

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
May 18, 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 9:04 AM in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida.

Present

Russ Kimball, Vice-Chairman, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
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
Kenneth T. Welch, City of St. Petersburg Mayor
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Charlie Justice, Chairman, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chairman
Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor

Others Present

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Katie Bridges, Senior Advertising Manager
Kristin Coryn, Community Relations Manager
Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Katie Poviones, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Acting Chairman Kimball called the meeting to order at 9:04 AM; whereupon, at his request, the members introduced themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS – NONE

MINUTES OF THE APRIL 20, 2022 REGULAR MEETING

Ms. Moore made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Williams and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the April 20 meeting be approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Neil Cosentino, Tampa, appeared and expressed that he is a member of a small public interest think tank. He referred to a letter, which has been made a part of the record; discussed a project pertaining to the repurposing of the Howard Frankland Bridge; and responded to queries by Mr. Williams.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Deviating from the agenda, Mr. Hayes related that the following Department Updates would be presented at this time.

Advertising & Promotions – “Unwind and Be Kind” Campaign

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Unwind & Be Kind Campaign Recap*, Ms. Bridges provided an overview of the campaign, indicating that its main goals are supporting the local workforce and community, ensuring great traveler experience, and taking care of the destination. She discussed the associated brand partnerships, in particular with Keep Pinellas Beautiful; media coverage and advertising; community and visitor participation; campaign results; and the amplification of the campaign’s message, reminding travelers to practice patience and be kind, and to encourage preservation and sustainability of the environment.

Mr. Smith and Ms. Pletcher arrived at 9:18 AM and 9:20 AM, respectively.

Ms. Bridges introduced Caulin Donaldson as an eco-activist social media influencer on TikTok, a Redington Shores resident, and a partner in the campaign, relating that his mission is to encourage people to take care of the environment. He referred to the PowerPoint presentation and elaborated on his mission, the future of eco-travel and tourism, and methods for introducing local conservation efforts. The members thanked him for his positive work in the community, and in response to a query by Mayor Hibbard regarding improving preventative measures to reduce the need for beach cleanups, Mr. Donaldson related that transitioning to an educational litter prevention strategy may be

beneficial in the long term, and Mr. Hayes noted that VSPC is considering additional messaging to encourage responsible visitation to the destination.

Responding to a query by Mayor Welch, Mr. Donaldson explained that TikTok allows him to reach a diverse array of individuals who are not necessarily searching for him or his content, whereas on other social media platforms, he may only reach those who follow him.

Community & Brand Engagement – National Travel & Tourism Week Recap

Ms. Coryn referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *National Travel & Tourism Week Recap* and indicated that National Travel & Tourism Week is an initiative developed by the U.S. Travel Association to recognize and celebrate tourism's place in our communities. She highlighted events that took place throughout the week, including buildings and landmarks lighting up red in honor of tourism, a rally at the St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport, an event at the Bellwether Beach Resort, a park cleanup, and a Pineapple Cup Tournament with Visit Tampa Bay. She noted that next year's festivities will take place May 7 through 13, 2023.

STRATEGIC PLAN PRESENTATION

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *2022 Strategic Planning Summary*, HCP Associates Vice President Robert Allen discussed the strategic plan's process and purpose, noting that an emphasis was placed on increasing the economic impact of each visitor, developing the assets of the region, increasing the economic benefits of tourism to the local community, and deepening partnerships across the county.

Mr. Allen indicated that stakeholders agreed that the county's primary appeal is a beach-focused, hospitable, family-friendly destination, which also offers art, cultural, hidden gems, and other experiences; that transportation, red tide, affordability, and unique experience advertising present some challenges; and that VSPC needs to expand messaging on the value of tourism to the residents and the availability of different experiences to the visitors. He noted that the stakeholders expressed support for the County sponsorship of distinctive events, new hotel inventory for meetings and conventions, County-operated sport facilities, robust marketing, and furthering coordination between VSPC and local industries on matters such as workforce and promotion.

Mr. Allen pointed out that the survey of the residents reflected a balanced representative sample of the county based on the U.S. Census data regarding gender, race, ethnicity, age, geography, and education; that the findings show that the residents broadly support

tourism and feel that it improves most aspects of life in the county, with the exception of litter, crime, crowding, and traffic; that they utilize the tourist amenities and attractions themselves; and that 67% of the residents hosted out-of-state family or friends in their homes.

In response to a query by Mayor Hibbard, Mr. Hayes indicated that per Destination Analysts data, there is an increasing number of visitors utilizing a combination of accommodation types, including staying with friends or relatives or renting a hotel room or other type of lodging; whereupon, Mr. Allen discussed the strategic plan outcomes, where VSPC may take on the role of owner, partner, or advocate, highlighting the following and other strategies:

- Emphasize marketing and storytelling focus and explore more bold, targeted, and innovative storytelling strategies and channels with high return on investment
- Be the liaison between hoteliers and the destination to drive increased tourist capacity
- Deepen engagement with visiting friends and relatives market
- Increase engagement with locals to raise awareness of tourism's benefits
- Emphasize quality over quantity of visitors in promoting the destination
- Encourage more large-scale cultural and sporting events and study the capacity of county sports facilities and fields to determine residential and tourist needs
- Fight for beach renourishment
- Encourage respect for the environment among tourists and residents, raise awareness of nature preserves, and promote ecotourism
- Collaborate for increased airline routes to the area to improve destination access
- Continue supporting the arts and culture
- Advocate for environmental protections such as shoreline resiliency and red tide mitigation
- Advocate for an increase in hotel meeting and convention space
- Advocate for improved transportation and for workforce-related issues

Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Allen related that the strategic plan should be reviewed and refreshed on a yearly basis; and that while the plan timeline is still being decided in collaboration with VSPC, the process of creating the strategic objectives is complete. Mr. Hayes noted that the strategic outcomes will still need to be identified as short-term, mid-term, or long-term goals; that this is VSPC's first strategic plan since the early 2000s; and that this was the first time that VSPC consulted the community and industry stakeholders for feedback; whereupon, discussion ensued about the collaborative efforts between the local governments and VSPC to help hoteliers drive more tourism.

Responding to further queries, Mr. Allen indicated that a calendar on the VSPC website lists mostly major events in the area, and Creative Pinellas Chief Executive Officer Barbara St. Clair expressed that the Creative Pinellas arts navigator is in its initial stage of testing; that it will include arts and culture events of all sizes; and that it will soft launch at the end of June before a full launch in November during Creative Pinellas' annual arts event, and Ms. Moore provided input.

During discussion, Mr. Allen related that the resident survey was designed to reach individuals who are not biased, and the responses were relatively unanimous across the county; whereupon, Mr. Hayes indicated that as the finalized strategic objectives have been presented to the BCC and the TDC, the next step is to review and discuss a more detailed written report; that there will be additional presentations to staff before the plan returns to the BCC; that within the next and the following fiscal years, the budget will begin to reflect progress towards the various strategic objectives as they are prioritized; and that the resident survey will be repeated on an annual basis to measure any changes in how the community feels it is impacted by the tourism.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES (CONTINUED)

FY 2023 Budget – Overall Budget & Decision Packages

Mr. Hayes referred to a document titled *Convention & Visitors Bureau FY 2023 Budget* and explained that the budget for intergovernmental services is approximately \$1.17 million, noting that it is a 2% increase from FY 2022; and that it includes the actual cost for Business Technology Services, which was recently received.

Mr. Hayes provided information regarding the FY 2023 proposed decision packages and the associated funding sources, indicating that they were discussed at the April Board meeting; that VSPC is supportive of the five packages requested by the Creative Pinellas arts agency; and that the Board's support of the cultural plan package, in particular, is important, as it would provide a strategy regarding arts and culture direction for the County

as a whole; whereupon, he suggested that the cultural plan package be funded through Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenue instead of the Pinellas County General Fund, as requested originally. In addition, he noted that he feels very comfortable about supporting the co-op program package requested through TDT funding; and that the remaining packages, which are requested for full or partial funding through the General Fund, would be considered by the BCC.

Thereupon, Ms. St. Clair discussed Creative Pinellas' partnerships with the Florida Botanical Gardens and Heritage Village, highlighting that their gallery and the surrounding Pinewood Park area services two key audiences in the county, as 40% of visitors are tourists and 60% are residents; that the gallery can support VSPC's efforts to identify St. Pete/Clearwater as an arts and cultural community with two art exhibits, the gardens, and the village available to visitors for free; that Creative Pinellas was one of 26 arts organizations nationwide that recently received a \$500,000 grant from the National Education Association; and that the distribution of the grant funds to arts organizations and artists in Pinellas County is almost complete.

Ms. St. Clair related that the cultural plan will provide a better understanding of the best investments in the arts, the available resources, and the needs of the community. Responding to queries by Mr. Williams, she noted that the plan is in the beginning stage of development with consultants; that approximately 79% of Creative Pinellas' budget is from local government funding, which is typical for local arts agencies nationwide; and that she presents monthly reports to VSPC and works closely with the Office of Management and Budget to ensure funds are spent efficiently; whereupon, Budget and Financial Management Analyst Jim Abernathy indicated that Creative Pinellas has received a total of nearly a million dollars from the County for the current year, with the majority of the funding coming from TDT revenue and smaller amounts from the Transportation Trust Fund and the General Fund.

During discussion, Mayor Welch, with input by Ms. Moore, emphasized that the County used to provide more arts funding in the past and noted the need for a dedicated funding source and a potential funding increase in order to be competitive; whereupon, Mr. Hayes related that VSPC spends \$1-1.5 million on digital and traditional advertising of the arts, and Ms. St. Clair discussed the County funding of Creative Pinellas in the past years.

Ms. Pletcher left the meeting at 11:25 AM.

Upon request by acting Chairman Kimball, Mr. Hayes explained that next steps for the budget process include acquiring the Board's support of VSPC's recommended budget and the decision packages that are fully funded by TDT revenue. Responding to queries by Mayor Welch as to the budget asks for increased beach nourishment and arts funding

discussed at the last meeting, Mr. Abernathy noted that the budget and decision packages have already been submitted; that following the presentation of the budgets by the County Administrator to the BCC in July, VSPC's budget would tentatively be adopted in September; that formal requests for decision packages may be submitted to incorporate the above asks; and that the TDC may still make amendments to the budget.

Thereupon, Mr. Henderson provided an update on beach nourishment projects throughout the county based on a recent meeting with Mr. Hayes and Public Works Director Kelli Hammer Levy, emphasizing that the County may lose federal funding; that the status of the funding would be confirmed within the next three to four months; that the loss of federal support would greatly diminish the likelihood of getting beach renourishment funding from the State; and that Ms. Levy will be making a presentation at the June TDC meeting to inform the ongoing discussion by the Board about increasing the budget allocation for beach renourishment.

Mr. Hayes indicated that the next step in the budget process would be the Board's approval of the recommended budget; and that the requests to increase beach renourishment and arts funding will be discussed further at upcoming TDC meetings.

Responding to a query by acting Chairman Kimball, Attorney Zas suggested that a motion be made that articulates the two aforementioned decision packages proposed to be funded through TDT; whereupon, Mayor Welch made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Moore, to recommend approval as stated by staff, including the co-op program and cultural plan in the amounts of \$400,000 and \$240,000, respectively.

Ms. Moore indicated that the remaining three decision packages proposed by Creative Pinellas should be included; and that she would either amend the motion or make a secondary motion to recommend the items for consideration by the BCC; whereupon, Mr. Hayes provided information relating to the decision packages process and funding. Upon the acting Chairman's call for the vote, a motion carried unanimously.

Department Reports

Acting Chairman Kimball indicated that the reports can be found online at partners.visitstpeteclearwater.com.

VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Destination Metrics*, Mr. Hayes reviewed March 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 St. Pete/Clearwater placed second in occupancy, ADR, and revenue per available room among the top 25 U.S. markets for the month of March based on Smith Travel Research data; that an unprecedented \$12.9 million in bed tax revenue was collected, compared to \$9.7 million last March; and that year-to-date revenue is \$47.6 million, compared to \$29.9 million at this point last year. He indicated that the increase in collections is driven by the higher hotel rates; and that the numbers are beginning to drop slightly as winter and spring travel comes to an end.

Mayor Hibbard left the meeting at 11:45 AM.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSION

Mr. Hayes related that as part of last week's festivities during National Travel and Tourism week, VSPC supported the Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce Annual Tourism Luncheon, where Vice-Chairman Kimball was named the Tourism Person of the Year; whereupon, Mr. Hayes and the members congratulated and recognized him for his contributions to the community and the tourism industry.

Mr. Hayes noted that the next TDC meeting will take place on Tuesday, June 21 to accommodate Chairman Justice, who would not be available on a Wednesday due to budget meetings.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:49 AM.