



TDC Meeting Minutes

June 11, 2026

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

Council Members in Attendance

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, Holly Smith, Robert Wells III, Jay Johnson, Bill Steinke, John Lai, Nigel Fullick, Tony Lapi and Bill Waichulis.

Pam Cronin, Liston Bochette, Scott Safford, Lori Fayhee and Brian Kramer were excused.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve May 14 TDC meeting minutes. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

John Albion, SVN Commercial Partners, thanked and honored Tamara Pigott for all the great work she's done for the tourism industry and the Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB).

Chris Mosteiro of Visuality, a local nonprofit organization, shared that Visuality operates a downtown center that is open to the public, offering support and resources for LGBTQ+ individuals and allies, including community support, peer support, and related services. He announced that the SWFL Pride Festival will be held this Saturday in downtown Fort Myers and is expected to attract attendees from across the country. He shared that the festival had previously been hosted at the Alliance for the Arts for over 10 years, but following disruptions from COVID-19 and hurricanes, the event was reimagined and relocated to downtown Fort Myers. He also expressed appreciation to the City of Fort Myers for its collaboration and support with Visuality.

Municipalities to be heard

Joe Petrella, Director of Cape Coral Parks & Recreation introduced Honey Phillips, Supervisor at the Rotary Park Environmental Center, who highlighted the significant economic contribution of eco-tourism. Phillips noted that Florida's state parks generated \$3.6 billion in direct economic impact in 2023. Local parks including Four Mile Cove Preserve and Rotary Park reported strong visitor numbers, with over 57,000 visitors to Four Mile Cove, representing 56% from outside Cape Coral, and Rotary Park had 82,000 visitors, 33% from outside Cape Coral. Phillips reiterated the importance of maintenance funding for these parks due to their impact on tourism in the area.

Ashley Anderson, City of Cape Coral, highlighted upcoming 4th of July events, including Red, White & Boom, which will commemorate America's 250th anniversary, as well as the Freedom 5K and Kids Fun Run. She shared the recent grand opening and ribbon cutting of Jaycee Park, noting its waterfront location and amenities including a playground, splash pad, walking path, and



volleyball courts. The park's opening event attracted thousands of attendees, demonstrating strong community interest and positioning the park as a recreational asset for both residents and visitors. She also recognized Salty Native Charters, a veteran-owned business based in Cape Coral that offers fishing charters, dolphin tours, eco tours, shelling excursions, and private captain-for-hire services throughout Lee County.

Special Presentations

Crystal Wanke, VCB hospitality training manager, presented the Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina with their Certified Guest Service Professional (CGSP) property designation. The resort was recognized for developing an internal training program that certified 221 frontline employees in guest service excellence to earn this designation. The Pink Shell has implemented the Guests First training program as part of employee onboarding and professional development.

Report of the Executive Director

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for April 2026 was \$5,193,092, a 25.0% increase over April 2025 preliminary collections of \$4,152,523. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$40,177,315, an increase of 23.0% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for April 2026 was 67.8%, which is up 5.1% from April 2025. The average daily rate for April 2026 was \$196.12, an increase of 1.9% from April 2025 and RevPAR for April 2026 was \$132.95, up 7.1% from April 2025.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for April 2026 was 40.0%, which is up 14.6% from April 2025. The average daily rate for April 2026 was \$321.89, up 1.6% from April 2025 and RevPAR for April 2026 was \$128.73, up 16.5% from April 2025.

During April 2026, 1,152,669 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, a decrease of 2.2% compared to April 2025. Calendar year-to-date, airport traffic is up 0.9% compared to the same time last year.

Marketing Update

Lesley-Ann Thompson, VCB director of marketing, provided an overview of the VCB's current marketing initiatives, including a comprehensive wrap report on the Sports Illustrated partnership, which generated more than 13 billion impressions. She noted ongoing out-of-home advertising in key summer markets and highlighted the launch of the Summer Nature Navigator digital pass and Family Fun Quiz. Thompson also reported on strong national sweepstakes performance, which has contributed to database growth and national visibility. Plus, she summarized active booking-focused efforts with Expedia, Hopper, TripAdvisor and other partners, and closed with a preview of fall campaign plans and new creative assets.



New Business

Bylaws Amendment – Tamara Pigott provided an overview of the proposed amendments to the TDC bylaws to align with recently enacted state legislation and requested a motion to approve the amendments. The changes expand the Council by adding two voting members: one representing the county’s most populous municipality and one community member with an interest in tourism. The amendments also revise the municipal seat structure, with one seat designated for the most populous municipality, one for the municipality generating the highest bed tax revenue, and a third rotating annually among the remaining municipalities. The VCB is awaiting final bed tax revenue data from the Clerk of Court to determine the applicable municipality before moving forward with ordinance amendments and public hearings before the Board of County Commissioners. The updated Council membership is anticipated to be in place by August or September.

Bill Steinke made a motion to approve the amendment to the TDC Bylaws. Jay Johnson seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Tamara Pigott introduced the discussion regarding requests that qualify for Tourist Development Tax funding but fall outside the Beach & Shoreline Program. She noted that these projects have historically been recommended for funding from TDC reserves, but concerns were raised during the recent Beach & Shoreline Workshop about declining reserves balances and the long-term sustainability of that approach. Tamara explained that the purpose of the discussion was to allow the full Council to consider potential funding strategies and develop a recommendation for the Board of County Commissioners. TDC members discussed the pros and cons for funding eligible projects outside of the Beach and Shoreline program, with many council members expressing caution against depleting reserves for routine project funding, emphasizing the importance of maintaining reserves for emergencies such as hurricanes and red tide events.

TDC Member Items

- Tony Lapi shared that he served with Rene Affourtit and Pamela Cronin on the selection committee that hired Tamara Pigott as Director. Tony thanked Tamara for her years of service with the VCB and her work promoting Lee County.
- Rob Wells shared that he served on the TDC before Tamara Pigott became Director. He remarked that no one knew the organization's numbers better than Tamara, that she was always available to take a call, and that she consistently put the interests of all of Lee County first while building an outstanding team at the VCB.
- John Lai thanked Tamara Pigott for her service at the VCB and being a good friend for all these years and wished her a great retirement in Tallahassee.
- Nigel Fullick thanked Tamara Pigott and Pamela Johnson for their presentation to the Bonita Springs City Council in June and thanked Tamara for her years of service. He noted that two Bonita Springs restaurants, The Canary Club and the Bohemian, have been recognized in the Michelin Guide. He also highlighted the success of the Memorial Day



event, including a moving presentation by Ray Sandelli, and shared that the July 4 celebration will feature fireworks, a laser light show, and a drone show. He also noted that the splash pad and Riverside Park will be open for the holiday.

- Holly Smith noted that hurricane season began on June 1 and shared that she recently spoke in Tallahassee to the state legislature about taxes. She highlighted the ongoing Love Sanibel Back event, now in its third year, and announced that Sanibel's America 250 celebration will include a July 4 parade. She also thanked Tamara Pigott for her support and guidance, recalling her comprehensive onboarding process and noting that Tamara has always been available to answer questions and help her better understand the organization.
- Bill Waichulis remarked, "What a ride!" reflecting on the various crises and challenges the VCB, TDC, and community had weathered during Tamara's 25 years of service as Executive Director. Bill stated that we couldn't have asked for a better leader to help us through those tough times.
- Jay Johnson announced that the Sanibel-Captiva and Greater Fort Myers Chambers of Commerce have merged. He also shared that, effective July 1, the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association (FRLA) will engage the Chamber as its management company for the Southwest Florida Region. He congratulated Tamara Pigott on retiring and thanked her for always being available to take his calls and answer his questions and greatly appreciated her leadership.
- Bill Steinke stated that he understands his responsibility as a TDC member is to represent all of Lee County. He thanked Tamara Pigott for her leadership and guidance through the many challenges faced during her tenure. He announced that the annual Flag Day celebration will be held at the Veteran's Memorial on the Cape Coral side of the bridge at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, and that as part of the America 250 celebration, the City of Cape Coral will be raising the flag on Florida's tallest flagpole during a celebration beginning at 2:00 p.m. on July 4.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:39 a.m.