



TDC Meeting Minutes

March 17, 2022

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, Jim Atterholt, Darla Bonk, Colleen DePasquale, Larry Fiesel, Mike Gibson, Holly Smith, Brian Kramer, Fran Myers, Bill Waichulis and Robert Wells III.

Pamela Cronin, Tony Lapi, and Gloria Tate were excused.

Myers made a motion to approve the Feb. 10, 2022 meeting minutes. Smith seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

None to be heard.

Municipalities to be heard

Jennifer Nelson, Cape Coral city councilwoman and Captiva Erosion Prevention District (CEPD) director, gave an update on the CEPD project that is adding ropes and poles to protect the new dune plantings on the island. She added that she participated with National League of Cities and had meetings with Sen. Rick Scott, Sen. Marco Rubio and Congressman Byron Donalds regarding the flood insurance bill that will be signed April 1. Amendments can still be proposed, and Rubio's office has submitted an amendment to the proposed bill. In addition, another bill was proposed, the Flood Insurance Pricing Transparency Act. She mentioned the forthcoming infrastructure grants and municipalities ability to apply for them. She added that Donalds will be earmarking the budget and it is important to write a letter to his office to make requests for federal funding.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for January 2022 was \$7,660,090, a 47.95% increase over January 2021 preliminary collections of \$5,177,355. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$20,687,459, an increase of 51.90% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for January 2022 was 76.8%, which is up 40.9% from January 2021 (54.5%). The average daily rate for January 2022 was \$199.04, up 35.4% from January 2021 (\$147.03) and RevPAR for January 2022 was \$152.94, up 90.8% from January 2021 (\$80.17).

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for January 2022 was 77%, which is up 32.8% from January 2021 (58%). The average daily rate for January 2022 was \$277, up 17.4% from January 2021 (\$236) and RevPAR for January 2022 was \$144, up 54.8% from January 2021 (\$93).

During January 2022, 1,044,816 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, an increase of 52.2% compared to January 2021.

Pigott also gave staff updates and introduced Juliana Silva, the VCB's new customer service specialist, and two new interns, Sara Campos and Taylor Wilson. She also announced that Francesca Donlan, VCB communications director, would be leaving the bureau to return to her home state of Rhode Island. Donlan will be the new communications director at Discover Newport.

Jeff Mielke, Lee County Sports Development executive director, gave a brief update on spring training and said there will be a full slate of games through April 4-5. This is half the usual schedule and ticket sales are going well. The VCB will be hosting its annual industry appreciation game April 4.

Marketing report

Brian Ososky, VCB marketing director, presented the "Good Day" campaign creative showcase, along with performance metrics from 10/1/21 to 1/31/22. Various brand launch initiatives were covered, including the destination's new digital identity, new TV spots, addressable direct mail, Drew Barrymore Show integration, premium publisher partnerships and more. He also provided a quick look at upcoming placements for spring including The New York Times, Smithsonian, Matador and VRBO.

4th quarter research report & calendar year 2021 summary

Phillip Downs, Downs & St. Germain Research, reported that Lee County welcomed 1,301,600 visitors between October and December 2021, an increase of 18.6% from 2020. During this timeframe, visitors spent more than \$959 million in the destination, resulting in a total economic impact of more than \$1.5 billion, up 46.2% from 2020. For the calendar year, Downs said that for calendar year 2021 Lee County welcomed 4,687,500 visitors, an increase of 38.2%. These visitors spent more than \$3.7 billion with an economic impact of more than \$5.9 billion.

TDC member items

Waichulis said Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina has an upcoming \$7 million renovation on bathrooms and kitchens.

DePasquale said SWFL Craft Beer Week 2022 will be a 10-day event kicking off Aug. 27-Sept. 4, Labor Day weekend. To boost awareness of the event, the Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce is presenting a "Halfway to Southwest Florida Craft Beer Week" event to be held at the Alliance for the Arts from 4-7 p.m. on Friday, April 1. Tickets are available on [SWFLCraftBeerWeek.com](https://www.swflcraftbeerweek.com).

Myers said roads are finished on Fort Myers Beach and the island had its St. Patrick's Day Parade today.

Smith said she moved to Lee County years ago due to the marketing the county does and applauds their successful efforts. She also thanked Donlan and wished her luck at Discover Newport and welcomed the new ex-officio council members.

Kramer announced the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association is hosting a legislative reception March 28 with Sen. Kathleen Passidomo and FRLA's vice president of government relations, Samantha Padgett at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa. Florida Gulf Coast University's Wanderlust event is back on at The Ritz-Carlton, Naples will honor FGCU President Michael Martin, who is retiring. Vacation auction items will raise money for resort and hospitality management students. He added the Hyatt just finished a \$16 million renovation of all guest rooms at resort. Also, the property was listed as a gold badge winner of best hotels in the country from U.S. News & World Report. Gold badge winners are the top 10% of hotels in the nation. He added group business is back at his property.

Atterholt thanked the TDC for seat on the council. There will be a ribbon cutting for the Estero Boulevard project completion coming up. The island will now be working on the south bridge.

Fiesel thanked TDC for the welcome to the council. He moved here in 1965 to work in the initial construction of Marco Island.

Gibson added he is happy to be back on the council.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:17 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

The next TDC meeting is at **9 a.m. Thursday, April 14, 2022** at the Lee County Admin East Building, Room 118, 2201 Second St., Fort Myers. To view a complete tax collections report, go to www.LeeVCB.com. Contact: Tamara Pigott, TPigott@leegov.com, Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.