



## **TDC Meeting Minutes**

December 14, 2023

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

### **Council members in attendance**

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, Larry Fiesel, Jay Johnson, Pamela Cronin, Bill Steinke, Bill Waichulis, Robert Wells III, Liston Bochette and Nigel Fullick.

Dan Allers, Tony Lapi, Fran Myers, Brian Kramer and Holly Smith were excused.

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass and Executive Director, Tamara Pigott presented a plaque to Commissioner Brian Hamman and thanked him for his service as TDC Chair for 2022-23. Commissioner Brian Hamman thanked the TDC for all their hard work this year. He's proud of the way our tourism market has rebounded in adversity, including the opening of Margaritaville and the creation of more than 400 jobs.

### **Approval of previous meeting minutes**

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the October 12, 2023 TDC meeting minutes. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

### **Public to be heard**

None to be heard.

### **Municipalities to be heard**

Sharon Woodbury, economic development manager, introduced the newest member of the City of Cape Coral's economic development team, Claudia Miller. Claudia joins the team as a business recruitment and retention specialist with experience in working with CVBs. She is looking forward to bringing tourism back to pre-lan numbers.

Sharon shared an update of events and new projects coming to Cape Coral. Upcoming events include the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Tree & Menorah Lighting held on Nov. 30, Holiday Boat-A-Long paired with Movie in the Park on Dec. 16, Joe Corvello Park Ribbon Cutting on Dec. 19, and New Years Eve celebration on Dec. 31 featuring a kid's ball drop at 8:00 p.m. and a ball drop at midnight. On Dec. 15 the City of Cape Coral will host the Commercial Real Estate Industry Roundtable and on Jan. 19, 2024, the City will host the Retail Industry Roundtable. Press releases go out every month to the community to inform and invite them to these events.

The Cape Coral Quest 2.0 mobile app developed in partnership with the VCB has been refreshed, and the new challenge began Dec. 1. To date, there have been 210 sign ups, 173 locations checked, 7 prizes claimed, and 1 coupon redeemed.

The city has started a Tourism Spotlight, and this month's feature is Four Mile Ecological Preserve. It is a 365-acre park that has kayak rentals, guided paddle tours (moonlight and daytime), walking trails and a boardwalk where you can explore nature and learn about the ecosystem.

### **Report of the executive director**

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for October 2023 was \$2,198,594, an 18.3% increase over October 2022 preliminary collections of \$1,859,291. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$2,251,717 an increase of 8.7% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for October 2023 was 62.2%, which is down 19.0% from October 2022. The average daily rate for October 2023 was \$137.86, down 13.3% from October 2022 and RevPAR for October 2023 was \$85.70, down 29.8% from October 2022.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for October 2023 was 22%, which is up 17.9% from October 2022. The average daily rate for October 2023 was \$158, up 6.0% from October 2022 and RevPAR for October 2023 was \$35, up 26.3% from October 2022.

During October 2023, 737,527 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, an increase of 70.5% compared to October 2022.

### **July-September 2023 research report**

Joseph St. Germain, DSG, presented an overview of July-September visitor research. Lee County welcomed nearly 706K visitors during this time, a decrease of 36.6% compared to 2022, resulting in direct visitor spending of approximately \$584 million. He added that 78% of visitors flew to the Fort Myers area, with two thirds flying in through RSW. He reported that the international market is slowly making a comeback, accounting for 13.3% of visitors during the July through September timeframe, with Canada representing the largest share at 7%. He reported that 60% of our visitors were families, and 33% were first time visitors. Find the full report here.

### **Marketing report**

Brian Ososky, VCB marketing director, presented a selection of integrated media placements planned for FY24. These include a four-market "blitz" campaign Feb-June in Cincinnati, Detroit, Minneapolis and Grand Rapids, as well as placements in The New York Times, Garden & Gun, AFAR, and Midwest Living/Southern Living. He also shared three new videos – our destination declaration, animated "Sand Dollar Sense" about the value of tourism, and new destination anthem called "Feels Like Home to Me."

### **Sports Development update**

Jeff Mielke, sports development director, reported that Lee County was able to host two top-tier sporting events in November – the Gulf Coast Showcase at Hertz Arena as well as the Fort Myers Tip-Off at Suncoast Credit Union Arena at FSW. He also shared that 49,662 room nights sold in the months of July through September 2023 with direct visitor spending of nearly \$21.4 million.

### **New Business**

- Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the fourth quarter FY22/23 budget reports. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the [2024 meeting dates](#). Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.
- Pam Cronin made a motion to nominate Jay Johnson to serve as vice chairman for 2024. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

- Bill Waichulis approved the FY24 sales and marketing plan. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

### **2024 TDC meeting dates**

Jan. 11 – 9 a.m.	April 11 – 9 a.m.	July – no meeting	Oct. 10 – 9 a.m.
Feb. 8 – 9 a.m.	May 9 – 9 a.m.	Aug. 8 – 9 a.m.	Nov – no meeting
March – no meeting	June 13 – 9 a.m.	Sept. – no meeting	Dec. 12 – 9 a.m.

### **TDC member items**

- Bill Waichulis reported that he visited the insurance provider for the Pink Shell Beach Resort, and it looks like insurance rates will be stabilizing and only increasing in the single digits for 2024. He also mentioned the number one movie on Netflix, “Leo” is set at Fort Myers Elementary School, and is a fun watch if you haven’t seen it yet.
- Bill Steinke shared that Cape Coral is looking to expand their ecotourism efforts on the western side of the city similar to Eco Park on the eastern side of the city. Please watch for weather updates on the Holiday Boat along in Cape Coral this weekend. Oasis Charter High School’s girls Volleyball team are state champions after entering the tournament as the lowest ranked team. Speaking of sports, the city is looking forward to opening a racquetball center and the parking lot for the new wave pool at Sunsplash Family Waterpark in Cape Coral. The city has engaged a service to assist with identifying all of the personally owned data from vacation rentals in Cape Coral, and the data is starting to come in. Over the past 10 years, about 14,000 addresses have been listed as vacation rentals, and currently 6,000 addresses per month are listed as rentals. Cape Coral is in the process of comparing this new data to their vacation rental registry and working with the Clerk’s Office to ensure that the tourist tax is being collected.
- Larry Fiesel had no comment.
- Pam Cronin had no comment.
- Nigel Fullick had no comment.
- Jay Johnson had no comment.
- Liston Bochette had no comment.
- Rob Wells had no comment.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

### **Next TDC meeting**

The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at **9 a.m. Thursday, January 11, 2024**, 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](http://LeeVCB.com). Contact: Tamara Pigott, [TPigott@leegov.com](mailto:TPigott@leegov.com), Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.