



TDC Meeting Minutes

Feb. 9, 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, Darla Bonk, Brian Kramer, Jay Johnson, Larry Fiesel, Robert Wells III, Tony Lapi, Holly Smith, Bill Steinke, Bill Waichulis and Nigel Fullick

Dan Allers, Pamela Cronin and Fran Myers were excused.

Holly Smith made a motion to approve the Jan. 12, 2022, meeting minutes. Darla Bonk seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Leoma Lovegrove, an artist who resided and owned a gallery on Matlacha for 28 years, recounted her experience of being embraced by the VCB and learning about how tourism partnerships could help her business flourish. After Hurricane Ian, she found pieces of her gallery roof shingles in her garden along with some paint and brushes and painted the shingles as part of series called "A Piece of the Roof." Lovegrove presented each TDC member as well as Tamara Pigott with a specially framed commemorative "A Piece of the Roof" painted shingle. Lovegrove said that her gallery will be moving from Matlacha to downtown Fort Myers soon.

Municipalities to be heard

None to be heard.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for December 2022 was \$2,925,882, a 45% decrease over December 2021 preliminary collections of \$5,320,349. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$7,774,894 a decrease of 39.6% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for December 2022 was 72.0%, which is down 1.4% from December 2021. The average daily rate for December 2022 was \$185.64, down 0.1% from December 2021 and RevPAR for December 2022 was \$133.72, down 1.4% from December 2021.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for December 2022 was 23%, which is down 54.9% from December 2021. The average daily rate for December 2022 was \$210, down 25.9% from December 2021 and RevPAR for December 2022 was \$47, down 66.5% from December 2021.

During December 2022, 862,368 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), a decrease of 20.6% in passenger traffic compared to December 2021. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is up 0.2% from the same period last year.

October - December visitor tracking report

Joseph St. Germain, DSG presented October through December 2022 visitor research data. He reported that compared to October-December 2021, more visitors traveled to the Fort Myers area alone or with business associates. This is likely due to the influx of recovery workers, volunteers, etc. He also noted that RSW saw a 26% decrease in flight passengers compared to October-December 2021. Domestically, 32% of visitors came from the Midwest, while the majority of international visitors originated from Canada, accounting for 5%.

Hurricane Ian beach erosion and repair update

Steve Boutelle, Lee County Natural Resources, gave an update on Lee County beach erosion and needed repairs, post-Hurricane Ian. Specific projects and costs included: Gasparilla Island, Captiva Island, Sanibel Island, Estero Island, Lovers Key and Bonita Beach. Some funding is already available but up to \$55 million additional funds may be required to complete all the repairs. County officials are optimistic that most of that funding will come from pending FEMA claims or additional state support as reflected in Gov. Ron DeSantis's proposed budget.

New business

- a. Rob Wells made a motion to approve the first quarter budget reports for the VCB and Sports Development. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which was passed unanimously.
- b. Bill Steinke made a motion to appoint Pamela Cronin, Holly Smith, Jay Johnson, Dan Allers and Darla Bonk to the Events and Attractions Marketing subcommittee. Rob Wells seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

TDC member items

- Bill Waichulis encouraged everyone to be prepared for insurance renewal increases. As an example, he said the renewal for his property is due Feb. 15 and it has increased 400%.
- Holly Smith said that the City of Sanibel is making progress every day. Sanibel opened two beaches to the public on Feb. 4, a mobile post office for residents in the 33957 ZIP code opened on Feb. 6, and the Sanibel School reopened Feb. 8.
- Darla Bonk had no comment.
- Jay Johnson had no comment.
- Nigel Fullick shared that there are five major insurance companies currently not doing business in the state of Florida and those companies have submitted the paperwork necessary to begin doing business in the state. Fullick stated that the City of Bonita Springs has a great working relationship with Lee County.
- Bill Steinke reminded everyone of the great restaurants, attractions and wildlife that Cape Coral has to offer. Steinke also said that Cape Coral has approximately 9,000 private vacation rentals available to supplement hotel rooms.
- Larry Fiesel agreed with Bill Waichulis about the increase in cost for insurance renewals.
- Brian Kramer shared the good news that the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point finished the month of January having picked up 7,000 room nights. He said 2023 is off to a good start, as the hotel is a couple million dollars in revenue ahead of where they thought were going to be.
- Rob Wells had no comment.

- Tony Lapi said that the Sanibel Captiva Chamber of Commerce meeting will be held Feb. 22 at Tween Waters Island Resort & Spa and he along with Doug Babcock will be the guest speakers.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at 9 a.m. Thursday, March 16, 2023, at the Lee County Admin East Building, Room 118, 2201 Second St., Fort Myers. To view a complete tax collections report, go to LeeVCB.com. Contact: Tamara Pigott, TPigott@leegov.com, Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.