



TDC Meeting Minutes

August 11, 2022

Commissioner Pendergrass, chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, Brian Kramer, Fran Myers, Jay Johnson, Larry Fiesel, Pamela Cronin, Robert Wells III, Tony Lapi and Bill Waichulis.

Darla Bonk, Gloria Tate, Holly Smith, Jim Atterholt and Mike Gibson were excused.

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the June 9, 2022, meeting minutes. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Andrew Kurtz, President and CEO of the Gulf Coast Symphony thanked the TDC for their support of the local arts and culture organizations in Lee County. The Music and Community Center, also known as "The MAC" opened in January 2021 as a performance and educational space and Andrew invited the TDC to come out and view the new community space.

Alison Charney Hussey, Executive Director of CROW (Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife) thanked the TDC for their support of CROW (the only wildlife animal hospital in Lee County) through the years and noted that about 80% of their patients come to them from off of Sanibel Island.

Beth Oliver, Vice President and Director of Sales & Marketing, Offshore Sailing School announced that Doris Colgate, President and CEO of Offshore Sailing School will be inducted to the National Sailing Hall of Fame in Newport, R.I. in November. She joins her husband Steve Colgate inducted in 2015 as being one of the only couples in the sailing industry recognized individually with this distinction.

Municipalities to be heard

Councilwoman Jennifer Nelson, City of Cape Coral District 4 reported on behalf of Councilwoman Gloria Tate. She gave an update of the progress and improvements of multiple parks in Cape Coral and a recap of several successful events held during the summer months including the Red, White and Boom event with over 40,000 attendees. She announced many great events coming up in the next few months and thanked the TDC for their continued support.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for June 2022 was \$4,671,244, a 3.3% decrease over June 2021 preliminary collections of \$4,830,490. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$56,173,491 an increase of 31% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for June 2022 was 65.0%, which is down 9.9% from June 2021 (72.2%). The average daily rate for June 2022 was \$171.10, up 3.5% from June 2021 (\$165.28) and RevPAR for June 2022 was \$111.22, down 6.8% from June 2021 (\$119.28).

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for June 2022 was 53%, which is down 23.9% from June 2021 (69%). The average daily rate for June 2022 was \$247, up 12.5% from June 2021 (\$220) and RevPAR for June 2022 was \$130, down 14.5% from June 2021 (\$152).

During June 2022, 663,141 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), a decrease of 21.0% in passenger traffic compared to June 2021. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is up 17.6% from the same period last year.

Pigott also announced two new VCB staff members: Dr. Roberta Atzori, Market Intelligence Analyst and Bryelle Benzing, Marketing Manager.

One additional exciting announcement Pigott shared was the headliner Gary LeVoix from Rascal Flatts who will be performing live at the Pink Shell on Fort Myers Beach on Sunday, September 25th.

Sales report

Jill Vance, VCB sales director, reported that the team has already attained four of the seven sales goals for FY21-22. She shared highlights of successful third-quarter group media and sales activities. The team executed a successful fashion editorial photo shoot with Bridal Guide magazine and now owns over 130 images with hours of video b-roll in addition to being featured on the cover of two issues of Bridal Guide with eight editorial pages. The sales team attended a variety of in-person meeting planner and consumer/travel trade shows including HelmsBriscoe annual Business Conference and a west coast Florida travel agency sales mission. Vance also presented upcoming sales activities for August and September, comprised of in-person meeting planner appointment shows, travel agency sales missions and trade shows for the SMERF (Social, Military, Education, Religious and Fraternal) markets. On behalf of Charm Evans, global sales manager, who was traveling, Vance presented some results of the 53rd annual IPW show in Orlando along with upcoming international sales activities for August and September.

Visitor Services report

Simone Behr, VCB visitor services director, reported that Tourism Ambassador volunteers assisted 86,649 visitors during the third quarter of FY22. Additional community support included Tourism Ambassadors helping at the FineMark Pro Tennis and First Responder Games, greeting Breeze Airlines inaugural flights and continued assistance with arriving Eurowings Discover and Cubazul passengers inside U.S. Customs at RSW. On June 21, Visitor Services celebrated National Seashell Day by handing out shell necklaces to all arriving passengers. Visitor Services looks forward to hosting the 22nd annual Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service Awards on Sept. 8. Learn more at EAwards.com.

Communications report

Ray Sarracino, VCB communications director, presented an overview of the PR team's third-quarter activities, including overall impressions of nearly 2 billion, and top-tier and local coverage. The destination continues to earn rave reviews in publications, in particular a piece in Travel & Leisure, which included the destination in a list of 12 best tropical vacations. Sarracino announced a new communications outreach product called Industry Partner Spotlight which will debut in October. The first episode in the series will highlight Nautical Tiki Cruises, a six-passenger boat departing from the Fort Myers Yacht Basin that will take guests for a boat ride on the Caloosahatchee River.

April – June 2022 research report

Joseph St. Germain, DSG, presented an overview of April-June visitor research. Lee County welcomed nearly 1.5 million visitors during this time, an increase of 12.8% compared to 2021, resulting in direct visitor

spending exceeding \$1.2 billion. He added that 66% of visitors flew to the Fort Myers area, with one in two flying in through RSW. He reported that the international market is slowly making a comeback, accounting for 10% of visitors during the April through June timeframe, with Canada representing the largest share at 4%. He reported that 44% of our visitors were families, and 36% were first time visitors. [Find the full report here.](#)

Sports Development report

Jeff Mielke, Sports Development Director, reported on April, May, and June events. May was the best on record with nearly 20,000 hotel room nights sold. June featured direct visitor spending of \$6.6 million dollars. Perfect Game Baseball held six events producing 11,276 room nights. Mielke shared his appreciation for all of the partners efforts supporting sports tourism including the Red Sox, Twins, Mighty Mussels, Lee County Parks & Recreation and the volunteers and staff at the VCB.

New business

- a. Tina Valdecanas, Clarity of Place, presented an overview of the destination strategic plan. The TDC unanimously approved the plan. Tony Lapi made a motion to approve the strategic plan. Pam Cronin seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- b. The TDC unanimously approved the FY22/23 proposed budget report for the VCB and Sports Development. Rob Wells made a motion to approve the strategic plan. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- c. The TDC unanimously approved the third quarter FY21/22 budget reports. Tony Lapi made a motion to approve the third quarter budgets. Rob Wells seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- d. The TDC formalized recommendations for BoCC approval of FY22/23 Events Marketing funding, for nine events totaling \$156,400. Rob Wells made a motion to approve the FY22/23 Events Marketing funding. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- e. The TDC formalized recommendations for BoCC approval of FY22/23 Attractions Marketing funding, for 32 attractions based on two budget models. The current budget recommendation is \$445,615, and pending final BoCC approval, the proposed budget recommendation is \$539,715. Rob Wells made a motion to approve the FY22/23 proposed budget. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

FY22/23 co-op buy-in opens on August 18

The VCB's FY22/23 co-op placements will open for purchase at 10:30 a.m. Thursday, Aug. 18, on a first-come, first-served basis. If you are not already registered for the program, please do so by contacting MMGY's Joshua Lambert by noon Tuesday, Aug. 16, at jlambert@mmgy.com. FY22/23 plan details are available at LeeVCB.com and partners may log into their co-op accounts at <https://coop.leevcb.com/> to review offerings and to save orders ahead of the purchase date.

TDC member items

Waichulis mentioned that the FRLA is holding their operations summit next week at the Seminole Hardrock Casino in Hollywood. Waichulis recommended this event as a great educational event for any up-and-coming managers.

Kramer announced that the FRLA's culinary cookoff will be held on Oct. 13 at Shangri-La Springs. Professional chefs will be prepared with high school students to compete for the best tapas. Funds raised will go back to supporting the schools.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:22 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

There will be no TDC meeting in September. The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at 9 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 13, 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.