Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
October 21, 2026 Meeting Minutes

The Pinellas County Tourist Development Council (TDC), 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

Dave Eggers, Chair, County Commissioner
Dave Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
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
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort

Not Present

Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Katie Gannon, City of Oldsmar Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
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, Director of Public Relations, VSPC
Steve Grimes, Chief Marketing Officer, VSPC
Jasmin Parrado, Board Reporter
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 Eggers called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM and requested that Ms. Moore lead the Pledge of Allegiance; whereupon, he confirmed the presence of a quorum.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Eggers indicated that this is Mayor Gattis' final TDC meeting and presented him with a certificate of appreciation; whereupon, Mayor Gattis expressed his appreciation to the Board.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – AUGUST 19, 2026

Upon the Chair's call for a motion to approve the minutes, Mayor Gattis made a motion to approve, which was seconded by Mr. Smith and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

PRESENTATIONS

Marketing Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation and displaying several promotional videos, Mr. Grimes provided updates regarding VSPC's marketing initiatives, including the following:

- The *Beach. Culture.* campaign is now live in all of VSPC's key markets, with three new television advertisements currently airing. VSPC also released print and digital advertisements highlighting beaches, museums, and food, as well as advertisements targeting cold-weather markets and promoting the County as a destination for meetings and conferences.

- Advertising for The Ocean Race Round the World 2027 is underway, with digital advertisements targeting sailing communities along the east coast. Additional advertisements are planned leading up to the race's start in January 2027 and the St. Petersburg-Clearwater stopover in May.

- VSPC continues to promote the Tampa Bay Rays through advertising, social media content, and an influencer partnership. Advertisements will be updated to reflect the team's advancement to the 2026 World Series.

- In partnership with the TradeWinds Resort, VSPC hosted two beach parties for visiting Green Bay Packers and Pittsburgh Steelers fans, encouraging them to stay in Pinellas County while attending Tampa Bay Buccaneers games. The events attracted

hundreds of attendees and led to more than 100 hotel bookings at the TradeWinds Resort.

- Through its partnership with the Tampa Bay Lightning, VSPC continues to promote visitation to Pinellas County through in-arena promotional activities offering prizes to encourage visits to local attractions and restaurants, as well as television advertisements highlighting the county's beaches.

- Targeted campaigns generated more than 130 million impressions in September 2026, with positive results in website engagement for the Ocean Race campaign, hotel searches associated with visiting National Football League fans, and search conversions among Canadian audiences.

- VSPC continues to explore new advertising platforms and formats, including advertisements through United Airlines and Kinective, Spotify podcasts, influencer campaigns, Meta Lodging, and TikTok travel advertisements. Additionally, VSPC is producing short documentaries highlighting the County's attractions, including a recent video exploring the origins of Clearwater Beach's sand.

- As part of the *Beach. Culture.* campaign, VSPC launched a promotional initiative to recruit individuals for three contract C-suite positions, through which they will experience and promote the destination's attractions. The initiative has received more than 3,000 applications in the form of video submissions and garnered national media coverage, including a feature on *Good Morning America*. Applications will be accepted through October 22.

- St. Pete-Clearwater will be featured as a grand prize destination on the November 10, 2026, episode of *Wheel of Fortune* as part of a special week highlighting four Florida destinations. Additionally, *Live with Kelly and Mark* is scheduled to film four episodes at the Sandpearl Resort on Clearwater Beach during the week of November 16, 2026.

Mr. Grimes also introduced Art Everywhere, a month-long celebration of arts being held in partnership with Creative Pinellas and other local arts organizations; whereupon, Creative Pinellas Chief Executive Officer Margaret Murray provided an overview of the initiative, including details regarding Museum Week, various arts and cultural events throughout the county, and a planned kickoff event at Coachman Park.

Responding to a query by Commissioner Latvala, Mr. Grimes discussed VSPC's advertising strategy for the Ocean Race, indicating that St. Pete-Clearwater will be the race's only North American stopover; and that marketing efforts have primarily targeted areas with strong sailing communities through digital advertising and outreach to more

than 300 yacht clubs nationwide, facilitated by the St. Petersburg Yacht Club. He also related that VSPC plans to broaden its advertising efforts as the race approaches to attract visitors interested in the event's associated activities and entertainment.

In response to a query by Mr. Hubbard, Mr. Grimes indicated that VSPC currently plans to hire one individual for each of the three contract C-Suite positions, although the significant number of applications received may present opportunities for additional collaborations.

Website Update

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and provided an update regarding the redesign of VSPC's website. He discussed the results of a website return on investment study conducted with Future Partners and indicated that, in 2025, VSPC's website drove more than 110,000 incremental trips to Pinellas County, generated approximately $191 million in economic impact, and contributed to over 288,000 room nights. Mr. Kirsch then reviewed the website's updated layout, new artificial intelligence (AI) search and personalization features, and initial performance metrics.

In response to comments by Chair Eggers, Mr. Lowack discussed ongoing efforts to integrate AI into VSPC's internal operations, indicating that a technology consultant has been engaged in order to evaluate existing business practices and identify opportunities for greater efficiency; and that, in two weeks, staff will begin a 12-week training program to learn how to incorporate AI into their work processes.

Responding to a query by Mr. Hubbard, Mr. Kirsch confirmed that Miles Partnership served as the lead developer of the redesigned website.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed metrics for August 2026, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections, total visitors, hotel and vacation rental performance, supply, and demand, top origin markets, and spending insights; whereupon, he also provided details related to the pace of hotel and vacation rental bookings for the next three months.

Influencer Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Latimer provided an update regarding VSPC's influencer marketing initiatives, including a partnership with Steller through Envisionit to promote the *Beach. Culture.* campaign. He indicated that the partnership involved 16 content creators across different levels of social media following, audience

demographics, and geographic markets; that the partnership suggested travel itineraries and produced promotional videos and other content for use on VSPC's website and social media platforms; and that the initiative generated more than 30 million impressions, 2.8 million video views, and approximately $2 million in earned media value.

Mr. Latimer then discussed a partnership with Cheeky Golf Club, a group of United Kingdom-based content creators, to promote local golf courses and the Skechers World Champions Cup, noting that the partnership generated nearly one million views across social media platforms. He indicated that VSPC also collaborated with local food-focused influencers to distribute Michelin Guide plaques to six restaurants and promote their dining experiences through social media content, generating almost 250,000 views.

In response to comments by Chair Eggers, Mr. Latimer discussed a July visit to Canada with Mr. Lowack, indicating that their conversations with Canadian contacts were positive; and that he had not encountered reluctance toward visiting the destination. Responding to a query by Mr. Hubbard, Mr. Latimer also confirmed that Steller coordinated the content creators and related social media activities, while VSPC developed the itineraries to highlight the destination’s attractions.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Mr. Lowack indicated that Denis Zyuzin has joined VSPC as the new Global Travel Trade Strategy Director; whereupon, Mr. Zyuzin introduced himself and provided brief comments regarding his background.

Thereupon, Mr. Lowack provided information regarding the following updates:

- The Board of County Commissioners (BCC) approved the TDC’s recommended amendments to its bylaws, granting the Commission the sole discretion to appoint non-elected TDC members representing the accommodations or tourism-related categories who have reached their term limit of three four-year terms to serve for up to two additional years in a non-voting, ex-officio capacity.

- Two TDC members are approaching their term limits, and their potential appointments to the additional two-year terms in a non-voting, ex-officio capacity will be considered by the BCC at its October 27 meeting.

- The Capital Projects Funding Program cycle has begun, and staff held an opening information session last week. Applications are being accepted through January 15, 2027.

- As part of its adopted Fiscal Year 2027 budget, the BCC approved the use of approximately $746,000.00 in TDT funds to support two full-time equivalent (FTE) coastal management positions in the Public Works Department. The positions are responsible for overseeing the beach nourishment project, inlet management studies, and permitting requirements of the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Funding will be derived from the capital portion of the TDT budget.

- The BCC also approved the TDC's recommendation for an additional $367,500.00 in Elite Event funding for 2026 only.

- Following a discussion at the previous TDC meeting, he consulted with the County Attorney's Office and confirmed that piers could potentially be considered eligible to receive TDT funding under the existing statute and Tourist Development Plan.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Ms. Rodriguez provided information regarding *Holiday in Lights*, a campaign developed by Clearwater Beach stakeholders in partnership with AMPLIFY Clearwater to encourage visitation to downtown Clearwater and Clearwater Beach during the holiday season, beginning in November and continuing through the end of December; whereupon, she indicated that local businesses are invited to participate by submitting information regarding their upcoming events and special promotions for inclusion in the campaign.

Commissioner Latvala noted that the University of South Florida Bulls will play against the Florida State Seminoles at BayCare Ballpark at 1:00 PM on October 24.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 AM.