

Tourist Development Council  
Elite Events Funding Program Workshop  
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 for an Elite Events Funding Program workshop on this date at 10:35 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.  
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry  
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  
Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney  
Jim Abernathy, Sr. Financial Management and Budget Analysis  
Sarah Rathke, Board Reporter  
Other interested individuals

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Eggers called the meeting to order at 10:35 AM.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

## **ELITE EVENTS FUNDING PROGRAM**

Mr. Hayes indicated that staff is seeking the Council's guidance regarding the key areas of the Elite Event Funding Program guidelines in order to improve the program; and that he anticipates that recommendations for potential changes based on today's discussion will be brought back to the Council at the December TDC meeting, with the final guidelines document prepared for January; whereupon, discussion ensued concerning the following and other topics pertaining to the guidelines and the program:

- Defining a "cultural heritage" event
- Funding categories and criteria
- Importance of the overall event impact vs. generated room nights
- Funding limitations
- History of the guidelines
- Current application process and review challenges
- Importance of supporting and creating an additional category for new events
- Defining "elite event"
- Limiting the number of events per city

Mayor Kriseman suggested to the Board that the definition of "cultural heritage" be changed, since it is an ambiguous phrase. He indicated that the "Cultural Heritage Event" category actually pertains to events which have an impact on the community, but may not fit under the definition of "cultural heritage". Mayor Bujalski echoed his statement and related that many events have a positive impact on the community and attract day trippers, but do not generate the room nights required under the category, and some members concurred.

Attorney Zas indicated that it is possible to reinstitute a sunset clause in the guidelines in order to free funding for other events; and that the guidelines could provide an "up to" funding amount in the recommendations, giving staff leverage to negotiate marketing benefits. He underscored that the goal of the program and the associated statute is to attract tourism; and that "room nights" requirement is a measure of that, noting that the "Cultural Heritage Event" category does not have that requirement; whereupon, discussion continued regarding the application review and evaluation process, funding criteria, and related matters, and Mr. Hayes provided input.

Chair Eggers and Mayor Bujalski emphasized the importance of spreading the funding to small city events, and Mr. Henderson recalled the history of the program and the Board's previous reasonings for the current guidelines.

Mr. Prather noted the challenges in the application and review process, indicating that the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg event organizers have expressed that it is

extensive and complicated. Mayor Kriseman concurred and provided details regarding the matter.

Mayor Bujalski suggested that the Elite Events Funding Committee be bypassed in the application review process in order to reduce the amount of redundancy experienced by event organizers; that subsequent to staff evaluation, the applications be reviewed directly by the TDC; and that staff be more involvement in the process. Mr. Hayes agreed, and he and other members provided input.

Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Abernathy provided various financial information, including funding the Elite Event program and beach nourishment, general reserves, and the budget process, and Chair Eggers requested that further details be provided at the next meeting regarding various fund reserves and related matters.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:41 AM.