

**Tourist Development Council  
Pinellas County  
February 15, 2023**

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 9:03 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  
Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor  
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember  
Frank Hibbard, City of Clearwater Mayor  
Phil Henderson, Jr., Starlite Cruises  
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.  
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry  
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort

**Not Present**

Melinda Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner  
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

**Others Present**

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO  
Katie Bridges, Senior Advertising Manager  
Craig Campbell, Sports and Events Interim Director, Community and Brand Engagement Director  
Brian Lowack, Intergovernmental Liaison  
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 9:03 AM.

## **CHAIR COMMENTS – NONE**

## **APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES**

Mayor Hibbard made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Smith and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the December 21, 2022, and January 18, 2023, meetings be approved.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS – NONE**

## **INDUSTRY PRESENTATION**

### Tampa International Airport Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tampa International Airport Update*, Airport Executive Vice President Chris Minner provided information and statistical data regarding Tampa International Airport (TPA) operations, emphasizing a regional economic impact of \$14.4 billion in 2022. He discussed the TPA Ambassador Program and provided an update on market and passenger traffic, including new airlines and nonstop service locations. He highlighted the following information:

- 22% of TPA's passengers are departing from or arriving to Pinellas County.
- While passenger traffic in 2022 surpassed metrics from 2021, it was still slightly below the recorded data for 2019.
- Almost 20 new nonstop destinations have been added at TPA, which now serves more markets than prior to the pandemic.
- TPA's largest unserved markets are located in Amsterdam, internationally, and domestically in California.
- In October of 2022, TPA staff met with representatives of 37 airlines at the Routes World Conference to pitch individual route opportunities to TPA and the Tampa Bay area, and approximately half of them reached out for a follow-up meeting.

Mr. Minner provided information regarding growth and modernization at TPA and elaborated on recent accolades and progress towards completion of the airport's master plan, including new offerings such as Blue Express Curbsides and an online booking system for parking; whereupon, he presented a digital tour of Airside D, a fifth terminal, which is currently under construction and is expected to be completed in 2027.

In response to queries by the members, Mr. Minner provided clarifying comments, with input from Mr. Hayes, regarding the potential for new lounge and security offerings, the air service incentive program to attract new airlines, benefits of the new online parking system, and the impact of increased passenger traffic on local infrastructure.

### Legislative Update

Mr. Lowack referred to a document titled *CVB 2023* and discussed the following Florida House and Senate bills that could impact the tourism industry:

- SB 92 – Vacation Rentals
- HB 105 – Preemption of the Regulation of Vacation Rentals
- SB 714 – Vacation Rentals
- HB 309 & SB 640 – Tourist Development Taxes
- HB 251 – Entertainment Industry Tax Credit Program
- SB 476 – Florida First Production Partnership Pilot Program

Mr. Lowack noted that the Governor recently released his recommended budget that included \$50 million for beach renourishment plus an additional \$106 million for counties impacted by hurricanes Nicole and Ian, \$5 million for cultural and museum grants, and a 100% increase in funding for VISIT FLORIDA with a \$100 million allocation. Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Lowack provided clarifying comments regarding the bills, and Mr. Prather remarked that the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association (FRLA) will soon be reviewing bills that could impact the tourism industry in anticipation of FRLA's Tourism Day held in Tallahassee in March.

## **DEPARTMENT UPDATES**

### Advertising Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *“Warm Up to Win” Integrated Activation Recap*, Ms. Bridges provided information regarding the activation that took place in New York. She discussed the campaign's goals and strategies, relating that VSPC partnered with TradeWinds Island Resorts for a sweepstakes to offer one individual five years of free trips to TradeWinds on St. Pete Beach; and that the campaign's messaging and sweepstakes were promoted via gas station screens, electric vehicle charging stations, a booth at the New York Travel and Adventure Show in January, and an experiential pop-up event in New York City on January 31 in tandem with National Plan for Vacation Day.

Ms. Bridges presented the campaign's results and next steps, highlighting that the activation received 358 earned media placements, over 216.2 million public relations impressions, and 5.2 million paid media impressions; whereupon, in response to queries

by the members, she, with input from Mr. Hayes, provided clarifying comments relating to the update and indicated that the campaign had an overall cost of approximately \$300,000.

### Community & Brand Engagement Update

Deviating from the agenda, Mr. Campbell referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Community & Brand Engagement FY23 Update* and discussed the Department's mission, assets, engagement with target audiences, support of other VSPC departments, and upcoming events. He emphasized that a new campaign conveying the value of tourism to locals will launch at the Localtopia event this weekend; and that the campaign's messaging utilizes data provided by BVK to demonstrate the positive impacts of tourism on the local economy; whereupon, he recognized the efforts of staff to support the Department's participation in various events, and Mr. Hayes concurred.

Mayor Bujalski suggested that VSPC could create branded signage to display on buildings throughout the county that were funded by tourist development tax (TDT) dollars to stress the value of tourism to locals, and Mayor Hibbard and Mr. Hayes agreed.

### Elite Event Grant Program Update

Referring to the above-referenced PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Campbell indicated that staff does not recommend any changes to the Elite Event Funding Guidelines; and that there are a few areas of the guidelines that staff will clarify for applicants this year, including some definitions, registration requirements with the State, and deadlines for post-event documentation. He provided an overview of the program timeline, relating that a public information meeting will be scheduled; that the application window opening on March 3 and closing on March 31 is a month earlier than usual to give staff more time to formulate deal terms; and that applications will be evaluated by staff in April and May prior to the TDC and BCC's review in May and June/July, respectively.

In response to queries by the members, Mr. Campbell, with input from Mr. Hayes and Attorney Zas, provided clarifying comments regarding application scoring and explained that VSPC will communicate about the modified application timeline through an industry update and via communications with past applicants and municipalities.

Deviating from the agenda, Mr. Campbell referred to the PowerPoint and provided an update on sports and events, indicating that VSPC recently hosted a community event in partnership with the Philadelphia Union soccer club; and that the event featured a soccer clinic led by four members of the club and attended by 120 youth soccer players.

## Department Reports

The item was not addressed.

## **VSPC PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT**

### Destination Metrics

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Pinellas County Tourist Development Council Meeting*, Mr. Hayes reviewed the December 2022 statistical data regarding TDT collections, including hotel and vacation rental occupancy and average daily rates (ADR). He related that occupancy in December decreased by 3.3% for hotels and by 1% for vacation rentals from the same time in 2021; whereupon, Messrs. Prather, Kimball, and Smith provided input regarding potential reasons for lower hotel occupancy in December, including particularly cold weather, hoteliers not hosting meetings and conventions, and airline travel issues.

In response to queries by Mr. Henderson, Mr. Hayes provided clarifying comments regarding the data utilized for destination metrics. He explained that ADR remains above levels seen between 2019 and 2021; that there has been a double-digit increase in mid-week business, which is an indication of the return of meetings and conferences, as well as business travel; that VSPC is hosting a webinar on March 2 to encourage vacation rental companies to provide occupancy and ADR data to better inform destination metrics; and that he will be distributing the visitor profile report for December as soon as he receives it from Destination Analysts.

Thereupon, discussion ensued regarding the challenge of comparing TDT collections by city when large vacation rental companies fail to provide the locations of their properties. Chair Long suggested that VSPC could work with the Tax Collector's Office to acquire that information.

### Joint Meeting Agenda

Mr. Hayes related that the joint TDC-BCC meeting will take place at the Sheraton Sand Key Resort on February 28 from 9 to 11 AM; that agenda items for the meeting include a presentation regarding the future of amateur sports facilities in the county and a discussion about the capital program; and that the members may bring up any topics they want to discuss with the BCC at the meeting; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding potential capital program funding requests and the possibility of capital funding for tourism-related transportation.

March 15, 2023 meeting rescheduled to March 29, 2023

In response to a query by Mr. Henderson, Mr. Hayes provided clarifying comments regarding the TDC's budget meeting in May and related that the March meeting was rescheduled so as not to conflict with Tourism Day; whereupon, the members discussed their plans for the event.

**BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS – NONE**

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:18 AM.