



TDC Meeting Minutes

Aug. 13, 2020

Commissioner Brian Hamman, chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council (TDC) meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Brian Hamman, Pamela Cronin, Rexann Hosafross, Tony Lapi, John McLain, Fran Myers, Bill Waichulis and Robert Wells III.

Colleen DePasquale, Fran Myers and Brian Kramer were excused.

McLain made a motion to approve the March 12, 2020 TDC meeting minutes. Waichulis seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Renee Pesci, Florida Repertory Theatre development director, thanked council for being a recommended recipient of an attractions marketing grant. The funds were requested to update its website to expand outreach.

Jay Johnson, Bubba's Roadhouse owner and Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association's Lee chapter president, updated the council that FRLA will be giving away masks to Lee County restaurants and hotels and thanked council for its support.

Cynthia Welch, Greater Pine Island Chamber of Commerce board member, thanked the TDC for its support. Welch gave update that the chamber's main fundraiser was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and chamber is operating with volunteers.

Lisa Sbuttoni, River District Alliance (RDA) president, thanked Lee County staff working in emergency roles for assisting downtown businesses with LeeCARES funding. She said the funding made a huge difference to the businesses. Sbuttoni also thanked council for its events marketing grant support. She added that the RDA is able to plan events, like the Fourth of July flyover with the support of TDC event marketing funds.

Municipalities to be heard

Judie Zimomra, Sanibel city manager, thanked the TDC for beach & shoreline funding support and for working together to assist disappointed visitors. Sanibel is working to put out the best product possible and it would not be possible without the TDC.

Report of the executive director

The preliminary resort tax collected for June 2020 was \$2,337,503, a 19.9% decrease over June 2019 preliminary collections of \$2,918,447. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$31,582,734, a decrease of 13% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average occupancy rate in June 2020 was 42.7%, which is down 34.9% from June 2019 (65.6%). The average daily rate for June 2020 was \$134.97, up 2.5% from June 2019 (\$131.73) and RevPAR for June 2020 was \$57.69, down 33.3% from June 2019 (\$86.48).

During June 2020, 237,706 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), a decrease of 59.5% compared to June 2019. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is down 39.6% from the same period last year.

DSG report

Joseph St. Germain, Downs & St. Germain president, reported on its [latest consumer sentiment survey](#). Four waves (April-July) have been completed and Wave 5 is in progress. Wave 4 was conducted July 9-10, when Florida was experiencing a spike in COVID-19 cases. The results show that there are three groups of people:

- Those who are very comfortable traveling
- Those who are very opposed to traveling
- A middle group that is varied

Germain said the spike in July did affect people's security level. Those who are concerned about traveling want a vaccine before they travel again. This wave of research shows travelers want to feel safe and know what precautions are being taken by destinations. Travelers in general are becoming more receptive to some travel messaging. Consumers did look at travel media more in July and stated they start their search on Google and destination websites. Destination websites are significant right now because they are a one-stop shop for vacation planning especially since they provide destination-wide COVID-19 updates. July saw a significant increase in travel in the last three weeks. Activity in general is increasing when it comes to going to restaurants, stores and beaches.

Wells asked who was surveyed and St. Germain explained participants were largely in drive markets in Florida, Atlanta and some fly markets (Chicago and New York). Visitor sentiment appears to fall in line with how their home state is handling the pandemic in regard to reopening.

St. Germain also gave a quarterly report for April-June. Overall occupancy, visitor spending and economic impact were significantly down. There were fewer day visitors in addition to paid accommodations and calendar year to date had a similar pattern. Vacation planning window is shorter and with more impulse trips. Younger people are more willing to travel but are more sensitive to price. Those who did travel here were happy with their stay and felt peaceful in destination.

Lapi asked how The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel compares to the rest of Florida's west coast. St. Germain said the sentiment is very similar. Additionally, the panhandle is doing well, given the circumstances.

Hamman asked how people feel about going to the beach. St. Germain said the beach is why visitors are coming and it is a place where they feel peaceful and safe. Pigott added that outdoor vacations are high on consumer lists nationally. Florida is still a top destination for visitors. Hamman asked council how Labor Day is looking. Waichulis said with school going back later, business has increased and Labor Day is close to being sold out. 70-80% of his bookings are visitors from the state's east coast.

Council is in favor of keeping beaches open over Labor Day as it is usually not as busy as other summer holidays.

Pigott said the VCB is canceling its Island Hopper Songwriter Fest for 2020, but has developed a [new Island Hopper website](#). Additionally, the VCB has launched [Shellcast the Podcast](#) to keep our destination top of mind. Pigott also shared a news story about [regular visitors from Germany who recreated the Outrigger Beach Resort in their backyard](#).

Sports development update

Jeff Mielke, Sports Development director, reported that January and February were great months, in fact January was the second best January in history. He said 39,476 room nights were sold from January to June 2020 with direct visitor spending of \$19,468,946. The KIA Tigers stayed for 45 days due to COVID-19 which made for the best February on record. There were no sports events in April and May, but the summer months have been active with youth baseball and softball events. Mielke recognized Gary Ewen, who is retiring after working with the county for 36 years, 17 of which were with sports development. Waichulis asked about pace for 2021, and Mielke said it is looking good as of now. No cancels yet as many sports events are uncertain.

New business

Formalization of FY20-21 beach & shoreline funding requests

Legislative findings:

2BN – City of Sanibel – beach & shoreline erosion study – Motion was made by Cronin, seconded by Lapi, which carried unanimously.

3BN – Town of Fort Myer Beach – beach erosion monitoring – Motion was made by Hosafross, seconded by Cronin, which carried unanimously.

E – Lee County Parks & Recreation – beach & shoreline maintenance – Motion was made by Hosafross, seconded by Lapi, which carried unanimously.

G – Lee County Facilities & Construction Management – beachfront park maintenance – Motion was made by Wells, seconded by Waichulis, which passed unanimously.

J – Barrier Island Park Society – Cayo Costa & Gasparilla State Park utility vehicles – Motion was made by Wells, seconded by Hosafross, which carried unanimously.

L – Lovers Key State Park – beach park maintenance, motion was made by Lapi, seconded by Wells, which carried unanimously.

The TDC unanimously approved beach & shoreline funding recommendations for fiscal year 2020-21, allocating \$9,107,155 to 16 projects throughout Lee County. Motion was made by Waichulis, seconded by Lapi. Project funding will be considered for final approval by the BoCC as part of the FY 2020-21 budget. [View the requests and allocations at LeeVCB.com.](#)

Formalization of FY20-21 events marketing funding

The TDC formalized recommendations for BoCC approval of FY 2020-21 events marketing funding, for six events totaling \$91,975. Motion was made by Lapi and was seconded by Cronin, which passed unanimously. View the [list of allocations at LeeVCB.com.](#)

Formalization of FY20-21 attractions marketing funding

The TDC formalized recommendations for BoCC approval of FY 2020-21 attractions marketing funding, in the amount of \$429,380 for 33 organizations. Motion was made by Wells and was seconded by Hosafross, which passed unanimously. View the [list of allocations at LeeVCB.com.](#)

Third quarter FY20 budget reports

Pigott said the expenditures in the VCB and Sports Development third quarter FY20 budgets had been moderated to match revenue in anticipation for the decrease in revenue for the remainder of fiscal year. A motion was made by Lapi to approve the reports and was seconded by McLain, which carried unanimously.

FY21 proposed budgets

Pigott said that flat budgets were prepared for 2021 and that they will modify them in 2021, as needed. Salyer added that there is expense capacity and if the situation improves, the VCB can expand its marketing without budget amendments. Reserves can be used as well, if needed.

Lapi asked if the budget can be revised if things are going well and Hamman said the county has been good at budgeting in case of a situation like the one we are facing and that the county needs to be open to the idea of budget amendments. Pigott added that each month tourism in Lee County has outperformed the tourism economics model by a small margin. June collections came in higher than expected, which is a good sign, however the VCB is being very careful.

A motion was made by Lapi to approve the proposed FY21 budget report for the VCB and Sports Development, which was seconded by Wells and passed unanimously. The budgets will be considered for final approval by the BoCC as part of the FY 2020-21 budget.

TDC Member Items

- Waichulis updated the council that the .com business has plummeted and is finding that guests want to speak to customer service representatives directly.
- Hosafross thanked Pigott for the TDC orientation and is looking forward to working with the TDC. She will serve on the TDC for one year, filling out Anita Cereceda's term.
- Salyer reported that the BoCC approved Round 2 of LeeCARES and asked council to spread the information.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:07 a.m.

Next TDC Meeting

The next scheduled TDC meeting is at 9 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 8, 2020, in the Admin East Building, Room 118, 2201 Second St., Fort Myers. To view a complete tax collections report, go to LeeVCB.com. Contact: Tamara Pigott, TPigott@leegov.com, Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.