

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
June 25, 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 9:06 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
Katie Gannon, City of Oldsmar Mayor
Phil M. Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Dylan Hubbard, Hubbard's Marina
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Bruce Rector, City of Clearwater Mayor
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry

Not Present

Brian Scott, Chair, County Commissioner
Dave Eggers, County Commissioner (non-voting)
Dave Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
Chuck Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort

Others Present

Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete-Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Craig Campbell, Community and Brand Engagement Director, VSPC
Eddie Kirsch, Director of Digital and Data, 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 9:06 AM and led the Pledge of Allegiance; whereupon, at his request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS

On behalf of the TDC, the Board of County Commissioners, and VSPC staff, acting Chair Kimball presented former City of Oldsmar Mayor Dan Saracki with a plaque recognizing his service on the TDC; whereupon, Mayor Saracki commended Mr. Lowack's leadership and expressed appreciation to VSPC staff for their helpfulness.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – MAY 21, 2025

Later in the meeting, upon the acting Chair's call for a motion to approve the May TDC minutes, Ms. Rodriguez made a motion. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hubbard and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Acting Chair Kimball requested that public comment regarding Elite Events be held until the item has been presented; whereupon, no one responded to his call for public comment related to items that are not on the agenda.

PRESENTATIONS

Creative Pinellas Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Creative Pinellas Chief Executive Officer Margaret Murray provided brief comments regarding her organization's primary functions and discussed various topics, including the following:

- Opening of the Sightline Gallery at St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport
- Redesigning digital presence to focus mainly on cultural tourism marketing
- Upcoming rollout of the *Making Waves* pilot program
- Website traffic and social media growth and engagement
- Art sales and attendance at The Gallery at Creative Pinellas
- Support for the growth of the Pinellas County cultural community
- Finalization of the Pinellas County Cultural Plan

In response to a query by Mr. Henderson, Ms. Murray confirmed that approximately 5 to 8% of visitors to The Gallery at Creative Pinellas are Florida residents living outside of Pinellas County; whereupon, referring to a document titled *Making Waves: A Celebration of Nature, Creativity & Community in Pinellas County*, Ms. Murray provided additional details related to the *Making Waves* program, including its purpose, goals, objectives, and creative project guidelines. She also presented several *Making Waves* project

examples and discussed target audience demographics, estimated economic impact and visitation, marketing and outreach strategy, key partners, and program budget.

Responding to comments and queries by Mr. Hubbard and Ms. Rodriguez, Ms. Murray provided brief comments regarding the proposed utilization of grants to fund artists and art organizations through the *Making Waves* program and discussed the program's cost, return on investment, and timeline for implementation; whereupon, responding to a query by Mr. Hubbard, Ms. Murray indicated that this pilot program will be a proof of concept for investing in cultural tourism in Pinellas County.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed metrics for April 2025, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of hotel and vacation rental occupancy, average daily rates, revenue per available room, accommodation supply and demand, and Tourist Development Tax collections; whereupon, he provided detailed information regarding Spring visitor profile survey data for March and April and hotel supply, demand, and revenue in the Tampa Bay region and other Florida destinations.

Mr. Lowack briefly discussed increased visitor recognition of advertisements and rising inbound visitation from New York; whereupon, in response to a query by Mr. Hubbard, Mr. Kirsch provided information regarding the individuals interviewed for the visitor profile survey and related that social media use is prevalent among all demographics.

Elite Event Funding Recommendations

Mr. Campbell referred to a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed changes made to the Elite Event program. He also described VSPC's priorities for awarding funds and indicated that funding is not guaranteed year-to-year; and that recommendations are made based on value to VSPC; whereupon, Mr. Campbell discussed funding categories and eligibility criteria.

Referring to a spreadsheet titled *FY26 Elite Event Funding Recommendations* and a document titled *Elite Event and Destination Enhancement Funding Program Guidelines*, Mr. Campbell provided updates related to funding applications associated with the Clearwater Jazz Holiday, 2026 John's Pass Seafood Festival, and SHINE St. Petersburg Mural Festival events. He also provided historical information regarding the program's growth and presented details related to the VSPC staff that reviewed the funding applications, review process, rating criteria, and recommendation formula.

Mr. Campbell summarized that, of the 50 applications received, staff is recommending 43 applications and one bundle for funding; and that the total amount being recommended

for funding is \$2.685 million, which results in \$315,000.00 in remaining program funding. He also indicated that funding applications are now being accepted year-round; and that any additional events received for categories 1 through 4 would be brought before the Board for review and approval, while additional events received for category 5 would be handled administratively by VSPC; whereupon, Mr. Campbell related that new data and measurement tools are forthcoming.

Mr. Lowack provided additional information regarding changes made to the Elite Events program, including that, with the exception of attendance data, the Destinations International calculator is now being utilized to gather event data in lieu of self-reported data provided by event organizers; whereupon, in response to a query by acting Chair Kimball, he related that, with the TDC's approval at today's meeting, the program funding recommendations would be placed on the July 22 Board of County Commissioners' meeting agenda for approval.

In response to comments and queries by the members, Messrs. Campbell and Lowack provided information regarding the following topics:

- VSPC's future ability to capture event attendance data through new technology
- Funding recommendation for the 2026 Clearwater Offshore Nationals event
- Recommendation formula and weight of rating criteria
- Distribution of events across funding categories

Following brief discussion, and upon the acting Chair's call for public comment, Julie Ward Bujalski, Dunedin Chamber of Commerce, and Mike Schulze, ReliaQuest Bowl Clearwater Beach Day, appeared and provided brief comments.

Upon the acting Chair's call for a motion to accept the recommendations report, Mr. Henderson made a motion to accept. The motion was seconded by Ms. Rodriguez and carried unanimously.

Deviating from the agenda, Mr. Campbell also discussed VSPC's internship program and introduced new intern, Elise Eason; whereupon, Ms. Eason provided brief comments regarding her background.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Lowack provided information regarding the following updates:

- He was joined by Chair Scott and several VSPC staff while attending the U.S. Travel Association's IPW trade show in Chicago.

- VSPC's activation and United Kingdom teams attended the Taste of London Food Festival in London.
- "727 Day" will be celebrated during the weekend of July 27.

Mr. Lowack congratulated Mr. Hubbard regarding Hubbard's Marina being ranked as the Best Fishing Charter by USA Today's 10Best 2025 Reader's Choice Awards; whereupon, he also commended VSPC Vice President of Finance and Administration Teri Tuxhorn and other staff for their efforts related to VSPC's renewal as an accredited Destination Marketing Organization from Destinations International.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Acting Chair Kimball indicated that the next TDC meeting has been cancelled; whereupon, Mayor Rector provided brief comments regarding a recent trip to London with Global Tampa Bay and the upcoming "727 Day" celebration.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:48 AM.