2401 SE Monterey Rd.
Stuart, Fl 34996

Martin County
Tourist Development Council
Minutes

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

Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2026, **3:00 PM**
Administration Building, 4th Floor Workshop Room

CALL TO ORDER

- Meeting was called to order at 3:04 PM
- Roll call was taken- Patty O'Connell and Nimesh Patel were absent.

WELCOME

MINU APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Frank Fender Moved to approve minutes of Nov. 12, 2025.
  Chris Vitale 2nd the motion
- (7 – 0) Motion was approved/denied/modified

ONGO Ongoing Business

A. Financials — Shannon McCarthy

- PowerPoint Presentation was provided.

APPROVAL OF Financials

- Frank Fender Moved to approve the finances as presented.
  Rob Steele 2nd the motion
- (7 – 0) Motion was approved/denied/modified

PRES PRESENTATIONS / UPDATE

A. Treasure Coast Sports Commission — Rick Hatcher, TCSP

- Introduction of Ryan Strickland with his new title of Chief Operating Officer
- Introduction of Stephen Okiye who is currently completing an internship with the Sports Commission
- New Event -Treasure Coast Disc Golf

- Recap of December Events
    - USA Junior Olympics Sailing Festival – 964 Participants with 658 Room Nights
    - CSAA Winter Training (S & D) – 9 Colleges, 293 Participants with 740 Room Nights

- Update on upcoming events –
- **January 2026 Events**
    - 1 New Event at JBHS
    - **Jan. 9-10 Cradle Cancer Wrestling Invitational** – 38 High Schools with 24 of those High Schools staying for 1-2 nights.
    - **Jan. 17-19 Club 420 Team Mid-Winter Championships**
- **February 2026 Events**
    - 1 New Event
    - 1 Cross-Over Event
    - **Feb. 1-3 UNC Greensboro – Advanced Golf Partners Women's Collegiate Invitational**
    - **Feb. 3-5 Laser Masters Midwinter Championships**
    - **Feb. 14-16 Club 420 Midwinter Championships**
    - **Feb. 21-22 Treasure Coast Disc Golf Martin County Open (New Event)**
    - **Feb. 15-April 15 Florida Elite Spring Training Session 1 & 2 (Cross Over Event in SLC)**
- **March 2026 Events**
    - 3 New Events
    - 1 Cross-Over Event
    - **Mar. 1 Marathon of the Treasure Coast**
    - **Mar. 3-5 South Zone Artistic Swimming Championships (New Event)**
    - **Mar. 7-8 Optimist Sunshine State Championships**
    - **Mar. 12-15 Youth Soccer World Cup Invitational (100+ teams) (New Event)**
    - **Mar. 14-21 International Sunfish Class Association Masters (New Event)**
    - **Mar. 14-15 Florida Half Century Softball Tournament**
    - **Feb. 15-April 15 Florida Elite Spring Training Session 1 & 2 (Cross-Over Event in SLC)**
- **April Events**
    - 1 New Event
    - **April 4-5 Single Fin Showdown**
    - **April 18-19 NE NW Artistic Swimming Association Championships (New Event)**
    - **Feb. 15-April 15 Florida Elite Spring Training Session 1 & 2 (Cross-Over Event in SLC)**
- **USA Team Handball is relocating its headquarters to Ft. Pierce, this is a great opportunity to highlight and give attention to the Treasure Coast.**

B. Martin Arts Council **Nancy Turrell**

- Friday night, Jan. 9, 2026, opened the All-Florida Juried Art Show.

        - About 70% of the artists were from other areas and stayed overnight
    - ArtsFest – Feb. 7-8, 2026
        - This year, ArtsFest will be introducing the Art of Food & Wine
        - There will be a kickoff party on Friday night, Feb. 6, 2026, to include a ticket to ArtsFest for either Saturday or Sunday
        - Nerissa added that the Office of Tourism & Marketing will once again be doing the glass turtle scavenger hunt.
        - This year's turtles will be 10 gold and 40 red & ivory ones
    - Nancy updated on the Stuart High School project – the plans for the next phase have been submitted to go into negotiations with the School District.

C. Florida Oceanographic Society **Anthony Brunet, FOS**

- Anthony introduced Ronnie Allen, the new Director of Development & Marketing
- **Operation Fish-Mas**
    - 250+ new fish and invertebrates including parrot fish, sharks' rays and other marine species.
    - Providing a permanent, lifelong home for these animals.
    - Serves as ambassadors for their species, inspiring conservation awareness.
- **Coastal Lecture Series**
    - Jan. 20-Mar. 10 at 6:30PM
    - FREE Admission
    - Blake Library
    - Fascinating topics including:
    - Sea Turtles
    - Coral Reefs
    - The Everglades
    - Scrub Jays
    - Streaming live on Zoom (Registration required)
    - Learn more @ FloridaOcean.org/CLS
- **Waterways Day**
    - Spend the day connecting with nature and conservation through activities for all ages-Jan. 24th 10:00am-2:00pm
- **Florida's Legislative Session**
    - Begins Jan. 13, 2026 – Runs for 60 Days
    - During the legislative session, Florida Oceanographic Society will be actively tracking bills that relate to:
    - Water quality
    - Estuaries and the IRL
    - Wildlife and habitat protection
    - Environmental funding
    - Coastal resilience
- **Water Quality Grading Updates**

- Changes include:
- How data is averages within each zone.
- Visibility grading criteria for each zone.
- The weight of each parameter in the final grade.
- The revised system better represents conditions in a dynamic estuary system.

D. Historical Society **Ales Day**

- **Current Exhibits:**
  - "Wonderful Things"; The Return of King Tut
  - Crowned in Jewels, The Faberge Imperial Egg Collection
  - The Highwaymen

- **Upcoming Events at the Elliott Museum**
  - "Howard Carter and the Search for Tutankhamun Movement" with historian Michael Marflee- Jan. 16th from 1:00pm to 3:00pm.
  - Audubon of Martin County Art Exhibition. Exhibit Opening Reception - Jan. 22nd from 5:00pm-7:30pm.
  - Bountiful Bonsai Workshop with Kimberly Helms – SOLD OUT
  - "From Faberge to Flying Saucers" An FBI Agents Case Files – Jan. 28th from 1:00pm to 3:00pm.
  - Pianist Gregory Hartmann – Feb. 1st at 3:00pm.
  - "Mysteries of Tutankhamun's Tomb" – Feb. 6th from 1:00pm to 3:00pm with Michael Marfleet.
  - Eat Cake and Create with Debbie – Feb. 12, 2026, from 10:00am-1:00pm.
  - Plein-air Painting with award winning Plein-air artist Mary Lou Pults - Feb. 16th from 10:00am – 4:00 pm.
  - "The Origins of the Highwaymen Movement" Go behind the scenes with Roger Lightie, one of the foremost experts on Florida's legendary Highwaymen artists. Feb. 18th from 2:00pm to 3:00pm.
  - "The Wonderful World of Penguins: Stories from Behind the Lens" with international photographer Gary Krosin-Feb. 23rd from 1:00pm – 2:00pm.
  - "The Wreck of the 1715 Spanish Fleet and the Real Pirates of the Caribbean" Lecture with Al Simbritz, Historian, Feb. 26th at 1:00pm.
  - "The Windup – A Baseball Themed Evening of Songs, Stories, and Silent Film"- Mar. 5th from 6:00pm – 8:00pm.
- The House of Refuge remains closed for restoration is set to reopen in March of 2026.

OTM Office of Tourism & Marketing Update

- **Ecotourism Program Update** **Emily Dark & Anna Grace Agnini**
- Example of past tours –

- **Explore Natural Martin Participant Total - 2565**
    - Beach Birding Walk
    - East Coast Greenway Walk
    - Mysterious Mushrooms Walk
    - Native cats Nature Hike
    - New Years Nature Hike
    - East Coast Greenway Walk 2

- Upcoming events-
    - **Looking Forward**
        - **Explore Natural Martin Seasonal Birding Series**: Indian River Lagoon
        - Thursday – 9:00am, Indian Riverside Park
        - **New Year, No Footprint: Leave No Trace Walk:**
        - Thursday – Jan. 22, 2026, 9:00am, Hobe Sound Scrub Preserve
        - **Winter Wildflower Wander:**
        - Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2026, 9:00am, Halpatiokee Regional Park
        - **Explore Natural Martin Seasonal Birding Series: Ancient Scrub**
        - **Mon. Feb. 9, 2026, 8:30am – Savannas Preserve State Park – Hawk's Bluff Trail**
        - **Dark Sky Night with the Treasure Coast Astronomical Society -**
        - Friday, Feb. 14, 2026, 7:00pm – John G. and Susan H. Dupuis Jr. Wildlife and Environmental
        - **Florida's Fascinating Wildlife Nature Walk: The River Otter -**
        - Thursday, Feb. 19, 2026, 9:00am – Halpatiokee Regional Park
        - **Winter Morning Beach Walk –**
        - Tuesday, Feb. 24, 2026, 8:30am – Beach Walk Paisley
        - **Explore Natural Martin Seasonal Birding Series: Pine Flatwoods-**
        - Monday, Mar. 9, 2026, 9:00am – Halpatiokee Regional Park

    - **Promotional Materials:**
        - Monthly flyers sent to the hotels to update visitors about our upcoming programs and how they can sign up.
        - Programs will be scheduled every:
        - 1st Saturday
        - 2nd Monday
        - 3rd Thursday

    - **Leave No Trace Gold Standard Hospitality**
        - Working with 4 hotels to meet Leave No Trace Gold Standard Hospitality Standards.
        - Creating a custom training program for hotel staff to learn LNT principles.
        - Solidifying 1 year partnership between each hotel and LNT.
        - Creating LNT specific marketing and promotional content.

    - **East Coast Greenway**
        - Advancing East Coast Greenway signage and have confirmed the most up to date ECG route with the East Coast Greenway Alliance to work towards trail town designation for Stuart and Port Salerno.

- **Public Relations Update** **Ian Centrone**

- **PR Coverage:**
    - 38+ print & digital placements
    - 6.5 billion impressions

- $64 million + est. media value
- Forbes
- Southern Living – 14 Best Things to do in Jensen Beach, Florida"- Relax at Jensen Sea Turtle Beach, Visit the Children's Museum of the Treasure Coast.
- Travel + Leisure – "This Tiny Treasure Coast Beach Town Was Once Known as the "Pineapple Capital of the World" – and It Has Old Florida Charm"
- Best Hotels & Resorts - Hutchinson Shores Resort & Spa, The Driftwood Motel
- Yahoo!
- The Telegraph – "The ultimate guide to Florida" quiet corners, Art & high streets
- msn
- AOL
- USA Today -Start planning 2026 adventures with USA TODAY'S wall calendar – April has a photo from Blowing Rocks, on Jupiter Island.
- Caribbean Journal

- **End of the Year PR Results**
  - 300 + print & digital placements
  - 45 + billion impressions
  - $413 million + est. media value
  - 24% increase in impressions and 36% increase in earned media value year over year.
  - Conde' Nast Traveler
  - Southern Living
  - National Geographic
  - Outside
  - USA Today
  - Time
  - AARP
  - The New York Times
  - Yahoo!

- FAM Trips:
  - **Wheel the world –** November 12-16, 2025
    - 500+ followers
    - Target audience -Wheelchair / family travel and lifestyle
  - **Robin McKelvie** – December 10-13, 2025
    - The National (Scotland) –
    - Target audience- International travel
  - **Martina Engler**
    - February 24-26, 2026
    - VISONEN Magazine (Germany)
    - Target audience – Eco-Friendly Travel & Wellness
  - **Ada Yacobi**
    - April 17-19, 2026
    - FAJO Magazine (Canada)
    - Target audience – Luxury Travel

- **International Media Marketplace**
  - IMM NYC 2026
  - January 21-22, 2026
  - Javitz Center – NYC
  - 550+ Attending Media
  - 400+ Global Travel Brands
  - 30 Appointments

- Awards and Recognition
  - HSMAI Adrian Awards – The Office of Tourism & Marketing won 3 HSMAI awards:
  - "Best of Category" – Gold Adrian Award – Integrated Marketing Campaign, - AI Means More Here Campaign.
  - "Gold Adrian Award" – Integrated Marketing Campaign – AI Means More Here Campaign.
  - "Bronze Adrian Award" – Owned Media – Explore Natural Martin Video Series.
  - 2025 Awards Recap:
  - Gold Standard Program Recognition – Explore Natural Martin
  - Leave No Trace Awards – Leave No Trace – Tourism Partner of the Year
  - Readers' Choice Award – Convention South – Martin County Office of Tourism
  - 40 Under 40 Award – News Service of Florida – Ian Centrone
  - Video, Visual and Virtual Awards – Ragan Communications – Best Marketing Design
  - Platinum AVA Digital Award – (AMCP) – Integrated Campaign
  - Gold AVA Digital Award – AMCP – Travel Video
  - Platinum Hermes Creative Award – AMCP – PR Campaign
  - Gold Hermes Creative Award – AMCP – Podcast Series
  - Gold Hermes Creative Award – AMCP – Digital Ad Campaign
  - 2025 Outstanding Partner Award – Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network
  - eTSY Award Winner – eTourism – Sustainability & Social Responsibility Award
  - Platinum Viddy Award – AMCP – Digital Marketing Campaign
  - Platinum Viddy Award – AMCP – Video Series
  - DMAP Certification- Destinations International
  - 2025 Nonprofit Awards – PRNEWS – Best PR or marketing campaign
  - ESTO Destination Award- US Travel Association – Digital Brilliance
  - Gold Stevie Award – International Business Awards – Best Marketing- Arts & Culture
  - Silver Stevie Award – International Business Awards – Best Marketing – Digital Brilliance
  - Best of Show – (Henry) Flagler Award – VISIT FLORIDA -$500,000.00 to $2 million budget category
  - Gold (Henry) Flagler Award – VISIT FLORIDA – Internet Advertising
  - Gold (Henry) Flagler Award – VISIT FLORIDA – Sustainable Tourism Marketing
  - Silver Flagler Award – VISIT FLORIDA – Direct Marketing
  - Bronze Flagler Award – VISIT FLORIDA – Radio Advertising
  - Travel Pulse – 40 Under 40 – Ian Centrone
  - Gold Magellan Award – Travel Weekly – Destination Marketing Campaign
  - Silver Magellan Award – Travel Weekly – Special Needs Destination
  - Platinum MarCom Award – AMCP – Native Advertising
  - Platinum MarCom Award – AMCP – Video Series
  - Gold MarCom Award – AMCP – Integrated Marketing Campaign
  - Gold MarCom Award – AMCP – Advertising Campaign
  - Best of Category Adrian Award – HSMAI – Integrated Marketing Campaign
  - Gold Adrian Award – HSMAI – Integrated Marketing Campaign
  - Bronze Adrian Award – HSMAI – Owned Media

- **OTM Update** **Nerissa Okiye**
  - **Working/Approved Strategic Plan 2026-2028**
    - Marketing & Sales review
    - Destination Management review
    - Partnerships & Community Engagement review
    - Organizational Excellence review
    - Strategic Plan Overview
    - Strategy at a Glance (2026 Scorecard) review
    - Marketing & Sales

- Destinations Management
- Partnership & Community Engagement
- Organizational Excellence

- **2026 Training Industry Training and Development**
  - Unlock the Power of A.I. – 3 – Part Digital Training Series in partnership with Miles Partnership
  - Session 1: A.I. Foundations (Jan. 5.) A strategic overview of the current AI landscape and how it can be leveraged in tourism and small business contexts.
  - Session 2: A.I. Live Lab (Jan. 19) Live demonstrations of curated AI tools for content generation, image editing, itinerary building and more.
  - Session 3: A.I. Update & Office Hours (Jan. 26). An open Q & A session with AI strategists to address participant questions and emerging industry developments.

- **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Initiative Update**
  - Start onboarding partners shortly
  - Accessibility FAM: @TheLizzyO

- **Wheel the World**
  - Nov. 12-16, 2025
  - 500K + followers
  - Wheelchair / Family Travel & Lifestyle

- **Wheel the World**
  - API Plug-In for DMO Websites
  - Wheel the World's new API integrates verified accessibility information into each hotel listing on DMO websites to increase bookings.
  - IFRAME Carousel –
  - Partners can also embed accessibility carousels onto relevant destination site pages for hotels, attractions, restaurants, boutiques, parks, etc.
  - AI Chatbot / Accessibility Advisor – WTW's new AI-Driven Accessibility Chatbot centralizes all accessibility-related data from each destination site, WTW's verified data, relevant blog articles, community posts, accessibility reviews and more to live on a dedicated landing page.

- **Destinations Florida update**
  - Nerissa Okiye named Chair of the Board for 2026
  - The Destinations Florida Annual Meeting will meet at the Hutchinson Shores Resort & Spa on Oct. 14-16, 2026.

- **Leave No Trace Gold Standard Hospitality Program update**
  - Team started meeting with hotels.
  - Team started developing materials.
  - Waiting to review the Leave No Trace Training Program.

- **Event Program Discussion – Overview provided**
  - Strategic planning discussion on advertising reimbursement program
  - Off-season reimbursement programs discussed
- **Model A**:
  - Reimbursement for Out-of-Area Marketing (Most Common) –
  - Grant funding reimburses eligible out-of-area advertising, marketing and promotional expenses that directly support an event's ability to attract visitors.
- **Model B**:

        - Room-Night or Tourism-Threshold Based Event Grants – Funding levels are tied to documented tourism outcomes, such as hotel room nights, verified visitor origin, or distance-based attendance thresholds.
    - **Model C:**
        - Hybrid Programs (Cash Grants + In-Kind Marketing Support)
    - **Model D:**
        - Cultural, Arts & Heritage Tourism Grant Programs -Event funding is administered through arts, culture, or heritage organizations while remaining aligned with tourism outcomes.
    - **Model E:**
        - Seasonal Activation & Shoulder-Season Incentive Programs – Grant programs are explicitly designed to address seasonal demand gaps by incentivizing events during low-occupancy periods.
    - **Model F:**
        - Portfolio & Micro-Grant Programs – A portfolio approach provides multiple funding lanes – including micro-grants – to address different tourism objectives and event scales.
    - **Considerations for Martin County –** Thoughts & Discussion Points
        - If tickets are sold for an off-season event, it would be good to have them provide their zip codes for tracking purposes.
    - Nerissa asked – what makes sense to the hoteliers
            - TDC member, Ed Griffith shared that the bed tax was developed for marketing.
            - Ed firmly believes that use of the TDT dollars has to result in "heads in beds"
            - Ed doesn't want to dilute the TDT & how we use it for marketing.
            - Ed also shared that we are getting more repeat groups meeting here now than ever.
            - TDC member, Chris Vitale agrees that the priority needs to be getting people here to stay overnight.
    - TDC member, Robert Steele wants to look at novel ideas to get more people here in the summer market.
        - Nerissa Okiye shared that the Office of Tourism & Marketing increasingly works on innovative campaigns year over year to bring people here year-round.
    - Nerissa will bring to the March meeting ideas for a funding program for the June-Sept. period with tracking data & hotel stays documented.

    - **Treasure Coast Update –**
        - Treasure Coast Show Schedule –
        - Washington DC Travel Show – Jan. 17-18, 2026
        - New York Travel Show – Jan. 24-25, 2026
        - AAA NE Travel Marketplace – Jan. 31, 2026
        - Chicago Travel Show – Feb. 21-22, 2026
        - South Florida Travel Show – Feb. 28-Mar. 1, 2026

    - **Current Campaigns and Ads -**
        - Video creative -examples provided
        - Digital creative – examples provided
        - Print examples Golf/ meetings – examples provided
        - 2026 Visit Florida Guide-example provided
        - Expedia Group Advertising – 2025 Year-In Performance Review, Martin County
    - **Destination Insights**
        - Search & Booking Seasonality Trends for Martin County
        - Indexed Book Trends in the last 12 weeks for Your Destination
        - Insights

- Top book source markets – United States is the primary source market to your destination.
- Florida, New York and Georgia are the top book state IP's.
- Stuart, Jensen Beach and Hobe Sound are the top booked cities.
- In 2025, travelers were typically traveling to your destination in March and February.
- Future travel booked for your destination is 62.2% for the next 2 months.
- Future stays YoY (Hotels & Vacation Rental)
- Future stays YoY (Hotels only)
- Future stays YoY (Vacation Rental only)
- Two adults make up the majority of lodging bookers to your destination
- Lodging property category –
- Vacation rental / Conventional Lodging / Unknown
- Search & Booking window trends for your destination
- Average trip duration trends for your destination

- **Legislative Update**: -
  - None given at this time.

COMMENTS

A. TDC MEMBERS –
- None

B. Staff Comments
- **None**

C. Public Comments
- None

CHAIR'S CLOSING

Next Meeting Date – March 11, 2026, **BOCC Chambers**

ADJOURN

- Meeting was adjourned at 5:03 PM

Sally Beyn 1/14/26

Sally Beynon, Tourism Project Coordinator Date

Name & Title of preparer

Stacey Hetherington

Stacey Hetherington, Chair Date

Name & Title