Highlands County Tourist Development Council
Highlands County Government Center Boardroom
Regular Meeting
April 30, 2026 @ 8:15 a.m.

Draft Regular Meeting

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:27 a.m. by Commissioner Campbell.

Roll Call

Council Members Present:
Commissioner Campbell
Elizabeth Compton
Andy Kesling
Kristyn Robbins
Cindy Garren

Absent:
Christine Hatfield
Lydia Capote
Debra Worley
Josh Stewart

Also, Present:
Casey Hartt, Lead Marketing Consultant
Reagan Fultz, Tourism Marketing & Project Manager
Leah Sauls, Development Services Director
Paola Cruz, Tourism Development Coordinator
Jen Carlisle, Madden Media
J.R Rozier, Airstream Ventures
Kate Strickland, Citrus Golf Trail Marketing

Ms. Fultz established that a quorum had been met.

2. Acceptance of TDC Meeting Minutes of January 29, 2026.

Commissioner Campbell asked if there were any comments or questions to the minutes of January 29, 2026. No comments or corrections were noted.

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

All Council members voted in favor, and the motion carried.

3. Financial and Office Reports

Ms. Fultz stated that she included the state financial reports covering October through January. She noted that the charts would look different because Fiscal Year 2024 data was added to provide a comparison and show how current trends are aligning more closely with that period. She also explained that she did not call as many names due to two vacancies currently on the TDC Board.

Ms. Fultz explained that the elected official seat rotates and this year the seat will transition to Avon Park, as Lake Placid has completed its term. She also reviewed the process for electing the member and stated that the board is expected to be fully staffed by August.

Ms. Fultz asked if the board had any questions. Board members inquired only about which members would be replaced.

4. Marketing and Event Updates

A. Destination and Budget Update

Ms. Hartt provided an update on staff activity and stakeholder outreach. She discussed ongoing communication and collaboration with TDC consultants, prospective vendors, and new and existing partners. She stated that she and Ms. Fultz finalized the draft for the FY27 budget and provided an update on the distribution of TDC's new window clings to local businesses.

Ms. Hartt also provided an update on public relations efforts through Much PR on behalf of Visit Sebring. Updates included media pitches to Travel + Leisure, a press release for the Caladium Festival, published articles, attendance at the Regional Team Retreat in February, and participation in the International Media Marketplace in New York City.

Ms. Hartt then provided a facilities update and reviewed the status of ongoing projects. She shared information regarding upcoming projects and events, including the Tourism Insights and Awards Breakfast and the opening of the Avon Park Baseball Museum. She concluded with a budget update and opened the floor for questions.

Ms. Hartt then provided an update on behalf of Ms. Phelps-Whitfield. She reported that Ms. Phelps-Whitfield attended a bus conference, conducted three community stakeholder meetings, attended the Regional Team Retreat, and facilitated hospitality training, along with several additional community workshops and outreach activities.

The presentation and any discussion are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 08:26 mark at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=506.

B. Digital Marketing Update from Madden Media

Ms. Carlisle provided an update on the previous quarter and reported that the website continues to experience healthy engagement levels, along with strong in state traffic. She explained outbound clicks and provided additional insight into website engagement and performance metrics.
Ms. Carlisle reviewed paid media campaigns and their performance, noting that the additional budget allocation resulted in increased views and engagement. She explained

that the Meta prospecting campaigns utilize a split strategy between in state and out of state audiences. In state campaigns focus on destination specific messaging, while out of state campaigns emphasize Florida branding to generate broader interest.

Additional updates included a media performance overview, search engine optimization performance, and summaries of Google and Meta platform analytics, all of which reflected positive overall engagement. Ms. Carlisle also highlighted website enhancements designed to make events more prominent in search results.

Ms. Carlisle concluded the update by discussing opportunities to better utilize artificial intelligence and evolving search behaviors, as well as the importance of continued content creation to engage audiences. She also reviewed potential future website enhancements, including updated photography and video content.

The presentation and any discussion are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 24:40 mark at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=1480.

C. Sports Events Updates from Airstream Ventures

Mr. Rozier provided an update regarding conventions attended by him and his team, as well as upcoming conventions scheduled for later in the year. He stated that the team conducted 51 meetings with event planners and reported positive discussions regarding opportunities to bring new events to the county, resulting in increased visitation year over year.

Mr. Rozier explained that the team's goal is to secure 22 different events for the county, not including multi event opportunities associated with various organizations. He concluded by stating that projected goals for events held, room nights booked, and overall tourism impact are expected to be met or exceeded.

The presentation and any discussion are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 38:13 mark at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=2293.

D. Citrus Golf Trail Marketing Update

Ms. Strickland began her update by discussing the recent Citrus Golf Trail meeting held the previous afternoon, stating that it provided a strong outlook for the upcoming months and outlined future growth opportunities for the organization.

Ms. Strickland reported that social media engagement continues to grow steadily despite having no financial investment in advertising efforts. She noted a slight decline in email marketing performance but stated that a plan is already in place to help attract additional interest and improve engagement.

Ms. Strickland also explained that, although there have been some issues with the website, progress is being made to correct minor errors. She stated that the organization now fully owns the website domain, which has been released from the county firewall. She then provided an overview of the redesigned website and its new features, as well as the release of a performance dashboard distributed through a post meeting link. The dashboard provides insights into content performance, audience growth, and monthly analytics snapshots.

The presentation and any discussion are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 47:19 mark at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=2839.

5. Items for Voting

A. Caladium Festival High Impact Grant Funding Request (July 24-26, 2026)

Ms. Jennifer Bush, the executive director of the Greater Chamber of Lake Placid, reported that the festival attracted approximately 17,000 to 20,000 visitors over the three-day event, with an estimated 40 percent of attendees traveling from outside the area. She stated that these figures were obtained through the use of Placer.ai analytics data.

Ms. Fultz provided additional explanation regarding Placer.ai and explained to Ms. Garren that the reports provide percentage-based visitor data through aggregated mobile application usage and origin location tracking. She noted that the data identifies where visitors traveled from and compiles the information into reporting metrics.

Ms. Leah Sauls also contributed to the discussion by providing further insight into how the reports are generated and the parameters used to compile the data. Ms. Fultz clarified that all information collected through the reporting process is anonymous.

Ms. Bush concluded by stating that the information allows organizers to identify key visitor markets and better target advertising efforts in those areas.

The Board received the grant application as part of the voting item under consideration.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Compton, to approve the grant funding request from the Greater Lake Placid Chamber of Commerce for the 2026 Caladium Festival with funding up to $10,000 based on $0.50per verified attendee. Reimbursable grant funds are to be used for tent rentals, bus rentals for Caladium Field bus tours during the event, and portable restroom facilities.

All Council members voted in favor, and the motion carried.

Commissioner Campbell also commended everything Ms. Bush had done for the chamber and announced her departure on May 8th.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at mark 51:07 at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=3067

B. Visit Sebring Classic Sport or Special Event Grant Funding Request (October 12-14, 2026)

Mr. Rozier presented a Sports or Special Event Grant request on behalf of Minor League Golf Tour for the 2026 Visit Sebring Classic, scheduled to be held October 12 through October 14, 2026, at Sun 'N Lake Golf Club.

Mr. Kesling made a motion to approve the Sport or Special Event Grant Request from Minor League Golf Tour in an amount of up to $4,000 reimbursed at $20 per verified room night for their 2026 Visit Sebring Classic. All grant funds are reimbursable and may be used for facility rental, event officials, and digital marketing. The motion was seconded by Ms. Garren.

All Council members voted in favor, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at mark 57:04 at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=3460.

C. Citrus Golf Trail Open Sport or Special Event Grant Funding Request (November 18-20, 2026

Mr. Rozier presented another Sports or Special Event Grant request on behalf of Minor League Golf Tour for the 2026 Citrus Golf Trail Open, scheduled to be held November 18 through November 20, 2026, at Sun 'N Lake Golf Club.

Mr. Kesling made a motion to approve the Sport or Special Event Grant Request from Minor League Golf Tour in an amount of up to $5,000 reimbursed at $20 per verified room night for their Citrus Golf Trail Open at Sun N Lake Golf Club. The motion was seconded by Ms. Robbins.

All Council members voted in favor, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at mark 58:57 at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=3537.

D. UFFL Facility Fee Grant Funding Request (August 8-9, 2026)

Mr. Rozier presented a facility rental fee grant request on behalf of Norman Mclean with UFFL for their Weekend Warrior event to be held at the Highlands County Multi-Sports Complex on August 8 through 9, 2026.

Ms. Compton made a motion to approve the Facility Rental Fee Grant Request from UFFL for their Weekend Warrior Event in an amount of up to $5,000 for their September Softball Event taking place at the Highlands County multi-sports complex. The motion was seconded by Ms. Garren.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at mark 59:55 at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=3595.

E. USFA Facility Fee Grant Funding Request (September 12-13, 2026)

Mr. Rozier presented a facility rental fee grant request on behalf of Kim Largin with US Fastpitch for their October Softball Event to be held at the Highlands County Multi-Sports Complex on September 12 through the 13, 2026.

Ms. Garren made a motion to approve the Facility Rental Fee Grant Request from USFA in an amount of up to $5,000 for their September Softball Event taking place at the Highlands County multi-sports complex. The motion was seconded by Ms. Robbins.

All Council members voted in favor, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at mark 1:01:05 at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=3665.

F. USFA Facility Fee Grant Funding Request (October 24-25, 2026)

Mr. Rozier presented a second facility rental fee grant request on behalf of Kim Largin with US Fastpitch for their October Softball Event to be held at the Highlands County Multi-Sports Complex on October 24 through 25, 2026.

Ms. Garren made a motion to approve the Facility Rental Fee Grant Request from USFA in an amount of up to $5,000 for their October Softball Event taking place at the Highlands County Multi-Sports complex. The motion was seconded by Ms. Garren.

All Council members voted in favor, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at mark 1:02:15 at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=3735.

G. Phase 2-4 Synergy Sports

Ms. Hartt presented the agreement with Synergy Sports Charlotte LLC, which outlines the phases for both facility projects in an effort to streamline the overall process. She explained that the agreement authorizes progression through the construction and preconstruction phases, contingent upon board approval.

Ms. Hartt further noted that each phase requires approval before proceeding to the next stage. Ms. Hartt stated that the agreement had previously been approved by the County Commission and was being presented to the TDC for review and consideration.

Ms. Garren made a motion to approve expenses totaling up to $475,000 for the agreement with Synergy Sports Charlotte LLC, to be paid from Fund 152 (Tourist Development Trust). The motion was seconded by Ms. Robbins. All council members voted in favor, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at mark 01:03:27 at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=3807.

H. TDC Capital Project Proposed Guidelines

Ms. Fultz presented the proposed TDC capital funding guidelines. She explained that portions of the document were developed from previous discussions held by the TDC Board and the County Commission and were intended to provide guidance regarding the information applicants should submit and the criteria the board would like to see for capital funding requests associated with the third cent tourist development tax revenues.

Ms. Fultz noted that the guidelines are considered a working document and may be revised or modified at any time.

All Council members voted in favor, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at mark 01:06:32 at https://youtu.be/wPIhudvPxQU?t=3992.

I. Florida Wildlife Corridor Mural Program Funding Request
Ms. Jane Benham, Director of Avon Park Main Street, presented a funding request in the amount of $5,000 to support the proposed Florida Wildlife Corridor community mural project in downtown Avon Park. She explained the vetting process used in selecting the mural location and determining the subject matter to be featured in the artwork. Ms. Benham stated that the mural would highlight local wildlife while also acknowledging the area's connection to the Avon Park Air Force Range.

Ms. Benham presented a rendering of the proposed mural to the board and explained that the funding request was contingent upon award of the primary grant funding from the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation and subject to execution of an agreement acceptable to the County.

Commissioner Campbell opened the floor for questions. Ms. Garren inquired about future maintenance of the mural, and Ms. Benham stated that maintenance responsibilities would be handled by the building owner. Additional discussion followed regarding elements that could be incorporated into the mural design, as well as clarification regarding the proposed use of funding if approved.

Ms. Garren made a motion to approve the funding request from Avon Park Main Street in the amount of $5,000 to support the proposed Florida Wildlife Corridor community mural project in Downtown Avon Park, contingent upon award of the primary grant funding from the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation and subject to execution of an agreement acceptable to the County.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Robbins. All Council members voted in favor, and the motion carried.

J. August Meeting Date Change
Commissioner Campbell stated that, due to a personal scheduling conflict, the August meeting date may need to be rescheduled to August 20, 2026, pending board consensus. He also noted the possibility of holding a special meeting in June if necessary.

Mr. Kesling made a motion to approve the Regular TDC meeting scheduled for August 13, 2026, to Thursday, August 20, 2026, with time and location to remain the same. The motion was seconded by Ms. Robbins. All Council members voted in favor, and the motion carried.

6. Old Business / Discussion / Informational

A. Lake June Lagoon Update

Ms. Kristen Smoyer, owner of Lake June Lagoon, provided an update on the inflatable water park project. She shared information regarding the park's layout, features specific to the Lake Placid location, pricing structure, and estimated opening timeline.

Ms. Smoyer explained the origin of the inflatable structures, including the companies responsible for their design and engineering, and reviewed several of the main attractions planned for Lake June Lagoon. She stated that the project is intended to enhance both the local community and the area's tourism industry.

The floor was then opened for questions. Ms. Garren inquired about the possibility of hosting future tournaments at the facility. Ms. Smoyer responded that the venue would be better suited for special events rather than tournament style competitions.

Ms. Smoyer concluded the presentation by explaining that the current development represents Phase 1 of the project. She noted that initial operations will include a temporary capacity limit of approximately 40 to 50 guests, infrared alarm cameras to prevent after-hours access, established hours of operation, and ongoing cleaning and maintenance procedures for the inflatable park. She added that additional features and expansions are planned for Phase 2.

B. National Travel & Tourism Week Proclamation (May 3-9)

Ms. Hartt presented a proclamation recognizing National Travel and Tourism Week, observed May 3 through May 9, which she stated would also be presented to the Board of County Commissioners.

Ms. Hartt also announced several upcoming events and initiatives, including the opening of the Avon Park Baseball Museum and the Tourism Insights and Awards Breakfast. She concluded by inviting board members to attend the Board of County Commissioners' meeting for the presentation of the proclamation.

C. Tourism Awards& Insights Breakfast

Ms. Hartt presented a flyer promoting the 2026 Tourism Insights and Awards Breakfast and encouraged board members and attendees to participate in the event. She stated that Nerissa Okiye would serve as the keynote speaker and noted that doors would open at 8:00 a.m.

Ms. Hartt further explained that tickets are $15 per person, encouraged early registration, and stated that breakfast would be included with registration.

D. TDC Vacancies

Ms. Fultz announced that there are currently two vacancies on the TDC Council. She reviewed the specific eligibility criteria and requirements associated with each vacant position.

E. TDT Local Tax Collection

Ms. Hartt explained that she was presenting the draft for the local tax ordinance that had been developed in collaboration with legal counsel. She stated that the purpose of the presentation was to ensure the TDC was comfortable with the proposed draft and offered to answer any questions from the board. No questions were raised.

F. FY26 Quarterly Report
Ms. Fultz provided an update regarding the quarterly report and stated that it was being presented as an informational item. She explained that the report had previously been distributed electronically and that the purpose of the presentation was to ensure broader quarterly distribution and accessibility.

7. Public Input

Time was made for public input.

8. Board Member Roundtable

Time was made for board member roundtable.

9. Upcoming Meetings & TDC-Sponsored Events

- May 1-3: Inspire Dance at Alan Jay Arena
- May 2-3: USFA at Highlands County Sports Complex
- May 3-9: National Travel and Tourism Week
- May 5: National Travel and Tourism Week Proclamation at Board of County Commissioners Meeting
- May 9: Avon Park Baseball Museum Grand Opening
- May 12: Annual Tourism Insights and Awards Breakfast at Circle Theatre
- May 30-31: GVILLE 7v7 Flag Football at Highlands County Sports Complex
- June 5-7: Florida Prep Lacrosse's Lax O Lakes - Boys at Highlands County Sports Complex; Girls at Lake June Park
- June 13-14: USFA at Highlands County Sports Complex
- August 13: Quarterly TDC Meeting *(possible date change)*
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10. Adjournment

Commissioner Campbell adjourned the meeting at **10:09AM.**

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