



TDC Meeting Minutes

June 8, 2023

Commissioner Brian Hamman, chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Council members in attendance

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

Darla Bonk, Brian Kramer, Tony Lapi, and Fran Myers were excused.

Bill Waichulis made a motion to approve the May 11, 2023, meeting minutes. Holly Smith seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Lisa Wilson, Edison Ford Winter Estates (EFWE), Marketing & PR Manager, thanked the TDC for their continued support with grant funding.

Sam Swami, Best Western Colonial, Fort Myers Inn & Suites, Tahitian Inn and Beach Shell Inn, Owner, shared his concerns for the attractions funding increases and budget going up per transaction at \$50,000 per attraction. He emphasized the focus of the TDC needs to be about bringing people into our area. He attended the AAHOA (Asian American Hotel Owners Association) and shared that the keynote speaker mentioned Tampa Bay has seen a tremendous increase in tourism and ADR. He would like to see the TDC empower our VCB with marketing dollars to bring additional tourism to our destination. He believes most of the current inland business is still being generated from people assisting our area with rebuilding after Hurricane Ian.

Municipalities to be heard

Sharon Woodbury, City of Cape Coral, Business Development officer, shared an update of events that happened in May and June for Cape Coral. They welcomed the International Society of Arboriculture Conference to The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village June 5-7th which brought in 400 people. They had their Tree Giveaway on June 3rd which helped replace some of the trees they lost from Ian in the city and residents could get one as well. The Hurricane Preparedness Expo was well attended with 500 residents and 20 vendors on May 31 at Mercola Market. They hosted the first City of Cape Coral Business & Industry Roundtable with the city's lenders. The roundtables will be happening monthly with different industries each month, next month will be with restaurants. Stone Throw just opened in downtown Cape Coral. Also, Woodbury provided a Cape Coral Quest update: 3,115 people signed up, 4,536 locations checked, 45 SunSplash Season Passes were awarded, and 93 people were added to the Westin Stay Contest.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for April 2023 was \$2,974,092, a 57.0% decrease over April 2022 preliminary collections of \$6,922,083. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$25,283,480 a decrease of 46.1% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for April 2023 was 74.2%, which is down 2.9% from April 2022. The average daily rate for April 2023 was \$170.11, down 23.0% from April 2022 and RevPAR for April 2023 was \$126.29, down 25.2% from April 2022.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for April 2023 was 27%, which is down 57.5% from April 2022. The average daily rate for April 2023 was \$190, down 42.2% from April 2022 and RevPAR for April 2023 was \$50, down 75.5% from April 2022.

During April 2023, 981,216 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, a decrease of 19.7% compared to April 2022.

Marketing update

Brian Ososky, VCB Marketing Director, presented four new destination ambassadors as part of the post-hurricane recovery campaign, "My Fort Myers." He also shared examples of summer media placements and recent social media posts, as well as the team's progress on placemaking efforts including neighborhood murals and webcams. This year's Island Hopper Songwriter Fest takes place Sept. 22-Oct 1, and the VCB's annual meeting is scheduled for Nov. 9 at the Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village.

MMGY Global Chairman Clayton Reid and CEO Katie Briscoe addressed the TDC with a special presentation, reframing the macro impacts of tourism, future demand trends, and how innovation and technology will continue to affect our industry. Consumer spending in the travel industry has increased with seniors dominating spending. Business travel is expected to increase over the next year, while leisure has gotten more expensive for middle and lower-class households. Social media greatly influences travelers purchasing decisions with AI technology changing how travelers book a vacation.

Sports update

Jeff Mielke, Sports Development director, reported that 32,202 room nights sold in the months January through March 2023 with direct visitor spending of more than \$13.2 million.

New Business

Bill Waichulis made a motion to approve the FY24 proposed budget report. Rob Wells seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Beverly Dearborn, Lee County Facilities Construction Management Fiscal Manager, requested funds to be reallocated from an existing project to the Bat House Park project. A major portion of the current budget for the Beach Front Maintenance Project was for new lights and railing repairs at Lynn Hall Memorial Park. Due to the condition of the Fort Myers Beach pier, these projects have been cancelled. Even though \$359,198 was returned to reserves earlier this year, the project has funds that will not be spent. Dearborn requested shifting \$100,000 for temporary emergency repairs to the Matlacha Bat House Restroom site while waiting to do a permanent restoration (design and construction) that may take couple years due to the lengthy process required by FEMA. Due to the condition of the facility, the work needs to be completed immediately.

The TDC unanimously approved the recommendation. Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the request to reallocate Beach & Shoreline project funds. Holly Smith seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Based on county attorney feedback during the TDC Beach & Shoreline Workshop last month, a motion was made to have staff present a proposed process for an independent professional analysis demonstrating the positive impact of infrastructure projects on tourist-related businesses in the county as required by Florida Statutes 125.0104(5)(a)6 at a TDC meeting before the end of the year. The TDC unanimously approved the request.

TDC member items

- Pam Cronin wished the TDC a Happy Father's Day
- Jay Johnson wished the TDC a Happy Father's Day.
- Bill Waichulis shared that he is thankful to be on Fort Myers Beach and the Pink Shell was sold out this Memorial Day weekend and the pool reopened as well. Bill shared that the travelers were very thankful to be in the area and the feedback was excellent. He believes there is going to be a pent-up demand as more hotels come back online.
- Holly Smith shared that SanCap Chamber of Commerce had their grand reopening and had 200 attendees. Their last beach, Lighthouse beach will reopen June 16th. She attended the VCB Hurricane Industry workshop on June 5th at EOC. It was well attended and VCB staff did a great job presenting information. The City of Sanibel will be holding their hurricane workshop on June 23rd from 1-3pm live on Facebook and in person at Big Arts. Ding Darling was featured on CBS this morning for their "Moment in Nature" segment. Encouraging media to come to our island and working with the VCB on areas to visit and let people know we are open and the visitor expectations when you visit. City of Sanibel will be celebrating their 50th Anniversary next year. It will be a multi month celebration, but the event will be held on November 5, 2024.
- Bill Steinke thanked Sharon Woodbury for a great update on what's going on in Cape Coral. Steinke asked the question, "How do we go about asking the TDC to fund a request for analysis for City of Cape Coral?" Commisionr Hamman suggests it is an item for an upcoming TDC Agenda so they discuss and vote on it. Steinke appreciates the support of TDC. A motion was made by Rob Wells to discuss the analysis at a future meeting and was seconded by Jay Johnson.
- Brian Hamman congratulated Dan Allers for his appointment to TDC as a voting member. Allers echoed what Holly Smith and Bill Waichulis mentioned is that Fort Myers Beach is open and the pool opening at Pink Shell and Diamondhead is exciting. Allers said we have tried very hard to protect the beach and clean it up. The beach burn project is 75% done but has been slowed from turtle season. Publix has reopened on the beach and visitors are still coming and they understand their expectations of the beach. Yucatan Stand has just reopened. Developers are very excited in helping rebuild the beach back and have been conveying their ideas and working with the Town of Fort Myers Beach. Summer camp will be at the Mound House this year while the school and community center are being rebuilt.
- Larry Fiesel shared that Estero is seeing some development break ground and he noticed that the TDC meetings are conveying a more positive message and attitude with reconstruction.
- Nigel Fullick shared that they had 700 attendees at their Memorial Day ceremony in Bonita Springs. A lot of visitors came from out of town such as Michigan, Minnesota, and New Hampshire because of the ceremony. July 4th they will have evening festivities in Bonita Springs. After a National search, Center for the Arts has hired a new Executive Director, Alyona Ushe. There are 7,000 realtors in our area, this could be an opportunity for them to help us spread the word about our destination on our behalf.
- Rob Wells had no comment.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:01 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

There is no TDC meeting in July. The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at **9 a.m. Thursday, August 10, 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.