

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
April 21, 2021 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 9:07 AM at the Pinellas County Cooperative Extension Magnolia Room, 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo, Florida.

Present

Dave Eggers, Chair, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chair
Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor
Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Frank Hibbard, City of Clearwater Mayor
Rick Kriseman, City of St. Petersburg Mayor
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Melinda Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner (late arrival)
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Others Present

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Tim Ramsberger, VSPC Chief Operating Officer
Tony Armer, Film Commissioner
Katie Bridges, Senior Advertising Manager
Leroy Bridges, Vice President of Digital and Communications
Craig Campbell, Sports and Events Interim Director
Andrea Gabel, Senior Sales Manager, Brazil
Suzanne Hackman, Vice President of Business Development
Liz McCann, VSPC Executive Administrative Assistant
Rosemarie Payne, Leisure Travel Director
Michael Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Amelia Hanks, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Eggers called the meeting to order at 9:07 AM.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Eggers expressed a desire for a healthy discussion regarding the budget and remarked on the general challenges and opportunities facing the tourism industry in Pinellas County due to the pandemic, noting that there is increasing optimism in the area for many reasons.

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 17, 2021 REGULAR MEETING

Upon motion by Mayor Hibbard, seconded by Mr. Kimball and carried unanimously, the minutes of the March 17 meeting were approved.

Ms. Pletcher arrived at the meeting at 9:11 AM.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Upon invitation by Chair Eggers, former member Anthony Satterfield appeared and expressed his appreciation and gratitude for having served on the TDC, and the members expressed their heartfelt thanks to Mr. Satterfield for his service and dedication to the citizens of Pinellas County.

FISCAL YEAR 2022 BUDGET OVERVIEW

FY 22 Revenue Projections

Budget and Financial Management Analyst Jim Abernathy referred to a document titled *Tourist Development Council – FY 2022 Budget Workshop* and presented the proposed budget, explaining how the projections were developed based on the negative impact of COVID-19 on revenues. He indicated that the budget request for FY 2022 is \$1.9 million less than the previous year's request; that the lack in revenue is anticipated to continue; and that adjustments to the budget can be made as emergencies arise.

Mr. Abernathy noted that the FY 2022 budget includes \$42.2 million in expenditures and projects approximately \$54.8 million in Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenue, which is split between promotions and marketing at 60 percent, and capital programs at 40 percent, or \$32.9 million and \$21.9 million, respectively. He indicated that any unused monies in capital programs will be kept in reserves for use in subsequent years; whereupon, he discussed potential qualifying projects, the need for reserves to counter unforeseen circumstances, and the need to monitor potential legislative changes regarding used of TDT revenue.

In response to queries by the members, Mr. Abernathy clarified that the budget is based on revenues received through February 2021; and that the budget remains conservative and anticipates no income from federal stimulus packages, and Mr. Hayes provided input.

Mr. Kimball reported that hotel stays and meeting room bookings have been better than expected; and that he is optimistic that 2021 results may be close to 2019 by the end of the year, and discussion ensued.

Mr. Abernathy reviewed the projected six-year budget forecast and noted that while reserves will continue to increase each year between \$16 million and \$21 million, there is a projected operating loss each year for the fund; whereupon, he directed members to pages 12 and 13 of the document showing the forecasts of expenditures and revenues.

Capital Project Funding Program Update

Mr. Abernathy provided information regarding potential obligations and commitments for capital projects. He explained that funding for capital projects was suspended in 2020; and that 2021 funding for the Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg will be retained in the 2022 budget awaiting the project's expected completion.

Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Abernathy described how capital and operating metrics are separated in the budget, relating that the way to eliminate deficit spending is to reduce expenditures; and that the budget projection comes from the Office of Management and Budget and not VSPC; whereupon, Mr. Hayes concurred and reiterated that the budget can be amended, and discussion ensued.

Department Budget Overview

VSPC SUMMARY

Mr. Hayes referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Visit St. Pete/Clearwater Update* and discussed the changes in room occupancy from March 2019 to today and TDT revenues from Fiscal Year 2017 to the present. He noted that Fiscal Year 2021 will show improvement over 2020 likely due to the lessening impact of COVID-19 on tourism; that VSPC uses industry research and analysis to better inform its decisions; and that the budget will be presented to the Board of County Commissioners for approval in May.

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONS

Ms. Bridges referred to pages 19 through 31 of the *FY 2022 Budget Workshop* document and presented on the following topics:

- Fiscal Year 2021: Sales Plan Recap
- Fiscal Year 2022: Budget Summary, Budget Request, and Sales Plan

Responding to queries by the members, Ms. Bridges related that VSPC continues to partner with BVK Advertising, and has done so for the past 10 years; that staff is working to complete a brand perception study; that VSPC departments collaborate with the advertising department to promote many types of destinations throughout the county; and that sport partnerships, most notably with the Tampa Bay Rays, will continue this year.

DIGITAL AND COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Bridges discussed how digital and traditional advertising remain highly integrated, noting that digital advertising is more tactical by targeting specific events, such as spring training, racing, and other occasions. He indicated that a new consumer website will be launching in June and will be ADA-compliant; that through January, tracking indicates that a dollar spent on digital ads generates \$15 in hotel revenue; whereupon, he discussed the Fiscal Year 2021: Sales Plan Recap and reviewed the goals for Fiscal Year 2022.

Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Bridges clarified that the market for digital advertising has grown rapidly in the past few years; and that staff continues to set the right balance between traditional and digital marketing expenses.

Mayor Kriseman left the meeting at 11:29 AM, and the meeting was recessed at 11:37 AM and reconvened at 11:52 AM.

MEETINGS AND CONVENTIONS

Ms. Hackman referred to pages 47 through 64 of the *FY 2022 Budget Workshop* document and presented information regarding the following:

- Fiscal Year 2021: Sales Plan Recap
- Fiscal Year 2022: Budget Summary, Budget Request, and Sales Plan

Messrs. Kimball and Prather commended Ms. Hackman and her staff on their ability to continue generating revenue by bringing meetings and conventions to the county; whereupon, in response to a query by Mr. Williams, Ms. Hackman indicated that the department is planning to hire one position, having lost two positions in the past year, and

Mr. Williams noted that he would support hiring additional direct sales positions immediately, even to the point of overstaffing the department.

SPORTS AND EVENTS

Mr. Campbell referred to pages 65 through 77 of the *FY 2022 Budget Workshop* document and presented information regarding the following:

- Fiscal Year 2021: Sales Plan Recap
- Fiscal Year 2022: Budget Summary, Budget Request, and Sales Plan

In response to queries by Mr. Kimball and Mayor Bujalski, Mr. Campbell, with input by Mr. Hayes, provided information regarding recreational sports facilities in the county, noting that a preliminary feasibility study was completed in April 2020, at which time the project was put on hold, and discussion ensued.

COMMUNITY AND BRAND ENGAGEMENT

Mr. Campbell referred to pages 78 through 89 of the *FY 2022 Budget Workshop* document and presented information regarding the following, with Mr. Hayes providing input:

- Fiscal Year 2021: Sales Plan Recap
- Fiscal Year 2022: Budget Summary, Budget Request, and Sales Plan

FILM COMMISSION

Mr. Armer referred to pages 90 through 105 of the *FY 2022 Budget Workshop* document and presented information regarding the following:

- Fiscal Year 2021: Sales Plan Recap
- Fiscal Year 2022: Budget Summary, Budget Request, and Sales Plan

In response to queries by the members, Mr. Armer related that the department's recent budget reduction was part of the total VSPC budget being reduced in Fiscal Year 2021; that two bills proposing film incentives will likely not pass during the current legislative session; and that the department provides many services for projects that film in the county.

Mayor Hibbard left the meeting at 12:58 PM.

LATIN AMERICA

Ms. Gabel referred to pages 106 through 120 of the *FY 2022 Budget Workshop* document and presented information regarding the following:

- Fiscal Year 2021: Sales Plan Recap
- Fiscal Year 2022: Budget Summary, Budget Request, and Sales Plan

LEISURE TRAVEL

Ms. Payne referred to pages 121 through 139 of the *FY 2022 Budget Workshop* document and presented information regarding the following:

- Fiscal Year 2021: Sales Plan Recap
- Fiscal Year 2022: Budget Summary, Budget Request, and Sales Plan

In response to a query by Mr. Henderson, Ms. Payne related that increasing the number of staff in the department could lead to an increased focus on marketing in Canada, and Mr. Hayes provided input.

INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

Mr. Hayes referred to page 142 in the *FY 2022 Budget Workshop* document, reviewed the budget information, and provided input regarding the future of public relations in Europe for the VSPC.

Responding to a query by Mr. Kimball, Mr. Hayes indicated that VSPC is in contact with Tampa International Airport staff concerning the status of flights to and from Europe.

DECISION PACKAGE

Earlier in the meeting, Mr. Bridges related that the current 5-year contract in digital marketing expires at the end of December 2021; and that he is asking for an additional \$2.5 million decision package in the 2022 budget, noting that \$2 million would be used in partnership with Media Connects for buying ads and other trackable marketing; and that the remaining \$500,000 would be used for content development, video advertising and marketing, and other assets.

Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Bridges clarified that the ask is for \$2.5 million annually for five years. Mr. Hayes indicated that he is comfortable with the expense over the lifetime of the contract; that funds in certain years may not be spent in full; and that shifting landscapes would provide flexibility in funding; whereupon, Mr. Henderson commented that it is the right time to be aggressive in advertising. Several members concurred, and discussion ensued.

Later in the meeting and upon the Chair's call for a motion, Mr. Henderson moved, seconded by Mr. Williams and carried unanimously, that the decision package be approved for inclusion in the proposed Fiscal Year 2022 budget.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSION

In response to a query by Mr. Prather, Mr. Hayes related that VSPC currently has four open positions; whereupon, he announced that an athletic competition between VSPC and Visit Tampa Bay will be held on May 4; and that Tourism Week is May 2 through May 8.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:43 PM.