



**Highlands County Tourist Development Council
Highlands County Government Center Boardroom
Regular Meeting
October 31, 2024 @ 8:15 a.m.**

Regular Meeting

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:18 a.m. by Josh Stewart.

Roll Call

Council Members Present:

Josh Stewart (Acting Chair)
Andy Kesling
Debra Worley

Maritza Christansen
Christine Hatfield
Cindy Garren

Absent:

Commissioner Campbell
Lydia Capote

Elizabeth Compton

Also, Present:

Casey Hartt, Lead Marketing Consultant
Reagan Fultz, Tourism Marketing & Project Manager
Leah Sauls, Development Services Director
Alan Verlander, Airstream Ventures, LLC
Jason Boudrie, Synergy Sports
Alex Noto, Madden Media
Brandon Gunn, Parks and Facilities Director
Danielle Kelly, City of Avon Park
Jared Lee, City of Sebring
Chantel Strahan, Highlands County Legal Assistant
Linda Udall, Toastmasters
Jennifer Codo-Salisbury, Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC)

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

2. Acceptance of TDC Meeting Minutes of August 8, 2024.

Mr. Stewart inquired if there were any comments or changes to the minutes of August 8, 2024, to which there were none.

3. Financial and Office Reports

Ms. Fultz presented the revenue and office reports that showed a balance total of \$1,694,476.46 October – June for FY 23/24.

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

4. Marketing and Event Updates

A. EAR/Comp Plan Presentation

Ms. Codo-Salisbury explained the CFRPC is working with the Highlands County organization and communities in updating the Highlands County Comprehensive Plan. The current comp plan has a 2030 horizon. They will be reviewing the policies of the plan, as well as any changes in state legislation since the last plan's conception, changes in trends and growth within the county, and more. She explained that tourism falls within the economic development element of the plan and highlighted the current policy around tourism. She explained this is something they will be looking at for any potential updates as they move through the evaluation and appraisal report (EAR) process.

B. Marketing and Public Relations Update

Ms. Hartt presented the Highlands County Tourist Development Council Marketing update that included the information on Q4 Media and PR Highlights; Staff Outreach & Events; and a 2023-2024 Budget Update.

1. Public Relations Update

Ms. Hartt shared that FY24 Q4 saw promotion of the Caladium Festival which secured more than 60 pieces of coverage, as well as 2 TV spots on Tampa news channels secured by the TDC staff.

2. Shellie from Wetumpka Visits

Ms. Hartt recapped the visit from Shellie Phelps, the executive director for the Wetumpka Chamber of Commerce. She shared that Shellie visited and toured downtown Lake Placid, Avon Park and Sebring, holding stakeholder meetings in each community and serving as Keynote Speaker for the Tourism Luncheon. Ms. Hartt noted Shellie emphasized that if there was anything Wetumpka could have done better following their influx of tourism from HGTV's Hometown Takeover, it was to work together as a region, and not see Wetumpka as a single city. Ms. Hartt shared that is what the TDC staff is working to accomplish, to promote Avon Park and Lake Placid to people that might be visiting Sebring post-Hometown Takeover, and make the entire county a destination for those visitors.

C. Digital Marketing Update from Madden Media

Ms. Noto presented a FY24 Overall recap of the efforts made by Madden Media on digital marketing and campaigns for Visit Sebring. Council members received detailed printouts of the reports. Ms. Noto noted the FY saw a 23% increase in Engaged Sessions on VisitSebring.com YOY, and 50% increase in Engagement Rate, and a 13% increase in Average Session Duration on the website.

Ms. Noto also shared new media plan, asset capturing, and creative, including the new campaign for Visit Sebring digital marketing and storytelling efforts, that being “Come Full Circle”. The campaign highlights the convenience and accessibility of the area’s central location, and the connection or “Circle of Friends” of Avon Park, Sebring and Lake Placid, the versatility of experiences, and the satisfaction that comes from a well-rounded trip.

D. Sports Tourism Update from Airstream Ventures

Ms. Verlander presented an update on Airstream Ventures Sports Tourism efforts for Highlands County. Mr. Verlander provided updates on conferences attended and upcoming, events brought to Highlands County in the fiscal year, those booked for the upcoming year, and those they are in serious talks or beginning conversation with about coming to the Sebring area. He also touched on the impact from the Southern Outlaw Dragboat Association’s event on Lake June the weekend of September 7-8, which brought 45 race teams and crew and attracted over 1,500 spectators, with local vendors participating in the event as well.

5. Items for Voting

A. HUG Sports Complex Analysis Presentation

Jon Schmieder from Huddle Up Group (HUG) presented study results of an analysis completed by Huddle Up Group on Management of the Highlands County Sports Complex. Recording of the full presentation can be found at the link <https://youtu.be/U9q8R1utRHk> starting at the 7:55-minute mark.

In addition to facility enhancement recommendations, the study determined that the current team over the Sports Complex has managed the facility to the best of their ability, but that being a government department there are constraints that they will not be able to overcome to operate the facility at its highest and best. As such, the Huddle Up Group recommended that a public private partnership (P3 model) with a third-party management company would be more optimal.

Members posed questions answered by Mr. Schmieder and county staff, including Brandon Gunn, Director of Parks and Facilities department, which currently manages the Sports Complex.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Hatfield, to present the Highlands County Multi-Sport Complex Analysis results to the Board of County Commissioners.

All Council members voted aye. The motion carried.

B. Indoor Facility Update

Mr. Boudrie presented an update on the indoor facility. He recapped that last he presented to the TDC there was a developer interested in donating land that would house an indoor facility as well as new outdoor sports amenities. He explained that since then, there was another developer that had come forward, also expressing interest in donating land for the indoor sports complex, but that this new land would be in much closer proximity to the existing Multi-Sport Complex. This option would separate the original plans of having indoor and outdoor facilities on the same piece of land, instead building the indoor on the new offered land, while expanding the current sports complex to be able to host larger tournaments and events in coordination with the indoor facility.

The entire presentation can be found at the link <https://youtu.be/U9q8R1utRHk> starting at the 40:07-minute mark and carrying over into a second part at the link <https://youtu.be/pk1gefCyjHw>.

Members posed questions answered by Mr. Boudrie and county staff.

Mr. Kesling made a motion, seconded by Ms. Garren, to move forward with the separation of the indoor and outdoor plans for the facility previously presented.

All Council members voted aye. The motion carried.

C. Sports Complex Expansion & Appraisal

Ms. Hartt explained that the next steps in looking at expanding the Sports Complex would be an appraisal of the land that's been presented as available for purchase.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Mr. Kesling, to approve the expense of up to \$5,000 for an appraisal of the property.

All Council members voted aye. The motion carried.

D. Sports Facility Enhancement Grant Program Policies

Ms. Hartt presented the policies for the TDC's new Sports Facility Enhancement Grant Program.

Mr. Kesling made a motion, seconded by Ms. Christiansen, to approve the Sports Facility Enhancement Grant Program Policies.

All Council members voted aye. The motion carried.

The policies can be found at tinyurl.com/VS-Sport-Facility-Grant.

E. Water Experience Development Grant Program Policies

Ms. Hartt presented the policies for the TDC's new Water Experience Development Grant Program.

Mr. Kesling made a motion, seconded by Ms. Christiansen, to approve the Water Experience Development Grant Program Policies.

All Council members voted aye. The motion carried.

The policies can be found at tinyurl.com/VS-Water-Experience-Grant.

F. UFFL Event Grant Date Change

Mr. Verlander presented a request for a change of date for the United Flag Football League's Event that was awarded a grant by the TDC, moving the event from September 14-15, 2024 to December 14-15, 2024.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Christiansen, to approve the change of date.

All Council members voted aye. The motion carried.

G. TDC Chair for 2025

Mr. Kesling made a motion, seconded by Ms. Christiansen, to appoint Commissioner Campbell as the TDC Chair for 2025.

All Council members voted aye. The motion carried.

H. 2025 TDC Regular Meeting Dates

Mr. Kesling made a motion, seconded by Ms. Christiansen, to approve the meeting dates for 2025 as follows:

Thursday, January 30, 2025

Thursday, April 24, 2025

Thursday, August 7, 2025

Thursday, October 30, 2025

All Council members voted aye. The motion carried.

6. Old Business/Discussion

A. TDC Grant Committee

Ms. Hartt shared that the County's legal team feels it is time for a full review of the TDC's current event grant program. As such, she explained that the TDC staff is proposing a series of grant committee meetings with the goal of bringing a revised grant program to the TDC at their April quarterly meeting. She asked all members interested in being part of this process to let staff know.

B. Ozark Outdoors

Ms. Fultz shared that this week she had received a letter from Ozark Outdoors that they are cancelling their event in the area. She clarified no funds had yet been encumbered towards their previously approved grant, and so the funds would remain available for future event grants.

7. Public Input

Ms. Kelly, the City Manager for Avon Park, was present to relay concerns about the county monument signs. She shared the main concern was advertising Sebring so large on the sign in the North end of the county. She invited the TDC to present to Avon Park City Council to share the work the TDC is doing, as she felt the TDC is doing amazing things for the county.

Ms. Hartt confirmed the lettering had gone up the day before. She shared that she asked the installation team to pause so staff could go see the signs in person in response to the concerns being made by the public. She also pointed out the previous sign only mentioned Highlands County, and the new sign does the same while also listing each municipality by name.

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

10. Adjournment

Mr. Stewart adjourned the meeting at 10:44 a.m.

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