

PINELLAS COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

October 17, 2018

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 in the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Assembly Room, 315 Court Street, Fifth Floor, Clearwater, Florida, on this date at 9:01 A.M. with the following members present:

Members Present

Kenneth T. Welch, BCC Chairman, Chair
Russ Kimball, Sheraton Sand Key Resort, Vice Chair
Doug Bevis, City of Oldsmar Mayor
George Cretekos, City of Clearwater Mayor
Charlie Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Joanne “Cookie” Kennedy, City of Indian Rocks Beach Mayor
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Anthony Satterfield, Alden Suites

Not Present

Eric Waltz, Sandpearl Resort

Others Present

David Downing, Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Tim Ramsberger, Chief Operating Officer
Leroy Bridges, Vice President, Digital and Communications
Teri Tuxhorn, Administrative Director
Liz McCann, Executive Administrative Assistant
Michael Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Other Interested Individuals
Jerry Gottlick, Board Reporter

Agenda

- I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL – Chair Kenneth T. Welch
- II. CHAIR COMMENTS
- III. APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – TDC Meeting & Work Session from June 20, 2018; TDC Meeting from July 18, 2018; and TDC Meeting from September 19, 2018
- IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS – Update Red Tide Cleanup Efforts – Kelli Hammer Levy, Division Director, Environmental Management

- V. COUNTY ATTORNEY REPORT – Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
- VI. ELITE EVENT FUNDING PROGRAM – Guideline Changes
- VII. PRESENTATIONS
 - A. Beach Re-nourishment – John Bishop, Coastal Management Coordinator
 - B. Central Europe – Marion S. Wolf, Director Central Europe
 - C. UK/Ireland/Scandinavia – Venessa Alexander, Director UK, Ireland & Scandinavia
- VIII. STAFF REPORTS
 - A. Digital and Communications – Leroy Bridges, Vice President
- IX. VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT – David Downing
 - A. Tourism Economics Snapshot – October
 - B. Pinellas County Bed Tax – August 2018
- X. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS
- XI. ADJOURNMENT

All documents and presentations provided to the Clerk’s Office have been made a part of the record.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Welch called the meeting to order at 9:01 A.M. At his request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Welch invited Mayor Bevis and Mr. Downing to the podium; whereupon, he presented Mayor Bevis with a plaque thanking him for his service on the Board. Following comments by the Chair, the mayor, and Mr. Downing, Chair Welch remarked that this is a year of transition, noting that Tim Bogott, Jen Carlisle, and Eric Waltz have also moved off the Board.

Thereupon, Chair Welch congratulated Messrs. Henderson and Kimball on their reappointments, and announced that new members Doreen Moore, Keith Overton, Charles Prather, and Mayor Julie Ward-Bujalski will be in attendance at next month’s meeting.

MINUTES OF THE JUNE 20, JULY 18, AND SEPTEMBER 19, 2018 MEETINGS – APPROVED

Upon motion by Councilman Gerdes, seconded by Mayor Kennedy and carried unanimously, the minutes of the June 20 and July 18, 2018 meetings were approved. Following brief discussion, Mayor Bevis moved, seconded by Mr. Satterfield and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the September 19, 2018 meeting be approved.

COUNTY ATTORNEY REPORT - NONE

Deviating from the agenda, Chair Welch requested that the County Attorney Report be heard at this time, and Attorney Zas stated that he had no information to present.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Environmental Management Division Director Kelli Levy provided the members with an update on the County's red tide cleanup efforts. Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, she reported that 981 tons of red tide debris have been removed as of today, at the cost of \$2.1 million through September 30; that while Hurricane Michael disrupted the red tide bloom near the Florida panhandle, it did not improve conditions in the Tampa Bay region, although conditions have recently improved; and that a respiratory forecast tool from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is expected to go live this Friday, providing the projected risk for red tide-related respiratory irritation every three hours.

Thereupon, Chair Welch and other Board members thanked her for her outstanding effort, and she responded to their queries. Mayor Kennedy announced that she would like to host an event for Ms. Levy on the beach once the red tide bloom has subsided, and Mr. Kimball offered to host it.

Later in the meeting, the Chair observed that a member of the public had not heard his earlier call for public comments; whereupon, Raymond Hess spoke about his surfing website and his search for funding. Following brief discussion, Chair Welch suggested that Mr. Hess speak with VSPC staff or make an appointment with his office.

ELITE FUNDING PROGRAM – GUIDELINE CHANGES

Attorney Zas indicated that four substantive changes are being proposed to the Elite Event Funding Program:

- Adding two new definitions.
- Creating a fourth event category for cultural heritage events.
- Removing a provision that barred applying for and receiving funding after three years.
- Streamlining the application approval process.

Attorney Zas indicated that cultural heritage events under the new category would need to generate at least 20,000 unique attendees and could receive a maximum funding amount of \$25,000; and that in contrast, the three existing event categories require anticipated room night figures as part of the application process. Later in the meeting and responding to query by Mayor Bevis, he clarified that Elite Event funding is never to be used for operating expenses.

Attorney Zas related that the final proposed change to the guidelines is intended to streamline the application process and reduce time spent reviewing event applications; whereupon, he explained that groups that have received consistent funding for five years and have met all of the requirements will not have to go through the normal approval process, but the application would go directly to the Board for approval.

Lengthy discussion ensued as to what type of cultural event might qualify for funding under the proposed change. Mayor Cretkos inquired whether funding could be used for religious events, such as the annual Epiphany event held in Tarpon Springs. Councilmember Gerdes responded that he felt the new category was aligned with the Board's mission; that not every type of event needs to be defined in the guidelines; and that he has faith in the credibility and legitimacy of staff when approving a funding application; whereupon, Attorney Zas noted that a key factor is that the event promote tourism; and that he would have to research the religious concern.

Councilmember Gerdes moved, seconded by Mr. Satterfield and carried unanimously, that the Elite Event Funding Program guideline changes be approved.

PRESENTATIONS

Beach Nourishment

Coastal Management Coordinator John Bishop conducted a PowerPoint presentation titled *Pinellas County Beach Management Program*. He provided background information regarding the program and discussed nourishment projects on Sand Key and Treasure Island beaches, including estimated project costs and funding sources, and showed photographs of several beaches. Referring to the Upham Beach stabilization project, he discussed the previous placement of geotextile groins and the newly placed rock groins; whereupon, he related that future nourishment projects are planned for Sand Key, Treasure Island, and Long Key, and discussed associated funding challenges.

Mr. Bishop related that relocating sea turtle nests has presented a significant challenge during beach nourishment projects; and that the projects might have to cease during turtle season if no safe areas are found to relocate the nests and turtles. He reported that a large increase in the number of turtle nests was observed; and that lighting issues at county beaches can cause turtles to become disorientated; whereupon, he presented a chart detailing the county's high sea turtle disorientation rates and a public outreach brochure providing tips for turtle protection.

Discussion ensued regarding the need to obtain easements to receive federal funding for Sand Key nourishment and public misunderstanding about the goal of the projects, and Mr. Bishop related that a communications plan is being developed. Responding to queries by Mr. Henderson and Mayor Cretkos, he discussed the seasonal migration of sand, associated dredging projects, and the effects of Hurricane Michael on the nourishment project areas.

European Campaigns

Venessa Alexander, Director for United Kingdom, Ireland, and Scandinavia, referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *European Snapshot* and described various advertising campaigns undertaken this year, including one with Expedia and one in partnership with Visit Florida and three other destinations, as well as a targeted media buy in the U.K. She played a YouTube video produced as part of the U.K. promotion, indicating that research shows that any promotion needs to mention that the beaches are only 90 minutes from Orlando, a major destination for Europeans.

Thereupon, Ms. Alexander recounted a promotional event recently held at a U.K. beach destination popular with families, and displayed related videos.

October 17, 2018

Marion S. Wolf, Central Europe Director, presented an update regarding marketing efforts in Central Europe. Noting the importance of face-to-face contact with consumers, she related that the agency participated in 13 trade shows last year. Referring to the PowerPoint presentation, she described a promotional activity using a mobile travel agency trailer that traveled throughout Germany, as well as a campaign conducted with Expedia Germany.

Ms. Wolf related that current statistics show that the majority of German consumers still prefer booking through a travel agency, with only 20 percent of the winter 2017-2018 sales revenue generated by online retailers, and referring to a graph, noted that the higher the vacation value, the lower the percentage of online bookings, which is likely due to a requirement that tour operators carry insurance to protect the consumer's investment. She stressed the importance of working with and educating travel agents, and described an initiative with tour operator America Unlimited featuring a German recording artist and TV celebrity; whereupon, she displayed the promotional video.

Ms. Wolf reported on the market climate, noting that economies are currently stable; that the labor market is healthy, with income expectations on the rise; that there is low unemployment; and that consumer confidence is up. She indicated that several factors have negatively affected tourism to the United States and Florida, primarily the exchange rate; however, the outlook for 2019 is favorable.

Ms. Alexander referred to the U.K.'s pending exit from the European Union (EU), also known as Brexit, and discussed the uncertainty of whether an agreement will be negotiated with the EU before the March 29 deadline, noting that it could result in the restriction of movement and trade. She indicated that the Pound does not compare favorably with the U.S. Dollar or the Euro, but the majority of the tour operators have reported that business is up this year; whereupon, she opined that the British seem to be cutting back rather than cancelling, and trying to get their travel in prior to the Brexit deadline.

Mr. Downing indicated that Delta Airlines will begin nonstop service from Amsterdam to Tampa in May 2019, and Ms. Alexander noted that Norwegian Air will begin direct service from London in October, opining that the increased service may cause British Airways to be more competitive in their pricing. Mr. Downing commented on the growth of Norwegian Air, and Ms. Wolf expressed enthusiasm with regard to the new Amsterdam service.

Responding to queries by Mr. Satterfield, Ms. Alexander and Wolf provided information pertaining to the average length of stay for travelers from their respective markets and online bookings.

STAFF REPORTS – NONE

Mr. Downing indicated that, due to time constraints, Mr. Bridges would not be presenting his report. He thanked Mr. Bridges for his work with regard to the red tide issue, indicating that an update will be presented after it has passed.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT

Mr. Downing referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tourism Economics Snapshot, October TDC Meeting*, and reviewed the market comparison and year-to-date data for rooms sold, average daily rate, and revenue per available room, noting that destinations to the south were affected by the red tide earlier than the St. Pete/Clearwater area. He reported that revenue from the Tourist Development Tax was up 13.96 percent in August; that the year-to-date amount is \$56.5 million; and that it could reach \$60 million for the fiscal year, indicating \$1 billion of hotel room sales for the first time ever.

Mr. Downing provided additional comments, as follows:

- Thanked Messrs. Henderson and Kimball for applying for reappointment and agreeing to serve for another four years, and staff for their continued efforts.
- Noted that plaques will be mailed to Messrs. Bogott and Waltz and Ms. Carlisle.
- Announced that there will be no regular TDC meeting in December; however, the annual marketing meeting will be held at 3:00 P.M. on December 12 at the Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach.
- Expressed gratitude and best wishes to retiring County Administrator Mark Woodard.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Mr. Kimball announced that he will hold a reception honoring Mr. Woodard on October 25 at the Sheraton Sand Key and encouraged all interested parties to attend.

Mr. Satterfield suggested that Mses. Alexander and Wolf remain an extra day during their next visit to meet with travel industry leaders, and Mr. Downing concurred.

October 17, 2018

Mayor Bevis expressed his thanks to everyone, noting that serving on the TDC has been a great experience and given him an understanding of how the industry works; whereupon, he related a recent experience assisting in the rescue of a manatee trapped in an Oldsmar lake.

Mayor Cretekos noted that the Clearwater Jazz Holiday Elite Event begins on Thursday, October 18.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 A.M.