

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

The Indian River County (IRC) Tourist Development Council (TDC) met on Wednesday, August 17, 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/PSPC/2015.

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
Steve Hayes, BCC 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:

Jim Hill, Councilmember, City of Sebastian

Others Present were:

Allison McNeal, Tourism Director, Indian River Chamber of Commerce
Penny Chandler, Director, Indian River Chamber of Commerce
Beth Mitchell, President/CEO, Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce
Rick Hatcher, Executive Director, Treasure Coast Sports Commission
Nicole Holbrook, Tourism Director, Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce

Indian River County Staff Present were:

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

Call to Order

Chairman Flescher called the meeting to order at 2:00 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 Ms. Adams, SECONDED BY Mr. Howle, the Members voted unanimously (8-0) to approve the agenda as presented.

Approval of Minutes from the May 11, 2016, TDC Meeting (Action Item)

ON MOTION BY Ms. Adams, SECONDED BY Mr. Howle, the Members voted unanimously (8-0) to approve the May 11, 2016 meeting minutes with a correction to the spelling of Mr. Kite's name on page 4.

Tourist Tax Revenues Update

Mike Smykowski, Director, Management and Budget, presented an overview of the most recent revenue figures through June 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. The revenue figures for June 2016 show an increase of 2.9% over June of 2015, with an overall increase year to date of 8.3% and 13.9% over the expected revenue budget. Mr. Smykowski indicated that the early arrival of Easter in 2016 shortened the tourism season.

Mr. Kite asked about the reserve funds. Mr. Smykowski stated that based on historical trends it appears that there will be a reserve of \$100,000 to \$120,000 remaining this fiscal year. He acknowledged that it was important to keep reserves available for the health of the tourism industry and to provide funds in the event that tourism marketing needs to be increased in a tough year.

Presentations from Requesting Agencies

- **Indian River County Chamber of Commerce**

Allison McNeal, Director of Tourism, presented a PowerPoint presentation to the Council, demonstrating the Tourism measures taken in the previous calendar year as well as what is being worked on for the upcoming year. A copy of the presentation is on file at the Board of County Commissioners Office. Ms. McNeal noted that there had been a 6% increase in visitors over the previous year. She advised that the marketing efforts through the website and other social media were directly bringing in 59% of the people coming to Indian River County. Ms. McNeal stated that the new search engine marketing started in June where individuals are shown advertisements for visiting Indian River County based on specific search words used. Targeted advertisements are also placed on a persons' web browser who has previous looked at an ad through remarketing which started in early August. For print and digital media, there have been more than 50 million impressions. Advertisements have been shown at New York Time Square, Toronto and Montreal rail lines as well as interstate newspaper print ads. The Visitor Guide has been redesigned, where it is showing an increased interest at the Florida Visitor Centers which has seen a high rate of requests. The Chamber has provided information booths at many consumer shows in large cities, promoting Indian River County for reunions, large groups, conventions and weddings. One event attended for several years is a presentation at the Villages as well as providing bus tours for promotion of the area to large tour operators. These promotions are bringing in various reunions and conventions such as the Florida Association of Wholesale Dealers which will be held in Vero Beach in September. Many travel articles and books provide over \$10 million in value for the public relations funds expended. Ms. McNeal stated that the budget for trips is \$6,500, but the return value is in excess of \$7,975,000, or for every \$1 of expenses in public relations, there is a return of \$1,226.

Ms. McNeal advised that the 2016-2017 marketing budget will include funds for:

- 1) Digital content:
- 2) TripAdvisor: Destination Partnership with Vero Beach, Sebastian, Fellsmere, Indian River Shores – Provides blogs for activity segments, suggested itineraries, trip ideas and events through websites, video/photos, visitor guide, social medial channels and digital ads
- 3) Print
- 4) SEM
- 5) Public Relations: Updated Media kit; Monthly story ideas; Press trips for writers
- 6) Remarketing

Visit Florida retargeted ads will provide search capability with the web and have a dedicated page. The ads will incorporate such events and the Wine and Brew Trail which is being marketed with St. Lucie and Martin Counties.

Ms. McNeal gave a brief outline of the anticipated outreach that will be done by the Indian River Chamber of Commerce each quarter. Quarter 1 will concentrate on a new creative ad, 2017 vacation planner, Canadian targeted articles, cultural arts, presentation at the Villages, hosting a New York/New Jersey press trip promoting Elite Flights and articles in Visit Florida magazine. Quarter 2 will include consumer shows in New York Boston and Philadelphia, wedding shows, beaches/nature articles and remarketing articles and BRAND USA article. Quarter 3 consists of hosting a State press trip promoting summer vacations; wedding shows; an ad in Undiscovered Florida, a Visit Florida State insert and article and targeted articles and remarketing ads with an emphasis toward family. Quarter 4 will include a Social Media giveaway with hotel partners; some hotel deals and last minute trip promotions as well as nature/eco targeted articles and remarketing ads.

The Council discussed the issues related to the algae in the lagoon and how it was affecting the tourism industry. Ms. McNeal advised that the Chamber is proactive in providing information on the lagoon issues and will remain on top of the issue. Mr. Collins noted that he has seen a positive effect on the business as tourists are coming to Indian River County instead of heading further south.

Mr. Kite asked about the mobile app and whether it could be cross linked via the web to the economic development council to promote economic development as well as tourism.

- **Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce**

Nicole Holbrook, presented a PowerPoint presentation to the Council, demonstrating the Tourism measures taken in the previous calendar year as well as what is being worked on for the upcoming year. A copy of the presentation is on file at the Board of County Commissioners Office. Ms. Holbrook stated that the new welcome center, Pelican Porch, provides an interactive kiosk, children's activities corner, viewfinder to look out at the lagoon, webcams of Pelicans Island, map displays and information on where to stay and attractions in the area. Ms. Holbrook advised that there was a revised version of the Visitors Guide, a copy which was provided to the Council members and for the file. Ms. Holbrook explained the outreach through social media and the different categories and targeted audiences to visitors. She also stated that they would continue advertising in Florida Travel and Lifestyles, the Visit Florida Magazine, Undiscovered Florida and on Facebook.

Related to the algae issues in the Lagoon, Ms. Holbrook advised that they have been showing the area through the webcam, providing water quality reports as well as health department reports on water testing. They also provide information on Zika cases in Florida, noting that Indian River County has not had any cases.

Ms. Holbrook noted that they have upcoming ads for the Sebastian area in the October AARP magazine. Advertisements and articles will be forthcoming in Undiscovered Florida, the Visitors' Guide, and Sport Fishing. The various State parks and travel destinations will be shown in banner ads through social media venues, including Google and YouTube. Additionally, the Chamber will be in attendance at all festivals and events to promote the area attractions and update the Concierge Books displayed at the 25 hotels and attractions throughout the Sebastian River Area and Vero Beach.

Other Matters

The Council discussed issues related to the health of the lagoon and the Zika virus and how it affects the tourism industry. They discussed the number of inquiries coming into the each of the Chambers and providing positive information that clarifies what those outside of the area are hearing through national news outlets.

Richard Hatcher of the Treasure Coast Sports Commission provided an update to the Council on upcoming events. The following events are upcoming: Mike Millay of Clancy Sports will be at the new Intergenerational Center for an event, Vero Cup Soccer and Special Olympics will be hold events in October, a National Baton Twirling competition, a Lacrosse tournament and a softball tournament are also planned for November. The SKA National Fishing Tournament will be held in St. Lucie County in November, however, many of the fishing teams are coming into Indian River County.

Barbara Hoffman noted the Americans for the Arts efforts in gathering information on the County's art and cultural events. The report will be submitted by next spring and will be available for the grant meeting next year. The Arts and Cultural information guide will be available by the end of September. On September 24th is the Celebrate the Arts event.

Council Matters

Mr. Kite asked about the Board appointees from the Commissioners. Commissioner Flescher advised how the Council is made up. Mr. Kite noted that good representation will be needed from the northern part of the County based on the outcome of the Commissioner election. Ms. Adams noted that the north County representation is being considered ahead of the election.

Mr. Kite requested information about the Indian River Lagoon Council, the regional council that addresses issues along the length of the lagoon. Mr. Kite asked why Indian River County had not joined the Council. Commissioner Flescher explained the nutrient reduction and water quality programs ongoing in Indian River County and the majority of the Commission determined that the projects can be moved forward under Indian River County direction without the further oversight of the Lagoon Council. Commissioner Flescher noted the number of successful projects that have been undertaken and continue directly through Indian River County. Commissioner Flescher stated that it is good to have a regional approach, but the local government can address this.

ON MOTION by Mr. Kite, SECONDED BY Mr. Hayes, the Tourist Development Council voted unanimously (8 to 0) to support any and all efforts of the Board of County Commissioners to continue to improve the water quality of the Indian River Lagoon.

Next Meeting Date

The next Tourist Development Council meeting will be held on **Wednesday, December 7, 2016, at 2:00 p.m.**

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 3:53 p.m.