

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
August 20, 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 9:01 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)
Katie Gannon, City of Oldsmar Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
Dylan Hubbard, Hubbard's Marina
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Bruce Rector, City of Clearwater Mayor
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort

Not Present

Dave Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
Phil M. Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Chuck Prather, The Birchwood Inn

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, Public Relations Director, 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 9:01 AM and requested that those in attendance introduced themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Scott expressed appreciation to Mr. Kimball for serving as acting Chair at the June TDC meeting; whereupon, he discussed various topics, including his and staff's attendance at the U.S. Travel Association's IPW trade show in Chicago, a recent decrease in tourism, and brief updates related to the Clearwater Phillies and the Tampa Bay Rays.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – JUNE 25, 2025

Chair Scott indicated that the Board's first action item is approval of the June 25 minutes; whereupon, Mr. Gerdes made a motion to approve. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hubbard and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

PRESENTATIONS

Beach Nourishment Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Emergency Beach Nourishment Project FY 2025-2026*, Public Works Director Kelli Hammer Levy provided background information regarding the County's beach nourishment program and indicated that 12 miles of the County's beaches are regularly restored; that while beach nourishment is typically accomplished through the County's partnership with the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the current projects are being completed solely by the County; and that storm damage reduction benefits from this projects are in excess of \$10 billion.

Ms. Levy provided historical information related to the County's beach nourishment program, including its Congressional authorization in 1966, and related that, typically, 65% of costs would be funded by the federal government, while the County would split the remainder of the costs with the State of Florida through its beach grant program; and that, without federal funding, the County is funding approximately 89% of costs via Tourist Development Taxes, and 11% of costs are covered by grants; whereupon, she noted that the County is continuing to work toward necessary policy changes to ensure that future beach nourishment projects are compliant with the Army Corps of Engineers.

Ms. Levy indicated that the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) authorized a one-time emergency beach nourishment project for Sand Key, Treasure Island, and Upham Beach; whereupon, she provided information regarding the project, including the following details:

- Funding sources
- Temporary construction easements for work completed on Sand Key
- Difficulties with acquiring easements and associated challenges
- Differences between a previous emergency dune project and the current nourishment project
- Profiles and specifications for each portion of the project
- Selected contractor and subcontractor
- Process and sources for dredging sand
- Tentative scheduled start dates for construction

In response to a query by Mr. Smith, Ms. Levy provided brief comments regarding pipeline corridors; whereupon, responding to queries by Mr. Hubbard, she discussed the process for placing wet sand on the beaches and the extensive monitoring requirements related to turbidity, sea turtles, and seabirds.

Responding to comments and queries by the members, Ms. Levy provided information related to the selective placement of rock groins, longshore transport, coastal management, and the potential restoration of the south jetty at John's Pass; whereupon, in response to comments and queries by Ms. Moore and Chair Scott, Mr. Hubbard and Ms. Levy discussed a John's Pass dredging project, permitting through the Army Corps of Engineers, and the nourishment of Madeira Beach.

In response to a query by Mr. Kimball, Ms. Levy confirmed that Sand Key Park will remain open while being utilized as a staging area for equipment; whereupon, Mr. Kimball, with input from Chair Scott, provided brief comments related to the use of resort tax funds to preserve the County's beaches.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed metrics for June 2025, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of hotel and vacation rental performance, domestic and international hotel and vacation rental feeder markets, accommodation supply and demand, and Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections; whereupon, he discussed industry insights, factors that may be affecting visitation, and staff's strategic efforts to increase visitation.

In response to comments and queries by Mr. Kimball, Mr. Kirsch provided clarifying comments regarding staff's efforts to identify optimal markets on which to focus time and

resources and VSPC's marketing partnership with Allegiant Air; whereupon, Mayor Rector and Mr. Hubbard discussed various topics, including post-hurricane recovery, ongoing challenges, and tourism.

727 Day

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Morrow provided information regarding the "727 Day" event, including the following details:

- Goals and objectives
- Promotional strategy
- Design and distribution of the "727 Day" t-shirt
- Utilization of mobile passport technology
- Engagements received through local activations and redemption of deals
- Advertising, public relations, and digital performance

Thereupon, Mayor Rector, Ms. Rodriguez, and Mr. Hubbard provided brief comments regarding the growth of the "727 Day" event.

Palate & Palette Media Event

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Latimer indicated that, in partnership with the James Beard Foundation, VSPC recently hosted the *Palate & Palette* event in New York City; that the event paired four local chefs with four museums based in St. Petersburg; and that each chef designed a dish which would be emblematic of their partner museum; whereupon, he displayed photographs and a video highlighting the event and related that 45 New York City-based media and content creators were invited; and that social posts related to the event generated more than a million impressions.

Mr. Latimer also noted that Food & Wine magazine featured St. Petersburg as an up-and-coming food destination; and that the partnership with the James Beard Foundation will continue through activations at two 'Taste America' events.

Thereupon, Mr. Kimball, Chair Scott, and Ms. Moore provided brief supportive comments regarding the event.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Mr. Lowack indicated that VSPC's advertising agency contract is ending; and that, earlier this year, two Requests for Proposals (RFPs) were issued, with the first RFP relating to creative and brand strategy and the second RFP pertaining to media buying and planning; whereupon, he expressed appreciation to individuals who served on the RFP evaluation

committee and related that one agency received the top ranking for both RFPs, which are being combined into one contract; and that the contract will be brought before the BCC for approval at its September 4 meeting.

Mr. Lowack indicated that VSPC Film Commissioner Lisa Dozois is retiring, effective October 3, 2025; and that the position is being advertised. He also noted that a revision to the film incentive program will be presented next month.

Thereupon, Mr. Lowack provided the following additional updates:

- The Crisis Communication Plan has been provided to the TDC members.
- At the U.S. Travel Association's 2025 Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations conference, VSPC received the Excellence in Print Marketing Award for its 2024-2025 *Gulf to Bay Magazine*.

Mr. Lowack indicated that while the September TDC meeting has been cancelled, a joint meeting between the TDC and the BCC is scheduled to take place; whereupon, Chair Scott noted that the meeting is scheduled to begin at 9:00 AM on September 11.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Chair Scott indicated that, earlier this year, he mentioned that one of his goals was to identify opportunities for utilizing TDT funds to promote tourism while also benefiting residents; whereupon, he suggested that the members consider utilizing TDT for capital projects specific to parks. Chair Scott, with input from Mr. Lowack, related that he would like to determine the members' interest; that, if there is a consensus, Mr. Lowack and staff will work on identifying potential projects that would promote tourism while also benefiting residents; and that potential programs would be presented at the joint TDC/BCC meeting.

Thereupon, discussion ensued regarding the potential utilization of TDT for capital projects specific to parks and park maintenance.

Mr. Smith left the meeting at 10:56 AM.

In response to a query by Mr. Gerdes, Attorney Coffey, with input by Chair Scott, provided clarifying information regarding potential options available to the TDC, indicating that since the Tourist Development Plan does not currently allow the utilization of TDT funds for beach park facilities, the Plan would need to be amended in order to do so; whereupon, following brief discussion and in response to comments by Commissioner Eggers, Attorney Coffey provided additional details related to the Tourist Development Plan, including current limitations and potential options available to the TDC.

Thereupon, Chair Scott indicated that Representative Anna Paulina Luna contacted him to schedule a meeting in order to discuss beach nourishment; and that he will update the members at the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:04 AM.