

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
May 15, 2024 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 9:09 AM in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida.

Present

Kathleen Peters, Chair, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chair
David Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc. (appeared virtually)
Chuck Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Bruce Rector, City of Clearwater Mayor
Brian Scott, County Commissioner (non-voting)
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Phil Henderson, Jr., Starlite Cruises
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry

Others Present

Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Craig Campbell, Community and Brand Engagement Director, VSPC
Lisa Dozois, Film Commissioner, VSPC
Andrea Gabel, Latin America Senior Sales Manager, VSPC
Steve Grimes, Chief Marketing Officer, VSPC
Brian Hilterbrandt, Sales Manager, VSPC
Eddie Kirsch, Director of Digital and Data, VSPC
Rosemarie Payne, Leisure Travel Director, VSPC
Caleb Peterson, Senior Business Development Manager, VSPC
Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Tammy Burgess, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Peters called the meeting to order at 9:09 AM. At the Chair's request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

At the request of Chair Peters, Mr. Smith made a motion to allow Ms. Moore to participate virtually. The motion was seconded by Mayor Gattis and carried unanimously.

CHAIR COMMENTS

None.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES

Mayor Gattis made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 17, 2024, meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Prather and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No one appeared upon the Chair's call for public comment.

PRESENTATIONS

Appreciation for Mayor Julie Ward Bujalski

Chair Peters indicated that since Mayor Bujalski is unable to attend today's meeting, her award will be delivered.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed metrics for March 2024, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections, hotel and vacation rental occupancy, average daily rates (ADR), and revenue per available room (RevPAR); whereupon, he presented a comparison of tourists who visit in the summer versus the fall and provided historical information related to RevPAR and occupancy during the Easter weekend time period.

Mr. Kirsch, with input by Mr. Lowack, responded to queries by the members and indicated that while safety did not rank as one of the most liked aspects of the destination among summer tourists, it is not indicative of them feeling unsafe; and that approximately one in

five summer tourists spend a week or more in-market, while one in four do so during the fall.

In response to comments by Mr. Williams, Ms. Moore provided input regarding the difficulty with forecasting the growth of vacation rentals; whereupon, Mr. Williams suggested that staff review the growth of vacation rentals over the past five years, noting that it may greatly influence VSPC's messaging and advertising if the market continues to grow at the same rate.

In response to comments and a query by Chair Peters, Mr. Kirsch discussed visitors' interest in entertainment, noting that it fluctuates throughout the year based on the availability of events and the weather.

Fiscal Year (FY) 25 Budget

Mr. Lowack introduced the item, indicated that VSPC submitted a flat budget to the County Administrator, and thanked everyone involved in the process.

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Lowack discussed VSPC's mission, vision, pillars for success, and organizational chart, indicating that the newly hired Vice President of Business Development and two other candidates chosen to fill vacant positions will be starting on Monday; and that two positions remain unfilled; whereupon, he provided additional details regarding the vacant positions. Mr. Lowack thanked Mr. Williams for the complimentary remarks regarding efforts to successfully recruit and fill long-term vacancies and expressed his appreciation for the support he received during the recruitment process.

Mr. Lowack presented VSPC's organization-wide key performance indicators (KPIs) and targeted goals; whereupon, in response to comments by Commissioner Scott, Mr. Lowack clarified that the goal for visitor sales tax reflects a three percent increase over FY 2023 and does not consider ADR or room nights.

Referring to a document titled *Tourist Development Council FY 2025 Budget*, Mr. Lowack related that the total FY 2025 budget request is for \$41,751,720.00 and provided details regarding its categories; whereupon, he noted that the Promotional Expenses category represents the bulk of the budget.

Mr. Lowack briefly discussed the outlook for travel and highlighted the following details:

- Effects of the high costs of travel
- Increased competition due to more post-pandemic travel options
- Continued prioritization of travel by consumers

- Timeline for the return of international travel and spending to pre-pandemic levels

1. Marketing

Mr. Grimes discussed the Marketing Department's purpose and functions, highlighting that it is divided into three groups: Advertising and Promotions, Data and Digital Platforms, and Communications and Public Relations; whereupon, he provided information regarding the following topics:

- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
- Priorities
- Budget Details

Responding to comments and queries by Mr. Prather, Mr. Grimes provided clarifying comments regarding traditional and digital advertising efforts; whereupon, Mr. Smith provided brief comments regarding the return on investment for digital advertising and noted an opportunity relating to the number of Florida residents who lack knowledge of the destination's location.

2. Business Development

Mr. Lowack highlighted that the departments within Business Development include Global Travel, Meetings and Conferences, the Sports Commission, and the Film Commission. Thereupon, he presented information regarding the departments' Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Global Travel (Latin America)

Ms. Gabel presented an overview of the Department and provided information regarding the following topics:

- FY 2022-2023 KPI Accomplishments
- Priorities
- Budget Details

Responding to queries by Commissioner Scott, Ms. Gabel, with input by Mr. Lowack, discussed a contracted full-time representative in Brazil and efforts to return to pre-pandemic levels of collaboration with VISIT FLORIDA, Visit Tampa Bay, Brand USA, and other Florida destination marketing organizations. In response to queries by Mr. Williams, Ms. Gabel confirmed that local hotels are providing international wholesale rates, allotments, and the inventory necessary to make an impact; whereupon, she noted that offering promotional rates during Latin America's travel season of December through January would be helpful.

Global Travel (United States, Canada, and Europe)

Ms. Payne discussed the Department's vision and provided information regarding the following topics:

- Priorities
- Budget Details

In response to comments and queries by Messrs. Prather and Smith and Mayor Rector, Ms. Payne discussed marketing strategy for travelers from Asia and potential reasons for less attendance by hoteliers at IPW. She indicated that a new Delta flight from Amsterdam may provide more opportunities for travel from eastern and western European cities to the Tampa Bay area.

Meetings and Conferences

Mr. Hilterbrandt related that the Department has been fully staffed since March and provided information regarding the following topics:

- FY 2024 Accomplishments
- Priorities
- Budget Details

In response to queries by Mr. Prather, Mr. Lowack, with input by Mr. Hilterbrandt, indicated that staff has discretion when offering monetary incentives via VSPC's incentive program for meetings and conferences; that the full value of services offered by VSPC is weighed when determining the potential utilization of monetary incentives; and that while incentive program funding has not been exhausted in the past, additional funds could be added if needed; whereupon, Mr. Hilterbrandt provided clarifying comments regarding the "Other" category line items included in the budget.

Responding to comments and queries by the members, Mr. Hilterbrandt, with input by Mr. Lowack, discussed preparation conducted by staff to identify potential business at trade shows and available meeting and conference space in the county; whereupon, Mr. Gerdes provided input regarding potential meeting space at the future Tampa Bay Rays site.

Film Commission

Ms. Dozois presented information regarding the following topics:

- Priorities
- Accomplishments

- Budget Details

Following comments and queries by Mr. Williams, a brief discussion ensued regarding the lack of a film incentive program at the state level, the County's film incentive program, and other topics.

Deviating from the agenda, Chair Peters indicated that several TDC members will be leaving the meeting early; and that action needs to be taken regarding the budget while a quorum exists.

In response to queries by Mayor Gattis, Mr. Lowack provided information regarding the Elite Event Funding Program, noting that the Tourist Development Plan has not been amended to allow for more than \$2 million in funding; and that if additional funds were necessary, marketing funds would be used to supplement the Program funding; whereupon, Chair Peters indicated that additional funds could also be secured through a budget amendment.

In response to a query by Chair Peters, Mr. Lowack related that he is seeking a recommendation to submit VSPC's budget to the BCC; whereupon, Mr. Gerdes made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Williams. Mr. Smith suggested that the motion include a strong recommendation for approval of the \$6 million decision package. Mr. Gerdes confirmed that his motion includes Mr. Smith's suggestion. Upon the Chair's call for a vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Gattis and Commissioner Scott left the meeting at 11:11 AM and 11:12 AM, respectively.

Sports Commission

Mr. Peterson presented information regarding the following topics:

- Priorities
- Budget Details

3. Community Engagement

Ms. Diaz provided information regarding Brand Activations and Community Relations within the area of Community Engagement and discussed its Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Mayor Rector left the meeting at 11:19 AM.

Brand Activations

Ms. Diaz, with input from Mr. Campbell, provided information regarding the following topics:

- Priorities
- Budget Details

Mr. Campbell acknowledged a previous suggestion made by Mr. Smith regarding the utilization of a concert stage as a branded amenity and provided a brief update related to its successful implementation and plans for future use; whereupon, he responded to queries by Mr. Williams regarding the concert stage which was utilized and recruitment for the Brand Ambassador program.

Community Relations

Ms. Diaz provided information regarding the following topics:

- Priorities
- Budget Details

Responding to a query by Mr. Smith, Ms. Diaz indicated that while VSPC has not engaged with the Pinellas Chapter of the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association (FRLA) regarding tourism education initiatives, staff has a meeting scheduled with FRLA on Friday to discuss the support of frontline hospitality workers.

4. Decision Packages

Mr. Lowack reviewed the decision packages, which include a \$6 million increase for advertising, a request to carry over \$350,000.00 in non-recurring costs for stadium consulting services from FY 2024 to FY 2025, and \$162,000.00 for a business development sales initiative; whereupon, in response to queries by Mr. Prather, Mr. Lowack indicated that unspent budgeted operating funds would be transferred to operating reserves.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Mr. Lowack introduced newly hired VSPC Marketing Project Manager Jessica Morrow and provided the following updates:

- He recently attended IPW and will provide an update at the July TDC meeting.

- The application windows for the Elite Events Funding Program and the Capital Projects Funding Program close on May 17 and May 31, respectively.
- Joint TDC/BCC meeting next steps will be discussed at the July TDC meeting.
- The “Besties” award ceremony will be held on May 16.
- There will not be a TDC meeting in June.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Ms. Moore provided brief comments regarding the significance of the one-on-one meetings that Mr. Lowack conducts with the members.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Peters adjourned the meeting at 11:38 AM.