

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
January 17, 2024 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

Kathleen Peters, Chair, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chair
Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Brian Aungst, Sr., City of Clearwater 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.
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry

Others Present

Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Eddie Kirsch, Director of Digital and Data, VSPC
Tammy Burgess, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Peters called the meeting to order at 9:04 AM and requested that the members and staff introduce themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Peters provided introductory comments regarding her priorities as Chair of the TDC for the upcoming year.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES

Mayor Gattis made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Moore and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the December 20, 2023, meeting be approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – NONE

PRESENTATIONS

St. Pete/Clearwater International Airport (PIE) Presentation

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, the Airport's Director of Air Service Development and Marketing, Jeff Clauss provided information regarding accomplishments from the past year including information regarding growth in passenger traffic, the origin of passengers flying into PIE on Allegiant, and Fiscal Year 2023 concessions revenue; whereupon, he highlighted that 2.445 million people flew into or out of PIE in 2022.

Thereupon, Mr. Clauss introduced Starmark International President Jacqui Hartnett, and she provided an overview of PIE's marketing initiatives from 2023, displayed a video highlighting the ease of travel through PIE, and discussed a recent collaboration with Sandtastic to install a new sand art display in the baggage claim area.

In response to queries by the members, Mr. Clauss discussed strategies for expanding PIE's destination and airline options, facility expansion to accommodate additional inbound flights, collaboration with VSPC, and other topics.

Creative Pinellas

Creative Pinellas Board President David Warner introduced the organization's new CEO, Margaret Murray; whereupon, Ms. Murray provided brief comments.

Destination Metrics

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Kirsch reviewed metrics provided by Smith Travel Research for November 2023, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections, hotel and vacation rental occupancy, average daily rates (ADR), revenue per available room, accommodation

supply and demand, overnight and day trip statistics, total revenue, and visitor profile data.

In response to comments and queries by the members, Mr. Kirsch, with input by Mr. Lowack, provided information regarding traveler trends, ADR softening, and targeted digital marketing; whereupon, Mr. Kirsch indicated that a status update regarding new local hotels can be included in future destination metrics presentations.

Marketing Performance Creative and Update

Deviating from the agenda, Mr. Lowack provided brief comments related to a new presentation regarding marketing strategy. Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and provided information regarding quarterly digital and web marketing performance highlights and statistics, the discontinuance of third-party cookie tracking, media impressions, creative media updates, and a feature in an episode of the Atlas Obscura podcast. He provided an update on the 2024 Co-op Advertising Program, pointing out that a record-breaking 32 confirmed partners participated in the program in November and December.

Mr. Kirsch, with input by Mr. Lowack, responded to comments, concerns, and queries by the members regarding advertising partners, the use of artificial intelligence tools, efforts to address the potential impacts caused by the removal of third-party cookie tracking abilities, and other topics.

St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *2023 World Shuffleboard Championship*, Executive Director Christine Page provided information regarding the 2023 International Shuffleboard Association World Championship, noting that the International Shuffleboard Association was founded at the St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club in 1979; and that the Club hosted the 2023 World Championship in honor of its 100-year anniversary in 2024. Thereupon, she thanked VSPC for assisting with media outreach for the event and provided additional information regarding upcoming events.

In response to a query by Mr. Williams, Ms. Page indicated that the Club is the oldest and largest shuffleboard club in the world; whereupon, Mr. Lowack discussed promoting the Club at an upcoming event in New York.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Dune Restoration Update

Deviating from the agenda, Mr. Lowack recognized VSPC's Sports and Events Department staff for the work that they perform while working with various sports organizations to bring tournaments, participants, and spectators to the destination.

Mr. Lowack provided an update regarding a storm front that impacted the St. Pete/Clearwater area last week and discussed its effects on the beaches, noting that the damage to the dunes was minimal. He discussed the impasse in negotiations between the County and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, relating that a report to Congress is due this month from the Corps regarding its easement policy; whereupon, he provided information regarding proposed legislation that has been filed to address the renourishment issue.

Discussion ensued, with input by Mr. Lowack, regarding access for beachfront property owners. In response to comments and queries by the members, Chair Peters discussed preparations for beach renourishment, safety issues related to eroded dunes, plans to replenish the sand elevation on the beaches, and dredging in the Grand Canal. Lengthy discussion ensued regarding potential solutions for beach renourishment and efforts at the state level to address the impasse in negotiations with the Corps.

Mr. Lowack provided a legislative update, pointing out that several proposed bills could impact the TDC, including potential restrictions on the allocation of TDT funds.

Mr. Lowack introduced VSPC Business Development Manager Katie Brunk and indicated that she will be working with the Sports and Events Department; whereupon, Ms. Brunk provided brief comments.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Chair Peters indicated that Mayor Bujalski's new role as President and CEO of the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce and simultaneous service on the TDC, although legal, has the potential for perceived conflicts of interest due to the Chamber receiving funds from the TDC, which Mayor Bujalski would now oversee. Chair Peters solicited feedback from the members; whereupon, discussion ensued wherein the members expressed opinions and concerns regarding the perceived optics of Mayor Bujalski's concurrent service, and Attorney Coffey provided clarifying comments.

Thereupon, Mr. Prather made a motion to request that the Mayor's Council appoint a new member to the TDC for the remainder of Mayor Bujalski's term. The motion was seconded by Mr. Williams and carried unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:13 AM.