

Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
July 17, 2024 Meeting Minutes

The Pinellas County Tourist Development Council (TDC), as created under Pinellas County Ordinance 78-20 pursuant to Section 125.0104, Florida Statutes, met in regular session on this date at 9:01 AM in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida.

Present

Kathleen Peters, Chair, Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Chair
Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
David Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
Phil Henderson, Jr., Starlite Cruises
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Charles Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Bruce Rector, City of Clearwater Mayor (appeared virtually)
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Dan Saracki, City of Oldsmar Mayor
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort
Michael Williams, Innisbrook Golf Resort

Not Present

Brian Scott, County Commissioner (non-voting)

Others Present

Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Craig Campbell, Community and Brand Engagement Director, VSPC
Kylie Diaz, Vice President of Community Engagement, VSPC
Andrea Gabel, Latin America Senior Sales Manager, VSPC
Steve Grimes, Chief Marketing Officer, VSPC
Eddie Kirsch, Director of Digital and Data, VSPC
Rosemarie Payne, Leisure Travel Director, VSPC
Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Franchesca DiNapoli, Board Reporter, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

All documents provided to the Clerk's Office have been filed and made a part of the record.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Peters called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM. At the Chair's request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

At the request of Chair Peters, Mr. Williams made a motion to allow Mayor Rector to participate virtually. The motion was seconded by Mr. Smith and carried unanimously.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Peters welcomed Mayor Saracki to the TDC and related that he will be completing the term vacated by City of Dunedin Mayor Julie Ward Bujalski.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES

Mayor Gattis made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 15, 2024, meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Prather and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Peters requested that public comment regarding specific agenda items be held until after each item has been presented; whereupon, no one responded to her call for public comment relating to items not on the agenda.

Ms. Moore arrived at 9:05 AM

PRESENTATIONS

Marketing Summer/Fall, Budget Amendment Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Marketing Update*, Mr. Grimes indicated that the BCC approved a \$6 million budget increase for advertising in May. He discussed focus areas where expending the funds will provide the highest return on investment, including key market areas in Florida and southern Georgia, the Northeast and Midwest, and the Greater Tampa Bay area; whereupon, he displayed a video and print media highlighting the fall campaign and provided information regarding the targeted messages to encourage visitation within each market.

Mr. Grimes related that "727 Day" will be celebrated on July 27 as part of VSPC's *From Visitors with Love* campaign and will highlight Pinellas County residents and their role in tourism; that a custom t-shirt was designed for the event; and that t-shirts will be

distributed to fans at the July 27 Tampa Bay Rays game. He displayed a video featuring content created by a local influencer highlighting locals and their knowledge of tourism, noting that more videos of this nature will be posted leading up to July 27; whereupon, Mr. Grimes discussed various savings opportunities that will be offered to residents throughout the county in celebration of “727 Day”.

Mr. Grimes provided information regarding the FunShine Savings Passport, noting that it is a mobile application which will offer various deals and encourage visitors to explore all areas of the county.

Thereupon, Mr. Grimes discussed the planning process and objectives for Fiscal Year 2025, noting the creation of a marketing committee to bring stakeholders together for discussion and collaboration.

In response to comments and queries by the members, Mr. Grimes provided information relating to efforts to increase VSPC’s presence in New York, allocation of the \$6 million budget increase for advertising, and outreach to community partners and municipalities regarding participation in the FunShine Savings Passport program.

Capital Funding Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Diaz provided an overview of the review timeline for the Capital Projects Funding Program and indicated that applications are currently under review to determine eligibility; that applications over \$10 million would first require approval from the BCC; and that she anticipates that staff will present their funding recommendations for review and approval by the TDC and the BCC in September and October, respectively; whereupon, she provided information regarding the eight project requests received thus far, noting that they total approximately \$67 million; and that one request exceeds \$10 million.

In response to comments and queries by Mr. Williams, Ms. Diaz, with input from Mr. Gerdes, provided information regarding the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum, Inc. project request, indicating that it is in the eligibility determination stage; and that the intent of bringing the request forward at this time is to allow construction to begin.

Ms. Diaz, with input from Mr. Lowack, responded to comments and queries by Messrs. Kimball and Prather regarding the funding match required by applicants, prior project funding obligations, and the budget available for Capital Projects.

In response to comments by Mr. Prather, Mr. Lowack related that the intent of today’s presentation is to inform the Board of the applications that have been submitted; whereupon, he welcomed the Board’s feedback.

In response to the Chair's call for public comment, Paul Wilborn, Palladium Theater, and Ignacio Barron, Florida Orchestra, appeared and provided brief comments.

Mr. Gerdes pointed out that the Palladium Theater has received state and private funding; and that the City of St. Petersburg has pledged to support the Theater over the next four years during the design and construction phase of the project; whereupon, in response to a query by Mr. Prather, Mr. Lowack indicated that the Eddie C. Moore Complex has received funding through the Capital Projects Funding Program for its facilities in the past.

Elite Events Update

Mr. Lowack acknowledged the VSPC Review Committee, indicating that he has confidence in its recommendations; and that, at the direction of the TDC and the BCC, focus was placed on large-scale events.

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Campbell compared metrics for this year's application cycle to previous years and provided an overview of the program's current rating criteria and review process, as well as the priorities considered when determining funding. He referenced a spreadsheet titled *VSPC Elite Event Funding Program FY25 Funding Recommendations* which includes detailed information regarding each event and indicated that staff recommends funding 33 of the 51 applications received for a total of \$1,865,000.00 in requested funding; and that a public information webinar was held on April 18 to discuss staff's priorities during the new review process; whereupon, he related that of the 33 events recommended for funding, staff identified 21 that qualify at an Elite Event level, with the remaining 12 qualifying as Destination Enhancement Events; and that \$135,000.00 of the \$2 million budget for the program remains available for a second funding cycle later in the year.

Mr. Lowack noted that while Destination Enhancement Events are handled administratively, they are reflected on the aforementioned spreadsheet for informational purposes; whereupon, he indicated that, for the purpose of today's meeting, staff is seeking the Board's recommendation regarding funding for the Elite Events.

In response to the Chair's call for public comment, the following individuals appeared and provided brief comments:

Keith Overton, St. Pete BikeFest
Thomas Covington, St. Petersburg Powerboat Grand Prix
Rick Kriseman, Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg
Mike Schulze, ReliaQuest Bowl Clearwater Beach Day
Jeff Gow, Dunedin Mardi Gras
Frank Chivas, XINSURANCE Clearwater Offshore Nationals

Discussion ensued, with input by Messrs. Lowack, Campbell, and Grimes, regarding the scoring process, verification of projected room nights within applications, funding recommendations, the reasoning behind the scoring of specific applications, and other topics.

Mr. Henderson made a motion, which was seconded by Ms. Rodriguez, to increase the funding for the XINSURANCE Clearwater Offshore Nationals event to \$100,000.00, noting that the event will now include television coverage. Mr. Kimball opined that staff should review the proposed funding recommendations again after hearing various suggestions by the members, and Mr. Prather concurred; whereupon, Mr. Lowack indicated that postponing the Board's vote could jeopardize funding for events scheduled to occur in October.

Mr. Prather indicated that he would amend Mr. Henderson's motion to include that staff take under advisement the recommendations for reexamination suggested by the members, such as the St. Pete BikeFest. Chair Peters clarified that Mr. Prather made a motion for an amendment to add St. Pete BikeFest; whereupon, Mr. Smith seconded Mr. Prather's amendment.

Chair Peters restated the amended motion on the floor, indicating that it includes reconsideration by staff regarding funding for the XINSURANCE Clearwater Offshore Nationals and the St. Pete BikeFest.

In response to a query by Mr. Williams, Mr. Lowack suggested that the Board provide a recommendation that includes a dollar amount and indicated that staff will work with the event organizers based on the Board's recommendations; whereupon, Chair Peters clarified that the amended motion is to recommend funding for the XINSURANCE Clearwater Offshore Nationals and the St. Pete BikeFest in the amount of \$100,000.00 and \$75,000.00, respectively.

Mr. Henderson indicated that he would like to add that the event organizers must prove that the criteria needed for funding is met. Chair Peters clarified that Mr. Henderson's amendment to the amended motion includes funding for the XINSURANCE Clearwater Offshore Nationals at \$100,000.00 and the St. Pete BikeFest at \$75,000.00, with the caveat that St. Pete BikeFest present and demonstrate that it will increase marketing beyond the local region; and that XINSURANCE Clearwater Offshore Nationals demonstrate that it has the media coverage stated in a letter provided to the members by Mr. Chivas. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kimball. Mr. Gerdes pointed out that Ms. Rodriguez would need to second the motion as she was the seconder of the original motion; whereupon, Ms. Rodriguez seconded the motion, and discussion ensued

regarding the process for presenting the funding recommendations to the BCC, with input from Messrs. Lowack and Campbell.

Responding to queries by Mr. Smith, Mr. Campbell provided brief comments regarding the funding recommendation for the St. Petersburg Powerboat Grand Prix; whereupon, Mr. Smith indicated that he would like staff to consider increasing funding for the event to \$150,000.00. Chair Peters clarified that Mr. Smith's amendment is to fund the St. Petersburg Powerboat Grand Prix in the amount of \$150,000.00, based on a comprehensive marketing plan that meets criteria. The motion was seconded by Mr. Gerdes.

Chair Peters restated the amended motion, indicating that it increases funding for the XINSURANCE Clearwater Offshore Nationals and the St. Pete BikeFest by \$25,000.00 each, as well as the St. Petersburg Powerboat Grand Prix by \$50,000.00, contingent upon event organizers demonstrating a marketing plan that meets criteria. In response to a concern expressed by Mr. Lowack, Chair Peters indicated that \$35,000.00 in program funding for the program would remain if the recommended increases were applied.

Upon the Chair's call for a roll call vote, the amended motion carried unanimously.

Following staff's presentation of the remaining agenda items, Mr. Henderson proposed an amendment to the amended motion to fund the XINSURANCE Clearwater Offshore Nationals, St. Petersburg Powerboat Grand Prix, and St. Pete BikeFest up to the maximum of the category for which they qualify. Chair Peters indicated that a new motion is required and sought clarification related to the intent of Mr. Henderson's comments; whereupon, the motion was seconded by Mayor Rector.

Following discussion, Mr. Henderson clarified that his motion is for staff to reassess the three aforementioned events and, if they meet the criteria to receive the maximum amount, determine how to divide the available funding among them. Chair Peters expressed concern that two of the event organizers left the meeting with the understanding that funding would be allocated based upon the amended motion approved by the members earlier in the meeting. In response to a query by Mr. Gerdes, Attorney Coffey indicated that because the TDC has not adopted Robert's Rules of Order, the original motion can be replaced by the new motion, provided that every member of the Board has had the opportunity to speak regarding the topic; whereupon, discussion ensued wherein the members expressed their opinions and concerns.

In response to a query by Mr. Williams, Mr. Lowack clarified that the funding amounts approved by the TDC and BCC will be subject to each event organizer's ability to meet the minimum requirements.

Mr. Henderson suggested that staff review the applications for the St. Pete BikeFest and the St. Petersburg Powerboat Grand Prix to first determine if the minimum requirements can be met; that if the requirements can be met, these two events would have first opportunity with the funds; and that the XINSURANCE Clearwater Offshore Nationals would then have the opportunity to receive the remaining funds in the program's budget if the event qualifies. Chair Peters indicated that Mr. Henderson is amending his motion; and that the amended motion does not replace the vote previously taken. Discussion ensued regarding the amended motion.

In response to comments by Mr. Gerdes, Mr. Lowack explained that while staff did not recommend maximum funding for the St. Petersburg Powerboat Grand Prix and the St. Pete BikeFest events, both events met the guidelines and qualify for maximum funding.

Chair Peters clarified that Mr. Henderson's amended motion, which was seconded by Mayor Rector, is to increase the TDC's funding recommendation for the XINSURANCE Clearwater Offshore Nationals from \$100,000.00 to \$135,000.00 if the event qualifies, which will not impact funding for the other two events; whereupon, she confirmed that Mr. Henderson and Mayor Rector agreed.

In response to comments and a query by Mayor Gattis, Mr. Lowack provided brief comments regarding the submittal of the TDC's recommendations to the BCC and the subsequent timeline requirements for event organizers; whereupon, Ms. Moore expressed caution regarding the Board making judgement calls relating to guidelines that are already in place.

Chair Peters provided brief comments and upon her call for a roll call vote, the amended motion passed by a vote of 7 to 5, with Mayor Saracki, Ms. Moore, and Messrs. Smith, Prather, and Gerdes dissenting; whereupon, Attorney Coffey indicated that there is a statutory requirement which stipulates that, in order to fund events, one of their main purposes must be the attraction of tourists, as evidenced by promotion of the events.

IPW Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Payne related that VSPC staff and partners recently attended the U.S. Travel Association's IPW trade show in Los Angeles, California. She displayed photos of VSPC's booth at the show and indicated that staff scheduled 201 meetings with representatives in key markets, as well as with more than 30 journalists and content creators from nine different countries; whereupon, she discussed marketing opportunities in domestic and international markets.

Ms. Gabel provided information regarding various meetings held involving the Latin American markets, highlighting that VSPC staff conducted 21 appointments with Mexican

tour operators and 36 appointments with existing and new Brazilian clients; whereupon, she indicated that the 2025 IPW trade show is scheduled for next June in Chicago, Illinois.

Finance Report

Referring to a document titled *Visit St. Pete Clearwater, FY 2024 Budget, June 2024*, Ms. Tuxhorn provided information regarding Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections, several under-budget line items, and expenses; whereupon, she pointed out that VSPC received a budget amendment in May, which included \$395,000.00 for capital consultants and \$6 million for additional marketing.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed metrics for May 2024, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of hotel and vacation rental occupancy, average daily rates (ADR), accommodation supply and demand, hotel performance, hotel inventory, and TDT collections; whereupon, he provided historical information related to ADR and occupancy during the spring season and discussed visitation from in-state and out-of-state markets.

In response to comments and a query by Mr. Gerdes, Mr. Kirsch, with input by Ms. Moore, provided information relating to data received from Key Data regarding tracking vacation rental supply in comparison to previous years; whereupon, Mr. Gerdes requested that staff begin tracking the number of countywide vacation rental rooms on a monthly basis.

Responding to queries by Mr. Williams, Mr. Kirsch, with input by Mayor Rector, discussed hotel inventory and indicated that staff can look into providing information regarding hotel inventory for Hillsborough County.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Mr. Lowack provided the following updates:

- County staff received a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to allow for the completion of the northern portion of the Pass-A-Grille Beach nourishment project.
- The County Administrator included VSPC's Fiscal Year 2025 budget in his proposed budget to the BCC, as recommended by the TDC, including a strong emphasis on the request for an additional \$6 million for advertising.
- Several recommendations from staff related to the Tourist Development Plan, which were addressed at the joint TDC/BCC meeting, will be discussed with individual

County Commissioners prior to a presentation to the BCC for adoption. Next steps include having a more holistic discussion regarding allowable uses under Florida Statutes versus the Plan.

- An announcement pertaining to a new international direct route may be forthcoming.
- The BCC proclaimed July 27 as “727 Day” at its meeting on Tuesday, July 16.

Mr. Lowack introduced newly hired VSPC Contracts Manager Patricia Overway and VSPC Vice President of Business Development Kathryn Reagan; whereupon, Mses. Overway and Reagan provided brief comments.

Mr. Campbell introduced two interns participating in VSPC’s internship program.

Chair Peters referenced a discussion at a previous TDC meeting regarding the process for local restaurants to gain admission into the MICHELIN star rating system and requested an update; whereupon, Mr. Lowack highlighted St. Petersburg’s recent recognition by Travel + Leisure Magazine as the Best Food City in the United States and indicated that staff is working with VISIT FLORIDA to highlight local restaurants and advocate for their inclusion in the system.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

No one responded to the Chair’s call for comments.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Peters adjourned the meeting at 12:01 PM.