



TDC Meeting Minutes

Mar. 16, 2023

Commissioner Brian Hamman, chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Brian Hamman, Dan Allers, Pamela Cronin, Jay Johnson, Larry Fiesel, Robert Wells III, Tony Lapi, Holly Smith, Bill Steinke, Bill Waichulis and Nigel Fullick.

Darla Bonk, Brian Kramer and Fran Myers were excused.

Holly Smith made a motion to approve the Feb. 9, 2023, meeting minutes. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Lisa Wilson, Edison and Ford Winter Estates, announced that their annual vintage baseball game will take place at Terry Park on March 26. Included with admission on March 24 and 25, program manager Holly Shaffer will conduct baseball presentations at the Estates that detail the connection between Edison and Terry Park along with the history of spring training in Fort Myers.

Municipalities to be heard

Sharon Woodbury, City of Cape Coral, gave an overview of newly opened attractions as well as planned future attractions and developments. Gator Mike's Family Fun Park opened their 19-Hole Dinosaur Mini Golf in December 2022. The Lake Kennedy Racquet Center will open on March 24, which includes 32 pickleball courts and 12 tennis courts. The Cape Coral Yacht Club is in the planning stages to include an expanded beach, boat ramp, seawall replacement and parking garage. The Yacht Club is tentatively scheduled to open in 2024. A new mixed-use development in Downtown Cape Coral named the Cove at 47th is set for an August 24 groundbreaking. The Cove at 47th will have 327 luxury units, retail space and a 585-stall parking garage to accommodate visitors in the area. Another mixed-use development named Bimini Basin will include a waterfront restaurant, 500-stall parking garage, 190 luxury residential units, retail space and Lee Health offices. Cape Coral Parks and Recreation is proud to announce the Sounds of Jazz and Blues musical event that will occur on March 25 at Coral Oaks Golf Course in Cape Coral.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for January 2023 was \$4,280,672, a 44.1% decrease over January 2022 preliminary collections of \$7,660,090. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$12,150,990 a decrease of 41.3% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for January 2023 was 79.6%, which is up 2.2% from January 2022. The average daily rate for January 2023 was \$208.66, up 12.0% from January 2022 and RevPAR for January 2023 was \$166.06, up 14.4% from January 2022.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for January 2023 was 33%, which is down 57.2% from January 2022. The average daily rate for January 2023 was \$223, down 18.1% from January 2022 and RevPAR for January 2023 was \$73, down 65.0% from January 2022.

During January 2023, 932,896 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, a decrease of 10.7% compared to January 2022.

Calendar year 2022 overview

Overall, Lee County saw growth in spending metrics despite the storm. Although visitation decreased 5.4% compared to 2021, direct spending and economic impact increased 10.9%. This was caused by increases in inflation and ADR, a decrease in travel party size, as well as the ongoing post-pandemic trend of U.S. households spending larger portions of their discretionary income on travel. TDT collections for calendar year 2022 totaled \$60,902,400, an increase of 5.9% compared to calendar year 2021. In terms of visitor origin, 90% came from the U.S. with the largest share originating from the Midwest at 36%. International visitors accounted for 10% of visitor origin with the largest share originating from Canada at 5%.

Marketing update

VCB Marketing Director Brian Ososky provided an update featuring a variety of integrated media placements for summer season and the remainder of FY2023, with an emphasis on our consumer approach. He referenced the recovery roadmap and provided creative examples of the “My Fort Myers” campaign and how it’s being utilized across print, digital, social, and broadcast. Other marketing updates included spring training radio, the Cape Coral Quest scavenger hunt, digital visitor guide, and new placemaking initiatives.

Sports Development report

Jeff Mielke, sports development director, reported that 13,949 room nights sold in the months of November and December 2022 with direct visitor spending of \$5.6 million. There were no sporting events held in the month of October following Hurricane Ian. For calendar year 2022, 150,283 hotel room nights were sold resulting in a total of \$62 million in direct visitor spending.

Old business

- a. Rob Wells made a motion to appoint Pamela Cronin, Holly Smith, Jay Johnson, Dan Allers and Darla Bonk to the Events and Attractions Marketing subcommittee. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

TDC member items

- Pamela Cronin shared that she is happy to see that things are starting to pick up again and people are optimistic and that’s great to see in our community.
- Holly Smith shared that the City of Sanibel lighthouse was relit on Feb. 28, and thanked the VCB for capturing the moment and sharing it with the world. Smith informed the council that Deputy Secretary Todman from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was on Fort Myers Beach yesterday announcing funding opportunities of approximately \$1.1 billion to municipalities in Southwest Florida. Smith advised the council to be aware of the TDT bill currently in the legislative session, HB 309 and SB 40 which would allow for TDT funds to be used for emergency expenses in

coastal communities. Smith shared that the FGCU women's basketball team are in the first round of the NCAA tournament playing on Saturday, March 18 on ESPNU.

- Jay Johnson had no comment.
- Nigel Fullick apologized for missing the relighting of the Sanibel lighthouse due to a council meeting conflict. Fullick shared that Bonita Springs's progression as a city is either opening on schedule or ahead of schedule and they are excited about that.
- Bill Steinke reminded everyone that in 2018, the City of Cape Coral approved a \$60 million GO Bond to enhance neighborhoods parks and bring more parks to the city. After a pause due to the hurricane, the city is happy to report that most of the parks are going to have ribbon cuttings soon. Steinke shared that a great cooperative effort is occurring between Fort Myers and Cape Coral called the Caloosahatchee Connect program which allows Cape Coral to purchase reclaimed water from the City of Fort Myers instead of discharging it into the river. Steinke shared the following upcoming events: The Sounds of Jazz and Blues on March 25, Cape Coral Bike Night on April 8, and Cape Coral Culture Fest on April 22.
- Dan Allers thanked all the businesses on Fort Myers Beach that have stepped up to find creative ways to open so that people can come spend the day at the beach and the restaurants. Allers shared that there are over a dozen businesses that are open on the beach. Also, Allers advised if you come to the beach, please take back home what you bring to the beach. A lot of hard work has gone into cleaning up the beach and keeping it nice. More beach accesses will be opening soon.
- Larry Fiesel mentioned that Estero doesn't have any beaches but alluded that may be changing soon. Fiesel mentioned that he visited the beaches recently with his grandkids and they had a positive experience. He is hopeful that the news will get on board with our marketing efforts in promoting the area with more positive recovery stories.
- Rob Wells appreciated the open dialogue during the meeting, and how the TDC members come together to share different experiences and opinions to market the area.
- Tony Lapi had no comment.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:39 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at 9 a.m. Thursday, April 13, 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.