



TDC Meeting Minutes

June 12, 2025

Commissioner Kevin Ruane called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 8:59 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Kevin Ruane, Bill Waichulis, Brian Kramer, Robert Wells III, Pamela Cronin, Nigel Fullick, Jay Johnson, Bill Steinke, Lori Fayhee and Holly Smith.

Liston Bochette, Tony Lapi and Dan Allers were excused.

Approval of previous meeting minutes

Rob Wells made a motion to approve the May 8, 2025, TDC meeting minutes. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Elyzabeth Spires, Marketing Manager, The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village, shared that they will be adjusting the resort fee to include the sunset cruise for all guests. She also thanked the TDC and VCB for including them as an Island Hopper Songwriter Fest venue again this year.

Lisa Wilson, Edison Ford Winter Estates, shared that their site remains open despite the surrounding road closures due to construction. All normally scheduled fall events will take place, including a family-friendly fall festival in October, a garden festival in mid-November, and the Holiday Nights event will begin the day after Thanksgiving.

Alison Hussey, Executive Director, CROW (Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife), gave an update on the Sanibel Wild Mile Pass. This free mobile passport app was created in partnership with the VCB and launched on March 1, 2025. It allows users to check-in at CROW, SCCF (Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation), J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, and the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum and Aquarium to explore, earn points, and win prizes. The pass has had 545 signups and 283 check-ins since launch. 49% of participants were from outside of Florida. Prizes range from stickers to t-shirts, and the pass has been featured in various publications and VCB newsletters in addition to being promoted by the partnering agencies.

Municipalities to be heard

Ashley Anderson, Business Recruitment and Retention Specialist, City of Cape Coral, shared some upcoming business openings in Cape Coral. Slipaway Food Truck Park & Marina is slated to open in June 2025 featuring 10 locally owned food trucks selected from over 140 applicants. The Marina features 30 boat slips with a fuel dock and ship store. Paradise Cove Wave Pool, a 12,000 square foot pool, is also tentatively scheduled for a mid-June opening at SunSplash Family Waterpark. Red, White & Boom annual 4th of July event will kick off with a 5K and Kid's Fun Run in the morning, and American Country Music star George Birge will perform in concert at 8:00 p.m. with fireworks following at 9:30 p.m.



Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for April 2025 was \$4,152,523, a 15.6% increase over April 2024 preliminary collections of \$3,591,315. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$32,674,900 an increase of 4.87% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for April 2025 was 64.4%, which is down 3.4% from April 2024. The average daily rate for April 2025 was \$191.54, an increase of 9.7% from April 2024 and RevPAR for April 2025 was \$123.26, up 5.9% from April 2024.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for April 2025 was 39.4%, which is up 7.9% from April 2024. The average daily rate for April 2025 was \$277, up 8.9% from April 2024 and RevPAR for April 2025 was \$109, up 17.6% from April 2024.

During April 2025, 1,178,980 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, an increase of 4.0% compared to April 2024. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is down 1.8% from the same period last year.

Marketing update

Lesley-Ann Thompson, VCB Marketing Director, shared a combination of initiatives designed to drive incremental demand in our traditional need period. These efforts included a satellite media tour to promote National Seashell Day and summer travel in 14 markets, as well as a hotel sale co-op buy with Expedia that will run from August 1-September 30th. She also shared details on an upcoming collaboration with Kind Traveler in which guests can support a local charity by donating a portion of their stay, and a culinary event presented in partnership with Garden & Gun and local chef Melissa Donahue from Sweet Melissa's that allowed us to present a destination-inspired cocktail menu and signature dish in an Atlanta restaurant for a week. The partnership culminated with a Sunday Supper attended by restaurant guests, media, and social media influencers. In terms of national reach, the destination also received valuable on-air mention, alongside Sanibel Inn, in a group trip giveaway segment on the TODAY show.

In addition to our consumer-focused marketing efforts, she noted that we continue to maintain a presence with proven performers that reach key segments within the meetings and weddings markets. Live now on visitfortmyers.com/meetings is a new interactive meetings video created as a helpful resource for meeting planners. In terms of wedding leads, we also ran a successful Romantic Getaway sweepstakes with Honeyfund sweepstakes that enabled couples to win a stay at Lovers Key Resort.

Strategic plan update

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, gave an update of the destination strategic plan. She reviewed the three overarching goals for the destination that were established to ensure the visitor economy continues to create economic opportunity and contribute to the quality of life in Lee County. The three goals are: (1) Optimization of Visitor Economy Impacts (2) Thought-leadership in Placemaking, and (3) Destination Adaptability. She then gave updates on each objective in the plan and how the internal VCB teams are implementing them using prioritized strategies as guidelines.

Jay Johnson replied, "Continue to promote the ways that TDT brings value to the community."

New business

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the amendment to the TDC Bylaws. Nigel Fullick seconded the motion which passed unanimously.



TDC member items

- Pamela Cronin had no comment.
- Nigel Fullick shared that they are exploring the idea of building a fishing pier in Bonita Springs. The City of Bonita Springs would likely partner with Lee County and the surrounding municipalities before any decision is made. Bonita Springs will be hosting a free 42-minute-long laser and fireworks show in celebration of the 4th of July starting at dusk. Fullick also shared that they are beginning to revitalize their public-private art projects in Bonita Springs. One installation will be going up in the Midtown complex at the intersection of I-75 and Bonita Beach Road, and in partnership with Sugar Shack, a sculpture will be installed at their business downtown. The goal is to add a sculpture walk as an attraction to Bonita Springs.
- Bill Waichulis wished everyone a Happy Father's Day weekend.
- Jay Johnson shared that the Lee Chapter of FRLA (Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association) is aware of their vacant seat on the TDC and will provide a recommendation to fill the seat before the August TDC meeting.
- Brian Kramer was pleased to announce that all ballroom spaces at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point will be shutting down in mid-July for an extensive \$18 million dollar renovation of their meeting spaces. The project will last three to four months, and the meeting spaces will reopen in mid-October just in time for the VCB's Annual Meeting on November 12. They are excited to continue investing and elevating the property.
- Lori Fayhee had no comment.
- Holly Smith shared that Sanibel will be hosting a 4th of July event with a parade. Their "Love Sanibel Back" campaign is running now through September, highlighting a different location each week. Smith also shared her appreciation for the Wander app available through the Sanibel-Captiva Chamber of Commerce website that showcases open businesses on the islands. Smith shared that she had just returned from Washington, D.C. last night, and it was clear that our advocacy regarding the Tourist Development Tax in Florida has been heard. Smith shared an interesting piece of data from the Everglades Foundation that Florida water is a \$1 trillion asset that generates \$31.5 billion annually.
- Bill Steinke shared that he also was in D.C. but representing the interests of Florida Realtors. The Chiquita Lock in Cape Coral has been removed, and with less restricted boat traffic, should help attract more people to the waterways. Cape Coral received all permit approvals necessary to begin the construction of a marine seawall at the Yacht Club site. The Boathouse restaurant plans to rebuild at the Cape Coral Yacht Club as well. Until the new Boat House restaurant is built, their contract will allow for food trucks to supply food and beverages, and temporary restrooms will be set up for customers. The Paradise Wave pool will open tentatively in mid-June at SunSplash.
- Rob Wells had no comment.
- Commissioner Ruane discussed the sustainability of the County's enterprise funds and indicated that the Commission is not looking to raise tolls to balance the budget. Ruane also shared that the millage rate in Lee County has not been raised in the 19 years he's been in office.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:16 a.m.