



2401 SE Monterey Rd.
Stuart, FL 34996

Martin County Tourist Development Council Minutes

Stacey Hetherington
Frank Fender
Campbell Rich
Tammy Calabria
Nimesh Patel
Patty O'Connell
Ed Griffith
Robert Steele
Christopher Vitale

3:00 PM

Wednesday, Mar. 12, 2025,

Commission Chambers

CALL TO ORDER

- Meeting was called to order at 3:00 PM
- Roll call was taken- no council members were absent.

WELCOME

MINU APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Ed Griffith Moved to approve minutes of Jan. 15, 2024.
- Nimesh Patel 2nd the motion
- (6 – 0) Motion was **approved**/denied/modified

ONGO Ongoing Business

A. Financials

- PowerPoint Presentation provided.
- Handout provided.

Shannon McCarthy

PRES PRESENTATIONS / UPDATE

A. Treasure Coast Sports Commission

- Update on recent events
 - There were 10 scheduled sporting events from January to February
 - Winter Training at Sailfish Splash Waterpark (six championships)
 - Florida Half Century men's softball
 - 4 sailing events
 - 1 golf event
 - 1 baseball event
- Update on upcoming events

Rick Hatcher, TCSP

- There are five (5) sporting events scheduled from March through May
- Running (Marathon of the Treasure Coast)
- Sailing (Optimist Sunshine Stat)
- Baseball (Florida Coast Spring Training)
- Surfing (Single Fin Showdown)
- Softball (USSSA Sailfish Splash State Tournament)
- Potential new events (Florida Flag Football Tournament, Large Youth Soccer Events, Southern Kingfish Association Southeast Regional in 2026)

B. Martin Arts Council

- MartinArts did not attend – no presentation or update was prepared for the meeting

C. Florida Oceanographic Society

Anthony Brunet, FOS

- Recent events
- 2025 Coastal Lecture Series (1,094 total virtual attendance)
- Habitat Health Trends: January-March 2025
- Lake Okeechobee discharges fluctuated significantly (738 cfs to 452 cfs)
- Inflow to St. Lucie Estuary (SLE): Consistently ranged from 1,310 to 2,146 cfs
- Water Clarity: Graded as poor to fair for seagrass health, with fluctuating visibility.
- Dissolved Oxygen Levels: Consistently fair to good, providing stable conditions for marine life
- Rivers Coalition Meeting & Business Roundtable - March 27, 2025
- Colonel Bowman of USACE discussing peroxide treatment testing of algal blooms on lake and C-44 Canal and answering questions about Lake Okeechobee recovery time
- Local Business Roundtable at 2 PM to discuss impacts of discharges and algal blooms on the local economy
- Participation from the Martin County TDC requested and encouraged
- Emily Dark, Martin County Senior Environmental Resources & Eco Tourism Program Manager, will attend in person
- TDC members including Rob Steele and Mayor Campbell will also be in attendance

MMGY 3-Year Strategic Plan Review, Shelly Green

- Powerpoint presentation provided
- Stakeholder Engagement
 - 10 one-on-one, in-depth interviews were previously conducted
 - Two (2) focus groups previously held with 32 participants
- Ideal Future
 - Key accomplishments and strategic objectives include brainstorming and prioritization
- TDC and Staff Voting
 - Priorities were scored and ranked based on TDC and staff feedback to incorporate into Strategic Plan
- Goals, Initiatives and Targets

- Strategic Goals: Marketing & Sales, Destination Management, Organizational Excellence, and Community Engagement
- Strategic Initiatives and respective leads presented
- Council discussed potential issues of associating numeric values and percentages to the strategic goals (i.e. increasing local hotel demand by 1.8% annually)
- Hoteliers expressed challenges of creating hotel demand due to obstacles like growth-averse local leadership, citing a recent decision against the proposed Fairfield Inn in Stuart
- Nimesh asked Shelly if the numeric/monetary KPIs are adjusted for inflation
- Council collectively prefers to update the strategic plan and remove percentage benchmarks and revise the KPIs of the Strategic Plan
- Council expressed interest in creating funding mechanisms to incentivize events during shoulder seasons and slower periods (i.e. summer months) to attract overnight visitation
- Nerissa discussed the opportunity of collecting additional Tourist Development Tax from short term rentals and provided historical context for previous attempts in recent years
- Commissioner Heatherington requested Ruth Pietruszewski, Martin County Tax Collector, attend the next TDC Meeting to present current tourism development tax collection practices pertaining to short term rentals (STR) and discuss opportunities to increase STR collections in the future
- Group discussion about revisiting conducting a resident sentiment study
- Nerissa will collect quotes from research organizations who provide resident sentiment studies to present to the TDC (i.e. Downs & St. Germain, Longwoods International, etc.)
- Group discussion about updating assets/videos to explain the positive impact of tourism to residents and the community
- Group discussion about including this 'positive impact' video on MCTV and other local outlets
- Rob recommended adding verbiage about the positive impact of tourism to beach signage
- Nerissa will share most recent 'positive impact of tourism' video with TDC
- Nerissa will share current draft of the Strategic Plan with TDC for closer review
- Shelly will make edits based on discussion and provide final draft for approval

OTM Office of Tourism & Marketing Update

- **Ecotourism Program Update** **Nerissa Okiye**
- PowerPoint presentation provided.
- Example of past tours -
 - Explore Natural Martin Participant Total: 1686
 - Hardwood Hammock Birding
 - Night Hike
 - Prescribed Fire Nature Walk
 - Mangroves Nature Walk
 - Valentine's Day Birding Walk
 - General Nature Walk
- Upcoming events
 - Looking Forward
 - Florida In Bloom: Wildflower Nature Walk
 - Southeast Florida Action Network BleachWatch Observer Training
 - Nature After Dark: A Guided Nature Night Hike
 - Dolphin Spotter Evening Nature Walk
 - Birding Series: Florida Wetlands
 - Spring is in the Air: Florida's Butterflies and Bees Nature Walk
 - Pathways to the Past: Historical Nature Walk
 - A True Tail: Life with Coyotes Nature Walk

- Promotional Materials
 - Monthly flyers sent to hotels for visitors with upcoming events
 - Programs will be scheduled every 1st Saturday, 2nd Monday, and 3rd Thursday
- Destination Climate Champions
 - Free virtual course hosted by the Travel Foundation and Expedia
 - Train DMOs to create a Climate Action Plan roadmap to reduce emissions and improve climate resilience
 - Martin County participating along with Destination Livingstone (Zambia), Experience Sussex (England), Destination Vancouver (Canada), City of Durango (Colorado) and Lake Wanaka Tourism (New Zealand)
- 2025 Sea Turtle Programming
 - In partnership with Ecological Associates Inc, Explore Natural Martin will offer 4 morning nest excavations and 4 night nesting walks in June and July

- **Public Relations Update**

Nerissa Okiye

- PowerPoint presentation provided.
- Recent PR results:
 - 40+ print and digital placements
 - 5.2 billion impressions
 - \$48 million estimated media value
 - Coverage examples included outlets: USA Today, AFAR, Yahoo!, Forbes, Southern Living, Fodor's, Orlando Weekly, MSN, and Outside
- FAM Trips:
 - Francesca Montalbiano: February 2-4, wrote a blog post travel guide and provided real-time social media coverage
 - Alicia Cox: February 26-28, freelance travel writer visiting with her family to write about Martin County's family-friendly attractions and activities for Today's Parent Magazine
- Award Wins:
 - Best Marketing Design, Video, Visual & Virtual Awards
 - Other winners: NASA, Disney, Southwest Airlines, AARP and more
 - Platinum in "Integrated Marketing Campaign" in the AVA Digital Awards
 - Gold in "Travel Video" in the AVA Digital Awards
 - Other winners: Visit Reno Tahoe, AT&T, CVS, Re/Max, Kentucky Bourbon Trail and more
- **OTM Update** **Nerissa Okiye**
 - SB 1110*/**: Introduces greater oversight of publicly funded destination marketing organizations, such as Visit Orlando, by mandating a one-to-one match between public contributions and private sector funding.
 - SB 1114*/**: Under existing law, counties must allocate at least 40% of their TDT revenue to destination marketing before utilizing the tax for public transit projects. This proposes capping this requirement at the lesser of 40% or \$50 million, thereby easing restrictions on how counties deploy these funds.
 - HB 6031: Deletes provision requiring specified percentage of all tourist development tax revenues to be used to promote & advertise tourism.
 - SB 1116*/**: Would authorize TDT funds to be used for public safety improvements and workforce housing by directing revenue toward law enforcement, emergency services, and crime prevention in tourism-heavy areas.
 - SB 1664 introduced 3/10: Requiring specified taxes to be renewed by an ordinance in a specified manner; providing an exception; providing for the expiration of specified ordinances; authorizing the adoption of new ordinances, etc.
 - **Counties that collected \$10+ million in TDT

- **Orlando Delegation (Visit Orlando Audit concerns)
 - Wheel the World plan to expand the program to additional sites in Martin County
 - New Webpages and Website Audit
 - Refreshed pages (attractions, family-friendly, travel agent, etc.) and new features (mobile site menu)
 - TravPRO Mobile: Travel Advisor Training – Martin County modules officially launched
 - VISIT FLORIDA 2025 Travel Leaders Network Program
 - VISIT FLORIDA Domestic Sales Mission
 - VISIT FLORIDA Computerized Corporate Rate Association (CCRA) Power Solutions
 - One Fun Day: Family campaign running from March 15 through April 26
 - Las Vegas Travel Agent Forum 2025 (March 30-April 2) – Treasure Coast regional program
 - Treasure Coast Podcast update (new episodes include Eco Adventures for March, Wildlife Experiences for April, and History of the Treasure Coast for May)
- **Legislative Update:** -
 - None given at this time.

COMMENTS

A. TDC MEMBERS –

- Rob Steele requested ongoing update presentations from the Historical Society of the Treasure Coast at future TDC Meetings (similar to FOS and MartinArts)
- Tammy Calabria requested ongoing update presentations from the Children’s Museum of the Treasure Coast at future TDC Meetings (similar to FOS and MartinArts)

B. Staff Comments

- None

C. Public Comments

- None

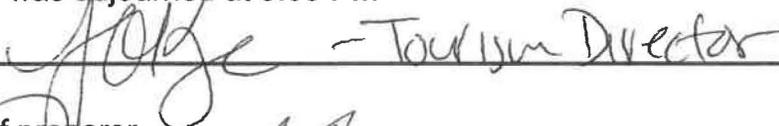
CHAIR'S CLOSING

Next Meeting Date – May 21, 2025,

BOCC Chambers

ADJOURN

- Meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM

 Adam Hodge - Tourism Director	3/ 12 /2025 Date
 Stacey Hetherington, Chair	7/30/25 Date
TDC STAFF Name & Title of preparer	
Name & Title	

ADA

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