



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

**Regular Meeting**

**1. The meeting was called to order at 8:17 a.m. by Josh Stewart, acting chair.**

**Roll Call**

*Council Members Present:*

Josh Stewart (Acting Chair)  
Lydia Capote  
Elizabeth Compton  
Cindy Garren  
Andy Kesling  
Kristyn Robbins  
Debra Worley

*Absent:*

Commissioner Campbell  
Christine Hatfield

*Also, Present:*

Casey Hartt, Lead Marketing Consultant  
Reagan Fultz, Tourism Marketing & Project Manager  
Leah Sauls, Development Services Director  
Alex Noto, Madden Media  
Alan Verlander, Airstream Ventures  
Shellie Phelps-Whitfield, Biggest Fish Consulting  
Kate Strickland, Wander Media  
Dr. Ron Seveingy, Avon Park Baseball Museum  
Nancy Fisk, Avon Park Historical Society  
Carla Kappmeyer-Sherwin, Highlands Hammock State Park  
Gaylin Thomas, Heartland Cultural Alliance  
Jared Lee, City of Sebring

Ms. Fultz established that a quorum had been met.

Mr. Stewart welcomed Kristyn Robbins as a new member of the TDC representing the Holiday Inn Express in Sebring and Lake Placid.

**2. Financial and Office Reports**

Ms. Fultz presented the revenue and office reports. She noted that the most recent month reported from the Florida Department of Revenue was June 2025, and so they were waiting for the remaining months through September to know the full collections for Fiscal Year 24/25.

She noted that the lead generation reports were reflective of the leads received through September 2025.

She also pointed Paola Cruz in the audience, sharing that she would be starting as the new Tourist Development Coordinator on November 4, 2025.

Council members received detailed printouts of the financial and office reports. Questions from the council on formatting and titles of the reports were addressed by staff. There were no other questions.

### **3. Acceptance of TDC Meeting Minutes of August 7, 2025.**

Mr. Stewart asked if there were any comments or changes to the minutes of August 7, 2025. No comments or corrections were noted.

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

Upon roll call, all Council members voted aye, and the motion carried.

### **4. Marketing and Event Updates**

#### A. Destination and Budget Update

Ms. Hartt presented a destination, marketing, and budget update, highlighting recent tourism performance indicators and ongoing marketing and public relations efforts. Staff activities included stakeholder outreach, hospitality training initiatives, coordination with partners on facility-related efforts, and preparations for upcoming tourism and industry events. She also shared upcoming initiatives and timelines related to kiosks, staffing, and future presentations.

The presentation and any discussion are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 45:18 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

#### B. Digital Marketing Update from Madden Media

Ms. Noto provided the Tourist Development Council with a digital marketing update, including an overview of Visit Sebring's website performance, paid media campaigns, and search engine optimization efforts. Key website indicators, partner referral activity, and engagement trends were shared, along with highlights from recent promotional campaigns and content performance.

Ms. Noto also outlined upcoming marketing priorities and initiatives, including continued content development, search optimization, and efforts to build upon recent campaign visibility and audience reach.

The presentation and any discussion are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 55:46 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

### C. Sports Events Updates from Airstream Ventures

Mr. Verlander presented an update on current and upcoming sports tourism activity in Highlands County. He highlighted recent and prospective events, ongoing outreach to event organizers, and efforts to position Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid as competitive hosts for sports tourism events.

The presentation and any discussion are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 1:08:27 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

### D. Citrus Golf Trail Marketing Update

Ms. Strickland presented an update on marketing efforts for the Citrus Golf Trail. The update included an overview of ongoing digital marketing activities, email campaigns, and website enhancements aimed at promoting member courses and supporting upcoming tournaments and seasonal travel.

The presentation and any discussion are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 1:25:03 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

### E. Tourism Collaboration Initiative Update

Ms. Phelps provided an update on the Tourism Collaboration Initiative, highlighting recent hospitality training sessions, stakeholder engagement activities, and regional collaboration efforts. She also outlined upcoming training opportunities, industry meetings, and representation of Highlands County at future tourism and travel-related events.

The presentation and any discussion are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 1:30:49 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

## **5. Items for Voting**

### A. Local Tax Collection Change

Mr. Zwayer, Highlands County Tax Collector, presented information to the Tourist Development Council regarding an option to change the remittance of the Tourist Development Tax from the Florida Department of Revenue to the Highlands County Tax Collector's Office.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Worley, to begin collecting the Tourist Development Tax through the Highlands County Tax Collector's Office effective January 1, 2025.

Upon roll call, council members voted Aye, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 35:20 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

#### B. Inspire Dance New Event Grant Request

Mr. Verlander presented a funding request on behalf of Inspire Dance for the Sebring Regional Competition to be held at the Alan Jay Arena in Sebring on May 1–3, 2026, with additional events proposed in subsequent years.

Ms. Worley made a motion, seconded by Ms. Capote, to approve the request as a three-year New Event Grant with funding of up to \$20,600 for Year One (2026) and up to \$10,600 per year for Years Two (2027) and Three (2028). Upon roll call, Council members voted in favor of the motion, with Ms. Garren opposed, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 1:38:07 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

#### C. Deep South Lax Recruits Showcase

Mr. Verlander presented a funding request on behalf of Florida Prep Lacrosse for the Deep South Lacrosse Showcase to be held at Lake June Park in Lake Placid on November 22–23, 2025, with additional events proposed in subsequent years.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Worley, to approve the request as a three-year New Event Grant with funding of up to \$22,500 for Year One (2025), up to \$22,500 for Year Two (2026), and up to \$27,500 for Year Three (2027). Upon roll call, all Council members voted in favor of the motion, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 1:46:24 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

#### D. TDC Grant Policies

Ms. Fultz presented the updated and new grant policies for the TDC grant program for the Council's approval.

Ms. Compton made a motion, seconded by Mr. Kesling, to approve the policies as presented. Upon roll call, all Council members voted in favor of the motion, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 1:50:56 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

### E. Avon Park Baseball Museum Funding Request

Dr. Sevingy and Ms. Fisk presented a request for \$100,000 in funding from the Tourist Development Council for the Avon Park Baseball Museum. The presentation was made pursuant to direction from the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners at its August 19, 2025 meeting.

Council members asked questions of the presenters, and discussion occurred among the Council, presenters, and staff. The option to table the item for consideration at a future meeting was discussed. The presenters requested that the item not be tabled and stated a preference for the Council to take action at the meeting.

Mr. Kelsling made a motion, seconded by Ms. Capote, to deny the funding request. Upon roll call, the motion passed unanimously, and the request for funding was denied.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 06:10 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

### F. Facility Study Additional Update & 3<sup>rd</sup> Penny Funds

Ms. Hartt and Mr. Verlander presented information in response to the Council's prior request for additional financial strategies related to facility recommendations identified in the most recent facility study.

The presentation included potential next steps for the Tourist Development Council, including the creation of designated projects to earmark available third-penny funds for county-owned or proposed sports facility development concepts, specifically the Sports Complex Expansion and a multi-purpose indoor sports facility.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Compton, to allocate \$1.9 million from Cost Center 5309 to a project created to support facility enhancement and development at the Highlands County Sports Complex, and to allocate the remaining balance of Cost Center 5309 to a project created to support development of a TDC-approved multi-purpose indoor sports tourism facility within Highlands County.

Upon roll call, all Council members voted in favor of the motion, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 1:54:18 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

### G. 2026 TDC Meeting Dates

Ms. Fultz presented a proposed meeting schedule for the 2026 calendar year which would follow the schedules set and adopted for previous year.

Mr. Kesling made a motion, seconded by Ms. Compton, to set the TDC meeting schedule as follows for the 2026 calendar year:

Thursday, January 29, 2026

Thursday, April 30, 2026

Thursday, August 13, 2026  
Thursday, October 29, 2026

Upon roll call, Upon roll call, all Council members voted in favor of the motion, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 2:18:37 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

#### H. 2026 TDC Chair & Vice Chair

Ms. Fultz introduced the item for the Council's' voting of their Chair and Vice Chair for the 2026 calendar year.

Ms. Garren made a motion, seconded by Ms. Worley, to approve Commissioner Campbell as the 226 TDC Chair, and Josh Stewart as the 2026 TDC Vice-Chair.

Upon roll call, all Council members voted in favor of the motion, and the motion carried.

The presentation, discussion, and vote are available for public viewing at the following link, beginning at the 2:19:50 mark: <https://youtu.be/JbW5cKaiBg0>.

### **6. Old Business / Discussion / Informational**

#### A. Caladium Festival Update

The item was presented for informational purposes only. No discussion or action was taken.

#### B. TDC Grant Recommendations

The item was presented for informational purposes only. No discussion or action was taken.

### **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**

- Oct. 30: Art & Culture Stakeholder Meeting at SFSC Center for Performing Arts
- Nov. 10 – 11: Citrus Golf Trail Open at Sun 'N Lake Golf Club
- Dec. 6: Last Paddler Standing at H.L. Bishop Park
- Dec. 12: Spartan Group Tour – RSVP with Reagan or Casey
- Dec. 13 – 14: Spartan Trifecta Weekend at Skipper Ranch
- Dec. 27 – 30: Citrus Golf Trail Ladies Invitational at Sun 'N Lake Golf Club

- January 29: TDC Quarterly Meeting

## **10. Adjournment**

Mr. Stewart adjourned the meeting at 10:39 a.m.

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