



TDC Meeting Minutes

December 12, 2024

Commissioner Kevin Ruane called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Kevin Ruane, Pamela Cronin, Larry Fiesel, Brian Kramer, Robert Wells III, Jay Johnson, Bill Steinke, Liston Bochette, Tony Lapi, Fran Myers, Dan Allers and Bill Waichulis.

Nigel Fullick, Fran Myers and Holly Smith were excused.

Commissioner Kevin Ruane thanked Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass for his tenure on the TDC and Tamara Pigott presented him with a plaque of appreciation. Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass thanked Tamara, VCB staff and the TDC for all their hard work the past two years.

Approval of previous meeting minutes

Jay Johnson made a motion to approve the August 8, 2024, TDC meeting minutes. Bill Waichulis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Sharon McAlister, ArtFest Fort Myers founder, thanked the TDC for their continued support as they celebrate 25 years in downtown Fort Myers. ArtFest has become a legacy event for our area. ArtFest 2025 will be February 1-2, 2025, with opening night on Friday, January 31.

Lisa Wilson, PR Director, Edison & Ford Winter Estates, announced they are having their 49th Annual Holiday Nights event from November 29-December 23 and December 26, 2024-January 5, 2025. They will be hosting a cookie decorating event on December 21. Wilson wished everyone Happy Holidays.

Municipalities to be heard

Ashley Anderson, Business Recruitment and Retention Specialist, City of Cape Coral, shared some upcoming events: Reindeer Run December 14, Holiday Boat-a-long December 21, New Year's Eve celebration December 31, 39th Annual Cape Coral Art Festival & Market Place January 13 & 14 10am-5pm and Tour De Cape January 17-19, 2025. 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. It is sunsetting and here are the final stats: 2,028 sign ups, 5,540 locations checked, 387 prizes claimed, 155 coupons redeemed, 133 residents entered to win a 2-night stay at the Westin, and 72 residents checked in at all 30 events and earned a Sun Splash Season Pass. The current Tourism Spotlight is on Paradise Cove, the new wave pool at SunSplash which will open in 2025. It is a 12,000 square wave pool with over 160,000 gallons of water and waves. Max depth is 5 ft. It will have a 16ft x9ft wave pool video screen and additional shade and cabanas.

Special Presentations

Steve Boutelle, Lee County Natural Resources, gave an update on beach renourishment and hurricane recovery projects for Gasparilla Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, and Lovers Key/Bonita Beach.

The Gasparilla Island renourishment project is a federal project fully funded by the Army Corps of Engineers that was approved after Hurricane Ian. Advertisements for construction bids have begun for a full beach renourishment project in 2025.

Captiva Island was impacted by Hurricanes Ian, Helene, and Milton and experienced significant sand loss. Captiva Erosion Prevention District (CEPD) is the lead agency on the Captiva beach renourishment project. The project calls for 1.1 billion cubic yards to complete the full renourishment.

The Fort Myers Beach renourishment project is being managed by the Town of Fort Myers Beach. The project is currently underway at a total cost of \$22 million; \$6 million of which came from the bed tax. There is a phenomenon called a "storm bar" that formed after the latest storms that has created a trough of water along the beachfront. There are no plans to fill it, as it will naturally move sand back onshore in the next six months or so. The next phase of the project will be on the south end of the island with plans to finish before May 1, when the window for construction closes due to bird nesting, etc.

The renourishment projects at Lovers Key and Bonita Beach are being managed by Lee County. The total cost for these projects is \$44 million, with about \$7.5 million coming from the bed tax. Work began about a week ago on Lovers Key and will wrap up in early January. Next, the project will move to renourish Bonita Beach. The project design was modified to make the beaches more resilient to future hurricanes.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for October 2024 was \$1,908,697 a 13.2% decrease over October 2023 preliminary collections of \$2,198,594. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$2,037,234 a decrease of 9.5% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for October 2024 was 62.1%, which is down 0.3% from October 2023. The average daily rate for October 2024 was \$133.40, decrease of 2.9% from October 2023 and RevPAR for October 2024 was \$82.88, down 3.2% from October 2023.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for October 2024 was 20.5%, which is down 11.9% from October 2023. The average daily rate for October 2024 was \$167, up 5.0% from October 2023 and RevPAR for October 2024 was \$34, down 7.5% from October 2023.

During October 2024, 657,488 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, a decrease of 10.9% compared to October 2023. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is up 12.0% from the same period last year.

Marketing report

Brian Ososky, VCB Marketing Director, presented the new Just Feels Right brand campaign that will roll out in early 2025, including the campaign anthem as well as print and digital creative executions. He shared integrated media packages from AFAR, Garden & Gun and The New York Times, as well as a "mega campaign" utilizing VRBO and Dotdash Meredith to promote the area's vacation rentals. He also previewed

the new 2025 digital visitor guide, provided updates about the upcoming Ag Expo, and looked in on our newest neighborhood webcam on Pine Island.

New business

Rob Wells made a motion to approve the fourth quarter FY23-24 budget reports as presented by April Green, VCB fiscal manager. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Rob Wells made a motion to appoint Jay Johnson as the TDC Vice Chair. There were no other nominations. The motion passed unanimously.

Bill Waichulis made a motion to approve the 2025 TDC meeting dates. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Rob Wells made a motion to approve the FY25 Sales & Marketing Plan. Tony Lapi seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

TDC member items

- Bill Steinke wished everyone Happy Holidays.
- Bill Waichulis is looking forward to all the events and Happy Holidays!
- Jay Johnson said Happy Holidays.
- Liston Bochette had no comment.
- Larry Fiesel said Happy Holidays and safe travels.
- Rob Wells said Happy Holidays.
- Tony Lapi shared that he is working on a surprise for January.
- Dan Allers shared that the sand sculpting event was successful followed by the boat parade. There will be the lighting of the tree and chili cookoff on. Bike event with Christmas carols on December 21st where the Ben Allen Band will perform a free concert. New Year's Eve fireworks will be shot off from the barge on December 31st.
- Brian Kramer had no comment.
- Pam Cronin said Merry Christmas and thanks for the nice tribute to Shell Factory.
- Chris Brady thanked the board and VCB team for all they do.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:40 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

The next TDC meeting will be held at **9 a.m. Thursday, January 16, 2025**, 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. Contact: Tamara Pigott, TPigott@leegov.com, Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.