

Tourist Development Council  
Pinellas County  
September 15, 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 9:05 AM in the Magnolia Room at the Pinellas County Cooperative Extension, 1220 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.  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry  
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn  
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort  
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Melinda Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner

Others Present

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO  
Katie Bridges, VSPC Senior Advertising Manager  
Leroy Bridges, VSPC Vice President of Digital and Communications  
Teri Tuxhorn, VSPC Senior Administrative Manager  
Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney  
Teresa Ribble, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk  
Other interested individuals

**CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE/ROLL CALL**

Chair Eggers called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM and requested that Mayor Bujalski lead the Pledge of Allegiance; whereupon, he requested that the members introduce themselves.

## **CHAIR COMMENTS**

Chair Eggers expressed his gratitude to the members for their continued commitment to the work being done by the Council.

## **MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 18, 2021 REGULAR MEETING**

Mayor Hibbard made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Williams and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the August 18 meeting be approved.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

No one responded to the Chair's call for public comment.

## **FISCAL YEAR 2022 DATA REVIEW AND CREATIVE MESSAGING PLAN**

### Destination Analysts

Destination Analysts CEO and President Erin Francis-Cummings conducted PowerPoint presentations and provided updates and statistical data regarding national travel trends related to COVID-19, visitor profile details and a tourism performance forecast for Pinellas County, and key insights regarding a VSPC advertising campaign effectiveness and return on investment study.

Referring to a report regarding a national coronavirus travel sentiment index study, Ms. Francis-Cummings noted that surveys initially began in March 2020; that 1,200 new travelers are surveyed each week; and that data collected is related to how Americans are thinking, feeling, and making decisions when it comes to travel; whereupon, she indicated that, based upon recent surveys, there have been significant declines regarding feelings of a return to normalcy and optimism and increased personal health and finance concerns. She noted that while 41% of those surveyed indicated that they feel confident in an ability to travel safely, the percentage is a decrease from earlier in the summer; that the COVID-19 Delta variant is the primary reason for cancelled and postponed trips; and that Florida is taking the brunt of association with the variant.

With regard to the Quarter 2 visitor profile update, Ms. Francis-Cummings indicated that there were no significant changes in visitor demographics; that in-state and day trips increased; that there was a significant increase in visitor recall related to earned and paid media; and that there was increased usage of the VSPC website and the Gulf to Bay Destination Magazine; whereupon, she also reported that there was a high level of visitor

satisfaction and likelihood to return, with 92.8% of visitors indicating that they were very satisfied with their visit.

Ms. Francis-Cummings referred to a series of slides which provided data related to Pinellas County visitor economic impact forecasts for the remainder of 2021 and provided information related to hotel occupancy, visitor volume, estimated direct, indirect, and induced visitor spending, and tourism tax collections. She noted that data from the first two quarters of 2021 shows that Pinellas County led the rest of the nation in recovery through strong hotel occupancy; that performance has outpaced previous forecasts; and that the remainder of the year is expected to be at or above pre-pandemic averages, barring effects from the COVID-19 Delta variant.

Referring to an additional slide presentation, Ms. Francis-Cummings summarized methodology utilized to conduct a study regarding effectiveness of the winter recovery advertising campaign and highlighted information regarding estimated total direct visitor spending, total economic impact, return on investment, and taxes generated. She noted that the 40.9% advertisement recall rate of those surveyed is remarkable; whereupon, she discussed the successful return on investment, including that nine in ten visitors surveyed indicated that an advertisement did influence their decision to visit the area; that over 40% indicated that they were at a decision-making point when they were exposed to an advertisement; and that over 90% confirmed that the advertisements were important in influencing their decision to visit the area. She concluded her remarks regarding the study with key takeaways, including an estimated \$219.7 million in campaign-generated economic impact and an overall return on investment of \$35.00 for every dollar spent.

In response to comments and queries by the members, Ms. Francis-Cummings provided the following information:

- Research shows that campaigns which use multiple types of media yields higher performance, such as was seen with the winter recovery campaign.
- Quarter 2 Visitor Profile Study average *nights in market* statistics includes all travelers, including regional visitor and day trippers, and the LGBTQ+ community had the option to not identify.
- Pinellas County is tracked as part of an international visitor study done on an annual basis in January. Destination Analysts is in discussion with the U.S. Travel Association regarding the completion of more than one study per year.
- Destination Analysts includes Pinellas County as a meeting brand in a meeting planner study, which is conducted more than once per year.

- Data will be provided which will provide a breakdown of visitor type by city.

Mr. Prather praised the efforts of the VSPC marketing team regarding the campaign, and both he and Mr. Henderson cited the impressive return on investment.

At the request of Mr. Hayes, Ms. Francis-Cummings provided information regarding a market perception study currently in progress. She provided a description of the study and indicated that it will include data which may be used as benchmarks related to brand strengths, weaknesses, and areas of opportunity.

Mayor Bujalski opined that investing in specialized research related to visits for spring training events is important; and that the data could be utilized for yearly comparisons; whereupon, Mr. Hayes noted that, at the Board's upcoming workshop, he is planning a discussion regarding projections and actual outcomes related to capital improvement programs.

### Creative Partners

Mr. Hayes provided an overview of the presentation, noting that strategic brainstorming sessions between the VSPC team and external partners began in February 2019; and that today's presentation reflects resumed meetings beginning in June 2021 to strategize efforts for moving forward.

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *FY 2022 Marketing Strategy & Oct-March Media Plan*, Ms. Bridges and Mr. Bridges highlighted information regarding the following strategies:

- Future marketing objectives
- Marketing strategies
- Media planning approach and recommendations
- Research/Data tools
- Developmental and maintenance market strategies
- International markets
- Leisure core audience and media consumption habits
- Focus and strategy for an arts audience
- Marketing strategy related to LGBTQ+, Black, and Hispanic travelers
- Timing considerations for travel
- Traveler journey and its complexities

Mr. Bridges introduced BVK Vice President Carmen Boyce and Miles Partnership Account Director Scott Bacon, indicating that they would present the tactics which will be used to implement the upcoming marketing strategy and media plan.

Utilizing the *October-March Media Plan* section of the PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Boyce discussed broadcast, out-of-home, and print media which will be utilized in both the maintenance and developmental markets and highlighted the following strategies:

- Radio spots will be used for developmental and maintenance markets through promotions and radio host endorsements.
- Digital billboards will be employed in both markets, with digital urban and exterior public transit wraps planned for the developmental market of Chicago, and the continuation of airport wrap programs at the St. Pete-Clearwater International (PIE), Tampa International, and Orlando International Airports.
- Advertisements will be placed in luxury travel, city lifestyle, and arts and culture publications on national and regional levels in developmental markets for the core audience, and in specific publications for the LGBTQ+, Black, and Hispanic traveler.
- An experiential escape room campaign, Escape Winter, will be conducted in Chicago and will include sensory attributes to Pinellas County attractions and will be promoted through an integrated media approach.

Responding to a query by Mr. Williams, Ms. Boyce, with input by Mr. Bridges, indicated that selection of publications for advertisement is based upon demographic and psychographic data; that Garden & Gun magazine is a southern lifestyle magazine; and that the cost of advertising in the magazine is minimized due to a co-operative agreement through Visit Florida.

Mr. Bacon continued the PowerPoint presentation and provided information regarding the use of digital media as part of upcoming marketing initiatives and the core brand campaign. He outlined details regarding the ongoing use of specific digital programming platforms, new trends and methods of advertising, custom content in The New York Times, reaching the arts and culture audience, and leveraging the Visit Florida advertising co-op program.

Ms. Bridges completed the presentation by briefly reviewing expected expenditures by specific marketing channel and noted that the breakdown reflects a total of approximately \$9.25 million to be spent in the first six months of the fiscal year.

Responding to a query by Mr. Williams, Ms. Bridges, with input by Ms. Boyce, related that the competitive analysis presented earlier in the year revealed that most Florida markets spend heavily in the same timeframe; and that level of spending by market will be provided to the Board.

Mayor Bujalski requested that future surveys include questions regarding the professional sports teams in the area; and that portions of future marketing campaigns focus on the availability of professional sporting opportunities if survey results show a benefit; whereupon, Mr. Bridges indicated that leveraging spring training or a baseball season may not require a traditional campaign; that staff utilizes non-advertising techniques at little cost, such as hosting journalists at sports event; and that the journalists may then write and present their experience to multiple publications.

In response to queries by Chair Eggers and Ms. Moore, Mr. Hayes, with input by Mr. Bridges, discussed the feasibility of partnerships with Visit Tampa Bay and indicated that international travel and regional efforts involving Visit Florida and U.S. Travel are potential areas of opportunity; that there is no definitive date regarding international border openings as related to COVID-19 restrictions; and that VSPC is committed from budgetary and market standpoints when international travel resumes. Mr. Bridges provided information regarding a planned November 5, 2021 direct flight from PIE to Toronto, Canada and indicated that marketing plans are in progress.

*Mayor Hibbard left the meeting at 11:16 AM.*

Addressing Mr. Hayes, Mr. Kimball requested that a comparison of our tax-generated revenues and subsequent spending as they relate to similar-sized Florida counties be conducted.

## **DEPARTMENT UPDATES**

Mr. Hayes referred to a financial document included in the agenda packet and noted that Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenues have surpassed 2019 and 2020 numbers; and that a combination of high occupancy and average daily rates have contributed to this result.

Mr. Hayes played a video which highlighted the redesigned VSPC website and summarized changes and enhancements; whereupon, he and Mr. Bridges shared that the agency received a Henry Award for the St. Pete Pier Brought to Life with Virtual Media Tour and a Silver Award for the Gulf to Bay Magazine at the 2021 Florida Governor's Conference.

Mr. Hayes announced that Mr. Bridges and Chief Operating Officer Tim Ramsberger have resigned; and that he would be working to fill both positions. Mr. Bridges provided brief remarks; whereupon, the members expressed appreciation for his significant contributions and efforts.

## **VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT**

Mr. Hayes provided information regarding the upcoming joint meeting of the Board of County Commissioners and TDC on November 4, scheduled for 9:30 AM at the Marriott Hotel, 12599 Roosevelt Boulevard, St. Petersburg and a 2:00 PM Annual Marketing meeting to be held at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium, 249 Windward Passage, Clearwater.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:43 AM.