



**Minutes of Meeting
Tourist Development Council
St. Johns County, Florida
County Administration Building
500 San Sebastian View
St. Augustine, Florida 32084
May 19, 2025 - 1:30 p.m.**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Kass called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m.

Present: Irving Kass, District 2, Chair
Troy Blevins, District 5, Vice Chair
Regina G. Phillips, District 2
Nancy Sikes-Kline, Mayor, City of St. Augustine Representative
Dylan Rumrell, Mayor, St. Augustine Beach City Commission, Seat 2
Charles Cox, District 3
Michael Gordon, District 4

Absent: Krista Joseph, BCC Representative
Michael Wicks, District 4

Staff Present: Dena Masters, Senior Tourist Development Council Administrator
Jesse Dunn, Deputy County Administrator
Lex Taylor, Deputy County Attorney
Artricia K. Allen, Deputy Clerk

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Kass led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

Masters called the roll. Council members Gordon, Phillips, Sikes-Kline, Rumrell, Kass, Cox, and Blevins were present. Joseph and Wicks were absent.

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by Rumrell, seconded by Cox, carried 7/0, with Wicks and Joseph absent, to approve the Agenda, as submitted.

Yea: Rumrell, Cox, Kass, Gordon, Phillips, Sikes-Kline, Blevins

Nay: None

Absent: Joseph, Wicks

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Phillips stated that the minutes needed to be amended to reflect her reference to Excelsior High School's 100th anniversary, rather than the 130th.

Motion by Cox, seconded by Rumrell, carried 7/0, with Wicks and Joseph absent, to approve the minutes for the April 21, 2025, meeting, as amended.

Yea: Cox, Rumrell, Kass, Blevins, Sikes-Kline, Phillips, Gordon

Nay: None

Absent: Joseph, Wicks

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was none.

7. FOLLOW-UP FROM PRIOR MEETING ON THE USE OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT TAX (TDT) FUNDS FOR PUBLIC SAFETY AND TDT REVENUE COLLECTIONS UPDATE

Lex provided an update explaining that there was no practical way to use TDT funds for public safety items in St. Johns County. He noted there were no concerns with purchasing items like barricades, as public safety is a typical County expense. However, he concluded that he could not find a path forward to proceed with using the funds in that manner.

Discussion ensued regarding the differences between leasing and purchasing. Leasing was identified as a permissible use, along with custodial services and lighting, as allowable public safety expenses. However, restrictions remained on using the funds for employee salaries.

Masters presented the details of the Revenue Collection update.

8. INITIAL DISCUSSION OF FISCAL YEAR 2026 TOURISM BUDGET

Dunn presented an overview of the budget. Discussion ensued regarding Category 3 reserves, noting that last year the percentage of reserves was not aligned with the State's expectations, whereas the current year's reserves were generally in compliance. Concerns were raised about the location and justification of certain reserves, including the use of impact fees for parks. It was noted that Category 2 reserves were at zero, and questions were raised about the status of State funding that had been pulled the previous year and whether it had been restored in the current budget.

Jeff Potts, Executive Director of St. Johns Cultural Council, provided additional information on Governor DeSantis' decision to veto specific grant funding for the arts and cultural programs

statewide last year. He explained that the funding was not zeroed out, but the threshold for receiving grants had been increased to 95 percent.

9. INITIAL DISCUSSION OF FIVE SEASONS TO DRIVE YEAR-ROUND BUSINESS

Kass presented the details of the five seasons and expressed hope that the Cultural Council and the Visitor and Convention Bureau (VCB) would collaborate with the agency to develop strong concepts for building the five sub-brands, each lasting 10 weeks.

Discussion ensued about the Nights of Lights and the Sing Out Loud events, targeting groups and focusing on the history season. The council expressed their position on the five seasons. Gordon expressed being concise, determine how your months would go, all the factors have to be planned into it, themes incorporating history seasons, and the role of the cultural council and the VCB.

Susan Phillips responded to Sikes-Kline's questions about the Tinsley Agency process. She explained that the agency was already on board and working on the Nights of Lights campaign, and that she planned to provide directions from the Council to guide the development of the creative materials. Discussion ensued on the Save the Summer program, local pilot, and Undiscovered Florida, with a theme centered on key points and various ongoing projects.

10. ST. JOHNS COUNTY VISITOR TRACKING STUDY REPORT

Masters provided background information on the visitor tracking study and introduced Erin Dinkel, Downs and St. Germain Research Consultant, who presented an overview of the visitor tracking and beach study data report. She also responded to the Council's questions regarding the length of stay, and the median age for surveys was similar across other areas in Florida.

11. MONTHLY REPORTS PROVIDED IN PACKETS

Susan Phillips presented the monthly update for the St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra, and the Beaches Visitors and Convention Bureau, including visitor and convention information, and the digital ads. She displayed a video from Tinsley advertising for the State of Tourism Industry Event.

12. MEMBER COMMENTS

Dylan Rumrell discussed House Bill 1221, noting that it did not appear likely to pass during the current session. The bill proposed eliminating the Tourist Development Tax (TDT) to use the funds to offset property taxes. He stated that to keep monitoring and reaching out to everyone to ensure the bill does not resurface next year. Additionally, he thanked staff for the additional backup material and reported that, based on conversation with beach residents, activity at restaurants and shops were higher than last year.

Phillips noted a correction regarding the 100th anniversary and explained that the proposed date had to be changed due to the equipment being back-ordered. She stated she would inform the Council once a new date was determined. Additionally, she noted the need to speak out against the land swap involving Parks and Recreation GTM and to block any commercial development.

Blevins noted that occupancy and average daily rates were remaining flat and asked if others were seeing similar trends. Discussion ensued regarding average daily rates, bed tax revenue, and a decline in booking pace during the month of April.

Kass reported speaking with David about additional ways they could assist and noted that the City would not be able to develop an app. He suggested that the project be handled through TDC or Susan Phillips, proposing the use of an outside contractor to create a Nights of Lights app and directing the VCB to take the lead. Discussion ensued, focusing not only on the Nights of Lights but also on utilizing the app for broader promotional efforts related to all events hosted in the city.

Sikes-Kline recommended that Melissa Wissel provide an update on the City's activities. Melissa Wissel, City of St. Augustine Communication Director, shared details about a city project involving an innovative, web-based interface to display general parking availability. She clarified that the city was not pursuing a mobile app and encouraged the Council to help spread the word about attending the City's public meetings. Discussion ensued on collaborating with Troy Blevins and Susan Phillips (VCB).

13. NEXT MEETING DATE

Masters stated that the next meeting was scheduled for June 16, 2025. She also noted that the VCB and Cultural Council would present their marketing plans, and the Council would review the budget.

14. ADJOURN

With no further business to come before the Council, the meeting adjourned at 3:09 p.m.

Approved _____, 2025

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA

By: _____
Irving Kass, Chair

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

By: _____
Deputy Clerk