

## **Tourist Development Council Regular Meeting**

Ocala/Marion County Visitor & Convention Bureau

109 W Silver Springs Blvd.

Ocala, FL 34475

Wednesday, May 21, 2025

9:09 A.M.

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

### **Notice of Publication**

Notice was published on the County Website on December 27, 2024, and subsequently updated to include Teams information on March 13, 2025.

Due to lack of a quorum, the meeting proceeded with items for which no vote was required with plans to return to the start of the meeting once a quorum was present.

### ***Sales Update***

Mr. Corry Locke presented a monthly sales update and offered the opportunity for questions from the council members. The first item was the Florida Senior Games, a statewide game which includes 25 different sports run by the Florida Sports Foundation. Mr. Locke presented the opportunity to host the softball tournament on September 27<sup>th</sup> or possibly the weekend before. The sales team would work with staff to ensure the event occurred at Ocala Regional Sportsplex. The event organizer estimated that 50 room nights would be secured.

Mr. Locke also discussed the American Youth Football Southeast Regional Championship. The event was previously hosted in Ocala/Marion County, in 2013 and 2022. Mr. Locke advised the event would be held November 14-16, 2025 and the event organizer estimated 650 room nights. The sales team was working with Ocala Regional Sportsplex and Belleview Sportsplex in an effort to secure the event.

Next, Mr. Locke discussed the United States Trampoline and Tumbling Association, a lead sourced from PlayEasy. Mr. Locke noted that, after researching fees, the event appeared to be a great opportunity and would be held in the middle of June. The organizers were looking at bid fees for June 15-20<sup>th</sup>, 2026 or June 14-19<sup>th</sup>, 2027. The event organizer estimated 1,600 room nights and our staff is reviewing the RFP.

Mr. Locke then presented the American Angus Association's Leaders in Angus Development (LEAD) conference. The event organizer would like the event to be held July 25-30<sup>th</sup>, 2026 and

were considering Florida, Kentucky or Texas as options. Mr. Locke further advised that Ocala was the only Florida location being considered. The event organizer estimated 222 room nights would be secured for this event.

Mr. Locke advised the Florida Chamber Foundation Learners to Earners Workforce Solutions Summit's representatives were at Tallahassee's XSITE two weeks ago. They provided an RFP for July 23, 2027. Mr. Locke stated the event would be a one-day event with a board meeting the day before. The event organizer estimated 187 room nights with about 250 attendees.

Mr. Locke went on to discuss the Recycle Florida Today Conference and Expo which would be held June 25-27<sup>th</sup>, 2027. He further advised that Recycle Florida was based in Ocala. Mr. Locke noted that the team met with their CEO to discuss the idea of hosting the event in Marion County, but the event was already contracted elsewhere for 2025 and 2026. The estimated room nights would be 250.

Mr. Locke presented an opportunity to the council with the Florida Fire Chiefs Association Executive Development Conference. The conference would be a weeklong summit for people in the fire industry looking for career growth and would be held July 13-17, 2029 or July 12-17<sup>th</sup>, 2030 with an estimated room night total of 1,300. They have two bid years currently available. The sales team received RFPs for the organization at the XSITE conference and met with them.

Mr. Locke continued his update by sharing that we received an internal RFP from the Florida Society of Association Executives (FSAE) on behalf of the Association Societies Alliance (ASA) for their annual Winter Conference. ASA would like to bring the event to Florida and contacted FSAE to be connected with DMOs across the state. Mr. Bryan Day submitted proposals for the January/February 2026 or 2027 timeframe. The event organizer estimated a total of 75 room nights.

Christopher Fernandez enters the room at 9:15 AM.

Mr. Locke then moved on to page 199 of the agenda regarding the Tourism and Hospitality Roundtable. He advised that it would be held in the VCB Conference Room on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025, and noted that there would be insights on 2025 travel trends as well as funding programs and Tourism Exchange USA updates.

Mr. Locke then advised the Sales Blitz would be held in Tallahassee on June 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025 at the AC Hotel in Cascades Park. He advised two events are being held, a reception to socialize and meet people and a business breakfast the next morning which would include a presentation outlining the resources we offer to encourage them to bring their business to Marion County. Mr. Locke further explained that 80-90% of the associations were based in Tallahassee and the objective was to introduce them to Ocala/Marion County as a meeting destination, which they

might not have considered before. Mr. Day and Mr. Locke would attend as well as industry partners and hoteliers (with \$250 buy in).

Mr. Rus Adams advised that the quorum still had not been met and that two more people were needed.

### ***Marketing and Communications Update***

Ms. Jessica Heller presented the marketing and communications update. She explained that the last update had the numbers and time range from January to February, but today's update was going to review the impressions and data from March through May. As she explained the placements, she remarked that along with the current running media and ongoing billboards, there were unique out of home-based advertising placements with Carvertise (car wraps). The wraps were designed by VCB staff and promote Ocala/Marion County. They would run March through May, 12 weeks, on six rideshare vehicles. Events were selected that aligned with our target audience to do swarms in Orlando. All six vehicles were parked at events to generate interest when audience members walked out of the stadiums or events. For the March through April figures which were based on the events the vehicles were placed at and the attendees (guests and residents of Orlando), the vehicles were driven over 65,000 miles resulting in over 4.1 million impressions.

Mr. Adams inquired about wrapping the county vehicles used by the Visitors and Convention Bureau. Ms. Loretta Shaffer advised the vehicle was wrapped previously and now that the rebranding was completed, the wrap could be reconsidered.

Ms. Heller advised that the digital section of the report showed the impressions and clicks based on various placements noting that Carvertise was included in the report as they performed a geo – retargeting to capture people within the area that potentially may have seen those car ads and retarget them in digital ads.

Mr. Adams clarified with Ms. Heller that rideshare meant Uber and Lyft vehicles. Ms. Heller confirmed and further clarified that they pulled into a swarm and people leaving that event would get a vehicle from the swarm that was waiting. The swarm drivers had a print piece with our QR code to the ocalamarion.com website that they gave to passengers for an interactive, multifaceted placement. Ms. Heller indicated that she hoped to have swarm photos available for the next meeting.

Ms. Heller provided updates regarding the industry and advocacy communications; the department was represented at Marion at the Capital in Tallahassee in April with a section and tent area with over 1,000 attendees.

\*Commissioner Carl Zalak enters the room at 9:23 AM.

Ms. Heller continued with an update about National Tourism and Travel Week which was in the beginning of May and explained the Proclamation at the Board of County Commissioners and postcard photo contest that ensued. She also outlined the ticket give-away for Rock the Country that was driven by e-newsletter sign-ups, resulting in over 300 signups. She also explained that another episode of the Insider's Guide – Mojos was published and is available on YouTube, the Facebook page and ocalamarion.com Ms. Heller gave an update on the performance of the campaign. She also advised that the OMCVCB has recently won two marketing destination awards for last year's campaign with Nativo and Miles with vibrant imagery, culture-based foods, and equestrian content winning the internet advertising competition award for best online campaign. The bureau also won an eTSY award for best family friendly marketing campaign delivering over 14.3 million impressions, 52 seconds average time on content reading the article and over 79,000 page views to ocalamarion.com with over 205 content shares.

Discussion ensued about the next agenda which could be addressed without quorum present.

### ***Report from Chair***

### ***PRESENTATION: Gateway Signage Update – North and South***

Mr. Richard Busche with Kimley-Horn Associates presented progress updates on the gateway project. The status for the south gateway, which is northbound I-75 over 42<sup>nd</sup> street flyover, is that the panel covers have been modified to be all one shade. He explained that the lights were on, they came on Wednesday night as a test and Thursday night they came on by themselves. The lights are on photocells and come on automatically once dusk, approximately 8:18 to 8:30 currently. The gateway has a fantastic presence at night. We are going through some permit close outs with FDOT, some punch list items that the contractor is working on and working on final contract close out with CIC who is general contractor. A rendering was shown from the March TDC meeting showing the panels as one color and the next slide showed a drone photo from last week with the panels one color. Mr. Busche clarified that the updated panels did result in one matching shade. The photo also showed the landscaping at the tower, the right of way grassed in and the Ocala letters. He remarked that, at this time, there was not a night photograph to show as it requires a tripod, camera and nighttime exposure to professionally shoot it and is not available yet. He encouraged everyone to look at it at night when they had an opportunity.

Mr. Adams inquired if the project was turned over to Maven. Sky Wheeler advised that the team was aware and working on scheduling.

Mr. Busche continued discussing the north gateway at I-75 and 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue where the Buc-ee's would be going. Plans were completed and out to bid. DOT expected to have a construction

contract in summer 2025. The county prepared a set of landscaping plans but that would be a separate project after the interchange was functioning. Mr. Busche expected completion of the interchange to be in 2027-28 as FDOT had not published a date yet as that would take place after a contractor was selected. Diverging diamond interchanges typically take 2 to 3 years to build. There have been a lot of improvements on the sides of the interchange as well, such as roadway and signalization improvements. There was discussion at the last meeting regarding the cantilevered sign, a directional sign with a pole that hangs out over the roadway directing which lane to be in, as it will be in the middle of the bridge. DOT has agreed to remove the sign from the bridge behind the towers and place it in the area where there will be a retaining wall. After the last meeting, Marion County Administration reached out to DOT which resulted in discussions as well as a summit call on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. Due to the great relationship Marion County has with District 5, they agreed to take another look at the issue and upon a 2<sup>nd</sup> review they agreed the sign could be moved. It will be dealt with during bidding process and we should check progress to make sure it happens. This is a huge project that is really going to change transportation in the north part of the county.

Mr. Adams asked if there would be a second one on the right side. Mr. Busche advised that yes and due to it being an interchange there would be lights, other signs, and a bit further out there will be traffic lights. They are trying to keep the view from the bridge clear.

Commissioner Zalak asked if the design over the top of the OCALA letters could be changed to add a horse. Mr. Busche advised it will be clear to match the south gateway and structurally where the letters are it's difficult to get any other vertical elements between it and the barrier wall of the bridge. The centerpiece letters are the same height as south gateway which is larger than DOT normally allows. The bridge is longer so there are more elements outside of the lettering. Future updates will be on the bidding process and their timeline.

Mr. Adams verified with Mr. Busche that the front, back and internal components, eye beams, of the gateway will be painted the same color. Mr. Busche advised that yes and it will have the same black fencing as well. Additionally, Mr. Busche advised that from the southbound direction, the tips of the towers would light up and glow at night. Discussion ensued regarding quorum and scheduling, it was determined that Sky Wheeler would present the TDT Collections/STR and Key Data Update.

### ***TDT Collections/STR and Key Data Update***

Ms. Sky Wheeler advised that she provided the trends chart for the hotel and short-term rental data in the original packet. At the time of publication, she did not have the Smith Travel research traditional hotel data for Marion County or the State of Florida. A new copy was provided at the meeting which included all the updated data as well as providing the information on screen for those attending online.

The Smith Travel research for Marion County in the month of April shows total occupancy at 59% this year, which is up .8 % year over year. The average daily rate was \$129.34, which was an increase of 5.6% year over year and the revenue per room was \$26.37 that was an increase of 6.5% from last year. Looking at the running 12 months for Marion County, the Smith Travel research data showed the occupancy was up 4.4%, the average daily rate was up 6% and revenue per available room was up 10.7%. Additionally, we received Visit Florida's April state research data which showed all their numbers up as well, however they were in some cases not as good as Marion County's numbers. Occupancy statewide was 72.2%, which for the state was an increase of 1.1% over last year, average daily rate was \$217.77, which was 6.3% up from last year and the revenue per available room was \$157.22 which was an increase of 7.5%. It was noted that the destination is leading the state percentage wise in both occupancy and revenue per available room.

Revenue per available room and occupancy are two metrics that are heavily weighted in the tourism industry, and the destination is outpacing the state. Transitioning into Key Data, she advised this is the short-term rental information as it relates to occupancy, average daily rate, nights available, and revenue per available room and should not be confused with the data that the tax collector's office uses for compliance and tracking of taxes collections. In April occupancy was 43.2% which was a decrease of 14% from last year, however average daily rate was \$147 and that was a \$7 increase over last year. We have not seen an increase in the average daily rate in our short-term rentals since the onset of using the program. Coming out of COVID we saw some increases as a lot of people were staying in non-traditional lodging opportunities. This could be in response to more enforcement happening, so they are increasing their rate to make up for that. We believe we will see that level off a bit and in nights available. Things had been really growing, and we may see a bit of constricting in that due to the compliance element. Revenue per available room was \$41 and that was a decrease of \$10 from last year and nights available were 3,113, which is an increase of 7% over last year. The first quarter showed nights available well over 4,000 so we see less people having their accommodation online during this time frame. For the running 12 months occupancy was down 4% but the average daily rate was up 2%, RevPar was down 5% and nights available still increased by 13% whereas there were increases in the 20% area previously.

Ms. Wheeler explained that tax collections were not within the packet as we have George Albright, Marion County Tax Collector and Tammy McCann, who oversees the tourist development tax collection to give an update and explain everything they are doing as it relates to short-term rentals and that she would defer to their expertise.

Ms. Wheeler explained that for the reporting period of April, collections are going to be perceived as lower, but Ms. McCann and Mr. Albright are going to explain what that means and how that is not exactly the scenario we are in. Collections totaled \$294,671.29, which may be concerning if you are looking at the chart in front of you as last March, we had the best March we have ever had which meant our April revenues were close to \$700,000. We are seeing less in collections but not less in revenue or less for what was done for marketing the destination, securing events

or getting visitors. The change is due to accounts getting balanced and a lag in remittance with new software changes.

Mr. Adams asked if today is the official presentation from the Tax Collector. Ms. Wheeler advised this presentation is in response to data that she provided.

Mr. Albright advised that post-Covid they were asked if it was time to engage another vendor to help scrape down and find people that were eligible to pay the Tourist Development Tax. They looked at 3 companies and settled on Deckard Technologies. The tax department advised the Tourist Development Tax vendors of their working with Deckard. They started at the end of February, and they had some concerns as once they instituted change there were concerns from the vendors that were paying the tax. Deckard, which was being paid \$14,000, advised they had not done collections previously. They did not have experience on the collection side but had quite a bit of experience on the scraping side. Deckard utilized Stripe, a third-party administrator. Stripe asked for the banking account and routing codes for all the vendors to be able to collect the TDT. The Tax Collector's office did not agree with releasing that information. The Tax Collector's Office got the business and \$14,000 back from Deckard and are just utilizing them for scraping. They have a contract between \$60,000 and \$70,000. The TDT vendors were immediately notified, and they were happy to learn that the responsibility was to go back to Ms. McCann. The March figures are skewed as there are still some funds with Stripe which will be returned and there may have been a slight decline. The positive news is that TDT collection vendors went from 535 to 767 from the scraping. Deckard Technologies believes there are several hundred more that have been identified but not pulled into the program yet. These are smaller vendors as all the large hotels are in the system. If the numbers come to fruition the Deckard scraping was a worthwhile mission.

Tammy McCann introduced herself as being with the Tax Collector's Office and responsible for the collection of the TDT. She advised they are still in the process of collecting for March and switching from Deckard back to West Florida. She predicts that over the next few months that the monies will be collected, and the revenues will increase to where we are used to seeing them. She advised that she is getting 4 to 5 emails daily regarding identifying short term rentals from the letters sent out by Deckard. Mr. Albright advised that Deckard has a series of 3 letters to potential short-term rentals showing Ms. McCann as the contact and advised the first round and some second-round letters have been sent.

\*Councilmember Barry Mansfield entered the room at 9:51 AM.

The short-term rental vendors were being advised by their platforms that they are collecting the tax, and the vendor doesn't need to send it in but that is not the case. The platforms are collecting the state tax not the local tax. They launched February 26<sup>th</sup>, and the accounts have increased, which is positive. In two-months they have increased by 232 accounts. Mr. Albright suggested they come back in the fall to provide updated figures. Ms. McCann advised that the majority of

the accounts have been found on Airbnb, with over 2,000 accounts, VRBO, shows over 800 accounts, and Mr. B and B. which showed 211 accounts, and Bookings.com with 110-115 accounts. The rentals may have multiple accounts on multiple platforms. Advising there may be potential for multiple new accounts.

Commissioner Zalak questioned that he believed there were an additional 4,000 room nights available in the county over regular hotel rooms. Ms. McCann advised that Deckard showed about 3,500, however that was overall which listing which may be repeated on different platforms. Commissioner Zalak asked if we are trying to collect based on address or from the platform. Ms. McCann advises that Deckard looks at the address for the rental location on all the platforms. Deckard's letter sent to short-term vendors has the listing from the platform on the back.

Mr. Adams added that Airbnb can be a room rental whereas VRBO must also have cooking facilities. A listing can be on both platforms if it has cooking facilities and that a hotel room would not qualify for VRBO. Ms. McCann advised that it may also be shown on Booking.com, meaning an address can show up three times on the different platforms.

Commissioner Zalak inquired that if you acquire a rental or room through an online platform who submits the TDT payment. Ms. McCann advised hotels are advertising on Bookings.com and the platform accepts the funds and remits back to the hotelier. VRBO and Airbnb funds get remitted back to the individuals or homeowners. Commissioner Zalak inquired if there is a way that the platforms can charge the tax and remit directly back to the county. Ms. McCann advises that it is a possibility that has been investigated but requires a contract with the platform and there is no way to audit them. We would just receive a lump sum from the platform without knowing where it goes. Mr. Albright advises that this is a big piece of the legislation going back and forth in Tallahassee. Commissioner Zalak wondered if it would be more beneficial to go that route with the 2,000 addresses in the platform system and receive automatic payment vs county tracking them for payment. Mr. Chris Fernandez inquired and Ms. McCann advised that hotels are auditable and that hotels must report to the Department of Revenue whereas other platforms report to the entire county to the Department of Revenue. The Department of Revenue's contract with platforms does not allow an audit. Mr. Albright advises there may be an audit ordinance, but they don't have the manpower for an actual audit. Mr. Fernandez asks how the hotels are audited and is advised that the Department of Revenue handles the process. Mr. Albright advises that the hotels have never been an issue as they have national software that collects the funds. Commissioner Zalak believes the contracts may be the way to go as opposed to chasing down 2,000 addresses. Mr. Albright advises it is the smaller rentals as larger hotels have been complying since the beginning and agrees that the smaller rentals will add up. Rus Adams advises that there are no hoteliers or collectors in the room and that the TDT collection process is to protect them as this is a direct assault on their business by people taking spare rooms and guest houses and getting into their business and avoiding paying the taxes. Everyone needs to pay their fair share if they are going to get into the hotel business. Mr. Albright advises that the whole room is being driven off the tax and he takes that very seriously. He and Ms.



McCann are committed to the process as the TDC, along with the CEP, is the economic engine that makes things happen. The system is old and flawed. Ms. Shaffer added that the platforms have not been transparent on short-term rental listings, making tax collecting difficult. Mr. Albright advised that legislation is not forcing the platforms to be auditable. Ms. Shaffer wonders that with Deckard's scrubbing if it is possible to go back to platform and push for data. She advised it's a challenge to sign a contract with Airbnb, but other counties are making millions of dollars off the short-term rental platforms. Mr. Albright advised that the process is new, and they should re-evaluate once it is in place for a while. Commissioner Zalak agrees that a review post-summer is a good idea and asked that the department review some of the contracts executed by other counties in Florida, so we have some data to compare in September. Mr. Adams also requested the tax collector's office investigate manpower costs to expand staff, potentially with TDT funds. He pointed out that the tax department doesn't have the current resources to collect. Mr. Albright advised that the TDT funds collected are under the maximum allowance of 3% and Ms. Shaffer advised the implementation of the software has allowed them to take between 3 and 4%. Mr. Albright requested that Deckard provide a list of short-term rentals and send the platforms a letter with the list included requesting feedback. Mr. Albright has been trying for years to hire an assistant CPA so finding an auditor may be a challenge as the cost would be over \$100,000 or more. Mr. Adams and Mr. Albright agree there are actionable items that will need to be re-reviewed in 90 days.

\*Commissioner Carl Zalak leaves the room at 10:08 AM.

Mr. Rus Adams officially brought the meeting to order, as quorum was met and a roll call could be initiated.

Mr. Rus Adams 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, Commissioner Ron Livsey, Councilmember Barry Mansfield, Commissioner Carl Zalak

Staff:

Loretta Shaffer, Sky Wheeler, DeeDee Busbee, Bryan Day, Jessica Heller, Corry Locke, Heidi Villagomez, Coleen Robinson, Candace Shelton, Samantha Solomon, Angel Roussel

Guests:

Dana Olesky, Chief Assistant County Attorney; Paresh Chhotu, Hilton Garden Inn; Evelyn Morales, Hampton Inn & Suites; Corian Yandel, Naventure; Amy Caraletto, City of Ocala; Tammy McCann, Marion County Tax Collector; Jaye Baillie, Marion Cultural Alliance; George Albright, Marion County Tax Collector; Richard Busche, Principal Engineer/Senior Vice President, Kimley Horn.

\*Commissioner Carl Zalak returns into the room at 10:11 AM.

### ***Approval of Minutes***

**A motion was made by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, seconded by Christopher Fernandez, to adopt the minutes from the April 24, 2025 Tourist Development Council Meeting as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).**

### ***Acknowledgment of Financials – April 2025***

**A motion was made by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, seconded by Commissioner Carl Zalak, to review and approve April 2025 Financials. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).**

### ***Funding Requests***

Ms. Shaffer advised that a large workshop was held in the fall which was presented by Mr. Locke and Ms. Wheeler. They worked with Ms. Dana Olesky, Chief Assistant County Attorney, to present three funding programs for the sales team and two funding programs for the marketing team, highlighting one program as being entirely new, Arts and Culture Destination Enhancement.

Mr. Locke advised that he would first present a funding request and then review the funding programs.

Mr. Locke advised that the only funding request on the agenda was Patriotic Skies, which would be held at Tuscawilla Park on July 4, 2025. This is the second year of the event and would showcase fireworks versus drones. The requested funding amount is \$25,000.00 with a staff recommendation and eligible amount of \$6,100. The estimated economic impact is just over \$137,000, which is a negative ROI of 47%. The anticipated attendance is 10,000 people and the

event organizer anticipated to generate 30 room nights. The intended use of funds would be for billboards, advertising of the event, production of the event and entertainment expenses. This event fell outside of our normal process for a room night generating event with only 30 room nights anticipated. The VCB staff analyzed the event and noted that expenses for sound and lighting were estimated at \$15,000, entertainment expenses for the singer were estimated at \$6,000 and expenses for the billboard were going to be a total of \$4,000. The County attorney's office suggested awarding funding based on an estimated attendance of 10% tourists at the event. Therefore, the recommendation was 10% of both sound/lighting (\$1,500) and entertainment (\$600) plus the entire \$4,000 for billboards, if they are outside county lines. The billboards would be considered a marketing expense to bring people to the destination which could be eligible for reimbursement per state Statute 124 as well as giving us the ability to collect tourist development tax. The city would have to prove that 10% of the attendees were from outside Marion County as stated on the second page of the memo. Mr. Locke advised that Amy Casaletto from the City was in attendance to answer any questions regarding the event and the tracking mechanisms associated with it. Mr. Fernandez asked why it was switched from drones to fireworks and Councilmember Barry Mansfield explained there was a drone incident in Orlando involving the company we were contracted with which resulted in injuries. Mr. Adams explained the company pulled the contract and Amy Casaletto with Special Services for the City of Ocala agreed it was the best course of action. Commissioner Carl Zalak inquired how long the fireworks show would be and Amy Casaletto responded with 18 minutes adding that the fireworks show would be sponsored by Ocala Main Street. Amy Casaletto added that the launch location will be different from last year as they have a bigger footprint this year happening at Tuscaawilla Park.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Carl Zalak, seconded by Christopher Fernandez, to approve the funding request of \$6,100.00 for Patriotic Skies (Room Night Generating Event) as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).**

Amy Casaletto verified with Commissioner Carl Zalak that the amount approved was \$6,100.00.

### ***Staff Updates***

Mr. Locke advised the funding programs presented at the October workshop would be reviewed. The guidelines reviewed are to be presented to the Board of County Commissioners for approval. Ms. Wheeler added that as the programs were being developed many great opportunities were brought forward especially in one of the new sales programs. To administer these programs, authorization is required from the Board of County Commissioners. Mr. Locke has been working with the county attorney's office to streamline the funding programs which includes drafting a resolution. The resolution will authorize the board interpretation that governs the TDC and will also allow staff to carry out the programs effectively. Currently, a resolution does not exist so it would provide a safeguard and the ability to discontinue certain programs if there was a change

in funding or catastrophic event. The resolution is a function for the county attorney's office to present to the Board of County Commissioners.

Mr. Locke presented the first program as the Meeting Rewards Program. The program was in place prior to Covid and now with extra staff on the sales team it's a great opportunity to bring the program back for smaller to mid-size meetings. There are 3 main requirements: RFP for hotel rooms through our office, the meeting must be in Marion County, and the meeting must generate a minimum of 50 room nights. The fund scale starts at 50 room nights and goes to 200 plus. The new event must be held from April to December to incentivize meetings in off-peak seasons and if it's a repeat event they receive a bit less. The maximum amount of funding is \$2,500.00 with a new event from April to December with over 200 room nights. Ms. Wheeler clarified that the program was budgeted at \$30,000.00 so the sales team, specifically Bryan Day, who handles meetings and associations, has the ability to offer it to those meeting planners who are typically able to decide, in the moment, while he is in a meeting with them. The quarterly reports would be brought to the TDC and BCC after the fact. There are no loopholes or caveats to this program, if the requirements are met, a check will be presented.

When presenting for the motion Commissioner Zalak asked if the council was required to continue with calling each member when voting as it was not done in other meetings. Ms. Olesky advised that years ago there was an audit that was done that recommended the council vote individually when dealing with financials. Ms. Olesky does not believe it's a state statute but based on some recommendations by the auditors for financial votes. She further advised the guidelines could be voted on as one motion for today's purposes. She is going to research whether this method would be applicable to other area votes and bring that information to the next meeting.

Mr. Locke presented the next program, Room Night Generating Event Funding Program, budgeted at \$300,000.00. The program has been in place for several years and this is the updated version. The minimum room nights requirement was increased to 250 as it was previously 50. There has also been a 120-day deadline to submit the request implemented to allow staff the ability to get the contract and paperwork completed prior to the event. Previously it was a \$14 a night blanket reimbursement throughout the year and now it's broken down into quarters, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter is \$5.00 room night reimbursement with a maximum of \$10,000.00, 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter would be a \$10.00 room night reimbursement with a maximum of \$25,000.00 and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter would be a \$15.00 room night reimbursement with a maximum of \$25,000.00 and finally the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter would be a \$10.00 room night reimbursement with a \$25,000.00 maximum. Mr. Locke also stated that if a specific request was presented above the \$25,000.00, a request could be brought to the board. They would need to contact the housing bureau if the event was in quarters 2,3 and 4. The housing bureau would ensure the rooms are trackable and verified. The contract was also reduced from 14 to 6 pages to streamline it for applicants to apply and review guidelines. Ms. Shaffer reiterated that the content was still there, but the cumbersome language was eliminated. Mr. Adams verified that 120 days before the start date is important. Commissioner Zalak advised that he feels 120 days is long and asked why it wasn't 90 days. Mr. Locke advised that it was

decided at the workshop and Ms. Shaffer advised it's needed for accountability. Ms. Wheeler advised they would just need to submit the online application at the 120-day point so there would be enough time to get it onto the agenda and that the contract wouldn't need to be finalized within that time frame. Ms. Wheeler also reminded the council that there would not be a meeting in July or December and that the 120 days provides a buffer. Mr. Adams asked that if the funding program was approved today and put in front of the BOCC when it would take effect. Ms. Wheeler advised the BOCC has a second meeting in June which the resolution could be reviewed.

Mr. Locke reviewed the next program, Bid-Fee Funding, advising there was no formalized policy for this program previously although we have had bid fee events and have scheduled events in future. The budget is \$500,000.00 which it has been since the beginning of the program. This is for larger events with a bid process. This program allows sales the tools needed to bid on events, some being 2 to 3 years out. The event provides a packet outlining what they can provide for the community. The Sales Team reviews the bid fee proposals in search of a projected ROI that is favorable for the county as well as off-peak timing, whether the event is a good fit for the county's market and community and if there is a large marketing and media reach to leverage the county's brand exposure to inspire a legacy of visitation. The event organizer is required to submit a Letter of Intent or RFP packet as there is no application.

Commissioner Zalak asked why repeat events were ineligible. Mr. Locke advised the staff does not want events that were previously held in the county to switch to a bid fee. The bid fee program is to bring in new business. Mr. Locke further explained if the event was previously here as a bid fee event we could continue that agreement. Commissioner Zalak stated that if an event grew to over the \$25,000.00 cap instead of having to come ask for larger amount maybe they should go to a bid fee. Mr. Locke advised if they have a current event under the room night generating funding program that has contracted with the housing bureau, they can request more funds, explaining that the housing bureau contracts with hotels and gets rooms blocked for events so attendees could use the portal or website to book. Ms. Wheeler advised that a bid fee opens competition with other markets. Ms. Shaffer advised the \$500,000.00 would be in place to generate new business. Ms. Shaffer added that we are over a million dollars in funding, which is a sixth of our budget. Mr. Angel Roussel asked to clarify that if an event was a previous event in the county and decided to go with a bid fee that we would be unable to bid. Mr. Adams believed that to be correct and stated that we would not be able to bid but could move quickly to change policy. This is to protect previously held events from switching to a bid fee for more funding dollars. If it shows that we protected ourselves from growth, we could reverse the program. Mr. Roussel stated that reversing the program may take 60 days and we would potentially lose a year so we may want to reconsider by having some flexibility built in. Ms. Olesky pointed out that the event holder who submits the application which the TDC can review and the TDC may decide it's not worth the money versus the economic ROI that was expected. Ms. Olesky further explained that the way it stands we wouldn't even be able to apply to be considered for the bid fee. Mr. Adams inquired what the bid-fee lead times typically were. Mr. Locke advised it would normally be 2 to 3 years in the future, adding if an event holder came in with a bid fee

event to be held in six months, it would be out of desperation. Mr. Adams requested to know if when presented to the BOCC can the program be altered and sent back to the TDC. Commissioner Zalak advised that the BOCC would just not approve it and he knows that Rock the County wants more than the \$50,000.00 and other counties are going to give them \$150,000 plus as they are trying to offset their public safety fees that run \$300,000 to \$400,000. Commissioner Zalak added they are a perfect example of why the program should have a waiver process. Ms. Wheeler advised the board is reviewing a summary sheet and read further program details regarding Events Previously Hosted/Already Secured which states that events previously hosted without a bid fee or OMCVCB is aware of other destinations securing the event without paying a bid, this set a precedent that the bid fee may not be required, nor should a bid fee be paid. Ms. Wheeler furthered explained that the summary sheet was just highlights of the full program for the benefit of council's time. She further advised that if the event was previously hosted without a bid fee or we know that no other destination is paying a bid fee that we are not paying one either. Ms. Wheeler states to Commissioner Zalak's point that if someone else is paying a bid fee we could also. Commissioner Zalak expressed that he is unsure if some of the smaller communities or rural areas are paying through a bid fee or just providing public safety or something comparable. Commissioner Zalak asked if room night generator is the only option and asked how we could figure that piece out. Mr. Adams asked if there was an option outside of the bid fee where an event could be presented to the BOCC. Ms. Wheeler advised there is not, and we would need to adjust one of the programs to cover that scenario. Commissioner Zalak advised there is currently no waiver just the 5 set programs. Mr. Adams believes that the programs may be too structured, and some ambiguity is needed to entertain other opportunities that may be out there. Mr. Locke interjected that the program is there so they can be proactive in seeking events that fit the criteria set forth in their strategy to be able to bring events to the county like Major League Fishing two months ago. Rock The Country came two years ago without working with the programs available and since working with them they have been approved for the \$50,000.00 so far. Ms. Olesky advised that paragraph number 3 would also preclude Rock the County from applying for a bid fee. Ms. Olesky advised further that the way paragraph number 3 is written states that previously held events, not requiring a bid fee, would not be eligible to apply for the bid fee program. Mr. Adams asked if striking that paragraph would provide the latitude to make an exception. Ms. Wheeler asked for some time to make some adjustments to the program and have meetings with the other commissioners as well as the county attorney's office before presenting to the BOCC. Commissioner Zalak stated he believes they should allow the flexibility to switch programs as the room night generating program is capped. Ms. Wheeler explained that the cap is removed if you have a housing bureau as they sell tickets with the hotel included so it's known revenue. Mr. Adams asks if \$25,000 is the cap and Ms. Wheeler advised that there is a caveat that if a housing bureau is involved and the event is held in quarter 2, 3, or 4 there is no cap, and they can request up to any amount as long as they can substantiate the request with room nights. That was put in place for events that could justify the room nights as opposed to a blanket amount of funding as a lot of bid fees are paid upfront. Mr. Adams asked to clarify bid-fee meaning and Ms. Wheeler advised that the event would have to complete the items outlined as deliverables in the contract and we would look at the ROI for the event. Commissioner Zalak asked about Rock the County and Ms. Wheeler advised that they were contractually bound to provide 3,572 room nights and we are awaiting confirmation. Mr. Locke advised that was at the \$14 per room night.

Commissioner Zalak asked what it would be next year, and Mr. Locke advised if the event was still held in the second quarter it would be \$10 per room night. Commissioner Zalak stated that they would get less money, and he believed they would not come back. Commissioner Zalak advises they may go to another destination, and we would let a potential \$4-5 million event go. Mr. Adams advised we could still entertain \$50,000 for the room-night generating funding request for next year but if they only have 3,500 we would only pay \$35,000. Mr. Roussel asked the sales team if all the other bid fees they have handled have the same level of performance that was expected or does staff have some flexibility as sometimes we are bound by the other party that is putting on the show based on what their conditions are. Commissioner Zalak states that we just did the Major League Fishing that Mr. Locke verified was \$75,000 and was not based on room nights but the advertising package which included television exposure but with these funding programs we cannot even offer Rock the County, whose revenues were \$4-5 million, a \$100,000 or \$150,000 contract even though it has the ROI we are looking for. Mr. Roussel clarified that Rock the County was a room night generating event and we are trying to be able to bid on the event if they were to come in the future. Mr. Adams verified that if they try to come back to us as a bid fee as opposed to staying with room night generating event. Mr. Adams verified through Mr. Locke that we currently do not have bid fee guidelines that are published, and this would give us the opportunity to look at them as they would be excluded as they have been here before. Mr. Adams suggests just striking a line and Ms. Olesky advised the bid fee guidelines would need multiple adjustments. Commissioner Zalak believed he may have found an exception and asked if there was a process in which the board would agree to allow an event that doesn't fit these programs to make a special request. Commissioner Zalak asked if the board wanted to be tied by the program's guidelines. Mr. Adams stated that staff prefer to set policy versus some board members' lenience. Mr. Christopher Fernandez agreed with Commissioner Zalak that special circumstances may occur. Ms. Wheeler advised that we could look at the other programs and bid fees can come back in front of the board after revisions. Commissioner Zalak suggested using a waiver if the ROI was agreeable with a larger set amount of revenue. Mr. Adams agreed to pull the bid-fee out of the approvals and re-evaluate next month. Ms. Olesky advises that can be done if that is the board's preference, but the BOCC will make the ultimate decision, and the program can go to the BOCC with the council's recommendations. Ms. Wheeler asked Ms. Olesky if the council could make a motion to approve the programs as written, aside from the bid fee program, with the intention of adjusting it, with the help of legal and advising the commissioners during the one on ones. Commissioner Zalak advised maybe we could put the waiver process in place. Ms. Wheeler wanted clarification of the numbers for the waiver process, so we have the leeway to put it together for review. Mr. Roussel believed that the BOCC has the ability to make specific legislative findings on exceptions. Ms. Olesky advised that they do and whether they are going to fund an event is always up to the BOCC as it's a legislative decision for them to make. Ms. Olesky went on to explain by ordinance the tourist development council is tasked with reviewing those funding requests and making a recommendation as to whether it will be the way staff had presented and if the request is an allowable use of TDT for those events. Ms. Olesky advised that the guidelines would tie staff's hands from even allowing an event that was previously here to come in as a bid fee as they would not be allowed to take that application. Ms. Olesky further advised it would complicate the process by then allowing that event and asking for a special application to come through. Ms. Olesky believed some caveats within the bid fee

guidelines exist that read that an event is not excluded if you have been here before but it's going to be a consideration as to whether staff would recommend approving it in the bid fee category and if the TDC would recommend approving it as a funding request. The event holder would need to understand that they can apply but they may not get funding if they are only applying under the bid fee because the ROI and all the other numbers we were looking at may not support funding. Ms. Olesky is concerned it would limit staff as they would not be allowed to consider it and cause a delay in getting these through. The purpose of adopting these guidelines by resolution is to facilitate and expedite staff's ability to move these funding requests through. Ms. Olesky further advised that in the past these exceptions would come through asking for more than the cap and its months and months before we can get it in front of the BOCC. The guidelines would set rules for the staff so the council could put the motion through with the caveat as part of the motion to amend the guidelines to not exclude an event that has previously been here without a bid-fee, and we can work on getting alternate language to the BOCC. Ms. Olesky does believe that all the funding programs need to go through at one time for the resolution otherwise it is going to be uneven. Mr. Adams asked if the TDC has the ability to move forward and legal make the needed changes to present to BOCC at their next meeting. Ms. Olesky affirmed the second BOCC meeting in June and based on the discussion today they can prepare alternatives. Mr. Adams verified that it would still be a 30-day turnaround. Ms. Wheeler advised that the meeting agenda deadline for the first meeting in June is tomorrow. Mr. Adams asked if there will be an impact from a sales perspective if we review the programs again in 30 days. Mr. Locke advised there are several events awaiting the room night generating funding program to be approved in which he has advised there will be an answer in mid to late June. Mr. Adams suggested after the first round we could take 90-day applications. Mr. Locke agreed that it would help solve the problem. Mr. Adams suggested to table the bid fee funding program for today and return with exception language in 30 days and we would initially except a 90-day application for room night generating if approved in July. Commissioner Zalak advised that often the BOCC will move some items and suggested working with legal before it goes to the BOCC as it can always be pulled off the agenda until parties agree. Commissioner Zalak then directed the chair to move on the other items, get items into process, the sales team can move forward as its conceptually agreed with a couple exceptions that need to be addressed.

Sky Wheeler presented the Marketing Assistance Funding Program which is largely the same funding program that has been used in the last few years with the same budget amount of \$75,000.00. Ms. Wheeler advised based on information gained through the funding workshops, there is a desire to ensure fair and equitable opportunities to all Marion County tourism businesses therefore any partner that has had five years of funding, whether consecutive or non-consecutive, will defer participation in the program for two cycles. She further advised the timeline on page 99 of the packet shows the importance of moving forward as it is contingent on the approval from the second June BOCC meeting.

Ms. Wheeler then presented the only new program titled the Arts and Cultural Enhancement Program. This program is a reaction to the outreach received from the arts, cultural, heritage and nature community to have tourism funding. These tourism partners attract visitors but don't



generate room nights or have a bid process. This funding program was developed in cooperation with Ms. Jaye Baillie from the Marion Cultural Alliance as well as Ms. Victoria Billig, the Vice- Chair of the TDC and The Deputy Director of the Appleton Museum along with Natalie McComb whom oversees the Reilly Arts Center. Previously there was a High Impact Signature Events program with an intensive allocation process, but it was beneficial as it helped those applicants develop something that was marketable that they could also use in other places to garner sponsorship and organizational support. The Arts and Cultural Enhancement Program is modeled after that program with the highlights being a \$100,000 anticipated program budget which means anyone applying for this program would be eligible for the maximum amount of \$10,000 or 10% of the budget. Ms. Wheeler further advised there must be a 50% equivalent match, whether in kind or monetary, to the TDC approved award amount. Ms. Wheeler then advised that volunteers are a large part of what makes these programs and events work so the Office of the Inspector General of the US assigns a dollar value for volunteer hours. Another difference from the previous program is we would receive all the proposals, distribute them to the TDC and the TDC would review, score and bring them back to a council meeting to formally vote on them. The process is to be streamlined through a new procedure with the County Administrator and a Rank and Review Committee consisting of four members. The members would come from each of the following departments Tourist Development, the Library as well as Parks and Recreation, as those are all outward facing organizations that understand how grant and fund administration work. The fourth member would be the Executive Director of the Marion Culture Alliance, as they are the designated Local Arts Agency by resolution from Marion County, and if they are not available the county administrator may approve a designee, so the process is not delayed. The Rank and Review Committee would then convene, score proposals, and make a recommendation to the TDC along with a percentage of funds to grant. Applicants, once brought forward to the TDC with the score, are required to present a presentation at the meeting to discuss any questions. This is a once-a-year program with a requirement for a Letter of Intent that outlines what they are going to do and how it is directly related to the program. If an applicant does not meet the requirements for this program, we can help guide them to the program that is best for their needs. The department would tentatively start accepting Letters of Intent October 1<sup>st</sup> (the start of the fiscal year). Ms. Wheeler advised the submission of the Letter of Intent would start the timeline which the applicant would need to have their proposal in, when the review committee would convene with the intent of bringing the application back for TDC review at the beginning of the year and vote to make a recommendation to the BOCC. This process would occur far enough in advance so the organization would be able to complete any other requirements, especially with state appropriations. Mr. Adams proposed a scenario of \$20,000 default and it comes back the same year if it has the ability to reopen the same business year. Ms. Wheeler answered that the intent is to process once a year.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Carl Zalak, seconded by Christopher Fernandez, to approve the Meeting Rewards Funding Program Guidelines, the Room Night Generating Event Funding Program, the Marketing Assistance Funding Program, the Arts and Cultural Destination Enhancement Funding Program and Bid Fee Funding Program with the caveat that the**

Chairman works with legal before sending to BOCC. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

***TDC Events Calendar***

Mr. Adams advised the TDC Events Calendar was in the packet.

***Notation for Record***

Mr. Adams advised the Quarterly Economic Impact Visitor Tracking Report January through March was in the packet. Mr. Adams advised the TDC Attendance Report was in the packet.

Mr. Adams advised the Sales Report was in the packet and reviewed at the beginning of the meeting.

***Old Business***

Mr. Adams called for any old business and none was brought forth.

***New Business***

Mr. Adams called for any new business and none was brought forth.

***Public Comment***

Mr. Adams called for any public comment and none was brought forth.

***Upcoming Meeting***

Mr. Adams stated the next TDC meeting would be Thursday June 26, 2025.

The meeting adjourned at 11:17 A.M.

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Rus Adams, Chairman

DRAFT