



TDC Meeting Minutes

Jan. 12, 2023

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

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Brian Hamman, Brian Kramer, Jay Johnson, Larry Fiesel, Robert Wells III, Tony Lapi, Holly Smith, Bill Steinke and Pam Cronin.

Dan Allers, Darla Bonk, Fran Myers and Bill Waichulis were excused.

Holly Smith made a motion to approve the Dec. 8, 2022, meeting minutes. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Kathryn Kinsey, executive director, ArtFest Fort Myers thanked the TDC for their continued support, and unveiled the official 2023 poster. Framed copies were presented to Sanibel Mayor Holly Smith, Fort Myers Beach Mayor Dan Allers (accepted by Commissioner Brian Hamman on his behalf), and the TDC.

Municipalities to be heard

Dana Souza, Sanibel city manager, gave an update on Sanibel Island. To date, Sanibel is 85-90% complete in removing storm debris from the island, having removed more than 1.3 million cubic yards. Building permits are coming in quickly, and approximately 1,500 are currently in review. City Hall with the exception of the Council Chambers will be back in operation on January 17th. There is still a curfew in force from 9 p.m. until 6 a.m. daily. There have been no noteworthy traffic delays since the causeway reopened, nor a significant increase in traffic since the re-entry requirement was dropped on January 2. The beach parks and beach accesses are currently not open to visitors, and the fishing pier and boat ramp are also closed. The city estimates that it has lost nearly \$3 million in revenue so far this fiscal year in the beach parking fund. The city is happy to report that the Sanibel lighthouse will be re-lit soon, and "Shine On, Sanibel" has been adopted as the recovery slogan for the island.

Looking ahead, Tarpon Bay Road and Blind Pass Beaches are slated to or re-open in early February. Beach parking will transition to the T2 parking app in February when these two beach parks re-open. Looking ahead, the long term priorities and legislative priorities are for Sanibel to renourish Sanibel beaches and dunes, replace dune walkovers and repair restrooms, and repair the shared use path system.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for November 2022 was \$2,386,100, a 40.3% decrease over November 2021 preliminary collections of \$3,999,301. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$4,605,141 a decrease of 38.0% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for November 2022 was 82.6%, which is up 14.9% from November 2021. The average daily rate for November 2022 was \$180.20, up 19.9% from November 2021 and RevPAR for November 2022 was \$148.76, up 37.7% from November 2021.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for November 2022 was 21%, which is down 57.1% from November 2021. The average daily rate for November 2022 was \$171, down 11.9% from November 2021 and RevPAR for November 2022 was \$36, down 62.1% from November 2021.

During November 2022, 812,305 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), a decrease of 17.7% in passenger traffic compared to November 2021. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is up 2.6% from the same period last year.

Communications report

Ray Sarracino, VCB communications director, presented an overview of the team's first quarter activities, including overall impressions, top-tier and local coverage. Top projects included the Road to Recovery video series that showcases the resilience and ingenuity of the Lee County community, the industry partner newsletter that shares vital recovery information with tourism partners, and the weekly *What To Do* email blast deployed each Monday to tourism partners as a resource for events in the area. Three podcast episodes were launched between October and December 2022, each focused on recovery efforts. Sarracino shared the first video in the Industry Partner Spotlight series, highlighting The Perfect Cup Roastery & Café on Matlacha. This series will continue monthly to highlight tourism partner businesses throughout the County. Upcoming activities include hosting outdoor writers, showcasing the destination to our PR contractors in New York, producing and participating in a UK update video and press conference and hosting a Spring Training FAM as well as USA Today writer Wendy Pramick.

Sales Report

Jill Vance, VCB sales director, reported that the team is ahead or on pace for five of the six sales goals for FY22-23. She shared highlights of successful first-quarter post-Ian meetings messaging and sales activities. The sales team attended a variety of in-person meeting planner trade shows including IMEX America, American Express Interaction and HPN Partners conference. Vance also presented upcoming sales activities for January through March, comprised of in-person meeting planner appointment shows, travel trade roundtables and trade shows for the faith-based and motorcoach markets. Charm Evans, global sales manager, presented an update on the international sales activities along with upcoming travel trade events such as the Eurowings Discover Roadshow, Florida Huddle and ITB Berlin.

Visitor Services Report

Simone Behr, VCB visitor services director, reported that our tourism ambassador volunteers assisted 344,890 visitors during calendar year 2022 resulting in 23,335 volunteer hours worked, a value of \$684,588 to Lee County. Highlights during Oct. through Dec. 2022 included tourism ambassadors assisting at the Fort Myers Tip-Off, donating items for hurricane relief to the Kiwanis Club of Fort Myers Beach as well as the children of Lutheran Services, and greeting passengers at the airport in a "Santa dolphin" costume, bringing joy to the holiday season. Visitor services looks forward to hosting the 33rd Annual Volunteer Tourism Ambassador Appreciation Luncheon on April 12.

TDC member items

- Pamela Cronin announced that the biggest yearly event and fundraiser for the Shell Factory & Nature Park, the 20th Annual Gumbo Fest, will be held February 6, 2023, from 11:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

- Jay Johnson reported that Gator Mike’s Family Fun Park in Cape Coral has recently opened Dinosaur Falls Mini Golf. This attraction features a volcano, waterfalls, and 12 animatronic dinosaurs that are fun for the whole family.
- Holly Smith encouraged everyone to come out and support the businesses that are open on Sanibel Island, and drive through to Captiva to support those businesses as well. There are a lot of folks offering to volunteer on the island since restrictions have been lifted, and many opportunities are currently available through SCCF and Ding Darling. Fishing is amazing right now if folks have the opportunity to get out on boat and enjoy the water.
- Tony Lapi wanted to share his learnings about the 12-foot storm surge and 8-foot wave action on the Sanibel causeway and toll booths during Hurricane Ian. He also reported that updated designs for the causeway reflect that it will be rebuilt to a standard to withstand a storm similar to Hurricane Ian and is projected to be repaired by the end of 2023.
- Rob Wells appreciated the Sanibel update and requested a broader Lee County update from county staff at a future meeting.
- Larry Fiesel reported that the Village of Estero is doing well and will soon be completing its last sweep of debris pickup.
- Brian Kramer announced that the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa is building back newer and better than ever. Two pool decks, an outdoor restaurant and the beach remain closed, but the things that have been rebuilt look better than ever. The hotel expected to lose 50% of their group business after the storm, but in actuality, have only lost 10% of group business.
- Bill Steinke is glad to have been appointed to the TDC, and excited to supply information about Cape Coral to the council. Cape Coral is open for business, and offers many activities that visitors can participate in. Steinke added that in addition to the mini golf course, Gator Mike’s in Cape Coral also has a ropes course that many businesses and organizations use for team building exercises. He also announced that one of Cape Coral’s banner events takes place January 14 and 15, the 38th Annual Cape Coral Art Festival.
- Commissioner Hamman encouraged folks to take a drive down Pine Island Road in Cape Coral and check out all of the new businesses and restaurants.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:19 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

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