

**Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
January 21, 2026 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

Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Katie Gannon, City of Oldsmar Mayor
Dave Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
Dylan Hubbard, Hubbard's Marina
Chris Latvala, County Commissioner (non-voting)
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Bruce Rector, City of Clearwater Mayor
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry

Not Present

Dave Eggers, Chair, County Commissioner
Phil M. Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
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, Director of Community and Brand Engagement, 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 9:02 AM, confirmed the presence of a quorum, and led the Pledge of Allegiance; whereupon, at his request, those in attendance introduced themselves.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Acting Chair Kimball welcomed new Board member, Commissioner Latvala.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – DECEMBER 17, 2025

Acting Chair Kimball indicated that the first item on the agenda is approval of the minutes; whereupon, Ms. Moore made a motion, which was seconded by Mayor Gattis and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

PRESENTATIONS

St. Pete Powerboat Races (Elite Events)

Deviating from the order of the agenda, acting Chair Kimball indicated that the St. Pete Powerboat Races item will be presented at this time.

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Campbell provided background information regarding the St. Pete Powerboat Grand Prix Elite Event, including that the original applicant, Powerboat P1 USA, previously applied and was approved for up to \$125,000.00 in funding for Fiscal Year 2026; and that the event was originally scheduled for September 4 through 6, 2026. He indicated that Powerboat P1 USA was purchased by the International Hot Rod Association (IHRA); that the IHRA modified the event to begin in St. Petersburg, rather than to conclude there; and that the event has been rescheduled to March 27 through 29, 2026.

Mr. Campbell related that the change in ownership and different dates necessitated a new Elite Event funding application, which was submitted on December 19, 2025, with a requested funding amount of \$125,000.00; and that VSPC's internal Elite Event committee reviewed the application and considered the following key metrics:

- 60,000 projected attendees
- Approximately 12,000 projected room nights
- Over \$12 million in economic impact
- Television exposure via commercial units and in-broadcast assets on CBS Sports Network, YouTube, and Speed Sport

Thereupon, Mr. Campbell indicated that staff's recommendation is to award funding for the event in the amount of \$125,000.00; and that staff is seeking the TDC's approval to present the recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) in February.

In response to comments and queries by Mr. Hubbard, Mr. Campbell confirmed that the modified time period for the event was considered by VSPC's internal committee during the scoring process. He related that, during a conversation with the IHRA, staff expressed concern regarding the new event dates; and that the IHRA indicated that the event dates are subject to change in the future, with an ideal date range of early February in Fiscal Year 2027; whereupon, Mr. Hubbard made a motion for approval. The motion was seconded by Mayor Gattis and carried unanimously.

St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport (PIE) Presentation

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Interim Airport Director Mark Sprague provided information regarding accomplishments from the past year, including information regarding growth in passenger traffic, top markets, passenger statistics, and Fiscal Year 2025 concession revenue; whereupon, he indicated that the data reflects a 14% increase in passenger traffic over last year.

Starmark International President Jacqui Hartnett provided information regarding the results of the National Pie Day 2025 activation and discussed new activations for 2026, including a marketing campaign for a new route to Colorado Springs, refreshed creative assets to promote a route to Key West, custom PIE stickers, and organic social media efforts; whereupon, she noted that National Pie Day 2026 will be celebrated on Friday, January 23.

Mr. Sprague also discussed Allegiant Air's recent purchase of Sun Country Airlines, indicating that Sun Country is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota and predominantly services warmer destinations; whereupon, he displayed a video featuring Allegiant and Sun Country's Chief Executive Officers discussing the merger of the two airlines.

In response to a query by acting Chair Kimball, Mr. Sprague provided details regarding the destinations serviced by Sun Country Airlines. Responding to queries by Mayor Rector, Mr. Lowack briefly discussed the collaboration between VSPC and PIE with regard to marketing efforts focused on top markets, including Tennessee; whereupon, in response to an additional query by Mayor Rector, Mr. Sprague provided information related to PIE's peak periods.

FY25 Visitor Profile/Insights

Mr. Lowack introduced the President and CEO of Future Partners, Erin Francis-Cummings and indicated that Future Partners is VSPC's research firm; that the firm conducts over 4,000 in-market visitor intercept surveys each year; and that VSPC utilizes this visitor sentiment data to make marketing decisions.

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Francis-Cummings provided detailed information regarding American traveler sentiment and key consumer trends based on the results of her firm's ongoing "The State of the American Traveler" Study. She also reviewed the Fiscal Year 2025 visitor profile and methodology utilized for survey purposes; whereupon, she discussed details regarding the average traveler who comes to Pinellas County, identified different types of travelers based on the locations they visit while in the destination, and provided key insights for each group.

Ms. Francis-Cummings briefly discussed additional surveys, studies, and research that Future Partners will conduct going forward in order to expand upon insights gained; whereupon, in response to queries by Mr. Hubbard, Mayor Gannon, and acting Chair Kimball, she provided clarifying information regarding various topics, including ensuring the accuracy of information provided by survey respondents, standardizing questions across surveys to ensure data accuracy, and potentially modifying survey methodology for new online surveys.

Thereupon, Mr. Kirsch provided brief comments regarding the work performed by Future Partners, including that their contributions have been part of the core foundational work utilized by VSPC for strategic marketing and identification of target audiences.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed metrics for November 2025, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of hotel and vacation rental performance and Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections; whereupon, he provided details related to temporarily closed accommodations, the pace of hotel and vacation rental bookings, and top origin markets for hotel bookings.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Mr. Lowack provided information regarding the following updates:

- The BCC approved the revised Capital Project Funding Program guidelines and the revised Tourist Development Plan, which added beach park facilities as an allowable Capital Project Funding Program expenditure.

- Pinellas County Intergovernmental Liaison Tristan Sommer will provide a legislative update at next month's TDC meeting.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSION

No one responded to the acting Chair's call for Board member comments.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon the acting Chair's call for a motion to adjourn, Mr. Hubbard made a motion, which was seconded by Mayor Gattis; whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at 10:12 AM.