

Clearwater, Florida, July 19, 2017

PINELLAS COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL  
JULY 19, 2017

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 Assembly Room, 315 Court Street, Fifth Floor, Clearwater, Florida, on this date at 9:01 A.M. with the following members present:

Members Present

Janet C. Long, County Commissioner, Chair  
Russ Kimball, Sheraton Sand Key Resort, Vice-Chair  
Doug Bevis, City of Oldsmar Mayor  
Timothy Bogott, TradeWinds Island Resorts (late arrival)  
Jen Carlisle, Clearwater Marine Aquarium  
George Cretekos, City of Clearwater Mayor  
Charlie Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilman  
Joanne “Cookie” Kennedy, City of Indian Rocks Beach Vice-Mayor  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry  
Anthony Satterfield, Alden Suites  
Eric Waltz, Sandpearl Resort

Not Present:

Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises

Others Present

David Downing, Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO  
Tim Ramsberger, VSPC Chief Operating Officer  
Leroy Bridges, VSPC Media and Interactive Director  
Liz McCann, VSPC Executive Administrative Assistant  
Michael A. Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney  
Other Interested Individuals  
Jenny Masinovsky, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk

July 19, 2017

Agenda

- I. CALL TO ORDER/CHAIR COMMENTS** – TDC Chair Janet C. Long
- II. APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES** – Meetings of April 19 and June 21, 2017
- III. PUBLIC COMMENTS**
- IV. COUNTY ATTORNEY**
- V. APPROVAL OF CVB BUDGET FISCAL YEAR 2018**
- VI. ELITE EVENT FUNDING**
  - A. Fiscal Year 2017/2018 Funding Recommendations
  - B. Propose August Workshop for New Guidelines Review
- VII. CONSULTANT REPORT**
  - A. Research Data Services – David Downing  
May Visitor Profile – Report on file
- VIII. PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT** – David Downing, President and CEO, VSPC
  - A. Financial Statements (Pinellas County Bed Tax)
  - B. Miscellaneous
- IX. DEPARTMENT UPDATES** – May 2017, no presentations, all reports on file
  - A. Leisure Travel/Canada
  - B. Advertising, BVK Advertising
  - C. Central Europe and United Kingdom
  - D. Film Commission
  - E. Latin America
  - F. Media and Interactive
  - G. Meetings and Conventions
  - H. Sports and Events
- X. INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS REPORTS** – May 2017
  - A. St. Petersburg/Clearwater International Airport – Report on file
  - B. Tampa International Airport – Report on file
- XI. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**
- XII. ADJOURNMENT**

All documents referred to in the minutes have been made a part of the record.

July 19, 2017

CALL TO ORDER/CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Long called the meeting to order at 9:01 A.M.; whereupon, at her request, those at the dais introduced themselves.

MINUTES OF THE APRIL 19 AND JUNE 21, 2017 MEETINGS – APPROVED

Vice-Mayor Kennedy moved, seconded by Mayor Bevis, that the minutes of the meeting of June 21, 2017 be approved, and upon call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously; whereupon, Councilman Gerdes moved, seconded by Mr. Satterfield, that the minutes of the meeting of April 19, 2017 be approved, and upon call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT – NONE

COUNTY ATTORNEY – NO ITEMS

CVB BUDGET FISCAL YEAR 2018 – APPROVED

Chair Long noted that the budget was reviewed during the Budget Workshop in May; whereupon, Mr. Kimball moved, seconded by Ms. Carlisle, that the Fiscal Year 2018 Budget be approved, and upon call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Downing indicated that the budget was approved by the subcommittee; and that a subsequent internal adjustment, which did not change the final numbers, involved a shift of funds in the amount of \$190,000 from Promotional Opportunity Funds to Personnel Services. Mr. Downing requested approval of a drawdown of the reserves, noting that it occurs annually at this time, and Mr. Kimball moved, seconded by Councilman Gerdes, that the reserves be drawn down in the total amount of \$1.4 million, as indicated by the Office of Management and Budget; whereupon, Mr. Downing explained how the funds will be spent, and upon call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

ELITE EVENT FUNDING

Mr. Ramsberger related that a number of applications for the Elite Event funding were approved at the TDC Elite Event Committee Review Meeting on June 14; whereupon, he read the list of selected applicants, indicating that the total requested amount for Fiscal Year 2017/2018 is \$1.497

million, which is under the budgeted amount, and requested that the Council approve the funding and provide an approval recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners.

Councilman Gerdes commended the subcommittee participants on behalf of himself and the City of St. Petersburg for their efforts in the difficult task of reviewing thousands of pages of applications and analysis, noting that he could not participate due to a conflict; and that he may have advocated for different allocations.

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Mr. Bogott entered the meeting at 9:08 A.M.

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Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Ramsberger indicated that it has not yet been decided how the difference between the budgeted and approved amounts would be spent; that St. Pete Pride was the only new event receiving funding this year; and that after funding is approved, staff will negotiate the application requests as authorized by the Committee; whereupon, Mr. Kimball moved, seconded by Vice-Mayor Kennedy, that funding in the amount of \$1.497 million for the twelve selected events be approved, and upon call for the vote, the motion carried unanimously.

August Workshop Proposal for New Guidelines Review

Messrs. Downing and Ramsberger proposed that a workshop to discuss new guidelines for Elite Event funding be scheduled in August in lieu of the regular meeting, noting that it is a preference and not imperative, since the application period is not until spring; whereupon, Chair Long discussed the importance of developing bylaws for the Council and possibly adding that as an item to the workshop agenda. Upon requesting feedback from the members, there appeared to be a consensus to include the bylaws discussion in the workshop agenda, and Attorney Zas indicated that bylaws will be prepared pursuant to the wishes of the Council.

Following discussion regarding the members' availability, Chair Long requested that staff work with the members to find an amenable date for the workshop.

CONSULTANT REPORT – MAY 2017 VISITOR PROFILE

Research Data Services, Inc. Director Walter Klages referred to PowerPoint presentation titled *May 2017 Visitor Profile* and related that year-to-date increases in overnight visitations (3.3 percent), room nights (4.2 percent), economic impact (7.1 percent), and resort tax collections

July 19, 2017

(7.9 percent) show stellar growth from last year and a very good standing as compared with 11 similar destinations throughout Florida. He discussed room rates from January through May, a comparison of occupancies among Florida cities, and the May Visitor Profile, reporting that economic impact in May was up by 7.4 percent.

Noting the significance of the growing international impact, Mr. Downing related that the European market is up by almost 9 percent; that the Canadian market is recovering, as demonstrated by added flights to Tampa; and that Latin America has become a major area of tourism growth; whereupon, he discussed the largest international gathering of Latin American travel industry professionals, La Cita 2017, to be hosted by VSPC during the last week of August at The Vinoy Renaissance St. Petersburg Resort and Golf Club, and encouraged the members' participation and promotion of the area, noting that a great potential presence of tourism buyers and media coverage is anticipated at the event.

Councilman Gerdes pointed out that this year, 91,000 additional visitors brought 1,000 jobs to the area, and Mr. Klages agreed, noting the high quality of the jobs, as well as the increasing presence of upscale visitors, particularly from Europe and Canada; whereupon, Mr. Downing remarked that the economic impact more than doubled, as compared to last year, and stressed the importance of the visitors' economic footprint over their numbers.

Responding to queries by Messrs. Bogott and Satterfield regarding a decline in the Midwest market from January to May and the upsurge in May, Mr. Klages indicated that the decline may be attributed to competitors from Collier, Lee, Broward, and Dade Counties attracting the Chicago visitors; and that the data does not indicate erosion of the market. Mr. Downing related that the metrics include only five months of the year, and assured the members that there is a lot of upscale travel from Chicago contributing to the economic yield; that VSPC is heavily invested in Chicago, doing major campaigns every winter; and that it has historically been one of the biggest tourism producers for the area.

Noting a recent change in business relating to the size of traveling parties, Mr. Kimball requested a report and an executive summary of trends occurring in international markets with regard to currencies, booking methods, and sizes of parties over a period of six months, possibly through June of this year. Mr. Downing agreed and discussed the new metrics and the means to obtain granular information; whereupon, Mr. Klages invited the members to join his upcoming trip to Europe as an opportunity to obtain more information.

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Deviating from the agenda, Mr. Downing requested that the President and CEO Report be deferred until later in the meeting.

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DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Mr. Downing indicated that the monthly department reports are on file and are available for viewing on the website.

ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Interactive Director Leroy Bridges played the *Go Gulf Coasting In St. Pete/Clearwater* video and referred to photographs on the [gogulfcoasting.com](http://gogulfcoasting.com) website; whereupon, with input provided by Mr. Downing, he discussed the VSPC marketing campaign launched for the summer and various strategies involved, responding to queries by the members and highlighting the following:

- The campaign includes (1) across-the-state brand marketing with television, radio, and Out-Of-Home media, and (2) an Activations team engaging people to enter a sweepstakes to win an Airstream Basecamp trailer or a four-night vacation to St. Pete-Clearwater. The sweepstakes has generated a tremendous response with 110,000 entries in four weeks; the sweepstakes component is housed at the [gogulfcoasting.com](http://gogulfcoasting.com) website.
- The video was produced entirely in-house and has received almost 100,000 views on YouTube and over half a million views on Facebook; outsourcing its production would have cost substantially more than the \$38,000 spent on the Airstream trailer.
- Sweepstakes always work out in the VSPC’s favor.
- The Activations team travels to promote the destination and participation in the sweepstakes throughout Florida cities and locally.
- Information regarding a geographic breakdown of the viewing public will be provided to the Council next month.

July 19, 2017

Thereupon, Mr. Bridges played the *Grouper Land: Grouper Week 2017* video, and Messrs. Bridges and Downing responded to queries by the members and highlighted the following:

- Grouper Week is an authentic alternative to the popular Restaurant Week celebrated at other destinations.
- The video was also produced in-house, with VSPC Film Coordinator Tony Armer directing.
- The website includes additional elements that may be of interest to the public, such as recipes, a list of restaurants, and fishing charters.

During discussion, Messrs. Bridges and Downing indicated that both campaigns use various means of enticing the public with the ultimate purpose of drawing them to the different aspects of the destination, and Mr. Downing stressed the importance of digital marketing, noting that the information delivery method draws people with the greatest intent to travel to the destination, generating a big return on investment; whereupon, the members congratulated staff on producing high-quality promotional videos.

In response to Mayor Cretkos' concerns regarding Junior Women's Softball National and World Championship events not being given the same consideration as other sporting events with regard to marketing on Facebook and other media, Mr. Bridges discussed how advertising on venues such as Twitter is more advantageous for these events and indicated that he would add the events' advertisement to the VSPC Facebook page.

During discussion, Mr. Kimball agreed that those sporting events need local and global recognition, and Councilman Gerdes noted that bed tax funds have been invested in the facilities hosting the tournaments; and that their visibility should be raised through the online linkage with the VSPC.

Responding to query by Mr. Downing, Mr. Ramsberger indicated that VSPC is heavily invested in promoting events and opportunities associated with a growing international interest in softball and provided information regarding the VSPC's rebranding relating to sports and events and utilizing "business to business" communication to attract the event organizers; whereupon, Mr. Downing discussed the task of determining touch points involved in maximizing the economic impact of an event and noted that with softball being a participant sport, the aforementioned events were marketed in ways that mostly targeted the participants.

July 19, 2017

PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT / INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT REPORTS

Mr. Downing provided a report regarding the airports and markets, responding to queries by the members and highlighting the following:

- Tampa International Airport (TIA) has added 11 flights by Frontier Airlines, an ultra low-cost carrier, including one new direct service to Colorado Springs, Colorado. The airline is creating competition with Allegiant Air and Southwest, and VSPC plans to meet with its representatives with regard to a potential partnership and expanded service opportunities.
- Mr. Downing attended a meeting with British Airways, which provides daily non-stop connections to the United Kingdom (UK), the largest international market. Various factors disturbing the British economy and strong competition from Dubai are affecting tourism to the area; however, British tourists have an affinity for American beaches. VSPC will be promoting the area at the annual World Travel Market trade show taking place in the UK this fall.
- The Canadian dollar has bounced back after being devalued against the American dollar, and consequently, Canadian travel appears to be picking up. As the global economy affects local travel, it is important to create as wide a footprint as possible.
- Unprecedented growth is reflected in taxes collected in May and year-to-date, up 9.27 and 12.5 percent, respectively, as compared to last year.
- International Officers from the Central European Market (Marion Wolf) and the UK (Venessa Alexander) will provide their reports and action plans for the coming year in October.
- St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport (PIE) and Allegiant Air continue to be great providers of local tourism; Allegiant Air is the only airline involved in a longstanding marketing agreement with PIE; a new promising marketing platform launched with Allegiant Air involves in-park promotions at Six Flags amusement parks throughout the country's Midwest and Northeast regions.
- Mr. Downing stressed the importance of the upcoming trade show, La Cita, as an opportunity to showcase the destination, noting that representatives from 15 countries, as well as Convention and Visitors Bureaus from all over the United States, will be present; and that he will provide detailed information to the members.

## MEMBER COMMENTS

### Mayor Bevis

- Inquired about possibilities for all-inclusive local tourism. Mr. Kimball indicated that it is not traditional, based on tourists having certainties with regard to safety and the desire to explore; that tour operators develop travel packages; and that there are some all-inclusive resorts in Florida. Mr. Bogott added that efforts are being made to offer packages which include meals and other amenities.
- Announced that the City of Oldsmar will be acknowledged by the Florida League of Cities as the recipient of the City Spirit Award for its centennial celebration last year, noting that the city was one of four in Florida receiving municipal achievement awards and the only one in Florida receiving the City Spirit Award.

### Mayor Cretekos

- Expressed pride and appreciation with regard to VSPC staff for creative and innovative efforts in promoting the area around the country and the world.

### Councilman Gerdes

- Complimented radio and television advertisements of the area he encountered while traveling in the state, and complimented and thanked staff for their good work.

### Ms. Rodriguez

- Discussed VSPC advertisement and cross-marketing efforts in Orlando and Chicago.

### Mr. Bogott

- Discussed the misleading information relating to tourism and bed tax collection recently seen in the media and the importance of tourism as the number one job-creating industry in the county and its benefits to the community. He pointed out that the bed tax is paid primarily by visitors, and by residents only when staying in hotels; that the nonexistence of income tax is enjoyed by the residents because of tourism; and that attacks on tourism by the legislature or media are inappropriate and a disservice to the community.

Mr. Satterfield

- Discussed the indirect benefit of tourism to various local businesses; whereupon, Mayor Cretekos pointed out that one third of the Penny for Pinellas tax for capital improvement projects is collected from tourists, and would otherwise fall on the residents.

Mr. Kimball

- Thanked VSPC staff for their hard work in the communities, including long hours and weekends, and noted growing participation by the cities and their Chambers of Commerce in VSPC activities.

Vice-Mayor Kennedy

- Enjoyed her first opportunity to work on the Elite Events.
- Discussed the Fourth of July cleanup on Indian Rocks Beach, noting that it turned out to be a massive two-day affair, attracting a considerable amount of press; and that it may be a good idea to start a similar program for all the local communities to ward off litter.

Ms. Carlisle

- At the request of Chair Long, discussed the enormous impact that the *Dolphin Tale* films have brought to the destination and the Clearwater Marine Aquarium.
- Discussed the important role of local hospitality in the growing success of the destination.

Mr. Waltz

- Indicated that since the Sandpearl Resort is located in close proximity to the Clearwater Marine Aquarium, *Dolphin Tale*'s success has made a great impact on the business for two to three years.

Mr. Downing

- Indicated that VSPC faces unique opportunities and challenges, including statewide, national, and international competition; and that it strives to promote all aspects of the destination in order to grow the economic footprint for the residents under the guidance of the Council and

July 19, 2017

the law (125.0104 Florida Statutes), which provides direction and requirements for transparency; whereupon, he remarked on the successive growth of the destination and thanked the Council for its support and guidance.

Chair Long

- Referring to recent articles in the media regarding the VSPC Film Commission and Film Coordinator Tony Armer's visit to the Cannes Film Festival in France, Chair Long expressed her resentment of fabricated stories, which undermine efforts of County staff, in pursuit of sensational journalism; whereupon, she asked Mr. Downing to provide facts regarding the matter.

Mr. Downing explained the significance of investing in the film industry, given the lack of incentive by the legislature and potential opportunities and exposure offered at film festivals and industry shows, especially since VSPC is the only American film destination at the event.

He indicated that as a result of Mr. Armer's three visits to the Cannes Festival, the return on the investment of \$130,000 is \$11 million worth of projects in the pipeline to come to the destination, which is commendable; that in the film industry, turnaround may be years in the making; that many films made for under \$2 million, which Mr. Armer is pursuing, have been very successful; that while the film business in Georgia is booming with billion-dollar profits, VSPC has to find alternative ways of involvement in the industry; and that staff is appreciative of the Board's approval of next year's participation in the event; whereupon, he noted that the concept of international travel with the intention of bringing business back to the destination is entirely supported by Statute.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:46 A.M.