



TDC Meeting Minutes

August 10, 2023

Rob Wells, Vice-chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Brian Kramer, Tony Lapi, Fran Myers, Pamela Cronin, Larry Fiesel, Jay Johnson, Robert Wells III, Bill Waichulis and Nigel Fullick.

Commissioner Brian Hamman, Liston Bochette, Dan Allers, Bill Steinke and Holly Smith were excused.

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the June 8, 2023, meeting minutes. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Jack Carver, Florida RV Association announced he retired last December, but he wanted to thank the TDC and VCB staff for making things easy to get information out to his clients.

Ellen Vaughn, Friends of the Mound House, thanked the TDC for all the support to the Mound House and all the attractions in SWFL. She stated that it's critical that the grant funds distributed by the TDC funding programs help to keep us all afloat in this post-Ian time.

Ding Darling Wildlife Society thanked the TDC for all the support they have given past and present. They are grateful for the TDC funding grants they received, and thanked VCB staff for assisting them with the application process.

Lisa Wilson, Edison and Ford Winter Estates, thanked the TDC for all their support throughout the years. The Estates have used the TDC grant funds for advertising and marketing outside the area. They are happy to announce that they have completed recording their guided tour in Chinese and will be adding it as an option in the app so that Chinese visitors can listen to the tour in their native language.

Devon Parker, Sidney & Berne Davis Arts Center, thanked the TDC for their support and the attraction marketing grant that will assist in some video marketing projects.

Municipalities to be heard

Sharon Woodbury, City of Cape Coral, Economic & Business Development Officer, shared an update of events and new projects coming to Cape Coral. Slipaway Food Truck & Marina will be coming to the city in 2024. It will feature 10 food trucks and 30 boat slips. Bimini Square is anticipated to break ground in September 2023. This mixed-use project will include a waterfront restaurant, 218 premium apartments, a 25-slip boat dock, 48,000 square feet of retail and professional space and a public parking garage. Cape Coral Grove (commencement date TBD) will be a new vibrant mixed use destination offering retail shops and restaurants, as well as a boutique hotel and park space. The CRA Business Assistance program has

launched two new programs: *Breaking Barriers to Business* and the new *Demolition Incentive Program*. The next Business and Industry roundtable is scheduled for August 18 with the marine industry. The parking management plan is set to launch soon to assist with providing a solid plan for managing parking in Cape Coral's downtown core. There was a groundbreaking for the Cape Coral Fire Department's fire training facility in July. It is anticipated to be completed in late 2024. The Cape Coral Quest mobile app has had 3,513 people sign up, 6,305 locations checked, 82 Sunsplash season passes awarded, 136 people added to Westin stay contest, 401 prizes claimed, and 149 coupons redeemed. Woodbury shared a video of Cape Coral's Red, White & Boom event celebrated on the 4th of July.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for June 2023 was \$2,405,557, a 48.5% decrease over June 2022 preliminary collections of \$4,671,244. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$30,123,911 a decrease of 46.4% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for June 2023 was 67.0%, which is up 2.6% from June 2022. The average daily rate for June 2023 was \$134.63, down 13.5% from June 2022 and RevPAR for June 2023 was \$90.26, down 11.2% from June 2022.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for June 2023 was 21%, which is down 55.9% from June 2022. The average daily rate for June 2023 was \$180, down 23.8% from June 2022 and RevPAR for June 2023 was \$37, down 66.5% from June 2022.

During June 2023, 643,486 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, a decrease of 3% compared to June 2022.

Pigott also announced Vanessa Gomez has joined the VCB team full time as marketing specialist.

Communications report

Miriam Dotson, VCB communications manager, presented the Savor the Shore advocacy campaign, a combined marketing and communications effort to encourage locals to visit coastal restaurants impacted by Hurricane Ian. The campaign includes print, digital, radio and social media placements. The media's response has been incredibly positive, and we will continue to coordinate for more coverage.

Sales report

Jill Vance, VCB sales director, reported that the team has attained two and is ahead of pace for four of the six sales goals for FY22-23. She shared highlights of successful third-quarter group media buys and sales activities. The sales team attended a variety of in-person meeting planner and travel trade shows, including HelmsBriscoe Annual Business Conference, Lamont Associate Xchange Summit, Global Travel Marketplace and East Coast Florida Travel Agency Sales Mission. Vance also presented upcoming sales activities for August through September. Charm Evans, global sales manager, presented an update on the international sales activities such as IPW and Visit Florida and Eurowings Discover's Germany Roadshow along with upcoming travel trade events such as the Connect RTO Marketplace, and Visit USA Germany and Switzerland Roadshows.

Visitor Services report

Simone Behr, VCB visitor services director, reported that tourism ambassador volunteers assisted 78,983 visitors during the third quarter of FY23. Additional community support included Tourism Ambassadors

helping at FineMark Pro Women's US Tennis and USA Sports Karate championships, as well as various conferences. Visitor Services is collaborating with the Port Authority in providing assistance through the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program, a simple tool for individuals to wear the Sunflower lanyard to indicate that they might need additional assistance and understanding when traveling through the airport. Sunflower lanyards can be picked up at the visitor information booths seven days a week. Visitor Services celebrated National Seashell Day with our dolphin and manatee mascots and volunteers handing out shell necklaces to the traveling public at RSW. The team looks forward to hosting the 23rd annual Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service Awards on August 24th. To RSVP, please visit EAwards.org.

April – June 2023 research report

Joseph St. Germain, DSG, presented an overview of April-June visitor research. Lee County welcomed 727,200 visitors during this time, a decrease of 50.8% compared to 2022, resulting in direct visitor spending exceeding \$683 million. He added that 67% of visitors flew to the Fort Myers area, with one in two flying in through RSW. He reported that the international market is slowly making a comeback, accounting for 14% of visitors during the April through June timeframe, with Canada representing the largest share at 8.5%. He reported that 40% of our visitors were families, and 30% were first time visitors. [Find the full report here.](#)

Sports update

Jeff Mielke, Sports Development director, reported that 40,885 room nights sold in the months of April through June 2023 with direct visitor spending of more than \$16.7 million.

New Business

- a. Tony Lapi made a motion to approve the 3rd quarter FY23 budget report. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- b. Fran Myers made a motion to formalize recommendations for BOCC approval of FY23-24 Events Marketing Funding for nine events totaling \$177,950. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- c. Fran Myers made a motion to formalize recommendations for BOCC approval of FY23-24 Attractions Marketing Funding for 35 attractions totaling \$599,330. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- d. Nigel Fullick made a motion to cancel the November 9, 2023, TDC Meeting. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously. The VCB Annual Sales & Marketing meeting will be held on the morning of November 9 at The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village. Please save the date.

TDC member items

- Pam Cronin recently stayed at two local properties for staycations. She commented on the excellent food and service at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort as well as the Crow's Nest restaurant at Tween Waters on Captiva Island.
- Jay Johnson shared that they are seeing an uptick in Cuban tourists and business at his restaurant in Cape Coral.
- Fran Myers appreciated the air service update, and she is happy to be back at the TDC.
- Rob Wells had no comments.
- Larry Fiesel shared that Estero's city council will be taking August off and he congratulated Tony Lapi and Brian Kramer for the awards they received.
- Brian Kramer shared that they hosted the Florida Society of Association Executives at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort. The resort hosted them for a 4-day event and business is already coming in from their visit which is fantastic.

- Nigel Fullick shared that the City of Bonita Springs is celebrating their 25th birthday next year and will be spending several million dollars on signs to assist visitors with finding their way around the city. Fullick thanked Brian Kramer for being a great business partner and community leader.
- Bill Waichulis congratulated Tony Lapi and Brian Kramer on their awards and dedication to the tourism sector.
- Tony Lapi shared that there is a golf tournament at the Rosen Shingle Creeks golf course during the Governor's Conference if you are attending and interested in participating. He also asked to keep Maui in your thoughts and prayers due to the deadly fires.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:41 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

There is no TDC meeting in September. The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at **9 a.m. Thursday, October 12, 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.