

**Tourist Development Council  
Pinellas County  
December 20, 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 9:04 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  
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. (late arrival)  
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry  
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort  
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

**Not Present**

Brian Aungst, Sr., City of Clearwater Mayor

**Others Present**

Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney  
Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO  
Eddie Kirsch, Digital Producer, VSPC  
Kevin Knutson, Assistant County Administrator  
Jason Latimer, Public Relations Director, VSPC  
Teri Tuxhorn, Finance and Administration Vice President, VSPC  
Tammy Burgess, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk  
Other interested individuals

**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Chair Long called the meeting to order at 9:04 AM and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

## **CHAIR COMMENTS – NONE**

## **APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES**

Mr. Smith made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Kimball and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the November 15, 2023, meeting be approved.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chair Long introduced Attorney Coffey and related that she has replaced Managing Assistant County Attorney Michael Zas as the attorney for the TDC; whereupon, Attorney Coffey discussed her background with the County.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

### Destination Metrics

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Visit St. Pete/Clearwater Destination Metrics*, Mr. Kirsch introduced a new dashboard which is populated with data from Symphony and reviewed metrics provided by Smith Travel Research for October 2023, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections, hotel and vacation rental occupancy, average daily rates, revenue per available room, accommodation supply and demand, and total revenue.

In response to comments and queries by the members, Mr. Kirsch explained that the TDT collections are broken down by fiscal year, not calendar year; and that travel budgets for visitors living in the United States have remained below last year's levels; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding macroeconomic indicators, international travel, and areas of opportunity for advertising, and Mr. Lowack provided input.

*Ms. Moore arrived at 9:16 AM.*

Mr. Kirsch reviewed the results of a monthly tracking survey of traveler sentiment and presented the visitor profile snapshot for September 2023. During discussion and in response to comments and queries by the members, Mr. Kirsch indicated that the average income reported in the visitor profile is less than previous years, which may have resulted from some surveyed visitors' unwillingness to provide information related to their income; and that year-to-date data trends can be included in future destination metrics presentations.

Mr. Henderson suggested that unspent funds in VSPC's budget should be used to advertise the destination in new markets; whereupon, Mr. Lowack discussed the budget process, indicating that he is preparing a request for additional advertising and marketing funds, which will be presented to County Administration.

## **VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE**

### Dune Restoration Update

Mr. Latimer provided an update regarding a storm front that impacted the St. Pete/Clearwater area over the past weekend and discussed its effects on the beaches, relating that all county beaches are now open, and specified that dune restoration will resume on Indian Shores on January 2, 2024. He commended the County's Public Works staff for their nonstop efforts to determine the damage caused by the storm front and reminded the public to stay off the newly installed dunes.

In response to comments and queries by Mr. Prather, Messrs. Latimer and Lowack discussed the quality and origin of the sand brought in to renourish the beaches. Mr. Lowack indicated that a graphic illustrating beach renourishment projects throughout the county can be provided to the members, pointing out that there is a website dedicated to the emergency dune restoration project. Mr. Latimer noted that the website is updated as new information becomes available; whereupon, Ms. Moore expressed concern regarding beach access for beachfront property owners and the potential impacts on turtle nesting caused by the newly installed dunes.

Chair Long indicated that it is important to consider the cyclical nature of weather and potential future impacts.

### 2024 Meeting Dates

Mr. Lowack presented the proposed TDC meeting dates; whereupon, Ms. Moore made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Prather and carried unanimously, that the meeting dates be approved.

### Finance Reports

Mr. Lowack presented the September and November 2023 financial reports, and at the request of Chair Long, Ms. Tuxhorn provided a brief summary regarding the actual figures, deposits, tax collections, and promotional expenses.

Discussion ensued, wherein Mayor Bujalski suggested that future reports include VSPC's current reserve fund level and its reserve fund goal; and that some of the reserve fund

could be used for previously unbudgeted special projects. Mr. Lowack indicated that reserve funds must be allocated in order to be spent and reiterated that he is preparing a request for allocating additional funds for direct advertising and marketing of the destination; whereupon, discussion ensued regarding the budget process and potential uses for reserve funds, including focusing additional funds during non-peak times.

In response to comments and queries by Mayor Gattis, Mr. Lowack indicated that although there is an incentive program for meeting-related hotel bookings, across-the-board hotel room booking incentives have not been contemplated.

Discussion ensued regarding hotel room rates, and Mr. Kimball noted that the TDC cannot discuss rates due to Federal Trade Commission regulations relating to hoteliers, and Attorney Coffey provided input.

### 2023 A Year in Review

Mr. Lowack reviewed statistics, highlighted the accomplishments of the VSPC staff over the past year, recognized them for their hard work, thanked the members for bringing their expertise to the TDC and for their support for VSPC, and discussed organizational priorities for 2024.

Mr. Williams commended Mr. Lowack for his contributions to tourism and to VSPC, and the members thanked Chair Long for her leadership and guidance over the past year; whereupon, Mr. Lowack presented Chair Long with a plaque and a commemorative key recognizing her service as Chair of the TDC.

Mr. Lowack indicated that Creative Pinellas CEO Barbara St. Clair is retiring, and Ms. St. Clair provided brief comments. Later in the meeting, Ms. Moore wished Ms. St. Clair success in her future endeavors and discussed efforts to fill the Creative Pinellas President/CEO position.

Mr. Lowack announced that Executive Administrative Assistant Stacy O'Donnell will be leaving VSPC to pursue other endeavors, and thanked her for her hard work; whereupon, he introduced and welcomed VSPC Project Coordinator Tracey Nix as Ms. O'Donnell's replacement.

### **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS**

Mayor Bujalski provided brief comments regarding a recent visit to downtown Dunedin by residents from The Villages.

Following comments by Mr. Lowack, Mayor Bujalski announced that effective January 2, 2024, she will be the new President and CEO of the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce. She discussed the actions taken to avoid any potential voting conflicts, noting that her last TDC meeting will be October 2024, as her term expires in November 2024. Mr. Lowack indicated that he is working with Attorney Coffey in an effort to avoid any potential conflicts of interest; and that he will inform the BCC of Mayor Bujalski's intent to resign from the TDC following the expiration of her term.

Mayor Gattis thanked Chair Long for her service and Mr. Lowack for meeting individually with the members.

Following brief discussion, Chair Long noted a recent conversation with VISIT FLORIDA President and CEO Dana Young regarding the public-private partnership governance model for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and indicated that she believes it is deserving of a conversation so that the Board can make an informed decision, and discussion ensued regarding the following topics:

- Competitive pay
- Use of the model by other DMOs
- Review of the strategic plan
- Potential impacts on employees' retirement
- Decision-making authority of TDT funds
- Meeting dedicated to discussing the model
- Comparison of the current governance model versus the model to be discussed
- History of the TDC

Mr. Williams made a motion to schedule an ad-hoc meeting to discuss the topic of a public-private partnership governance model; and that the Board empanel a committee to determine an agenda for the meeting, and discussion ensued, wherein Mr. Smith seconded the motion.

Mr. Knutson related that the County Administrator has tasked him and Mr. Lowack with researching the model to determine positive and negative aspects and identifying potential impacts to staff and the TDC if a different governance model is utilized; and that having a future meeting to discuss their findings would be productive; whereupon, discussion ensued wherein Mr. Lowack requested that the members provide ample time for him to properly research and assess the potential use of the model, and Mr. Knutson provided additional input.

Following discussion, Mr. Williams withdrew his motion, and Mr. Henderson indicated that documents previously provided by Chair Long provide a good foundation to the public-private partnership governance model discussion.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:12 AM.