

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
August 18, 2021 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 9:12 AM in the Magnolia Room at the Pinellas County Cooperative Extension, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo, Florida.

Present

Dave Eggers, Chair, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chair
Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sand Key Resort
Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor
Frank Hibbard, City of Clearwater Mayor (late arrival)
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Melinda Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Phil Henderson Jr., StarLite Cruises
Rick Kriseman, City of St. Petersburg Mayor
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry

Others Present

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Liz McCann, VSPC Executive Administrative Assistant
Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Sitara Coyle, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE/ROLL CALL

Chair Eggers called the meeting to order at 9:12 AM and requested that Ms. Pletcher lead the Pledge of Allegiance. At the Chair's request, the members introduced themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Later in the meeting, Chair Eggers extended condolences to the family and friends of the late City Manager of Clearwater, Bill Horne, noting his service to the City and the County

and asked for a moment of silence in his honor; whereupon, Mayor Hibbard and Mr. Kimball provided remarks.

MINUTES OF THE JULY 21, 2021 REGULAR MEETING

Ms. Moore moved, seconded by Mr. Kimball, that the minutes be approved. Upon call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Responding to the Chair's call for public comment, David O'Neill, St. Petersburg, appeared and indicated that he is the Director of the University of South Florida Bishop Center for Ethical Leadership at the Muma College of Business, provided information regarding the University's Hospitality Leadership Program, and requested the Council's support for the program.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT

Red Tide Update

Deviating from the agenda and at the request of Chair Eggers, Public Works Department Director Kelli Hammer Levy referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Red Tide Update* and discussed the planning efforts, County's response, and current status of red tide, noting that over 1,800 tons of marine debris have been collected thus far. She provided background information and the current status of the industrial site at the former Piney Point phosphate plant, relating that there have been numerous releases of toxic wastewater from the site into Tampa Bay; and that the most recent release occurred in April 2021, resulting in a discharge of over 200 tons of nitrogen; whereupon, she discussed the timeline of algae blooms and other events directly related to the release in April.

In response to queries and comments by the members, Ms. Levy indicated that the Department of Environmental Protection has filed a complaint against the owners of Piney Point; that the facility has been under a consent order, requiring the removal of all toxic wastewater by 2019, which has not been completed; and that the growth of the red tide will dissipate as the ocean water gets colder, and Mr. Hayes provided input.

ELITE EVENTS FUNDING PROGRAM

St. Pete BikeFest

Mr. Hayes provided background information regarding the request for an increase in funding through the Elite Events program for the St. Pete BikeFest from a Category Three event to a Category Two. Attorney Coffey advised the Board of how they can take action on the matter, noting that the Board should waive the guidelines relating to accepting a recommendation from the Elite Events Funding Subcommittee should the Board wish to move forward without input from the subcommittee, and discussion ensued.

OCC Road House and Museum Manager Keith Overton appeared and indicated that he is the applicant for the St. Pete BikeFest event; and that he submitted the application for Category Three funding prior to the release of a Destination Analysts study, which indicated that the event qualifies for Category Two funding.

Mr. Kimball moved, seconded by Mr. Williams, to waive the guidelines requiring Subcommittee review and recommend approval of the increase in funding to the BCC for Category Two funding in the amount of \$75,000.00. Upon call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Hibbard arrived at 10:03 AM.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Mr. Hayes referred to budget documents included in the agenda packet and discussed revenues and expenses for July 2021, highlighting that Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenues have surpassed historical numbers when compared to 2019 and 2020; and that Travel, Advertising and Marketing, Elite Events, and Direct Sales projected expenses are under budget and expected to stay that way due to the cancellation of certain events or programs, resulting in decreased staff travel.

Responding to queries by the members, Budget and Management Analyst Jim Abernathy, with input from Mr. Hayes, indicated that June 2020 TDT collections were 45% higher than that of 2019; that projected collections are about \$70 million, surpassing the budgeted amount of \$52 million; and that the \$4 million reallocated from the capital reserves to the operating reserves will be returned with the Fiscal Year 2022 budget.

Discussion ensued regarding the impact of the rising number of COVID cases on bookings and traveler confidence for the remainder of the year.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) Division Manager Suzanne Hackman announced that Brian Hilterbrandt, CVB's newest Sales Representative, will be focused on the Florida market of travelers for meetings and conventions; whereupon, Mr. Hilterbrandt introduced himself, citing his prior work experience.

Ms. Pletcher left the meeting at 10:38 AM.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT

Key Destination Metrics

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tourism Economic Snapshot August 2021 TDC Meeting*, Mr. Hayes reviewed June 2021 statistical data regarding TDT collections, hotel and vacation rental occupancy, average daily rates, and top origin arrival markets into the area from out of state and provided visitor profile comparisons between June 2021 and 2019.

In response to comments by Mayor Bujalski regarding the representation of north county in the statistical data, Mr. Hayes related that he would inquire which locations are represented in the data and present that information at the next meeting.

September TDC Meeting

Mr. Hayes indicated that Destination Analysts will present data and other information pertaining to the first half of 2021; and that BVK and Miles Partnership will conduct a presentation regarding creative and strategic messaging for the beginning of 2022.

Workshops to be Scheduled

Mr. Hayes related that the Fiscal Year 2022 Capital Program and Fiscal Year 2023 Elite Events workshops are scheduled to be held immediately after the October and November TDC meetings, respectively.

General Comments

Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Hayes provided information regarding the continued effort to provide appropriate information to travelers about COVID-19, red tide, and hurricanes. He indicated that the Joint BCC and TDC meeting is scheduled for 9:30 AM on November 4, 2021 at the St. Petersburg Marriott Clearwater.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Mayor Bujalski commended Film Commissioner Tony Armer and his staff for their collaboration with the City of Dunedin during the filming of *A Taste Of Love*, and Mr. Hayes and his staff on the increased communication efforts regarding red tide and the hurricane season. She expressed excitement regarding Allegiant's announcement of new service to Key West from the St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport and provided remarks about Bill Horne, noting the role he played in securing the Blue Jays contract for Dunedin.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:56 AM.