



**Highlands County Tourist Development Council
Highlands County Government Center Boardroom
Regular Meeting
May 1st, 2025 @ 8:15 a.m.**

Regular Meeting

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:15 a.m. by Mr. Campbell

Roll Call

Council Members Present:

Commissioner Campbell (Chair)
Maritza Christansen
Debra Worley
Elizabeth Compton
Cindy Garren

Absent:

Christine Hatfield
Lydia Capote
Andy Kesling
Josh Stewart

Also, Present:

Casey Hartt, Lead Marketing Consultant
Reagan Fultz, Tourism Marketing & Project Manager
Leah Sauls, Development Services Director
Alex Noto, Madden Media
Charlette Rodriguez, Town of Lake Placid
Alan Verlander, Airstream Ventures
Sarah Maldonado, Tourism Development Coordinator
Kamla Long, Executive Director of Avon Park Chamber of Commerce
Cole McNeal, Huddle Up Group
Jason Boudrie, Synergy Sports
Jared Lee, City of Sebring
Rob Livingston, Sebring Firemen, Inc.
Ms. Maldonado established that a quorum had been met.

2. Financial and Office Reports

Ms. Fultz presented the revenue and office reports. It was noted that TDT collections are up by 20% year-over-year through January.

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

3. Acceptance of TDC Meeting Minutes of January 30th, 2025.

Mr. Cambell inquired if there were any comments or changes to the minutes of January 20th, 2025. No comments or corrections were noted.

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

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

4. Marketing and Event Updates

A. Destination and Budget Update

Ms. Hartt indicated that occupancy rates have increased year-over-year. Ms. Hartt shared a recap of staff activity which included launching a new website and travel guide, coordinating two media itineraries for travel writers, in collaboration with Cycle Here media a new 30 second commercial was made, coordinated a county wide facility study.

Ms. Hartt asked if there were any questions or comments, and Ms. Worley commented that if needed, the last paddler standing event could be held at Lake June. Ms. Hartt thanked Ms. Worley for the offering however, noted that the event specifically identified H.L. Bishop Park as the desired location for the event to take place.

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 pointed out that since the updates to the website the average session duration has increased year-over-year. Copies of the full presentation were shared with the TDC members in the agenda packets.

Mr. Campbell asked if there were any questions or comments from the board. Mr. Campbell commented that during a cruise last week he met a couple who mentioned the Sebring area due to the HGTV spotlight.

C. Sports Events Updates from Airstream Ventures

Mr. Verlander opened with a comment stating that at a conference attendees were mentioning to him their view of Sebring on HGTV. Mr. Verlander presented to TDC the current sporting events booked within Highlands County.

Mr. Verlander asked the board if there were any questions. Ms. Garren asked what he feels is the reason for an event picking Sebring over another location. Mr. Verlander stated it is the central location, the destination's ability to make event participants feel special, and the relationships the Airstream Ventures team has with the event organizers.

C. Sports Events Updates from Airstream Ventures

Mr. Verlander and Mr. Boudrie presented to the TDC the findings in the county-wide facility study. This study looked at key facilities across Highlands County and assessed potential enhancements that would help drive tourism, hotel stays, and economic impact. The full presentation was provided to the board in their meeting agenda packets.

5. Items for Voting

A. Caladium Festival High Impact Signature Event Grant Request

The board were provided with a copy of the complete application in the meeting agenda packets from the Lake Placid Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Bush asked the board if there were any questions. Ms. Worley commented on behalf of the Town of Lake Placid to note that the amount that is covered by the town for police is not known at this time but will be provided moving forward.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Hatfield, to approve High Impact signature event grant request from Greater Lake Placid Chamber of Commerce for the 2025 Caladium Festival with funding up to 10,000 dollars based on .50 cent per verified attendee. Reimbursable grant funds are to be used for tent rental, bus rentals for the bus tours taking place at the event, and portable restroom facilities. Funds come from the cost center 5305.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

B. Visit Sebring Classic Sport Event Grant Request

Mr. Verlander asked if the board there any questions and none were given. The full discussion can be found starting at the 1:57:23 hour mark.

Motion made by Ms. Compton to approve the Sports Grant request for 2025 Visit Sebring Classic with funding up to six thousand dollars based off of twenty dollar verified room night. Reimbursable Grant Funds are to be used for facility rental, event officials, and digital marketing. Funds to come from cost center 5305, Seconded by Ms. Christiansen

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

C. Citrus Golf Trail Open Sport Event Grant Request

Ms. Compton moved to approve the sport event grant request with funding up to six thousand dollars based on twenty dollars per verified room night. Funding is to be used for facility rental, event officials and digital marketing. Funds should come from cost center 5305. Seconded by Ms. Cristiansen.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

D. Excel Sports New Event Grant Request

Mr. Verlander asked if there were any questions. None were asked.

Ms. Garren made a motion to approve the new event grant request with funding up to 7,045 dollars based on twenty dollars verified room nights. Reimbursable grant funds are to be used for facility event rental, marketing, online registration, awards, signage, and t-shirts featuring the Visit Sebring logo with staff approved design. All funds come from cost center 5305. Ms. Christiansen seconded the motion.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

E. BNA Sports New Event Grant Request

Mr. Verlander asked if there were any questions. None were asked.

Ms. Garren made a motion to approve the New Event Grant for 2025 with funding up to 9,940 dollars based on 20 dollars per verified room night. Reimbursable grant funds are to be used for facility event rental, marketing, online registration, awards, signage, and t-shirts featuring the Visit Sebring logo with staff approved design. All funds come from cost center 5305. The motion was seconded by Ms. Hatfield

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

F. Gray dog Contract Renewal

Ms. Sauls mentioned that the renewal would be a recommendation to the BOCC from TDC. Year 4 is identified by Ms. Sauls as the current year of the contract.

Ms. Compton made a motion, seconded by Ms. Worley.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

G. Industry & Partner Relations- Biggest Fish Consulting, LLC.

Ms. Hartt shared with the board the value that staff has found in the collaboration Shellie Phelps has spearheaded.

Ms. Garren made a motion to approve contracting Biggest Fish Consulting for tourism industry and partner relations from June 1, 2025, to September 30th, 2025, for 5,400 dollars a month all inclusive, seconded by Ms. Hatfield.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

H. Kiosk Location Selection

Ms. Hartt indicated that there are foot traffic reports for all the suggested locations within the board agenda packets. Ms. Fultz added for the record that Ms. Worley has completed a voting conflict form and will not be participating in the vote at this time. Ms. Worley read the voting conflict form for the record.

Ms. Garren made a motion to approve the jacaranda hotel for the city of Avon Park, Circle Park for the City of Sebring, and Journal Plaza for the Town of Lake Placid. The motion was seconded by Ms. Hatfield.

All council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

6. Old Business/Discussion/ Informational

A. National Travel & Tourism Week (NTTW) Proclamation

Ms. Hartt noted for the board that withing their agenda packets is a copy of the proclamation to be presented to the Board of County Commissioners.

B. Tourism's Impact from VF & Legislative Update

Ms. Hartt noted for the board that withing their agenda packets they can find info graphics provided by Visit Florida.

C. USFA Update

Mr. Verlander shared that Kim Largen will be paying the self-organized fee for facility rentals from the county moving forward. Mr. Verlander shared that this is in hopes to simplify post event reporting and conserve funds for the TDC.

D. Tourism Luncheon Update

Ms. Hartt asked if anyone had any suggestions for keynote speakers for the luncheon in September to let the staff know. The speakers that have been identified by staff were priced higher than expected.

E. TDC Grant Committee Update & Special Meeting

The grant committee meeting was held, and staff are working to make the desired updates, as mentioned by Ms. Hartt.

F. Sports Complex Property Purchase & Management Update

Ms. Hartt shared that the status of the purchase is on hold. Staff is scheduled to have a call in the upcoming week to discuss the grant award status for funding to assist in the purchase of the land.

G. Strategic Plan Grant Update

Working with the state grant company which staff have worked with in the past, Ms. Hartt shared that staff are looking to have the application submitted by early June.

H. TDC Terms Expiring

Ms. Fultz Shared that Ms. Christiansen and Ms. Compton's terms on the TDC board are expiring. They have both expressed interest in reapplying this will go before the Board of County Commissioners for appointment. Ms. Fultz stated that no other applications have been submitted for consideration at this time.

7. Public Input

Mr. Campbell prompted the public to provide any comments. Ms. Rodriguez provided a comment stating that the town of Lake Placid had previously desired for the Kiosk mentioned in the meeting to be placed in Donaldson Park. However, after speaking with TDC Staff she believes that the town and the TDC staff can work together to accomplish the goal of installation at the location voted for by the TDC.

8. Board Member Roundtable

Time was made for board members round table.

9. Upcoming Meetings & TDC-Sponsored Events

- May 3-4: Southern Outlaw Dragboat Association Races at Lake June Park
- May 4 – 10: National Travel & Tourism Week
- May 6: NTTW Proclamation at BOCC
- June 7-8: Lax N' Lakes (FKA Florida Blast) at Highlands County Sports Complex & Max Long Complex
- June 27-29: Excel Speed at Highlands County Sports Complex (pending)
- July 25-27: Caladium Festival in Downtown Lake Placid (pending)
- August 1-3: BNA Sports at Highlands County Sports Complex (pending)
- **August 7: TDC Quarterly Meeting**

10. Adjournment

Mr. Campbell adjourned the meeting at 10:30am

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