



TDC Meeting Minutes

Apr. 13, 2023

Commissioner Brian Hamman, chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

Council members in attendance

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

Darla Bonk, Bill Waichulis, Larry Fiesel and Fran Myers were excused.

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the Mar. 16, 2023, meeting minutes. Holly Smith seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Mike Flanders, President and CEO of the Edison Ford Winter Estates (Estates) shared two upcoming anniversaries for the Estates. The first one marks 75 years since the City of Fort Myers opened the Estates to the public in 1948. The second one marks 20 years since the City of Fort Myers dissolved the Estates as a department of the city but kept ownership of the property. A non-profit company, Thomas Edison & Henry Ford Inc. was created to run the operations of the Estates and be entirely self-funded. Flanders thanked the TDC for their annual grant from the attractions marketing program because it helps fund their marketing and advertising budget. Flanders mentioned that the Estates has seen a decrease in funding from the TDC in recent years and wanted to remind the TDC of the positive impact the Estates have on Lee County tourism and its economic growth.

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 February 2023 was \$4,343,495, a 46.20% decrease over February 2022 preliminary collections of \$8,074,002. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$16,863,117 a decrease of 42.52% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for February 2023 was 84.1%, which is down 5.4% from February 2022. The average daily rate for February 2023 was \$243.87, down 6.4% from February 2022 and RevPAR for February 2023 was \$205.09, down 11.4% from February 2022.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for February 2023 was 45%, which is down -49.6% from February 2022. The average daily rate for February 2023 was \$282, down 12.3% from February 2022 and RevPAR for February 2023 was \$128, down 55.8% from February 2022.

During February 2023, 967,416 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, a decrease of 15.8% compared to February 2022.

Pigott announced Alison Giesen, Product Development Coordinator has joined the VCB team. Among her duties and responsibilities, Giesen will assist with managing all aspects of tourism product development initiatives, including Tourist Development Council grant funding programs.

Pigott also shared a “feel good story” of some visitors that were in Lee County for their daughter’s wedding that needed EMS assistance. VCB has nominated the EMS team for an internal Lee County *One Organization* award.

Communications Update

Ray Sarracino, VCB communications director, presented an overview of the communications team’s second-quarter activities, including press trips, overall impressions, top-tier coverage and upcoming press visits and projects. In March, nearly 1.8 billion impressions were made in earned media resulting in more than 4 billion impressions in the second quarter. Top projects include hosting a high volume of domestic and international press visits focusing on recovery efforts following Hurricane Ian and what is currently available to visitors. As a result of hosting journalists, the destination has received coverage in the Orlando Sentinel, UK Sun, Fox Weather and the Weather Channel. The communications team produced a spring training episode of the Shellcast podcast and several videos as part of the Road to Recovery and Partner Spotlight series. The team is also organizing an upcoming UK press trip along with individual press visits from domestic and international journalists in Canada, UK, Germany and domestic writers. Staff will attend IPW in May. The team is working to promote National Travel and Tourism Week, also in May.

Research Update

Roberta Atzori, VCB research & analytics manager, presented the results of the first wave of an online survey conducted among Lee County’s loyal visitors. The survey was embedded on the VCB consumer website, visitfortmyers.com, and 692 responses were collected from the end of January to the end of February. The survey data showed high visitation intentions among loyal visitors, with those who visited both before and after Hurricane Ian planning to come back to Lee County sooner than those who visited only before Ian. Actionable insights based on the study include tailoring messages based on previous visitation and continue to inform visitors about the recovery of the destination, so that they are reassured that the destination is ready to welcome them back.

Sales Update

Jill Vance, VCB sales director, reported that the team is ahead, or on pace, for four of the six sales goals for FY22-23. She shared highlights of successful second-quarter, post-Hurricane Ian meetings messaging and sales activities. The sales team attended a variety of in-person meeting planner and travel trade shows, including RCMA Emerge, ConferenceDirect APM, Florida Peninsula Shows and Florida Encounter. Vance also presented upcoming sales activities for April through June, comprised of in-person meeting planner appointment shows, travel trade sales missions and trade shows. Charm Evans, global sales manager, presented an update on the international sales activities along with upcoming travel trade events such as the Eurowings Discover Florida Roadshow, Spoiled Agent Spring Networking Event and IPW.

Visitor Services Update

Simone Behr, VCB visitor services director, reported that the VCB’s tourism ambassador volunteers assisted 119,143 visitors during the second quarter of FY23. Additional community support included tourism ambassadors helping at ArtFest Fort Myers and USA Men’s Gymnastics State Championships, greeting Avelo Airlines inaugural flights, and participating in the Port Authority’s Mass Casualty Incident Exercise. On

March 29, visitor services celebrated National Manatee Appreciation Day with the manatee mascot and volunteers handing out celebratory stickers to travelers at RSW. Visitor services looks forward to hosting the 23rd annual Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service Awards on Aug. 24. To learn more or to nominate, visit EAwards.org.

Beach & Shoreline Update

Nancy MacPhee, VCB product development manager, provided an update in preparation for reviewing fiscal year 2023-24 Beach & Shoreline funding requests. There are 17 eligible requests totaling \$12,531,472. The TDC will discuss and recommend funding at the April 26 Beach & Shoreline Review Workshop to be held at 2 p.m. in Room 118 of Admin East.

TDC member items

- Pam Cronin thanked the VCB for the Volunteer Luncheon that was held on Apr. 12, it's always one of her favorite events. Cronin met with District 76 Florida House Representative Spencer Roach to discuss HB 7053. Cronin encouraged the TDC to reach out to Spencer Roach regarding HB 7053 to let him know how it impacts tourism in Lee County and its small businesses.
- Jay Johnson had no comment.
- Holly Smith apologized for missing the Volunteer Luncheon as it's one of her favorite events and she thanked the VCB for sending information about HB 7053. Smith shared there will not be a July 4th event this year on Sanibel but, they will be celebrating the 61st anniversary of the SanCap Chamber along with their 30th annual "Island Night" on May 3 at Hammond Stadium. In a post-Ian article, Sanibel was recognized as #7 in the list of top 10 best small towns to visit. Holly encouraged people to come to Sanibel and enjoy its beaches. All beaches are currently open except Lighthouse Beach Access.
- Bill Steinke updated the TDC on how the Cape Coral Quest app has been doing. So far 2,643 people have joined the Quest, they have had 3,300 check-ins, given out 196 prizes and 74 coupons have been redeemed. Steinke mentioned the following parks opened or will open in Cape Coral: March 4 Del Prado Linear Park, March 31 Gator Trails Park, April 14 Cultural Park, and a ribbon cutting on May 5 for Sands Park. Cape Coral will be doing its first Earth Day Community "Clean up the City" on April 22 and Culture Fest will be held on April 22 at Cultural Park. Steinke announced that the Caloosahatchee Connect project between Fort Myers and Cape Coral broke ground March 23 and should finish ahead of schedule in February 2024. The cities plan to have an event with Guinness World Records to celebrate the project once it is completed.
- Dan Allers announced the new town manager of Fort Myers Beach will be Mr. Andrew Hyatt who will start May 1. Allers shared that Fort Myers Beach has the sand for their Emergency Beach Berm project, and they are hoping to have the project done before turtle season, but it's more likely it will be done before Hurricane season.
- Nigel Fullick shared they are celebrating their 23rd anniversary as the City of Bonita Springs on April 29. Bonita Springs celebrated a ribbon cutting for the official opening of the Fairfield Inn Bonita Springs last week. Fullick also mentioned that all their beach accesses are open.
- Brian Kramer shared that 3 of their 4 pools are open at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort and they plan to have the 4th pool (Lazy River Pool) open on June 16. The resort is still working to have their beach access open, and they have no official dates as to when that project will be completed. Through the first quarter of this year the resort has set a record production for future business. Between September 2023 and 2024 they have booked half a million dollars worth of group business.
- Rob Wells had no comment.
- Tony Lapi had no comment.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:20 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at 9 a.m. Thursday, May 11, 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.