

TDC MEETING MINUTES, MARCH, 2008

Commissioner Judah called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

Council Members in attendance were: Commissioner Judah, Fran Myers, Rob Wells III, Dolores Bertolini, Pamela Cronin, Martha Simons, and Colleen DePasquale. Roxie Smith, René Affourtit and Tony Lapi asked to be excused.

- ➔ Dolores Bertolini made a motion, seconded by Pamela Cronin to approve TDC Meeting Minutes of February 1, 2008. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Judah asked Council to recognize Diane Short, who will retire on April 4, 2008 after 15 years of service. Fran Myers stated that it is difficult to imagine the TDC or the VCB without Diane; she praised Diane for her unbelievable contribution to the County. Ms. Short thanked Ms. Myers and stated that she 'lives and breathes tourism', and will be available to assist or volunteer in the future.

Public to be Heard

➔ René Melville thanked Council for its efforts to bring visitors to this destination. He stated that the County has various great attractions and areas; however, there is a need for signage to attract visitors to them. Mr. Melville advised that banners would enhance traffic to these attractions, that they are inexpensive and an immediate solution. He advised that he is in front of Council on behalf of a group of prominent Lee County residents; Mr. Melville asked Council to advocate his request to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC).

Commissioner Judah advised that the request has merit; however, he needs input from staff and the attorneys' office to determine if this request qualifies for TDC funding.

➔ Kevin Godsey, Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge announced that 'Ding' Darling will have a new manager effective May 27, 2008. He also stated that the Refuge will start a conservation planning effort; the 15-year master plan will define how the Refuge is managed from visitor use to habitat management. This process will start next month and invitations are forthcoming.

Commissioner Judah re-opened Mr. Melville's request regarding banners for discussion. Councilwoman Bertolini stated that banners have been very successful in generating interest in downtown Cape Coral. Councilwoman Simons advised that the topic came up in Bonita Springs recently and the city declined because there were no criteria in place. Martha added that although festive and colorful, banners could be a problem down the road. Ms. Cronin suggested a joint effort with the BOCC where the TDC could supplement funding. She stated that events organizers could be encouraged to use banners to attract visitors to their events. Pamela added that although it is important to attract people downtown, and with banners being used county-wide, there should be some restrictions related to the banners' appearance.

Mr. Wells commented that he is in favor of any effort that drives people to attractions and downtown. He inquired about some legal issues and if potentially everyone could come to Council to receive funding for banners. Rob Wells requested clarifications concerning the banners to which René Melville stated that the banners will hang on lamp posts and would require FPL's permission. Providing some specifications, Mr. Melville advised that the 90x36 banners are made of silk and cost \$210 each, including the bracket.

- ➔ Martha Simons made a motion, seconded by Pamela Cronin to look at having banners countywide.

Tamara Pigott advised that the request will be forwarded to the County Attorney's office; she added that regulations may have to work on a municipality level.

Commissioner Judah directed staff to move forward once legal provides an approval. Ms. Pigott inquired if Council wishes to support the request should the attorneys' office deem the request not a legal use of the bed tax dollars.

- ➔ Martha Simons amended the original motion, seconded by Pamela Cronin, to look at having banners countywide; in addition, should the funding for banners not be a legal use of the bed tax dollars, staff should write a letter of support on behalf of Council. The motion passed unanimously.

Municipalities to be Heard

➔ Mick Denham, Mayor, City of Sanibel provided a 'Healthy Beach Program' update; he advised that the City of Sanibel's initiative seeks the source of contaminant in our waters and focuses on urban pollution. Mr. Denham advised that at a future meeting, he would like to ask for a resolution to support this effort.

Commissioner Judah stated that the impact on water quality affects tourism and asked if Council was ready to make a motion concerning a resolution.

- ➔ Martha Simons made a motion, seconded by Dolores Bertolini, to provide the City of Sanibel with a Resolution in support of its healthy beach program. The motion passed unanimously.
- ➔ David Sallee, Interim Manager, Town of Fort Myers Beach advised that the Town agreed to contract with William 'Scott' Janke as the new Town Manager. Mr. Sallee introduced Theresa Schober who submitted a bid for a funding grant for the Mound House. Ms. Schober stated that an archeologist will be brought on board very soon after the grant is received; she advised that the Mound House is open to the public; however, the exhibit is not available for display at this time. Commissioner Judah commended Ms. Schober for her efforts and stated that this is a great achievement for our community. Mr. Sallee thanked Council for its support.

Director's Report

- ⇒ In the absence of Suya Davenport, Tamara Pigott presented the Executive Director's report. Ms. Pigott reported that bed tax collections for the month of January 2008 totaled \$ 2,293,638, a 2.1% increase over January last year.
- ⇒ Tamara advised that the STR report shows occupancy in Lee County at 61.9% for the month of January 2008, while the average daily rate was at \$136.53 and RevPAR at \$84.57.
- ⇒ During the month of January 762,316 passengers traveled through the airport, a 2.7% decline compared to last January.
- ⇒ The Administration Activity Report is included for Council's review.

Sales Report

Pamela Johnson summarized the February Sales activity report; she reported that staff were in Baltimore and Philadelphia and hosted a VIP event in Boston; staff also hosted our own VIP event in Chicago at Macy's culinary school. 14 RFPs were received from this event. Staff attended the Mid-Atlantic Workshop & Travel Seminar in Iceland, where tour operators from northern Europe converge each year to learn about new trends. Ms. Johnson announced that Jo Piani has been busy getting started as our new representative in the United Kingdom. Staff will hold a U.K. Forum in Fort Myers on April 23. In a community outreach effort staff participated in Celebrate Estero at Miromar. During the reporting month, staff secured for future months 11 group leads with a potential of 3,000 room nights.

Communications Report

Lee Rose presented the January Communications Report. Mr. Rose stated that to maximize editorial coverage for Lee County staff promotes not only to travel media but also to lifestyle journalists with specific niches. This month Lee focused on a national TV program called 'George Poveromo's World of Saltwater Fishing' - a half hour program devoted entirely to Lee County, fishing and the Tarpon Lodge; it aired on ESPN twice. He showed part of the video to Council and reported that the program reached 1.2 million households and had an advertising equivalency of \$82,500.

Visitor Services

Judi Durant presented the February Visitor Services report. Ms. Durant advised that volunteers responded to 31,366 inquiries during the reporting month. She thanked Tarpon Bay Explorers and the Southwest Florida Historical Museum for hosting volunteers. Judi provided an overview of assistance provided by staff and volunteers as well as activities in the tourism education area.

Fran Myers recognized Ms. Durant for the outstanding services she provided when a Canadian couple staying at the Red Coconut got hit by a car while they were bicycling. Judi provided assistance to the family. Ms. Myers stated that Judi does excellent work at the airport with the volunteers; however Judi's efforts in this instance were exceptional. Ms. Pigott added that this is one of the many important services the Bureau offers during difficult times and she commended Ms. Durant for everything she did for the Canadian family.

Beach & Shoreline

Tamara Pigott presented the February Beach & Shoreline report. Ms Pigott informed Council that she attended the 2008 American Shore & Beach Preservation Summit in Washington, DC and that the Florida delegation met with staff from Senator Martinez and Senator Nelson's offices as well as with staff from Representative Connie Mack's office. Tamara advised that 25 requests were received for consideration for next fiscal year's process; she stated that the CAC will review the request on March 10 and the TDC Workshop is scheduled for April 23, 2008.

Commissioner Judah asked Steve Boutelle about the status of Fort Myers Beach renourishment funding status to which Mr. Boutelle responded that the funding might be in jeopardy as Federal and State are looking at revenue sources. Ms. Pigott added that by next month we could be at a more solid position concerning retaining the funds.

Sports Authority

Jeff Mielke presented the February report. Mr. Mielke reported that 7,000 room nights were generated to date for the month of January; however, a couple of February events' room nights were mixed in the January count. Total economic Impact amounted to \$3.6 million. Jeff asked for RSVPs to be sent in by next Friday regarding the next event at Hammond Stadium. Finally, Jeff announced that three photos of Lee County were shown on ESPN, while Commissioner Judah stated that there is an article about Lee County on the first page of Air Tran Magazine.

Rob Wells observed that every month Council members receive during the Executive Director's report the same information provided in the reports and posted on the Website and Council members do not get further educated. He would like staff to take five or ten minutes during the Executive report to analyze data: STR shows a decline across the board, RSW traffic down by 2.7%, but bed tax collections are up. Mr. Wells would like Council to have some in-depth information so that Council members may respond to inquiries when they are approached by the general public. Ms. Simons concurred and advised that we should look regionally at what is happening. Ms. DePasquale provided input regarding increased room supply versus decline in demand; she stated that her company uses the STR report as its baseline and noted that fewer groups are coming to Florida because of costs.

Tamara Pigott responded to Council's questions by stating that the economy has had an impact on the housing market and locals are not traveling as much, which explains the decline in airport traffic; occupancy is not related to tax collections as room rates are the controlling factor; that it is difficult to compare airport traffic with tourism numbers; she added that the Bureau has attempted to provide in-depth information to Council via the AAU report and the STR report. Based on Council members' request, Ms. Pigott agreed that staff could share more information with Council in the future.

Jeff Mielke provided additional information regarding his report and stated that sports tourism is recession-proof and hopefully, sports numbers will continue to climb.

Commissioner Judah stated that perhaps a workshop could be arranged to discuss this issue to which Rob Wells responded that he was thinking of an overview at the beginning of each TDC meeting.

CONSULTANTS' REPORTS

ADVERTISING REPORT

⇒ Victoria Simmons, BVK presented the January 2008 Advertising report. Ms. Simmons reported that during the reporting month we received over 300,000 Urchin sessions and 104,000 WebSideStory visitors who spent between six to eight minutes on the Website. She stated that the Treasure your Trip micro site was introduced in January; Island Treasure tour is ongoing, and we are enjoying success in the Midwest as demonstrated by the articles we are receiving. We received over 8,000 requests for our Visitor Guide during the month of January. Victoria advised that the bulk of our media plan will hit in March rather than May; an in-state TV broadcast has been launched and will last six weeks through March and April. Annie Ecken circulated samples of our advertising campaign material, which is providing a lot of exposure in our core State market. The new Trade Wind newspaper is included in key newspapers. Finally, Ms. Simmons advised that a new activity report regarding the 2008 Island Treasure RV Tour is included with Council's report.

RESEARCH REPORT

⇒ Nicole Devine, Davidson Peterson Associates (DPA) presented the January report. Occupancy for the month was at 63.1%, the Average Daily Rate (ADR) at \$130.20 and total expenditures totaled \$26 million. Ms. Devine reviewed the revised July, August and September reports based on an updated lodging inventory. Nicole stated that the number of short-term rentals available in Lee County at this time is 20,385; however, these numbers constantly fluctuate. Currently short term accommodations are split as follows: Hotel & Motel: 10,825 units; Condominium & Homes: 5,374; and RV & Campground: 4,186.

Old Business

None

New Business

Fish & Wildlife – Mosquito Control on Federal Land

Kevin Godsea, 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge informed Council of a new policy that will come on line in November concerning the use of chemical on federal land; currently there are no guidelines in place. Mr. Godsea stated that if the new policy comes to fruition, the Refuge operation would not be impacted as the new guideline fits easily with current practices at 'Ding' Darling. A discussion ensued regarding how chemicals affect wild life; Kevin assured Council that the refuge uses the lowest risk alternative and the product used are environmentally friendly. Commissioner Judah added that as Mayor Denham mentioned earlier, chemicals/nutrients that get into our estuaries may cause algae bloom; he stated that the studious way the refuge is approaching this issue is very much appreciated.

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For Council Information

None

TDC Member Items

- Fran Myers circulated the Airport's News & Notes.
- Ms. Simons invited everyone to attend 'Celebrate Bonita' on April 15.
- Commissioner Judah advised that CREW will sponsor a concert on March 29 and to contact Martha Simons or him for \$250 sponsorships that are still available.

All reports are included with the Minutes and are on file at the Visitor & Convention Bureau and at the Lee County Minutes Department.

The next Tourist Development Council meeting is scheduled for April 4, 2008 at the Visitor & Convention Bureau.

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.