

PINELLAS COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

February 20, 2019

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 9:02 A.M. with the following members present:

Karen Williams Seel, BCC Chair, Chair
Russ Kimball, Sheraton Sand Key Resort, Vice-Chair
Julie Ward-Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor
George Cretekos, City of Clearwater Mayor
Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Joanne “Cookie” Kennedy, City of Indian Rocks Beach Mayor
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Keith Overton, Tradewinds Resort
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Anthony Satterfield, Alden Suites

Not Present

Charlie Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember

Others Present

Jim Dean, Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater (VSPC) Interim President and CEO
Tim Ramsberger, Chief Operating Officer
Leroy Bridges, Vice President, Digital and Communications
Katie Bridges, Senior Advertising Manager
Liz McCann, Executive Administrative Assistant
Michael Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Mary DeLong, BVK Senior Vice-President and Director of Tourism
Other interested individuals
Chris Bartlett, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk

Agenda

- I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL – Chair Karen Seel
- II. CHAIR COMMENTS
- III. APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – TDC Meeting of January 16, 2019

- IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS
- V. COUNTY ATTORNEY REPORT – Michael A. Zas
- VI. VSPC CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER REPORT – Tim Ramsberger
 - A. Capital Project Funding Program – City of Clearwater/Philadelphia Phillies
 - B. Elite Event Funding Program
- VII. DEPARTMENT REPORTS
 - A. Research Update – Leroy Bridges
 - B. Marketing Update – Katie Bridges and Mary DeLong
- VIII. VSPC INTERIM PRESIDENT & CEO REPORT – Jim Dean
- IX. NEW TDC COMMITTEES
 - A. Budget & Finance Committee
 - B. Marketing Committee
- 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 Seel called the meeting to order at 9:02 A.M., and at her request, those in attendance introduced themselves. She welcomed Mr. Dean and noted that the County Commission will meet in early March to discuss tax funding allocations of the TDC; and that a joint BCC/TDC meeting on the subject will be scheduled in April.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES/PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chair Seel indicated that the minutes of the TDC meeting of January 16, 2019 are not yet available; and that no one has come forth wishing to be heard for Public Comments.

COUNTY ATTORNEY REPORT – NONE

VSPC CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER REPORT

Capital Project Funding Program

Mr. Ramsberger related that five applications for funding have been received; that requests for more than \$10 million will be brought before the BCC for preliminary review; and that once the review is complete, all five applications will come before the TDC for funding consideration.

Mr. Ramsberger stated that the task of managing the Philadelphia Phillies' application was assigned to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Bill Berger, Consultant Dennis Long, and himself; whereupon, he invited Messrs. Berger and Long to provide an update.

Mr. Berger referred to documents titled *City of Clearwater Category E Tourist Development Plan and Retained Spring Training Facility Deliverables as of 1/22/2019*, indicated that the current stage of the process is to provide the TDC an opportunity to review the draft deliverables and provide its feedback, and discussed the remaining process once the deliverables are finalized. He related that there are currently six deliverables in the draft, including an economic impact study, a marketing plan, and a detailed budget and completion timeline, among others.

Responding to queries by Mr. Satterfield, Mr. Berger stated that the use of Spectrum Field for outside activities is expected to be subject to the term sheet between the team and the City of Clearwater; and that there is nothing definite at this time. Mayor Cretokos related that the team has worked with the City in the past to allow several sports tournaments and a high school graduation use of the field by scheduling Clearwater Thresher games around events when possible.

Chair Seel indicated that an economic impact study will be considered for all capital project funding requests to be reviewed by staff, and thanked Messrs. Ramsberger, Berger, and Long for their management of the process.

Elite Event Funding Program

Mr. Ramsberger stated that the application process will begin April 1 and close at the end of the month; and that the TDC will set up a review committee to evaluate the applications and bring them to the TDC for full review sometime in May. He indicated that for the first time during the process, the TDC will also ask its independent marketing and advertising agency, BVK, to weigh in on the value of the proposals as part of the review; whereupon, Chair Seel stated that a call for volunteers to serve on the review committee will take place as part of the March TDC meeting,

and Mr. Satterfield noted that in the past, the committee has held one meeting lasting five to six hours to complete the application review process.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Research Update

Mr. Bridges introduced the item and discussed how the TDC is working to share research and metrics with its partners by leveraging multiple sources of digital research into a tool using Business Intelligence. He noted that research data has become more readily available; that shared data has become less rigid and can be filtered in real-time; and that research data now comes from multiple sources, including Smith Travel Research, AirSage, and others.

Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Bridges discussed the source of AirSage data, noting that it is anonymously collected from millions of cell phones as people move from place to place; whereupon, he conducted a live demonstration of accessing the County's AirSage data, which is available to everyone using the TDC partner website.

In response to queries by Chair Seel, Mr. Bridges related that data can be used to track particular locations, attractions, and events; that about 60 percent of cell phones share data with AirSage; and that data sets from phones can be brand-based, but it is more common to use application-based data regardless of the brand of the phone used.

Mr. Bridges noted that a comprehensive report on international markets should be available towards the end of March; that the ability to understand how tourist dollars are spent in Pinellas County from the top 50 markets will be available soon; that a new in-house staff position will be filled shortly; and that the new partner website launched in December.

Mr. Bridges demonstrated how the data can be filtered by department, year, or month, relating that the shared data is released two months behind in order to line up with Bed Tax collection reporting; that Tax Collector data allows one to filter by aggregate, type of accommodation, or city; that some smaller cities are grouped together in the report, protecting certain hotel data; and that the miscellaneous/other designation includes all vacation rental data, such as Airbnb, Expedia, VRBO, and other platforms, which is reported only for the county as a whole and not by individual cities. He further demonstrated ways to filter by points of interest, discussed the use of Destination Analysts to provide monthly visitor profile reports, and provided information on how the data is collected from the various data sources.

Responding to comments by the members, Mr. Bridges acknowledged that data gaps, such as vacation rental data, still exist and will always present a challenge for research. He indicated that he has contacted three separate vendors who could provide more detailed information on vacation rental rooms sold, length of stay, and other key information, and Chair Seel commented that perhaps the Tax Collector could ask for the corresponding number of room nights from vendors who remit Bed Tax to the County, and discussion ensued.

Mr. Dean noted that while the data is not exact, it will continue to improve over time; and that it will also be used to look forward and help plan initiatives for next year. Mr. Bridges stated that new reports are making it easier to know where things are moving 18 months into the future; and that the data will provide better insights into which VSPC initiatives are more effective.

Marketing Update

Ms. Bridges introduced the item and noted that reports from AirSage and Destination Analysts are being used in planning and have been shared with BVK; and that researching the area's visitor markets has shown that the Orlando market has provided a significant amount of traffic to Pinellas County destinations.

Responding to an earlier query by Chair Seel regarding points of interest (POI), Ms. DeLong related that data going back to 2013 is being used to track 15 points of interest, such as Busch Gardens, Dali Museum, Tampa Aquarium, and others; that taking a day trip to Sarasota from Pinellas County has become popular among visitors; and that tracking additional POI is possible moving forward.

In response to queries by the members, Ms. DeLong discussed tracking only POI that have a high number of visitors, and Mr. Bridges noted that Destination Analysts provides a visitor profile to help understand who is traveling in a given month; that visitors are categorized as arts travelers, family travelers, luxury travelers, and/or beach travelers; and that the profiles identify specific characteristics and average spending habits.

Mr. Prather discussed a St. Petersburg resident's desire to dissolve the TDC over concerns that beaches are more heavily promoted than museums and the arts, and discussion ensued regarding marketing niche opportunities and encouraging more involvement from others when discussing strategy and developing future campaigns. Ms. Moore related that the recent partnership with Creative Pinellas will help ensure the arts and culture offerings in the county are more readily promoted, and Mr. Satterfield provided input.

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Ms. DeLong discussed how digital data helps define ways to better use marketing resources and how it is more fluid in helping to answer more specific questions than static data could in the past; whereupon, referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *2019 Advertising Strategy*, she discussed which markets are providing the most visitors to Pinellas County and responded to queries by the members regarding the data. She noted that Orlando has become more of a year-round focus; and that Miami, Tampa, and New York also remain key markets.

Mr. Bridges indicated that multiple sources of data are reviewed in order to reach valid conclusions; and that TDC web traffic and Google Analytics establish similar key markets as found in the other sources. Responding to queries by Mr. Henderson, he noted that the old data would sometimes conflict or show anomalies between data sources, and Mr. Satterfield stated that his organization's data very much aligns with the new data, where it did not always do so in the past.

Ms. DeLong discussed the Destination Analysts visitor profiles and the national surveys completed by Media Research, Inc., and responded to queries by the members regarding specific details of each.

In response to queries by Mr. Henderson, Mr. Bridges indicated that upcoming reports will be instrumental in setting strategies for Canada and other international markets. Mayor Bujalski stated that Canada remains a key international market; that marketing efforts in Canada could expand beyond what currently exists with the Toronto Blue Jays; and that there are unique opportunities to market Pinellas County to millennials and invite them to re-visit the area after their initial visit, and discussion ensued.

VSPC INTERIM PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT

Mr. Dean discussed how VSPC and BVK work together to maximize marketing resources in the various markets targeted for advertising. He conducted a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tourism Economics Snapshot* and provided information from December 2018, noting that St. Pete/Clearwater was the fourth largest market in Florida for rooms sold; that it dropped just over three percent when compared to the previous year; and that the existence of red tide in December may have kept the number low, and Mr. Bridges provided input.

Referring to a document titled *Pinellas County Tax Collector Tourist Development Tax*, Mr. Dean noted that Bed Tax collections were up slightly in December.

NEW TDC COMMITTEES – BUDGET & FINANCE AND MARKETING COMMITTEES

Chair Seel thanked the members for their willingness to serve on one or both committees. She stated that Councilmember Gerdes, Mr. Prather, and Ms. Rodriguez have been chosen to serve on the Budget & Finance Committee; and that Mayors Bujalski and Cretekos, Ms. Moore, and Mr. Kimball would all serve on the Marketing Committee. She noted that Mr. Bridges and Ms. Delong and Bridges would prepare the marketing agenda; and that she would prepare the agenda for Budget & Finance.

Chair Seel indicated that the first meetings of both committees have been scheduled for March 13, immediately following the regular TDC meeting; and that separate locations for each will be announced shortly.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Mayor Cretekos provided information on the St. Pete/Clearwater Elite Invitational softball tournament, held recently in Clearwater, and indicated that it was a great success. He thanked the City of Clearwater, BVK, and ESPN for their efforts to promote and host the event, and Ms. DeLong provided input.

Mr. Kimball asked the members to consider sending a letter of recognition through the BCC to Michelle Smith, a two-time Olympic medal winner and former collegiate and professional softball athlete, for her role in promoting the event and the St. Pete/Clearwater area. Mr. Ramsberger noted that she is currently a commentator for ESPN who lives and owns a small business in Pinellas County, and discussion ensued.

Mayor Kennedy related that a Red Tide Summit, sponsored by the City of Indian Rocks Beach and Pinellas County, has been scheduled for March 28 at the Sheraton Sand Key Resort; and that it will be open to citizens and business owners; whereupon, Mr. Kimball provided an update on Major League Soccer's spring training, which has included several teams from the league and continues through the month of February. Mr. Ramsberger provided input, and discussed the upcoming BMX Olympic-qualifying event in Oldsmar.

Mayor Bujalski noted that construction of a player development center for the Toronto Blue Jays has started; and that the stadium remodeling will begin after baseball's spring training concludes in early spring. She related that Governor DeSantis recently spoke at the annual Governor's

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Baseball Dinner and reminisced for several minutes about growing up in Dunedin and playing games on the stadium field, and other local activities.

ADJOURNMENT

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