

**MINUTES OF MEETING
TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA
MARCH 15, 2021
1:30 P.M.**

Proceedings of a regular meeting of the Tourist Development Council (TDC) of St. Johns County, Florida, held in the auditorium at the County Administration Building, 500 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, Florida.

Present: Michael Gordon, Chair
Joe Finnegan, Vice Chair
Paul Waldron, BCC Representative
Nancy Sikes-Kline, Vice Mayor, City of St. Augustine Representative
Don Samora, Vice Mayor, City of St. Augustine Beach Representative
Diane Mataraza, District 3
Danny Berenberg, District 4
Michael Wicks, District 4
Troy Blevins, District 5
Sindy Wiseman, Deputy Clerk

Also present: Tera Meeks, Tourism and Cultural Development Director; Dena Masters, TDC Administrative Coordinator; and Regina Ross, Deputy County Attorney

(03/15/21 - 1 - 1:34 p.m.)

1. CALL TO ORDER

Gordon called the meeting to order.

(03/15/21 - 1 - 1:34 p.m.)

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Berenberg led the Pledge of Allegiance.

(03/15/21 - 1 - 1:34 p.m.)

3. ROLL CALL

Masters called the roll. All Council members were present.

(03/15/21 - 1 - 1:35 p.m.)

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mataraza requested to switch Items 7 and 8 on the agenda. Discussion ensued on switching the agenda order.

(1:36 p.m.) Motion by Mataraza, seconded by Waldron, carried 8/1, with Gordon dissenting, to switch Items 7 and 8.

(1:38 p.m.) Motion by Berenberg, seconded by Blevins, carried 9/0, to approve the Agenda, as amended.

(03/15/21 - 2 - 1:39 p.m.)

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Berenberg, seconded by Mataraza, carried 9/0, to approve the minutes for the February 8, 2021, meeting, as submitted.

(03/15/21 - 2 - 1:39 p.m.)

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was none.

(03/15/21 - 2 - 1:40 p.m.)

7. ACH GRANT GUIDELINES

Christina Stone, Executive Director of the St. Johns County Culture Council, commented on the report from Robin Malpass at the October 19, 2020, TDC meeting, regarding her intent to have a larger advertising budget. She provided the details of the guideline changes, via PowerPoint. She highlighted a change to the proposed guidelines, in response to a suggestion she received from one of the Council members, requesting financial statements from applicants.

(1:50 p.m.) Gordon questioned whether there would be changes to selection of the evaluation panelist. Stone responded that the guidelines were drafted in a way that would allow, in the future, to move toward an appointed evaluation panel. Meeks added that there was a separate process to make changes to the Funding Panel Board. Discussion ensued.

(1:56 p.m.) Phil McDaniel, 7 Milton Street, spoke on the changes and having a time limit on the amount of money given to the organizations to prevent them from becoming dependent and complacent.

(1:59 p.m.) Motion by Mataraza, seconded by Berenberg, carried 9/0, to approve the Arts, Culture and Heritage Grant guidelines for Fiscal Year 2022.

(2:00 p.m.) Blevins questioned how the consideration for larger organizations versus smaller organizations would be determined. Stone responded that the guidelines included a provision that would eliminate funding for special events, where the special event was the only cultural activity the organization produced, after a certain number of years would only receive marketing dollars. Additionally, she spoke on special event funding outside of the grant program.

(03/15/21 - 3 - 2:04 p.m.)

8. TDC 5TH CENT DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Meeks presented the details of the recommendation, including a history of the bed tax funds, via PowerPoint.

(2:11 p.m.) Waldron suggested discussing how the funds would be allocated prior to deciding to levy the fifth cent. Discussion ensued on the amount for beach renourishment out of Category 3; whether Crescent, Butler, and Ponte Vedra North beaches were being renourished; the current allocation of the funds; and matching funds for projects. Meeks showed Ordinance No. 2019-24, regarding the definitions and distributions for each category, *Exhibit A*. Discussion ensued on manipulating the types of expenditures for the categories.

(2:40 p.m.) Beth Angelo, 1283 Ponte Vedra Boulevard, spoke in support of the fifth cent tax due to the Ponte Vedra beach erosion.

(2:43 p.m.) Elaine Ashaurian, 315 Ponte Vedra Boulevard, spoke in support of the fifth cent tax, the impact of COVID-19 to tourism, and the importance of the beaches to the tourism industry.

(2:48 p.m.) Phil McDaniel, 7 Milton Street, provided a history of his involvement with the Cultural Council. He spoke on the history of the tourism bed tax, and showed the tax allocation changes through the years, *Exhibit B*. Additionally, he spoke on growing the bed tax.

(2:56 p.m.) Casey Van Rysdam, 1527 San Rafael Way, Chair of the St. Johns County Recreation Advisory Board, requested consideration of improving the visitor experience, pier improvements, and developing regional sports facilities.

(2:58 p.m.) Eric Becher, 13532 Ala vista drive, spoke in support of the fifth cent tax.

(2:59 p.m.) Irving Kass, 887 Garrison Drive, former Council member, provided a background of his tourism history, spoke on growing the bed tax returns and provided an estimated table of the additional cent growth, *Exhibit C*.

(3:05 p.m.) Virginia Whetstone, 286 St. George Street, spoke in opposition of a fifth cent tax, due to the impact of COVID-19 to the County. She clarified that 55 percent of the other counties in the State had a four percent or less bed tax.

(3:08 p.m.) Michael Wicks provided a list of all the Counties and their bed tax percentages total collections from levied tax, *Exhibit D*. Ross clarified that the list shown was produced periodically by the Department of Revenue. Discussion ensued on reviewing the collective information before making any decisions. Waldron requested placing a three- or five-year limit on the fifth cent, unless extended by the Board.

(3:16 p.m.) Lori Moffett, 917 Ponte Vedra Boulevard, spoke on the Federal Government selecting Ponte Vedra Beach as one of eight projects to be placed on the Army Corps of Engineer's 2021 Work Plan. Additionally, she said that the State Delegation was aggressively trying to get funding out of the current Legislative session, for Ponte Vedra beaches. She spoke in favor of the fifth cent and urged the Council to allocate the funds for beach renourishment.

(3:20 p.m.) Sikes-Kline spoke on taking more time to process the information and make a plan at the next regularly scheduled meeting. Discussion ensued on the requested information including: 1) comparison to other counties, 2) summary of historical TDT expenditures by category and use type, 3) information from the VCB on the sentiment of overnight accommodation owners and managers on levying the fifth cent, 4) redline draft of the discussed changes to the Tourist Development Plan, 5) upcoming TDT legislation, and 6) a summary of fiscal impact of levying the fifth cent.

(3:38 p.m.) Regina stated that she would provide all pending legislation, the status of the legislation, and information regarding sunseting bed taxes.

(3:39 p.m.) Discussion ensued on tabling the matter, reorganizing the categories, renaming the categories, making a category for beach related items, recreational maintenance, infrastructure, beach parking, marketing, and showing how the fifth cent would be allocated.

(4:36 p.m.) Richard Goldman, President and CEO of the St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra, and The Beaches Visitors and Convention Bureau (VCB), stated that he had received phone calls regarding the fifth cent bed tax and read an email that he received from Todd Hickey, General Manager of Sawgrass Golf and Spa, who was in favor of the fifth cent bed tax. He said that the VCB would conduct a survey of the accommodations, including vacation rentals.

(4:36 p.m.) **Motion by Sikes-Kline, seconded by Blevins, carried 9/0, to table the matter to collect additional information to present a plan to the BCC, in the event the fifth cent was levied.**

(03/15/21 - 5 - 4:42 p.m.)

9. MONTHLY REPORTS PROVIDED IN PACKETS

(03/15/21 - 5 - 4:42 p.m.)

10. MEMBER COMMENTS

Michael Witt presented a handout to the Council regarding the economic impact of the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall to the community.

(03/15/21 - 5 - 4:45 p.m.)

11. NEXT MEETING DATE

- April 19, 2021

(03/15/21 - 5 - 4:45 p.m.)

12. ADJOURN

With there being no further business to come before the Council, Gordon adjourned the meeting at 4:45 p.m.

Approved _____, 2021

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA

By: _____

Michael Gordon, Chair

ATTEST: BRANDON J. PATTY,
CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT & COMPTROLLER

By: _____

Deputy Clerk