



Charlotte County Tourist Development Council

Meeting Minutes

July 10, 2015

Administration Conference Room

Members Present

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

Staff Present

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

Guests

Ed Hill, Englewood Chamber of Commerce
John Wright, Punta Gorda Chamber
Denise Dull, Charlotte County Hospitality Association
Gary Quill, Punta Gorda Airport
Patti Allen, Fishermen's Village
Craig Holt, Four Points Sheraton
Nancy Prafke, Punta Gorda City Council
Patti Allen, Fishermen's Village
Troy Connor, Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association
Dick Carr, Vietnam Wall Group
Bill Akin, Vietnam Wall Group

Caroline Clabaugh, Boca Beacon

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 on May 8, 2015.

2) Citizen's Input

John Wright from the Punta Gorda Chamber gave the council an update on the Blues, Brews and BBQ event. He said the attendance was around 650 people. Commissioner Constance said the Saturday event was wonderful. He thought it was very well organized. Mr. Wright said 70% of the tickets were purchased on line, 58% within Punta Gorda zip codes, 15% were from Port Charlotte and Englewood, 9% from North Port, 8% from Naples 3% from Sarasota and 6% out of state. He also said that hotels were full that weekend and 22 room nights were attached to the event. Mr. Wright thanked the bureau for their assistance with this event. They will continue with this event next year. Mr. Wright said he would not have the financial report available until all bills for the event had been received and a final reconciliation was completed.

Denise Dull gave the council an update on the Hospitality Association; they are now at 70 members and are in the middle of a membership drive. She has been talking with various individuals and groups about their educational needs so the right programs can be developed. She also talked about restaurants getting on board and joining the Hospitality Association. She said the organization is also working with the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association. She introduced Troy Connor, the area regional sales representative for FRLA.

Gary Quill gave the council an airport update. He talked about June traffic being up 50%, with a total of 800,000 passenger's year to date. They are expanding the parking area. Terminal expansion and upgrade is going forward as well. Commissioner Constance asked if a second floor could be added on to new terminal expansion. Mr. Quill said not at this time. He said the Airport Authority had avoided jet bridges due to the cost which can be in excess of \$500,000 with an average \$50,000 annual maintenance cost. Councilmember Keesling asked Mr. Quill how the surveys were going and what cities are passengers going to the most. Mr. Quill said that Cincinnati is the top city along and Columbus is second. He said the surveys were going well but he didn't think they had enough participation although the experts tell him it is a good sample. He said they will use a different set of questions for season. Mr. Quill said a Portsmouth route would begin in November. He said the Cincinnati route was "just exploding."

Ed Hill, Englewood Chamber of Commerce, distributed passes to the Let's Eat! Englewood restaurant week

which will take place September 25 to October 8. They will be bringing folks to Englewood, reaching out to Ft. Myers, Sarasota and the Tampa area. He invited everyone to attend this exciting two week-long event.

Nancy Prafke gave a presentation on One Community, One Message. She gave a brief update on what the group has been working on and also outlined the marketing and advertising plan. She also went over the group's mission and their goals.

3) Vietnam Wall Discussion

Ms. Steiner introduced General Bill Carr and Bill Akin with the Vietnam Wall group. General Carr mentioned the \$150,000 the organization received from the state. They are in the final stages of getting the specs approved. Commissioner Constance asked if the granite plates are the same as those in Washington D.C. General Carr said the same with one exception; There will be no dots that signify how the veteran died. There will be no room for that on the granite as this is a 50% replica. Commissioner Constance asked about laser etching and if you can still stencil them. General Carr said It will be litho or recessed and yes you can stencil the names. Councilmember Keesling mentioned that the city council sent a letter in support of this project and she would like the council to support it as well with \$50,000. Ms. Steiner reiterated that her only caveat is there still needs to be a process in place; an attraction funding process. Councilmember Keesling again spoke of all the positive points for bringing this attraction to the area. Ms. Mathis asked about the progress of the attraction application process. Ms. Steiner said it is not quite complete yet. Mr. Stead said the attraction development guidelines paperwork is in draft status. Ms. Williamson asked Mr. Akin what is the timeline to have the funds in hand. Councilmember Keesling said as soon as possible. Councilmember Keesling made a motion to approve the 50,000 request from the Vietnam Wall organization Mr. Akin said that the group will move forward regardless of what the TDC decides. He said it would be great to have the support of the council. Ms. Steiner asked if the group had the final construction costs. General Carr said no not at this time. Mr. Akin said that the group has also accounted for maintenance and upgrade of this attraction. Ms. Steiner asked about any ongoing promotional efforts for the wall. What is in place for promoting the attraction? Mr. Akin spoke about several events that have already been secured around the Vietnam Wall attraction. Councilmember Keesling also added the Military Heritage Museum and Fishermen's' Village is working closely with the group. . . Mr. Burnette added that the Bureau could take on a more PR or advertising approach to the attraction. Ms. Malbussion said she feels it is kind of fuzzy because there is no attraction funding process in place yet. She asked what they supplied to the state in order to get the funding. Ms. Malbussion suggested at least getting something on paper. She said the council needs to have back up for local community questions. Commissioner Constance said that he knows the council is in full support. Ms. Williamson said she believes in the interest of time the motion should move forward. Mr. Akin said that \$50,000 would secure the whole project. A motion was made by the majority to discuss the original motion further. Ms. Mathis asked about a process and why we don't already have one. Mr. Stead said we will have a final draft soon. Commissioner Constance suggested a special meeting be held in August. Ms. Mathis said she is supportive of this project. Ms. Kathy Burnam asked if any other TDC's contributed to an attraction like this in the area. Commissioner Constance asked if it is safe to say if the funding is not given

today, will that stop them from moving forward and Mr. Akins said no it would not. Councilmember Keesling said if the request got through the state, legislative and senate why the project can't get through the TDC. Councilmember Keesling said she wanted it approved today. Ms. Mathis asked if the group had a budget. Mr. Akin said that it has changed because of construction costs.

General Carr talked about the group "Victory Florida". It's a big initiative to boost tourism. He said he hoped the VCB would get on board with Victory Florida. Ms. Burnam added that she is also in favor of moving the project forward but her concern is that one piece of paper with budget information. General Carr said they do not have all the costs so getting it on paper is very difficult. Ms. Malbuisson volunteered to sit down with group and come up with something in writing to present. Ms. Williamson said she feels that no one would question why you gave funding but would question why you did not give funding. Ms. Steiner stated that it is the council's decision and not hers. Ms. Stead asked Commissioner Constance about his thoughts. Mr. Stead asked Councilmember Keesling if she would amend her motion to move forward with the funding. The attractions committee will meet and approve the final on the attractions funding process at the September meeting. Ms. Steiner read the letter in support of this attraction from the City of Punta Gorda. Commissioner Constance made a motion to approve the \$50,000 for the Vietnam Wall Attraction, all Council Members unanimously approved. Mr. Stead had to abstain from the motion and said he has to resign his post because he has just relocated to Sarasota County.

Commissioner Constance briefly went over the BP funding. He will keep the council updated on this item.

Mr. Stead said the budget numbers are all in line. He briefly went through some line item details.

4) Diane Mitchell, Financial Report

Diane Mitchell went through the Tourist Dev Tax financials for the second quarter Jan 2015 through May 2015. Total collections for the period were \$1,781,537 (an increase of 22%) compared to the prior year. Commissioner Constance asked for a report that would show percentage increases/decreases in each month over a three-year period. Ms. Steiner said Chip Futch could easily prepare that report.

5) Director and Staff Reports

Ms. Steiner talked briefly about Mr. Stead's moving and the legal requirements for being a TDC member. She said Charlotte County is in a unique situation due to the blurred line between Charlotte and Sarasota in West County. Many people who have businesses in Charlotte County and have a significant interest in tourism live just across the county line. She said she was looking into the possibility of getting an amendment to the statute that would address this. Ms. Steiner talked about the Ecological campaign and incorporating this into some of the bureau advertising. She is also working on getting this trademarked.

Hall of Fame subcommittee is meeting soon to finalize the guidelines. Ms. Steiner went over the VCB's plan to use a survey kiosk for visitor intercepts. A pilot program will be initiated at the Punta Gorda Chamber; and

then Fishermen's Village. This will be a free standing kiosk that can be moved from location to location.

Two bureaus RFP's are up and bids will be going out soon. Ms. Steiner is also working with a group on a Cycling Guide. Ms. Steiner briefly talked about Phase V and our ongoing response and service issues.

6) Citizen's comments

Ms. Patti Allen asked about the process of citizens' input and Commissioner Constance said that citizens can speak on agenda items only. He would like the agenda changed to citizens' input after the roll call. Ms. Allen asked about the BP money that the county is getting. She asked if there is anyway the TDC can come up with a list of where the money should go to and present that to the BCC. Commissioner Constance said yes that could be done. Ms. Allen asked about the visitors guide and will it be out by January. Ms. Steiner said yes it will ready and distributed in January. Ms. Williamson also asked about the timeline for the new guide. Mr. Futch added that most visitors go on line for events and that was the only thing not correct in the guide. Mr. Futch said the bureau was also waiting on industry partner responses. Ms. Allen said if the new guides are not out on a timely manner they might have to revisit their advertising dollars. Ms. Steiner said she certainly understood that concern. Ms. Allen briefly talked about the exciting new construction at Fishermen's Village. She also thanked everyone for the great discussion on the Vietnam Wall attraction. She looks at it as sustainable tourism.

Caroline Clabaugh with the Boca Beacon introduced herself and talked briefly about her job at the newspaper.

7) Council comments

- Mr. Stead said he enjoyed his time on the TDC. He will follow through on the Attractions Development process.
- Mr. Brunette spoke about Charlotte Leadership. He thought it was a great program.
- Ms. Williamson said how they have significant increases in occupancy and things are very busy at the tiki bar.
- Ms. Burnam said the July 4th events were terrific this year. She said kudos to Chip Futch for his appointment to the Visit Florida Board and Mr. Sean Doherty on his new CESS designation.
- Ms. Mathis asked about any news on the rest area. Commissioner Constance said that they are trying to put together a plan and purchase the property with the other counties. He will keep the council updated.
- Councilmember Keesling was pleased with the council's accomplishments.
- Ms. Devine mentioned a kiosk that she found through a vendor and how she thought this might be a great idea for our area.
- Ms. Malbuisson will try and get some budget numbers on paper for the Vietnam Wall.
- Commissioner Constance adjourned the meeting.