

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
March 19, 2025 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 9:00 AM in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida.

Present

Brian Scott, Chair, County Commissioner
Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Dave Eggers, County Commissioner (non-voting)
Phil Henderson, Jr., Starlite Cruises
Dylan Hubbard, Hubbard's Marina
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Chuck Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Bruce Rector, City of Clearwater Mayor
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort

Not Present

Dave Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember

Others Present

Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete/Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Eddie Kirsch, Director of Digital and Data, VSPC
Jason Latimer, Director of Public Relations, VSPC
Jessica Morrow, Marketing Project Manager, VSPC
Tammy Burgess, 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 Scott called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM; whereupon, Ms. Rodriguez led the Pledge of Allegiance. At the Chair's request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

In response to Chair Scott's request for a motion to allow Mayor Rector to appear virtually, Ms. Rodriguez made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Smith and carried unanimously.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Scott announced that City of Oldsmar Mayor Dan Saracki was not successful in his recent bid for re-election; whereupon, Chair Scott related that he sent a letter to the Chair of the Mayor's Council requesting that a new member be selected to serve on the TDC; and that the TDC will recognize Mr. Saracki for his service at the next meeting.

Chair Scott provided an update regarding the Tampa Bay Rays stadium deal, indicating that the Rays have stated that they will not be meeting their March 31, 2025, commitment deadlines; and that, for all intents and purposes, the stadium deal is off; whereupon, he related that the TDC should move forward and find unique and creative ways for spending Tourist Development Tax (TDT) and promoting tourism in Pinellas County, absent any deal with the Tampa Bay Rays.

Chair Scott related that one of his goals on the TDC is to find creative ways to utilize TDT funds that benefit residents, as well as tourism; and that while expenditures related to parks are not currently included in the County's ordinance as a permissible use of TDT funds, they are allowable under State law, which will be discussed further at a later date; whereupon, he noted two Capital Improvement Projects for Fort De Soto Park that may be good candidates for funding.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – FEBRUARY 19, 2025

Chair Scott indicated that the Board's first action item is approval of the minutes of the February 19 TDC meeting; whereupon, Ms. Moore made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Hubbard and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No one responded to the Chair's call for public comment.

PRESENTATIONS

Tampa International Airport Update

Airport Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Joe Lopano announced his upcoming retirement in April and noted that Michael Stephens will replace him as CEO. He also referenced a PowerPoint presentation titled *TPA Update* and provided information and statistical data regarding Tampa International Airport (TPA) operations, emphasizing an economic impact of \$11 billion annually; whereupon, he discussed various topics, including the following:

- TPA Ambassador Program
- Airline market share and top markets
- Nonstop and international service destinations
- Passenger traffic and traffic share by county
- Projected passenger traffic and security check wait times during Spring Break

Mr. Lopano provided information regarding growth and modernization at TPA, including a forecast of passenger growth and completion of the Airport's Master Plan. He also discussed the status of Airside D and provided brief comments regarding other projects; whereupon, he noted that TPA was ranked as the #1 airport in North America by the Airports Council International.

In response to queries by Messrs. Kimball and Prather, Mr. Lopano, with input from Mr. Lowack, discussed capacity improvements facilitated by Airside D and collaborative marketing efforts between TPA, Hillsborough County, and VSPC.

Messrs. Kimball and Prather, Mayor Rector, and Chair Scott expressed their appreciation for Mr. Lopano's years of leadership; whereupon, Chair Scott presented Mr. Lopano with a gift.

PR Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Latimer discussed his recent attendance at International Media Marketplace events in New York City and London and a media mission in Zurich; whereupon, he provided details regarding other recent and upcoming media events. He also provided information regarding a Satellite Media Tour (SMT) partnership with travel expert Laura Begley Bloom and displayed a video highlighting an SMT segment on television in Chicago. Thereupon, he discussed upcoming media visits, noting that over 40 journalists are scheduled to visit the destination through May.

In response to a query by Messrs. Henderson and Smith, Mr. Latimer provided brief comments regarding the costs associated with SMT television segments and the ability

to demonstrate the status of the County's post-storm recovery via the Clearwater Beach live webcam on the VSPC website.

Mayor Rector left the meeting at 9:41 AM.

727 Society Introduction

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Morrow indicated that the 727 Society is a local influencer program and provided background information related to its creation, purpose, and functionality. She discussed the program's benefits and indicated that it was soft launched in December; that VSPC has been working with 15 content creators, including 10 that are extremely active; and that the creators have attended 16 events since December; whereupon, Ms. Morrow related that 89 posts have been created, which reached 181,000 people and resulted in 12,000 combined engagements; and that the estimated earned media value is \$199,000.00.

In response to comments and queries by the members, Ms. Morrow, with input by Mr. Latimer, discussed various topics, including the program intake form, inclusion of Facebook as a platform that the program's influencers can post on, establishing goals for the program's earned media value, and matching local businesses with influencers.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed metrics for January 2025, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of accommodation supply and demand, revenue, and TDT collections; whereupon, he provided information regarding temporarily closed properties, visitor survey data, hotel inventory, and hotel and vacation rental supply and demand in the Tampa Bay region and other Florida destinations.

Responding to queries by Chair Scott and Commissioner Eggers, Messrs. Kirsch and Lowack provided information related to Fiscal Year 2025 TDT collection trends and the number of hotel rooms occupied by residents through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Transitional Sheltering Assistance Program; whereupon, Messrs. Henderson and Kimball provided input regarding post-storm hotel occupancy.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Mr. Lowack provided the following updates:

- Viewership statistics were recently announced for The Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg, which garnered 1.4 million viewers, and the Shriners Children's Clearwater Invitational, which had a 97% increase in viewers.

- A MICHELIN event will take place on April 17 in Orlando, which he will attend with Chair Scott.
- Voting for the 2025 Besties Awards has begun and is available on the VSPC website through March 23.
- Meetings and Conventions Senior Sales Manager Hortensia Simmons was selected as a Rising Star by Smart Meetings.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Mr. Henderson provided brief comments regarding his vote related to the Capital Projects Funding Program at last month's TDC meeting.

In response to a query by Mr. Prather, Chair Scott provided an update regarding beach renourishment, indicating that the County is working on obtaining temporary construction easements to complete its own project; and that meetings with White House and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers staff have been productive.

In response to a query by Mr. Kimball, Mr. Lowack indicated that a Request for Proposals was released in December for a youth sports tournament facility to be constructed on the Toytown site; and that additional information will be provided at a later date.

In response to queries by Mr. Kimball regarding future investments, Chair Scott expressed his interest in participating in a brainstorming session regarding potential opportunities and projects; whereupon, he suggested that he could discuss the topic with Mr. Lowack and bring it back to the Board next month.

Commissioner Eggers provided brief comments regarding his attendance at the recent Valspar Championship event.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Scott adjourned the meeting at 10:35 AM.