

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
February 21, 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 9:02 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 (late arrival)
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin Mayor

Others Present

Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Katie Bridges, Director of Advertising and Promotions, VSPC
Kylie Diaz, Vice President of Community Engagement, VSPC
Eddie Kirsch, Director of Digital and Data, VSPC
Hortensia Simmons, Senior Sales Manager, VSPC
Teri Tuxhorn, Vice President of Finance and Administration, VSPC
Tammy Burgess, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Peters called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM. At the Chair's request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS – NONE

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES

Mr. Gerdes made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Williams and carried unanimously, that the minutes of the January 17, 2024, meeting be approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

In response to the Chair's call for citizens wishing to be heard, Ray Hess, Tarpon Springs, appeared and provided brief comments.

Mr. Henderson arrived at 9:05 AM.

PRESENTATIONS

Capital Funding

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Diaz reviewed the timeline for the Capital Projects Funding Program and noted that funding applications are now being accepted on the VSPC website; that guidelines have been updated in the areas of funding standards, evaluation, and rating criteria; and that a meeting is being held on February 28 to answer questions from the public.

Destination Metrics

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Kirsch provided information regarding the state of the American traveler based on the results of an ongoing survey conducted by Destination Analysts and Miles Partnership. He reviewed metrics for December 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 (RevPAR), accommodation supply and demand, total revenue, and hotel inventory; whereupon, he presented the visitor profile snapshot for December 2023.

In response to comments, concerns, and queries by Messrs. Smith and Williams, Mr. Kirsch indicated that a 12-month overview of visitor profile data can be included in next month's presentation; and that overnight visitor household income will soon be reported using data collected through Symphony; whereupon, Mr. Lowack related that a transition to quarterly visitor profile reports is being considered to better illustrate trends.

Discussion ensued wherein Mr. Kirsch responded to queries by the members regarding a decline in visitors to St. Petersburg/Clearwater in December, focused marketing strategies, changes to the format for reporting future destination metrics, and other topics; whereupon, Mr. Lowack welcomed the members' feedback relating to content for future destination metrics presentations.

Advertising Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Bridges provided information regarding VSPC's advertising and media plan for the winter of 2024. She discussed broadcast media efforts in developmental and maintenance markets and presented some of VSPC's advertisements currently airing on television and radio; whereupon, she presented advertising initiatives in out-of-home and print media and influencer marketing.

Meetings and Conventions Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Simmons discussed 2024 first-quarter results, indicating that \$175,037.00 in monetary incentives were awarded to hotel partners and third-party meeting planners in an effort to set St. Pete/Clearwater apart from other destinations; and that 33,562 total room nights were booked; whereupon, she provided information regarding complimentary convention services and upcoming conferences.

In response to comments and queries by Mr. Williams, Mr. Lowack indicated that individual sales goals for staff will be established after departmental goals have been finalized; and that staff's attendance at future trade shows and conferences will be determined based on whether their participation directly led to any bookings.

Responding to comments and queries by Mr. Prather, Ms. Simmons and Mr. Lowack discussed the monetary incentive and how it compares to incentives offered in other destinations. Mr. Prather proposed adjusting the monetary incentive to ensure St. Petersburg/Clearwater is more competitive with other destinations; whereupon, Mr. Williams suggested performing a regret analysis regarding lost business.

WWE Royal Rumble Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Lowack discussed the WWE Royal Rumble event held at Tropicana Field, indicating that there were year-over-year increases of 10% in occupancy, 14.7% in ADR, and 26.1% in RevPAR; whereupon, he displayed media clips from the event promoting St. Petersburg/Clearwater and discussed a collaboration with two WWE Superstars, which resulted in 1.6 million cross-platform social impressions,

1.1 million social media accounts reached, and over 100,000 cross-platform social engagements.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Dune Restoration

Mr. Lowack indicated that future reports will be referred to as beach updates since the dune restoration project has been completed; and that the BCC accepted a \$15.1 million grant for the emergency dune restoration project from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. He discussed actions taken by the BCC related to beach nourishment, including approving a contract to begin design for a full-scale project; whereupon, Chair Peters provided information regarding recent legislative activity pertaining to the issue.

Coffee Chat with the CEO

Mr. Lowack indicated that he hosted the first *Coffee Chat with the CEO*; and that the event will be held quarterly.

Later in the meeting and in response to queries by Mr. Williams, Mr. Lowack provided information regarding attendance at the event; whereupon, Attorney Coffey and Chair Peters discussed the Sunshine Law and Board members' ability to attend.

Gulf to Bay Training

Mr. Lowack discussed actions taken to engage with community partners, including offering quarterly training sessions regarding partnering with VSPC and overall destination training.

Florida Tourism Day Tallahassee

Mr. Lowack provided an update regarding the potential impacts of proposed House and Senate tax packages on the use of TDT, noting differences in the language between the two; whereupon, in response to comments and queries by Mr. Prather, Attorney Coffey discussed the potential repercussions of the tax packages.

Finance Report

At the request of Chair Peters, Ms. Tuxhorn provided a brief summary of VSPC's Fiscal Year 2024 actual figures, deposits, tax collections, and promotional expenses.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Ms. Moore provided brief comments regarding a Hallmark movie recently filmed in Dunedin.

Mr. Prather commended Public Works Director Kelli Hammer Levy for her efforts and accomplishments related to the dune restoration and beach renourishment projects.

Ms. Rodriguez expressed appreciation to Mr. Lowack for his one-on-one meetings with TDC members.

Mr. Smith commended the volunteers at the WWE Royal Rumble event, noting that attendance was much larger than normal.

Mr. Lowack provided information regarding Home and Garden Television's *Rock The Block* and indicated that seven episodes were filmed in Treasure Island; that the first episode will air on March 4 at 9:00 PM; and that the show's previous season had 12.7 million viewers.

Mr. Lowack introduced VSPC's new Chief Marketing Officer Steve Grimes; whereupon, Mr. Grimes provided brief comments regarding his background.

Chair Peters provided an update regarding the request made to the Mayor's Council for nominees to replace Mayor Bujalski on the TDC, indicating that the Board should receive a list of nominees by April.

Referring to comments she expressed at the January TDC meeting, Chair Peters indicated that she plans to propose to the BCC that its Vice-Chair be appointed as a non-voting member of the TDC to be better informed when transitioning to the role of TDC Chair.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Peters adjourned the meeting at 10:31 AM.