



TDC Meeting Minutes

August 13, 2026

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass called the Lee County Tourist Development Council (TDC) meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. Pendergrass expressed condolences to Commissioner Ruane's family, and a moment of silence was held in honor of his daughter, Shannon.

Council Members in Attendance

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, Robert Wells III, Jay Johnson, Brian Kramer, Bill Steinke, John Lai, Tony Lapi, Lori Fayhee, Pam Cronin, Sandy Stilwell Youngquist and Bill Waichulis.

Darla Bonk, Holly Smith, Scott Safford and Nigel Fullick were excused.

Commissioner Pendergrass welcomed Sandy Stilwell Youngquist and Darla Bonk as new TDC members.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the June 11, 2026, TDC meeting minutes. Pam Cronin seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Lisa Wilson, Edison and Ford Winter Estates thanked the TDC for its continued support over the years. She announced the Estates' lineup of events for the upcoming season, including the Annual Fall Festival and Garden Festival; Holiday Nights, returning the day after Thanksgiving; and the Rhythm on the River concert series featuring five tribute bands.

Municipalities to be heard

Ashley Anderson, City of Cape Coral, highlighted 4th of July events, including Red, White & Boom, which commemorated America's 250th anniversary, as well as the Freedom 5K and Kids Fun Run. Together, the events brought 47,500 visits to Cape Coral. She also shared that the grand opening and ribbon cutting for Festival Park will be held on August 14 at 9:00 a.m., noting that it is the newest multi-use venue with sports fields, festival grounds, concessions, restrooms and infrastructure for a future amphitheater. She noted two upcoming events in Cape Coral: Island Hopper Songwriter Fest, September 21-22 at the Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village, and Cape Coral Oktoberfest, October 16-18 and October 23-25. She also recognized Escape the Cape Escape Rooms as the city's Tourism Spotlight this month.

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass introduced Pamela Johnson as the new VCB executive director before she delivered her first director's report to the TDC.



Report of the Executive Director

Pamela Johnson, VCB executive director, introduced new VCB staff members Dessa Bobosky and Breanna Alexander. Dessa joined the VCB as the new marketing coordinator, bringing experience in digital content creation, website management and marketing project implementation. Breanna is the new sales coordinator, with four years of marketing and communications experience from Edison and Ford Winter Estates.

Johnson reported the preliminary resort tax collected for June 2026 was \$3,813,291, a 20.7% increase over June 2025 preliminary collections of \$3,158,976. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$47,956,911, an increase of 22.2% year-over-year.

Johnson also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for June 2026 was 56.6%, which is up 1.1% from June 2025. The average daily rate for June 2026 was \$152.58, a decrease of 0.2% from June 2025, and RevPAR for June 2026 was \$86.32, up 0.9% from June 2025.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for June 2026 was 30.6%, which is up 13.3% from June 2025. The average daily rate for June 2026 was \$296.04, up 1.7% from June 2025, and RevPAR for June 2026 was \$91.02, up 17.3% from June 2025.

During June 2026, 689,514 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), a decrease of 1.3% compared to June 2025. Calendar year-to-date, airport traffic is up 0.6% compared to the same time last year.

Communications Report

Jackie Parker and Miriam Dotson, VCB Communications Managers, reported 8.9 billion media impressions for April through June. Parker credited the surge in impression numbers for April and May to the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit issue. She also shared coverage in Go RVing from a recent press trip with travel writer and fly fisherman Robert Annis. Dotson discussed the Canadian group press trip and the coverage produced in top Canadian publications, blogTO and Narcity. She also showcased results from the pre- and post-IPW press trips with Canadian and UK travel media, the "Girls Gone Mild" domestic group press trip, an Island Hopper preview event and a Boston Red Sox sales and media event. Parker also highlighted the VCB's success in reaching a new market through a six-page spread in Dishing Jackson Hole. Upcoming efforts include a satellite media tour, press trips and media missions.

Sales Report

Natalie Duran, VCB Director of Sales, reported that group and domestic sales continued to perform well through Q3, with strong conversion rates and group room nights ahead of pace despite lower RFP volume and shorter booking windows. The sales team generated qualified leads through key meeting planner and travel trade events, including the HelmsBriscoe Annual Business Conference, ASTA Global Convention, AAA sales calls, and a Tampa and Orlando sales mission, connecting with more than 220 travel advisors and 66 qualified meeting planners. FAM and site visit attendance, along with destination education events, also exceeded quarterly goals. Looking ahead,



the team will focus on Connect Marketplace and the Professional Fraternity Association Annual Convention to strengthen the sales pipeline and secure future group business.

Charm Evans, Global Sales Manager, shared key quarterly highlights, including participation in the international trade show IPW, where the team conducted 140 one-on-one appointments with tour operators, airlines, OTAs, and media representatives, while also engaging in enrichment and networking opportunities. The team also hosted an international destination FAM experience in April, showcasing the area and its diverse offerings to travel trade partners from Scandinavia.

Visitor Services Report

Simone Behr, VCB Visitor Services Director, reported that Tourism Ambassadors assisted 170,492 visitors and residents during the third quarter of FY26. Additional community support included Tourism Ambassadors helping at FineMark Women's Pro Tennis Championship, as well as various conferences. Visitor Services celebrated National Seashell Day with volunteers handing out local shells and shell-shaped lollipops to the traveling public at RSW. The team looks forward to hosting the 26th annual Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service Awards on August 20. Behr invited attendees to RSVP at EAwards.org.

April – June 2026 Research Report

Joseph St. Germain, DSG, presented an overview of April-June visitor research. Lee County welcomed 995,500 visitors during this time, an increase of 15.4% compared to the same period in 2025, resulting in direct visitor spending exceeding \$912 million. He reported that the international market accounted for 9.6% of visitors during the April through June timeframe, with Canada representing the largest share at 3.9%.

Sports Update

Jeff Mielke, Sports Development director, reported that 37,954 room nights were sold from April through June 2026, with direct visitor spending of more than \$19.1 million.

New Business

- a. Rob Wells made a motion to approve the funding request for Seafarer's Property on Fort Myers Beach in the amount of \$71,950 and asked that Beach & Shoreline funding be considered for future requests. Pam Cronin seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.
- b. Bill Waichulis made a motion to approve the third quarter FY26 budget reports. Jay Johnson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.
- c. Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass made a motion to approve the FY26-27 proposed budget. Sandy Stilwell Youngquist seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.
- d. Jay Johnson made a motion to formalize the recommendations for Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) approval of FY26-27 Events Marketing funding for six events totaling \$132,550. Bill Steinke seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.



- e. Jay Johnson made a motion to formalize the recommendations for BoCC approval of FY26-27 Attractions Marketing funding for 39 attractions totaling \$600,000. Brian Kramer seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

TDC Member Items

- Rob Wells had no comment.
- John Lai shared that the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association (FRLA) and Sanibel-Captiva/Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce Luncheon has 130 registrants and will be held at the Sundial Beach Resort on August 26, featuring guest speaker Pamela Johnson. The next state FRLA board meeting is October 12-14 at the Opal Sol Resort in Clearwater, Florida, where Tony Lapi will be inducted into the Hall of Fame. He noted that Visit Florida's Governor's Conference on Tourism is September 9-11 in West Palm Beach, Florida. He also shared that Brian Kramer is the newest board member for Visit Florida.
- Bill Waichulis had no comment.
- Jay Johnson shared that this year's Sizzle Dining event will include 141 restaurants, and that \$1 from each meal purchased goes to the nonprofit Blessings in a Backpack. The event will last for the entire month of September, and he encouraged everyone to participate.
- Bill Steinke shared that escape rooms such as Escape the Cape are used for team building and leadership development and are great for conferences and corporate events. The Festival Park ribbon cutting will occur on August 14 at 9:00 a.m.; the park includes 210 acres and up to 10 soccer fields. Festival Park also includes the Seahawk Airfield, which is used for model airplane competitions. Bill shared that an announcement regarding a medical facility addition to the Cape Coral area would take place after the ribbon cutting.
- Pam Cronin congratulated Pamela Johnson on her promotion to executive director of the VCB and welcomed Sandy Stilwell Youngquist to the TDC.
- Sandy Stilwell Youngquist shared that there are still vacancies at the new Captiva Island Inn during the Island Hopper Songwriter Fest for anyone looking for a place to stay on Captiva.
- Brian Kramer had no comment.
- Lori Fayhee had no comment.
- Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass shared that there is no TDC meeting in September. The next meeting is Thursday, October 8, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:44 a.m.