



TDC Meeting Minutes

October 9, 2025

Vice Chair Jay Johnson called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Brian Kramer, Robert Wells III, Holly Smith, Bill Waichulis, Jay Johnson, Bill Steinke, Lori Fayhee, John Lai and Tony Lapi.

Liston Bochette, Commissioner Kevin Ruane, Nigel Fullick, Pamela Cronin and Dan Allers were excused.

Guests First recognizes newest graduates

Crystal Wanke, VCB Hospitality Customer Service Training Specialist, recognized the newest Certified Guest Service Professionals (CGSPs), bringing the program's total to 1,204 graduates and marking a significant milestone in elevating service quality. She also celebrated Shalimar Beach Resort as the latest fully certified property in Lee County. Through its partnership with the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute, the Guests First program continues to offer both in-person and virtual sessions, helping frontline staff strengthen their skills, improve visitor satisfaction, and support the destination's goal of increasing repeat visitation.

Approval of previous meeting minutes

Tony Lapi made a motion to approve the August 14, 2025, TDC meeting minutes. Rob Wells seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Megan Dunphy, Director of Sales, Luminary Hotel & Co., shared that the property recently marked its 5th anniversary in downtown Fort Myers and will host a celebratory event on the evening of October 24.

Chris Farrell, Executive Director, Florida Repertory Theatre, announced that they are celebrating their 28th season. They are proud to report that the theatre attracts approximately 100,000 patrons annually to downtown Fort Myers, contributing millions in local spending, resulting in sold-out shows which has prompted the REP to add extra performances to keep up with demand.

Municipalities to be heard

Ashley Anderson, Business Recruitment and Retention Specialist, City of Cape Coral, shared some upcoming events and visitor data for Cape Coral. Manatee Man Triathlon took place on Aug. 31 at The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village. Island Hopper Songwriter Fest was held in Cape Coral on Sept. 22 and 23. The Tourism Spotlight features the Cultural Park Theatre. The theatre was established in 1963 and is Southwest Florida's longest-running community theater, showcasing local talent and enriching Cape Coral's cultural life for over 60 years. There will be several frightfully



fun fall events with Cape Coral Oktoberfest October 17-19 & 24-26, Kiwanis KidsFest October 4 from 10am-3pm, Cape Coral Bike Night October 11th from 5-10pm, and Trunk or Treat & Drone show October 24th from 5-9pm.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for August 2025 was \$2,319,072, a 6.58% increase over August 2024 preliminary collections of \$2,175,922. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$44,807,978 an increase of 5.93% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for August 2025 was 49.6%, which is down 2.4% from August 2024. The average daily rate for August 2025 was \$131.77, an increase of 6.9% from August 2024 and RevPAR for August 2025 was \$65.40, up 4.3% from August 2024.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for August 2025 was 21.7%, which is up 2.2% from August 2024. The average daily rate for August 2025 was \$212.14, up 3.2% from August 2024 and RevPAR for August 2025 was \$46.01, up 5.4% from August 2024.

During August 2025, 647,917 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, an increase of 5.4% compared to August 2024 and the best August in the 44-year history of the airport. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is down 0.3% from the same period last year.

Visitor Services Report

Simone Behr, VCB director of visitor services, reported that the Tourism Ambassador volunteers assisted a record number of 924,561 visitors and residents during the FY 24/25. Fiscal year to date the value of our volunteer hours is more than \$1 million. In August, Visitor Services hosted the 25th Annual Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service awards honoring hospitality and allied industry employees at the Caloosa Sound Convention Center. On September 19th, VCB volunteers celebrated National Talk Like a Pirate Day at RSW by handing out stickers and pirate favors to the traveling public. Visitor Services has recruited a number of new volunteers who are currently in training. Thank you to many of our industry partners who are hosting our volunteers for their fall destination education training.

TDC member items

- Bill Steinke shared that Saturday, October 11th is Bike Night in Cape Coral with 3 big bands, expanded parking for motorcycles, and better lighting for attendees to enjoy the event.
- Jay Johnson shared that there will be no November TDC meeting. He also announced that the Fort Myers Tip-Off basketball tournament will take place during Thanksgiving week as well as the Sand Sculpting tournament on Fort Myers Beach. Johnson extended his gratitude to VCB staff for another successful Island Hopper Songwriter Fest this year by expanding the festival's footprint across the destination and recruiting high-quality songwriters.
- Brian Kramer shared that the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort & Spa is wrapping up their \$16 million renovation of meeting spaces. Opening day of the renovated spaces will be Sunday, October 12, and the resort is looking forward to hosting the VCB for its Annual Meeting in



November. Kramer shared that the resort is currently in the design phase to reimagine and renovate the spa, with the project expected to cost a little more than \$12 million. Additionally, he shared that the resort was running at 20% occupancy during the renovations, and now that they are complete, they are sold out beginning on Monday.

- Lori Fayhee shared that there will be a groundbreaking ceremony at 3 p.m. on Friday, November 14 for the High 5 Entertainment venue at the Estero Village Center Hub. Fayhee shared that the pickleball courts will be ready in 2026.
- Holly Smith shared that the City of Sanibel is currently at a 71% open inventory rate for hotels and short-term rentals. Anchor Inn and Seashells of Sanibel are hoping to reopen in November 2025, and Beachview Villas plan to reopen in February 2026. Currently, about 81% of Sanibel's vacation rental inventory is online, and more than 83% of local Sanibel businesses are reopened with the Seashell Museum setting a 103% increase in attendance compared to 2022. Furthermore, Sanibel hosted Brian Rist from FGCU to hold an AI Hub for businesses to explore the technology and practical applications of AI. The farmers market reopened as well and it is held every Sunday from 8 a.m. - 1p.m. Additionally, Florida City Week will take place October 20-26 to promote awareness about municipal governments and promote civic engagement.
- John Lai announced that FRLA has invested more than \$5,000 in hospitality programs for Lee County Schools. The Lee County Schools Taco Cook-Off, an annual culinary competition for high school students, will take place at Shangri-La Springs on October 29 from 5-8 p.m. On December 5, Elizabeth Hargrave, a game designer with Hasbro Games, along with the Sanibel Captiva Chamber of Commerce, will be hosting a soft launch for her brand-new board game, "Sanibel." The game centers around collecting seashells to build different shell set combinations and acquire points to compete against your friends. John Lai invited the TDC to attend the soft launch of the board game.
- Rob Wells had no comment.
- Tony Lapi thanked the VCB for another successful Island Hopper Songwriter Fest this year and emphasized its continued importance for stimulating the economy in the month of September. Lapi also shared that the 'Tween Waters annual tree lighting ceremony will take place the day after Thanksgiving.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:16 a.m.