

Tourist Development Council Regular Meeting

Ocala/Marion County Visitor & Convention Bureau

109 W Silver Springs Blvd.

Ocala, FL 34475

Thursday, January 16, 2025

9:03 a.m.

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

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:

Victoria Billig, Christopher Fernandez, Danny Gaekwad, Commissioner Ron Livsey and Jeff Bailey

Staff:

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

Guests:

Paresh Chhatu, Hilton Garden Inn; Lea Brayton, World Equestrian Center; Isiah Lewis, Downs & St. Germain

Notice of Publication

Notice was published on the County Website on December 27, 2024 and subsequently updated to include Teams information on January 06, 2025.

Due to lack of quorum, Mr. Jeff Bailey requested the council discuss items which did not require a motion. He requested the attending members and staff review Staff Updates until additional council members arrived and quorum was met.

Staff Updates

Loretta Shaffer, Tourist Development Director introduced Mr. Isiah Lewis with Downs and St.

Germain to discuss the current economic impact research.

Quarterly Economic Impact/Visitor Tracking Report – July – September Data

Mr. Lewis advised he would present the July to September 2024 quarterly report. Mr. Lewis stated that 550 surveys were collected. He then proceeded to discuss an increase in TDT collections which was up 2.3% from July to September compared to 2023 for the same time period. There was also an increase in room nights but decrease in occupancy, ADR and RevPAR. Mr. Lewis explained, there were more rooms available this year but there was also an increase in paid visitors this quarter that lead to an increase in room nights and TDT collections. Mr. Lewis further advised there was a significant decrease in visitors who stayed in unpaid accommodations and day trippers but there was an increase in paid accommodations. He then clarified and advised, visitors who stayed in paid accommodations increased while visitors who stayed in unpaid accommodations and/or took day trips decreased.

Mr. Danny Gaekwad requested to know if the survey results for hotels was inclusive AirBnBs or rentals.

Mr. Lewis explained when looking at the overall calculations, the number of lodging units in the county, inclusive of vacation rentals and hotels, were included. Mr. Lewis then noted there was an increase in supply from July to September 2023 until July to September 2024.

Mr. Gaekwad requested clarification as to the type of lodging units included in the survey.

Mr. Lewis advised he did not have the information available at this time but that he would obtain it and provide it to the council.

Mr. Gaekwad advised the information was imperative so the council would be informed regarding the supply of rentals in the county because the Tax Collector would be looking for the information. He requested that Downs and St. Germain provide specific information on the supply and demand.

Mr. Lewis advised that he would provide the requested information. He further advised the increase of visitors staying in paid accommodations and decrease in day trippers was in alignment with the Long-Range Tourism Plan metrics. Therefore, the metrics the staff wanted to increase such as TDT and room nights were increasing.

Mr. Gaekwad indicated that occupancy was at 54% and that when supply increased, other metrics decrease.

Mr. Bailey advised that RevPAR decreasing by 5% was difficult for hoteliers assuming costs to operate had not gone down 5%.

Mr. Bailey advised that he was aware that TDT collections increased which was the goal of the council but that TDT collections were heavily funded by hoteliers.

Mr. Lewis then advised that spending per travel party had decreased which fell in line with

national trends and was not an issue solely for Marion County.

Ms. Sky Wheeler advised that the data provided does not only assess hotels, but that all Key Data short term rental information was reported which was why the increase appeared to be drastic. Though the data was beginning to “normalize”, for the running 12 months, nights available had increased 18% in market. Ms. Wheeler advised the data provided pertained to short-term rentals, hotels and accommodations. She then stated the VCB could provide data that spoke to hotel growth, hotels which opened and the number of rooms which have come into the county during this timeframe, but the report discussed at this time focused on economic impact.

Mr. Bailey clarified the aforementioned and advised the statistics that Mr. Gaekwad wanted would be provided by Ms. Wheeler during her presentation.

Ms. Wheeler affirmed.

Mr. Gaekwad stated the organization which conducted the feasibility research indicated that a 300-room hotel was needed in Marion County. Mr. Gaekwad requested to see information which explained how the County could sustain a hotel of that size.

Mr. Bailey advised it’s the lowest quarter of the year.

Mr. Lewis stated the post-COVID normalization of the tourism industry, and as cruise ships and international travel resumes, competition would increase. He further advised tourism numbers peaked in 2022 -2023 and the increased numbers were not sustainable. The numbers were now starting to normalize across the state of Florida.

Mr. Gaekwad advised the peak in tourism numbers was due to a term called “vengeance travel”.

Mr. Lewis advised the length of stay decreased from 4.0 nights to 3.7 a slight decrease in the number of nights travelers stayed in the destination. He further stated there was also a slight decrease in the travel party size from 3.2 travelers to 2.9. The percentage of visitors visiting Ocala/Marion County increased by 7% points with a sizeable increase in first time visitation of 8%. Mr. Lewis advised the destination had more first-time visitors from July to September 2024 compared on a percentage basis. There was a decrease in the number of visitors by 3.5% with the greatest decline being in unpaid visitors and day trippers. There was a 10% decrease in direct expenditures and a 12% decrease in total economic impact which aligned with the national trend of a decrease in spending. Occupancy, ADR and RevPAR were down while there was an increase in room nights and TDT.

During the trip planning cycle, more than half of visitors plan trips to Ocala Marion County less than a month in advance, this declined 10% year to year leading to a 4 day longer trip planning cycle up to 53 days compared to 49 days previously observed. There has been an increase in the length of the trip planning cycle throughout July to September. Pulling data from the top trip planning sources over half of visitors are travelling to see friends or family and over half use search sites with 15% using this destination’s social media and 7% using the OcalaMarionCounty.com website. The top trip planning sources align with the top reasons for visiting. Visiting friends and relatives is the top trip planning source. This data aligns with statewide trends as people are coming to visit friends and family in Florida due to warmer

weather. Good thing is seeing an increase of people staying in paid accommodations versus unpaid accommodations, not all visitors are staying with friend and family.

Mr. Gaekwad inquired if this number is similar to other counties.

Mr. Lewis advises it's pretty similar across most destinations but to be specific not those attending horse shows, sporting tournaments and events along with the springs, as those are specific to the location here but visiting friends and family is the top reason for visiting nationally.

Mr. Bailey assumes the percentage of business travel is lower than some other counties.

Mr. Lewis advises it is in some counties, but not all. The next slide shows 23% (1 in 4) visitors remember some form of advertising for the county. That's down slightly from year to year and it makes sense that day trippers are down, as day trippers are more likely to see advertising on their way into the destination which is a trend across all clients. Three in four visitors who recall advertising were influenced by that information to visit the area. Advertising isn't specific to Ocala Marion County VCB advertising, but includes all advertisement to the Ocala Marion County area. The sources of advertising recall at 31% are using social media and another 29% are online advertising. There is a strong increase up 5+% year to year in those whom report their sources of advertising recall of television ads. The top regions of visitor origin are similar year to year with a slight increase in those visiting from Florida and showing a steady hold of 4% of those visiting internationally. The quarter showed less visitors overall and more in paid accommodations with more international visitors staying in paid accommodations. 17% of visitors are coming from the south, 10% from Northeast and 6% from mid-west and 2% from the West. The top states of origin are familiar with Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Kentucky is new to the top 5 potentially due to the horse related events. The top origin markets are Orlando and Tampa Bay historically, then Jacksonville and Gainesville, West Palm Beach, Atlanta and Miami/Ft. Lauderdale. There is slight decrease in travel party size from 3.2 to 2.9 people on average but we are seeing a similar amount of people traveling with children so that number hasn't changed significantly this quarter as compared to last quarter of the same time period. Median age of visitor is 49 years old with a household income of \$82,500 per year that is an increase up from approximately \$77,000 year over year. First time visitors are up there and a slight decrease in loyal visitors described as those who have visited 10 plus times to the area.

Mr. Lewis indicated that Ocala/Marion County is a drive destination as 84% of visitors drove to the Ocala Marion County area which is the same year over year but we are seeing an increase in the visitors whom drove to the Orlando International Airport at 10% and it was at 4% last year. There was a decrease in nights stayed, it was 4 nights and now down to 3.7 nights. 7 in 10 visitors were only visiting Marion County during their trip which is up 7% percentage point from year to year which falls in line with your first-time visitors. There is an increase in the percentage of visitors staying in hotel/motel as mentioned we saw a decrease in unpaid visitors and day trippers.

Mr. Bailey asked for percentages year over year versus quarter after quarter.

Mr. Lewis advised there is a comparison breakout at the back of his report but he can include in the executive summary for October to December next time.

Mr. Lewis advised that dining out is a top activity. Nearly 2 in 5 visitors that are visiting friends and family polled are visiting the downtown and area springs as well as attending horse shows, relax and unwind, shopping and attending sporting events which is new to our top 8 list. Top draws are visiting friends and family and horse events, midlevel draws are sporting events, visiting area springs, relax and unwind and business conferences from July to September. Activity trip enhancers include visiting restaurants in downtown Ocala. The main drivers from July to September are horse related events, visiting the springs, visiting friends and relatives and canoeing and kayaking which are being done often and exceeding expectations of visitors. Things being done less frequently but exceeding expectations and room to grow areas are biking, hiking and running and other horse related activities like sales. Travel party spending as a whole is down from \$356 a day to \$319. As total during trip we are showing \$1148 being spent down from \$1424 that coincides with national trends. In post-trip evaluations 99% of visitor's expectations were met or exceeded. 48% of visitor's expectations were exceeded and visitors who said they would definitely return is slightly down this year over year. First time visitors are notoriously harder to have a positive sentiment versus your loyal visitors whom return time and time again. Visitors were asked to describe Ocala Marion County as a place to visit and stated "Ocala is a neat place, we used to live here and it's grown a lot since then definitely for the better", "We were unable to book a room in Gainesville for the game so we settled for Ocala fortunately and surprisingly and we fell in love with this small town, there is a great atmosphere here and friendly people and a lot to do" and finally "Ocala is beautiful, our old friends moved here last year and we are thinking about joining them, not too large of a town and people are super friendly".

Mr. Gaekwad inquires how the survey is done and requested a copy of the questionnaire, as well as clarity on if interviewers are local and how other counties do it.

Mr. Lewis advised the survey is distributed a couple different ways, a multi-modal approach which is also used with other clients, a combination of email, in-person and social media. Receiving 550 responses the last quarter. 85-90% are in person responses, 10 to 20% is online data collection. The county has a higher in person data collection ratio than other client's due partners allowing them to be onsite for data collection. There are 2-3 local based interviewers rotating daily across different locations, day of week and events including hotels, events, downtown, Silver Springs to collect data from different types of visitors. The interviewers with a questionnaire are in the field as much as possible, dependent on budget, to collect data. He can provide QR codes for hotels and will provide business card to obtain more partners.

Mr. Bailey advises that the Hilton and IHG are not going to give the guest list/email to them which limits the information.

Mr. Lewis advises that QR codes are gaining popularity as they had tried pre-COVID and they would be interested in providing hotel with that.

Mr. Gaekwad requested paper questionnaires.

Ms. Wheeler explained the structure of the questionnaire changes with responses, so digitally would be the best solution and re-trying QR code would be optimal.

Mr. Lewis advises that the QR codes subject will be brought up in research plan discussion

scheduled with Ms. Wheeler and Ms. Shaffer as they would like to increase the amount of partner locations.

Ms. Shaffer requested the council advise if there was a sentiment of a need for additional research, especially high impact signature events that we are funding to as Downs and St. Germain to quantify them.

Mr. Lewis advises that he and Mr. Locke have a shared event document of events in Marion County that is reviewed weekly to schedule out interviewers.

Quarterly Public Relations and Analytics Reports – July – September Data

Ms. Shaffer introduced Ms. Jessica Heller, Marketing and Communications Supervisor, to talk about PR and great analytics the team continually brings us. With reference to the July through September timeframe PR analytics report starts on page 141. On page 143 shows the public relations efforts we set a lot of press links in this time frame like the gateway project update, tourism exchange information sent out, hurricane information in September and Visit Florida requested multiple editorial leads for opportunities that included holiday happenings, manatee season. Visit Florida in turn sends them to their distribution lists of their media contacts.

With reference to pages 144 and 145 which show media exposure and public relations pick up, that's information on what is being talked about regarding our destination on a global scale, like what the media is interested in and kind of information is being picked up. The quarter shows the top 3 topics are events and venues, equestrian in general news and then outdoor adventure. Page 145 shows the geographical pickup of Florida being the most popular and California, Virginia, Ohio, and New York. From an international standpoint we have Canada, UK, India, Turkey, New Zealand and Malaysia, which we have seen previously.

Page 146 is a summary of a partnership with Visit FL for a Brazilian FAM trip that we hosted in this time period consisting of two couples, 4 people total, with their own Instagram and travel blogs with a combined reach of nearly a 1 million. Ms. Heller expounded on the wonderful hotel, attraction, and restaurant partners that help ensure a great return on investment. The recent trip was from an RV angle, by renting an RV and stayed at campgrounds doing different activities in the area including outdoor adventures, going out to eat. One couple is pregnant, so it gave a family aspect of international trip taking while planning for a family. She advised there would be additional reporting at a later date on recent German and Canadian FAM trips. The next couple pages, comprises additional earned media, highlighting articles in Travel and Leisure and The Knot.

Mr. Bailey requested details on the media value.

Ms. Heller advised media value was \$170,000 for Travel and Leisure.

Mr. Gaekwad inquired as to where this information was in the document.

Ms. Heller advises page 152 and The Knot article highlighted a wedding venue in the area with a reach of 18.4 million. This was a return of investment with keeping up with information requests. Page 157 of the report has the total print and digital earned media which are different items, not

covered due to timeframe, that were also earned media are over \$516,479.28 with a total reach of over \$43 million. There was also a AAA article that was published from a journalist that was hosted in partnership with Visit FL.

Mr. Bailey inquired about The Knot article and its reach.

Ms. Heller explained that that figure is the potential reach. A combination of average viewership for that article online and their print publication.

Ms. Heller explains the promotion of being a wedding destination helps to fill up hotels.

Mr. Gaekwad inquired if The Knot is a publication or online and requested for a copy.

Ms. Heller advises The Knot is both online and published and will reach out for a copy. She further explained the popularity of The Knot for wedding planning.

On page 158 of the report Social Media overview of different platforms. From July to September 2024, there were over 7.8 million impressions, over 91,000 engagements and over 9,00 post-link clicks. On page 165 is the Instagram specific information and the top post of the quarter was a reel of things to do in the area in the fall, which had 756 engagements, over 400 likes and 200 shares. Page 173 shows the top performing posts on Facebook with International Cat Day being number 1, showing you how social media works in virality. The metrics show that this was the highest performing post by far with over 42,000 reactions, 55,000 engagements and over 1200 shares. It was a video acquired through our user generated program. The wildlife photographer used a game camera to capture images of a bobcat with kittens in Ocala National Forest. On page 185 is where app date starts for the time period, there is a map for global downloads including Australia, Canada, Asia, a lot in Europe, US and South America. The number of downloads was 664. The total number of page views was 2,873. Total number of app downloads is over 4,000.

Mr. Gaekwad inquired as to the name of the app.

Ms. Heller advised that it is the "OcalaMarion Travel Guide" available on Apple App Store and Google Play. International visitors can also now download.

She further explained that the Website data begins on page 187 with comparisons as to last year's figures. There were 294,000 visitors for the quarter with 290,000 of those were new users. Average engagement on the website is 48 seconds. On page 188 shows events, Google Analytics is now called GA4, which is when user on the website acts of significance. The data shows 795,000 pageviews which means users were engaging in multiple pages on site. User engagement of 294,000. Page 189 shows data on blogs, we work with Tempest agency to generate new content and optimize keywords words in blogs that are popular at the time to gain organic traffic.

Mr. Bailey inquired about some of the most Instagram-able spots in Ocala.

Ms. Heller replied with a list inclusive of with Silver Springs, Silver Glen, Rainbow Springs, Shalom Park, Juniper Springs, Santos and downtown for art and murals.

Mr. Gaekwad inquired as to how many visitors Silver Springs get now?

Ms. Heller advises that last year they provided figures of about 1,000 a day during the week and 3,000 on the weekends.

Mr. Bailey and Mr. Gaekwad inquire as to Cronos' Cradle.

Ms. Heller explained that it's a beautiful, sustainable-based farm in Citra area that does ag tours and instructions on beekeeping and composting.

Ms. Heller advises the Top Visited Pages on the site as the Home page, the Events page which is updated daily, and as it was still summer time during the quarter a blog describing the springs was popular. On page 194, visitation broken out by month as provided by the website agency. There were 193 newsletter sign-ups for the quarter, 1,643 visitor guide requests through the website specifically. The monthly email newsletter showed 6,599 total open emails. Lastly, for the website there were 151,084 visits to partner directory page views and of those visits 43,272 clicked onto the partner's actual website.

VISIT FLORIDA Florida Huddle and Florida Encounter

Mr. Bailey moves the meeting into Florida Huddle discussion.

Mr. Locke advises he will give a quick overview and then jump into some of the special invitations. The Marion County Huddle is scheduled for February 3 through the 5th at World Equestrian Center. Registrations are at about 600 total for Encounter and Huddle. Florida Huddle is international travel trade association so everyone from all over the county in the travel trade business that are interested in doing business in Florida will be here. The total registrants 175 or so. On the Encounter side, that is everyone looking to source Florida meetings, meeting planner, and there is about 75 of those. The rest are all suppliers from other destinations in Florida trying to seek the same business we are. The team has been planning this for 3 years and are excited in 3 weeks to host for the first time. The opening reception is hosted by the Ocala Marion County VCB and the World Equestrian Center at the Stirrups terrace on February 3, 2025, Monday 6:30-9 PM. The County, the City, the legislative delegates will be attending this huge event in partnership with WEC making a fantastic event. The TDC is also encouraged to attend and he advised they will need a badge to enter.

Mr. Gaekwad inquired as to the expected attendance of the opening reception and if there will be a presentation for Ocala/Marion County.

Mr. Locke responds with 550 to 600 attendants.

Ms. Shaffer advised that there is great interest as this event is normally in Tampa, Miami or Orlando so people are really wanting to experience the new venue. Ms. Dana Young with Visit Florida will be opening up as it's her final event and then Ms. Shaffer will do a quick introduction and then Chair Bryant will speak then Commissioner Zalak. On Tuesday a lot of the conferences are trade show format and the team will be there taking appointments. On Tuesday the lunch and keynote will have an equine panel including Ms. Tammy Gantt, from the Florida Thoroughbred Breeders' and Owners' Association, as moderator and Mr. Jason Reynolds from the TDC with the topic will be a discussion being The Horse Capital of the World. Tuesday evening is an open evening for the conference so the sales team is taking the opportunity to have

a special event for invitees only at the Pavilion at Green Gaits.

Mr. Locke advised the location is a beautiful venue on 40 close WEC, it is a hay distributor and at night they have firepits, a nice pavilion with live music, drinks, food, etc. He believes it's Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. The closing evening event ceremony will be downtown at Bank Street Patio where they anticipate 350-400 attendees.

Ms. Shaffer reiterated Tourism Exchange and focusing on international tour operators, explain the work that Ms. Candace Shelton has been doing to sign partners within the destination.

Mr. Locke advised that there was a Tourism Exchange workshop in September and that Tourism Exchange can help if the business does not have an online booking system.

Mr. Locke advised the system caters to both international and domestic tour operators.

Mr. Gaekwad advised that Florida Huddle and Florida Encounter used to be done by a private company and his 2nd year with Visit Florida they bought and instituted the program.

Ms. Shaffer explained that Visit Florida is also looking at taking over World Travel Mart and Tourism Exchange will help us in that.

Mr. Gaekwad asked to be added to list to attend Huddle.

Tourism Day 2025

Ms. Shaffer explained that it is March 26, 2025 showcasing Florida's Natural Wonder and being the Horse Capital of the World. She invites the councilmembers to attend.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Danny Gaekwad, seconded by Ms. Victoria Billig, to adopt the minutes from the October 2024 Tourist Development Council Workshop Meeting as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

Acknowledgement of Financials –

A motion was made by Mr. Chris Fernandez, seconded by Commission Ron Livsey, to review and approve November and December 2024 Financials. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

Mr. Gaekwad asked if there were any financials that were of the normal spending.

Ms. Wheeler advised no and that any unplanned expenses would have been brought to board for conversation and recommendation.

Proposed Tourist Development Council Meeting Dates 2025

Ms. Wheeler explains that historically the TDC meeting is held the 4th Thursday of the month but that is not always possible due to Thanksgiving plus staff schedules and obligations of committee members. March and August present staff conflicts. She presented two options for alternative

meeting date schedule.

A motion was made by Mr. Danny Gaekwad, seconded by Mr. Christopher Fernandez, to accept the proposed tourist development council meeting dates for April, July, September and December as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

A motion was made by Mr. Danny Gaekwad, seconded by Commissioner Ron Livsey, to accept the proposed tourist development council meeting date for March as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Victoria Billig, seconded by Commissioner Ron Livsey, to accept the proposed tourist development council meeting date for August as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

A motion was made by Commissioner Ron Livsey, seconded by Mr. Danny Gaekwad, to accept the proposed tourist development council meeting date for May as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

A motion was made by Mr. Danny Gaekwad, seconded by Mr. Christopher Fernandez, to accept the proposed tourist development council meeting date for June as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

A motion was made by Commissioner Ron Livsey, seconded by Ms. Victoria Billig, to accept the proposed tourist development council meeting date for October as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

A motion was made by Commissioner Ron Livsey, seconded by Mr. Danny Gaekwad, to accept the proposed tourist development council meeting date for November 20, 2025 as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (5-0).

Sales Update

Ron Livsey out at 10:46 AM.

Mr. Locke advised they were reviewing page 199 and presented Major League Fishing as a professional fishing league comparable to Bass Masters and they are essentially an all-star tournament creating the model comparable to major league baseball and national basketball association where they are taking a mid-season break and the top anglers of the previous year are invited to attend the Heavy Hitters which is a smaller quaint event with the biggest prizes. There is more media coverage. Comparable to the all-star baseball game with a homerun derby and actual all-star game and major league fishing does the same in the spring. Potentially at Orange Lake in May of 2026. Orange Lake is rated as one of the top 5 bass fisheries. Marion County Parks and Recreation had a capital improvement already in place to improve that park and add a new boat ramp and parking opportunities for trailers. He advised there is a site visit planned in February.

Mr. Gaekwad asked for details on the attendance at that event.

Mr. Locke advised that it's the top 30 anglers so room night production won't be as much as other

larger tournaments, but media reach is where this really comes into play. Mr. Locke advised there will most likely be a Bid Fee request coming next month for \$75,000.00. There is a lot more media and levels to it that will be explained next month.

Ron Livsey in at 10:48 AM.

Mr. Gaekwad inquired if we would be paying the \$75,000.00.

Mr. Locke advises that yes, it would be part of the bid fee program and that they were at Kissimmee last year and that he would have further discussion next month.

Mr. Bailey advises he looks forward to discussion next month.

Mr. Locke explained that the next opportunity is the American Darters Association which would take place in July.

Ms. Victoria Billig requested to know what type of darts.

Mr. Locke explained it is regular darts and there is an association of skilled individuals that require a minimum of 18,000 square feet of space to do this event so we are pursuing that event.

Mr. Gaekwad asks if we would be paying any fees to them.

Mr. Locke advises there is a Bid Fee being discussed and currently this is just a lead with more information to coming in later meetings. He advised that ongoing leads didn't have much of an update., but there was an addition of two more fishing leagues owned by the same company that would have be consecutive weeks as well as UpDog International Finals which is another opportunity that was presented previously for March or April 2026.

Mr. Gaekwad asked for an explanation of UpDog.

Mr. Locke explains it as a Frisbee dog competition in a field which you liken to a football field in which the dogs have different areas on which they catch the frisbee with precision. He advised that it is a very complex sport brings in a lot of people. He indicated that Mr. Bryan Day pursued the opportunity and they have some other events that they are looking to bring our way. Florida Horse Park hosted the state championship. The last ongoing lead is USA Roller Sports National Championship though we lost the bid for 2025 we are still in the running for 2026. The association went to the West Coast for 2025 so the possibility to come to east coast in 2026 is high.

Mr. Gaekwad asks if there is a bid fee associated with that.

Mr. Locke advises there is a \$200,000.00 bid fee.

Mr. Bailey advises it's July to August business.

Mr. Locke's last piece of business is that in the previous sales update the Florida tourist development tax conference went to Cocoa Beach.

Mr. Bailey asked Mr. Locke to create a 2025 pace report for a future meeting.

Mr. Locke advised of the sales report and the definite business all the way through 2027.

Mr. Bailey advised he would like to be able to compare to past years to understand where we are as we add more supply.

Mr. Locke explains that a lot of the events book a year to two years out that's why a lot of these are running into the future but in 2025 we already have a lot of business secured. The sale report is fully in the packet.

TDT Collections/STR and Key Data Update

Ms. Wheeler then presented the collections update for both November and December which covers the revenue period of the previous month. For the reporting period of November, which covered October revenues, collections totaled \$558,579.61 and that was an increase of \$208,835.63 or 59.71% year over year. She reminded the group that was the hurricane time frame in October when generally there was not a hotel room to be had for that period of time so that had a great impact obviously and during that time period only 2.39% were from late taxes and penalties so roughly \$13,300 so the vast majority was new money generated in that month.

Mr. Bailey advises it certainly nice to be able to help people during a rough time that brought in \$100,000 more than the best previous year ever which is very remarkable.

For the reporting period of December, which covered November's revenues, collections total \$462,549.20 that was an increase as well up \$63,654.28, 15.96% year over year and only .78% were from late collection and penalties so that's \$3,610.96. Again, that's new money coming into the market. She reminded that as we move over into STR and key data, showing the trend graph, addressing when you go the RevPar portion of the chart, the red part doesn't have a huge swing and the low line on the chart is key data. The Marion County portion is the blue showing stable numbers. The Key Data which is the short-term rental numbers, these numbers can be manipulated with a click of the mouse, so that is why you will see great swings in that. Visit Florida seasonally across the state has much larger impacts than here in Marion County as there were some questions about that last time I did want to let you know that I went back and confirmed that the data was accurate. I will walk you through the numbers for November specifically now.

Mr. Bailey advised that one of the big problems when he joined was that there was a huge disparage between high season to off season and now when you look at that it's relatively flat which is good in a lot of ways.

Ms. Wheeler advised that now we just need to push it all up at once. As to what the chairman just noted that is we are looking to further fine tune through the funding revisions that Mr. Locke and his team will bring back. She advised that the team has really looked at how to stabilize throughout the year using the monies that are available to incentivize business to come into Marion County. For November the STR data with travel research, the traditional accommodations data, occupancy was at 66.2% that was up year over year.

Mr. Gaekwad advises it was due to two hurricanes.

Ms. Wheeler advised ADR was \$130.29 that was up 7.7% from last year. RevPAR was \$86.21 that is where the hurricanes certainly had an impact, that was up 22.4% from last year and then for the running 12 months occupancy was down 3.8% and ADR was up 1.9% and RevPAR was down

1.9%. Looking at the Visit Florida numbers occupancy statewide for November was at 70.8% which was up 8%, ADR was at \$178.07 which was up 3.7% from last year and RevPAR was \$126.12 which was up 12%. The November Key Data showed that Occupancy was at 42.7% and that was flat from last year, ADR was \$129.00 that was a decrease of \$14.00 from last year and RevPAR was \$37.00 which is a decrease of \$9.00 from last year and nights available was 5,541 and that was an increase of 11%.

Mr. Gaekwad advised that this is what needs to be provided to the Commissioners to show the increase up and down.

Ms. Wheeler advised that we will looking at is determining the partner internet side behind your log thru IDSS what we can provide you that has a little bit more robust information, not just for the council, it's anyone with an account. Then the information can be refreshed. Smith Travel Research and CoStar doesn't want to cannibalize their business base by just saying the DMO's can give it all away to everybody so that's where we are trying to be careful with them with also being transparent that if there is a request we can also met that. One last thing for key data for the running twelve months, occupancy was down 4%, ADR was down 7% and RevPAR was down 11% but nights available increased by 18% and 66,999 were in the running twelve months of nights available up from 56,658.

Mr. Gaekwad believes she should present a real picture rather than all the riding high of we need this and we need that. The county should not be in the business to build.

Mr. Bailey advised that there is a challenge there that when looking at our collections very much on pace for a record year which is great for our collections standpoint.

Mr. Gaekwad advises the visitation is up, but the hotels are down because short-term rentals are killing the entire state.

Mr. Bailey advises it comes down to the business and making sure that it also makes the investor in the property if a property cannot do well enough to survive with the occupancies then it won't matter.

Ms. Wheeler offered to go into depth with anyone whom was interested and is now on her way to getting STR certified.

Ms. Shaffer mentioned that there will be two meetings, a 9 AM joint workshop on March 13th at the BCC auditorium for follow up conversation between the city, the county and March 29 is the TDC meeting. Meeting invites will be sent.

TDC Events Calendar

Mr. Bailey advises that the TDC events calendar is within the packet so you know what we are supporting and advised to talk to staff if you like anything.

Staff Updates

Ms. Shaffer introduced staff members, Heidi Villagomez and Keleab Spencer.

Ms. Shaffer advised that when the packet went out we didn't have a ribbon cutting date.

Ms. Wheeler advised that after the packet was created they solidified a date of April 7th Monday at 10 am for gateway ribbon cutting as that time of day the lighting will look the nicest on the features. It should only run about an hour.

Ms. Shaffer reiterated that Business After Hours is this evening at the World Equestrian Center so there are new leadership members there at WEC, Mr. Doug Spencer and Ms. Sara Thacker are new to the operations and the sales team.

Old Business

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

New Business

Mr. Bailey called for any new business and advised that elections for chair and vice-chair come up in March for those interested.

The meeting adjourned at 11:03 a.m.

Report from Chair

Notation for Record

Mr. Bailey advised the Sales Report was in the packet.

Mr. Bailey advised the TDC Attendance Report was in the packet.

Public Comment

Upcoming Meeting

Mr. Bailey stated, that the next TDC meeting will be on Thursday, February 27, 2025.

The meeting adjourned at 11:01 a.m.

Jeff Bailey, Chairman