

Tourist Development Council Regular Meeting

Ocala/Marion County Visitor & Convention Bureau

109 W Silver Springs Blvd.

Ocala, FL 34475

Thursday, August 22, 2024

9:00 a.m.

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

Mr. Jason Reynolds 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, Victoria Billig, Christopher Fernandez, Danny Gaekwad, Commissioner Ron Livsey, Councilmember Barry Mansfield, Jason Reynolds and Commissioner Carl Zalak.

Staff:

Loretta Shaffer, Sky Wheeler, Danielle Neron, DeeDee Busbee, Bryan Day, Jessica Heller, Corry Locke, Samantha Solomon

Guests:

Rodney Gutierrez, World Equestrian Center; Hayley Radich, Miles Partnership; Lindsey Sullivan, Miles Partnership; Natalie McComb, Reilly Arts Center; Emily Parkman, City of Ocala Cultural Arts; Erin Santiago, HDG Hotels; Diamondz and Pearlz Event Center; Jaye Baillie, Marion Cultural Alliance; Justin Garner, World Equestrian Center; Paresh Chhotu, Hilton Garden Inn; Jessica Fieldhouse, Ocala Main Street; Dennis Thompson, Gypsy Gold Horse Farm; Erin Thompson, Gypsy Gold Horse Farm; Jim Couillard, Marion County Parks and Recreation; Elgin Carelock, C-2 Realty; Wyatt Stephens, World Equestrian Center; Lea Brayton, World Equestrian Center; Emily Connor, Hunden Strategic Partners; Lexi Cuff, Hunden Strategic Partners; Isiah Lewis, Downs & St. Germain Research; Ileana

Frascone, Miles Partnership; Brenna Dacks, Visit Florida; Jeff Haungs, R&L Carriers; Ruta Andris, Miss Rodeo; Dana Olesky, Chief Assistant County Attorney

Notice of Publication

Notice was published on the County Website on January 2, 2024 and subsequently updated to include WebEx information on August 12, 2024.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Carl Zalak, seconded by Rus Adams, to adopt the minutes from the June 27, 2024 Tourist Development Council Meeting as presented. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (7-0).

Acknowledgement of Financials – June and July 2024

A motion was made by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, seconded by Commissioner Carl Zalak, to review and approve June and July 2024 Financials. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (7-0).

Report from Chair

Advisory Board Training

Advisory Board Training Completion Forms were provided to each councilmember present. Each member was asked to execute the document and leave it at their seat for a staff member to retrieve after the meeting.

Funding Requests

Festivals of Speed presents A Salute to Veterans

Danny Gaekwad in at 9:04 am

Mr. Corry Locke, Group Sales Supervisor, addressed a funding request in the amount of \$4,200.00 for Festivals of Speed presents A Salute to Veterans to be held at the World Equestrian Center on September 14, 2024. The eligible funding amount/staff recommendation mirrored the amount requested from the event organizer. The total estimated economic impact was noted as \$325,515 with a ROI of 66%. The organizer of the event anticipated three-hundred total room nights and the requested funds would be used for marketing, promotion/advertising and event signage.

A motion was made by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, seconded by Victoria Billig, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$4,200 for the Festivals of Speed presents A Salute to Veterans to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (8-0).

Ocala Comic Con

Mr. Locke then presented a funding request in the amount of \$4,200 for Ocala Comic Con to be held at the World Equestrian Center on September 21-22, 2024. The eligible funding/staff recommendation mirrored the amount of funding requested. The estimated economic impact was noted as \$619,849 with a ROI of 128%. The event organizer estimated three-hundred total room nights and indicated the funds would be used for production costs, promotional expenses, rental items for events (tables, chairs, pipe/drape) and event signage.

Mr. Danny Gaekwad requested to know what type of event Ocala Comic Con was.

Mr. Locke advised the attendees would dress up as characters and meet the actors who play the famous characters. He further advised this was known to be a highly attended event as they anticipated attendance to reach 12,500 people.

Mr. Gaekwad then requested to know the number of days the event would run.

Mr. Locke advised the event was scheduled to run two consecutive days.

A motion was made by Christopher Fernandez, seconded by Rus Adams, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$4,200 for Ocala Comic Con to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (8-0).

Miss Florida Rodeo Pageant

Mr. Locke presented the funding request for the Miss Florida Rodeo Pageant in the amount of \$2,800. The eligible funding/staff recommendation mirrored the requested amount based on an anticipated 200 room nights. The event was scheduled to take place September 27-28, 2024 at Hilton Ocala and BG Ranch Ocala. This event was noted to be new to Ocala/Marion County as it was previously held in Kissimmee. The total economic impact was estimated to reach \$150,206 with a ROI of 31%. The event organizers stated the funds would be used for production costs, promotional expenses, marketing materials, a/v, rental items and judges.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know the anticipated attendance.

Mr. Locke advised he was unaware of the anticipated attendance but the event organizer was on the call and could assist with answering the question.

Ms. Ruta Andris with the Miss Florida Rodeo Pageant stated they anticipated approximately twelve to thirteen contestants. She further advised that family members would also attend the event in support of the contestants. Ms. Andris then stated the event would attract approximately 75-100 people per day.

A motion was made by Rus Adams, seconded by Danny Gaekwad, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$2,800 for Miss Florida Rodeo Pageant to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously

approved by the council (8-0).

Grandview Fall Fun Draft Horse Show

Mr. Corry Locke then presented a funding request in the amount of \$10,150 for Grandview Fall Fun Draft Horse Show to be held at the World Equestrian Center on October 11-12, 2024. The event organizer anticipated 725 room nights. When the anticipated room nights were multiplied by \$14.00 per room night it matched the eligible funding/staff recommendation of \$10,150. The total estimated economic impact was noted as \$451,931 with a ROI of 16%. The requested funds would be used for marketing, advertising, officials and equipment rental.

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

Mr. Locke stated this would be a two-day event.

Mr. Gaekwad requested clarification regarding additional shows sponsored by Grandview.

Mr. Locked advised Grandview had two additional shows which were held in the winter.

A motion was made by Commissioner Carl Zalak, seconded by Danny Gaekwad, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$10,150 for Grandview Fall Fun Draft Horse Show to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (8-0).

Fiddler's Turkey Run

Mr. Locke presented a funding request in the amount of \$5,040 for Fiddler's Turkey Run (Barrel Race) to be held at the World Equestrian Center on November 26-30, 2024. The event organizers anticipated 360 room nights to be utilized. The total estimated economic impact was noted to be \$497,306 with a ROI of 130%. The requested funds would be used for advertising/marketing, social media, show announcers, signage, live-streaming expenses and judges.

A motion was made by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, seconded by Rus Adams, to approve the recommendation for the requested funding amount of \$5,040 for Fiddler's Turkey Run to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (8-0).

Mr. Gaekwad requested the Sales Team provide a year to year comparison, inclusive of room night totals, impact numbers, etc., of the number of events held in Ocala/Marion County so the council would see the progression.

Mr. Locke stated he does not have the information available regarding previous years at this time but he advised the VCB has funded thirty-three events this fiscal year which equated to \$600,000 in funded events and totaled \$66 million in economic impact.

Mr. Gaekwad re-emphasized that he would like to see a comparison of the current year

to prior years to provide a visual representation of the progress made by the team.

Proposed Marketing Assistance Funding Program Recipients for FY 2024-2025

Ms. Sky Wheeler presented the proposed Marketing Assistance Funding Program recipients for FY 2024-2025. She stated the TDC and BCC allowed the Visitors and Convention Bureau an opportunity to leverage the Marion County brand to amplify the marketing message of our local tourism partners. The VCB presented three different workshops and a total of forty-one people attended. Ms. Wheeler advised the Marketing Assistance Funding Program was an annual opportunity made available to local business partners in May to coincide with the start of the new fiscal year in October. The application was extended to tourism related businesses, not solely event based, which offer tourism opportunities year-around. The program's ultimate goal was to provide the visitor, who had already scheduled a trip to Ocala/Marion County, additional incentives or opportunities to extend their stay and spend more money. The program was created to encourage local business owners to use funds to market their tourism opportunities outside of Ocala/Marion County. Ms. Wheeler then re-emphasized some program guidelines, specifically, the opportunity to allow businesses which had more than one organization under the same FEIN to apply as a primary applicant as well as a secondary applicant. The VCB budgeted \$75,000 last year to support this program and these funds were not completely encumbered by the applicants. This year the applicants requested funding in the amount of \$100,000. Therefore, the VCB was able to re-appropriate funds which allowed for the total amount requested from the current applicants to be supported. Ms. Wheeler then reiterated that the Marketing Assistance Funding Program was a reimbursement program and the applicants must submit actuals to show they have completed the marketing campaign, utilized the Ocala/Marion County brand, marketed outside of the county and that all other requirements were met.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know if hotels qualified for this program.

Ms. Wheeler affirmed. She then stated several restaurants, hotels and entertainment venues applied this year.

Ms. Wheeler then advised the VCB requested a motion to approve the balance of the funding request, recusing Santos Bike Shop and Appleton Museum of Art as they would be included in a subsequent motion, individually.

Mr. Gaekwad requested confirmation that the program started last year and then requested to know the number of applicants which applied at that time.

Ms. Wheeler stated thirteen applicants applied last year and three withdrew due to an inability to meet the program requirements.

Mr. Gaekwad stated he would like to see a report showing the results of the ten applicants which applied last year.

Ms. Wheeler advised the applicants had until the end of September to submit their reimbursement requests. To date, Marion Cultural Alliance submitted their

documentation which showcased how they implemented a website to collect all of the Arts opportunities available in Marion County and housed them in one location. To support their reimbursement request, they submitted documentation which showed where people were accessing the website from and what people wanted to do while visiting Marion County. Additionally, Acadia Acres successfully submitted their request for reimbursement. Acadia Acres used their funds to have a full website audit conducted to create a better booking tool and to promote their website outside of Marion County. Ms. Wheeler advised that success looked different for each business so she would not be able to provide a report which indicated specific metrics were achieved by each applicant.

Mr. Gaekwad then clarified and advised that he would like a report which showed the applicants who were successfully reimbursed.

Ms. Wheeler affirmed and advised that could be provided.

Mr. Rus Adams stated he would like to see a business partner explain how they utilized the reimbursement and the impact it made in the community. He further explained that he would like to see a report which showed the number of people the partner reached via the marketing campaign who may not have engaged with the business without the reimbursement opportunity.

Ms. Wheeler affirmed and stated the staff could compile said report but advised those statistics were not required by the program.

Mr. Adams stated he would like to see more testimonials as those could be used to encourage businesses unsure about participating in the program.

A motion was made by Rus Adams, seconded by Danny Gaekwad, to approve the funding request in the amount of \$90,000 for the Proposed Marketing Assistance Funding Program Recipients, excluding Santos Bike Shop and The Appleton Museum of Art, for recommendation for to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (8-0).

A motion was made by Commissioner Carl Zalak, seconded by Councilmember Barry Mansfield, to approve the funding request in the amount of \$5,000 for the Marketing Assistance Funding Program Recipient, Santos Bike Shop, for recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (7-0). Mr. Christopher Fernandez recused himself from the vote and Form 8-B was provided.

A motion was made by Commissioner Carl Zalak, seconded by Danny Gaekwad, to approve the funding request in the amount of \$5,000 for the Marketing Assistance Funding Program Recipient, The Appleton Museum of Art, for recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was unanimously approved by the council (7-0). Ms. Victoria Billig recused herself from the vote and Form 8-B was provided.

Commissioner Carl Zalak thanked Christopher Fernandez and Victoria Billig for their participation in the Marketing Assistance Funding Program.

Ms. Wheeler affirmed and stated when the community witnesses a TDC member attend a Marketing Assistance Workshop it emphasizes the significance of the opportunity presented. She then advised the recommendations would be presented to the Board of County Commissioners as individual contracts.

Staff Updates

Ms. Loretta Shaffer advised Ocala/Marion County was one of five finalists for the Mercury Award for the OcalaMarion.com website. She then stated some of the staff would travel to the Florida Governor's Conference on Tourism along with Commissioner Carl Zalak, Mounir Bouyounes, County Administrator and Angel Roussel, Assistant County Administrator. Ms. Shaffer advised that she was placed on the Visit Florida Board and the first meeting would occur during the conference. She then stated Hunden Strategic Partners would present the Ocala/Marion County Tourism Placemaking Plan and Feasibility Analysis next and subsequently, one-on-one meetings would be scheduled with the Tourist Development Council to allow for a more in-depth discussion regarding the findings. On November 20, 2024 a joint workshop would be held with the Board of County Commissioners and the Tourist Development Council to determine whether further research was necessary or if the findings should be implemented. She then introduced Lexi Cuff and Emily Connor with Hunden Strategic Partners who appeared virtually to present their findings.

Ocala/Marion County Tourism Placemaking Plan and Feasibility Analysis

Ms. Cuff advised that Hunden Strategic Partners was engaged to identify the Tourism Placemaking Plan, as well as, the Feasibility Study. She advised that Hunden Strategic Partners was a Chicago based consulting firm who specialized in destination development. They focus on destinations all over the country to identify compelling asset gaps in the market and areas for deep dive studies/feasibility studies. They then determine how the plan could assist counties in navigating through the asset gaps in the market to create a return on investment. Ultimately, Hunden's goal was noted as assisting counties with marrying their vision with different tourism and destination options. Ms. Cuff stated they completed a placemaking action plan by conducting a county-wide gap analysis to understand where opportunities exist for Ocala/Marion County. This analysis provided insight regarding how the county could position itself for residential growth while continuing to attract visitors and compete with other destinations; locally and nationally. The assessment aimed to guide the development of future Ocala/Marion County projects by identifying current strengths in the market and potential areas for growth. The objective of the placemaking action plan was to understand where Ocala/Marion County stood currently, what strong asset gaps existed from a tourism perspective, what was currently being utilized or resonating with county residents and how visitation was influenced. Ms. Cuff advised a geofencing tool called Placer.AI was used to help understand visitation trends such as; how long people were

staying at a given asset, where they were traveling from and what was driving the demand. Hunden also reviewed the county's attributes and quality along with overall performance which lead to information regarding the current gaps. Ms. Cuff stated the assessment of the current supply allowed Hunden to understand where gaps lie and what assets or programming could potentially fill those gaps to present greater opportunities for the county. The action analysis determined what strong opportunities currently existed which would bolster the county's overall tourism package. Once the information was gathered and the analysis was completed, Hunden assisted in determining how to execute and implement the opportunities via a strategic action plan. Ms. Cuff further explained the Asset Analysis and stated the pillars separated the asset categories to provide a better understanding of what the current supply was, what the top assets were and how hotel room night generation or out-of-market tourism correlated with the category. Based on the Asset Analysis, the Marion County supply of conference and meeting facilities was limited even with the existence of the World Equestrian Center (WEC) and its venue space. Ms. Cuff advised the World Equestrian Center represented a top of the market product as it related to quality, price and size. The venue does not cater to all event groups but meets the need for larger events. This resulted in a demand for venue space to accommodate a capacity of 100-500 people, the middle of the range group, which was too small for the World Equestrian Center but too large for the current hotel product. When the available asset of concert and entertainment space was reviewed, the analysis found a moderate supply since only a few existed that catered to the local market and generated minimal hotel room nights. The Top Assets which existed for concert and entertainment space were noted as Circle Square Cultural Center, Reilly Arts Center, Ocala Civic Theater and Appleton Museum of Art. Ms. Cuff stated the supply for Sports Facilities was noted as good but the county had an opportunity to bolster the sports package with the existence of more indoor sports facilities. The Top Assets which catered to regional tournaments and brought in significant visitation were noted as Florida Aquatics Swimming & Training Center (FAST), Belleview Sports Complex, Florida Horse Park, Ocala Regional Sportsplex and Southeastern Livestock Pavilion (SELP) some of which catered to local needs from an outdoor perspective therefore, opportunities existed for the sports trajectory to continue. Ms. Cuff further stated a minimal supply of Shopping and Dining Nodes existed in Ocala/Marion County which allowed visitors to come, stay and walk from one place to another (walkable area). She indicated that Downtown Ocala was the footprint as it related to walkable area but traditional assets existed such as Paddock Mall and Market Street at Heathbrook which drove visitation. The hotel supply was noted as moderate due to the number of hotels which were under construction. These hotels planned to be completed over the next few years which would add to this category but as it stands right now, The Riding Academy was the newest addition. Ms. Cuff further noted room night generation was strong for those hotels. The supply for attractions, festivals and events was noted as moderate with opportunity for growth.

Mr. Gaekwad interjected and stated that he owned the Holiday Inn which had a total meeting space of 6,800 square feet, more than the Hilton Garden Inn, but the

information was not provided in the analysis.

Ms. Cuff responded and advised the hotels included in the analysis had over 10,000 square feet of meeting space.

Mr. Gaekwad questioned the results of the analysis and stated neither the Hilton Garden Inn or Hilton of Ocala had 10,000 square feet of meeting space and requested that Hunden verify the information.

Ms. Cuff advised they would verify the information and provide slides to support the results. She then discussed the Marion County hotel supply and compared tourism generators vs tourism accommodators. She stated the county had a number of hotels which accommodated visitors but were not necessarily the catalyst for their visit or extended stay. She indicated the Hilton Garden Inn in Downtown Ocala was more of a tourism generator than an accommodator but she acknowledged Mr. Gaekwad's concern, reiterated the information would be verified and advised the correct data would be presented. Ms. Cuff circled back to the Asset Analysis to discuss attractions, festivals and events and stated the county had an opportunity to leverage additional events even though a number of major sports tournaments were held which generated consistent room nights on a consistent basis. She then discussed the Asset Analysis for parks, trails and outdoor space outfitters. Ms. Cuff advised the supply was very strong, the strongest of all the pillars, but there was still an opportunity to leverage existing assets in order to make sure they resonated with tourism and residents. The Top Assets were noted as the Cross Florida Greenway, Ocala National Forest, Silver Springs, Rainbow Springs, Santos Trailhead, KP Hole Park and Fort King National Landmark. Ms. Cuff then discussed Ocala/Marion County, what the county was known for and what Ocala/Marion County envisioned for the future. She advised the county had a unique charm and offered a diverse range of attractions, which included Natural Wonders, emphasized throughout the report since they were authentic to the county and not easily replicated by other areas. Next, she mentioned Equestrian Activities, Historic Sites and Cultural Events. She also wanted to emphasize that being centrally located was a significant asset for Ocala/Marion County but the county needed to determine how to leverage their proximity to Orlando, Tampa and Gainesville to capture the visitor journey from these established markets. The Hunden analysis provided opportunities to further enhance the county's appeal by developing a retail restaurant and mixed-use indoor sports and family entertainment facility which would boost tourism. Ms. Cuff advised it was beneficial for Hunden to engage with the local residents as well as local and out-of-market stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the opportunities or challenges which existed and that need to be addressed in order to make the area flourish. When the Sports Entertainment meeting and events perspective was considered, Hunden needed to determine what opportunities existed and how Ocala/Marion County could compete with other regions. For this analysis, Hunden spoke to youth sports tournament organizers from USA Volleyball, AU Volleyball, basketball and professional sports such as Minor League Hockey and the new CHL Commissioner. As an example, the Hunden analysis showcased Osceola Heritage Park in an effort to understand what

would have been done differently when the facility was built 15 years ago. The team wanted to know how Ocala/Marion County could position itself to be a benefactor of the natural tourism occurring within the state while generating its own tourism opportunities. Ms. Cuff then discussed the Deep Dive Analysis/Feasibility Analysis which acknowledged a gap or opportunity and then determined what the market demanded and what viability looked like, as well as, evaluating financial feasibility. For instance, in regard to hospitality there was potential for a conference hotel but Hunden wanted to explore how it would impact the county and what programming would look like. From a sports and outdoor recreation perspective, an indoor multi-use facility which could address entertainment needs would be feasible. Ms. Cuff then advised when looking at conference and meeting spaces, Hunden wanted to explore the impact of a multi-use facility and conference hotel. She stated a strong opportunity was noted for Silver Springs activation which focused on areas that could support further development and programming of tours or river cruises as well as commercial development near natural assets such as shopping, dining and entertainment. This would create a multi-use district which emphasized support of the existing opportunities but also continued the keynote development focus for the Downtown District. Ms. Cuff pointed out another priority which was deemed viable, the Eatertainment Concept, which coupled the ideas of food/beverage and entertainment such as Top Golf. There were many variations of Eatertainment Concepts which were gaining popularity due to a growing primary tourism market of families but also due to a younger demographic which felt excluded from the current supply. Ms. Cuff then discussed major attractions and events and noted opportunities such as guided excursion tours and the Winter, making sure one understood the current programming of events and where opportunities existed to further programming or supplement tourism in the off-season months (i.e. early summer) with a major festival or event. The analysis also emphasized the need for a transportation and connectivity strategy between assets, specifically the outdoor trails. Also, a waterpark or major family entertainment attraction was noted as a viable option, in addition to the equestrian related attractions which the World Equestrian Center has already established. The aforementioned opportunities addressed areas where a Deep Dive Study was recommended therefore Hunden focused on the top two, Multi-Use Facility & Conference Hotel and Large Entertainment Multi-Use District. Ms. Cuff advised that the continued recommendation of a water park and/or major family entertainment attraction along with addressing transportation needs was still a priority. She then went on to discuss ongoing phases and future phases of the feasibility study which assisted in understanding what the market demanded along with addressing financial feasibility and the economic impact these recommendations would generate. The Future Phase aspect of the study discussed how the county could move forward to the building phase of the recommendations now that the county was aware of the opportunities that existed and have an analysis to support it. Ms. Cuff advised the Future Phase section of the analysis further addressed how the county could identify viable locations for these projects, as well as, funding. Ms. Cuff then introduced Emily Connor, an Analyst with Hunden Strategic Partners to discuss the headlines from the Deep Dive Study.

Ms. Connor then began to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) as it related to the project. She first highlighted strengths which included the centralized location, being positioned between Gainesville and Orlando, the strong destination appeal, the outdoor assets, being The Horse Capitol of the World, the equestrian presence, trails, springs, etc. which all draw visitors. Ocala/Marion County also has a good supply of sports facilities, including the World Equestrian Center and Florida Aquatic Swimming and Training (FAST). The growth of the Marion County population over the past ten years was also noted as a strength since population and corporate growth were projected to continue. Ms. Connor then discussed area weaknesses which were inclusive of site locations and the lack of walkable amenities, moderate hotel supply, limited quality meeting space, the lack of traditional exhibit space (other than World Equestrian Center) and the increase in short-term rentals which has caused a need for enforcement and compliance. Next, Ms. Connor discussed opportunities available to Ocala/Marion County which consisted of establishing a singular host hotel site and larger committed room blocks for events, indoor flat-floor sports, a multi-use Venue for ticketed events/graduations/conventions, development of a catalyst asset to drive further development and growth in the local economy, adding more entertainment options in the local market to capture families and/or visitors and implementing a Commercial air service. Ms. Connor then stated threats which exist for the county which included having an uncommitted site for development, funding, a tenant for a potential arena and competition for ticketed events from facilities within Gainesville and Orlando. Next, she discussed the major headlines found throughout the study such as the location of Ocala/Marion County as a crossroad between two major metro areas that provide a positive impact on proposed development. Then she discussed Demographics & Population Growth as a headline stating that Marion County has experienced tremendous population growth over the last 10-years and when paired with strong demographics would be the key for the facility's success. Next, Ms. Connor discussed Destination Placemaking as a Headline stating the County currently struggled with capturing young talent due to the limited options for entertainment for kids and adults. The arena and flexible entertainment venue portion of the Project would help fill this gap but the need for an entertainment district still existed. She went on to discuss the need for flex indoor space to host youth and community sports, conventions, tradeshow, concerts, comedy shows, live entertainment and family shows. Many promoters saw Florida as a great place to start a touring show so the implementation of this Project could enhance the county's appeal as a host for diverse and sizable performances. She then stated that Ocala/Marion County lacked a small to mid-size arena or facility which could host youth sports tournaments and smaller entertainment shows. For example, the NBA G-League has moved to hosting their events in newly built arenas which house lower capacities and are more appropriate for the attendance trends of the league. Then, as other leagues continue to grow, future opportunities in expanding markets such as Ocala/Marion County present themselves. Ms. Connor then advised Ocala/Marion County was lacking a venue at the arena's proposed capacity for ticketed shows and events. She further stated that a few facilities exist in the regional area which would be competitive to the Project when completed but if the Project was

built to accommodate concerts, it would have the potential to be a compelling entertainment option in the region. Ms. Connor then turned the conversation over to Ms. Cuff to discuss recommendations.

Ms. Cuff stated the first priority would be a Multipurpose Facility with 7,000 seat capacity and flexible arena or entertainment venue space with a flat floor and retractable seating. This would allow the space to be used as 9 basketball courts which could also be converted into eighteen volleyball courts. The space could also be used for graduations, small concerts and community events. Ms. Cuff stated when the retractable seating was not in use, the arena could be used for youth sports tournaments and practices as well as different demand drivers throughout the week. The next priority was noted as a Conference Hotel. This would be a 300-key hotel with 16,000 square feet of ballroom space divisible into four separate rooms and 9,600 square feet which could be divided into nine meeting rooms. The Hunden analysis determined this would help meet the demand which was currently unaccommodated by the present hotel supply. The third priority (or future priority) was listed as a Mixed-Use Walkable District which included retail/restaurant space and a flexible entertainment venue. This walkable district would ideally be established around the multipurpose facility and conference hotel to heighten the visitor experience and extend their stay. The walkable district could also serve as a flexible entertainment space with a 2,000-3,000 (ideally 2,500) capacity indoor convertible venue space. Ms. Cuff advised a constant theme and the highest priority throughout the recommendations was the need for flexibility so venues could cater to different types of events which would expand the available options and ability for programming. Ms. Cuff then discussed some additional opportunities based on gaps in the market that could be successful for the county to venture into for the future. These consisted of a Water Park or major family entertainment attraction, cycling and events centered around the existing bike trails and quality of life amenities for residents. These major entertainment attractions would spotlight the centralized location of Ocala/Marion County and attract visitors traveling through the area on their way to larger markets such as Orlando. Ms. Cuff further stated these attractions would leverage some of the current assets which existed in Ocala/Marion County and the events would have the ability to highlight the natural and unique assets to the area. She then stated that as the county continued to grow in population and size, the need to cater to quality of life, connectivity and transportation requirements of local residents would also increase. This would be inclusive of a connectivity strategy between assets, connection of existing trails to tourism assets such as the Rainbow River & Silver Springs State Park as well as a Commercial airport with non-stop flights to regional destinations. Ms. Cuff stated additional opportunities in Sports & Outdoor Recreation also existed based on the gaps in the market. She advised the analysis determined that authentic commercial developments near natural assets, a gun/shooting range, the redevelopment of Shocker Park and additional youth sports facilities for traditional outdoor sports such as soccer, baseball, softball and football would be recommended to fill the market gap. Lastly, it was recommended that the implementation of additional shopping, dining and entertainment options be established which have a multi-use district focus inclusive of

unique and authentic retail/restaurant offerings and family-oriented “eatertainment”. Ms. Cuff then explained the recommendations in greater detail, beginning with the multi-purpose facility, by re-emphasizing that it would include nine courts with the ability to be converted into 18 volleyball courts and a championship court with the capacity to seat 900. She stated it would also include approximately 173,000 square feet of programming space for larger events. She then discussed the event space breakdown for the recommended conference hotel and advised that the total amount of functional space should be approximately 25,000 square feet with 10 divisions (4 ballrooms and 6 meeting rooms). The analysis further recommended future hotels with additional function space for events, meetings and banquets be developed adjacent to the multi-purpose facility to make the facility more attractive to meeting planners. The analysis highlighted eleven locations within Marion County, based on visibility and proximity to existing assets, which would be viable options for a multi-purpose facility, conference hotel or flexible entertainment venue.

Ms. Cuff then showed the council a number of site plans developed by Convergence Design (not in attendance) and discussed same.

She then discussed financial and impact projections for each concept over a ten-year period. Ms. Cuff advised the recommended components of the Project were expected to generate nearly \$7.62 million in capturable sales tax, more than \$28.6 million in tourism development tax and \$21.8 million in property tax over the 10-year period analyzed. The report indicated that the multipurpose facility would generate approximately 243,000 annual visitors, the flexible entertainment venue would generate approximately 83,000 annual visitors, there would be approximately 76,000 occupied room nights annually and the conference center would generate approximately 68,000 annual visitors over a 10-year period. Ms. Cuff advised continued execution of the plan, since the data and analysis had been secured, was the goal. She advised the county was currently in phase one, Vision Alignment and phase two, Feasibility Analysis of execution. She further advised that Hunden Strategic Partners would meet with county leadership and the community to align the vision for Ocala/Marion County and analyze the role the public sector would have in advancing tourism over the next 5-10 years.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know the cost of the current feasibility study and future studies.

Ms. Shaffer advised it was approximately \$107,000 in total. She further advised feedback regarding the presentation was welcomed and additional slides could be provided to explain the findings in greater detail before the scheduled workshops.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know the amount the Tourist Development Department paid to Hunden Strategic Partners to date. He further advised that although volleyball was mentioned in the analysis, he noticed that pickleball was not. He indicated that Florida had become the pickleball mecca. He then advised the study mentioned converting basketball courts into volleyball courts which was good but they may need to be converted into pickleball courts.

Commissioner Carl Zalak advised the analysis highlighted the need for flexible space therefore they could be converted into whatever was needed.

Mr. Gaekwad again requested to know how much had been paid for the study to date and if any additional costs existed.

Ms. Shaffer confirmed that Hunden Strategic Partners had received approximately \$107,000 to date and additional costs would exist if additional information was gained from conducting further research.

Ms. Wheeler then advised that Hunden Strategic Partners was paid approximately \$120,100 since a Change Order was executed to cover the cost of additional one-on-one meetings with the Board of County Commissioners and to facilitate a joint workshop. Therefore, the Tourist Development Department had spent \$107,000 to date but additional expenses were pending. She further advised that Hunden Strategic Partners had not been contracted to execute any additional work beyond the joint workshop and presentation.

Mr. Gaekwad advised he agreed with the need for a deep dive study but solutions should be provided as well. He requested the study be broken down to indicate what was needed to implement and execute the recommendations based on a three-year plan. He advised he would like a step-by-step outline which described what was needed to reach these goals.

Mr. Rus Adams affirmed and stated the study was necessary to highlight the opportunities that existed in the community so individuals with capital would know what was needed.

Mr. Gaekwad stated some individuals have the ability to invest \$1,000,000 into the community but they needed to know what outdoor facilities were needed, what type of financing was available and how the county & community could work together.

Ms. Wheeler advised a question was posed in the online chat from an individual named Don and requested to know if the Vice-Chairman, Mr. Jason Reynolds, wanted the consultant to address the question. Ms. Wheeler stated Don asked how many acres each of the potential footprints would utilize.

Ms. Cuff advised she would need to defer to the architect to answer this question. She then stated the development areas varied but the Red Oak Farm site plan noted 130 acres which allowed for parking. She advised the multi-purpose event center could range from 10-27 acres depending on the support footprint needed and the development site for the conference hotel could range from 3-15 acres.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know the amount of indoor space the World Equestrian Center had based on the study.

Ms. Cuff advised the World Equestrian Center had 266,000 square feet of functional space or 264,000 square feet of exhibit space and approximately 2,000 square feet of

meeting space. She further advised the meeting space would expand with their Event Center which included a 10,000 square foot ballroom.

Mr. Gaekwad then requested to know why Hunden Strategic Partners believed the county needed an additional meeting space when the World Equestrian Center already had approximately 300,000 square feet of functional space.

Ms. Cuff advised the World Equestrian Center was priced at the top of the market. She further advised that local and regional meeting planners stated the price was too high for a number of events such as youth sports tournaments that have to pay an additional cost to bring in their own indoor sports courts. She advised that many of the tournaments prefer to use a facility which included these amenities in the price. Ms. Cuff then advised another consideration for meeting planners was the availability of reasonably priced hotel rooms to accommodate overnight guests. She again advised the World Equestrian Center's price point was over budget for many events. Ms. Cuff went on to explain that the development of reasonably priced hotel rooms and meeting spaces was not to compete with the World Equestrian Center but to meet a demand. This would provide the community with practice spaces to utilize throughout the week and flexible meeting space that could be used for pickleball. She further stated the recommendation was provided to fill a void in the community as well as generate additional visitation so the community, as a whole, could benefit.

Ms. Shaffer stated as part of the analysis, Hunden Strategic Partners also measured the amount of business lost due to the lack of facilities, meeting spaces and hotels needed to accommodate potential tournaments/conferences.

Mr. Gaekwad then requested the presentation be amended to include more explanation and detailed numbers.

Commissioner Zalak further explained the analysis by stating the community had a facility which was at the top of the price point but needed facilities in the mid to low price point. He then advised that convention spaces and open spaces lose money so the county needs to leverage that by establishing a tax district where hotels and restaurants pay to support the underlying infrastructure.

Mr. Gaekwad advised that AirBNB's allowed for an individual to purchase a home and turn it into a hotel without any permits or regulations.

Ms. Shaffer then advised that Commissioner Zalak was working with Mr. George Albright, Marion County Tax Collector, to find solutions to the challenges presented regarding short-term rentals.

Media Plan FY 2024-2025

Ron Livsey out at 10:23am

Ms. Shaffer introduced Hayley Radich, Account Supervisor with Miles Partnership and Lindsey Sullivan, Media Planner with Miles Partnership to discuss the FY 2024-2025

Media Plan. Ms. Sullivan advised the objective of the media plan was to drive quality traffic to the Ocala/Marion County website, inspire leisure adventure/group travel and increase overnight stays in the county. She stated the budget was \$1.5 million to be utilized from October 1, 2024-September of 2025. Ms. Sullivan advised the primary audience for Ocala/Marion County were travel intenders.

Barry Mansfield out at 10:25am

Danny Gaekwad out at 10:26am

Ron Livsey in at 10:26am

Ms. Sullivan stated the campaign objective was to generate awareness, engagement and influence as it related to Ocala/Marion County. Miles Partnership worked to generate awareness of the county as a world class destination as well as make it widely recognized as Florida's Natural Wonder and the Horse Capital of the World.

Danny Gaekwad in at 10:27am

Danny Gaekwad out at 10:27am

Ms. Radich advised Miles Partnership was dedicated to engaging the potential traveler's interest by demonstrating the county was the right place for them to visit while spotlighting the hidden gems. She stated the primary market was the State of Florida, excluding Ocala/Marion County and secondary markets included Atlanta and New York. Ms. Radich explained the Visitors and Convention Bureau entered the Atlanta market approximately two years ago after hurricane Ian to shift dollars out of Florida and Atlanta. Subsequently, a Visit-Florida Co-op out-of-home opportunity presented itself and the team entered the Atlanta and New York markets which have been very successful. Test markets have also been utilized this year which included Chicago, Hartford, New Haven, Savannah and Philadelphia.

Ms. Sullivan advised the team partnered with a company called Arrivalist, a location-based visitation data partner, that allowed the team to access visitation by origin market. The Arrivalist program allowed the team access a date range of origin markets. The results indicated that approximately 400,000 people traveled from the Orlando market to Marion County. Ms. Sullivan further stated a group of people existed who were showing interest in coming into the market even though the team was not intentionally reaching out to them. She advised this presented an opportunity and Miles Partnership recommended adding them to the test market.

Danny Gaekwad in at 10:34am

Ms. Wheeler requested that Ms. Sullivan explain Arrivalist so the team had a better understanding of how visitation was tracked and how it influenced marketing.

Ms. Sullivan advised that Arrivalist allowed the team to pixel their media placements or anything digital. She stated that pixeling was the ability to put a one-by-one tracker on ads placed online to advise of a person's origin market (where their phone IP address

came from) and when entered into market. It excluded anyone within a 50-mile radius of Marion County therefore local residents were not tracked in the data. She further advised that pixeling tracked a person's arrival and time spent in market. This allowed the team to track their journey while the visitor was within market and only if Marion County was their primary market.

Danny Gaekwad out at 10:36am

Danny Gaekwad in at 10:37am

Rus Adams out at 10:38am

Ms. Sullivan advised the program allowed the team to determine where travelers originated so Miles Partnership along with the VCB staff could determine whether spending additional marketing dollars in that market would be beneficial. The program also allowed the team to monitor the destinations a traveler visited while in Ocala/Marion County. She further explained that data partners were utilized to assist in segmenting audiences to confirm the correct individuals were targeted. Ms. Sullivan advised the program was not collecting personal information but key data points which showed what a person searched for, how they interacted online, what they were interested in and what their behaviors were. This information was then layered on top of the media Miles Partnership marketed.

Rus Adams in at 10:40am

Ms. Radich explained Google would be utilized for search engine marketing. She further stated that partnering with Google would drive web traffic to the site and increase conversions on the site. She advised to accomplish this the team would need to maintain an "always on" search engine marketing presence and continue to incorporate Google's Performance Max product throughout the year. Ms. Radich stated Google Performance Max was provided elements, headlines, links, videos and images and the program created an ad based on an individual's search topics.

Ms. Sullivan advised based on the issues with the AI portion of Google, Miles Partnership minimized the use of AI until they could guarantee the ads were being seen. She advised the budget for SCM was reduced on the current plan until they could determine if the program would work well for the team but contingency dollars existed if it is necessary to reimplement the program. The social platform or Meta did not change and would handle the majority of the marketing. Therefore, the team would like to increase awareness, engagement and action across Ocala/Marion County social pages, Facebook and Instagram to drive visitation to the county. She further advised that Miles Partnership used an "always on" approach which allowed them to target visitors by age, interest, behavior and geographic market.

Mr. Gaekwad advised that Facebook was no longer the primary social media platform as it targeted families and friends but not the commercial market. He stated that Google was now the preferred social media platform.

Commissioner Zalak advised that people have transitioned to Instagram.

Mr. Gaekwad agreed and stated he would like more money to be spent on Instagram instead of Facebook marketing. He further advised that Facebook was not producing adequate results.

Ms. Sullivan advised that Miles Partnership could access results such as age demographics as well as whether the traveler was on Facebook or Instagram. She also advised results could be accessed which indicated where a traveler originated from. Ms. Sullivan stated their research showed that Facebook was still popular in the 55+ age market.

Commissioner Zalak requested to know if Miles Partnership tracked the differences between the visitor demographic from Facebook ads versus the visitor demographic from Instagram ads.

Ms. Sullivan affirmed and advised the results were included in the monthly report. She further advised if there was additional information the council was interested in reviewing, the information could be obtained and included in the reporting.

Commissioner Zalak requested to know if specific events could be pushed to specific platforms.

Ms. Jessica Heller, Sales and Marketing Supervisor, affirmed and stated that specific ads were promoted for Patriotic Skies and other summertime events.

Ms. Sullivan stated Miles Partnership would continue to build on the performance results from social media and promote organic posts which do not have the look or feel of ads. She also advised that Miles Partnership would provide information on the different age groups which access Ocala/Marion County social media.

Ms. Sullivan then discussed AdGenuity, a Demand Site Platform (DSP), which allowed the buying and selling of digital ads on the internet. She advised the process included accessing the platform, providing a budget, determining an audience and other parameters. The DSP would then begin a bidding process to obtain the best cost per click/cost per impression rate possible. Ms. Sullivan advised this process cut out the middleman when buying programmatically and allowed for approximately 30% more dollars to be used for additional media efforts instead of paying fees. She then advised by partnering with AdGenuity, a variety of ads would be utilized such as interactive, standard display, native online video, premium connected TV, digital out-of-home as well as other preferred partner deals.

Ms. Sullivan showed an example of an interactive static display ad.

Ms. Sullivan then discussed the incorporation of native ad units which live on user sought content. Therefore, when people searched for specific topics an ad popped up based on their search. She then explained that Ocala/Marion County utilized a new media platform called interactive online video. This allowed for a more actionable and

interactive piece during video hotspots encouraging the user to click on it. This enabled a “call to action” to pop-up on the side of the screen and ended by directing the user to OcalaMarion.com. Next, Ms. Sullivan discussed the premium connected TV partnerships with Hulu, Disney+ and Peacock. She then advised that by running the ads programmatically, the cost was reduced. She further advised the ads were not skippable (the viewer must watch the ad to the end).

Commissioner Zalak requested to know how the ads worked.

Ms. Sullivan advised they were similar to an online banner ad and based on the audience as well as a geographic location, ads were placed on the connected TV.

Commissioner Zalak requested to know how specific the program could get. For example, would it only allow for a specific county to be targeted or could it narrow the search down to specific zip codes.

Ms. Sullivan confirmed the program could allow for specific zip codes to be targeted or eliminated from the search but they didn’t normally utilize that option. She then discussed the out-of-home programmatic partner, Vistar Media, who was an aggregator of numerous vendors which allowed programmatic and digital placement. She further explained that digital ads could be placed on charging stations, urban panels, digital outdoor boards, gas station screens or anything else one could think of. Ms. Sullivan advised Teads, a premium partner who had access to numerous premium publishers, allowed for placement of in-feed video and social units to amplify social messaging. She stated the video ads were “in-feed” as well which allowed online video ads to play, based on the individual, as they consumed the content. She further advised the impression was not counted in the data unless the individual watched the video. Ms. Sullivan then discussed Undertone, a partner which offered large scale interactive units. She stated during the upcoming fiscal year, Miles Partnership would utilize an Undertone Page Grabber Unit which was an interactive customizable screen take-over. Ms. Sullivan advised the past year’s placement of the Undertone page grabber unit performed very well and received over 6 million impressions as well as 153,000 clicks with a click-through rate of 2.48. She advised the benchmark for click-through rate increased from one-percent to two-percent from last year. Ms. Sullivan then discussed Nativo, a marketing partner who curated custom articles. Nativo created the articles and then Miles Partnership had in-feed units which drove individuals to read the articles. The articles were inclusive of topics such as, “Discover Why Marion County is an Adventure Lovers Dream Destination”. These content articles with hyperlinks were crucial to assisting travelers with setting itineraries and suggesting options for travelers to engage in while in market. Ms. Sullivan advised fiscal year 2023-2024 metrics indicated that over 13,702,450 impression were counted as well as 74,446 clicks and time on content was at approximately one-minute. Ms. Sullivan emphasized that the average benchmark was previously 30 seconds, so the platform was performing extremely well. She then mentioned a new partner which would be utilized for the upcoming year, Odyssey Studios. Ms. Sullivan advised Miles Partnership aimed to boost viewership and

engagement with the Marion Insider's Guide video series. This would be accomplished by pushing out programmatic placements to drive awareness of the series and direct people to OcalaMarion.com. Odyssey Studios allowed for utilization of the YouTube in-stream partnership so videos could run across large format TV and mobile devices. There would be an Apple maps guide element, themed from the YouTube series, included with social traffic drivers to direct viewers to the Marion Insider's Guide as well. This program would also create an itinerary that people could follow and experience. Ms. Sullivan advised Miles Partnership would start with three videos, to see how they performed, and add additional videos in the future. She then discussed a two-month contract with Tripadvisor and stated Marion County would be a family content sponsor which allowed the county to align with robust upper-funnel content experiences that celebrated multi-generational travel, core memories and family-friendly adventure. Ms. Sullivan advised that supporting traffic drivers would be placed via Tripadvisor's social handles which directed off-platform users to the guide housed on Tripadvisor.com. When discussing print ads, Ms. Sullivan stated two full page ads were placed in Flamingo Magazine. Additionally, Flamingo Magazine would create three exclusive eNewsletters and host digital banners on FlamingoMag.com for three months. Another print-ad partner discussed was Sports Planning Guide Magazine which would host a two-page spread as well as a two-page advertorial in the Florida Sports Guide section. Miles Partnership also negotiated utilization of video and content on their website, SportsPlanningGuide.com, along with three-months of eNewsletter Banner Ads and a one-month highlight as the Sponsored Destination. Ms. Sullivan then mentioned Prevue, a publication which targeted meeting and event planners who seek information on where to book their next meeting and/or convention. Miles Partnership advised that a Visit Florida Co-op package existed with this partner which allowed for lower rates to publish full-page ads. Ms. Sullivan advised that she also negotiated some additional full-page ads, two feature stories, two sponsored contents, two custom eNewsletters with features, two Prevue eNewsletter Takeovers and six geo-targeted eBlasts.

Mr. Gaekwad requested to know if meeting planners would actually be engaged by the ads and consider Ocala/Marion County because the county had over 100,000 square feet of conference/event space which needed to be utilized. He further stated if one event planner hosted one mid-size meeting every month that could generate 6,000-10,000 room nights. He then requested to know what Miles Partnership did to engage with meeting planners.

Ms. Sullivan advised Miles Partnership could list the different venues and/or resources available in Ocala/Marion County.

Mr. Gaekwad then asked how does the information get pushed out to the meeting planners.

Ms. Sullivan advised the meeting planners were reached through publications like Prevue.

Mr. Gaekwad asked if that was the only way or if other methods existed such as email.

Ms. Sullivan advised another option to reach meeting planners was called eblasts. Miles Partnership partnered with eTarget, who creates eNewsletters to send to meeting planners. She also advised that LinkedIn was another method used to directly target meeting planners.

Mr. Gaekwad then asked how successful the method was.

Ms. Sullivan advised she could obtain the open-rate of each eBlast and the metics showing the click through rate for the eNewsletters to provide to the council at the next meeting.

Mr. Gaekwad emphasized the importance of reaching the meeting planners because they were familiar with the amount of conference and/or meeting space available in Orlando and Gainesville but did not know what Ocala/Marion County offered.

Ms. Wheeler advised that Miles Partnership assisted the Visitors and Convention Bureau with large format advertising. Individual touch points also existed which the Sales Team and Marketing Team handled internally by utilizing platforms such as Cvent, Mint+ and PlayEasy. Ms. Wheeler advised Miles Partnership was contracted to handle skill work better handled by a large company and some of the smaller marketing needs were handled internally. She then emphasized that although Miles Partnership did not have specific figures with them in the meeting, the Visitors and Convention Bureau team evaluated the open rate and success rate every time a newsletter was sent out. She advised that approximately 80 target newsletters were distributed last fiscal year.

Mr. Gaekwad then requested specific metrics be presented showing the number of newsletters distributed and the success rate of same. He further stated this would help the council determine where money should be allocated.

Ms. Wheeler advised an internal evaluation to determine the need for reallocation of marketing dollars occurred. She then advised the aforementioned presentation was informational only with a request for input and consideration.

Mr. Gaekwad stated the council would not know what input to provide without knowledge of the metrics. He further stated the metrics should be clearly stated within the Visitors and Convention Bureau and Miles Partnership reports but could be simplified to show results such as; 27,000 eblasts were sent to meeting planners and 27 were opened.

Ms. Sullivan then continued with the next piece of her presentation and discussed Traditional Out-of-Home marketing.

An example of a traditional billboard was shown to the council.

Commissioner Zalak requested to know if the Traditional Out-of-Home billboards were also located at the airports.

Ms. Sullivan advised that Miles Partnership looked into placement of billboards at the airports but that project has not been launched.

Ms. Sullivan advised that static outdoor boards were currently located in Orlando, at the I-75 Turnpike and one by the Welcome Pillar. She then discussed a new out-of-home marketing option recommendation, CarVertise. This company would pin-point specific events in a market of choice and swarm the event with rideshare cars wrapped in Marion County branding. Ms. Sullivan advised that Miles Partnership was working with the Visitors and Convention Bureau staff to vet markets and determine where this form of marketing would be beneficial. She advised that CarVertise offered a package which included a 12-week campaign with 16 partially wrapped cars, 8 event swarms, 200,00 retargeting impressions and 200 driver handouts per car. Ms. Sullivan stated the vendor provided a list of events ranked by number of attendees to review. The partner also allowed for retargeting based on location. For example, when a person walked close to one of the cars or was in close proximity to an event being swarmed, a Marion County ad would appear on their phone.

Commissioner Zalak requested to know if that form of marketing had been successful.

Ms. Radich advised the marketing equated to a moving billboard and brought awareness of a destination to an individual. The retargeting option of the program enabled the team to see how many people viewed an ad and whether they clicked on it.

Ms. Sullivan also stated the marketing option relied heavily on awareness and created a method to place Ocala/Marion County on the mind of those who come in close proximity to the rideshare vehicle. She further advised a QR code with a Marion County video attached would be utilized.

A flow chart was provided to all of the council members.

Ms. Sullivan advised the flowchart provided additional information regarding the vendors, metrics and cost.

Commissioner Zalak requested to know what type of ideas Miles Partnership developed to wrap the rideshare vehicles with.

Ms. Radich advised the Visitors and Convention Bureau creative team had amazing imagery which could be used such as The Springs, a manatee, a glass bottom boat or other various activities.

Ms. Heller added the imagery used depended on the time of year the marketing was implemented.

Ms. Radich advised Miles Partnership recommended the Visitors and Convention Bureau provide three different creative options for CarVertise.

Ms. Sullivan continued discussing the flowchart and pointed out that it showcased the recommended media options for the upcoming year from October to September.

Quarterly Public Relations and Analytics Report – April- June Data

Ms. Jessica Heller, Marketing and Communications Supervisor, reviewed the Public

Relations and Analytics Report which covered April thru June. She advised the Visitors and Convention Bureau's public relations efforts included sending out press releases and hosting FAMs. She then highlighted a Co-op opportunity with Visit Florida called a Satellite Media Tour (SMT), a public relations technique which connected the Visitors and Convention Bureau with viewers from across the county through television, radio, publishing press releases, conducting online interviews (live and taped), podcasts and any other type of media available. The Visitors and Convention Bureau invested \$10,000 and submitted an adventure travel-based pitch which was chosen as a destination based on the submission. Ms. Heller further advised the results of the SMT noted an audience reach of 25,769,275 with total ad value of \$803,405 and a total of 4,000 placements (podcasts, articles, TV airings). She then discussed Earned Media Value for the quarter which was \$2.7 million with a total reach of 654,000,000 inclusive of the Gateway press release, the Southern Living article, Patriotic Skies coverage, National Travel and Tourism Week as well as other leisure coverage. Ms. Heller stated a lot of exciting updates were forthcoming regarding the Gateway construction and communication regarding road closures would be provided to the public. Lastly, Ms. Heller highlighted the website metrics from April through June and stated there were 371,000 visits to the site, a 55% increase from last year, and 174,000 visits to partner pages 50,000 of which were to partner websites. The website generated 481 newsletter sign-ups and 944 requests for Vacation Guides. She then re-emphasized that the OcalaMarion.com website was one of five finalists for the US Travel Associations ESTO award. The OcalaMarion.com site competed with other websites from across the county and the VCB was proud to be nominated as a finalist.

Sales Update

Mr. Locke presented the Sales Update and highlighted the Babe Ruth World Series scheduled for August 1-9, 2025. He advised the Sales Team was close to finalizing a contract to secure the 16-18U age group. Mr. Locke stated approximately 16-20 teams would be in attendance for this event. Next, he discussed the Lady Bass Anglers Pro Bass Tour and the World Fishing Tour, owned by the same company, and tentatively scheduled to be held in 2026. This afforded an opportunity for the Sales Team to work on a partnership with the organization to host two consecutive weeks of fishing tournaments. Mr. Locke then mentioned the September 5th Industry Roundtable which would be held at the Visitors and Convention Bureau and extended an invitation for all to attend.

TDT Collections/STR and Key Data Update

Ms. Wheeler advised the Tourist Development Tax (TDT) for the reporting period of June which covered the May revenues, collections totaled \$402,595.36 which was an increase of \$28,063.43 or 7.4% year over year with 3.11% from late taxes and penalties. She then advised for the reporting period of July, which covered June revenues, collections totaled \$450,585.02 an increase of \$37,444.06 or 9.06% year over year. Ms. Wheeler then thanked the Tax Collectors Office for their collection efforts as 20% of the collections

were recouped from late taxes and penalties. She then went on to discuss Smith Travel Research (STR) data, which captures metrics for traditional hotels, and stated occupancy for the month of June in Marion County was at 63.2% which was a decrease of 4.7% year over year, the average daily rate was \$129.93 which was an increase of 2% and RevPar was \$82.15 which was a decrease of 2.8% from last year. During the month of June, the running twelve-months of occupancy showed a decrease of 7.8%, ADR increased 3% and RevPar decreased 5.1%. The Visit Florida data showed statewide occupancy at 69.1% which was a decrease of .4%, ADR was \$172.31 which was down .1% from last year and RevPar was \$119.07 which was down .4% from last year.

Commissioner Zalak requested to know how Rock the Country affected the metrics.

Mr. Gaekwad advised hotels in the county did very well the weekend of the concert but if the concert would not have occurred hotel occupancy would have suffered.

Ms. Wheeler advised the market had been normalized until now and the ADR for June reflected a significant increase in room rates from the previous year. She stated June wasn't normally a good month for ADR but the STR report showed a significant impact during the two days that Rock the Country was held.

Mr. Gaekwad requested the STR and Key Data report include an additional slide with information which compared hotel occupancy to short-term rental occupancy.

Ron Livsey out at 11:10am

She then advised that occupancy in short-term rentals was also down but the supply was increasing. Ms. Wheeler then stated the June Key Data report, which analyzed short-term rental metrics, indicated occupancy was at 32.8% which was a decrease of 8% from last year, ADR was \$130.00 which was a decrease of \$1.00 from last year and RevPar was \$33.00 which was a decrease of \$1.00 from last year but nights available totaled 6,155 which was an increase of 17% from last year. Ms. Wheeler advised that approximately 5,400 hotels were currently reporting to STR and the new hotels increased those numbers by 700-800 available room nights more than the short-term rental market had. Ms. Wheeler continued with the Key Data report (short-term rentals) and advised for the running twelve months occupancy was down 8%, ADR was down 7%, RevPar was down 17% but nights available increased by 22%. She further advised the running twelve months for the June STR report showed occupancy at 61.9% which was down 4.9% year over year, ADR was \$127.22 which was up .9% and RevPar (revenue per available room) was \$78.80 which was down 4.1% from last year. She then advised the July STR report for the running twelve months indicated that occupancy was down 7.7%, ADR was up 1.9% and RevPar was down 5.9%. The June Visit Florida statewide data noted that occupancy was down 68.2% which was down 1.8%, ADR was \$167.87 which was down 2.2% and RevPar was \$114.45 which was down 4%. She then advised the July Key Data report noted occupancy at 34.2% which was a decrease of 19% from last year, ADR was \$137.00 which did not change from last year, RevPar was \$38.00 which was a decrease of \$8.00 from last year and nights available were 6,290 which was an increase of 34%

from last year's room night total of 4,681. Ms. Wheeler then stated for the running twelve-months occupancy was down 9%, ADR was down 7%, RevPar was down 18% and nights available increased 21%.

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

Notation for Record

Ms. Shaffer advised the Economic Impact/Visitor Tracking Report – April – June Data was in the packet.

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

Mr. Reynolds advised the TDC Attendance record was in the packet.

Old Business

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

New Business

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

Public Comment

Upcoming Meeting

Mr. Reynolds stated, that the next TDC meeting will be on Thursday, September 26, 2024.

The meeting adjourned at 11:39 a.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'J' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.

Jeff Bailey, Chairman