



Charlotte County Tourist Development Council

Meeting Minutes

March 6, 2015

Administration Conference Room

Members Present

Commissioner Chris Constance
Julie Mathis
Kathy Burnam
Councilmember Rachel Keesling
Judy Malbuisson
Vice Mayor Kim Devine
Ken Stead
Kelly Williamson
Rick Brunette

Staff Present

Lorah Steiner, Director - Tourist Development
Chip Futch, Marketing Director
Jerry Jones, Charlotte County Film Director
Sean Doherty, Sports Marketing Manager
Elizabeth Parker, Admin Svc Coordinator
Jennifer Huber, Public Relations Manager
Diane Quilty – Fiscal Services
Diane Mitchell – Internal Audit

Guests

Ed Hill, Englewood Chamber of Commerce
John Wright, Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce
Denise Dull, Charlotte County Hospitality Association
Patti Allen, Fishermen's Village
Jim Finch, Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center
Lori Tetreault, County Attorney's Office

1) **Call to Order/Roll Call**

Commissioner Constance welcomed everyone to the Tourist Development Council and called the meeting to order. Roll call was taken and all members were present. A motion was presented by Julie Mathis, seconded by Kathy Burnam and unanimously carried to approve the minutes as written for the Tourist Development Council Meeting held January 9, 2015.

2) **Citizen's Input**

Ms. Denise Dull gave an update on the Charlotte Harbor Hospitality Association. She said there are now 65 members total. Between the networking and program meetings, they are keeping very busy. One of their next initiatives is reaching out to the dining community to join the association.

3) **Lori Tetreault – Attorney's Office**

Ms. Tetreault briefly gave an update on the ex officio status on the TDC which references the non-voting members that attend the Tourist Development Council Meetings. She said that after review she does not believe that ex-officios can vote at the meetings. This is prohibited by statute. The Attorney General's office has said even non-voting members must still comply with the Sunshine laws. Commissioner Constance said ex officio status was actually his idea. He believes these individuals are an important part of the process and their input is valuable to the council. Ms. Tetreault suggested to the council that they could choose to have a citizens input item on the agenda at the regular meetings. They can't vote but they can give their input. Ms. Steiner wanted this to be clarified for the Council and what the constraints are. Ms. Steiner asked Ms. Tetreault to put together some specific details and put it in a memo for the TDC members. Commissioner Constance also requested this information.

4) **Diane Mitchell, Financial Report**

Diane Mitchell presented the financials for the three months ending December 2014. Total collections for the period were \$539,958 (an increase of 18%) compared to the prior year. She briefly went through some geographical statistics. Ms. Steiner said the STR report showed revenue was up 31% in January, but the report only surveyed hotels. Ms. Mitchell spoke briefly about the private homes that are rented and the individuals that are not paying tourist tax. A period of less than six months is considered the threshold. Ms. Steiner talked about possibly getting a law requiring a county Identification number for these properties to list their rental property on line. Mr. Stead asked Ms. Steiner for a briefing page on this item. A motion was made by Mr. Ken Stead and seconded by Vice Mayor Devine and unanimously approved by the council to get a letter from Ms. Steiner regarding registration and collection of tourist tax. Ms. Steiner will get information to the council members.

5) **Diane Quilty, Budget Report**

Ms. Quilty shared the two year budget process which will be going to the Board of County Commissioners.

Ms. Steiner said possibly in May they could look at the advertising and marketing numbers.

Mr. Stead reviewed the budget numbers with the Council and let everyone know the budget numbers were on target for this quarter.

6) Presentation by the Vietnam Wall Group

Dick Carr made a presentation to the board on the Vietnam Wall. Bill Akin was also present. They were requesting monetary support for the Wall to be located in Punta Gorda. This would be the frame in Lashley Park. Mr. Carr talked briefly about the Vietnam War. He talked about the historical affect it would have on the area and about this attraction bringing visitors to the area. Mr. Bill Akin Director, of fund raising for the organization, briefly talked about the residual effects this attraction would have on the area.

Commissioner Constance asked how many mobile walls were there in the United States. Mr. Akin said there are three in total. Commissioner Constance thinks this is a great idea for the community. He is very supportive of this attraction. Ms. Steiner mentioned from a tourism perspective the bureau should look at the return on investment. She asked if they have done any research on the numbers. Mr. Akin said with his research they estimated anywhere between 80 to 100 thousand visitors a year. He said they have not looked at the meetings market at this time. Commissioner Constance suggested the group attend one of the BCC Meetings to ask for monetary assistance. Vice Mayor Devine added she believes this would be a nice addition to the county. Ms. Steiner told the council she liked the idea but with timing constraints, the bureau would not be able to devote the time to do additional research.

Ms. Steiner also suggested the council should have a process put in place to assess attractions funding requests.

Mr. Stead suggested an event/attraction application could be instituted. Ms. Mathis mentioned an application process that was developed for attractions/events several years ago that could be resurrected. Commissioner Constance reiterated that we need to define this process. Ms. Malbuisson also suggested this process could be explored. Councilmember Keesling was asking about the community groups from the past that have requested funding from the TDC. She would like more Council recommendations when these groups present at the TDC Meetings. She mentioned the FGCU Group that was given funding and Mr. Don McCormick's presentation to the Council for funding for the Art Community concept. She said those were very small amounts but she agreed it is important to define a process for these types of requests. Councilmember Keesling said the city submitted a request for an in-kind match of \$15,000 for the designing and engineering of the park for the Vietnam Wall attraction to the Board of County Commissioners.

Mr. Stead said we should also recognize that some items might not go through the council, but would go to the BCC. Mr. Wright offered to do the leg work and research on the Vietnam Wall attraction. Ms. Williamson talked about looking into bus tours as well.

Councilmember Keesling feels this is definitely a tourism related project. Ms. Burnam asked what was the total amount they were requesting. Mr. Akin said he was not sure as to the exact amount, right now the costs keep going up, and so far \$156,000 has been raised. He said this project be done in three phases. Mr. Albin

believes that \$350,000 might be the total needed. Mr. Albin said donated services will be a big plus to help this project move forward.

Ms. Mathis asked if there was a line item in the tourism budget for Attractions/Events. Ms. Steiner said no there was not at this time. Ms. Quilty said this process could be brought to the BCC at any time. A motion was presented by Ms. Mathis and seconded by Vice Mayor Devine to develop a process for dealing with these Attractions/Events requests that come to the TDC. Ms. Steiner said once the process is defined there will be a lot of groups approaching the TDC for funding. Ms. Steiner said this process of adding such a line item in the budget would need to go through the BCC.

Vice Mayor Devine asked what is the difference between funding the arts and humanities plan versus an actual attraction. Commissioner Constance said there is no difference that is why a process needs to be in place for accountability to look at these possible projects or events coming to the area. Vice Mayor Devine believes there should be a line item in the budget for Attraction/Event Development. Ms. Steiner said the funding that was given for the Arts should have had a process but that the request for the Arts was so small. That is why it is very important to get this done as quickly as possible. Councilmember Keesling said she would like more Council guidance and recommendations and a funding level along with the entire backup required for these projects. Commissioner Constance said this will be done. He suggested a subcommittee could also be put together to vet these applications. He said this could be discussed further at the next council meeting.

Commissioner Constance gave a brief film update. Ms. Steiner talked about the Asbury Short Film Festival taking place in Punta Gorda. She invited everyone to come and support this event. Commissioner Constance briefly talked about having an animated shorts and drone festival in the area. Mr. Jones can help look into this festival. The visitor center project is moving forward. Commissioner Constance will continue to keep the council updated.

Mr. Ed Hill talked about the Englewood Tourism Assembly that took place at the chamber. He briefly talked about some of the initiatives that came out of the meeting, one was a restaurant week. The other was a junior naturalist program.

Ms. Steiner briefly talked about the Tourism Hall of Fame nomination process.

John Wright, Punta Gorda Chamber President gave an overview of the, Blues, Brews and BBQ event; June 12 – 14. He said the VIP tickets sold out in 3 days and they added a new sponsor - Seminole Casino. He briefly mentioned some of the exciting acts that will be at the event. The event will take place at the History Park in Punta Gorda. Mr. Wright went through some logistics such as parking and signage. Over 2.5 thousand attended the Wine and Jazz Festival. Mr. Wright updated the council on the visitor center. The transition from

BP has been made to a Marathon station. A complete remodeling will be done including landscaping.

Mr. Ed Hill, Englewood Florida Chamber of Commerce President, gave an overview of Englewood Beach Water Fest to be held May 2015. He was pleased with the level of engagement with the community for this event. Friends of water fest have been established as well. He briefly went through some logistics of the event. Ms. Hill brought some new Englewood community guides and passed them out to the Council. Mr. Stead also gave a brief overview on the sponsorships for the event. Commissioner Constance suggested to reach out to Tracks and Trails for possible sponsorship.

7) Director and Staff Reports

Commissioner Constance showed the meeting planner boxes to the council. These will be going out to the Tweet up participants at the Rays baseball game.

Ms. Steiner briefly mentioned more particulars in her director's report in the TDC Packet.

Ms. Steiner discussed the numbers from the Smith Travel Research reports. In January the report showed a 24.7% increase in occupancy over the previous year.

Ms. Steiner submitted a grant to VISIT Florida for bicycling guide. She mentioned an economic impact study for Spring Training. She was looking at getting a formula to calculate this impact. She also mentioned the bureau has been getting more development inquiries.

8) Council comments

- Mr. Stead mentioned the fishing publication was out and ready for distribution.
- Ms. Malbuisson said the arts piece is wonderful and thanked the Charlotte State Bank for their sponsorship.
- Ms. Burnam said the Village has been very busy.
- Ms. Mathis loves the art brochure. She said the chamber is having a record breaking year.
- Commissioner Constance suggested all these brochures should be put on line for viewing.
- Rick Brunette briefly said he is seeing growth in the length of stay.
- Vice Mayor Devine will be meeting with Comcast to do a news broadcast in redefining retirees.
- Councilmember Keesling asked Ms. Steiner about the city council hearing agenda item on the bicycle friendly bronze level; she is hoping the TDC will partner with this group to get this initiative accomplished.
- Ms. Williamson briefly talked about the rates at the Sheraton. She also mentioned the shuttle (15 passenger van) that will be transporting visitors around the county.
- Ms. Steiner mentioned the southern boating piece that Ms. Huber worked on and the fishing guide Mr. Futch and Mr. Doherty worked diligently on.
- Commissioner Constance had a tour of the Florida Tracks and Trails Attraction. He also mentioned Ms.

Huber put on an amazing event at the sports park, Rays Game.

- Commissioner Constance mentioned the video of realtors and developers that he would like the council to see. He feels Charlotte County should look into producing such a video for Charlotte County.
- Commissioner Constance adjourned the meeting.