



Tourist Development Council

April 23, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Brevard County Government Center, Viera

The Tourist Development Council met on April 23, 2025, at 2:00 PM, at the Brevard County Government Center, Viera. Members present were Chair Rob Feltner, Vice Chair Tom Hermansen, Julie Braga, Alex Litras, Larry Jarnes, Wayne Soard, Mayor Rob Medina, and John Moran via Zoom. The staff present were Justin Caron from the County Attorney's Office; Peter Cranis, Laura Beebe, John Giantonio, Juawana Brooks, and Angela Essing from the Tourism Development Office. The guests present were Mike McGarry, Beaches, Boating, and Waterways Programs Manager; Wendy Nok Durden, Hubbs SeaWorld Research Scientist II; David German, Vice President, Cruise Business Development and John Lynch, Canaveral Port Authority; Gaell Francois, Brevard County Budget Office; Dave Berman, Florida Today; Adriana Faip (sp?) and Mayor Paul Alfrey, City of Melbourne.

Roll Call

Pledge of Allegiance

Action: The Board approved allowing John Moran to vote via Zoom.

Result: Approved

Mover: Mayor Medina

Second: Braga

Ayes: Braga, Soard, Jarnes, Mayor Medina, Litras, Vice Chair Hermansen, and Chair Feltner

Nays: None

Absent: Mayor Connors

Approval of Minutes

Action: The Board approved the March 26, 2025, Tourist Development Council Minutes.

Result: Approved

Mover: Vice Chair Hermansen

Second: Mayor Medina

Ayes: Braga, Soard, Jarnes, Mayor Medina, Litras, Vice Chair Hermansen, Chair Feltner, and Moran via Zoom.

Nays: None

Absent: Mayor Connors

Port Canaveral Report

German provided the committee with a brief background on himself and shared the professional journey that led him to his current role as Vice President of Cruise Business Development at Port Canaveral. He offered an overview of current activity at Port Canaveral, particularly regarding cruise operations. He reported that Fiscal Year 2024 marked a record-breaking year for the port, highlighting the following achievements: 1) \$7.6 million in passenger movements, 2) A record 13 homeported cruise ships, 3) 911 ship calls and 4) 914,000 vehicles parked at the port.

German also shared the projected outlook for Fiscal Year 2025, which anticipates continued growth and further milestones for Port Canaveral. Key projections include: 1) 8.4 million in passenger movements, 2) A record 16 homeported cruise ships and 3) 1,030 ship calls.

Mr. German provided the committee with updates on upcoming ship movements and changes at Port Canaveral: 1) *Norwegian Epic* – March 29, 2025, 2) *Caribbean Princess* – April 14, 2025, 3) *Celebrity Equinox* – April 19, 2025, 4) *RCI Voyager of the Seas* – May 3, 2025, and 5) *Carnival Venezia* – May 11, 2025.

The upcoming arrivals and transitions include: 1) *Norwegian Aqua* is scheduled to arrive on April 26, 2025, 2) *Disney Fantasy* will depart for Europe on May 4, 2025, and is scheduled to enter dry dock in September 2025 and 3) *Disney Magic* will replace *Fantasy* and begin sailing from Port Canaveral on May 7, 2025.

Chair Feltner asked Mr. German to arrange a tour for the committee to do a tour of a ship, view the amenities, and see what the ship had to offer.

Director's Report

Cranis noted that February had been down for Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections, showing a 7% decrease compared to previous years. Despite this dip, several prior months had reported record-high TDT numbers. Since the beginning of the new fiscal year, each month has shown an increase in TDT revenue, except for February.

Cranis expressed interest in seeing the March figures, though he anticipated a slight decline, attributing this to the timing of the Easter holiday, which fell in April and could shift travel patterns. He also referenced comments from the last TDC meeting, where concerns were raised about potential pullbacks in certain segments, such as business travel (particularly government travel) and Canadian travel. He emphasized that the department was monitoring the situation cautiously to assess any ongoing trends.

Budget Report

Cranis provided an update on the budget report, noting that the TDT numbers remain in strong financial standing despite March figures coming in 7% lower than in previous years. He noted that most of the marketing expenses were now being recorded for the spring season, as the

spring advertising campaign had been executed and the associated invoices were now being received and paid.

He informed the committee that the summer campaign was scheduled to begin in May. The campaign would be heavily promoted during the May–June timeframe and continue through August. He informed the committee that all STR and TDT reports are available on our public-access Dropbox. If, for any reason, you're not receiving our bi-weekly newsletter, which always includes the link to these reports, please provide your business card so we can ensure you're added to the distribution list.

Beach Improvement Committee

Wendy Nok Durden with Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute presented on behalf of the Marine Mammal Stranding Response program. She explained that their program is on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and they respond to whale and dolphin stranding events with three staff members and over 80 trained volunteers. Brevard County has more strandings than any other county in Florida. They investigate the strandings to understand the mortality events better. In 2024, there were 49 stranded animals, 17 of them alive. Dolphin entanglement has increased and is very dependent on a quick response. Drone technology can provide a more complete assessment of severity and configuration. Outreach and community engagement are needed to decrease the number of entanglements. She explained how Florida's wildlife excursions contribute \$5.6 billion annually to the economy. Her staff interacts with 1,000's of tourists and residents every year. She noted that their best allies are the eco-tour operators because they are on the water daily, and their business depends on the dolphins. In 2024, 21 reports came from the tour operators. She thanked the TDC for their partnership, which has allowed them to remove 801 (116 live animals) since 2008, which is greater than 18,000 pounds of biomass each year. Hubbs is seeking a contract renewal to the current contract that expires in September of 2025. They are requesting a 5-year contract with a 3% yearly cost-of-living adjustment. They have had a \$25,000 annual contract since 2008. Inflation has increased costs by 47.6%. Thus, they are requesting \$35,000 to help offset cost increases. The per-animal expense averages \$1,243, with an average of 47 events a year that total \$58,421. This cost per animal does not include volunteer manpower, freezer storage and incineration, maintenance (trucks, vessels, lifts, etc.), and live animal support (medications, etc.). Nok Durden stated that their estimated annual program costs to respond to strandings are \$380,000, with volunteers contributing \$38,000, and a TDC contract of \$35,000 would help to further defer their costs.

Action: The Board approved Hubb SeaWorld's funding request of \$35,000 per year under a 5-year contract, with a 3% annual escalator.

Result: Approved

Mover: Beach Improvement Committee

Seconded: Vice Chair Hermansen

Ayes: Braga, Soard, Jarnes, Mayor Medina, Litras, Vice Chair Hermansen, Chair Feltner, and Moran via Zoom.

Nays: None

Absent: Mayor Connors

Tourism & Lagoon Grant Program

Braga reported that the Beach Improvement Committee held a productive discussion focused on the status of the beach fund, anticipated storm impacts, and the rising costs of beach renourishment projects. Mike McGarry presented a detailed overview of the financial standing of the Beach Improvement Budget in preparation for potential storms and hurricanes.

Following the discussion, the committee voted not to move forward with the Tourism & Lagoon Grant Program for the upcoming year to prioritize the continued growth of the Beach Improvement Fund.

Capital Facilities Budget- 10-year committed projected expenditures update

Cranis provided an overview of the estimated Capital Facilities Budget for FY25. The estimated TDT collection for FY25–26 is \$3.2 million, with a projected carryforward to support ongoing and upcoming projects.

Project Updates:

Viera Park: 10-year debt service project; four years remain.

Aquarium Project: Cranis met with Keith Winsten. Groundbreaking is expected before September. The project is set to begin receiving \$1.5 million annually for 10 years.

U.S. Law Enforcement Foundation (Police Hall of Fame): Currently in year three of a five-year, \$1 million funding commitment.

Brightline: Awaiting updates on federal grant funding. The TDC has allocated \$5 million in the FY25–26 budget for this project.

Cape Canaveral Lighthouse: Most project expenditures are expected to occur in the next fiscal year.

Veterans Memorial Park Amphitheater: Site work has begun, and the project is underway.

Lifeguards: \$1.566 million has been budgeted for beach lifeguard services for the next fiscal year. Of this amount, \$875,000 will come from the Capital Facilities Budget, \$250,000 from the Culture Budget, and the remaining \$440,000 from the Marketing Budget.

Melbourne Fairgrounds:

Chair Feltner wanted to discuss with the committee the concept of having a fairground in our area. Additionally, recent events have highlighted the growing need for large spaces to accommodate major public events, reinforcing the value of this proposed fairground development. He introduced Paul Alfrey, the City of Melbourne Mayor, to add to the discussion.

City of Melbourne Fairground Partnership Request:

The City of Melbourne has requested a partnership with the County to assist in the purchase of approximately 50 acres of land, owned by the Solid Waste Department of the County and located adjacent to their existing landfill, for the purpose of developing a fairground. The estimated purchase price is \$5 million.

Alfrey discussed with the committee the potential inclusion of a fire training facility within the project to help offset the financial impact and serve broader community needs. Alfrey also committed that the property would not be sold for development but kept for public use to hold events.

The TDC committee also discussed several options related to the fairground concept, including considerations around land use and overall pricing. Additionally, recent events have demonstrated the need for large spaces capable of accommodating major public gatherings, further emphasizing the potential value of the fairground development.

Action: The City of Melbourne requested \$2.5 million in funding support from the TDC to be distributed over 10 years.

Result: Approved

Mover: Chair Feltner

Seconder: Mayor Medina

Ayes: Braga, Soard, Jarnes, Mayor Medina, Litras, Chair Feltner, and Moran via Zoom.

Nays: Vice Chair Hermansen (5.28.25)

Absent: Mayor Connors

Board Reports

Braga shared that the tourism industry is closely monitoring current legislative activity that could directly impact the collection of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) and the continued existence of the Tourist Development Council (TDC).

Mayor Medina thanked the committee for their support of the Sacrifice Park ribbon-cutting ceremony, which took place on March 28, 2025, at 9:00 AM. He noted it was a meaningful and well-attended event. Mayor Medina also shared that on this same date, 38 years ago, the City of Palm Bay experienced its first mass shooting, during which Officers Ronald Grogan and Gerald Johnson lost their lives, and eighteen others were wounded. He acknowledged the significance of remembering their sacrifice and honoring their legacy through the park.

Upcoming Meetings

The next Tourist Development Council meeting will be held on May 28, 2025, at 2:00 PM at the Viera Government Center, Building C, 3rd Floor, Florida Room.

The next Marketing Committee Meeting Dates are April 24th, May 22nd, July 22nd, and September 25th.

The next Beach Committee Meeting Date is September 18th.

Public Comment

No public comments were made.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 PM.