**TDC Meeting Minutes**
October 8, 2026

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass called the Lee County Tourist Development Council (TDC) meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

## Council Members in Attendance

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, Robert Wells III, Jay Johnson, Brian Kramer, Lori Fayhee, Pam Cronin, Darla Bonk, Holly Smith, Scott Safford and Bill Waichulis.

Bill Steinke, Sandy Stilwell Youngquist, John Lai, Tony Lapi and Nigel Fullick were excused.

## Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the August 13, 2026, TDC meeting minutes. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## Public to Be Heard

John Albion of SVN noted that airport deplanements had declined over the past several months and asked what factors might be contributing to the trend, particularly in light of hotel performance. He cited tariffs and pricing differences between the East and West Coasts as possible influences and encouraged further TDC discussion of the disparity and its potential causes.

## Municipalities to Be Heard

Erica Ballard of the City of Cape Coral highlighted recent summer activities, including Festival Park's expanded capacity for sports, festivals, and large-scale events; the Island Hopper Songwriter Fest at the Westin on September 21–22; and Sizzle Dining, a month-long regional promotion featuring Fathoms, Gather, and Next Door. She also announced upcoming Cape Coral events: Bike Night on October 10; the 41st Annual Cape Coral Oktoberfest at the German American Social Club on October 16–18 and 23–25; and Halloween Trunk or Treat at Cape Coral City Hall on Friday, October 23. The month's tourism spotlight was the Sounds Cape Concert Series, featuring the CandleGlow Halloween Concert on Saturday, October 17, at the Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village.

## Report of the Executive Director

VCB Executive Director Pamela Johnson introduced Matthew Cummings, the VCB's new communications director.

Johnson reported that preliminary resort tax collections for August 2026 totaled $2,657,000, a 14.6% increase from the August 2025 preliminary total of $2,319,407. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections totaled $54,496,493, a 21.6% year-over-year increase.

Johnson also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for August 2026 was 49.4%, down 0.6% from August 2025. The average daily rate was $128.67, down 2.8%, and revenue per available room (RevPAR) was $63.58, down 3.4%.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for August 2026 was 18.5%, up 1.1% from August 2025. The average daily rate was $235.39, up 6.6%, and RevPAR was $44.23, up 4.8%.

In August 2026, 609,026 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), a 6.0% decrease from August 2025. Calendar year-to-date airport traffic was down 0.5% from the same period in 2025.

**Strategic Plan Update**

VCB Executive Director Pamela Johnson provided an update on the destination strategic plan. She reviewed three overarching goals designed to ensure that the visitor economy continues to create economic opportunity and contribute to Lee County's quality of life: (1) Optimization of Visitor Economy Impacts; (2) Thought Leadership in Placemaking; and (3) Destination Adaptability. She also summarized progress on each objective and explained how internal VCB teams are using the prioritized strategies to guide implementation.

**VCB Annual Meeting**

The 2026 VCB Annual Meeting will be held Tuesday, November 10, at the Sidney & Berne Davis Art Center. Doors will open at 11:30 a.m., and the program will begin at noon. Registration is $25 per person.

**TDC Member Items**

- Pam Cronin welcomed the TDC's new members.
- Lori Fayhee had no comment.
- Bill Waichulis thanked the VCB staff for organizing the countywide Island Hopper Songwriter Festival.
- Darla Bonk said she was pleased to return to the TDC.
- Brian Kramer reported that the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point ranked No. 10 among the top 15 resorts in Florida in the Condé Nast Traveler 2026 Readers' Choice Awards.
- Holly Smith thanked the TDC for providing marketing funds to the Sanibel, Pine Island, and Fort Myers Beach Chambers and emphasized the funding's positive impact on Sanibel. She also highlighted Sanibel's recent accolades: recognition as one of Florida's Best Trail Towns for its 26 miles of bike paths; the top destination for a relaxing vacation by U.S. News & World Report; No. 8 on Expedia's Island Hot List and the only U.S. island in the top 10; No. 3 in the nation for a safe, worry-free beach day by Action Network; and one of the most charming small towns in AFAR Magazine's 250th anniversary edition.
- Scott Safford described August as a challenging month for tourism, citing earlier school start dates and the later Labor Day holiday as contributing factors. He suggested that the

decline in airport deplanements might reflect an increase in visitors traveling from within Florida. Safford welcomed the return of Roar Offshore to Fort Myers Beach and expressed hope that it would continue in future years. He also noted increased attendance and strong venue activity at the Island Hopper Songwriter Fest and mentioned the upcoming sand sculpting event in November.

- Rob Wells thanked the VCB for organizing the Island Hopper Songwriter Fest. He commended the festival's growth and success during a time of year when increased visitation is especially beneficial and acknowledged the significant effort required to produce the event.
- Jay Johnson reported that more than 290 people attended the Greater Fort Myers and Sanibel-Captiva Chamber event held the previous day at the Sanibel Harbour Marriott. Presented in partnership with FRLA and featuring Senator Scott, it was the chamber's largest event in recent history. He also announced that FRLA's October 20 meeting would begin at 5:00 p.m. with a ribbon-cutting ceremony marking Shangri-La's 100th anniversary, followed by a slider cook-off featuring six schools.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 10:22 a.m.