

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The Indian River County (IRC) Tourist Development Council (TDC) met on Wednesday, May 11, 2016, at 2:00 p.m. in the Commission Chambers of the County Administration Building, 1801 27th Street, Building A, Vero Beach, Florida.

You may hear an audio of the meeting; review the agenda and the minutes on the IRC website –www.ircgov.com/Boards/TDC/Index.htm.

Members Present were:

Chairman Joseph E. Flescher, Indian River County Commissioner, District 2
Susan Adams, City of Fellsmere
Will Collins, Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodations Appointee
Harry Howle, III, Councilmember, City of Vero Beach
Keith Kite, Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodation Appointee
Jennifer Bates, Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodations Appointee
Karen Mechling, Interested in Tourist Development not an Owner/Operator

Members Absent were:

Steve Hayes, BCC Appointee
Jim Hill, Councilmember, City of Sebastian

Others Present were:

Allison McNeal, Tourism Director, Indian River Chamber of Commerce
Beth Mitchell, President/CEO, Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce
Rick Hatcher, Executive Director, Treasure Coast Sports Commission
Richard Nalbandian, Treasure Coast Sports Commission
Nicole Holbrook, Tourism Director, Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce
Beth Mitchell, President/CEO, Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce
Rick Hatcher, Executive Director, Treasure Coast Sports Commission
Ruth Stanbridge, Indian River Historical Society
Susan Feeney, Executive Director, Heritage Center

Indian River County Staff Present were:

Jason Brown, Director, Management and Budget, Indian River County
Mike Smykowski, Director, Management and Budget, Indian River County
Lisa Hill, Recording Secretary

Call to Order

Chairman Flescher called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m., and requested Roll Call. With a quorum in attendance, Chairman Flescher led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Additions or Deletions to the Agenda

Chairman Flescher called for agenda item additions or deletions. No changes were requested of the Agenda.

ON MOTION BY Mr. Howle, SECONDED BY Ms. Adams, the Members voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the agenda as presented.

Approval of Minutes from the February 24, 2016, TDC Meeting (Action Item)

ON MOTION BY Ms. Bates, SECONDED BY Mr. Howle, the Members voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the February 24, 2016 meeting minutes as presented.

Tourist Tax Revenues Update

Jason Brown, Director, Management and Budget, presented an overview of the most recent revenue figures from March 2016 from the Tourist Development Tax. A PowerPoint presentation, on file at the Commission Office, shows the increase in tourism revenue in Indian River County in comparison to previous years. For the month of March 2016, there was an increase of 17.1% for the month over March 2015 with an overall increase of 13.4% for the year. The revenue comparison shows that the highest yielding month, March, is the peak of the tourism season. The revenues received exceeded the budgeted amount by \$232,122 or 18.3% for the year. Mr. Brown added that over the past three years, there have been improvements in the tourism business, especially in the shoulder season.

Rating System

Jason Brown provided an overview of the rating sheets that may be used to determine the funding amount to be awarded to the agencies requesting a portion of the Tourist Tax for the upcoming fiscal year. Mr. Brown noted that the County is in the position of having enough funds from the Tourist Tax to provide the requested funds to each of the agencies, making it possible that the rating system may not be needed this year. Mr. Brown reviewed the Florida Statute which governs the provision of the Tourist Tax.

Mr. Kite cautioned that the Tourist Tax may not continue to increase in revenue and that the funding levels not continue to rise over the next years.

Presentations from Requesting Agencies

- **Cultural Council – Request \$60,000**

Barbara Hoffman, Executive Director of the Cultural Council of Indian River County, presented a PowerPoint presentation on the Cultural Council, which is on file in the Office of the Board of County Commissioners. Ms. Hoffman stated that the mission of the Cultural Council is to be the “Beacon for the Arts” which is to grow and promote cultural arts in Indian River County. She stated that there has been an increase of 100 percent in the past four years in cultural tourism. Cultural Tourism includes visits to places such as McKee Botanical Gardens, Riverside Theater, Vero Beach Museum of Art, The Emerson Center, Vero Beach Opera, Theatre-Go-Round Dinner Theatre and art festivals. With the requested Tourist Tax funds, the Cultural Council will promote the cultural art venues through various means including the distribution of art guides to hotels and other tourist sites, promotion on websites, mobile apps, radio, print, newspaper advertisements and outreach at events. Ms. Hoffman added that the funds allow attendance statewide conferences and to partner with the Chambers to promote the cultural arts.

- **The Indian River County Historical Society – Request \$20,000**

Ruth Stanbridge provided a brief history on the Indian River County Historical Society (IRCHS) and its mission. She presented a PowerPoint presentation, a copy of which is on file at the Commission Office, that outlined how the requested funding would be utilized. The projects proposed for the FY 2016-2017 budget include historical components for the Vero Beach Airport, Forest Service Fire Tower and Macedonia Church; Florida Heritage Markers for Allen Chapel A.M.E. and Hallstrom Farmstead and Tour Guide Heritage Markers.

- **Treasure Coast Sports Commission - \$188,000 (increase of \$24,704)**

Rick Hatcher, Executive Director, Treasure Coast Sports Commission, briefly described the Treasure Coast Sports Commission which is the recognized sports tourism commission of the area. He presented a PowerPoint presentation, a copy of which is on file at the Board of County Commission Office. Mr. Hatcher outlined some of the recent State events held in Indian River County including the Special Olympics, College System Activities Association, High School Athletic Association, Florida Premier Baseball and the State softball championships. All of these activities support the hotels, restaurants, and retail venues in the County, bringing in the tourism dollars. Additionally, there are many high quality venues and partners that are instrumental in supporting these and other events, including Historic Dodgertown, Indian River State College, Indian River Soccer Association, Indian River Rowing Club, Treasure Coast Swimming, Indian River Lacrosse, Bolt Aquatics, Summer Storm Athletics and Vero Beach Polo Club. All of these events are projected to have an economic impact of about \$16 million. Mr. Hatcher advised that they are requesting additional funding this year to support bringing in these and other new events to the area. He added that there is a return of \$161.76 for each \$1 that the Treasure Coast Sports Commission receives in the Tourist Tax.

- **Vero Heritage, Inc. - \$13,000 (increase of \$1,000)**

Suzy Feeney of Vero Heritage, Inc., gave an overview of the Vero Heritage Center and the Indian River Citrus Museum's community and outreach events. Ms. Feeney presented a PowerPoint presentation, a copy of which is on file at the Board of County Commission Office. Many of the events are dedicated to the preservation of heritage and the citrus industry. Ms. Feeney stated that Vero Heritage had recent undergone a strategic plan which will allow them to serve those in the County and outside the County with a greater focus on heritage. Ms. Feeney advised that there are visitors to the Heritage Center and Citrus Museum from all 50 States and several foreign countries, many staying in local hotels for 3 to 5 days.

- **Florida Archery Foundation – New Grant request for \$5,000**

Mike Lundeen, representing the Florida Archery Foundation, advised that the Foundation was a non-profit which was established to build and create an international facility to provide a place to learn archery skills as well as other life skills. One of the goals of the Foundation is to provide an Olympic caliber training facility with the capability to host major tournaments and events. Mr. Lundeen presented a PowerPoint presentation, a copy of which is on file at the Board of County Commission Office. Mr. Lundeen advised that the Florida Archery Foundation is one of seven archery institutions in the world that provides a program for the training of coaches and that provides students with the highest quality facility for learning. As the training lasts for long periods of time, the families travel with them, adding to the tourist revenue. In response to discussion with the Commission members. Mr. Lundeen stated that they will work in partnership with the Treasure Coast Sports Commission on larger events and tournaments, as the need arises. Mr. Lundeen advised that the grant funds will be used to market the program and what Indian River County has to offer to people outside of the area. Further discussion included the coordination of larger events with activities and hotel stay with the Chamber of Commerce's assistance. Mr. Lundeen added that he would market to specific geographic regions, such as during winter advertising the facility to northern climates with snow.

Discussion

Commissioner Flescher stated that all of the grant requests have a substantial impact on the community and bringing in tourism to the area.

Mr. Brown stated that there are enough funds to move all of the requests forward at this time. He advised that the tourism dollars have increased to enable the additional funding. Mr. Brown acknowledged that the Chambers had requested additional funding for the upcoming year, however, the Commission was not voting on their requests at this meeting.

In response to Mr. Brown, Beth Mitchell of the Sebastian Chamber of Commerce advised that the increase in funding requested for the following year will allow for one additional staff person which is needed as the visitor's center has seen a significant increase in business, especially due to the new Pelican Porch and remodeling of the center.

Mr. Kite stated that he would support all of the requests, but noted that he would like the Florida Archery Foundation to receive the grant funding as a one-time grant. He added that the Foundation should provide a marketing plan and substantiating statistical information on the use of the funds and their results.

Commissioner Flescher agreed with Mr. Kite that there are other archery facilities in the area and that the Foundation will need to prove that the funding is beneficial to the overall community.

Mr. Howle also agreed, but stated that the request is a small amount of money it is worth seeing how beneficial it is.

Mr. Collins expressed concern that approving the funding for the Archery Foundation sets up a precedence for smaller requests.

Ms. Adams stated that the Fellsmere Frogleg Festival started with a grant of only \$5,000 and no background on how it would do. However, it has grown into a very large event, so she did not see any problem with the request from the Archery Foundation.

Approval of Grant Requests

ON MOTION by Ms. Adams, SECONDED by Mr. Howle, the Council voted unanimously (7 to 0) to approve the funding for all requested grants for Tourist Tax funds.

Next Meeting Date

The next Tourist Development Council meeting will be held on **Wednesday, August 17, 2016, at 2:00 p.m.**

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 4:04 p.m.