

**Tourist Development Council  
Pinellas County  
May 18, 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  
Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises  
Frank Hibbard, City of Clearwater Mayor  
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.  
Melinda Pletcher, City of St. Pete Beach Commissioner (late arrival)  
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn  
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

**Not Present**

Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor  
Rick Kriseman, City of St. Petersburg Mayor  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry

**Others Present**

Steve Hayes, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO  
Katie Bridges, Senior Advertising Manager  
Leroy Bridges, Vice President of Digital and Communications  
Mackenzie Comerer, Senior Media Relations Manager  
Kristin Coryn, Communications Relations Manager  
Liz McCann, Executive Administrative Assistant  
Michael Zas, Managing Assistant County Attorney  
Teresa Ribble, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk  
Other interested individuals

**CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE/ROLL CALL**

Chair Eggers called the meeting to order at 9:07 AM and requested that Ms. Moore lead the Pledge of Allegiance; whereupon, at the Chair's request, the members introduced themselves.

## **CHAIR COMMENTS**

Chair Eggers expressed his thanks to Tampa Bay Beaches' Chamber of Commerce President Robin Miller and her team for the recent luncheon and noted that it was well-attended with people excited to again see one another.

## **MINUTES OF THE APRIL 21, 2021 REGULAR MEETING**

Upon motion by Mr. Kimball, seconded by Mayor Hibbard and carried unanimously, the minutes of the April 21 meeting were approved.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

No one responded to the Chair's call for public comment.

## **SALES AND MARKETING UPDATES**

### Destination Analysts Quarterly Report

Destination Analysts CEO and President Erin Francis-Cummings conducted a PowerPoint presentation and provided updates and statistical data regarding national travel trends and effects of the pandemic, visitors to the County and the economic impact of tourism during Quarter 1 of 2021, and a County tourism forecast.

Ms. Francis-Cummings appeared virtually and related that based on the most current results of a 62-week Coronavirus traveler sentiment online survey of 1,200 Americans, there has been a 25% increase in people indicating a readiness to travel; that 71.6% say that they will take a summer vacation; that July appears to be the peak month for travel; and that Florida remains as the top destination for summer travelers. She also noted that the survey revealed that post-pandemic sentiment has shown consumers to be more budget and safety conscious, but that confidence has increased with regard to trust in destination informational sources.

Detailing the lingering effects of the pandemic, Ms. Francis-Cummings summarized that the survey shows consumers remain concerned regarding potentially contracting the virus; that pandemic protocols, including vaccination and testing requirements, are restrictive; and that they will continue to engage in booking reservations closer to the start of a trip and be in the market for deals and discounts. However, she noted that trends which appear to be retreating are a lack of interest in traveling out of state and hesitancy to travel by air.

Ms. Francis-Cummings summarized information regarding the economic impact of visitors to the County for the first quarter of 2021, including demographics and trip behaviors of visitors, direct visitor spending, economic impact estimates, tax revenues generated, and visitor satisfaction; whereupon, she highlighted that there were 3.5 million visitors; and that the total economic impact was \$2.1 billion.

Responding to queries by Mayor Hibbard and Mr. Henderson, Messrs. Hayes and Bridges indicated that data received from agencies such as Destination Analysts is utilized to refine marketing and advertising messages; that any of the 17 survey locations covered by Destination Analysts may request details of the surveys so that they are better informed of visitor demographics; that the survey locations are geographically diverse so that a balanced perspective is attained; and that a field manager is in place to further assure survey equality.

Ms. Francis-Cummings detailed an analysis of the visitor economic forecast and noted that last quarter's projections have been revised to reflect higher anticipated outcomes; that while forecasts are showing increases in hotel occupancy, visitor volume, and tourism tax collection, the total economic impact will most likely remain lower than 2019 benchmark levels.

Responding to comments and queries by Mr. Kimball, Mr. Bridges related that a report will be provided to the Board which will show seasonality views of travelers to include demographics, origin markets, booking sources, and methods of transportation.

In response to comments and queries by Chair Eggers and Mr. Prather, Ms. Erin-Cummings indicated that future reporting will utilize 2019 data which is being considered as the benchmark; that Coronavirus concerns appear to be driving the safety consciousness of potential travelers; that today's report contains actual data for January through March 2021; and that total tax collection data includes more than just the bed tax.

Mr. Williams opined that marketing Pinellas County as a safe place to visit should continue; whereupon, Chair Eggers noted that future messaging should also reflect changes to safety protocols so that businesses may transition accurately.

#### Digital and Communications Update

Mr. Bridges referred to a PowerPoint presentation and provided updates from the department related to digital programs and campaigns, highlighting the following:

- The utilization of a new digital partner, Undertone, which measures consumer emotion with regard to a destination.
- Tripadvisor and Expedia campaigns drove more than \$72 million in hotel revenue since the beginning of the fiscal year.
- The ADARA Impact tool, utilized to provide data regarding return on investment for digital programming, as well as information regarding origin markets and booking trends.
- Data obtained via Arrivalist shows that VSPC's advertising campaigns are converting consumers at a 55% higher rate than those to whom no marketing has been conducted.
- Three videos related to Pass-a-Grille, St. Pete Beach, and the new Cambria Hotel Madeira Beach, which have generated 2.4 million views since January 1.

Responding to queries by the members, Mr. Bridges indicated that variations in booking trend data will show different results based upon the tool used to track the statistics; and that information will be requested from Destination Analysts for insight regarding consumer behavior as related to the lack of cancellation fees.

### Public Relations Recap

Deviating from the agenda, Mr. Bridges asked Ms. Comerer to provide the public relations update.

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Comerer provided information, videos of media coverage, and examples of print coverage regarding VSPC's National Travel and Tourism Week events and the Life's Rewards series.

### National Travel and Tourism Week Recap

At Mr. Hayes' request, Ms. Coryn conducted a PowerPoint presentation and provided an overview of VSPC's activities related to National Travel and Tourism Week held May 2 through May 7. She noted that the week included local landmarks being lit in red, an inaugural Pineapple Cup Battle of the Bay shuffleboard tournament, the Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce tourism luncheon, a webinar regarding VSPC's strategic plan, and a travel rally held at St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport.

Ms. Coryn and Mr. Hayes recognized VSPC staff Brandee Bolden and Justin Leiser for their efforts during National Travel and Tourism Week and the Rise to Shine campaign, with Chair Eggers expressing his appreciation for their efforts.

### Advertising Update

Ms. Bridges referred to a PowerPoint presentation pertaining to advertising and promotions' updates and highlighted the following:

- *Ultimate Beach Day Getaway* campaign ran January through April and incorporated the *Rise to Shine* pledge to promote COVID-safe behaviors. There were over 33,000 unique entries, and the winner of the getaway has been selected.
- In March, the Sunshine Steward Street Team awarded 600 \$25 gift cards redeemable at local businesses to people practicing safe behaviors, as part of the *Do Right, Get Rewarded* promotion. The campaign received widespread public relations coverage.
- Summer/Fall 2021 Traditional Media Plan designed to generate increased levels of awareness, consumer engagement, and an ultimate visit to the St. Petersburg Clearwater area. Identification of media sources for advertisements will be customized based upon the identification of the market as maintenance or developmental and may include cable television and radio, digital billboards and/or magazines.
- *Gulf to Bay* destination magazine will be released on May 27 with 500,000 copies to be distributed.

## **VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO REPORT**

### Key Destination Metrics

Mr. Hayes referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Tourism Economic Snapshot May 2021 TDC Meeting* and reviewed March 2021 statistical data regarding hotel and rental occupancy, average daily rates, tourist development tax collections, and top origin arrival markets into the area.

### Elite Events Application/Workshop – June 11, 2021

Mr. Hayes reported that the Elite Event Committee Review meeting will be held on June 11, 2021, from 9:00 until 1:00 PM at the Pinellas County Cooperative Extension Magnolia Room in Largo. He noted that the funding application period has closed; and that 20 applications were received.

Mr. Hayes related that three additional Board members are needed to complete the six-member review committee, and Mayor Bujalski, Mr. Henderson, and Ms. Pletcher volunteered to serve.

### Strategic Plan Update

Mr. Hayes indicated that the process has begun to develop VSPC's strategic plan; and that members will receive email correspondence from HCP Associates which will request the selection of a time for each member to provide input regarding a five-year vision for local tourism. He noted that the public will also be invited to participate and provide input via an online survey.

### Legislative Recap

Referring to a document provided in the agenda packet titled *Tourism Industry Briefing*, Mr. Hayes summarized tourism-related outcomes from the 2021 General Session, and noted that the next session will occur in January 2022.

### General Comments

Mr. Hayes indicated that advertisement for the open TDC seat has been completed; that the application deadline is May 28 by 4:00 PM; that the appointment must be someone affiliated with a hotel or a tourism-related business; and that the intent is for the appointment to be made at the June 27 Board of County Commissioners meeting.

## **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS**

Mr. Henderson commented that the hospitality industry is experiencing difficulty with staffing at an appropriate service level; and that he believes the elimination of the additional federal assistance being provided would incentivize a return to work; whereupon, Mr. Hayes indicated that he would request a status update from Pinellas County Intergovernmental Liaison Brian Lowack.

Mayor Hibbard congratulated Mr. Williams and Tournament Director Tracy West regarding the recent Valspar Championship golf tournament.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:11 AM.