

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
December 17, 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)
Dave Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
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

Katie Gannon, City of Oldsmar Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
Phil M. Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Dylan Hubbard, Hubbard's Marina

Others Present

Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete-Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Stephanie Alexander-Priakos, Director of Meetings and Conferences, VSPC
Katie Bridges, Director of Advertising and Promotions, VSPC
Craig Campbell, Director of Community and Brand Engagement, VSPC
Dave Caputo, Film Commissioner, 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, Director of Public Relations, VSPC
Rosemarie Payne, Director of U.S. and Canada Leisure Sales, VSPC
Caleb Peterson, Director of Sports Commission, VSPC
Jessica Oakes, 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 and requested that those in attendance introduce themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Scott indicated that he will provide his comments at the conclusion of today's meeting.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – NOVEMBER 19, 2025

Mayor Rector made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Ms. Moore and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

PRESENTATIONS

Department Updates

Mr. Lowack introduced the item, indicating that it is an opportunity for each department to highlight their accomplishments from 2025 and discuss their priorities for 2026.

ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONS

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Bridges highlighted the following accomplishments and priorities:

Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments

- Launched the Still Shining and Ampersand campaigns
- Formed strategic partnerships with all of Tampa Bay's professional sports teams
- Published the 2025-2026 Gulf to Bay Destination Magazine
- Developed new Business Development Marketing Manager role

Fiscal Year 2026 Priorities

- Launch a new brand campaign and a revamped Ampersand campaign
- Expand social, influencer, and content production capabilities

- Utilize enhanced technology and measurement for precision marketing and increased return on investment

Responding to queries by Mr. Prather, Ms. Bridges indicated that staff plans to present the new brand campaign to the Board in early summer; and that the Ampersand campaign will continue, with minor changes to headlines. In response to a query by Mr. Kimball, she also provided information regarding co-op advertising, explaining that participation decreased slightly this year; that the new marketing plan being developed by Envisionit will incorporate co-op advertising; and that more co-op opportunities will be introduced in 2026.

DIGITAL AND DATA

Mr. Kirsch highlighted the following accomplishments and priorities:

Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments

- Formed a partnership with Vox Media to produce content across several publications
- Launched the Savor Social Series to feature local chefs and restaurants
- Built a partnership with local influencer Sarah Phinney to showcase lesser-known hotels and attractions in the destination
- Developed the Still Shining campaign to share stories related to the resiliency of local tourism businesses

Fiscal Year 2026 Priorities

- Improve data strategy and integration by enhancing the Symphony dashboard and building a consumer data platform
- Redesign VSPC's website to leverage emerging technology and deliver relevant experiences to visitors
- Invest time and resources into delivering personalized emails to specific audiences

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Latimer briefly highlighted the following accomplishments and priorities:

Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments

- Executed a local media outreach plan for 727 Day and the Still Shining campaign
- Elevated conversations surrounding the destination's dining scene
- Hosted media and familiarization trips in the destination

Fiscal Year 2026 Priorities

- Conduct outreach across Florida, the destination's largest visitation market

- Expand and refine influencer/content creator strategy
- Build awareness of the destination through national exposure

Responding to queries by Chair Scott, Mr. Latimer provided additional information related to the MICHELIN Guide program and staff's efforts to elevate conversations surrounding the destination's dining scene, indicating that while staff has not yet discussed factors associated with remaining in the program, the program's selections for 2026 will likely be announced in the spring.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ms. Diaz summarized information related to the following accomplishments and priorities:

Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments

- Awarded TDC funding to five Capital Projects in the amount of over \$26 million
- Adjusted the Chamber Funding Program following Hurricanes Helene and Milton and installed new measurement technology in all chambers of commerce
- Hosted various engagement opportunities, including Gulf to Bay Destination Trainings, Coffee Chat with the CEO, and a focus group with partners that related to upcoming meaningful travel initiatives

Fiscal Year 2026 Priorities

- Allow for increased transparency, prioritization, and return on investment and enable Beach Park Facilities to receive funding through improved Capital Project Funding Program guidelines
- Establish a VSPC-branded countywide visitor center at a critical gateway
- Partner with Tourism Cares to highlight meaningful travel experiences to potential travelers
- Increase accessibility in the destination through a partnership with Wheel the World

In response to a query by Mr. Prather, Ms. Diaz indicated that the countywide visitor center will be located in the Clearwater area. Responding to a query by Mr. Smith, Ms. Diaz also indicated that VSPC is continuing its efforts regarding the From Visitors with Love campaign; and that the members may soon see new campaign messaging created in collaboration with Envisionit; whereupon, Mr. Lowack noted that, next year, he will prioritize continuing to educate residents and elected officials regarding the ways in which local communities benefit from tourism.

BRAND ACTIVATIONS

Mr. Campbell provided information related to the following accomplishments and priorities:

Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments

- Executed nine strategic, high-impact activations in London, New York, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and Orlando
- Supported 56 local events with promotional assets
- Worked with local partners to execute activations

Fiscal Year 2026 Priorities

- Continue to focus on strategic out-of-market activations
- Identify and measure impacts of Elite Events through a pilot program
- Maintain delivery of key messaging through Brand Ambassador and Internship Programs

MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

Ms. Alexander-Priakos discussed the following priorities:

Fiscal Year 2026 Priorities

- Utilize data and feedback from hotel partners to implement aggressive incentives
- Rework the client incentive program
- Share hotel specials with third-party meeting planners
- Expand and deepen relationships with meeting planners
- Measure new contacts and engagements with meeting planners and corporate buyers
- Benchmark competitor destination activity to stay ahead of market trends
- Increase site visits and familiarization trips
- Increase partnership activity with hotels, venues, vendors, and tourism partners to ensure comprehensive site and destination support

Responding to comments and queries by Mayor Rector, Ms. Alexander-Priakos provided brief comments related to anticipated growth in 2026 and reported that data for 2025 shows a slight decrease due to significant group activity in September and October of 2024.

LEISURE – INTERNATIONAL

Ms. Gabel provided information regarding the following accomplishments and priorities:

Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments

- Conducted 78 destination training sessions and trained over 5,000 travel trade professionals
- Hosted 27 familiarization trips in the destination, welcoming a total of 184 travel trade professionals
- Generated over 15,000 room nights through co-op marketing programs
- Conducted three sales missions in Brazil, the United Kingdom, and Mexico

Fiscal Year 2026 Priorities

- Continue to focus on engagement and building relationships with key clients
- Enhance destination training sessions

Responding to a query by Mr. Prather, Mr. Lowack provided brief comments regarding an upward trend in international travel over the last five years, which is partially due to flight availability at local airports.

LEISURE – UNITED STATES/CANADA

Ms. Payne provided an overview of the following accomplishments and priorities:

Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments

- Executed an activation at the U.S. Travel Association's IPW trade show in Chicago, hosting over 60 clients and tour operators
- Increased the number of room nights generated through co-op marketing
- Traveled with partners to 19 sales initiatives

Fiscal Year 2026 Priorities

- Leverage research for strategic decision-making related to sales initiatives
- Form new partnerships to grow leisure traveler base
- Focus on training, educational visits to the area, and new opportunities to educate and inspire tourism partners in Pinellas County

SPORTS COMMISSION

Mr. Peterson indicated that there were slight decreases in participation among sports team event organizers in Fiscal Year 2025. He also noted that, following the loss of some events due to hurricanes, staff attempted to repurpose some funds to go toward sponsorships at trade shows; whereupon, Mr. Peterson briefly discussed new developments and renovations planned for Fiscal Year 2026 and indicated that staff is excited to work toward hosting more large-scale events in the destination; and that one of staff's strategies for Fiscal Year 2026 is to work with local companies that may be interested in supporting large-scale events.

Responding to comments and queries by Mr. Kimball, Mr. Peterson, with input from Mr. Lowack and Mayor Rector, discussed the status and timeline associated with redevelopment of the Toytown site and renovations to the Eddie C. Moore Complex and the Clearwater Beach Municipal Marina; whereupon, in response to queries by Chair Scott, Mr. Peterson also provided brief comments regarding efforts to re-book events at Tropicana Field.

FILM COMMISSION

Mr. Caputo summarized the following accomplishments:

Fiscal Year 2025 Accomplishments

- Recorded nearly 500 shoot days, which translated into 1,552 local crew hires and 1,524 room nights, totaling 124 total productions and a local spend of approximately \$5.3 million
- Implemented the revised Screen Industry Incentive Program
- Increased trade show outreach throughout the year, including at Gotham Week

Thereupon, Mr. Caputo also discussed a strategic framework being built for Fiscal Year 2026, which will help drive stronger outcomes through higher-quality productions, greater distribution, and more recognizable names. Responding to comments and queries by Mr. Smith, he indicated that he is not aware of a Film Commissioner within the Visit Florida organization; and that film commissions are able to meet through the Film Florida Entertainment Production Association, which is a nonprofit organization and coalition of all film commissions throughout the State.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch indicated that he will be presenting a fiscal year update generated by Future Partners; and that the update is based on a combination of survey data and other data collected by VSPC; whereupon, referring to a PowerPoint presentation, he summarized that the destination received 14.9 million visitors in Fiscal Year 2025; that, for the fourth consecutive year, tourism generated over \$92 million in Tourist Development Taxes (TDT) and more than \$10 billion in economic impact; and that while the destination continues to recover, broad headwinds exist going into 2026. Mr. Kirsch noted that, in comparison to Fiscal Year 2024, total visitors and TDT revenue for Fiscal Year 2025 decreased by approximately 2.7% and 4.3%, respectively; whereupon, he presented year-over-year comparisons of the following key visitor metrics:

- Average length of stay in paid lodging
- Average daily spend
- Travel party size
- Planning window
- Advertising/promotion recall
- Average age and household income
- Primary reason for visiting

Thereupon, Mr. Kirsch referred to the aforementioned PowerPoint presentation and reviewed metrics for October 2025, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of TDT collections and hotel and vacation rental performance and demand. He also presented statistics pertaining to pacing of hotel and vacation rental bookings for December 2025 through May 2026, including details related to average daily rates, check-ins, and guest nights.

Responding to comments and queries by Mr. Kimball, Mr. Kirsch reported that events held in the destination during November 2025 were well attended. He also indicated that staff will re-incorporate comparative statistics for other destinations in future presentations.

Following a query by Chair Scott, discussion ensued, with input from Messrs. Lowack and Kirsch, regarding predictions for hotel booking in 2026, the bifurcation of hotel stays between visitors with different income levels, and potential pent-up demand.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Mr. Lowack provided information regarding the following updates:

- The Capital Project Funding Agreement associated with the Clearwater Marine Aquarium was recently approved by the Board of County Commissioners (BCC).
- Funding was approved for a contractor to complete subsurface work at the Toytown site. The goal is to present a final proposal to the BCC regarding the project by October 2026.
- VSPC's Annual Partner Summit will be hosted from January 13 through 16, with four different summits taking place throughout the county.
- The County's beach renourishment project is ahead of schedule and news regarding its completion is anticipated to be received soon.

Mr. Lowack recognized Chair Scott for his time and efforts over the past year and presented him with a gift; whereupon, Chair Scott commended VSPC staff for their outstanding work and discussed his international trips taken while serving as Chair. Commissioner Eggers also acknowledged Chair Scott's work over the past year and provided brief comments regarding his future service as Chair.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:43 AM.