



Charlotte County Tourist Development Council

Meeting Minutes

July 11, 2014

**Charlotte County Visitor's Bureau
BCS Conf Room**

Members Present

Commissioner Chris Constance
Julie Mathis
Kathy Burnam
Mayor Rachel Keesling
Councilmember Kim Devine

Members Absent

Rick Brunette
Judy Malbuisson

Staff Present

Lorah Steiner, Director - Tourist Development
Chip Futch, Marketing & Communications Coordinator - Tourism
Diane Quilty, Budget
Diane Mitchell, Finance

Guests

Ed Hill, Englewood Chamber of Commerce
Ken Stead, Cape Haze Marina
Gary Quill, Punta Gorda Airport

1) Call to Order/Roll Call

Commissioner Constance called the meeting to order, roll call was taken Rick Brunette and Judy Malbuisson were excused. All other members were present.

2) Approval of Meeting Minutes

A motion was presented by Julie Mathis, seconded by Kim Devine and unanimously carried to approve the minutes as written for the Tourist Development Council Meeting held May 2, 2014. There were two edits made: "Community Services" was changed to Community Development and Ms. Quilty's name was spelled Ms. Quality which was also changed.

Commissioner Constance and Ms. Steiner presented an award to Captain Ralph Allen for his years of service on the TDC. Commissioner Constance thanked Capt. Allen for his tremendous support of tourism.

3) Diane Mitchell – Financial Report

Diane Mitchell presented the financials for 6 months ending March 31, 2014. Total revenue generated was \$1,945,171 which showed a 17% increase over the same period one year ago. She briefly went through some collections by category and geographic area. Ms. Steiner said the STR (Star) Report (Smith Travel Research) showed a much stronger April than what was indicated by the tax collections report. Ms. Mitchell asked Ms. Steiner to send her the STR report and she can double check the figures. Ms. Steiner also asked about whether there were payments not yet made that would account for the difference between what the STR report shows and the County's report. Ms. Steiner will get with the clerk's office to get further details.

4) Dianne Quilty – Budget Report

Ms. Quilty gave a brief overview of the Tourism budget. The bottom line shows a significant increase. Commissioner Constance asked about actuals. Commissioner Constance asked for a more clear and concise report for everyone to read and understand. Ms. Quilty will look into creating a report that is easier to understand. Mayor Keesling also asked about where the tourism information is posted. Ms. Steiner said it is now updated and posted correctly on the Charlotte County website. Commissioner Constance also suggested it be posted on the tourism bureau website as well. Chip Futch indicated it is difficult to post on our current website due to the structure of the site but we will look for a place to host it where it will be easily accessible. The new website, which should launch in January 2015, will have a partner portal and a site for information about the VCB, the TDC, research, meetings and more. The TDC information will also be available to the public on the new site.

Capt. Allen asked about the projected revenue line item. Councilmember Devine also asked for more clarification on the budget. Ms. Steiner suggested the Council have a drill down budget meeting to explain the whole budget line by line.

Commissioner Constance wants to see the one-year and the two-year figure comparisons. He also asked about

the \$150,000 for dredging and beach renourishment. Ms. Steiner indicated the cost of the dredging, as a VCB charge, is legal as long as the dredging is used to renourish the beaches.

Mayor Keesling asked how the budget process works. Ms. Quilty explained that it is a 2 year budget cycle.

Ms. Steiner mentioned the bureau now has a research program and can begin to base advertising decisions on research results and determine whether advertising is working by comparing visitation from certain markets and market segments to research results. Councilmember Devine asked if the board has any say so as to how the money is spent. She said she would like to know what the council expects from her and what her role should be. Ms. Steiner said the TDC does not determine the advertising or marketing program but has input. She also said she would like to invite Jack Wert from the Collier County VCB to talk about the state statute governing TDC's and the role of the TDC. Ms. Steiner said the role of the TDC is to assure that the VCB is spending TDT revenues appropriately (in keeping with the provisions of the state statute). She said the reason she had formerly asked Capt. Ralph to review and report on expenditures and revenue was to have that process one step removed from the VCB staff. Commissioner Constance said that he envisions this group as field commanders.

Ms. Steiner mentioned that Capt. Allen did the financial overview for the council and now that he is leaving she is looking for a new volunteer from the council to do this job. Ms. Steiner said the final draft of the advertising plan for 2015 would be presented at the September TDC meeting.

5) *Dr. Walter Klages – Research Data Services Presentation*

Dr. Klages talked about the summer season research and introduced Claire Klages. Dr. Klages reviewed some data information collected. The first question asked when collecting data was "What would you call this area?" - a few top comments were: "beautiful", "relaxing" and "beaches."

Dr. Klages briefly reviewed the numbers for 2013 summer time period. He explained the methodology. The main focus was on West County. Ms. Steiner said since the budget was so limited this is where they wanted to concentrate on first: The Port Charlotte, Punta Gorda research would then begin in the first quarter of 2014.

Dr. Klages explained the visitor profile research is done by obtaining information from face-to-face surveys and post-visitation email surveys. He briefly went through some statistics for the time period April-September 2013. Dr. Klages will try to break down the numbers by geographical areas such as Punta Gorda, Port Charlotte, and Englewood in the next report. Estimated number of visitors was 155,000 visitors. According to Smith Travel Research occupancy was 44.0% and ADR was \$73.66 for time period Apr-Sept 2013. Visitor origins largest group is Florida. Dr. Klages went over the destination choice factors and purpose of the trip. He also went over the types of websites consulted for travel information. He briefly talked about Visitors who flew into local airports, the top was Tampa. Lastly, Dr. Klages reviewed some of the Charlotte comments, and the last comment quoted – "it is dead during off season; the area is beautiful but lacks cultural opportunities." Dr. Klages told the council we have the ultimate market for International visitors. Mr. Hill, from the Englewood Area Chamber, asked about getting the information to the lodging facilities and letting them know how they can help assist Research Data Services with visitor research numbers.

6) **Lorah Steiner, Review of Tourist Development State Statute**

Ms. Steiner briefly discussed the state statute requirements for the composition of the Tourism Development Council. Ms. Steiner explained the recent issues related to two of the TDC seats. Mr. Wright submitted an application in for a board seat but the Chamber's financial relationship with the VCB prohibited him to serve on the board (in regard to the operation of the Visitor Center). She briefly explained that Ms. Crouch's position on the board was not legal because she is not eligible to vote in Charlotte County as she is not a citizen of the U.S. As of now there have been two applicants that have applied for Ms. Crouch's position: Kelly Williamson with the Four Points and Robin Madden with Islander Properties. Ms. Burnam's position on the Board is under the Tourism Accommodations slot. Ms. Steiner said another question came up regarding the makeup of the Council which was owner/operator criteria in the statute. She is waiting on legal for interpretation. (This has been resolved – Ms. Williamson could serve on the TDC) Ms. Steiner addressed Punta Gorda City Council - Tourist Development Council members. She stated the statute calls for "two elected officials with one from the most populous municipality. She suggested someone from the Airport Board could also be a member of the Council in the future. Ms. Steiner is checking all the legalities. She suggested Jack Wert, Executive Director of the Collier County VCB; be invited to attend the next meeting in September and give an overview of the state statute for the Tourist Development Tax.. Mayor Keesling asked about the Chairperson on the board. Commissioner Constance explained how the BCC chooses a chair for the TDC. Mayor Keesling had a meeting with the Legal Department and asked about the terms of the Council members. This information has been updated and currently we have an updated list of all members with their expiration dates listed. Ms. Steiner suggested that TDC notebooks be created with all the collateral in them for each TDC member. Ms. Steiner also asked the council members how they would like the meeting minutes to be done. This information can be much shorter with only bullet points. This could be discussed at the next meeting. Mayor Keesling asked about the Contract Services line item on the budget. Ms. Steiner told the council that this was the Dr. Stephen Leatherman pilot production costs. Ms. Mitchell briefly talked about the tourist tax collections within the county. The problem is some individuals are renting out homes and not paying the tourist tax. Ms. Steiner said the total loss of collections is many thousands of dollars annually.

7) **Chip Futch - Overview of Marketing and Advertising Plan**

Mr. Futch went through the marketing presentation. He briefly went over the marketing vs advertising dollars. Mr. Hill asked about expenditures in the other Counties. Ms. Steiner would like to see and compare the increase in visitors with the actual expenditures. Mr. Futch briefly reviewed the Summer 2013 research and the winter 2014 research and the satisfaction rate. He reviewed the marketing process and concentrated on the top of the marketing funnel which is awareness of Charlotte Harbor. He then touched on digital online versus print and also online mobile versus desk top. He spoke about how important it is for a website to be adaptable to all platforms Mr. Futch also talked about a brochure versus an application website. He then touched on the new website vendor. The new system will have a Meeting/Convention sales module, client services & referrals, DMO events management, FAM/site visits management, co-op and advertising, email marketing, media/PR module,

and outlook/Gmail integration. Mr. Futch talked about how the bureau can make edits to the site much easier with the new system whereas changes to the VCB's current site are very expensive to make. Mr. Hill also asked about the vendor portal which will make it much easier for partners to edit their listings as well. The group broke for lunch around 11:00 a.m. The meeting resumed 15 minutes later.

Mr. Futch continued with the marketing presentation. He spoke about Visit Florida data. Mr. Futch played a video created by Brand USA for the German Market. Commissioner Constance asked about translating parts of the website into German. Mr. Futch said the new website will have multi-lingual capabilities. Mr. Hill asked how the consumer gets the information to book their trip. Mr. Futch said the customer will be directed to our website. Councilmember Devine asked about getting the industry partners trained on the website portal data entry. Mr. Futch said that is planned. Commissioner Constance would like Mr. Futch to present this information to the BCC. Mr. Futch also talked about building the visitors journey with visual elements. Commissioner Constance suggested getting some high school students and doing a local video competition. Mr. Futch talked about one destination/two personalities. In other words, we need to create awareness and identity for Punta Gorda and Englewood. He handed out the preliminary advertising budget to the council members. He went through some highlights - for the Punta Gorda marketing plan some examples were - Billboards on I-75 (Outdoor), Tampa Via media (Television+SEM), Assistance with OCOM (Multi-Channel), Walking Map (Print/Electronic), a Coupon Book (Print), Visitor Center (Direct/Service), and lastly West Palm Beach (Television+Minor SEM). Some Englewood examples included, SEM (Electronic), West Palm Beach (Television+Minor SEM), Tampa Via media (Television+SEM) and Billboards on I-75 (Outdoor).

Ms. Steiner briefly mentioned some key focus areas the bureau will be working on. Some of the most important items were Sports, Earned Media (advocates), Partner Relations/Charlotte Harbor Hospitality Association, Content Development/Syndication, Off-Season Development, Allegiant Airlines, the International Market, and the Visitor Center. Ms. Huber and Ms. Steiner are also working on a local FAM for the area.

Mr. Futch briefly touched on the visitor experience.

Mr. Futch presented the Show Us Your Charlotte contestant entries. The council voted on the top two winners. The Council unanimously selected picture number one for first place and picture number four for second place. A press release will be issued. The winners were first place Patty Stefan who works for the County and second place went to Rick Fried; he volunteers with the Sierra Club.

Mr. Futch reviewed some additional research numbers. Mr. Futch talked about the TV screens like the one running at the Visitor Center. He talked about how inexpensive, efficient and easy it was to operate. Mr. Hill said he would like to have one at the Englewood Chamber office. Ms. Burnam from the Fishermen's Village said she would also like to have one at Fishermen's Village. Ms. Steiner talked about maybe doing mini marketing plans for the larger festivals in the area.

Ms. Steiner told the council all the information contained in the Marketing/Advertising plan was developed based upon current research data.

8) *Guest and Council Comments*

Mr. Quill from the Airport mentioned the June passenger count was 52,000, up 63% from a year ago. He also mentioned some possible new announcements in the pipeline. Ms. Mathis asked if the airport was doing any research on where the visitors are coming from. The percentage was around 68% North coming South and in the summer season it flip flops, with Florida going north. Ms. Mathis asked about where they are going when they get here. Mr. Quill's gut feeling was that passengers were traveling to first Lee, secondly Collier and then Charlotte. He mentioned that the Punta Gorda Chamber conducted some interviews and that 30 percent were heading to Charlotte County. Allegiant does have agreements with Sheraton Four Points and Palm Island Resort. Mr. Quill said there are no new carriers coming on board but there could be some new destinations added to Allegiant Air routes.

Mr. Ed Hill talked about the new additions on the Englewood Chamber website. Also Mr. Quill mentioned a Beach Cam possibly posted at Englewood Beach.

Commissioner Constance discussed the Association of Counties meeting he attended. There was a presentation by VISIT FLORIDA. He mentioned some key highlights of www.VISITFLORIDA.com, the number one Tourist destination information site for Florida. Commissioner Constance reviewed some of the VISIT FLORIDA tourism numbers and showed a couple of the videos that were on the website. The general point he wanted to make was getting some good videos of Charlotte Harbor produced and getting them on the VISIT Florida website. He also showed the interactive VISIT FLORIDA Site.

Commissioner Constance adjourned the meeting.