

**Tourist Development Council  
Pinellas County  
August 17, 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 9:03 AM in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida.

**Present**

Charlie Justice, Chairman, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chairman  
Russ Kimball, Vice-Chairman, Sheraton Sand Key Resort  
Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor  
Frank Hibbard, City of Clearwater Mayor  
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.  
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn (late arrival)  
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort  
Kenneth T. Welch, City of St. Petersburg Mayor  
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort (late arrival)

**Not Present**

Phil Henderson, Jr., Starlite Cruises  
Melinda Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry

**Others Present**

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO  
Katie Bridges, Senior Advertising Manager  
Mackenzie Comerer, Senior Media Relations Manager  
Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney  
Jim Abernathy, Sr. Financial Management and Budget Analyst  
Katie Poviones, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk  
Other interested individuals

**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Chairman Justice called the meeting to order at 9:03 AM.

## **CHAIR COMMENTS**

Chairman Justice noted that the BCC recently approved the Elite Event Funding Program package recommended by the TDC, with the addition of the MLK Dream Big Parade event.

## **MINUTES OF THE JUNE 21, 2022 REGULAR MEETING**

Mayor Hibbard made a motion, which was seconded by Mayor Welch and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the June 21 meeting be approved.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS – NONE**

## **CAPITAL PROGRAM DISCUSSION**

### Introduction of Crossroads Consulting

Mr. Hayes introduced the President and CEO of Crossroads Consulting Susie Sieger and related that her company is based in Pinellas County; that it made the winning bid in VSPC's search for a consultant to assist with the Capital Program; and that he invited Ms. Sieger to today's meeting to gain insight on thoughts and concerns of the members regarding the program.

### Discussion Areas

Mr. Hayes noted that the members should have received a document with redline changes to the Capital Program guidelines made in response to their comments; that the goal for today's discussion is to receive clarification regarding certain items; that staff will ensure that any changes to the guidelines are mirrored in the program application; and that pending the Board's approval, staff will make any necessary edits before presenting the finalized guidelines to the Board.

*Mr. Prather arrived at 9:08 AM.*

## **DEFINITIONS**

Referring to a document titled *Capital Project Funding Program Items for Discussion*, Mr. Hayes asked for the Board's input regarding a modified definition of 'Tourism Economic Benefits', indicating that it includes information regarding economic impacts of a project, including tourist room nights, attendance, and government revenue, emphasizing that the goal of the program is to support the tourism industry and drive business to the

community; whereupon, in response to a query by Mayor Welch, Mr. Hayes provided clarifying comments regarding the redline changes.

## FUNDING STANDARDS

Mr. Hayes related that in response to concerns by the members, the consultant will work with staff to ensure that the program requirements for tourist room nights and attendee numbers are realistic. He proposed to discuss whether the members would prefer to keep a separate item for a Major League Soccer training facility under the guidelines' funding standards section IV.A.3 or incorporate it under the sections IV.A.1 or IV.A.2, and Mayor Bujalski and Mr. Kimball expressed support for the latter.

Responding to a query by Ms. Moore, Mr. Hayes indicated that based on the guidelines, projects are reimbursed upon their completion, unless there is a different method of reimbursement determined as optimal by the BCC; whereupon, Chairman Justice and Mayors Bujalski and Hibbard voiced their support for enabling the BCC to modify reimbursement schedules to provide flexibility to program applicants.

*Mr. Williams arrived at 9:16 AM.*

## TIMELINE

Mr. Hayes discussed the tentative timeline for the program, noting that the Board could approve the guidelines and application in October prior to a joint TDC-BCC meeting in November; that pending the BCC's approval, the program could be announced with an application period from December to mid-February of 2023; and that staff and the consultant would then review the applications to present their recommendations to the TDC members in May for their approval before forwarding them to the BCC for its approval in June.

In response to queries and concerns by Mayors Bujalski and Welch, Attorney Zas clarified that the guidelines include an exception for instances where certain sports projects may deviate from the program's set calendar; that the current process for eligible projects begins with a conceptual approval from the BCC based on the requested funds; and that staff will work on making the exception clearer in the guidelines.

Responding to a query by Mr. Kimball regarding certain ongoing projects that have been under the BCC's purview pending negotiations, Chairman Justice related that there is not currently a defined timeline for negotiations between a program applicant and the BCC, and Attorney Zas noted that there has not been a substantive discussion regarding the implementation of a set timeframe for the negotiation process; whereupon, Mr. Hayes explained that some projects have been delayed by the pandemic and other factors; and

that the Dali Museum's Executive Director Hank Hine will be present at the November meeting to provide an update regarding a project pertaining to the museum.

## EVALUATION PROCESS

Mr. Hayes indicated that the current guidelines suggest that a TDC committee review the program applications; and that the members may choose to have the entire TDC conduct the review or to allow the consultant and staff to do it before presenting recommendations to the Board; whereupon, the members expressed their support for having the consultant and staff review the applications first, similar to this year's Elite Event program application process.

In response to queries by Mayor Welch, Attorney Zas explained the process of reviewing applications for sports projects by the BCC and TDC, indicating that following the conceptual approval by the BCC, the review would be on a case by case basis; and that the details of the process are not captured in the guidelines due to the complexity of the matter, and Mayor Welch noted the importance of the TDC's input in the process. Thereupon, in response to a query by Mayor Bujalski, Chairman Justice encouraged the members to share with the Commissioners information relating to any funding sources, dollar limits, or ideas that may be deal breakers for sports projects.

## RATING CRITERIA

Mr. Hayes related that a proposed change involves collaboration between the consultant and staff to formulate specific rating criteria requirements, including projected economic benefit, projected attendance and room nights, marketing and sponsorship benefits that help VSPC achieve its mission, and meeting one or more of the objectives outlined in VSPC's strategic plan; whereupon, Mayor Hibbard commented that the criteria should include geographic diversity of the economic impact, and Mayor Welch concurred.

Mr. Hayes remarked that the next steps are to combine all of the redline changes to the guidelines into one document and review the application to ensure the correct information is being requested from the applicants. In response to a query by Mayor Welch, Attorney Zas clarified that rating points were removed from the draft guidelines as part of the decision for staff and the consultant to review applications instead of a TDC committee; and that the consultant and staff will determine whether to develop a new point system as part of the new rating criteria, and discussion continued.

## FUTURE DISCUSSION WITH BCC ON THE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT PLAN (NOVEMBER)

The item was not addressed.

## **ARTS PLAN DISCUSSION**

### Cultural Plan and Co-op Marketing Program

Mr. Hayes related that Creative Pinellas submitted two decision packages as part of the Fiscal Year 2023 budget request, a Pinellas County Cultural Plan and a Local Co-op Arts and Culture Advertising and Marketing Program; that there was discussion by the members surrounding additional funding for the arts; and that learning more about and discussing the decision packages may provide some guidance for funding priorities with limited resources; whereupon, Creative Pinellas Chief Executive Officer Barbara St. Clair discussed the Cultural Plan, highlighting that cultural plans have been used in the United States since the 1970s, as they have been shown to build the capacities of cultural sectors in communities and enable them to partner with other sectors to address community concerns; and that the goal of the plan is to align the purpose and direction of the arts community, businesses, local governments, and the TDC.

Ms. St. Clair indicated that she has identified and will screen professional cultural planning organizations to sit on an advisory board for the development of the plan; that there will be a town hall meeting on September 30 at Ruth Eckerd Hall, where a keynote speaker will discuss cultural planning; and that the goal for the meeting is to obtain data from the community to create a roadmap showing where and what to invest in, how to optimize resources, and to set the stage for the future of the County growing as an arts and cultural destination; whereupon, the members expressed their support for the plan.

In response to queries by the members, Ms. St. Clair expressed that the plan will provide the data needed to make informed decisions regarding the distribution and spending of dedicated arts funding; that she and Mr. Hayes will soon be interviewing consultants for the project; and that the consultant will likely not be based in Pinellas County to capture a more objective perspective, however, County resources, the community, and others will be heavily involved in the process. She noted that the plan will take approximately 6 to 9 months to create, with the goal of having a draft prepared in the spring; and that she will provide regular updates to the TDC.

During discussion and responding to a query by Mr. Prather, Mr. Abernathy related that the \$240,000 cost for the plan is included in the TDC's budget; whereupon, Ms. St. Clair discussed the Co-op Marketing Program, indicating that its purpose is to resolve the challenge of connecting visitors to the arts; that every dollar spent through the program will be matched by advertisers; and that it will also assist smaller arts organizations by creating a marketing fund for them.

Ms. St. Clair emphasized that Creative Pinellas will work with VSPC and their media purchasing experts to ensure that advertising dollars are spent effectively; that the program will utilize call-to-action advertising to support the brand promise of Pinellas County as an arts and cultural destination; that Creative Pinellas will recruit businesses, arts organizations, and artists to participate; and that the first year will be conducted as a pilot to experiment and collect data to evaluate whether the initiative can engage visitors in participating more actively with arts opportunities. The members expressed their support for the program, and Mayor Hibbard voiced his concerns, as well as a desire to implement the Cultural Plan before funding the Co-op Marketing Program, to formulate a spending strategy; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding the following topics:

- Guidelines for the organizations and events funded by the program
- Collaboration with BVK for media purchases
- The use of digital platforms for advertising
- Implementing the program in conjunction with the Arts Navigator
- Introducing educational opportunities for individuals in the tourism industry

During discussion, Mr. Abernathy highlighted that the original budget request for the Co-op Marketing Program was for approximately \$400,000, to be paid to Creative Pinellas as part of their annual funding transfer and included one Full Time Employee (FTE) position; that the request has changed to \$200,000 and appears under VSPC's advertising budget, without the FTE; and that the changes are reflected in the proposed budget, which will be presented to the BCC for approval. Chairman Justice noted that any future support for the program depends on the success of the pilot. Thereupon, Mayor Bujalski made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Williams and carried unanimously, that the TDC support the Cultural Plan and the Co-op Marketing Program.

## **DEPARTMENT UPDATES**

### Advertising/Marketing Update

Ms. Bridges introduced Creative Manager Marcus Oania and thanked him for his contributions to VSPC and its campaigns; whereupon, she referred to a PowerPoint presentation pertaining to advertising and promotions' updates and provided information about the *Gulf to Bay* destination magazine, relating that it was released in July with 500,000 copies distributed. She discussed the VSPC's brand platform, relating that it was built around a core human value of vibrancy nearly a decade ago, and has served as the basis for several successful campaigns; whereupon, she spoke on the new 'Let's Shine' brand campaign development, including the brand perception, traveler priorities, marketing objectives, and insights from the campaign testing.

BVK Vice President Carmen Boyce played a video capturing the Let's Shine campaign and highlighted its sample photography, creative aspects, new color palettes, and the emphasis on inclusivity and the arts. In response to queries by the members, Ms. Bridges indicated that VSPC will be distributing a release today to industry partners sharing the new campaign; that while the destination magazine is available at Chamber of Commerce visitor centers, staff is discussing adding printed material promoting the campaign; that Destination Analysts recommended 30 60-minute in-depth interviews with diverse participants from key target markets to gather feedback regarding potential advertising campaign concepts; and that the goal for the campaign's duration is two years, at which point staff can re-evaluate its lifespan.

Responding to further queries by the members, Ms. Boyce related that the campaign will be adapted for usage by other tourism segments outside of leisure travel; and that the font utilized in the campaign is part of its unique stylistic personality; whereupon, Mr. Hayes noted that VSPC's previous brand campaign endured for 8 years; that there will likely be a presentation at the September TDC meeting regarding the effectiveness of the last campaign's advertising; and that adjustments can be made to the new campaign based on feedback from customers.

### Public Relations Update

Ms. Comerer related that VSPC's digital team recently received an Educational Seminar for Tourist Organizations award from the U.S. Travel Association for the best destination website; and that VSPC was one of three finalists for its public relations campaign during the Super Bowl. Thereupon, she referred to a PowerPoint presentation pertaining to public relations' updates and discussed missions, visits, and coverage relating to traditional media, as well as partnerships with influencers to promote the destination. She emphasized that media coverage garnered \$1.1 billion in total earned media to date and \$18.5 million in total advertisement value, with a total of 404 media placements in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

In response to a query by Mayor Hibbard pertaining to media missions, Ms. Comerer clarified that she ensures the destination's unique offerings are emphasized to distinguish it from the competing destinations; and that there is follow-up with media to provide specifics if previous conversations were not fruitful, which may lead to a media visit.

### **VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT**

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Pinellas County Tourist Development Council Meeting*, Mr. Hayes reviewed the June 2022 statistical data regarding Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections, including hotel and vacation rental occupancy,

average daily rates, visitation forecasts, and visitor profile metrics. He highlighted that the difference in monthly TDT collections from 2021 to 2022 is starting to decrease; that Key Data representatives will present additional information regarding vacation rental occupancy at a future TDC meeting; that occupancy and the mean number of days per visit have decreased, likely due to increasing rates and overall costs for travel; that international travel is returning to its typical travel pattern, while meetings and conventions travel is beginning to return as well; and that travelers now have more alternative destination options, as international travel and cruises have fully returned.

Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Hayes related that he would review outliers present in the economic snapshot for July; that the budget for promotional expenses currently only shows spending that has been processed, however, the remaining amount will be expended; that while there may be some issues with hiring to fill current vacancies due to the competitiveness of compensation, VSPC will collaborate with County Human Resources regarding pay ranges; that VSPC does not currently utilize executive search firms for hiring, however, they have the ability to do so; and that he is working with Key Data to make documents easier to read; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding vacation rental statistics, and Chairman Justice requested to discuss the topic at a future TDC meeting.

During discussion, Mr. Abernathy responded to queries by Mayor Bujalski regarding revenue collections, indicating that the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 budget was recently updated to reflect a \$5-million increase to the previously-estimated FY 2022 collections amount for a total of \$91 million based on the information available through June; and that a 5.3% annual increase will add a total of nearly \$9 million to reserves for the year, with a portion going to the beach nourishment fund.

## **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS**

Mayor Welch indicated that the City of St. Petersburg is currently finalizing a Request for Proposals for the historic gas plant site and home of Tropicana Field; and that he would like feedback from the TDC regarding the concept of conference space at the site. Attorney Zas, with input from Chairman Justice, noted that the members can individually share their input with Mr. Hayes; and that Mr. Hayes could compile the feedback to share with Mayor Welch.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:56 AM.