

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
June 23, 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 9:04 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, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor
Rick Kriseman, City of St. Petersburg Mayor
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Melinda Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner (late arrival)
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Frank Hibbard, City of Clearwater Mayor

Others Present

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Leroy Bridges, VSPC Vice President of Digital and Communications
Tim Ramsberger, VSPC Chief Operating Officer
Michael 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/PLEDGE/ROLL CALL

Chair Eggers called the meeting to order at 9:04 AM and requested that Mayor Kriseman lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Eggers expressed his gratitude and welcomed the agency team members in attendance.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – MAY 18, 2021

Upon motion by Ms. Moore, seconded by Mr. Kimball and carried unanimously, the minutes of the May 18 meeting were approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Upon invitation by Chair Eggers, EndorFUN Sports Chief Operating Officer Ryan Jordan appeared and expressed why the St. Petersburg Run Fest should be included in the Elite Event Funding Program, stating that the event is much like a festival in terms of merging local heritage and economic impact with wellness, charities, arts, and music.

FINANCE UPDATES

Revenues

Mr. Abernathy referred to a report and presented an update of revenues and projections for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 and FY 2022 and indicated that Tourist Development Tax revenue is projected at \$63.1 million in the budget request; and that operating and capital reserves are \$41 million and \$40.7 million, respectively. He noted that the one-time use of \$4.4 million from reserves and used for additional marketing expenses in the current budget year will be repaid in FY 2022; and that operating reserves will be more than adequate moving forward.

In response to a query by Mr. Prather, Mr. Abernathy indicated that the budget will have a \$61.2 million fund balance beginning FY 2022.

Expenses

Mr. Hayes referred to a document titled *Financial Statement for May 2021* and discussed the items included under Personal Services, Operational Expenses, and Promotional Expenses, noting that the statement reflects what has been paid to date; and that certain payment data is often delayed up to three months, particularly in relation to advertising.

Referring to a document titled *Finance Report – May 2021*, Mr. Hayes explained that the report captures expenses that are still in progress but have not yet been paid; and that it includes an adjusted budget indicating a more accurate account of the amount of funds

remaining in the current budget; whereupon, he discussed several categories reflected in the document.

In response to queries by the members, Mr. Hayes stated that advertising expenses would increase in July to boost fall travel; that VSPC has several open positions; and that tourism is increasing to reach pre-pandemic levels, and discussion ensued.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

FY 2022 Elite Events Recommendations

Mr. Ramsberger referred to a document titled *FY22 Elite Events Funding Program TDC Committee Review, June 11, 2021*, listing the elite events, scoring, and funding amounts recommended by the Elite Events Funding Committee. He related that the following three events did not qualify for funding:

1. Books at the Beach Convention – the application did not meet requirements.
2. Localtopia, “A Community Celebration of All Things Local” – received a score below the recommended guidelines for consideration.
3. St Pete Run Fest – did not meet the “cultural heritage” definition of the criteria.

LOCALTOPIA

Mayor Kriseman stated that Localtopia’s attendance has grown each year; that City staff has to close certain streets during the event as it has outgrown its assigned location; and that the TDC had a similar discussion last year as to what qualifies an event for funding; whereupon, Ms. Rodriguez stated that she values the event and its purpose and offered to adjust her scoring of the application.

Discussion ensued regarding the definition and scoring of cultural events. Mr. Prather stated that Localtopia certainly celebrates the cultural diversity of local businesses within St. Petersburg. Mayor Bujalski indicated that approving the event would open the door to other similar events throughout Pinellas County, and discussion ensued.

Responding to a query by Mayor Kriseman, Attorney Zas stated that allowing an application to be rescored would be inappropriate and recommended that the Council ask the BCC to waive the score requirement and approve the application as presented.

Mayor Kriseman moved, seconded by Mr. Kimball, that the Elite Events list as recommended by the Funding Committee include a request to waive the score

requirement for Localtopia, and be amended to include the event for approved funding. Following discussion, Chair Eggers called for the vote and the motion carried 7 to 1, with Mayor Bujalski dissenting.

ST PETE RUN FEST

Mayor Kriseman stated that the St Pete Run Fest should be considered for funding as it meets the definition of “an elite event that recognizes and celebrates community history and identity bonds to the past, present, future, and/or values and traditions that attract tourists.” He noted that the event also meets the definition of an elite event; and that the event focuses on wellness which is something the City promotes through the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg; whereupon, he asked the members to find that the event qualifies for the requested funding based on the current language of the program.

Attorney Zas indicated that should the members wish to include this event, the first threshold for members to determine is whether the event meets the category definition; and that the Elite Events Funding Committee would then be asked to score the event and determine if it reaches the required 700 points.

Mayor Bujalski related that the Committee excluded this event due to it not meeting the definition of “cultural heritage”; and that staff had stated that the event was to receive a portion of funding via a separate mechanism through VSPC’s other programs, and discussion ensued.

Mayor Kriseman moved, seconded by Mr. Williams, that the Council find the St Pete Run Fest meets the category definition.

In response to queries by the members, Mr. Ramsberger explained that prior guidelines prohibiting an event from obtaining funding elsewhere were removed several years ago. Mr. Prather noted that he is in favor of both Localtopia and the St Pete Run Fest; and that there is money remaining in the budget to fund both events. Mayor Bujalski suggested that the event should not be approved at this time; and that the TDC should revisit the Elite Events guidelines, definitions, and categories in the fall.

Following further discussion and upon call for the vote, the motion failed by a vote of 3 to 5, with Messrs. Eggers and Kimball, Mayor Bujalski, and Mses. Moore, and Rodriguez dissenting.

Upon call by Chair Eggers, Mayor Bujalski moved, seconded by Mr. Williams and carried unanimously, that the amended list to include Localtopia as stated be the final recommendation of the TDC to the BCC for approval.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Department Reports

Mr. Hayes related that staff and agency partners are preparing a 12-month strategic and tactical plan; and that the plan will be presented in two parts, in September and January.

Department reports can be found online at partners.visitstpeteclearwater.com.

VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT

Agency Partner Summit

Mr. Hayes introduced Carmen Boyce of BVK, Kimberly Vince-Cruz of Destination Analysts, Scott Bacon of Miles Partnership, and Laura Lopez of NJF, who each presented the objectives of their organization, illustrating the partnership between their agency and VSPC and highlighting certain accomplishments of the prior year. Mr. Hayes concluded by discussion the ongoing and collaborative communication between VSPC and all of its partners, and brief discussion ensued.

Melinda Pletcher arrived at 10:20 A.M.

Red Tide Update

Mr. Hayes noted that they are working closely with county staff to keep residents and visitors informed as to where Red Tide may be located each day; and that it has not yet hindered visitor attendance.

Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Hayes related continuous updates are located on the county website to include the location presence of Red Tide and the associated level of respiratory risk. Mr. Bridges indicated that current Red Tide levels are not nearly as high as they were in 2018, and discussion ensued.

Strategic Plan Update

Mr. Hayes encouraged members to schedule a one-on-one meeting with HCP Associates regarding the strategic plan; and that the meeting is exceptionally critical for members holding multiple roles.

Key Destination Metrics

Mr. Hayes referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tourism Economic Snapshot, June 2021 TDC meeting* and reviewed the data for the month of April year-to-date, including

occupancy, supply and demand, tourist development tax year-to-date and a five-year comparison, and destination origin market arrivals outside of Florida. He clarified that all key destination metrics for 2021 were compared to 2019 rather than 2020 due to the reduction in tourism as a result of the pandemic.

In response to queries by members, Mr. Bridges indicated that he will add the in-Florida market breakdown of occupancy to the report; and that the new website will launch the third week of July.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/ DISCUSSION

Chair Eggers indicated that members should consider their location preference for TDC meetings prior to the July 17 meeting, brief discussion ensued.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:53 AM.