



## **TDC Meeting Minutes**

December 11, 2025

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

### **Council members in attendance**

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, Liston Bochette, Robert Wells III, Jay Johnson, Bill Steinke, John Lai, Pam Cronin, Dan Allers, Nigel Fullick and Tony Lapi.

Brian Kramer, Bill Waichulis, Lori Fayhee and Holly Smith were excused.

Commissioner Pendergrass thanked Commissioner Kevin Ruane for his service to the TDC the past year and presented him with a plaque.

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

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the Oct. 9, TDC meeting minutes. Bill Steinke seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

### **Public to be heard**

None to be heard

### **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. Cape Coral Oktoberfest attracted 15,000-16,000 attendees, Bike Night attracted around 14,000 attendees and the Halloween Trunk or Treat event attracted approximately 3,600 attendees. Upcoming events aim to boost holiday traffic and community engagement, including the Cape Coral Holiday Boat-A-Long on December 20 at Four Freedoms Park (Bimini Basin) from 4-9p.m. The boat parade begins around 6:30pm. Cape Coral's New Year's Eve Celebration & Ball Drop on Dec. 31 will feature a ball drop for families at 8pm and another at midnight on SE 47<sup>th</sup> Terrace in Downtown Cape Coral. The 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Cape Coral Art Festival & Market takes place on Saturday, Jan. 10 10a.m.-5p.m. and Sunday, Jan. 11 10a.m.-4p.m., and the 35th Annual Tour de Cape will be held Jan. 23-25, beginning at Rotary Park. The Tourism Spotlight featured Tropical Breeze Fun Park. They offer Mini-Golf and GellyBall, enhancing local entertainment options.

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

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for October 2025 was \$2,682,648, a 40.6% increase over October 2024 preliminary collections of \$1,908,697. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$2,754,882 an increase of 35.2% year-over-year.



Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for October 2025 was 54.1%, which is down 12.6% from October 2024. The average daily rate for October 2025 was \$136.80, an increase of 3.2% from October 2024 and RevPAR for October 2025 was \$74.05, down 9.9% from October 2024.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for October 2025 was 17.8%, which is up 30.6% from October 2024. The average daily rate for October 2025 was \$208.95, up 12.6% from October 2024 and RevPAR for October 2025 was \$37.02, up 44.0% from October 2024.

During October 2025, 774,689 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, an increase of 17.8% compared to October 2024 and the best October in the history of the airport. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is up 1.4% from the same period last year.

### **Sales report**

Erin Lester, VCB senior sales manager, reported that the sales team met or exceeded three of six FY24-25 goals. The sales team provided an update on recent activity and presented upcoming sales activities for the end of the year. Additionally, Lester congratulated Jennifer Walla for earning the 2025 TravelPluse 40 under 40. Charm Evans, global sales manager, provided an update on international travel to the destination, highlighting recent marketing initiatives and travel trade activities. A notable marketing effort included a two-month London black cab campaign featuring the "Just Feels Right" branding on 25 black cabs. These vehicles circulated through high-traffic areas such as business hubs and major attractions, serving as 24/7 mobile billboards to increase destination visibility. Evans also shared details of the international destination familiarization (FAM) tour taking place during the current week. The tour hosts a group of travel trade partners from the UK, Scotland and Ireland, aimed at strengthening relationships and promoting the destination.

### **Marketing & Communications report**

Brian Ososky, VCB chief marketing officer, provided a Marketing & Communications update that included a brief recap of the annual meeting on Nov. 12 at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point, as well as initiatives around U.S. Travel's IPW and the FIFA World Cup, both taking place in Florida next summer. He shared that we are Florida's first DMO to participate in Kind Traveler's "Every Stay Gives Back" program and provided an update about the new Sanibel board game that is rolling out next month. He reviewed VCB-hosted journalist visits in Q4 that resulted in more than 2.2 billion media impressions, as well as some of the integrated marketing packages the team is working on for 2026.

### **July-September 2025 research report**

James Brendle, DSG, presented an overview of July-September 2025 visitor research. Lee County welcomed 762,800 visitors during this time, an increase of 9.7% compared to 2024, resulting in direct visitor spending exceeding \$643 million, an increase of 3.3% compared to 2024. He reported that the international market accounted for around 9.8% of visitors during the July through September timeframe, with Canada representing the largest share at 4.2%.



### **Sports development report**

Jeff Mielke, Sports Development director, reported that a total of 36,513 room nights were sold during July through September 2025, generating more than \$14.8 million in direct visitor spending. Mielke also highlighted the success of the Thanksgiving Day MSU vs. UNC college basketball game held during the Fort Myers Tip-Off. The game was the most-watched college basketball broadcast ever on FOX and ranked as the second most-watched regular season college basketball game on any network in over 30 years.

### **Special presentation**

Kevin Karnes, Lee County clerk and comptroller, delivered a special presentation to the Board regarding the Lee County Tourist Development Tax. He outlined the clerk's responsibilities in the areas of tax collection, compliance monitoring, auditing, and enforcement. Karnes shared account holder statistics, addressed questions and concerns related to reporting requirements and compliance procedures.

### **New Business**

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the Q4 FY25 Budget report. Bill Steinke seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Wells made a motion to appoint Johnson as the 2026 TDC vice chair. Tony Lapi seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Steinke made a motion to approve the 2026 TDC meeting dates. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

#### **2026 TDC Meeting dates**

Jan 8 - 9 a.m.	April 9 - 9 a.m.	July - no meeting	Oct. 8 - 9 a.m.
Feb. 12 - 9 a.m.	May 14 - 9 a.m.	Aug. 13 - 9 a.m.	Nov. 12 - 9 a.m.
March 12 - 9 a.m.	June 11 - 9 a.m.	Sept. - no meeting	Dec. 10 - 9 a.m.

Wells made a motion to approve the FY26 Sales & Marketing Plan. Lapi seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

### **TDC member items**

- Bill Steinke invited everyone to come out and join them in Cape Coral for the New Year's Eve ball drop both for adults and kids. He wished everyone a Merry Christmas.
- Jay Johnson announced that the winner of the October FRLA Culinary Classic Cook-off was Island Coast High School in Cape Coral. FRLA will be participating in Tourism Days in Tallahassee during session, from Jan. 20-21. He also announced that FRLA will be bringing back their annual golf tournament this spring.
- Rob Wells wished everyone Happy Holidays.



- Tony Lapi shared that the beach renourishment on Captiva Island is done and that Sanibel received 300,000 cubic yards of sand from Blind Pass to Bowman's Beach as well. He wished everyone Happy Holidays.
- Pam Cronin wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.
- Liston Bochette thanked the VCB and TDC for the great information shared at these meetings which he takes back to the City of Fort Myers to provide helpful insights. He wished everyone Merry Christmas.
- Nigel Fullick shared that the Bonita Springs city council is dedicated to continuing their funding for the Holiday in the Park event in Bonita Springs after another great turnout this year. He also gave a shoutout to Mayor Dan Allers for the number of holiday cards for overseas soldiers collected by the Town of Fort Myers Beach. Fullick estimates that more than 50,000 cards were written by Lee County residents to our soldiers overseas this year and expressed his gratitude for the kind effort.
- Dan Allers had no comment.
- Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass announced that South Seas will be celebrating the grand opening of their waterpark, "Captiva Landing" on Dec. 22 with a ribbon cutting at 11:30a.m. He wished everyone Happy Holidays and Happy Hanukkah.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.