

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
November 17, 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 9:07 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
Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Frank Hibbard, City of Clearwater Mayor
Rick Kriseman, City of St. Petersburg 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
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Others Present

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Jim Abernathy, Sr. Financial Management and Budget Analyst
Sarah Rathke, Board Reporter
Other interested individuals

CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE/ROLL CALL

Chair Eggers called the meeting to order at 9:07 AM. At his request, Mayor Hibbard led the Pledge of Allegiance.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Eggers noted that the latter part of the meeting would include an Elite Event Funding Program workshop to review the current guidelines and to discuss potential changes for the next cycle.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES AND CAPITAL PROJECT FUNDING PROGRAM WORKSHOP MINUTES- OCTOBER 20,2021

A motion was made by Mayor Hibbard to approve the October 20 TDC minutes and Capital Project Funding Program workshop minutes. The motion was seconded by Mr. Williams and, upon call for the vote, carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Tony Smith, St. Petersburg

In response to concerns raised by Mr. Smith, Chair Eggers indicated that perhaps the County could do more to recognize the impact of snowbirds on the local economy.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Beach Renourishment Update

Public Works Director Kelli Hammer Levy referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Pinellas County Coastal Management* and provided background information and status regarding recent and current beach renourishment projects, noting the costs and funding sources. She related that Treasure Island and Long Key projects have been combined in order to achieve a benefit to cost ratio of a minimum of one required by the Army Corps of Engineers when determining whether or not projects should be federally funded; that the proposed project has a tentative completion date of 2028; and that the County contribution cost is going to increase significantly.

Ms. Hammer Levy stated that information regarding the Sand Key renourishment project can be found on the County website; and that the Army Corps of Engineers has advised the County that they need 100% of the easements to be secured within the project limits, otherwise, the next cycle scheduled for 2024 would be skipped, and the project would not move forward until 2030.

Ms. Hammer Levy emphasized the importance of beaches in supporting the infrastructure by protecting the land behind them. In response to queries by members, she discussed the following topics, and more:

- Army Corps of Engineers easement requirements
- Preserving nourished sand
- Beach renourishment costs and budget
- Dunedin Causeway nourishment
- Managing sand accumulation at John's Pass

Visit Florida Update

Convention and Visitors Bureau Director Steve Hayes introduced Visit Florida's Regional Representative Sam Rubenzer and called him to the podium.

Mr. Rubenzer described his relevant job experience; whereupon, he referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Florida Tourism Update* and provided an overview of Visit Florida's mission, various in-state, domestic, and international advertising and marketing campaigns, and their impact on visitation. He related that tourism greatly decreased in 2020 as a result of COVID-19; that during the pandemic, Florida remained open to tourists while most other states were closed; that various successful marketing efforts were implemented by Visit Florida to increase visitation at the onset of the pandemic in March of 2020; and that through aggressive and well-timed marketing, Florida tops the list of desired destinations among American travelers.

Mr. Rubenzer played a video of an advertisement from Visit Florida's family campaign, which highlighted the beauty Florida has to offer, and a promotional video focusing on state pride. He indicated that all of Florida's Destination Marketing Organizations are now partners with Visit Florida; that Florida is well on its way to a full recovery from COVID downtime; that Visit Florida's goal is to beat economists' projections of the recovery by 2024; and that international visitors are vital to Florida's tourism and typically spend twice as much per person compared to domestic visitors.

Mr. Hayes stressed the importance of co-op programs with Visit Florida in promoting the destination, including financial benefits, noting that a \$1,000,000 advertising campaign dedicated to St. Petersburg and Clearwater will start early winter, costing \$200,000 to the County.

Finance Report/Update

Referring to a document titled *Visit St. Pete Clearwater FY 2021 Budget, September 2021*, Mr. Hayes presented the end of the fiscal year financial statement, covering the areas of personnel services, operating expenses, and direct sales. He stated that VSPC gained more money than it spent; that the personnel portion of the budget involves

savings; that the organization is currently filling three positions; and that operating and promotional expense areas ended up under the budget.

In response to a query by Mr. Henderson, Budget and Financial Management Analyst Jim Abernathy indicated that any desired changes to the beach nourishment budget may be recommended by the TDC for approval by the BCC, and brief discussion ensued.

VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT

Strategic Plan Update

Mr. Hayes provided an update on the strategic plan and indicated that 75% of stakeholder telephonic interviews, 80% of the online stakeholder survey, 85% of the Community Sentiment Survey, and about 50% of the Industry and Visitor Analysis have been completed. He indicated that there will be stakeholder workshops the first week of January; that the formation of the strategic plan will likely occur through February, based on the survey results; that the plan may be presented to the TDC, BCC, and the industry partners in February or March of 2022; and that more updates will be provided at the December TDC meeting.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Hayes highlighted the destination metrics and Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collection data, relating that VSPC saw a \$10-million increase in revenue in the September 2021 as compared to September 2019. He provided a summary of the variables that drove the increase and, responding to a query by Mayor Bujalski, indicated that calendar and fiscal year reports will be provided to the Board in the upcoming months.

General Comments

Mr. Hayes noted that at the December meeting, there will be a presentation regarding a new technological tool that will allow VSPC to see certain key data, including where people are visiting from, whether it is a short or a long trip, and where the top markets are.

RECESS

At this time, 10:27 AM, Chair Eggers indicated that the meeting is complete; and that the Board will recess until 10:32 AM when the Elite Events Funding Program workshop will begin.