



TDC Meeting Minutes
April 8, 2021

Commissioner Brian Hamman, chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council (TDC) meeting to order at 2 p.m.

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Brian Hamman, Pamela Cronin, Colleen DePasquale, Rexann Hosafros, Brian Kramer, Tony Lapi, Fran Myers and Bill Waichulis.

Jon McLain and Robert Wells III were excused.

Myers made a motion to approve the March 11, 2021 meeting minutes. Lapi seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

None to be heard.

Municipalities to be heard

None to be heard.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported preliminary resort tax collected for February 2021 was \$5,582,292, an 18.9% decrease over February 2020 preliminary collections of \$6,879,812. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$19,596,412, an 11.7% decrease year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate in February 2021 was 69%, which is down 22.1% from February 2020 (88.6%). The average daily rate for February 2021 was \$188.51, down 18.3% from February 2020 (\$230.64) and RevPAR for February 2021 was \$130.08, down 36.3% from February 2020 (\$204.32).

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate in February 2021 was 76%, which is down 11.6% from February 2020 (86%). The average daily rate for February 2021 was \$287, which is up 1.1% from February 2020 (\$284) and RevPAR for February 2021 was \$219, which is down 10.2% from February 2020 (\$244).

During February 2021, 725,735 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, a decrease of 41.5% compared to February 2020. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is down 40.5% from the same period last year.

Domestic sales update

Jill Vance, VCB sales director, reported that her team has either attained or is ahead of pace to achieve four of the seven sales goals for fiscal year 2020-21. She reported that in March 2021, the group sales team had sourced the most RFP's since February 2020 and is hopeful recovery of the meetings market is underway. She shared highlights of second quarter group media and sales activities, travel trade and

weddings markets, including hosting a successful virtual FAM for the faith-based planner market (drive market). Vance also presented upcoming sales activities for April and May, including several virtual meeting planner appointment shows and virtual travel agent sales missions. Vance added that she was also interviewed for a Meetings Today podcast on health and wellness in the destination which can be found on the Meetings Today podcast app.

International sales update

Stefanie Zinke, VCB international tourism sales manager, reported that the VCB's international teams attended 12 key shows and events virtually in the second quarter, meeting with more than 100 trade partners in our core markets. The quarterly focus remained on training the travel trade audience and engaging with travel agents in special events hosted by the VCB for hotel partners. Further, the launch of The Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel's own Facebook page in Canada will allow the VCB to target and provide custom content to Canadian travelers moving forward.

Visitor Services update

Simone Behr, VCB visitor services director, reported that the Tourism Ambassador volunteer program was re-opened in February after an 11 month hiatus. During the first quarter 2021, the volunteers assisted 25,470 visitors. Visitor Services will be hosting a Team Tourism workshop on June 23 entitled "The Business of Accessible Travel, Opportunities and Benefits." The workshop will feature renowned travel writer and advocate, John Morris of wheelchairtravel.org. This year's Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service Awards (E Awards) will be held on Aug. 26.

Communications update

Francesca Donlan, VCB communications director, presented an overview of second quarter activities including the destination being featured on the cover of Southern Living's April issue and the destination's feature in Samantha Brown's "Places to Love" airing on WGPU on April 24. She also reported on upcoming activities including a week-long National Travel and Tourism Week campaign May 2-8, and the destination's TV feature in Raw Travel's eighth season on "Side Tripping the USA" airing May 22-23 and July 31-Aug. 1.

Beach & Shoreline update

Nancy MacPhee, VCB product development manager, provided an update on previously funded beach & shoreline projects. She also shared the documentation needed for the TDC to complete their review of fiscal year 2021-22 project funding. There are 25 eligible requests totaling \$10,284,410. The TDC will conduct the annual Beach & Shoreline workshop at 2 p.m. on April 22. To view requests and documentation related to the review workshop [click here](#).

TDC member items

Cronin announced that a baby sloth was born at the Shell Factory & Nature Park and added she is happy to see the industry recovering.

Hosafros said that the addition of bike paths and sidewalks that were a part of the Estero Boulevard road project have been well received and very busy. The road project is almost complete.

Kramer reminded the council about Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association's (FRLA) hospitality staffing luncheon 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on April 21 at Holiday Inn Fort Myers Airport with guest speaker, Cathleen Curtis, the new director of the FGCU hospitality program. He added that his property has been very busy with transient/leisure business. Their website is seeing traffic from Germany and the U.K. travelers indicating the interest in international travel is up. Waichulis added that this could be the busiest May in history.

Myers said Red Coconut RV Park is pacing way ahead of 2019 and is booked through September. Workforce has been an issue for her property.

Glen Salyer, assistant county manager, added that the two bills that propose changes to the use of tourist development tax dollars ([HB1429/SB2008](#)) are looking like they will not go anywhere in the Senate. Pigott added VISIT FLORIDA is looking like it will be fully funded.

DePasquale said she is still watching the tourist development tax bills and expressed concerns over workforce needs. Commissioner Hamman said the commission is open to ideas to assist in solving the workforce issue.

Lapi said 'Tween Waters Island Resort and Spa is seeing a lot of first-time visitors and is also having workforce issues.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:13 p.m.

Next TDC meeting

The next TDC meeting is scheduled for **9 a.m., Thursday, May 13, 2021** at the Lee County Administration East Building, 2201 Second St., Room 118, Fort Myers. To view a complete tax collections report, visit www.LeeVCB.com. Contact: Tamara Pigott, TPigott@leegov.com, Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.