

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

There was a meeting of the Indian River County (IRC) Tourist Development Council (TDC) on **Wednesday, May 21, 2008 at 2:00 p.m.** in the Commission Chambers of the County Administration Building, 1801 27th Street, Building A, Vero Beach, Florida.

Board Members Present:

Sandra L. Bowden	Chairman, IRC Board of County Commissioners
Al Paternoster	City of Sebastian
Debra Fromang	City of Vero Beach
Jon Bates	Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodations
Sheryl Koenes	Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodations
Kathryn Beatty-Self	Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodations
Susan Hunt	Interested in Tourist Development Not an owner/Operator
Susan P. Adams	Interested in Tourist Development Not an owner/Operator
Ervin Roberts	Interested in Tourist Development

IRC Staff Present: Jason Brown, Office of Management and Budget Director; Rick Woodard, Clerk of the Court Office; Bill DeBraal, Deputy County Attorney; Maria Resto, Commissioner Assistant, District 2; Beth Casano, Commissioner Assistant, District 5/Recording Secretary.

Presenting Agency Members Present: Tom Colucci and Rich Nalbandian, *Treasure Coast Sports Commission*; Rebecca Rickey, Eric Menger, Mary Jane Stewart, Kris Gault, and Elizabeth Graves, *Vero Heritage Center*; Karl Steene, and Elizabeth Stegenga, *Cultural Council*; Beth Mitchell, and Nicole Holbrook, *Sebastian Chamber*; Lori Burns, Penny Chandler and Chuck Mechling, *IRC/Vero Chamber*; Beverly Tyson, Ruth Stanbridge, and Harry Tanner, *IRC Historical Society*.

Others Present: Joe Ellis, Vero Beach Museum of Art; Tim Michael and Bill Hendrickson, Captain Hiram's; and Charlie Wilson.

(The recording is available and can be heard at: www.ircgov.com/Boards/TDC/2008.htm.)

*Note: Due to problems with the AV system during the meeting, some portions are inaudible.

Call to Order

Chairman Sandra Bowden called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. There were no additions or deletions to the agenda

Approval of Minutes of the February 20, 2008 Meeting

ON MOTION BY Ms. Beatty-Self and SECONDED BY Mr. Paternoster, the members voted unanimously (9-0) to approve the February 20, 2008 meeting minutes as submitted.

Presentation from Rick Woodard, Clerk of Court Office: Tourist Tax Collection

Mr. Woodward gave a brief overview of his job responsibilities and the difficulties encountered when dealing with RV Park collections; Internet Rentals, and keeping up with those who are not reporting. He reported that the benefits of local collection outweigh state collection and that, "99.999% of seasonal rentals are January through March or January thru April...of those, 99% get all their money up front and make their tax payment immediately." He explained that the County has 2 tax districts: District 1 is Vero Beach; and District 2 is everything else in County. He concluded his presentation by saying he did not anticipate any change in current revenue.

Description of Tourist Development Grant Rating Sheets

Jason Brown gave everyone a refresher course on the rating process. He reminded the Board that in 2003, they had adopted a policy to give 70 percent of the Tourist Tax to the Chamber of Commerce with 30 percent being allocated to the others based upon a 100 point system. All presented proposals are rated and assigned a total number of points; after the Chamber's automatic 70% allocation the final 30% is distributed with highest points earning the highest portion down to the lowest.

PRESENTATIONS

1. Indian River County Chamber of Commerce

Penny Chandler President of IRC Chamber of Commerce gave the presentation. She opened with the new Vero destination video but, due to room's equipment malfunction, was without audio. Ms. Chandler gave an overview of their advertising strategies, collaborative efforts and budget plans. She concluded by emphasizing to the council that they could be assured that their money was being well spent.

Beth Mitchell, Director of the Sebastian River Chamber of Commerce provided the following data: 5000 people walk through their door every year; they are closing in on 2 million hits on their website; spent a lot of time handing out cards to visitors; held multiple meetings with local partners in northern end of county; and are involved with all festivals. She said that they have worked hard to stretch their dollars with the Sebastian destination videos which were now on

UTUBE, Visit FL and Google with links to Travelocity, kayak.com, igougo.com, hotwire.com, etc.

Susan Adams asked how much was being allocated for the Sebastian Chamber's destination video. Ms. Chandler answered that they didn't have any specific numbers for their final budget allocation.

Mr. Bates questioned the out of State choices being made for advertising, especially Texas, and wanted to know what was being run in the Northwest. Ms. Chandler turned the answer over to Lori Burns, Chamber Director of Tourism, and discussion ensued. Ms. Burns explained that most of the in-state advertising concentrated on inserts and they try to advertise in markets that are holding. Ms. Beatty-Self asked if Ms. Burns had found any particular market was responding better than another. Ms. Burns felt that it was the internet market, i.e., website. More discussion entailed about various things being tried by Hotels and other tourist venues for marketing.

Ms. Mitchell stated that they would like to use \$7500 for a 3 month trial of their destination video on Comcast in the NY Metro, Boston Metro and Miami Metro areas. Mr. Paternoster and Mr. Bates wondered whether the Sebastian Chamber and Vero Chamber could collaborate in their efforts to market both videos. Ms. Chandler stated that they would work together and have something going in about 8 to 10 weeks.

Ms. Adams reiterated Mr. Bates' point that Dallas and Houston seemed a bit far for our advertising dollars and thought it might be better to market in other cities that are a bit closer. Ms. Burns said they would look into it but, so far, felt that they have had a good return of interest from the Texas areas.

2. CULTURAL COUNCIL OF INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

Elizabeth Stegenga, Membership/Marketing Director of the Cultural Council, gave the presentation. After introducing their Board Members, Ms. Stegenga continued with a PowerPoint presentation emphasizing that cultural tourists stay longer and spend more. She went on to describe: the Council's Mission; adherence to State Statutes; 94% of their budget spent on advertising, and "small town – big culture" theme.

Following Ms. Stegenga's summary, Mr. Karl Steene spoke about his career as a banker, his ties to his community, and his views on the direct positive impact that a strong cultural environment has upon economic development.

Mr. Bates expressed concerns about the Council's inability to back up their advertising dollars with statistical information. He pointed to an example of one ad costing \$30,000. Ms. Stegenga responded by suggesting that her Council would seek assistance from the Chamber of Commerce with how best to target their advertising dollars. Ms. Fromang suggested that maybe all ad monies should then be allocated to the Chamber of Commerce for distribution. Ms. Adams added that accountability for the funds that the Council is spending on advertising needed to be addressed to see if the monies spent are actually bringing people to the area. Ms. Stegenga said that the Council's Executive Director, Mary Jayne Kelly, would have more information as she is the one who places the ads.

3. INDIAN RIVER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Ruth Stanbridge, President of the Historical Society, stated that they were not here to ask for money for people's salaries or advertising. She stated that their budget request covered two things: material preservation and the walking tour. Harry Tanner, from the Sebastian Historical Society, gave an overview of the walking tour. He spoke of the following: walking tour idea development; how all fees associated with permits were waived by the City of Sebastian; the 70 sites listed in State Historical Records; DOT's consideration of assisting in putting signs on 95 designating Sebastian a Historic Town; proposal to MPO for an 8 ½ mile bike/walk path routed along historical sites. Ms. Stanbridge returned to the podium to emphasize that the Society gives the community much more for much less.

4. TREASURE COAST SPORTS COMMISSION

Tom Colucci, Executive Director and Rich Nalbandian, Assistant Director of the Treasure Coast Sports Commission presented their request. Aided by a PowerPoint Presentation, Mr. Colucci summarized his background, the Commission's history, and their plans for 2008-2009. He provided a list of events they wished to hold and gave examples of how the Commission's facilitation of sports tourism had assisted economic development in the past and how they would continue to do so in the future, i.e.; cooperative marketing and sales promotion, co-sponsorship of an interactive website, professional filming of Treasure Coast Sports Events with a media outlet, and continued positive collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, schools, and Parks and Recreation Department. Mr. Colucci concluded his presentation with a copy to each board member of their QuickBooks Expense Statement.

Discussion ensued concerning the definition of a "rights" fee, suggestions for sporting events, and unavailability of hotel rooms for large events during season.

Ms. Koenes wanted to know how many events on the list were actually secured and Mr. Colucci said that “most” were. Ms. Beatty-Self thanked Mr. Colucci and Mr. Nalbandian for providing her with information concerning last year’s figures from other counties. Mr. Bates pointed out that the Commission annually asks for more funds, even knowing the budget is tight this year, and noted that a lot of events planned for last year did not transpire. Mr. Colucci responded by agreeing that there were a few cancellations, 4 of which fell through because of Dodgertown and others due to being unable to get deals from hotels and others because things happen and people just cancel.

Mr. Bates said he understood their intentions to be good but he felt that the event list they had provided for the coming year was actually nothing more than a wish list. Mr. Colucci said that 90% of the events were secured. Mr. Bates then asked for the formulae used in deriving the numbers under the economic impact category as he calculated that there was still \$840,000 unaccounted for. Mr. Nalbandian replied that the state gives them a form with the formulae which not only calculates hotel revenue but also averages peripheral monies spent in the community during the stay. Commissioner Bowden asked if the prospective FAA Softball Championships were secured and Mr. Nalbandian said yes. Mr. Nalbandian concluded the presentation by emphasizing the work they do in communicating, negotiating, and securing events.

5. VERO HERITAGE CENTER, INC.

Rebecca Rickey, Director of the Center gave the presentation. She explained that the center was an event area that worked closely with the Chamber of Commerce. She stated that the Indian River Citrus Museum averages about 3-4,000 visitors per year. She summarized their work with schools and other groups and organizations and how they have become a “wedding destination.” Ms. Rickey described in-house events and fundraisers that drew people from out of town. She spoke about their surveys and how they would be tweaking them and their plans to partner with hotels, restaurants and retail stores as well as promote the downtown area. She concluded by stating that they would continue to find ways to improve and grow and would be surveying other museum/event destinations as to their marketing ideas. Ms. Fromang thanked her for the presentation and said that they did a great job with creativity.

DIRECTOR, JASON BROWN, TALLYS SCORES

Rating Results:

Organization	Score	Rank	Amount Requested	Funding Recommended
IRC/Seb. Chambers	838	1	\$412,500	\$412,500
Vero Heritage	795	2	\$15,600	\$15,600
Cultural Council	740	3	\$74,000	\$74,000
TC Sports Comm.	680	4	\$111,000	\$95,400

IRC Historical Soc.	677	5	\$,5000	0
	TOTAL		\$618,100	\$597,500

Council members expressed concerns about the system resulting in no funding for the Historical Society and discussed ways to rectify the situation. Ms. Chandler and Ms. Rickey spoke about the importance of the Society and their willingness to work something out that could benefit them. Commissioner Bowden suggested taking a sum from the Sports Commission. Ms. Fromang said that since the Cultural Council had not cut anything from their prior budget then she would like to see a decrease spread across the board with difference put into Heritage. Mr. Bates explained that the reason they had gone to a point system was so that decisions could be made more effectively but that it did not seem to be working and might need revisiting. Deputy County Attorney Bill DeBraal was consulted and he said that they would have to stand by the rating sheets but had the option to report the numbers to the Commission with the recommendation for them to vote for something else that the Council preferred. After a lengthy discussion, Mr. Brown suggested that if all agencies were limited to a 2% increase over last year's funding then the funding shortfall would be reduced by \$1,400 dollars allowing the Historical Society to receive approximately \$3,000.

ON MOTION BY Commissioner Bowden and SECONDED BY Ms. Fromang, the members voted unanimously (9-0) to provide a second option to the Indian River County Commission that would enable the Historical Society to receive some funding and that the option would entail a limit of no more than 2% increase to their current year funding at which point the rating results would be applied.

Council members briefly discussed revisiting the rating system at the next meeting.

The Meeting was adjourned at 5:26 p.m.