

PINELLAS COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

January 20, 2021

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 Pinellas County Cooperative Extension Magnolia Room, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo, Florida, at 9:04 A.M. on this date with the following members present:

Dave Eggers, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chair, Chair
Russ Kimball, Sheraton Sand Key Resort, Vice-Chair
Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Frank Hibbard, City of Clearwater Mayor
Rick Kriseman, City of St. Petersburg Mayor
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Melina Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner
Anthony Satterfield, Alden Suites
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry

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
Michael Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Other Interested Individuals
Sitara Coyle, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk

Agenda

- I. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE/ROLL CALL – Chair Dave Eggers
- II. CHAIR COMMENTS – Chair Dave Eggers
- III. APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – December 16, 2020

- IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- V. TOURISM INDUSTRY UPDATES
 - A. St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport – Tom Jewsbury
 - B. Creative Pinellas – Barbara St. Clair
 - C. The James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art – Tom James & Laura Hine

- VI. MARKETING UPDATES
 - A. Current Advertising Programs
 - B. Messaging around Busy Season

- VII. DEPARTMENT REPORTS

- VIII. VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT – Steve Hayes
 - A. Tourism Strategic Plan Discussion
 - B. Economic Snapshot
 - C. General Comments

- IX. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

- X. ADJOURNMENT

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

CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE/ROLL CALL

Chair Eggers called the meeting to order at 9:04 A.M; whereupon, Mayor Hibbard led the Pledge of Allegiance.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Eggers thanked the Council and County staff for their expertise, commitment, and consistent hard work, noting the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry. He expressed anticipation for the strategic planning process, reviewing the bylaws, and discussing the Tourist Development Plan this year.

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 16, 2020 MEETING – APPROVED

Upon motion by Mayor Hibbard, seconded by Mr. Kimball and carried unanimously, the minutes of the December 16 meeting were approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – NONE

TOURISM INDUSTRY UPDATES

St. Pete-Clearwater International (PIE) Airport

Following opening comments by Mr. Hayes, Airport Director Tom Jewsbury and Director of Air Service Development and Marketing Jeff Clauss referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *COVID-19 Air Service Impacts* and provided updates regarding the past year, including comparative air service data trends, accomplishments, projects, and related matters.

Mr. Clauss indicated that PIE fared relatively well in 2020 in spite of COVID-19, noting that it had the second lowest capacity change of all airports in Florida; that it filled 60 percent of available airline seats and finished the year with passenger traffic down by 39 percent compared to 2019; and that capacity is expected to return to 2019 peak levels in the summer of 2021. He related that PIE offers non-stop service to 53 destinations, including new service to Fargo, North Dakota, noting that service to Halifax, Nova Scotia, was cancelled due to COVID-19 international travel restrictions; whereupon, Mr. Jewsbury remarked that PIE had surpassed Las Vegas, becoming the second largest airport serviced by Allegiant Air in terms of passenger numbers, yielding only to Orlando.

Mr. Jewsbury related that implementation of COVID-19 safety measures helped create a safe environment and instill passenger confidence in travel; and that several concessions, including Mazzaro's Italian Market, have been completed, and the remaining gift shops and 3 Daughters Brewing restaurant are expected to be completed this year, noting that concession revenue continues to grow. He indicated that the Ticketing A Checked Baggage In-line System project was completed to accommodate Allegiant's growth; that Gates 7 through 11 were renovated and expanded to include new facilities and more seating; that the Customs and Border Protection facility was renovated; that landside green areas, parking lots, entrances, and exits were renovated, increasing short- and long-term parking by 38 percent; and that Allegiant has invested nearly

\$5 million into the airport and built a new maintenance and operations facility. He noted that passenger levels are about what they were in 2015, but, hopefully, will increase soon.

In response to comments and queries by the members, Mr. Jewsbury, with input by Mr. Clauss, discussed rehabilitation of the primary runway, capital improvement projects funding, current demand for air travel, possibilities of expanding the airline market, and related matters.

Creative Pinellas

Creative Pinellas CEO Barbara St. Clair related that Creative Pinellas is the local arts agency dedicated to promoting the county as an arts and culture destination; and that it is the recipient of Creative Loafing's 2020 Best of the Bay award for leadership efforts with regard to making art accessible online in response to COVID-19 restrictions. Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Creative Pinellas, A Tourism Overview*, she and her colleagues Leigh Davis, Kimberly DiVito, and Danny Olda displayed videos and discussed the agency's mission and key objectives and the following programs, projects, and initiatives:

- Grant programs for young and professional artists
- Festivals, Workshops, and Artist Talks
- Programs for Accessibility and the Community
- Public Art projects
- Fund raising for artists, arts organizations, and creative businesses during COVID-19
- Pinellas CARES Micro-Grant Program assistance
- Arts Annual and Arts Annual Beyond the Walls
- Arts Navigator, Virtual Art Galleries, Arts In Portal
- Arts Coast Journal and Arts and Cultural Guide
- Arts Coast Experience Training Program
- Initiatives for 2021

Ms. St. Clair related that the Arts Annual event was held in November; and that it included a socially distanced live show and was made accessible for online public viewing, allowing for marketing of the destination throughout the world; and that the Arts Annual Beyond the Walls program was designed to connect the tourism industry to the arts and bring unique experiences to hotel guests, noting that a video marketing campaign was launched this year featuring the artists and the hotels. Ms. Davis indicated that 12 different hotels throughout the county are currently participating in the program; that a site was built for each hotel partner for visitors to buy artwork;

and that over \$15,000 worth of artwork was sold to regional and national collectors in 2020 through Arts Annual.

Mses. St. Clair and DiVito related that the Arts Navigator application recognizes a traveler's interests and utilizes a comprehensive arts and culture activities database to create a customized travel plan; and that Creative Pinellas partnered with Sourcetoad and Roundhouse Creative Studio for the development, design, and branding of the application. Ms. St. Clair and Mr. Olda related that the Virtual Art Gallery serves as a sales tool to expand the artists' reach outside of the county, noting that it allowed for online attendance of art shows during the pandemic. Mr. Olda referred to the Creative Pinellas website and demonstrated the life-like sense of scale with regard to viewing the artwork.

Ms. St. Clair provided information about the agency's future initiatives; whereupon, Chair Eggers and Messrs. Satterfield and Kimball commended her and the agency staff for their hard work with regard to promoting the arts, innovative programs such as the Arts Navigator, and the successful partnership with hotels, noting the importance of the arts in marketing the destination.

The James Museum of Western and Wildlife Art

The James Museum Founder and Chairman Tom James provided an update regarding the Salvador Dali Museum, noting that an investment by the County has paid off; and that the Van Gogh Alive art installation is a success. He provided background information regarding The James Museum, indicating that it is located in St. Petersburg and showcases western and other art by local and North American artists, as well as by artists around the world; whereupon, he asked for support in advertising the museum, noting that it would benefit the destination as a whole.

Upon introduction by Mr. James, the museum's Executive Director, Laura Hine, encouraged the members and staff to examine a potentially untapped market where advertising of arts and culture is combined with advertising the beaches, which may further economic development. Mayor Kriseman concurred, provided input, and commended Yann Weymouth of St. Pete Design Group on the architectural design of the museum, encouraging everyone to visit and staff to consider marketing the opportunity of spending quality time exploring museums during the pandemic.

MARKETING UPDATES

Mr. Bridges referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Spring Into Safety* and discussed messaging, goals, strategies, and programs for the upcoming busy season, highlighting the following:

- The Rise to Shine campaign was launched around Labor Day to encourage travelers to visit safely and responsibly and primarily marketed to residents, the industry, and current and prospective visitors from the Tampa and Orlando areas.
- The Immerse Your Senses marketing campaign is targeted at ages 35-65 with a household income over \$100,000 and is currently running in-state and in key out-of-state markets, such as Indianapolis and Cincinnati.
- The number of individuals who are currently interested in traveling is significantly smaller than normal.
- March is the biggest month for visitors, resulting in the highest average daily rate for hoteliers; staff is working to drive visitation and economic impact but also aims to keep people safe.
- The goals and strategies include promoting lesser-known beaches to reduce overcrowding, continuing to support tourism partners with Rise to Shine materials, utilizing an upstream communications plan to emphasize the expectations of visiting safely, motivating travelers to participate in the “Rise to Shine” pledge and an Ultimate Beach Day Sweepstakes, and rewarding safe and responsible practices with popular destination experiences or products distributed by Sunshine Steward Street Teams.

In response to queries and comments by the members, Mr. Bridges indicated that marketing content for the sweepstakes, the pledge, and the reward can be made available to hotel partners; and that some specifics regarding the implementation of the Sunshine Steward Street Teams are undetermined.

Responding to query by Mayor Hibbard, member hoteliers discussed their expectations for bookings in the spring and summer seasons, relating that while they are optimistic, the industry has budgeted down significantly in comparison to prior years; that communication with law enforcement partners is important; and that a lack of Canadian and group markets has negatively affected the hotel and vacation rental industry. Mr. Williams noted that golf has seen a resurgence

during COVID-19 due to the outdoor and social distancing elements, which has resulted in increased numbers for that industry.

Chair Eggers expressed concerns regarding spring break crowds; whereupon, Mr. Hayes related that Pinellas has unique messaging directed to visitors and the community; that the time between making a decision to travel and arrival is 34 days, which is shorter than what the industry is accustomed to; and that more robust data regarding the tourism recovery pace will be discussed at the next TDC meeting, and discussion ensued regarding preparation for spring break travelers, the importance of messaging relating to masks, and COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

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Mayor Hibbard left the meeting at 10:46 A.M.

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VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT

Tourism Strategic Plan Discussion

Mr. Hayes provided an update regarding the strategic plan and requested that the members participate in a one-on-one phone survey with HCP Associates, indicating that following the phone surveys with certain industry partners, there will be an online survey for other partners and the community at large in order to get the most robust information possible.

Economics Snapshot

Mr. Hayes referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tourism Economic Snapshot, January 2021 TDC Meeting* and reviewed the data for the month of November 2020 compared to the 12-month average, including occupancy rate and average daily rate, and indicated that the data shows a 25-percent drop in tourist development tax revenue compared to November 2019; and that the vacation rental market average daily rate has increased, with occupancy remaining flat over the last six months. He noted that Smith Travel Research released its top 25 markets report, which stated that the Tampa/St. Petersburg market performed the best of the 25; that the VSPC website now has the capability to show metrics sorted by community under monthly reports; and that KeyData statistics for vacation rentals are now used instead of AirDNA.

January 20, 2021

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Mayor Kriseman left the meeting at 10:53 A.M.
Commissioner Pletcher left the meeting at 10:55 A.M.

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General Comments

Mr. Hayes related that the VSPC Fiscal Year 2022 budget will be presented to the Board in April; whereupon, he provided information regarding the Picture to Recovery event that occurred last week in conjunction with Meeting Planners International (MPI) Foundation, noting that MPI uses proceeds from selling destination imagery to provide grants to its members; that St. Petersburg was the kickoff city; and that staff worked hard in making the event successful.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS – NONE

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:59 A.M.