

DUVAL COUNTY TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

February 6, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
City Hall - Lynwood Roberts Room

TDC Members: City Council President Randy White (Chair), City Council Vice President Kevin Carrico (Vice Chair), City Council Member Ron Salem, Jitan Kuverji, Dennis Chan, Dennis Thompson, Mark VanLoh (*excused*), Shawn LeNoble, Michael Jenkins

TDC Staff: Carol Brock (Executive Director), Brett Nolan (Administrator), Phillip Peterson (Auditor), Jim McCain (Office of General Counsel)

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Chair White

Chair White called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. and the attendees introduced themselves for the record.

II. Public Comments Including Action Items

Chair White

Public Comments: *None*

III. Approval of Minutes

Chair White

The minutes of the December 2, 2024 Regular TDC meeting were approved **unanimously as distributed.**

IV. TaxSlayer Gator Bowl Recap

Greg McGarity

Chair White reminded the board that the TDC provides a multiyear grant to the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl. This year's grant was \$330,000 for their January 2, 2025 game between Duke University and Ole Miss (University of Mississippi). There is one year remaining on the multiyear grant contract in the amount of \$300,000. Greg McGarity, President and CEO of TaxSlayer Gator Bowl, was invited to the podium to provide a recap of the event.

Mr. McGarity stated that the 80th annual TaxSlayer Gator Bowl was broadcast nationally on ESPN and was unopposed. Due to the tragic events that occurred in New Orleans on January 1, 2025, the Allstate Sugar Bowl game was postponed by a day. This created a ripple effect that subsequently caused the Gator Bowl to be delayed by 30 minutes so the two games wouldn't overlap. The result of this had the television kickoff ratings of nearly 8 million viewers. The total average ratings for the game had 5,032,217 viewers, an increase of 46.9% from the previous year. It was the 4th most watched game in non-CFP Bowl Games history.

Approximately 42% of the attendees came from outside the 150 mile radius of Duval County. Mr. McGarity shared that there were \$4,419,927 in total direct sales as a result of the event according to Visit Jacksonville's economic impact summary. While the game's attendance was 31,290, Mr. McGarity and his team were happy with the report on the economic impact on the Jacksonville area. The low attendance was likely caused by both teams not being "anchor team", which is a team that fans can drive to within six hours. Mr. McGarity appreciates the support they receive from the City of Jacksonville and the TDC and opened up for questions.

Mr. Jenkins asked if the 46.9% increase was due to the slight delay in the start of the game to which Mr. McGarity answered in the affirmative. Fans were able to tune in to the Sugar Bowl game then immediately click over to the Gator Bowl. Mr. Jenkins then inquired about where the teams were lodged. Mr. McGarity shared that Ole Miss stayed at the TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach and Duke stayed at the Omni Amelia Island. One team's band stayed downtown and the other at the Embassy Suite on Baymeadows. The Hyatt Downtown is where most of the official sponsors and game officials stayed. Additionally, many fans stayed in downtown lodging as well. Mr. McGarity credited teams now staying Downtown due to lack

of things to do, he anticipates that as Downtown develops, that could present a lot of opportunity in the years ahead.

Mr. Kuverji asked about the rate of return from the dollars TDC invests compared to the tourist development tax collected. Mr. Corrigan, CEO of Visit Jacksonville, detailed that they can utilize the STR report on hotel occupancy during the duration of the event but its difficult to pinpoint which fans stayed at which hotel, overall, they were very satisfied with the December tourist tax numbers.

V. Visit Jacksonville Quarterly Report and Update

Michael Corrigan

The Chair introduced Mr. Corrigan who provided the quarterly update for Visit Jacksonville. He shared findings from the Economic Impact and Tracking Report, commissioned by Visit Jacksonville and funded by the TDC which was conducted by Downs & St. Germain Research. The data revealed that in 2024, Jacksonville welcomed over 8 million visitors resulting in an estimated economic impact of \$7.4 billion to the local economy. Overnight visitors accounted for \$4.1 billion in direct spending on restaurants, attractions, activities, rental cars, and more. Almost 5 million guest rooms were sold in local hotels during fiscal year 2024, generating \$31.5 million in bed tax collection.

Mr. Corrigan then provided a high level overview of the Visit Jacksonville Quarter One Report document provided in the meeting packets.

The Visit Jacksonville audit was approved by the Visit Jacksonville Board of Directors in January 2025 and was presented to the Executive Director of the TDC. Part of the contract with Visit Jacksonville is for the organization to write back any funds that were not expended during the year and they delivered a check to the TDC for \$352,342. Mr. Corrigan would like to see this money become activated rather than returned to the TDC's general fund balance and provided a few examples on how Visit Jacksonville could use that money in their marketing efforts hoping to have it reallocated at a future meeting.

Furthermore, Mr. Corrigan discussed a cash flow issue with TDC funding he would like addressed. Currently, there are some contracts where Visit Jacksonville has to pay out the money for a given project and then be reimbursed after its conclusion. He would like TDC to consider an arrangement for a portion or all of the funds to be made available upfront rather than on a reimbursement basis. This will help the organization not be financially restrained while doing the work they were approved to do by the TDC.

Mr. Kuverji asked about the process that takes place when the year-end refund check is issued to the TDC. Mr. Phillips explained the dollars are returned to the TDC fund.

Mr. Thompson asked for an update from Visit Jacksonville on their search for a new company that provides them with location data analytics to better understand Jacksonville's visitors and hotel occupancy. Josh Harrison, Chief Operating Officer of Visit Jacksonville, answered that they did contract with a new vendor to provide this data, Placer.AI. Visit Jacksonville feels much more confident with this technology when reviewing data.

VI. Strategic Plan Update

Erin Dinkel

Chair White welcomed Erin Dinkel, Director of Research at Downs and St. Germain, who delivered an update on the progress of the Strategic Plan initiative. Ms. Dinkel outlined the project timeline and informed the board that stakeholder meetings are currently being organized. She encouraged the board members to share any feedback, ideas, or suggestions they may have.

Mr. Corrigan expressed his admiration for the efforts of the consulting team and conveyed his enthusiasm for the forthcoming deliverables.

VII. Visitor Channel Update

Kate Strickland

The Chair introduced Kate Strickland from Wander Media, who provided an update on the Visitor Channel. Ms. Strickland discussed the data analytics and the successful rollout of the channel, which took place in October 2024. This initiative involved a two-part process: first, rebranding the existing channel available in hotels across Duval County to “Discover Jacksonville: The Flip Side of Florida,” and second, launching a new companion channel by the same name, which streams on platforms such as YouTube TV, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV, and Roku TV. Ms. Strickland guided the board on how to access the channel.

Ms. Brock mentioned that efforts are underway to consider integrating the content from this channel with the City of Jacksonville’s Channel 99 service. This integration will enable the streaming of this content during periods when City Council meetings are not being broadcast. Councilman Salem inquired about other potential productions that could be featured outside of live city meetings. In response, Ms. Strickland proposed various marketing strategies and additional content that could spotlight programming, historical narratives, and cultural stories beneficial to both residents and visitors. Chair White expressed interest in emphasizing public safety and historical content related to the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department.

Mr. Thompson raised a question regarding the production and curation of the channel, specifically whether the City has a public relations department involved. The Chair confirmed this, and Ms. Strickland stated that they are collaborating closely with the City on these efforts.

VIII. Financial Report

Phillip Peterson

Assistant Council Auditor Phillip Peterson gave the financial report. TDC tax revenues for the 12 months ending December 2024 were \$10,555,553.28, a 1.11% decrease over the 12 months ending December 2023. Revenue from the start of FY 23-24 to date, ending in December 2024, was \$2,580,202.34, up 6.25% compared to the start of FY 22-23 to date, ending in December 2023. Revenue for December 2024 was \$911,232.69, also up 16.66% from the same month in 2023. Actual collections for the fiscal year to date exceeded the average monthly budgeted amount by \$204,762.34.

Mr. Peterson reviewed the budgetary balances as of December remaining in the TDC’s contractual and operating accounts, they are: Destination Services - \$0; Marketing - \$0; Convention/Group Sales - \$0; Convention Grants, Sponsorships, and Promotions - \$493,004.80; Planning and Research - \$0; Event Grants - \$498,000; Development Account - \$2,121,075.63; Contingency Account - \$1,006,060.00; Equestrian Center Promotion - \$5,410.05; Remaining to be Spent in Accordance with the TDC Plan – TDC Operations - \$644,544; TDC Administration - \$253,532.66; and the Special Revenue Fund - \$32,767.50.

IX. New Business

Chair White

Mr. Kuverji provided an update on short-term rentals, emphasizing the ongoing effort to ensure that these accommodations are properly reporting their tourist development tax to the county in accordance with the Florida Statutes. He noted that communication is actively taking place with the Tourist Development Council (TDC), the Duval County Tax Collector (DCTC), Visit Jacksonville, the Mayor’s Office, and other governmental agencies to establish a unified approach to address this matter.

The Chair then opened the floor to audience members wishing to address the board. Alex Patel, a local hotelier, articulated that these groups have been engaged in discussions regarding this issue for some time. Through his research, he discovered that the City of Jacksonville Beach has implemented processes to ensure compliance with the payment of tourist development taxes by short-term rentals in that area. Mr. Patel expressed his frustration that the City of Jacksonville has not been enforcing these laws, resulting in a significant loss of revenue for the county. Council Member Salem recalled that former Council Member Jim Love had attempted to tackle this issue but faced considerable obstacles. Mr. Corrigan elaborated that Mr. Love was working to legitimize the process; however, the city’s ordinance code does not currently address it, making it a complex issue that will require time to resolve. He noted that there is a software-based system available that could aid in the collection of this tax, but implementing such a solution would be a multi-year and costly endeavor. The tourist development tax is a self-reporting tax, which complicates enforcement. Additionally, Mr. Corrigan clarified that only the Duval County Tax Collector is authorized to collect this tax, whereas Jacksonville Beach collaborates with a third-party entity that works alongside the DCTC.

Furthermore, questions arose regarding whether the TDC could allocate funds for the software, given that Florida Statutes stipulate that tourist development tax revenue can only be used to promote tourism,

not for tax collection. The Vice Chair expressed a desire to have representatives from the Tax Collector's Office and the Administration attend the next TDC meeting to provide further insights.

X. Closing Comments and Adjournment

Chair White

Chair White shared that the next TDC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 17 at 10:00 a.m. in the Lynwood Roberts Room, City Hall.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:53 a.m.

Meeting Minutes respectfully submitted by Brett Nolan, TDC Administrator

These minutes were approved at the TDC Regular Board meeting on April 17, 2025

