

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
April 16, 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 9:03 AM in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida.

Present

Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Dave Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
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

Brian Scott, Chair, County Commissioner
Dave Eggers, County Commissioner (non-voting)

Others Present

Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete-Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Kayla Freeman, Meetings and Conferences Sales Manager, VSPC
Steve Grimes, Chief Marketing Officer, VSPC
Eddie Kirsch, Director of Digital and Data, VSPC
Rosemarie Payne, Leisure Travel Director, 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

Acting Chair Kimball called the meeting to order at 9:03 AM; whereupon, he led the Pledge of Allegiance. At his request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS

At the acting Chair's request, the members and Mr. Lowack reported on various local activities and events.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – MARCH 19, 2025

Acting Chair Kimball indicated that the next action item is approval of the minutes. Upon his call for a motion, Mayor Gattis made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Ms. Moore and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

PRESENTATIONS

UK Roadshow Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Payne discussed her attendance at the UK Roadshow organized by Rooster, which took place in London and Manchester. She indicated that the Roadshow provided an opportunity to discuss the variety of offerings in St. Petersburg-Clearwater with tour operators and travel advisors; whereupon, she provided detailed information related to various training sessions, tour operator and travel advisor events, next steps, and feedback received.

In response to a query by acting Chair Kimball, Ms. Payne indicated that further training sessions will occur; and that ten inbound familiarization visits are scheduled.

Meetings Presentation

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Freeman discussed trends and insights related to meetings and conferences, emphasizing the importance of providing clients with a positive experience.

Ms. Freeman provided statistics regarding year-to-date results and progress related to leads and booked room nights and highlighted state and market segment data, indicating that Florida remains an important market; whereupon, she briefly discussed sales missions, events, tradeshow, and feedback and testimonials received from clients that visited St. Petersburg-Clearwater.

In response to comments and a query by Mr. Prather, Mr. Lowack, with input by Ms. Freeman, provided information related to increased visitation from Texas residents; whereupon, he noted that VSPC's Meetings and Conferences team is in the process of being realigned.

In response to a query by Mayor Rector, Ms. Freeman briefly discussed how the TDC can assist with bringing additional meetings and conferences to the destination; whereupon, Mr. Lowack provided details regarding the focus of the Meetings and Conferences team and feedback received from partners related to various events.

Mr. Lowack provided brief information regarding changing markets and efforts to create efficiencies; whereupon, he related that Ms. Freeman will fill a newly created VSPC Business Development Marketing Manager position beginning on May 12.

Marketing Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Grimes provided information regarding VSPC's "Ampersand" campaign, including various platforms which are being utilized to distribute content; whereupon, he displayed examples of the "Ampersand" campaign's advertisements and related that the "Ampersand" media advertisement placed in the New York subway, which was scheduled for removal in February, is still running; and that it has generated approximately ten million additional impressions.

Mr. Grimes related that marketing strategies include leveraging large events, such as the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg and the Valspar Championship, to maximize exposure. He highlighted sponsorships with the Philadelphia Union, FC Cincinnati, the Tampa Bay Rays, and the Tampa Bay Lightning and discussed forms of out-of-market advertising utilized during major league sports games.

Mr. Grimes noted that the focus of the campaign will soon shift from the Northeast and Midwest to other markets; whereupon, he provided an overview of the intended markets, a media plan which is currently in development, and ongoing and planned advertising initiatives.

Mr. Grimes indicated that an accommodation booking engine has been added to the VSPC website, which includes an aggregation of hotel properties and best published rates within the destination; and that a new "Stay and Play" initiative will be launched, which offers gift cards based on the length of stay; whereupon, in response to comments and queries by Mr. Hubbard and Ms. Moore, Mr. Grimes clarified that the "Stay and Play" gift cards are digital and may be utilized anywhere, although they are marketed for use in the destination; and that the booking engine includes a limited number of vacation rental properties.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed metrics for February 2025, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of accommodation supply and demand, revenue, and Tourist Development Tax collections; whereupon, he provided information regarding temporarily closed properties, hotel restoration timelines, and statewide hotel supply, demand, and revenue.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Mr. Lowack recognized the five-year employment anniversaries of Ms. Freeman and Sports Commission Business Development Manager Julie Bolfa and the ten-year anniversary of Director of International Leisure Sales Andrea Gabel; whereupon, he provided the following updates:

- VSPC staff is monitoring the 2025 Florida Legislative Session in Tallahassee for areas with potential impacts to tourism, including the Local Option Taxes Bill, Senate Tax Relief Package, and beach nourishment funding.
- The 2025 Florida MICHELIN Guide Ceremony will take place tomorrow evening.
- The annual “Besties” award ceremony will take place on May 8 at The Floridian Social.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSION

Mr. Henderson indicated that StarLite Cruises has been nominated as one of the best dinner cruises in America; and that the winner will be announced next week.

Mr. Hubbard related that Hubbard’s Marina has been nominated for best charter boat in the country; and that voting will begin April 28.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:04 AM.