

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING
April 7, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT

Commr. Kirby Smith, Chairman
Mayor Alan Reisman
Ms. Cindy Staley
Ms. Gigi Lemon
Mr. Robert Hendrick
Mr. David Perry
Mr. Christian Slupe

MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Mr. David Filipponi

OTHERS PRESENT

Mr. Ryan Ritchie, Director for the Office of Visit Lake
Ms. Rachel Bartolowits, Assistant County Attorney
Ms. Lindsey McBride, Associate Vice President of Events, Operations and Business Development for the Greater Orlando Sports Commission
Mr. Josh Pearson, Deputy Clerk, Board Support

CALL TO ORDER

Commr. Smith called the meeting of the Lake County Tourist Development Council (TDC) to order at 2:00 p.m. on April 7, 2025, in County Commission Chambers, Administration Building, Tavares, Florida.

Mr. Aaron Textor, Web Services Manager for the Office of Communications, gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

UPDATES

Mr. Ryan Ritchie, Director for the Office of Visit Lake, mentioned that Ms. Sheri Hutchinson was the new Financial Coordinator for his office, noting that she had been with the County for several years. He then showed the affidavit of publication for the current meeting per Florida Statutes.

MINUTES

On a motion by Mayor Reisman, seconded by Mr. Slupe and carried by a vote of 7-0, the TDC approved the minutes for the TDC meeting of January 6, 2025 (Regular Meeting).

CITIZEN QUESTION AND COMMENT PERIOD

Councilmember Alison Strange, with the City of Clermont and speaking on behalf of THE Spring Games, thanked the TDC for their ongoing support of THE Spring Games, noting that they had hosted an event with 1,441 games in Lake County since January 2025. She added that it was one of their largest years ever, and that they were seeing an initial overall increase of 12 percent for

room nights in Lake County over the previous year. She mentioned that they were already getting ready for 2026, and that they would have more information for the TDC at the next meeting.

REPORTS

MADDEN MEDIA

Ms. Jen Carlisle, Vice President of Destination Strategy for Madden Media, indicated that from a national trend standpoint, some of the sentiment had cooled from the Canadian market, and that they had seen a trend in a decrease across their clients in website interest and traffic from this market. She added that the decrease seemed to be continuing to trend in the media and public relations (PR) space, that some press trips had been paused, and that some travel outlets were starting to refocus some of the writers to cover more local aspects or other international features. She commented that Tourism Economics was projecting a 15 percent decrease year over year in travel from the Canadian market, and that for Lake County they were not currently doing any paid media efforts in that market; however, that market was important to the State of Florida in general. She commented that her organization would continue to focus domestically on their markets, particularly in-state, noting that they did not have any large strategy shifts currently. She said that their website traffic was slightly up from the Canadian market, and that it was flat from there. She then relayed that the summer travel season was looking promising with about a quarter of travelers saying that they had trips planned for the summer. She explained that this data was from ongoing research from Future Partners, and that it was showing that when asked, travelers were prioritizing cost savings, with about 43 percent of people indicating that they wanted to use rewards and loyalty programs; additionally, more than one-third were saying that they were looking for budget-friendly accommodations. She pointed out the option to drive instead of fly, and said that people were possibly looking at options closer to home, which she opined boded well for Lake County, particularly as they went into the summer markets. She elaborated that their summer targeting was relatively more in-state and looked at people who had access to easier, more affordable getaway options. She said that Visit Florida indicated that for January 2025, hotel demand, average daily rate (ADR), and visitor spending across the state were all up a few points compared to January 2024, and that the top visiting states were New York and Georgia, with both being relatively flat; furthermore, they saw a slight increase from the State of North Carolina. She said that top designated market areas (DMAs) included many in-state travelers traveling around the state, which stayed relatively flat, and that there was a small increase from individuals in the City of Tampa and City of St. Petersburg area traveling in January 2025. She remarked that they saw the same thing in February 2025 and that hotel demand, ADR and visitor spending were all up a couple points compared to the previous year. She said that the same top visiting states were relatively flat, noting that there was a small lift from the States of Pennsylvania and Ohio; additionally, there was flatness from the prior year in the top DMAs. She indicated that when they started looking more locally at Lake County using the Zartico dashboard for the first quarter of 2025, top markets were relatively flat; however, the map indicated some visitor spending trends by the different markets that visited. She specified that they were seeing some continued increases, particularly in the City of Miami and the south Florida markets, noting that they had put more emphasis in that market as it was deemed a high value market; therefore, they would continue to focus on those core drive and fly markets. She commented that for the spending breakdown, there had been an increase in retail spending in the last quarter compared to year over year with slight decreases in food, beverage and lodging. She mentioned that this was not dissimilar to the rest of the state with

relatively flat visitation, though the value of the visitor was seeing more trending in the spending side.

Ms. Olivia Wells, Destination Strategy Director for Madden Media, remarked that in the last quarter, paid media brought in more than 10 million impressions and drove over 200,000 clicks to their website. She commented that their paid media efforts continued to drive traffic to their website at about 85 percent, and that they continued to work with the Office of Communications to ensure that they were also bringing in organic traffic. She said that they were still working on seasonal pages, and for landing pages to be optimized for search engine optimization (SEO) and keywords. She relayed that their engagement rate, average session duration, and the average time were all up year over year, which was a tactic that they were optimizing for the current year. She commented that the top five DMAs had not changed year over year, but that their ranking had fluctuated where the City of Miami had increased to the top three. She stated that top performers included their paid search, Meta prospecting, and Google video, which continued to perform over their Madden Media benchmark, noting that this was above industry standards. She specified that clickthrough rate and views were the metrics that they were measuring for, and she showed some examples of top performers for Meta ads and Google videos. She mentioned that for their influencer content they had a value ad with Mr. Scott Martin, and that between Mr. Martin and Sarah's Outdoor Adventures, they brought nearly 150,000 impressions and over 6,500 engagements through the social media shorts. She said that custom content with Outside launched in the last quarter, and that this included a digital article written by the Outside team, display ads, custom emails, and paid social. She mentioned that this tactic married the active lifestyle and relaxation one could have in Lake County, and that while this campaign was still actively running, it was estimated to have 1.1 million impressions, which they were on track to exceed. She remarked that they worked with the Office of Communications to optimize the homepage for the spring campaign to have keywords to drive organic traffic, and to jump to a landing page which would speak to the spring season in Lake County with spring-oriented things to do. She added that they also had paid media efforts through Meta and Google Marketing. She said that they were contracted for two episodes with Mr. Martin, that the first episode featured Mr. Tim Frederick, and that the second episode featured Ms. Hilary Martin. She relayed that this included commercial and sponsored episodes, and that they also received a value ad through social media, noting that this would continue to drive users to discover Lake County's own social media.

Ms. Carlisle discussed PR activities and said that they had identified 30 articles which featured Lake County, noting that nine of them were driven by Madden Media, and that they achieved a total readership of over 80 million readers. She remarked that they had much activity with pitching with about 16 outbound proactive pitches, and that they had created mailer boxes for specific journalists, which she opined were well received; additionally, they followed the different editorial leads put out by Visit Florida and the State. She showed a list of some of the top journalists that they were having conversations with, and some headlines of the coverage they received. She specified that the mailer boxes were curated boxes which they sent to specific people, and that they included a variety of experiences within the boxes, noting that they wanted people to immerse themselves in the "Tune Out to Tune In" campaign. She said that they also attended the International Media Marketplace (IMM) in January 2025, and that it was the largest show of the year which connected everyone. She elaborated that they had 22 one-on-one appointments with

writers, and that they hosted a mixer with over 45 different writers joining them. She remarked that they secured a couple leads, including one which was currently visiting the destination, and another which would be coming in May 2025.

Ms. Wells stated that there had been a rising trend year over year in which City of Miami residents were spending more money in Lake County, and that they had identified this as a prime market to boost awareness and drive visitation to Lake County. She explained that they identified their top spending zip codes through visitor data, and she showed an example of a static billboard which would be placed in the City of Miami area. She mentioned that they would also have a digital billboard and digital kiosks around the City of Miami market. She added that they would also be doing the following: running ads on Nextdoor; influencer partnerships; commercials through connected television (TV); rich media displays; and their ever-running media tactics including Meta and Google. She mentioned that they were working alongside the Office of Communications to curate a landing page for these tactics. She summarized that they would have brand awareness through the billboard, that they would then be utilizing search engine marketing through Google, and that once one came to the landing page, one would be able to learn more of what resonated with the City of Miami market. She added that when it was identified that someone in the City of Miami market entered the website, they would be pulled into a database to be applied to a postcard series at home to continue the marketing and ultimately convert them to a stay. She concluded that the campaign would be launching in May 2025 and would run through June 2025.

Commr. Smith asked if the media reach slide was just for Lake County, and Ms. Wells confirmed this for the website traffic. Commissioner Smith then inquired what the email impressions meant for Outside custom content.

Ms. Wells explained that it was how many people received an email and opened them.

Commr. Smith asked that when they were doing their media show, if there was a way to put a banner on the front of the table that said "Discover Lake County."

Ms. Carlisle clarified that this show was particular about what one was able to do, though this could be explored.

Mr. Robert Hendrick asked how many billboards there would be and if there was an exact location.

Ms. Wells said that this could be sent to the TDC and that they had a static billboard in the heart of the City of Miami; additionally, they had a digital billboard in the City of Hollywood area, reiterating that it would be running May through June 2025.

Ms. Cindy Staley inquired how they measured if billboards were successful.

Ms. Carlisle clarified that they were not going to be able to have a correlated direct return on investment (ROI), though it was providing a visual message and speaking to inspiration. She commented that they worked with vendors and received impression reports on where the billboards

were located and daily traffic, and that some vendors had a beacon which could possibly sense if one passed a billboard and re-serve them digital ads from this.

Ms. Gigi Lemon mentioned that when her organization had billboards, they included a different web address on the billboard for one to visit before landing on their page, noting that this was so they could track who was seeing the billboards.

GREATER ORLANDO SPORTS COMMISSION

Ms. Lindsey McBride, Associate Vice President of Events, Operations and Business Development for the Greater Orlando Sports Commission (GO Sports), showed their event calendar for fiscal year (FY) 2024-2025, noting that she was still working on closing out some post-event reports to submit to the County. She mentioned that it was looking to be a great year with 28 events, slightly over \$12 million in economic impact, and a projection of over 13,000 room nights. She showed some pictures for events that they hosted including the following: the Rocking Horse Stables Winter II event; the Bassmaster high school and college event; the Florida Double Anvil; and the NXXT women's professional golf league. She said that they hosted the Major League Fishing (MLF) Bass Pro Tour event with 65 of the best anglers in the world competing, and that part of their contract was that MLF did a community feature which played during the livestream on Saturday and Sunday, and would also play when they replayed it on the Discovery Channel. She played the feature video, and added that they received a social media recap from MLF, noting that Lake County was the third tour stop: additionally, they had over 700,000 video views, over 18 million minutes viewed in total which was the number one total of all time for their regular season, and there were over 8.5 million impressions for this event over the previous year's stage two event. She thanked Mayor Alan Reisman, Commissioner Anthony Sabatini, Mr. Ritchie, and Mr. Frederick, noting that they attended the event to welcome fans and anglers.

Commr. Smith asked what stage two was.

Ms. McBride explained that it was just a different stop. She played a video recap of that day's events, noting that the portion of the video where everyone was on stage was on the livestream; therefore, everyone who was watching was able to see their support and collaboration with everyone in the community to make an event like this happen. She then said that for targets and opportunities, her organization was working with the International Waterski and Wakeboard Federation (IWWF) to host their World Wakeboard Championship, hopefully in fall 2026; furthermore, they were also working with the City of Groveland to collaborate on what the bid would look like for this. She added that she had a meeting with an individual at United States of America (USA) Beach Tennis, noting that they had been doing some events at Hickory Point Park and would like to see if GO Sports could bring some international teams over. She commented that the American Cornhole League was working with Ms. Lemon to see if they could get one or more of their events at The Big House, and that they were hearing some great things about the bid they submitted with the Professional Disc Golf Association. She listed the following upcoming events: the Fishers of Men Florida Central at Ski Beach on April 12, 2025; the Sunshine State Conference Women's Golf Championship in the current week; the Champions Cup; and the Division II Men's Golf Regional at Mission Club + Resort. She said that for upcoming travel, they would have Mr. Brent Nelson, Senior Vice President of Business Development for GO Sports,

and Mr. Ritchie attend the Sports Events and Tourism Association (ETA) in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the following week, and that their Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), and Mr. Nelson would be headed to Switzerland at the end of the current month to meet with international rightsholders to identify some opportunities in the United States (U.S.) leading up to the Los Angeles, California 2028 Olympics. She mentioned that they also had the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACTA) coming back, which came to the City of Orlando every two years, noting that this was a great opportunity to meet with collegiate event rightsholders; additionally, the Big 12 would be hosting their annual meetings in May 2025, and GO Sports would work with them to see if they could bring any conference championships to the area.

Commr. Smith asked if they had the economic impact compared to the cost ratio for the events, and Ms. McBride replied that this could be provided.

OFFICE OF VISIT LAKE

Market Analytics

Mr. Ritchie displayed the cumulative Tourist Development Tax (TDT) year to date (YTD) of just under \$2.4 million that they collected, noting that it was through February 2025. He added that they were up just under nine percent, and that there were some strong collections over the last four months; additionally, in November 2024 they were up 7.89 percent, in December 2024 they were up about 12 percent, in January 2025 they were up 8.3 percent, and in February 2025 they were up 13.8 percent. He showed the TDT revenues by source, noting that hotels and motels were at about 48 percent, and that online platforms, including Vrbo and Airbnbs, were at 52 percent. He said that Smith Travel Research (STR) reports had indicated that occupancy was 72.1 percent in quarter two of 2024, compared to quarter two of the current year being 75.5 percent; furthermore, their ADR in quarter two of 2024 was just above \$127, and the ADR of quarter two of 2025 was \$130.19. He said that Key Data Dashboard monitored short-term rental properties, and that typically in quarter two they saw a small decrease. He elaborated that average occupancy was just under 60 percent and that the ADR was \$118, which was down four percent; additionally, the average stay was about five days, noting that he did not see anything drastic or concerning with this.

Administration and Budget

Mr. Ritchie showed the promotional activities budget including how much funding was spent YTD, encumbered funding, and how much funding was remaining. He said that everything which came from this budget included any contracted events that they worked with GO Sports on, as well as any of the co-op marketing programs, any event organizers that came there, and any events that they were sponsoring through their TDC sponsorship program.

Visit Lake Updates

Mr. Ritchie remarked that for FY 2025 quarter two event sponsorships, they did 49 events with an estimated 286,000 visitors, an estimated 20,000 room nights, and an economic impact of \$61.7 million. He mentioned that for staff activities in the past quarter, staff had attended the Sports ETA Chief Executive Summit in Fort Worth, Texas, the MLF pro series event in the City of Leesburg, the Michigan Golf Show through their partnership with the Florida Golf Alliance, and

the Destinations Florida Tourism Day in the City of Tallahassee. He thanked Ms. Staley and her team at Mission Resort + Club for organizing the Lake County Hotel and Motel meeting on January 16, 2025, noting that his office wanted to continue to build relationships with hoteliers in Lake County. He recalled that GO Sports and the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association did presentations, and that he had spoken. He opined that this was well received, and said that they would continue to do this. He said that they sponsored a high school basketball event in the City of Miami area, and that Montverde Academy was playing Christopher Columbus High School, relaying his understanding that they were numbers one and two in the country. He elaborated that they had sponsored this event on ESPN2, and that it was broadcasted live with over 116,000 impressions, noting that the YouTube recap video had just over 21,000 impressions. He reviewed some of the game storylines, and he showed a video of what it looked like on TV. He then relayed that they had the opportunity to be the presenting sponsor with the Montverde Academy Invitational Tournament (MAIT) event, and that in February 2024 they had an opportunity to bid on the Sunshine Sports Council Innovation Think Tank; furthermore, they were awarded that bid, and it was hosted at the National Training Center in the City of Clermont. He stated that they had an opportunity to do a session on the partnership they had with the professional track and field team Star Athletics, and that Commissioner Smith had provided a welcome. He showed the top 10 quarter two event sponsorships based on projected economic impact, opining that their portfolio was diverse including festivals, community events and sporting events. He commented that for co-op marketing, they worked with four Lake County partners and had six new campaigns which included print and digital marketing, with one partner attending a conference/expo. He specified that these included Dash Sports, Sommer Sports Events, the Orlando Cat Café, and Lakeside Inn. He added that the new vacation guide included some of these partners, and mentioned that some of the quarter three upcoming events that they were sponsoring included Leesburg Bikefest and the weekends at Lakeridge Winery. He also mentioned the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II Men's Golf Regional, and he thanked GO Sports and Mission Resort + Club for assisting with this event.

NEW BUSINESS

2026 MAJOR LEAGUE FISHING TACKLE WAREHOUSE INVITATIONAL

Mr. Ritchie stated that this item was for the 2026 MLF Tackle Warehouse Invitational, and that they did not have dates determined currently; however, they were looking at February or March 2026, noting that it would be at Venetian Gardens in the City of Leesburg. He added that there was a \$90,000 request, and that the event would showcase up to 150 anglers competing for the top prize, noting that the winner would receive an invitation to Redcrest 2026. He elaborated that this included three practice days and three competition days, and he mentioned that the weigh-ins would be livestreamed, that there would be a one-minute in-show feature, and that it would be broadcasted on CBS Sports Network. He also indicated that there would be just under 1,200 room nights with an economic impact of \$565,000.

On a motion by Mr. Hendrick, seconded by Mayor Reisman and carried unanimously by a vote of 7-0, the TDC approved to support the 2026 Major League Fishing Tackle Warehouse Invitational with fiscal impact not to exceed \$90,000.

Commr. Smith relayed his understanding that Mr. Ritchie's numbers showed an increase in hotel and short-term rentals through the second quarter of 2025.

Mr. Ritchie clarified that there was an increase in hotels and motels, but that there was a small decrease in short-term rentals.

Commr. Smith indicated his understanding that Madden Media's presentation showed a decrease of around nine percent, and Mr. Ritchie commented that he could review this with them. Commissioner Smith then inquired where the Caribbean Jerk Festival would be located.

Mr. Ritchie replied that it was in the City of Clermont, and relayed his understanding that it would be in June 2025.

AROUND THE HORN

Ms. Lemon stated that The Big House had a great first quarter and that they recently hosted the Florida Rebels Invitational with over 100 teams, noting that they were looking at another 100 basketball teams in the current week. She added that they also had a chance to film Board Shorts with Commissioner Smith in the previous week.

Mr. Hendrick mentioned the grand opening ribbon cutting at the Hickory Point boat ramps, opining that it went great. He opined that it should help attract larger boats, and said that there had been many beach volleyball tournaments there. He indicated that in the City of Riviera Beach he had met with a beach tennis organization regarding doing more events with more of an international aspect. He also commented that the Lake County Water Authority (LCWA) recently had Star Athletics in attendance at their meeting.

Mr. Ritchie explained that Star Athletics' season had kicked off, and that there was a new professional league called Grand Slam Track that some of the athletes were in; furthermore, his office was working with Star Athletics on some marketing opportunities. He said that he also had a call with USA Track and Field's Chief Marketing and Revenue Officer about some sponsorship opportunities at the Prefontaine Classic and the national championships.

Mr. Hendrick stated that Sand Court Experts had been granted another year and were going to put on the National East Coast Championship Pairs Qualifier for the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA).

Mr. Christian Slupe mentioned that it had been a good start to the year regarding visitation at Lakeridge Winery, and that they had a car show on March 1, 2025 which was a good success with about 150 cars. He added that the vineyard was in great shape, and that they had live music, food, and a bar each weekend.

Mr. David Perry relayed that The Citrus hotel recently opened their sky bar, and opined that it had been well received. He added that their room remodels would begin on May 18, 2025.

Mr. Ritchie thanked Mr. Perry for his support.

Mayor Alan Reisman invited everyone to Leesburg Bikefest from April 25 to 27, 2025. He then recalled that the TDC had previously done some funding for the Susan Street Sports Complex, and mentioned that the groundbreaking would be on the following Wednesday at 10:00 a.m.

Ms. Staley commented that at Mission Resort + Club they finished their room upgrades at the end of February 2025, and that they had done some upgrades at Nicker's Clubhouse Restaurant; additionally, the spa had gone through some upgrades, and the tennis facility would be started in May or June 2025. She also mentioned that their culinary team participated in the food wars at the City of Tavares and had won first place, and that they were planning the remaining hotel meetings for the rest of the year.

Commr. Smith thanked Madden Media and GO Sports for all the work they did, and opined that it was starting to show some of the investments coming back to Lake County. He opined that they had a great TDC, and he thanked them for attending. He also opined that Mr. Ritchie was doing a good job.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to be brought to the attention of the TDC, the meeting was adjourned at 3:06 p.m.