

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
April 19, 2023 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 9:00 AM in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida.

Present

Janet C. Long, Chair, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chair
Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Brian Aungst, Sr., City of Clearwater Mayor
Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
Phil Henderson, Jr., Starlite Cruises
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort

Not Present

Melinda Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Others Present

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Katie Bridges, Senior Advertising Manager, VSPC
Craig Campbell, Community and Brand Engagement Director, VSPC
Lisa Dozois, Film Commissioner, VSPC
Eddie Kirsch, Digital Producer, VSPC
Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Katie Poviones, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Long called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Long provided information regarding her recent trip to London as part of a delegation from Tampa Bay, discussing takeaways from conversations with representatives from Virgin Atlantic and JPMorgan Chase and a presentation on advertising in London to promote Tampa Bay, with input from Mayor Aungst.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES

Mr. Smith made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Kimball and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the March 29, 2023, meeting be approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – NONE

OUTSIDE PRESENTATIONS

Creative Pinellas Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Creative Pinellas Reporting on Good News in the Arts First Quarter Update*, Creative Pinellas Chief Executive Officer Barbara St. Clair discussed notable updates on the organization's various programs and efforts, including the following:

- Murals at the Lealman Community Redevelopment Agency, St. Pete/Clearwater International Airport, and Pinellas Trail
- Signal Box Project along the Pinellas Trail
- Beyond the Walls – Art in Hotels program
- Emerging and Professional Artist Grants
- Improvements to the annual Pinellas County Arts & Culture Guide
- Soft launch for the Arts Navigator

Thereupon, Ms. St. Clair indicated that a Request for Proposal was advertised on March 29 for the County's Cultural Plan; that the posting will close on May 9 and be reviewed by VSPC, County Administration, Creative Pinellas, and a leader from the arts community; and that data gathering will begin in the third quarter of 2023 prior to the presentation of the first status report to the TDC at the end of the fiscal year; whereupon, she provided information regarding upcoming exhibits and invited the members to the 2023 Emerging Artist Exhibition Opening Reception on May 4 from 6 to 8 PM.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Upcoming Advertising/Marketing Programs

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *FY 2023 April – September Media Plan*, Ms. Bridges presented VSPC's media plan for the remainder of the fiscal year, discussing marketing objectives, strategies, geographic markets, and the demographics and media consumption of target audiences. She provided information regarding marketing partnerships and activations, an arts and culture co-op program in collaboration with Creative Pinellas, creative extensions, and new and returning tactics in broadcast, out-of-home, and print media; whereupon, she presented an award given to VSPC by the American Marketing Association (AMA) Tampa Bay to commemorate the organization's induction to the AMA Tampa Bay Hall of Fame in honor of VSPC's creative and strategic marketing strategies to enhance the County's economy through tourism.

Responding to queries by the members, Ms. Bridges provided clarifying comments and Mr. Hayes indicated that VSPC is working with a local public relations firm to address travel advisories for the LGBTQ community by ensuring that messaging promotes the destination's inclusivity. Thereupon, Mr. Kirsch introduced Miles Partnership Account Director Scott Bacon and remarked on the value of VSPC's partnership with the company.

Mr. Bacon referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *FY 22-23 Digital Media Plan Spring/Summer* and reviewed the performance of ad buys, search engine marketing, Native and Rich media, and the overall winter media. He discussed digital strategy and approaches and highlighted that concerning trends in hotel and short-term rental performance, seasonal visitation, and travel prices must be monitored; that it is important to utilize tools that are working efficiently while continuing to prioritize innovation; and that digital tactics will largely focus on awareness, engagement, and conversion; whereupon, he provided information regarding the spring/summer plan, including always-on channels and new ad units for the summer.

Mr. Bacon presented a summary of the budget for digital media and emphasized that there is approximately \$105,000 in unallocated funds for any unique opportunities or concerns that may arise; and that digital media contributed over \$500,000 in negotiated added value over the course of the year.

Film Commission Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Film Commission Update*, Ms. Dozois discussed production metrics for Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 and the Department's Business Development Marketing/cash rebate program. She highlighted that 92 film projects have been completed in the County thus far in FY 23 which has resulted in 1,113 local hires,

1,687 room nights, and a local spend of over \$4.5 million; that a variety of projects aside from films are shot in Pinellas County, including television shows, documentaries, and music videos; that the producers of 6 feature films, 7 made-for-television films, and one travel show have taken advantage of the cash rebate program in FY 23; and that she will be meeting with Mr. Hayes and stakeholders of the cash rebate program soon to discuss potential improvements to the program.

Ms. Dozois provided information regarding the upcoming Sunscreen Film Festival and next steps for the Film Commission, indicating that the Department will be prioritizing updating the crew and location database as a marketing tool for the cash rebate program; and that the Film Commission will be leading filmmakers visiting for the Festival on a tour of various south county filming locations; whereupon, she invited the members to the Sunscreen Film Festival taking place April 27 through 30 at the AMC Sundial 12 in St. Petersburg. In response to queries by the members, Ms. Dozois discussed connecting filmmakers with hoteliers and meeting venues prior to their arrival and facilitating tours of both north and south county for visiting filmmakers.

National Travel & Tourism Week Activities/Elite Event Program Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Community & Brand Engagement FY23 Update*, Mr. Campbell related that National Travel & Tourism Week is an annual tradition for the U.S. travel community where travel and tourism professionals unite nationwide to celebrate the value of travel to the economy, business, and personal well-being. He provided an overview of the schedule of events planned for May 7 through 13 and noted that participants of the planned activities include VSPC and local partners, residents, and visitors.

Thereupon, Mr. Campbell provided an update on the Elite Event program, indicating that the application window was open March 3 through 31; that 47 event organizers attended a public information webinar held on March 6; that the program was promoted to stakeholders via a variety of communications methods; and that 47 applications were submitted for a total request of \$2.6 million, which is a significant increase from last year's record numbers. He explained that the applications will now be reviewed by a committee of VSPC staff and external partners; and that funding recommendations will be presented at the May 17 TDC meeting; whereupon, Mayor Bujalski thanked Mr. Campbell and his team for their attendance at the recently held Dunedin Highland Games and Festival, which was funded by the Elite Events program.

Department Reports

The item was not addressed.

VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT

Destination Metrics

Mr. Hayes referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Pinellas County Tourist Development Council Meeting* and reviewed the February 2023 statistical data regarding tourist development tax (TDT) collections, including hotel and vacation rental occupancy, average daily rates (ADR), and visitor profile metrics. He highlighted that TDT collections increased by 11% from the same time in 2022 due to increased occupancy and ADR; that significant differences in the visitor profile include increased daily spend, an almost doubled decision to arrival time, a decrease in average income, and an improved media recall of VSPC advertisements from in-market visitors; and that 17% of tourists were first-time visitors to the destination, which is significant due to the destination's high repeat visitor percentage.

During discussion, Mr. Hayes congratulated VSPC staff and partners from Miles Partnership and BVK for the recognition from the AMA and introduced a new data set which tracks the number of Airbnb and VRBO listings in Pinellas County; whereupon, Mayor Bujalski, Councilmember Gerdes, and Mr. Smith remarked on the value of the data and the usefulness of comparing the data to hotel occupancy.

Tallahassee Update

Mr. Hayes indicated that there is still no companion bill in the Senate for House Bill 7053; that the bill is currently in the House Ways & Means Committee and has yet to be put on the agenda to be scheduled for hearing; and that staff will remain diligent and inform the members of any updates they receive regarding the proposed legislation.

General Tourism Update

Mr. Hayes discussed National Travel & Tourism Week celebrations and thanked Chair Long for representing the Board during her trip to London. He related that VSPC is striving to communicate the right message and target the appropriate markets to address market softening; and that messaging regarding issues like red tide and sargassum seaweed is being distributed; whereupon, he provided an update on employment vacancies at VSPC which are in various stages of being filled and noted that the number of applicants for positions has recently increased.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Ms. Moore remarked on the value of VSPC returning to an old practice of offering hospitality partners the opportunity to tour the different communities throughout Pinellas

County for marketing purposes; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding comments made by a representative of Virgin Atlantic and the importance of Tampa Bay leaders and governments cooperating and demonstrating a united regional effort to promote tourism and leisure travel.

Thereupon, Mr. Hayes provided clarifying comments in response to concerns expressed by Mr. Henderson regarding the almost doubled decision to arrival time shown in the visitor profile metrics.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:12 AM.