



TDC Meeting Minutes

Dec. 8, 2022

Commissioner Brian Hamman, chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:06 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Brian Hamman, Brian Kramer, Jay Johnson, Larry Fiesel, Robert Wells III, Tony Lapi, Mayor Holly Smith and Bill Waichulis.

Darla Bonk, Gloria Tate, Jim Atterholt, Fran Myers, Pam Cronin and Mike Gibson were excused.

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the Aug. 11, 2022, meeting minutes. Mayor Holly Smith seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Megan Dunphy, director of sales with Luminary Hotel & Co. introduced their new General Manager, Robert Nokley. Nokley thanked the TDC and looks forward to working with them.

Municipalities to be heard

Chadd Chustz, environmental project manager, Town of Fort Myers Beach, gave an update on Hurricane Ian recovery and debris pickup efforts. He also provided an overview of the various beach renourishment projects needed to repair erosion from Hurricane Ian.

Mayor Holly Smith gave an update on Sanibel Island post-hurricane Ian. Currently, there is limited access to the island as a business or resident pass is required for entry. Smith announced that Sanibel will withdraw the requirement for entry passes and reopen the causeway to the public on Jan. 2, 2023. The island is severely impacted right now; boardwalks are gone and parking lots are not in operation. She said debris cleanup is going steadily, and the island is hopeful for an October 2023 recovery. Every property on the island was impacted, although there is not a count with the exact number of buildings that are not able to be rebuilt. One property is open and that is the Island Inn. The Sanibel Lighthouse was broken but has a semi-permanent cast on one leg, and they are looking forward to the relighting.

FEMA Disaster Assistance Update

Curvin Snyder, FEMA private sector specialist, said that he along with representatives from the Small Business Administration, National Flood Insurance Plan, and Flood Plain Management will be guest speakers on the upcoming Tourism Industry Conference Call on at 9 a.m. on Thursday, Dec. 15, 2022.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for October 2022 was \$1,859,291, a 43.2% decrease over October 2021 preliminary collections

of \$3,275,154. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$2,071,295 a decrease of 38.3% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for October 2022 was 77.7%, which is up 23.9% from October 2021. The average daily rate for October 2022 was \$156.53, up 12.5% from October 2021 and RevPAR for October 2022 was \$121.65, up 39.5% from October 2021.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for October 2022 was 18%, which is down 52.3% from October 2021. The average daily rate for October 2022 was \$142, down 18.9% from October 2021 and RevPAR for October 2022 was \$25, down 61.1% from October 2021.

During October 2022, 432,667 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), a decrease of 43.8% in passenger traffic compared to October 2021. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is up 5.1% from the same period last year.

July-September 2022 research report

Joseph St. Germain, DSG, presented an overview of July-September visitor research. Lee County welcomed nearly 1.2 million visitors during this time, an increase of 3.1% compared to 2021, resulting in direct visitor spending of approximately \$855 million. He added that 78% of visitors flew to the Fort Myers area, with two-thirds flying in through RSW. He reported that the international market is slowly making a comeback, accounting for 12% of visitors during the July through September timeframe, with Canada representing the largest share at 7%. He reported that 64% of our visitors were families, and 42% were first time visitors.

[Find the full report here.](#)

Marketing report

Brian Ososky, VCB marketing director, presented an overview of marketing activities in the weeks following Hurricane Ian, including media and visitor guide decisions, transitional messaging, and several web-based efforts. He provided an update regarding the Hospitality Worker Relief Fund effort in partnership with the United Way and Collaboratory. Most importantly, Ososky presented the destination's roadmap to recovery, including the strategic framework for a new brand campaign, My Fort Myers, scheduled to launch in January.

Sports Development update

Jeff Mielke, sports development director, reported that Lee County was able to host two top-tier sporting events in November – the Gulf Coast Showcase at Hertz Arena as well as the Fort Myers Tip-Off at Suncoast Credit Union Arena at FSW. He thanked the facilities partners and hotel partners for helping the county to be able to host these events so quickly following the hurricane. Looking ahead, the City of Palms Basketball Classic will be held this month at Suncoast Arena, and Spring Training starting in late February.

New business

- a. Tony Lapi made a motion to appoint Robert Wells as the TDC Vice Chair for 2023. Smith seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- b. Holly Smith made a motion to approve the 2023 TDC meeting dates. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- c. Tony Lapi made a motion to approve the fourth quarter FY21/22 budget reports. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

TDC member items

- Mayor Holly Smith thanked the TDC for their continued support of Sanibel Island and wished everyone a happy holiday season.
- Bill Waichulis announced that the Pink Shell Beach Resort opened for lunch on Dec. 5, and some rooms will become available beginning on Dec. 19. He mentioned that he recently met with the hotel's insurance company, and the resort is looking at 50-300% increase in insurance for next year.
- Jay Johnson announced that Bubba's Roadhouse & Saloon in Cape Coral opened on Monday, Dec. 5. He also reported that Lois Croft has resigned as chapter director from the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association (FRLA) and John Lai will be the new Lee chapter director beginning Jan. 1, 2023. FRLA continues to accept donations for their Hospitality Workers Relief Fund.
- Larry Fiesel reported that the Village of Estero fared well with Hurricane Ian and that they hope to complete all storm debris pickup by the end of February.
- Brian Kramer announced that the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa was affected by storm surge from Ian and suffered significant damage resulting in approximately \$30 million in repairs made to-date. Completed repairs include two pools that have been re-opened, however the lazy river is estimated to reopen in September 2023. First quarter 2023 meeting groups are coming in for site inspections and are still planning on having their meetings.
- Rob Wells reported that water conditions on north side of the county (Boca Grande to Captiva) are looking much better. There was a bout with red tide which seems to have dissipated.
- Tony Lapi recognized the passing of two colleagues, John Naylor and Thomas Waits. He reported that they were able to serve a complimentary Thanksgiving meal to more than 150 recovery workers to thank them for their hard work on the island. He was pleased to announce that Tween Waters installed their annual Christmas decorations that the community enjoys so much. He reported that Tween Waters Island Resort will reopen soon, and that the Old Captiva House is currently serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner seven days a week.
- Commissioner Hamman said that he is glad to be serving as the chairman of the TDC in a year of rebirth and rebuilding. He wished the group a happy holidays and Happy New Year.
- Christine Brady, assistant county manager, acknowledged Jeff Mielke and Tamara Pigott along with their staff for their response to the hurricane. Many staff members held other positions within the Emergency Operations Center, as well supporting their day-to-day duties. Thank you for your hard work.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:58 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at 9 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 12, 2023, 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.