



2401 SE Monterey Rd.
Stuart, FL 34996

Martin County Tourist Development Council Minutes

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

Wednesday, DEC. 11, 2024,

3:00 PM

Commission Chambers

CALL TO ORDER

- Meeting was called to order at 3:00 PM
- Roll call was taken- Chris Collins was absent.
- Nerissa Okiye introduced & welcomed the new TDC Chair, Commissioner Stacey Hetherington

WELCOME

MINU APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Nimesh Patel Moved to approve minutes of SEPT. 18, 2024, meeting, with editorial changes requested by Ed Griffith.
Frank Fender 2nd the motion
- (8 – 0) Motion was **approved**/denied/modified

ONGO Ongoing Business

A. Financials

Shannon McCarthy

- PowerPoint presentation provided.
- Frank Fender asked about the decrease in bed-tax collections for FY 24.
- Nimesh Patel explained that the prior year was still being impacted by the Covid rebound so a decrease was anticipated.
- We also lost two major sporting events which impacted occupancy.
- Ed agreed and mentioned that the bed tax collections are directly tied to ADR. For his property they have a higher comp. set.

PRES PRESENTATIONS / UPDATE

A. Treasure Coast Sports Commission

Rick Hatcher, TCSP

- Brief recap on Q-1 on 24/25 year
- Returning events included the following.

- Martin County Senior Games *(Pickleball)
- Softball (Girls Fast Pitch)
- Softball (Men's Slow Pitch) (Florida Half Century)
- Lacrosse
- Sailing
- Swimming
- Golf
- Baseball (Cross over event)
- Rink Hockey
- The Marathon of the Treasure Coast - growing each year
- Surfing
- Artistic Swimming
- Water Polo
- Triathlon
- New events included the following.
 - Softball (Men's Slow Pitch) (Florida Half Century)
 - Martin County Sailing Center added 3 new sailing events – have 7 total sailing events.
 - New event at Jonathan Dickinson State Park – Ultra run 100k and 50K event
 - New women's UNCG, University of North Carolina Greensboro, collegiate golf event added and will be held at Hammock Creek.
 - Men's Golf team from UNC Greensboro has been here previously and was a success.
 - Projected 29 total events on the year spread out over 16 different sports.
 - Swimming, CSCAA training coming back for the 8th year in a row at Sailfish Splash Waterpark & Aquatic Center.
 - Will be hosting the Florida Sports Foundation Sports Summit Conference, June 8-11, 2025, at the Hutchinson Shores & Resort
 - The Treasure Coast region is listed as one of the possible training sites for the World Cup 2026.
 - Will be hosting some site visits for the FIFA World Cup, training sites.
 - Rob Steele would love to collaborate a golf exhibit with a golf event and would like to work with the Sports Commission on it.
 - Stacey Hetherington would like the Sports Commission to update the Parks and Recs advisory board on how the sports events help in driving room nights for Martin County hotels.
 - Rick confirmed the Sports Commission works very closely with MC Parks & Recs currently and the Sports Commission shares information with Parks and Recs. on what events are coming in.

B. Martin Arts Council

Nancy Turrell

- Shared a new brochure that highlights MartinArts annual events and gallery programming.
- The new brochure has been sent to the Florida Welcome Centers.

- Nancy, reported on the monthly call with representatives of the Arts and Culture Sector noting that the collaborative attitude to survive funding cuts from the State is strong.
- Currently have “It’s Not all Black and White” exhibit at the Court House Cultural Center.
- 34th annual all Florida juried art show opens on Jan. 10, 2025, with an awards night and opening reception for which many of the artists come from out of town and stay overnight.
- Artsfest is scheduled for Feb. 8th and 9th with adjusted hours due to the Superbowl.
- Staying open an hour later Saturday (10:00AM-6:00PM) and closing an hour earlier on Sunday (10:00AM-4:00PM).
- A Chopped Jr. event will be introduced this year.
- Nerissa shared that we are currently working on the colors for the glass turtles for the Artsfest.
- In partnership with the Art in Public Places Program there will be a live mural competition this year to celebrate the centennial, along with a patriotic concert on Sunday morning.

C. Florida Oceanographic Society

Anthony Brunet, FOS

- Recent events
- Sept. Estuaries Day
- Nov./Dec.
- Yoga on the ocean deck
- Eco-Logical trivia
- Marine Mammal mini fest
- Current Health of the Environment
- Waterways,
- Last week we were a B+ based on water clarity and inflows being minimal.
- Army Corp started discharges last Saturday.
- New Lake O operating system put in place in August.
- Currently at 15.3 feet
- The operating manual is a blueprint.
- Asking the Corp how long the discharges will last.
- Their goal is to get the lake to 12 feet by April in preparation of the wet season.

ACT ACTION ITEMS

A. Approval of the 2025 TDC Meeting Schedule:

**January 15, 2025; March 12, 2025; May 14, 2025; July 30, 2025;
September 17, 2025; Nov. 12, 2025**

Ed Griffith Moved to approve the 2025 meeting schedule as presented.

Robert Steele 2nd the motion

(7 – 0) Motion was **approved**/denied/modified with Frank Fender absent from the vote

B. Strategic Planning update and selection of a date for the TDC Strategic Planning Session .

- A strategic planning session with DestinationNext will be a 3-hour session with

the DestinationNext staff running the session rather than the Office of Tourism & Marketing.

- Discussion was held on whether to hold this session during a pre-approved TDC meeting timeframe or during a stand-alone date.
- It was decided that a stand-alone date would be best, in either January or February.
- Nerissa will send out January date options tomorrow for a session meeting from 2:00PM-5:00PM

C. Cruise and Tours Unlimited Travel Agent Training Conference Application

This is a Tier 1 sponsorship request.

Christopher Vitale Moved to approve the request of \$6,000.00 reimbursement based on room night pick up.

Patty O'Connell 2nd the motion

(6 – 0) Motion was **approved**/denied/modified with Frank Fender absent from the vote and Ed Griffith abstained from the vote & submitted the conflict-of-interest form.

D. Florida Career Pathways Network Application

This is a Tier 2 sponsorship request.

Tammy Calabria Moved to approve the request of \$4,000.00 reimbursement based on room night pick up.

Christopher Vitale 2nd the motion

(6 – 0) Motion was **approved**/denied/modified with Frank Fender absent from the vote and Ed Griffith abstained from the vote & submitted the conflict-of-interest form.

OTM Office of Tourism & Marketing Update

- **Ecotourism Program Update** **Emily Dark & Anna Grace Agnini**
- PowerPoint presentation provided.
- Example of past tours -
 - Explore Natural Martin Participant total @ 1514 to date.
 - Life of Bats Nature Walk
 - Exploring Dupuis WMA
 - Autumn Birding Nature Walk
 - Mysterious Mushrooms Nature Walk
 - Historical Nature Walk
 - Celebrating Sea Turtles
- Upcoming events-
 - Small but Mighty: Florida Wildlife Nature Walk -Dec. 12, 2024 @ 9:00AM
 - Holly-Day Nature Walk – Thursday, Dec. 19, 2024 @ 4:00PM
 - Coral Reef Beach Walk – Saturday, Jan. 4, 2025 @ 9:00AM
 - Explore Natural Martin Nature Walk – Monday, Jan. 13, 2025 @ 9:00AM
 - Birding Series – Florida Hardwood Forest – Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025 @ 9:00AM
 - Magnificent Mangroves Nature Walk – Monday, Feb. 10, 2025 @ 9:00AM
 - Birds & Butterflies – Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025 @ 2:00PM
 - Dark Sky Night with the Treasure Coast Astronomical Society – Saturday, Feb. 22, 2025 @ 6:00PM
- General program update -
 - Promotional Materials – Monthly Flyers are sent to the hotels to update visitors about our upcoming programs and how they can sign up.
- Programs for 2025 will be scheduled every:

- 1st Saturday
- 2nd Monday
- 3rd Thursday
- The goal is to encourage visitors to stay longer by coming in early or adding a Sunday night to their stay.
- BARK Ranger – was created by the National Park System in 2015. This program encourages responsible behaviors when exploring the outdoors with dogs.
- Martin County launched a Martin County Bark Ranger Program in December 2023.
- Since launching, we have had over 160 visitors and residents and their pets take the BARK Ranger pledge.
- GreenStep Sustainable Tourism –
 - Through GreenStep’s Free Sustainable Tourism Analysis, Martin County was scored a silver.
 - This analysis allows us to recognize our strengths and opportunities for improvement in terms of management, social, economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability.
- All Trails Public Lands Program –
 - As a member of the AllTrails Public Lands Program, Martin County can:
 - Create and manage trail routes on county preserves.
 - Collect data on trail usage.
 - Add trail alerts.
 - Share information on Leave No Trace.
 - QR codes linking to interactive trail maps can now be found at all Martin County preserves.
- Florida SEE –
 - The Florida Society for Ethical Ecotourism (Florida SEE) is an organization dedicated to encouraging awareness and stewardship of Florida’s natural heritage through ecotourism.
 - The FL SEE Annual Meeting will take place for the first time in Martin County the weekend of June 7, 2025.

- **Public Relations Update**

Nerissa Okiye

- PowerPoint presentation provided.
- Recent PR results:
 - 50 + print & digital placements
 - 5.7 billion impressions
 - \$52 million + est. media value
 - Travel + Leisure
 - AOL
 - MSN
 - Yahoo!
 - Sun Sentinel
 - Southern Boating
 - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
 - Forbes
 - Conde Nast Traveler
- PR Coverage:
 - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution –
 - Winter Travel: Culinary destinations add flavor to cold-weather getaways featuring Kai-Kai Farms and Indiantown
 - Only in Florida – Few people know this charming small town in Florida is the halfway point between Jacksonville and Key West
 - 11 of the Most Underrated Towns in Florida – Jensen Beach
 - Forbes: 50 Best places to travel in 2024 – Hutchinson Island, Florida
 - Flamingo – Martin County’s Natural Beauty and Seasonal Events Offer the Ideal Winter Escape

- **FAM TRIPS:**
 - Terry Ward – Florida-Based, Nov. 8-10. Freelance writer (Travel + Leisure, MSN, Nat. Geo. Etc.)
 - Stuart Airshow
 - Sarah Etinas – NY Based, Nov. 18-20, 2024. Freelance writer (Lonely Planet, Florida Guidebook 2025)
 - Andreas & Annett Conrad – Germany Based, Jan. 23-25, 2025. Freelance Writers, Front Row Society Magazine, Visit Florida Partnership – 10 Digital Florida Articles
- **Canada Media Mission –**
 - Visit Florida Canada Media Mission
 - Sept. 29-Oct. 4, 2024, Quebec & Toronto
 - 8 Media Events and 150+ Canadian media and influencers
 - Martin County was 1 of 6 destinations selected to represent Florida Tourism during the Canadian Media Mission. Other partners included:
 - Pensacola, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Kissimmee, and Fort Myers
- **Recent Awards:**
- **2024 Leave No Trace Awards – Tourism Partner of the Year Awarded to Martin County**
 - Above & Beyond – Honoring Women in Government & Public Service – Nerissa Okiye, 2024 Recipient
 - Visit Florida – Impact Awards – Celebrating Leaders Making an Impact in our Communities – Emily Dark Recipient.
 - Travel Weekly – Magellan Awards –
 - Gold Recognition:
 - In Destination Visitor Information Program (United States): “Explore Natural Martin”
 - Advertising/Marketing Campaign (Destination Marketing): “Explore Natural Martin Campaign”
 - Eco-Friendly Sustainable Destination (Overall Destinations): “Martin County, Florida”
 - Advertising/Marketing Campaign (Destination Marketing): “Sea Where Art Takes You Campaign”
- **Silver Recognition:**
 - Cultural/Arts (United States -Overall Destinations): “Martin County, Florida”
 - 2024 Adrian Award Winner hsmi –
- **Gold Adrian Award in the “PR Campaign Consumer” category for the organic PR results achieved promoting the Explore Natural Martin**
- **Silver Adrian Award in the “Integrated Campaign – Environmental, Social, Governance (ESG)”**
- **Category for the multifaceted marketing campaign promoting ENM.**
- **Bronze Adrian Award in the “Digital Video-Single Entry” category for the ENM launch video.**
- **We also earned 2 “Best of Category” Awards for the Gold and Bronze wins, meaning both entries received the highest scores from the judges.**
- **The Stevies Awards-**
 - Gold Stevie Award in the Travel & Tourism Video Category for our ENM promotional video
 - Bronze Stevie Award in the Communications or PR Campaign of the Year – Travel & Tourism category for PR and content marketing efforts promoting ENM.
 - Bronze Stevie Award in the Sustainability Initiative of the Year in Canada and the USA
 - Award Finalists:
- **Ragan Video, Visual & Virtual Awards Finalist –**
 - “Entertainment & Travel/Tourism Video” (up against Disney and MSC Cruises)
 - “Marketing Design” category (up against Q'Straint)
- **Digital Tourism Think Tank Awards-**
 - Categories Nominated:
 - “Purposeful Brand Award” (up against Visit Copenhagen, Visit California, and Dark Sky Terschelling)
 - “Peoples Choice Award” category (public voting now closed)

- **Florida Treasure Coast Update**
 - The Travel and Adventure Shows:
 - New York
 - Chicago
 - DC
 - Atlanta
 - Not doing the Canada Outdoor Adventure Shows this next year.
 - AAA Boston Travel Agent Forum
- Florida's Treasure Coast Podcast –
 - Now hosted by Nerissa Okiye and Charlotte Bireley (St. Lucie County Tourism Director)
 - Dec. Episode: "Deck the Coast-Holiday Events You Can't Miss"
 - Guest: Steve Crist, Opal Properties
 - Jan. Episode: "How to Thrive in 2025"
 - Guest, Michelle Byriel, Florida Oceanographic Society
 - Feb. Episode: "Treasure Coast Wine, Ale & Spirits Trail"
 - Guest, Katie Bougeouis, Frazier Creek Brewery
 - Mar. Episode: "Aquatic Adventures on the Treasure Coast"
 - Guest, Jordan Schwartz, Ohana Surf Shop
- Treasure Coast Wine, Ale & Spirits Trail-
 - New Logo – Rebranded from "Wine & Ale Trail" to expand partnership and incorporate new distilleries in the region.
 - Partners voted to skip organizing the Treasure Coast Wine, Ale & Spirits Trail Festival for 2024.
 - Instead, they are dedicating a full month of 15 themed events organized by each partner location to promote sign-ups for the trail.
 - The month of promotions will culminate with the "Brewers Ball" fundraiser event on Feb. 15th at Walking Tree, (the night before the Florida Craft Brew & Wing fest).
- Visit Florida Programs:
 - One Fun Family Day Video
 - Destinations sign up for a "One Fun Day" episode to be filmed in their location & distributed via paid media.
 - Destinations select three locations to be filmed. Visit Florida recommends activity, lodging and dining but these can be customized based on the individual needs of your destination.
 - Destinations will also select the talent based on their specific target audience needs (Example: Families, girls trips, multi-generational, couples).
 - Upcoming Visit Florida Co-Op programs –
 - Undiscovered Florida
 - Arts & Culture Geofencing Package
 - Lonely Planet
 - Travelspike
 - Flipboard
 - Kayak Travel Network
 - Digital Billboards
 - Travel Leaders Network
 - Florida is for (Girl) Friends
 - Southern Living + Midwest Living
 - Bridal Guide Magazine
 - Florida Huddle
 - Canada Sales Mission & Travel Market Report Tradeshow 2025 (Toronto & Ottawa)
 - Domestic Sales Mission – April/May 2025
 - Satellite Media Tours (SMTs) – pitched waiting for selection.
- New Web Pages & Web Page Audit:

- Anna-Grace Agnini is tasked with auditing our current web pages and updating them as well as creating new web pages.
 - Our Wedding Page has been updated.
 - We were able to use our B-Roll footage from the One Fun Family Day video shoots to update our Attractions Page.
 - Our Explore Natural Martin webpage has been updated.
 - Example of our New Outdoor Pages includes Birding in Martin County.
 - We now have a new Electric Vehicle Charging Page.
 - Sunshine for Candians.com page has been created.
 - Our New UK Promotion for the Upcoming Feature page is still under construction.
 - Travel Trade page and meetings page completed.
- **OTM Update** **Nerissa Okiye**
 - PowerPoint presentation provided.
 - **Thoughts Leadership and Development:** -
 - Florida Society for Ethical Ecotourism (Florida SEE) – Anna-Grace Agnini has joined the Florida SEE’s Board of Directors.
 - Leave No Trace Global Summit 2024, Powering the Next 30 Years
 - Nerissa and Emily Dark presented at this year’s Global Summit “Building from the Ground Up: Crafting Sustainable Destination Management Programs.
 - Destinations Florida – Nerissa Okiye will be the Vice-Chair for 2025 which means that when she is the Chair in 2026, the Destinations Florida Annual Meeting will be held in Martin County.
 - **Legislative Update:** -
 - Anticipated FY25 Legislative Items: -
 - Tourist Development Tax –
 - Multiple bills filed in FY24
 - SB7074 – Senate Finance & Tax Committee
 - HB 7073 House Ways & Means Committee
 - Most changes impact collections \$10 million+ or population thresholds.
 - Vacation Rentals –
 - Will be back with concessions passed last session.
 - Sen. DiCeglie ® SB 280
 - Rep. Griffiths ® HB 1537
 - Funding for Visit Florida –
 - Dana Young announced her retirement yesterday.
 - Hillsborough County Representative/ Visit Tampa Bay plans to file to change tourism tax to tourism surcharge.
 - Destinations Florida is vetting with partners – starting with FLRA.

COMMENTS

- A. TDC MEMBERS –**
 - None
- B. Staff Comments**
 - None
- C. Public Comments**
 - None

CHAIR'S CLOSING

Next Meeting Date – Jan. 15, 2025,

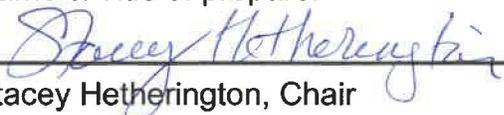
BOCC Chambers

ADJOURN

- Meeting was adjourned at 4:36 PM



 Sally Beynon, Tourism Project Coordinator 12/11/2024
Date

Name & Title of preparer


 Stacey Hetherington, Chair

Date

Name & Title

ADA

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