

Tourist Development Council Regular Meeting

Ocala/Marion County Visitor & Convention Bureau

109 W Silver Springs Blvd.

Ocala, FL 34475

Thursday, September 26, 2024

9:00 a.m.

The regularly scheduled meeting for the Tourist Development Council was held both in person and via WebEx.

Mr. Jeff Bailey read into the record, members of the public are advised that this meeting/hearing is a public proceeding, and the clerk to the board is making an audio recording of the proceedings, and all statements made during the proceedings, which recording will be a public record, subject to disclosure under the public records law of Florida. Be aware, however, that the audio recording may not satisfy the requirement for a verbatim transcript of the proceedings, described in the notice of this meeting, in the event you desire to appeal any decision adopted in this proceeding.

Roll Call

Present:

Rus Adams, Christopher Fernandez, Danny Gaekwad, Councilmember Barry Mansfield, Jason Reynolds and Jeff Bailey

Staff:

Loretta Shaffer, Sky Wheeler, DeeDee Busbee, Bryan Day, Jessica Heller, Corry Locke, Samantha Solomon, Heidi Villagomez

Guests:

Kristin Gutierrez, Ocala International Horse Show; Angel Russel, Assistant County Administrator, Thomas Schwartz, Assistant County Attorney, Dana Olesky, Chief Assistant County Attorney; Danielle Trees, HITS Shows; Janine Olaso, Lightning City Gymnastics; AJ Joseph, JVC Volleyball; Lea Brayton, World Equestrian Center; Isiah Lewis, Downs & St. Germain; Brenna Dacks, Visit Florida; Pam Walther, HITS Shows; Amy Agricola, HITS shows

Notice of Publication

Notice was published on the County Website on January 2, 2024 and subsequently

updated to include WebEx information on September 04, 2024.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Rus Adams, seconded by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, to adopt the minutes from the August 22, 2024 Tourist Development Council Meeting as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

Acknowledgement of Financials – August 2024

A motion was made by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, seconded by Jason Reynolds, to review and approve August 2024 Financials. Mr. Jeff Bailey asked if any of the members had questions or comments regarding the August 2024 financials and Mr. Danny Gaekwad requested that the financials be explained.

Ms. Sky Wheeler explained that the financials presented were from August 2024. She further stated a comprehensive review of the financials was normally provided at the end of the fiscal year where the council would begin seeing encumbrances for the upcoming fiscal year. Ms. Wheeler then advised there were no unexpected expenditures in August but if some existed, they would be brought to the council's attention. She then stated the majority of the expenditures were processed as promotional activities which were in-line with the mission of the department. Ms. Wheeler stated that any expenditures which were not included with the original approved budget were submitted to the council for funding approval.

Mr. Gaekwad requested that his question regarding the financials be placed on the record noting that he asked if any red flags or extra-ordinary expenses existed. He further requested for this question be addressed at all future council meetings.

Mr. Bailey affirmed and stated that any decisions regarding money, whether it be the marketing plan, staffing or funding sources, be addressed during the meeting.

Christopher Fernandez in at 9:06am

A motion was made by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, seconded by Jason Reynolds, to review and approve August 2024 Financials. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

Mr. Bailey read into the record, "In an effort to expedite today's meeting due to impending storm Helene, all additional items on the agenda, excluding Funding Requests, will be addressed during the October 24, 2024 meeting."

Report from Chair

Gateway Signage Update

Update postponed until October 24, 2024 due to impending storm Helene.

Funding Requests

Nike First in Show Volleyball Tournament

Mr. Corry Locke, Group Sales Supervisor, addressed a funding request for Nike First in Show Volleyball Tournament to be held at the World Equestrian Center from January 18-20, 2025. Mr. Locke advised this event had been held in Marion County for four years but last year was the first time the event organizers requested funding. He advised the council funded \$25,000 to the event last year and they have requested \$25,000 this year as well. The event would have to secure 1,786 total room nights to meet their requested funding amount. Mr. Locke further advised the anticipated economic impact was noted as \$2,105,989 with a ROI of 193%.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know the number of days the event would be held.

Mr. Locke advised three days, Saturday, Sunday and Monday of the Martin Luther King Jr. Weekend. He further stated the event organizers planned to use the funds for officials, volleyball court rental/shipping and equipment rental. Mr. Locke indicated this event had grown substantially over the years. He mentioned the tournament started with 110 teams and now they had 240 teams.

Mr. Gaekwad mentioned that hosting this event on a Sunday and Monday was very good for the local hoteliers as those days normally had low occupancy levels.

A motion was made by Danny Gaekwad, seconded by Christopher Fernandez, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$25,000 for the Nike First in Show Volleyball Tournament to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (6-0).

Nike Winner's Circle Volleyball Tournament

Mr. Locke then presented a funding request for Nike Winner's Circle Volleyball Tournament which was to be held from April 12-13, 2025 at the World Equestrian Center. The event organizers requested funding in the amount of \$10,010 with a room night guarantee of 715 rooms. The total economic impact was noted to be \$720,282 with a ROI of 61%. The funds would be used for officials, volleyball court rental/shipping and equipment rental. Mr. Locke then stated this would be the second year the event was hosted in Marion County.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know what days of the week the event would be held and if this event was anticipated to grow.

Mr. Locke advised the event would be held on a Saturday and Sunday. He then affirmed and advised the event had already secured a significant number of teams therefore they were trying to negotiate use of another expo center at the World Equestrian Center to accommodate all of the attendees.

Mr. Bailey requested to know the number of teams the event hosted last year.

Mr. Locke stated he was unsure but introduced Mr. AJ Joseph with JVC Volleyball who advised the event hosted seventy-one teams last year and already had over 180 teams

registered for this year. Based on their calculations, they could only accommodate 160-170 teams in one expo so they requested a second expo center at the World Equestrian Center. If an additional expo was unavailable at the World Equestrian Center, they would look to surrounding facilities (schools or recreation center) to determine if additional courts could be secured. Mr. Joseph advised the event had more than doubled in size this year.

Mr. Gaekwad then requested to know what other events this organization hosted in Florida.

Mr. Joseph advised they hosted events in Tampa and Daytona Beach. They also hosted events in Savannah, GA as well as Boston, Hartford, Providence and Springfield. He then stated that out of the thirty-three events they hosted there were two cities, Savannah and Ocala, which had a higher spectator ratio than others.

A motion was made by Danny Gaekwad, seconded by Jason Reynolds, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$10,010.00 for Nike Winner's Circle Volleyball Tournament to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (6-0).

The Sun Conference Swimming and Diving Championships

Mr. Locke presented the funding request for The Sun Conference Swimming and Diving Championships in the amount of \$8,400 to be held February 5-8, 2025 at Florida Aquatics Swimming and Training (FAST). The requested funding amount mirrors the eligible funding amount based on 600 anticipated room nights. Mr. Locke advised the total economic impact was noted at \$1,144,989 with a ROI of 285%. The requested funds would be used for operational expenses, marketing of the event, equipment rental, officials, timing/scoring and live streaming expenses. Mr. Locke advised there would be twenty teams in attendance, both male and female, at the tournament for four days.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know if this was the first time this event would be held in Marion County and if it had the ability to grow in attendance.

Mr. Locke advised this was the first time the event would be hosted in Marion County but the event would not grow unless the conference grew. Mr. Locke further stated the conference was a ten-team conference and the only way for the event to grow would be to increase the number of teams that participated.

A motion was made by Rus Adams, seconded by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$8,400.00 for The Sun Conference Swimming and Diving Championships to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (6-0).

Charity Challenge Cup Gymnastics

Mr. Corry Locke then presented a funding request for Charity Challenge Cup Gymnastics in the amount of \$5,012.00 which mirrored the eligible funding amount based on 358

anticipated room nights. He advised the estimated economic impact was noted at \$756,892 with a ROI of 202%. He further advised the funds would be used for officials/judges, sanctioning fees and equipment rental. Mr. Locke stated this youth gymnastics tournament, which raised money for charity, was previously held in Gainesville and possibly Tampa. This would be the first time the event was held in Marion County.

Mr. Bailey asked Ms. Janine Olaso with Lighting City Gymnastics how many people the event would have in attendance.

Ms. Olaso stated they anticipated over 200 gymnasts to compete at this event between the USA Gymnastics Competition and the AU Competition. Ms. Olaso advised they originally requested one side of the World Equestrian Center but they have since requested to expand the event to both sides of the venue.

A motion was made by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, seconded by Jason Reynolds, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$5,012.00 for Charity Challenge Cup Gymnastics to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (6-0).

HITS Holiday Series

Mr. Locke presented a funding request for the HITS Holiday Series, a three-week event, in the amount of \$25,000. The requested funding mirrored the eligible funding amount. The event would be held November 27-December 1, December 11-15 and December 18-22, 2024. Mr. Locke advised this event was previously only held for two-weeks but the organizers added an additional week to the series. The estimated economic impact was noted as \$2,616,264 with a ROI of 154%. The anticipated room night total was noted as 3,000 but they would only need to secure 1,786 rooms to qualify for the requested funding of \$25,000. The event organizers anticipated use of funds included judges/officials, promotional expenses and course designers (pending legal review & approval).

Mr. Bailey requested to know which week, out of the three noted, had been added to the series.

Mr. Locke advised the week of November 27-December 1, 2024 was the addition to the series.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know the number of anticipated attendees for the first week of the event and requested that a breakdown of attendees, per week when multiple weeks were noted, be provided in the future. He then advised that hosting an event in Marion County during the Thanksgiving week was wonderful because hotels normally had low occupancy levels during that time.

A motion was made by Rus Adams, seconded by Jason Reynolds, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$25,000 for HITS Ocala Holiday Series to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved

by the council (6-0).

HITS Post Time Farm Premier

Mr. Locke then presented a funding request for a new event in the amount of \$25,000 for HITS Post Time Farm Premier. He advised this event would be held from January 1-12, 2025 at the HITS Post Time Farm. He further advised the requested funding amount of \$25,000 mirrored the eligible funding amount based on an anticipated room night total of 2,500. He then stated per the funding program requirements, the event would only have to secure 1,786 room nights to qualify for the requested funding amount of \$25,000. Mr. Locke indicated the estimated economic impact was noted as \$1,895,400 which was a ROI of 82% and the funds would be used for judges/officials, promotional expenses and course designers (pending legal review and approval).

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know if the World Equestrian Center had any events which coincided with the HITS Series.

Mr. Locke advised he was not aware of any events hosted by the World Equestrian Center during that timeframe.

Mr. Gaekwad re-emphasized that January 1-15 was a low occupancy season and that events hosted in Marion County during that time were highly encouraged and appreciated.

A motion was made by Danny Gaekwad, seconded by Rus Adams, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$25,000 for HITS Post Time Farm Premier to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (6-0).

HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 1-5

Mr. Locke presented a funding request for HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 1-5 (January 14-February 16, 2025). The organization requested funding in the amount of \$50,000 although the eligible funding amount, based on the room night funding criteria and guidelines, was \$25,000. The estimated economic impact was noted as \$9,590,439 which totaled a ROI of 819% based on funding at \$25,000. The organizers anticipated 5,300 total room nights for this event. Mr. Locke advised the packet included economic impact details with ROI for the event based on funding at \$25,000 as well as funding of \$50,000. He then advised the ROI based on funding of \$50,000 would be 360%. Mr. Locke then requested a motion be presented to fund HITS Ocala Winter Circuit Weeks 1-5 for the requested funding amount of \$50,000 or a motion to fund the event at the eligible funding amount, based on the room night generating guidelines, in the amount of \$25,000. He then advised that based on the current guidelines, \$25,000 was the maximum amount an event was eligible to receive but the council had the discretion to increase the funded amount via vote. He then mentioned that a motion could also be presented to fund the event at an amount other than that noted.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know if this event was the same one HITS hosted in

Ocala/Marion County for the past thirty years.

Mr. Locke affirmed.

Mr. Gaekwad then stated the event currently on the floor for vote was not a new event and requested clarification as to whether the aforementioned HITS events were new to Marion County.

Mr. Locke advised that HITS Holiday Series was not a new event to Marion County but the event organizers added an additional week to the series transforming it from a two-week event to a three-week event. He then advised that the second event, HITS Post Time Farm Premier, was a new event to Ocala/Marion County.

Mr. Gaekwad then requested a description of each event and wanted to know what made one event different from the other.

Mr. Locke advised the HITS Series was hosted for a total of fifteen weeks with a different event showcased each week. He further advised the competitors would stay for the duration of fifteen weeks, November through March.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know if the event organizers were dividing the series up and requesting funding for each event separately.

Mr. Locke advised that was how it had been done for the past several years.

Mr. Gaekwad then requested a breakdown explaining whether different competitors attend the event and a description of each event. He advised that he thought these were four different events not one fifteen-week event. Mr. Gaekwad advised he was concerned that other event organizers may decide to divide their events into separate weeks in order to request additional funding which would deplete the money reserved for funding.

Mr. Locke emphasized that funding was reimbursed based on the number of room nights secured and verified.

Mr. Gaekwad advised that he would like to encourage new events to come to Marion County. He stated he was unsure whether bringing the same event over multiple years was a new trend but felt it was a dangerous trend.

Mr. Bailey deferred to Mr. Jason Reynolds to comment and then requested that a representative from HITS speak to the questions posed.

Mr. Reynolds advised the HITS Series successfully brought in competitors from outside of Marion County and kept them here for an extended stay. He then advised the series also encouraged people to visit Marion County during the week to attend the events.

Mr. Gaekwad advised the aforementioned was not of concern. He then advised that he was concerned that a fifteen-week event, combined weeks to create four separate events and then requested funding, separately, for each event.

Mr. Bailey then posed a question to the HITS representatives and asked what made the new event different from the others and not an extension of the existing events.

Ms. Pam Walther, Attorney for HITS, advised that all events were recognized by the US Equestrian Federation. The dates for the HITS Series were awarded from the Federation and they do not allow the overlap of another entity, within a certain area, unless an exemption was obtained. Ms. Walther advised an exemption was obtained by the World Equestrian Center. She then advised the HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 1-5 and 6-10 were historical events which had been hosted for over twenty years. Ms. Walther stated many competitors would come to Marion County to spend 5-10 consecutive weeks but the organization would also see variations in the competitors throughout the competition. She also stated that different awards were presented for each event. She then advised that although the events carried the same name the organizers were trying to encourage new competitors by hosting different jumping events, special award events and circuit events to extend the visitor stay. The World Equestrian Center brought similar competitors to the USEF (US Equestrian Federation) event they hosted but the level of competition varied. Ms. Walther also stated that many competitors would attend the World Equestrian Center's equestrian event as well as the HITS series. She advised that HITS had spent a substantial amount of money to upgrade the facility over the past two years so that visitors would want to attend and stay in Marion County. Ms. Walther advised that HITS requested additional money because they could show that additional competitors would attend and new events were created within the existing competition.

Mr. Gaekwad then requested a ten-year analysis of the HITS Series inclusive of the amount funded each year, what HITS events took place that year and whether any new events were created. He would then like that report compared to the amount of money funded to HITS in 2024 so the Board would better understand how the event grew, how the HITS organization grew and how the funding program grew. Mr. Gaekwad then advised this analysis should also be created for the World Equestrian Center so the Board could keep track of how much funding was awarded and how the money was used.

Mr. Bailey advised that four events were presented from HITS and history existed for three of the events. The only event without a historical record was the new event, HITS Post Time Farm Premier.

Mr. Rus Adams stated if the funding guidelines did not have a maximum funding limit of \$25,000 the HITS Post Time Farm event would be eligible for \$74,200 based on 5,300 anticipated room nights when multiplied by \$14.00 per room.

Mr. Locke affirmed.

Mr. Bailey then stated if the Board awarded funding in excess of the \$25,000 maximum, the \$14.00 per room night amount would be reduced. He then advised an exception could be granted to allow the Board authority to award \$50,000 to HITS as requested which would still generate a significant return on investment or maintain the maximum funding amount of \$25,000 so the county could invest in new events. Mr. Bailey advised

the room night funding program was designed to grow events within Marion County and fund new events.

Mr. Gaekwad reiterated that an analysis was necessary. He then advised Marion County funded \$8,000 for the same event in prior years. The event had not changed but the funding amount increased to \$25,000. Mr. Gaekwad advised the maximum funding amount should be maintained at \$25,000 to eliminate organizers from creating multiple events from an event previously held as a single event, in an effort to request more funding. He then advised that funding should be awarded to promote new businesses, new events and to bring new money into the county.

Mr. Adams advised that over the past ten-years the amount the county reimbursed to HITS was normally less than the amount requested because the necessary requirements were not met.

Ms. Wheeler stated there were some years the Florida Sports Foundation (FSF) reimbursed Marion County a portion of what was funded to HITS but the county could not depend on a potential reimbursement from FSF.

Mr. Adams then reminded the Board that without the HITS Series in November through March, that season of the year would not be busy and the hotels would not be occupied.

Mr. Gaekwad affirmed that HITS was a major reason why that season of the year was busy but HITS was a private-profit business, not public-profit, therefore all proceeds benefited the vendor. Mr. Gaekwad advised that Marion County does not have a fiduciary obligation to fund HITS. He advised the Tourist Development department would pay out too much money if an event was able to host the same event every year, re-group the event dates and request more funding. He then advised that he was opposed to the funding request.

Mr. Adams advised the goal of the Tourist Development department was to promote visitation to Marion County so local business owners, as well as, the community could profit.

Mr. Gaekwad then stated this event had sustained itself for over twenty years and he believed the event would continue to exist if funding was not granted.

Mr. Reynolds stated it was misleading to state HITS hosted the same event over the past twenty years. He advised the foundation of the event was equestrian jumping but additional events were added over the years to attract a variety of people.

Mr. Gaekwad advised his concern was that organizations may continue to split out their events in order to request additional funding. He then advised that a precedent should be set by the Tourist Development Council as they were stewards of the money and needed to administer it responsibly.

Mr. Bailey then requested to know how much money the department allocated for funding and if enough money existed in the funding budget.

Ms. Wheeler advised funding was paid out of the budget line item entitled Promotional Activities. She then advised that sub-sections existed under Promotional Activities which allowed funds to be budgeted for Bid-Fees, the Marketing Assistance Funding Program and Room Night Generating Event Funding. The Room Night Generating Event Funding budget was created based on a \$25,000 maximum funding amount per event and that was why the staff always recommended to stay within the current guidelines. Ms. Wheeler stated that another line item existed within the budget entitled Reserves for Tourism Initiatives. She further advised this line item existed in case the council determined there was a compelling reason to expend funds for something that was not previously budgeted. The recommendation would be presented to the Board of County Commissioners and if approved, the funds could be included in the budget and taken from Reserves for Tourism Initiatives.

Mr. Adams then requested to know if the budget had been exceeded as a result of the approved funding requests.

Ms. Wheeler advised the budget had not been exceeded and if the money did not exist in the budget to approve a funding request the staff would advise.

Mr. Christopher Fernandez stated the evidence presented showing HITS had doubled its participation from 2500 attendees to 5300 attendees should replace the need for creation of a new event for them to qualify for funding. He then requested to know how funding would be calculated if an event exceeded the \$25,000 maximum.

Mr. Gaekwad stated he would prefer to fund new events which might initially have low attendance but had the potential to grow their attendance over time than to continually fund events which have existed for years and grew organically on their own. He further advised that other Tourism agencies normally do not fund events which have shown growth in their attendance since they have been able to develop a customer base on their own. He stated that Marion County Tourism Department could not continue to support established events. He emphasized that Marion County was the Horse Capital of the World and the county appreciated the equestrian business but other organizations existed which could bring new events to the county.

Mr. Bailey stated he understood that Mr. Gaekwad preferred to fund new events and bring them into the county instead of funding existing events which doubled in size. He then advised that an existing event which doubled in size still required more judges and more prize money. He also advised that he agreed that a future conversation was warranted.

Mr. Gaekwad advised the goal of the TDC was to bring new business into Marion County through funding, help them grow and then release them to sustain themselves.

A motion was made by Danny Gaekwad to approve the staff recommended amount of \$25,000 (maximum reimbursement amount per current guidelines unless Board majority vote dictates otherwise) for HITS Ocala Winter Circuit Weeks 1-5 to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was rejected by the council (1-5).

Mr. Bailey requested another motion be presented for HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 1-5 with an amount between \$0-\$50,000 for Board consideration.

Mr. Adams requested to know if a motion was presented to fund HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 1-5 for \$35,000 or \$50,000 would the opportunity to apply for a 50% reimbursement from Florida Sports Foundation exist.

Mr. Locke affirmed.

Mr. Adams then reiterated that staff could not guarantee the 50% reimbursement request from Florida Sports Foundation would be honored but the opportunity existed.

Mr. Locke advised the Florida Sports Foundation offered 50% reimbursement, regardless of the amount funded, which Marion County would be eligible to receive.

Mr. Adams then asked if the staff had ever funded an organization in excess of \$25,000.

Ms. Wheeler advised the staff funded several organizations in excess of \$25,000 but there was an in-depth conversation, approximately one-year ago at a previous Board meeting, regarding funding above \$14.00 per room night. That conversation then led to implementation of some process changes, per direction from the council, which included advising the Board of the staff recommended funding amount. Ms. Wheeler then stated funding in excess of \$25,000 had not occurred since that time.

Mr. Bailey stated before the aforementioned the staff recommendation was presented to the council verbally but it was now included on the funding request form. He then went on to state that regardless of what an organization requested, if the necessary room nights were not secured they would not be awarded the funding. He then requested another motion be placed on the floor for a funding amount between \$0-\$50,000 (not to include \$25,000).

Ms. Wheeler added the council could decide to reconsider the motion for \$25,000 if they chose.

Mr. Adams requested to know when the \$25,000 maximum payout was adopted.

Ms. Wheeler advised the \$25,000 maximum funding amount was adopted when the room night generating funding program was created, reimbursing a specific dollar amount per room night. She further stated the council could adjust the maximum funding amount, at their discretion, for recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners.

Mr. Adams posed a question to the staff and requested to know the amount of research that went into establishing the \$25,000 maximum funding amount and what it was based on.

Ms. Wheeler advised it was not based on \$14.00 per room night because nothing would add up to \$25,000 when multiplied by \$14.00.

Mr. Locke advised the staff reviewed the funding program in 2022 and realized Marion County needed to find a way to compete with other destinations which were securing major events. He then conducted research on different funding programs administered by other destinations and found the highest room night reimbursement amount offered was twelve dollars per room night. He then considered that Marion County does not have a major airport or access to a major airport. Mr. Locke then considered what could be done to incentivize event planners to host their events in Marion County instead of Orlando or Tampa. He advised the staff came together, had an in-depth discussion and determined increasing the room night reimbursement amount to \$14.00 per room would offset other potential costs a planner may have, due to logistics, when deciding to host an event in Marion County.

Ms. Wheeler then added that most events do not last longer than one-week therefore, they would not secure enough hotel rooms to qualify for more than \$25,000. She added that staff reviewed the average duration of an event funded, the average length of an event the sales team pursues, the average number of room nights produced by those events and multiplied that by \$14.00. The budget was then reviewed to determine the maximum amount the department could pay each event for room nights, manage all other department expenditures and still have funds available to solicit new events.

Mr. Barry Mansfield advised that he does not have a problem with extending the requested \$50,000 to HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 1-5 as he understood that every show hosted at the event would be different.

A motion was made by Rus Adams, seconded by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, to approve funding in the amount of \$37,500 which is the mid-point between the staff recommendation of \$25,000 and the requested funding amount of \$50,000 if 2679 minimum room nights were secured and verified (reimbursed at \$14.00 per room) for HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 1-5 to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was approved by the council (5-1).

Danny Gaekwad dissented since the staff recommended funding amount was \$25,000 not \$37,500 as recommended and voted on by the Tourist Development Council for HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 1-5.

Rus Adams out at 10:08 am

HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 6-10

Mr. Locke presented a funding request for HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 6-10 which would be hosted February 18-March 23, 2025 at HITS Post Time Farm. The organization requested funding in the amount of \$50,000 although the staff recommended funding amount was noted as \$25,000. Mr. Locke advised the estimated economic impact would be \$9,677,624 with a ROI of 828%. The organizers anticipate an estimated 5,500 room nights would be secured for this event. The funds would be used for judges/officials, promotional expenses and course designers (pending legal review/approval).

A motion was made by Danny Gaekwad to approve the staff recommended amount of \$25,000 (maximum reimbursement amount per current guidelines unless Board majority vote dictates otherwise) for HITS Ocala Winter Circuit Weeks 6-10 to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was rejected by the council (1-4).

A motion was made by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, seconded by Jason Reynolds, to approve funding in the amount of \$37,500 which is the mid-point between the staff recommendation of \$25,000 and the requested funding amount of \$50,000 if 2679 minimum room nights were secured and verified (reimbursed at \$14.00 per room) for HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 6-10 to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was approved by the council (4-1).

Danny Gaekwad dissented since the staff recommended funding amount was \$25,000 not \$37,500 as recommended and voted on by the Tourist Development Council for HITS Winter Circuit Weeks 6-10.

Ocala International Horse Show

Mr. Locke presented a funding request for the Ocala International Horse Show to be hosted at the World Equestrian Center from October 22-26, 2024 in the amount of \$25,000. The event had been held in Marion County for four years but this was the first time a request for funding was presented. Mr. Locke advised the requested funding amount of \$25,000 mirrored the staff recommendation/eligible funding amount. He stated the total economic impact would be \$1,448,552 with a ROI of 39% and an anticipated room night total of 1,900 (the required room night total would be 1,786 rooms at \$14.00 per room to qualify for the maximum funding amount of \$25,000). The event organizers indicated the funds would be used for promotional items, marketing/advertising, live-streaming, announcers, judges and event-specific rental items.

Mr. Bailey requested to know where the event was previously held and how the event had grown over the years.

Ms. Kristin Gutierrez, Coordinator for the Ocala International Horse Show, advised what was now known as the Ocala International Horse Show was previously a smaller horse show held in the Tampa area. She advised some horse farms in Ocala, Tampa and Kentucky came together and decided they needed to showcase Ocala, FL - The Horse Capital of the World. Ms. Gutierrez advised in 2020 a contract was signed with the World Equestrian Center but the event could not be held due to COVID. Therefore, the first event was held in 2021 and had approximately 800 people in attendance and 450 horses that participated. Ms. Gutierrez stated in 2023 the event had approximately 2500 people in attendance and 800 horses showcased.

Mr. Bailey requested to know where the competitors came from.

Ms. Gutierrez advised competitors come from all over the country but most are from the eastern, northeastern and southeastern United States with a few from California.

A motion was made by Danny Gaekwad, seconded by Jason Reynolds, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount and staff recommended amount of \$25,000 for Ocala International Horse Show to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

Mr. Bailey read into the record, "In an effort to expedite today's meeting due to impending storm Helene, all additional items on the agenda will be addressed during the October 24, 2024 meeting."

Staff Updates

Short Term Rental Compliance Update

Update postponed until October 24, 2024 due to impending storm Helene.

Marketing and Communications Update

Update postponed until October 24, 2024 due to impending storm Helene.

Sales Update

Update postponed until October 24, 2024 due to impending storm Helene.

TDT Collections/STR and Key Data Update

Update postponed until October 24, 2024 due to impending storm Helene.

Ms. Shaffer advised the TDC Events Calendar was in the packet.

Notation for Record

Update postponed until October 24, 2024 due to impending storm Helene.

Old Business

Update postponed until October 24, 2024 due to impending storm Helene.

New Business

Update postponed until October 24, 2024 due to impending storm Helene.

Public Comment

Upcoming Meeting

Mr. Bailey stated, that the next TDC meeting will be on Thursday, October 24, 2024.

The meeting adjourned at 10:14 a.m.



Jeff Bailey, Chairman