



**Highlands County Tourist Development Council
Highlands County Government Center Boardroom
Regular Meeting
January 30, 2025 @ 8:15 a.m.**

Regular Meeting

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:16 a.m. by Josh Stewart.

Roll Call

Council Members Present:

Josh Stewart (Acting Chair)

Maritza Christansen

Andy Kesling

Lydia Capote

Debra Worley

Cindy Garren

Absent:

Commissioner Campbell

Elizabeth Compton

Christine Hatfield

Also, Present:

Casey Hartt, Lead Marketing Consultant

Reagan Fultz, Tourism Marketing & Project Manager

Leah Sauls, Development Services Director

Alex Noto, Madden Media

Jared Lee, City of Sebring

Sadie Tyson, Town of Lake Placid

Dennis Murray, Town of Lake Placid

Charlette Rodriguez, Town of Lake Placid

Alan Verlander, Airstream Ventures

Sarah Maldonado, Community Member

Ms. Fultz established that a quorum was present. Mr. Stewart established that the meeting was properly noticed.

2. Acceptance of TDC Meeting Minutes of December 16th, 2024.

Mr. Stewart inquired if there were any comments or changes to the minutes of December 16th, 2024, to which there were none.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Cristiansen, to approve the meeting minutes.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

3. Financial and Office Reports

Ms. Fultz presented the revenue and office reports that showed a balance total of \$2,061,580.15 October – September for FY 23/24 and \$175,788.94 FY 24/25 with only October having been reported at the time.

Council members received detailed printouts of financial and office reports. Council members had no questions on the financial or office reports.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Worley, to approve the financial report.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

4. Marketing and Event Updates

A. Destination and Budget Update

Ms. Hartt directed everyone to look at the first report which indicates the final numbers of the 23/24 FY Budget through September 30th. Recording of the full presentation and discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/3UgGKJKbsns starting at the 4:24 minute mark.

Mr. Stewart asked if there were any questions or comments, and none were given.

B. Digital Marketing Update from Madden Media

Ms. Noto presented to the Highlands County Tourist Development Council the updates that have been made to the Visit Sebring website. Ms. Noto stated that the website was launched on Tuesday January 28th, 2025. Ms. Noto shared a slide indicating the website overview. Copies of the full presentation were shared with the TDC members in their agendas. The full presentation and discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/3UgGKJKbsns starting at the 18:14 minute mark.

Mr. Stewart asked if the social media content that is shared on the site is curated or auto published, and Ms. Noto indicated that is curated by TDC staff. Mr. Stewart also asked what the frequency of the blog and newsletter content is, and Ms. Noto stated that it is monthly for the blogs. Ms. Hartt stated that the newsletter is intended to be distributed monthly as well. There are no other questions asked.

C. Sports Events Updates from Airstream Ventures

Mr. Verlander presented to the TDC on the current sporting events booked within Highlands County. He reminded the council that the events are booked from April to December. Mr. Verlander also wanted to inform the council that there has been a third individual who has been added to the sports sales team who is in Orlando and is

responsible for the new events that have been booked. The full presentation and discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/3UgGKJKbsns starting at the 34:33 minute mark.

Questions are asked and answered by Mr. Verlander.

5. Items for Voting

A. Southern Outlaw Drag Boat Association Date Change

Ms. Fultz stated that there is a copy of a letter provided in the meeting agenda packets from the Outlaw Drag Boat Association requesting to move their event from September to May. She noted that the Town of Lake Placid has approved this change however for grant purposes the TDC must approve as well. Recording of the full discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/3UgGKJKbsns starting at the 34:33 minute mark.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Cristiansen, to approve amending the TDC, grant agreement with Southern Outlaw Dragboat Association for their event's date moving from September to May for the remaining years on the grant.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

B. Sports Facility Enhancement Grant Program Presentations

i. City of Sebring

- a. Mr. Lee presented as the Budget and Grants Coordinator for the City of Sebring. He shared with the council in their agenda packets the facilities that the City of Sebring is requesting funding for. Recording of the presentation and full discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/3UgGKJKbsns starting at the 54:44 minute mark.

- b. The council asked questions, and they were answered by Mr. Lee.

ii. Town of Lake Placid

- a. Ms. Rodriquez, Mr. Murray, and Ms. Tyson spoke on behalf of the Town of Lake Placid. After Ms. Rodriquez introduced the group and thanked the council Mr. Murray began the presentation. Recording of the presentation and full discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/3UgGKJKbsns starting at the 1:09:29 hour mark.

iii. Alternative—County-wide Sports Facility Enhancement Study

- a. Ms. Hartt commented that there has been a great deal of collaboration and thought in the proposals presented by the Town of Lake Placid and the City of Sebring. Ms. Hartt elaborated on a plan to include other priority areas within the county. Recording of the presentation and full discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/3UgGKJKbsns starting at the 1:24:19 hour mark.

TDC members asked questions that were answered by Ms. Hartt.

Mr. Kelsing made a motion, seconded by Ms. Capote, to approve the alternative plan of contracting Huddle Up Group study to encompass the entire county for the expense of 65,000 dollars.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

C. Water Experience Development Grant Program Presentations

i. Lake June Pontoon

Ms. Smoyer presented to the council and started off by thanking them for the opportunity. She drew the attention of the council to the logo to discuss the thought behind the design. Recording of the presentation and full discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/G-VV_9nFdX0 starting at the 1:13 minute mark.

Questions were asked and answered by Ms. Smoyer.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Worley, that the TDC approve a 50,000-dollar reimbursable grant for the next 3 years.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

D. Welcome Monument Revisions

Ms. Hartt presented the proposed revisions to the current standing welcome monument. Recording of the presentation and full discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/G-VV_9nFdX0 starting at the 18:29 minute mark.

Ms. Capote made a motion, seconded by Ms. Worley, to approve option two to increase the size and darken the color of lettering on the sign.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

E. Hospitality Training

Ms. Hartt reminded the council that implementing hospitality training within Highlands County was previously discussed pre-covid. She presented a potential training option to the council for consideration. Recording of the presentation and full discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/G-VV_9nFdX0 starting at the 21:15 minute mark.

Ms. Worley made a motion, seconded by Ms. Garren, that we spend 12,500 dollars for a 2-hour local hospitality training session 4 in total, 4 in total. 1 in Lake Placid. 1 in Avon Park, and 2 in Sebring pending the details at next meeting.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

F. April TDC Meeting Date Change to May 1

Ms. Sauls presented a request from Commissioner Campbell to move the April 24, 2025 TDC meeting to May 1, 2025. Recording of full discussion can be found at the URL youtu.be/G-VV_9nFdX0 starting at the 31:30-minute mark.

Ms. Christiansen made a motion, seconded by Mr. Kesling, to approve quarterly TDC meeting, scheduled for April 24th, 2025 to May 1st, 2025, at 8:15 am. Location to remain the same.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

6. Old Business/Discussion/ Informational

A. TDC Taxable Privileges

Ms. Hartt shared a quick reminder that paying the TDT is a mandated tax. Language included in the members' packets read that for taxable properties who fail or refuse to charge and collect the tax, the property owner is liable and is guilty of a misdemeanor in the first degree as written in Florida Statute 125.0104..

B. Tourism Awards Press Release

Ms. Hartt reminded everyone about the Tourism Awards and hopes that everyone will nominate somebody.

C. TDC Grant Committee Update

Ms. Hartt updated that the Grant Committee meeting will be February 26th. She also added that this meeting has been publicly noticed.

D. Sports Complex Management Update

Ms. Hartt shared that the owners are requesting an RFP be drafted to get to a position to know what TDC wants proposals to look like. Ms. Hartt stated that TDC staff is hoping to accomplish this in the next couple of weeks.

E. Property Purchase

Ms. Hartt shared that this is regarding the property that is next to the existing sports complex. She then shared that there was an offer made but the owner has turned it down at this point.

F. Indoor Facility Update

Ms. Hartt spoke about a call that was had with Jason from Synergy Sports and the county legal department on December 20th. There were some questions posed by the legal department and some research that would need to be done to identify how this project could move forward. She stated that TDC staff is waiting to hear back from legal.

G. Tourism Development Coordinator Position Update

Ms. Sauls shared that the interviews had been completed. The selected candidate, Sarah Maldonado, was present in the meeting. Ms. Maldonado stood up to introduce

herself and thank the council for inviting her to the meeting. She stated how she is looking forward to joining the team and partnering with the community.

7. Public Input

Mr. Stewart asks if there is any public input. No input was given.

8. Board Member Roundtable

Time was made for board member round table.

9. Upcoming Meetings & TDC-Sponsored Events

- **Nov. 4-7:** ING Fall Forum at Inn on the Lakes
- **Nov. 5:** Citrus Golf Trail Open Pro-Am at Sun 'N Lake
- **Nov. 6-8:** Citrus Golf Trail Open at Sun 'N Lake
- **Nov. 9-10:** United States Fastpitch Association (USFA) Youth Softball Tournament at Sports Complex
- **Dec. 7-8:** Spartan Trifecta Weekend at Skipper Ranch
- **Dec. 14-15:** UFFL State Tournament (Pending TDC date change approval)
- **Dec. 27-30:** Citrus Golf Trail Ladies Invitational at Sun 'N Lake
- **Jan. 30:** TDC Quarterly Meeting
- **May 1:** TDC Quarterly Meeting

10. Adjournment

Mr. Stewart adjourned the meeting at 10:26 a.m.

For all backup documents, please contact Highlands County Public Information Office
863-402-6500.