



TDC Meeting Minutes

February 8, 2024

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, Larry Fiesel, Jay Johnson, Pamela Cronin, Brian Kramer, Bill Steinke, Bill Waichulis, Liston Bochette, Tony Lapi, and Holly Smith.

Dan Allers, Robert Wells III, Nigel Fullick and Fran Myers were excused.

Approval of previous meeting minutes

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the January 11, 2024, TDC meeting minutes. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

John Lai, Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association (FRLA) Regional Director for Lee, Charlotte and Collier, and President & CEO of Sanibel & Captiva (SanCap) Chamber of Commerce gave an update. Tourism day was very productive in Tallahassee. Chris Lopez will be taking over John's position as regional director of FRLA within the next 30 days. On Feb. 21, SanCap and FRLA will hold a luncheon at the Marriott Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa where Ben Siegel will be the speaker. The State of the Islands Summit occurred on Jan. 29 at the Marriott Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa with over 230 attendees. The SanCap Chamber in partnership with FGCU rolled out their business climate study to get a better idea of the recovery occurring on the islands, and it will be updated every quarter. The chamber wrapped up their 2023 year in review, and John shared some statistics with the group including: more than a million website visits, 459,650 referrals, 77,571 followers, and that the visitor center had an average of 41 visitors each day. All this information is available on the SanCap website.

Municipalities to be heard

Sharon Woodberry, economic development manager, City of Cape Coral along with Andreana Petersen, business recruitment and retention specialist, City of Cape Coral shared some upcoming events. February and March events include: Bike Night on February 10th, Music & Arts Fusion Walk on February 17th, and Movie in the park series February 29th. There will be a mangrove planting project to enhance the shoreline at Coral Pointe taking place on February 10th and the Burrowing Owl festival will take place on February 24th at Rotary Park. Taste the Cape will take place on March 3rd at Cultural Park and Brewfest will occur March 23rd at Cultural Park as well. The Economic and Business Development Spotlight featured The Greek Spot, Grazing Haus, Busy Bees Kids Salon, Bones Coffee Company, Crisp Creperie and the Palace Pub & Wine Bar. These spotlights garnered 536 likes on Facebook and 306 likes on Instagram. New businesses opening in Cape Coral include: BaRunch, East of Chicago Pizza, Lucky's 13 Pub, Love Boat Ice Cream, Twin Peaks and Hooked Island Grill.

Councilwoman Karen Woodson, Town of Fort Myers Beach, presented a proposal for an improved Fort Myers Beach pier. Woodson reported that in 2022, the pier hosted over 1.6 million of the 4.3 million total visitors to the Lee County area. In past years, the pier consistently had over one million visitors, making it the most popular tourist attraction in the county. Proposed improvements to the pier include widening to accommodate a greater capacity of people, an increased length for safety purposes, sunset/horizon view areas, a larger fishing area and more. Many of the proposed improvements are in compliance with the FEMA and ADA guidelines. The project is currently estimated at around \$8-10 million dollars, but this is a guesstimate at best and the project could be substantially lower. The Town of Fort Myers Beach ask the TDC for their support with funding as well as to act as advisors to the BoCC for the improved pier project.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for December 2023 was \$3,531,743, an 20.7% increase over December 2022 preliminary collections of \$2,925,882. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$8,727,799 an increase of 12.3% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for December 2023 was 634%, which is down 12.6% from December 2022. The average daily rate for December 2023 was \$156.50, down 15.2% from December 2022 and RevPAR for December 2023 was \$99.18, down 25.9% from December 2022.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for December 2023 was 31%, which is up 27.4% from December 2022. The average daily rate for December 2023 was \$240, up 11.7% from December 2022 and RevPAR for December 2023 was \$74, up 41.8% from December 2022.

During December 2023, a record-breaking 1,094,783 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, an increase of 27.0% compared to December 2022.

October - December visitor tracking report

Joseph St. Germain, DSG presented Oct. through Dec. 2023 visitor research data. He reported that compared to the same period in 2022, more visitors travelled to the Fort Myers area, resulting in an increased number of visitor days, thereby boosting direct expenditures by 26.2% and total economic impact by 26.9%. Domestically, 32.1% of visitors came from the Midwest, while the majority of international visitors originated from Canada, accounting for 6.4% followed by Germany with 3.6%. Visitors spent an average of 5.9 nights in the Fort Myers area, with 27% visiting for the first time, and 24% having visited more than 10 times.

Marketing update

Brian Ososky, VCB marketing director provided an update focusing on FYTD performance vs goals for paid media, email, social media, website, paid search, and creative. His update included a look at the new Minnesota Twins equipment truck sponsored wrap, new destination golf video featuring influencer LouLou Gonzalez, and an early look at the new meetings campaign and interactive video.

Sports development report

Jeff Mielke, Sports Development director reported that 65,542 room nights sold in the months of October through December 2023 with direct visitor spending of \$30.7 million. For calendar year 2023, 143 sporting events were held, resulting in a historic 188,291 hotel room nights sold generating a total of \$82 million in direct visitor spending.

New Business

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, presented first quarter budget reports for the VCB and Sports Development. Bill Waichulis made a motion to approve the first quarter budget reports for the VCB and Sports Development. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

TDC member items

- Commissioner Pendergrass shared an item he brought up this week at the Commissioners meeting that concerns TDT funding for two chambers of commerce that also act as visitor centers: Fort Myers Beach and Sanibel-Captiva. Commissioners have requested County staff receive details of the funding requests from the Sanibel-Captiva Chamber of Commerce and Fort Myers Beach Chamber of Commerce and ask the County Attorney's Office for an opinion as to whether those funding requests are eligible for Tourist Development Tax (TDT) funding.
- Holly Smith shared that Sanibel Island will have its 4th of July parade this year which will bring some sense of normalcy to the area. Smith also shared a fact sheet created by the SanCap Chamber of Commerce that highlights the statistics shared at the State of the Islands Summit.
- Bill Steinke invited everyone to come out to Bike Night on February 10th and the Sounds of Jazz & Blues Music Festival at Coral Oaks Golf Course on March 23rd. It sells out every year, and you can get admission, general and VIP tickets at capeconcerts.com.
- Larry Fiesel shared that there are five total hotels that are currently before the design review board that they hope will be coming online but there is no timeline at this point. They expect the 566 hotel rooms they have in Estero to double if these five new hotels are built. The Village of Estero purchased 200 acres for conservation and stormwater management. 50 acres around Estero High School are part of a 99-year joint agreement lease that will be used to develop recreational facilities to be shared by the school and citizens of Estero.
- Jay Johnson requested that the Greater Pine Island Chamber of Commerce be included with Commissioner Pendergrass's request for TDT funds.
- Liston Bochette shared that the City of Fort Myers hosted the first Global Sports Symposium with Tiffin University at the Collaboratory last week with over 2,000 online views tuning in. In addition, the symposium sent NBA, NFL, and Olympic athletes to visit the local schools. With the help of the STARS program and Jeff Mielke they were able to put together programs for FGCU, Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce, and Lee Health. The event exceeded expectations. The Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce former office location is vacant, and deed is restricted for public service use. Perhaps the City or County could capitalize on that waterfront property.
- Tony Lapi had no comment.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:09 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

There is no meeting in March. The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at **9 a.m. Thursday, April 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. Contact: Tamara Pigott, TPigott@leegov.com, Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.