop.

## **INDUSTRY PRESENTATIONS**

### Marketing Partner Presentation – Media Strategy for 3rd/4th Quarters 2022

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Media Recommendation FY22: Apr-Sept*, BVK Vice President Carmen Boyce provided information regarding marketing objectives, planning considerations, the core media plan, broadcast overlays, and experiential opportunities. She discussed new aspects of the media plan, including a partnership with Midwest Living/Southern Living, a half-page spread for print media, promotional extensions in television and radio, and influencer programs; whereupon, she introduced Miles Partnership Account Director Scott Bacon.

In reference to the PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Bacon elaborated on the digital marketing plan, strategic objectives, target audiences, the core brand campaign, and targeted displays on premium sites, highlighting that visits to VisitSPC.com increased by 60% and 21% in comparison to 2020 and 2019, respectively; that site visitors are looking at more pages and spending more time on the site; that approximately half of the growth in site visitors versus last year came through organic and direct channels, with large growth in Facebook referrals; and that pageviews of community content and partner deals have increased significantly.

Mr. Bacon noted that media strategy for the spring and summer of 2022 will include new programs and prospects for advertising, with key tactics including more podcasts and audio, new brand partnerships, more long form content, and custom co-op opportunities; whereupon, discussion ensued concerning the following topics and other matters pertaining to VSPC's marketing and media strategy:

- Data sources utilized to inform advertising and targeting of markets
- Collaboration with Creative Pinellas to advertise the arts
- Vacation rental occupancy data
- Advertising allocations for the drive and fly markets

## **VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT**

### Destination Metrics

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Destination Metrics*, Mr. Hayes reviewed January 2022 statistical data regarding Tourist Development Tax collections, including hotel and vacation rental occupancy, average daily rates (ADR), and visitor profile metrics. He noted that Smith Travel Research data ranked the top 25 U.S. markets by occupancy (OCC), ADR, and revenue per available room (REVPAR); that as part of the Tampa market, St. Pete/Clearwater placed first in OCC, fourth in ADR, and third in REVPAR in 2021; and that the Tampa market has continued to rank at or above third place throughout January and February.

### General Comments

Mr. Hayes indicated that the TDC's April meeting will be a budget meeting scheduled until 2:00 PM; and that VSPC will participate in several activities with local partners to celebrate National Travel and Tourism Week starting May 1.

At the request of Mayor Hibbard, and upon no objections by the members or staff, Mr. Hayes related that the April budget meeting will be rescheduled to begin at 8:30 AM.

## **DEPARTMENT UPDATES – NONE**

## **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS**

In response to a query by Mr. Prather, Mr. Abernathy clarified that the governmental expenses listed in the budget mostly go toward operational costs such as technology charges, salaries for staff who support the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and risk charges for employees.

Responding to queries by Mr. Prather, Mr. Hayes explained that he will be meeting with Mr. Abernathy to discuss next year's budget; that there is a County policy which requires a minimum balance to be maintained; that he intends to review the budget to identify monies for business continuity to be used in emergency circumstances; and that potential uses for the surplus dollars in the fund balance will be considered; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding the operating reserves, and Mayor Welch noted that he would also like to discuss a permanent level of support for the arts.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:33 AM.