



## **TDC Meeting Minutes**

May 9, 2024

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

### **Council members in attendance**

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, Larry Fiesel, Dan Allers, Robert Wells III, Jay Johnson, Bill Steinke, Bill Waichulis, Nigel Fullick and Tony Lapi.

Pamela Cronin, Brian Kramer, Liston Bochette, Holly Smith and Fran Myers were excused.

### **Approval of previous meeting minutes**

Rob Wells made a motion to approve the Apr. 11, 2024, TDC meeting minutes. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

### **Public to be heard**

None to be heard.

### **Municipalities to be heard**

Andreana Petersen, Business Recruitment and Retention Specialist, City of Cape Coral, shared some upcoming events. Tickets are on sale now for the City of Cape Coral's Red, White & Boom 4<sup>th</sup> of July event featuring Parmalee as the headliner; adults \$40 and kids \$20. Vino's Picasso Paint & Sip is offering two upcoming sessions on Friday, May 10<sup>th</sup> 7-9pm and June 8<sup>th</sup> 2-4pm. The City is hosting a Luau Party at Lake Kennedy Center on Tuesday, May 14<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm and Designer Bag Bingo Friday, May 24<sup>th</sup> at 7pm. The Cape Coral Quest 2.0 mobile app developed in partnership with the VCB has been refreshed, and the new challenge began Dec. 1, 2023. To date, there have been 1,382 sign ups, 3,606 locations checked, 262 prizes claimed, 89 coupons redeemed, 78 people entered to win a 2-night stay at the Westin contest, and 33 people have completed the entire scavenger hunt and have been entered to win a Sunsplash Season Pass. The Tourism Spotlight is on Big Tiki Tours of SW Florida who is locally owned and operated. Pickup is at the Westin in Cape Coral and they have custom tiki boat tours for up to 12 people. The City of Cape Coral Business & Industry Roundtables coming up are May 24<sup>th</sup> for CRA Businesses, June 21<sup>st</sup> for Retail and July 26<sup>th</sup> for Lenders/Financing.

### **Report of the executive director**

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for March 2024 was \$7,702,318, an 34.5% increase over March 2023 preliminary collections of \$5,728,042. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$27,370,309 an increase of 23.3% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for March 2024 was 78.3%, which is down 2.5% from March 2023. The average daily rate for March 2024 was \$245.57, down 0.1% from March 2023 and RevPAR for March 2024 was \$192.33, down 2.5% from March 2023.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for March 2024 was 67%, which is up 44.2% from March 2023. The average daily rate for March 2024 was \$320, up 13.7% from March 2023 and RevPAR for March 2024 was \$214, up 64.3% from March 2023.

During March 2024, 1,509,777 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, an increase of 29.4% compared to March 2023. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is up 25.3% from the same period last year.

### **January – March 2024 research report**

Joseph St. Germain, Downs & St. Germain Research, offered a tourism snapshot of calendar year 2023 as well as January through March 2024. In calendar year 2023, Lee County attracted nearly 3 million visitors resulting in direct visitor spending of \$2.9 billion. From January to March 2024, Lee County welcomed 828,300 visitors, an increase of 24.2% compared to 2023, resulting in direct visitor spending over \$1 billion. 66% of visitors flew to the Fort Myers area, with one in two flying in through RSW. The international market accounted for 8.3% of visitors during the January through March timeframe, with Canada representing the largest share at 5.5%.

### **Sports development report**

Jeff Mielke, Sports Development director reported that 32,909 room nights sold in the months of January through March 2024 resulting in visitor spending of \$13.9 million.

### **New Business**

Tony Lapi made a motion to approve the FY24 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter budget reports. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

### **Beach & Shoreline update**

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the legislative findings for 11 Beach & Shoreline projects. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Rob Wells made a motion to approve funding recommendations totaling \$11,785,362 for 15 Beach & Shoreline projects throughout Lee County. Jay Johnson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Tony Lapi made a motion to recommend the Board of County Commissioners consider funding 3 projects totaling \$944,751 from tourist development tax reserves. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously. These projects will be considered for final approval by the Board of County Commissioners as part of the FY2024-25 budget.

### **TDC member items**

- Dan Allers shared they are finishing the berm project on Fort Myers Beach. He announced that Fort Myers Beach will be celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with a parade and fireworks funded by residents and workers of the islands.
- Bill Waichulis announced that they are excited about Scotty McCreery coming to Pink Shell on Sept 29 to be the headliner for Island Hopper Songwriter Fest this year. He shared that Pink Shell was given the certification for being a “great place to work” via an anonymous survey.
- Bill Steinke shared that the rebuilding of the Cape Coral Yacht Club continues with growing public support. He is excited for the racquet club to open and be a draw to our destination for pickleball. The pier rebuild will involve removing the old pilings and replace with new pilings.
- Jay Johnson shared that the topic of the next FRLA meeting would be about legislation signed by Governor DeSantis that prohibits the sale of lab grown meat in Florida.

- Nigel Fullick shared that they are celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the City of Bonita Springs all year long. They have a Memorial Day event happening on May 27<sup>th</sup> featuring guest speaker Lieutenant General Robert Elder (retired USAF Commander) at Riverside Park at 9am.
- Larry Fiesel shared that the Village of Estero is excited to be breaking ground on their first entertainment district.
- Rob Wells posed a question to the council regarding the research presentation. He asked if the council believes it is worth a discussion to bring in an expert from DOT due to the visitors' negative comments on traffic in the destination?
- Tony Lapi shared the contract has been awarded for the reconstruction of Beachview Cottages on Sanibel. He anticipates shovels in the ground by October or November of this year. The estimated cost of construction is \$13 million for 22 units. Hoping to open rooms by December of 2025.
- Commissioner Pendergrass discussed the proposed notion that arose at a recent Commission meeting to remove at-large voting for County Commissioners to district-wide voting.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 10:31 a.m.

### **Next TDC meeting**

The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at **9 a.m. Thursday, June 13, 2024**, at the Lee County Admin East Building, Room 118, 2201 Second St., Fort Myers. To view a complete tax collections report, go to [LeeVCB.com](http://LeeVCB.com). Contact: Tamara Pigott, [TPigott@leegov.com](mailto:TPigott@leegov.com), Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.