

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
October 18, 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 9:01 AM in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida.

Present

Janet 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
David Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
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
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Others Present

Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Katie Bridges, Senior Advertising Manager, VSPC
Andrea Gabel, Latin America Senior Sales Manager, VSPC
Eddie Kirsch, Digital Producer, VSPC
Michael Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Tammy Burgess, Board Reporter
Other interested individuals

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Long called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES

Mayor Gattis made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Williams and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the August 16, 2023, meeting be approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – NONE

INDUSTRY PRESENTATION

Rays Update

Referring to a document titled *New Stadium Project – Outline of Future Project Agreements*, County Administrator Barry Burton provided an update regarding the development of the Tampa Bay Rays stadium site and reviewed the non-binding term sheet, indicating that the County will contribute \$312.5 million in Tourist Development Tax (TDT) funds; that the County will receive a \$25 million refund over 25 years; and that the Rays are responsible for any cost overruns which exceed the project's proposed \$1.3 billion budget.

In response to queries by the members, Mr. Burton, with input from Mr. Gerdes, provided clarifying comments and discussed property taxes for the site, stadium capacity, a construction timeline, parking, naming rights, and other topics. Mr. Burton related that the County is not financially responsible for any infrastructure costs; that non-game day events will have a significant impact on tourism; and that VSPC will have signage and a physical presence at the new stadium, and discussion ensued.

The members thanked Mr. Burton and staff for their hard work on keeping the Rays in Pinellas County.

Allegiant Airlines

St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport (PIE) Director Tom Jewsbury introduced Allegiant Airlines' Executive Vice-President and Chief Marketing Officer, Scott DeAngelo and commented on the Airline's economic impacts and importance to the community; whereupon, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. DeAngelo provided information regarding the Airline's unique business model, low competition for its routes, the state of the airline industry, strategic initiatives, performance at PIE, Allegiant's brand essence, partnerships and products, the Allegiant FlyClub, and the Allways Rewards Visa.

In response to queries by the members, Mr. DeAngelo indicated that new airplanes will allow for more new routes and greater capacity on existing routes; that Allegiant would be interested in partnering with Creative Pinellas for sponsorship, as the Airline is very committed to supporting the arts; that call center and customer care representatives are trained on helping passengers book hotel reservations in the area when scheduling a flight; and that the Airline will explore advertising at the existing Tampa Bay Rays ballpark,

as well as the team's new stadium; whereupon, Mr. Jewsbury indicated that Allegiant is always looking for opportunities to market with the local community.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Global Travel – Recap Brazil Sales Mission

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Brazil Sales Mission August 21 – 25, 2023*, Ms. Gabel provided information regarding the sales mission, including that she was joined by Mr. Lowack and Chair Long on visits to Sao Paulo, Curitiba, and Rio de Janeiro. She discussed tour operator meetings, trade media digital coverage, and destination presentations to travel advisors that took place during the mission and related that the mission's objectives were to maintain and create new relationships within the trade industry, continue to develop destination packages with tour operators, and maintain and elevate brand relevance; and that one-on-one, in-person education training sessions with tour operators are vital for promoting the destination; whereupon, Mr. Lowack thanked Ms. Gabel and remarked on VSPC's efforts to market the destination around the world.

Ad Effectiveness Survey

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Visit St. Pete/Clearwater Ad Effectiveness Study Fall/Winter 2022-2023*, Destination Analysts' Research Director, Taylor Trowbridge provided information regarding the return on investment, economic impact, and key metrics of VSPC's fall/winter ad campaign, highlighting that 4,400 surveys were conducted within 14 feeder markets; that direct spending from visitors who were exposed to the ads amounted to approximately \$165 million; that with the addition of indirect and induced spending, the total economic impact of the campaign totaled just over \$270 million; and that the overall return on investment (ROI) was \$41.20 in economic impact for the destination per dollar spent on the campaign; whereupon, in response to a query by Mr. Henderson, he provided clarifying comments and pointed out that a very conservative model was utilized to calculate the ROI.

Marketing Plan

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *FY 2024 Media Plan*, Mr. Kirsch provided information regarding the plan's marketing strategies and objectives, integrated markets, leisure core audiences, digital media tactics and plan highlights, noting that the plan includes approximately \$500,000.00 in negotiated added value and savings, with three new partners and 10 new tactics. Thereupon, Ms. Bridges discussed broadcast media, out-of-home and print media, marketing partnerships and activations, and influencer and international marketing.

In response to comments and queries by Mayor Bujalski, Ms. Bridges indicated that staff would continue to explore partnering with *Southern Living* and *Coastal Living* magazines; and that the current agreement with the Toronto Blue Jays focuses more on advertising through television rather than in-person stadium assets; whereupon, Mr. Prather highlighted the aforementioned advertising ROI, noting that staff invested the marketing dollars well.

Destination Metrics

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Pinellas County Tourist Development Meeting*, Mr. Kirsch reviewed the results of a monthly tracking survey of traveler sentiment, provided information regarding local hotels that have been proposed or are under construction, and discussed destination metrics for St. Pete/Clearwater in comparison to other Florida vacation destinations, including occupancy, average daily rates (ADR), and revenue per available room (RevPAR); whereupon, he reviewed the August 2023 statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of TDT collections, hotel and vacation rental occupancy, ADR, RevPAR, and the July 2023 visitor profile metrics.

In response to comments and queries by the members, Mr. Kirsch discussed capitalizing on events through sales and marketing strategies, the impact of available meeting and conference space on room night sales in Pinellas County versus Hillsborough County, and international marketing, indicating that staff has not yet discussed how to address increased international travel from the United States; whereupon, Mr. Lowack related that a request will be brought forth for additional funds focusing on international markets, and Chair Long indicated that a budget amendment may be appropriate.

Beach Renourishment

Mr. Lowack provided an update on the current beach renourishment projects, which include Sunset Beach, Pass-a-Grille Beach, Belleair Beach, and Upham Beach, indicating that the first project is scheduled to be completed by October 28, and the last project is planned to be completed by November 19; that the next beach scheduled for renourishment is Indian Rocks Beach; and that Pinellas County Public Works has created a website that is updated daily with information regarding current renourishment projects, beach access and road closures, and upcoming projects, which can be accessed from Pinellas County's main website and is linked on VSPC's website.

Mr. Lowack stressed the importance of the public staying off the newly installed dunes to prevent the destruction of the dunes before vegetation can be planted; whereupon, he indicated that signage from VSPC's *From Visitors with Love* campaign will be installed at beach access points as a reminder that visitors generating TDT via their hotel and

vacation rental stays are paying for beach renourishment. Mayor Gattis suggested that an increased presence by the Pinellas County Sheriff's Department may deter citizens from trespassing on the dunes.

In response to a query by Mr. Williams, Mr. Lowack provided an update on discussions with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and reviewed proposed legislation to address beach renourishment at the federal level; whereupon, he pointed out that a delegation of County employees will be traveling to Washington, D.C., to speak regarding concerns.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Deviating from the agenda, Chair Long provided comments regarding a document she previously provided to the members regarding national best practices for destination marketing organizations.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

The members congratulated Mr. Lowack on his permanent appointment as the VSPC President and CEO; whereupon, Mr. Lowack provided information regarding the process for filling several senior level positions.

New Business

Mr. Lowack indicated that he will continue to look for ways to improve the organization; and that he has assembled a marketing committee consisting of 10 individuals from different segments of the county related to tourism, economic development, leadership, and marketing, to receive their input on VSPC's marketing strategies and efforts; whereupon, he discussed the restructuring taking place within the organization and introduced the newest members of the organization.

Thereupon, Mr. Lowack recognized VSPC's Meetings and Conventions team for receiving the 2023 Platinum Choice Award from *Smart Meetings*.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 AM.