

Tourist Development Council  
Pinellas County  
May 21, 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 9:02 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)  
Dave Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor  
Phil Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises  
Dylan Hubbard, Hubbard's Marina  
Chuck Prather, The Birchwood Inn  
Bruce Rector, City of Clearwater Mayor  
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry  
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort

Not Present

Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember  
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.

Others Present

Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney  
Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete-Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO  
Katie Bridges, Director of Advertising and Promotions, VSPC  
Craig Campbell, Community and Brand Engagement Director, VSPC  
Kylie Diaz, Vice President of Community Engagement, VSPC  
Andrea Gabel, Director of International Leisure Sales, VSPC  
Eddie Kirsch, Director of Digital and Data, VSPC  
Jason Latimer, Public Relations Director, VSPC  
Rosemarie Payne, Director of U.S. and Canada Leisure Sales, VSPC  
Caleb Peterson, Sports Commission Senior Manager, VSPC  
Kathryn Reagan, Vice President of Business Development, 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 9:02 AM. At the Chair's request, those in attendance introduced themselves; whereupon, Commissioner Eggers led the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **CHAIR COMMENTS**

Chair Scott provided brief comments regarding the Besties Awards; whereupon, he briefly discussed recent short-term beach closures by the Florida Department of Health and emphasized the need for a media communication strategy to convey information related to similar situations in the future, indicating that several media outlets reported the closures but did not provide information regarding reopening; and that some hotels experienced cancellations due to the situation.

## **APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – APRIL 16, 2025**

Chair Scott indicated that the Board's first action item is approval of the minutes of the April 16 TDC meeting; whereupon, Mayor Gattis made a motion to approve, which was seconded by Mr. Hubbard and carried unanimously.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

## **PRESENTATIONS**

### Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed metrics for March 2025 and the first six months of the fiscal year, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of hotel and vacation rental occupancy, average daily rates, revenue per available room, hotel performance, accommodation supply and demand, revenue, and Tourist Development Tax collections; whereupon, he provided information regarding hotel restoration timelines and statewide hotel supply, demand, and revenue.

Responding to comments and queries by Messrs. Hubbard and Smith, Mr. Kirsch indicated that hotel data only reflects hotels which are open; and that accommodation supply data appears lower in February due to the number of days in the month.

In response to queries by Mr. Kimball, Mr. Kirsch discussed challenges related to collecting data pertaining to vacation rentals; whereupon, Mr. Lowack, with input by Mayor Rector, indicated that vacation rental supply will not recover to pre-storm levels; and that he will review any existing data regarding short-term and vacation rental supply throughout Pinellas and other counties.

### Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

Mr. Lowack introduced the item and indicated that VSPC submitted a flat budget. Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, he highlighted major changes to the budget, as follows:

- Expenses related to stadium development have been removed from the budget.
- Funds were reallocated to account for a \$1,000,000.00 increase approved by the Board of County Commissioners for the Elite Events Funding Program.
- Digital media buying has been transferred to advertising contracts.
- United Kingdom and Central European contracts were shifted to International Leisure Travel.

#### 1. Marketing

### Advertising and Promotions

Ms. Bridges indicated that the Advertising and Promotions budget was increased due to inclusion of digital media purchases; whereupon, she provided information regarding budget details, priorities, and initiatives.

Responding to comments and a query by Mr. Prather, Ms. Bridges discussed the promotion of arts through creative content and collaboration with Creative Pinellas.

### Data and Digital Platforms

Mr. Kirsch provided information regarding budget details, priorities, and initiatives, indicating that the decrease in the budget is due to the reallocation of funds to Advertising and Promotions for media purchases.

### Communications

Mr. Latimer indicated that the Department absorbed \$5,000.00 in funding for media familiarization visits; and that funds have been allocated in anticipation of VSPC's existing

domestic public relations agency's contract expiration; whereupon, he provided information regarding budget details, priorities, and initiatives.

## 2. Business Development

### Meetings and Conferences

Ms. Reagan provided information regarding budget details, priorities, and initiatives, indicating that the bulk of the budget is allocated to the incentives program.

### Film Commission

Ms. Reagan discussed budget details, priorities, and initiatives and noted that the budget decreased.

In response to queries by Chair Scott and Messrs. Smith and Hubbard, Mr. Lowack and Ms. Reagan provided information regarding Film Incentive Program payments, upcoming film projects, and funding options for major projects.

### Sports Commission

Mr. Peterson indicated that slight budget adjustments were made to compensate for upcoming travel; and that the majority of funding is allocated toward incentives for events held in the destination; whereupon, he provided information regarding budget details, priorities, and initiatives.

### Global Travel (United States and Canada)

Ms. Payne provided an overview of budget details, priorities, and initiatives; whereupon, in response to queries by Mr. Smith and Chair Scott, she discussed opportunities to attract attendees of the U.S. Travel Association's IPW trade show to visit St. Pete-Clearwater and marketing strategies in Canada.

### Global Travel (International)

Ms. Gabel discussed budget details, priorities, and initiatives, noting that the main change is the aforementioned transfer of contracts to the Department's budget.

Responding to comments and queries by Mr. Prather and Chair Scott, Ms. Gabel, with input by Mr. Lowack, provided information regarding multiple topics, including representation in Mexico and Brazil, strategies related to the European market, and changes in visitation from various markets.

In response to a query by Mr. Kimball, Mr. Lowack provided brief comments regarding maintaining relationships with airlines and investment in potential future airline development.

### 3. Community Engagement

#### Community Relations

Ms. Diaz provided information regarding budget details, priorities, and initiatives, noting that the majority of the Community Relations budget is allocated toward funding 13 Chambers of Commerce; and that some expenses were reallocated to the Brand Activations budget; whereupon, in response to a query by Mr. Hubbard, she provided information related to planned modernization of welcome centers.

#### Brand Activations

Mr. Campbell provided information regarding budget details, priorities, and initiatives, indicating that funds within the Department's budget were reallocated from brand activations into asset procurement.

In response to a query by Chair Scott, Ms. Diaz indicated that economic impact estimates for Elite Events were previously calculated with data reported by event organizers; whereupon, she provided information related to planned improvements to data measurement for Elite Events, including the utilization of foot traffic and cell phone data, drone measurement, and the implementation of artificial intelligence.

In response to queries by Messrs. Prather and Hubbard, Mr. Campbell indicated that approximately 90% of the Elite Events Funding Program budget will be expended by the end of the fiscal year; and that unused funds may be reallocated; whereupon, he briefly discussed increased utilization of a branded stage.

Later in the meeting and in response to a query by Chair Scott, Mr. Lowack requested that a motion be made to approve the budget; whereupon, Mr. Smith made a motion to approve the budget, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Henderson and carried unanimously.

### **VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE**

Mr. Lowack provided information regarding ongoing budget discussions at the state and federal levels, indicating that funding for Brand USA has been substantially reduced; and that work to increase the funding is continuing; whereupon, he emphasized the

importance of VSPC's partnership with Brand USA for international marketing expenditures.

Mr. Lowack expressed appreciation to those who participated in the Besties Awards and congratulated the winners. He also congratulated Mr. Henderson regarding StarLite Cruises being ranked as the Best Dinner Cruise by USA Today's 10Best 2025 Reader's Choice Awards; whereupon, Mr. Henderson provided brief comments regarding dinner services offered on StarLite Cruises.

## **BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS**

Commissioner Eggers suggested that information regarding potential future capital projects be included in the budget; whereupon, Mr. Lowack indicated that the current budget reflects approved projects only.

In response to comments and a query by Mr. Prather, Chair Scott provided an update regarding beach nourishment and assistance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He indicated that the Corps will be proceeding with dredging channels, which will create sand for nourishing the southern beaches; and that communications with Congresswoman Anna Paulina Luna and Senator Rick Scott regarding beach nourishment are ongoing.

Messrs. Smith and Kimball provided brief comments related to recruitment and retention of VSPC staff and the coordination of departments demonstrated during today's budget presentations.

Responding to queries by Mr. Kimball, Ms. Bridges provided information regarding the *Gulf to Bay Destination Magazine*, including partnerships with various newspapers, industry participation, and distribution.

In response to a query by Mr. Henderson, Mr. Hubbard discussed state funding allocated for dredging at John's Pass, delays, and upcoming expiration of funding.

Mayor Gattis suggested that advertising funds be allocated toward a campaign encouraging residents to sign easements needed for beach nourishment; whereupon, Mayor Rector and Mr. Smith discussed celebrating residents who have already signed them.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Scott indicated that the next TDC meeting will be held on June 25; whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 AM.