

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING
April 6, 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT

Commr. Kirby Smith, Chairman
Ms. Cindy Staley
Ms. Gigi Lemon
Mr. Christian Slupe
Councilmember Alison Strange
Commr. Alan Reisman
Mr. Robert Hendrick

MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Mr. David Filipponi

OTHERS PRESENT

Mr. Ryan Ritchie, Director for the Office of Tourism
Ms. Rachel Bartolowits, Assistant County Attorney
Ms. Stephanie Cash, 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 6, 2026 in County Commission Chambers, Administration Building, Tavares, Florida.

Mr. Ryan Ritchie, Director for the Office of Tourism, gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commr. Smith mentioned that there was a vacancy on the TDC and that if anyone was interested they could complete an application.

MINUTES

Mr. Ritchie wanted the minutes to include that Form 8B was completed by Councilmember Alison Strange based on her affiliation with THE Spring Games.

Ms. Rachel Bartolowits, Assistant County Attorney, stated that many of them were familiar with this form as it was commonly used with advisory boards and explained that this was part of the statutory process where it had to be incorporated into the minutes for the previous meeting. She relayed that she had copies of this form if anyone had a conflict of interest and needed to abstain from voting.

On a motion by Mr. Slupe, seconded by Ms. Staley and carried unanimously by a vote of 7-0, the TDC approved the minutes for the TDC meeting of January 12, 2026 (Regular Meeting).

CITIZEN QUESTION AND COMMENT PERIOD

No one wished to address the TDC at this time.

UPDATES

Mr. Ritchie indicated that on February 24, 2026, the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) approved the Strategic Plan and that staff was currently working through the first-year initiatives with the goal of going live on May 1, 2026 with the new structure of the TDC Event Sponsorship Program and the Capital Improvement Program, which was being reinstated. He commented that they were currently working with the County Attorney's Office on the documents and changes for this. He mentioned that at the January 12, 2026 TDC meeting, he had asked for approval of the 2026 International Waterski and Wakeboard Federation (IWWF) World Wakeboard Championships that would take place in the City of Groveland; however, the IWWF had decided to take that event to Italy in the current year but agreed to come back in 2027.

Councilmember Strange asked if the IWWF event was committed in 2027 and if the funding they had approved would apply for this.

Mr. Ritchie said that it would, adding that while the event was being held at the end of October 2027 and going into November 2027, it would be during Fiscal Year (FY) 2028.

Councilmember Strange questioned if this meeting was live and someone could watch the next presentation online.

Commr. Smith said that the meeting was not live.

PRESENTATION BY THE CENTRAL FLORIDA HOTEL & LODGING ASSOCIATION

Mr. Ritchie introduced Mr. Robert Agrusa, President and CEO of the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association (CFHLA), who would be providing an introduction and legislative update.

Mr. Agrusa stated that CFHLA was founded in 1980 in Orange County to help support the hotels and resorts in that region but had expanded beyond that and were now in five counties, including Orange, Osceola, Seminole, Lake, and Polk Counties, noting that they represented hotels, resorts, attractions, and about 500 small businesses who wanted to do business with the hospitality industry. He mentioned that they worked very closely with all of their direct marketing organizations (DMO), including Discover Lake, to create an environment that was conducive for the hospitality and tourism industry and to help support the initiatives and efforts to drive more tourism to their destinations. He said that they were a trade association, and that their role was similar to that of a chamber of commerce. He indicated that their mission was to collaborate, advocate, recognize team members, and provide education and service to the community, noting that even though they were the largest regional hospitality association in the country, they wanted to be a good community partner that created a collaborative place where employees wanted to go to work and also a place for people to come and play. He relayed that they created a five-year strategic plan a few years prior to identify and understand their members and their needs while looking at the future, and that their goals aligned with their mission. He highlighted that over the

prior two years they had received over 300 new members, many of which were hotels in Lake County, and that they stayed involved in political elections and issue advocacy where they defended the industry in the City of Tallahassee and at the local level; additionally, they hosted dozens of training seminars for all levels of the hospitality industry and held many networking events throughout the year. He spoke about their community impact, and commented that they recognized team members as well as law enforcement and first responders through their annual Patriot Day Remembrance Breakfast where they thanked all of those who went above and beyond every day. He relayed that they also gave back to local schools through their CFHLA Cares Drive, and that this current week they would be donating over 100,000 items to students in need across the region; additionally, they enjoyed investing in the next generation by giving out over \$1.5 million in student scholarships to high school graduating students and those already enrolled in a local colleges or universities who wanted to continue into hospitality. He displayed some slides showing the members of their Executive Committee as well as their team members, and stated that they had 54 Board members and 10 team members. He discussed some of their highlights, which included the following: they represented the Central Florida Hospitality and Tourism Industry, which made up nearly 37 percent of the total workforce; they represented over 120,000 hotel rooms from over 260 hotels and over 19,000 timeshare units in the Central Florida region, noting that they were the largest destination for time shares in the world; their membership included more than 800 full and select-service hotels, hotel ownerships, timeshare resorts, management companies, supplier/vendor businesses, DMO's and hospitality students; there was a near all-time record of 75.3 million visitors to Central Florida in 2024, which was 33 percent of the total visitation to Florida; and the visitation to Central Florida in 2024 was significantly higher than other major United States (U.S.) destinations, noting that New York City, New York, Chicago, Illinois, and Las Vegas, Nevada were continuing to decline. He indicated that there were 143.3 million visitors to Florida in 2025, which had increased from 2024, and 12.2 million international visitors with their top markets from Canada, Brazil, Argentina, and Spain. He commented that visitation was based on each of the country's economy, and that while visitors from Canada had slightly decreased most likely due to a 40 percent decline in their dollar, they were seeing an uptick in visitors from Brazil, Argentina, and Spain. He indicated that the Central Florida Hospitality and Tourism Industry drove about \$94.5 billion in economic impact in 2024 for Orange, Osceola, and Seminole Counties which provided about \$6.7 billion in local and state tax revenue that helped pay for arts and culture, schools, public safety, and infrastructure; furthermore, they paid out \$28 billion in wages for team members. He relayed that they had 11 priorities during the 2026 Florida Legislative Session, and that the number one issue they continued to advocate for was the protection of the TDT to make sure it was used for its intended purpose, noting that to date there had not been any movement to make changes to this. He said that their other priorities included the following: continued funding for Visit Florida at \$80 million; commercial property insurance reform; full funding of workforce/affordable housing through the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund; increased funding for transportation and infrastructure projects, such as Move Florida Forward; and additional education funding for hospitality/culinary programs at local schools, colleges, and universities. He mentioned that for their signature networking events, they hosted Hob Nob, which was a reverse tradeshow, and the Hospitality Tradeshow, which was the largest regional tradeshow in the southeast; furthermore, they hosted the Allied Relations Council Breakfast five times per year and two golf opens per year. He stated that their signature events and opportunities included recognizing the following: front line employees at the Golden Pineapple Awards Dinner; managers

and supervisors at the Distinguished Leaders in Hospitality Awards; and law enforcement and first responders at the Patriot Day Remembrance Breakfast. He indicated that there were multiple councils within their organization that allowed members to connect, including the Allied Relations Council, Engineers Council, Security and Safety Council, Housekeeping Council, Vacation Ownership Council, Talent and Learning Council, and NextGen Leadership Council. He reported that through the CFHLA Foundation, they had given out over \$543,000 in 2023 and 2024 through student scholarships and workforce development programs and had supported 32 different organizations that helped with food security, housing, and other needs. He said that 117 schools throughout the Central Florida region had been adopted by members through their Adopt-A-School program, which allowed them to give their time or even supplies to these schools. He said that they awarded 62 hospitality students with scholarships in 2025, which totaled \$160,300, and that the top scholarship was with the Freeberg Foundation, which was a four-year full ride scholarship that paid for their education, room and board, and an internship, noting that they were guaranteed a job after graduation. He stated that they partnered with the local high schools that had hospitality and culinary arts programs to try to recruit and retain students in the region by hosting these students at different properties so they could see what a hotel, restaurant, or attraction was actually like and what their career opportunities could be; additionally, through their mentorship program, they paired up-and-coming professionals in the industry with senior leaders, which provided connectivity in the industry and helped the workforce to stay in this region.

Councilmember Strange asked if there was any indication of what might be drawing visitors from Argentina and Spain.

Mr. Agruso explained that if a destination's economy was strong, then their visitation was generally strong, adding that they had been focusing a lot of energy in marketing to South America because of the close proximity and because there were many more direct flights, which helped draw those international markets.

Councilmember Strange commented that they had been marketing towards the City of Miami, and questioned if they were on the right track.

Mr. Agruso said that they were, and stated that there were two types of visitors, the drive-in market and the fly-in market, noting that the drive-in market was a tremendous portion of their business, with the City of Miami being a huge partner in that. He related that they drew many visitors from the City of Miami, whether it was from Florida residents who wanted to visit Central Florida or international visitors who had flown to there and then wanted to visit Central Florida. He remarked that many people were looking at the drive-in markets especially since the current cost to travel by air had increased greatly.

Commr. Smith asked if the percentage of visitors to the Central Florida region was broken down by county and if he had the numbers for Lake County.

Mr. Agrusa replied that the numbers in the presentation only included Seminole, Orange, and Osceola Counties; however, he did have the numbers for Lake County and could provide those to him soon.

Commr. Smith mentioned that the economic impact for the hospitality and tourism industry slide showed that it was for the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford MSA and The Villages MSA and asked if that was The Villages they were familiar with, and Mr. Agrusa said it was. Commissioner Smith relayed his understanding that The Villages MSA would encompass Sumter, Marion, and Lake Counties, and Mr. Agrusa agreed.

REPORTS

MADDEN MEDIA

Ms. Olivia Wells, Destination Strategy Director for Madden Media, introduced Ms. Nicole Klein, Associate Media Director for Madden Media, and stated that they would be giving a report on quarter two. She indicated that from a national level, about 62 percent of Americans stated that travel was a high spending priority as they went into the spring and summer months, which was up three percent from January 2026 and two percent from February 2025. She relayed that the average maximum annual leisure travel budget reached a new record high of nearly \$6,500, which surpassed January's previous peak and reinforced that households were allocating those funds towards travel, commenting that travel remained strong as they came into 2026. She mentioned that hotel demand remained fairly flat with just a slight increase year over year, and that short-term rentals were currently down from the previous year, which was the fourth consecutive monthly decline; however, the decrease was not significant. She indicated that while hotel occupancy and demand were down for the State of Florida, the average daily rate (ADR) had significantly increased, meaning that travelers were still willing to pay top dollar to visit Florida. She remarked that an increase in ADR may not be sustainable long term; therefore, for Lake County they would continue to drive demand generation through the emotional travel motivators, including the "Tune Out to Tune In" messaging and showcasing what Lake County had to offer. She stated that short-term vacation rentals grew 30 percent year over year, which doubled the revenue, but hotel demand slightly decreased by two percent, noting that they were keeping in mind that the booking window for short-term vacation rentals for leisure travel was much longer compared to hotels. She related that their targeted points of interest (POI), which included State parks, theme parks, fishing, and kayaking, had grown as they were hosting influencers who spoke to those, and that visitors now comprised 25 percent of traffic to these key POI's, which was a 42 percent increase year over year; furthermore, 40 percent of that growth was from out-of-state visitors with Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Chicago, Illinois being the highest, which were part of their key fly-in markets.

Ms. Klein stated that the paid media campaigns delivered 7.9 million impressions with a 20 percent lift in website sessions year over year resulting in 178,000 sessions to the Lake County website, noting that the sessions had also grown month over month. She said that user engagement was also increasing with a 14 percent lift in session duration, and that 80 percent of the website sessions were attributed to their paid media efforts, which reached users in key in-state and out-of-state markets. She displayed a chart of their performance tactics, and stated that Lake County was performing consistently above the Madden Media benchmarks, which were higher than industry benchmarks. She indicated that their standout performer was Google Performance Max (Pmax), which was a newer tactic and leveraged Google's best artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities to

make sure they were reaching people when they were actively searching, browsing, or watching across the Google network; furthermore, this was discovery driven using the “Tune Out to Tune In” messaging with different messaging for in-state and out-of-state markets. She related that they also had specific targeting for the high-intent audiences, such as fishing and theme parks, which was where they saw the POI lifts, noting that this had delivered an engagement of about 134 percent above the benchmark. She stated that due to the success of the University of Central Florida (UCF) football campaign, they were expanding this to reach attendees during the UCF basketball season with the goal of amplifying Lake County’s partnership with UCF Athletics, explaining that they used real-time digital device data to live target display ads during the games and created a digital geofence to re-serve ads to those attendees after they left. She said that during this basketball season they targeted 21 home games and delivered over 995,000 impressions. She relayed that they expanded their content on Meta to highlight blueways and byways in Lake County and to focus on trails, hiking, biking, kayaking, and outdoor high adventure activities, noting that this campaign delivered 400,000 impressions and 20,000 clicks to a dedicated landing page, which highlighted Lake Louisa State Park in the City of Clermont and Cat Boat tours in the City of Mount Dora. She commented that *Outside Magazine* had been a valuable partner to showcase the outdoor adventures and outdoor relaxation in Lake County, and that through this partnership they were able to increase third-party credibility and reach new users within their network. She said that they re-launched the “Florida’s Undiscovered Outdoor Paradise” article to rebuild on the prior year’s success, which generated over 7,000 pageviews and included two custom dedicated emails and paid social ads that reached an eight percent engagement rate, which was 160 percent above the *Outside Magazine* benchmark, showing that this was resonating with their audience. She said that display ads were served across the *Outside Magazine* network placing Lake County’s brand in key sights and allowing them to reach new leisure and sports focused outdoor enthusiasts.

Ms. Wells stated that they were continuing their partnership with the Scott Martin Fishing Challenge alongside Mr. Tim Frederick, the destination fishing ambassador, and that the Discover Lake County episode aired in March 2026. She mentioned that this was featured across seven networks and would air for one week each quarter, noting that the March 2026 episode had nearly 600,000 viewers. She said that this would generate sustained exposure among the core target audience of fishing and outdoor recreation, driving home that Lake County was a premier fishing destination.

Ms. Klein indicated that for their influencer partnerships, they were focusing on two audiences, the in-state explorers and the City of Orlando theme park travelers, noting that for this quarter they hosted three creators resulting in 20 posts and one blog generating 1.44 million impressions. She mentioned that they had established a year-long partnership with Sarah’s Outdoor Adventures that would focus on seasonal trips, commenting that for her winter trip she stayed at Mission Resort + Club and highlighted the harvest at Lakeridge Winery, which leaned more into agritourism; furthermore, she had upcoming trips for the spring and summer. She relayed that this partnership allowed them to have consistent messaging and awareness with her strong Florida following. She remarked that they were also focusing on theme park content creators to tap into audiences who were actively planning a trip to the City of Orlando, leaning into the repeat visitation that came with the theme parks, such as vacation clubs and annual passholders. She stated that they wanted

to have messaging that showed Lake County was either a trip add-on or an alternative to the theme park experience; additionally, they were amplifying the content that these creators were sharing by running paid ads on Facebook and Instagram and utilizing visitation data of people who had been to the theme parks within the past year to amplify the reach to the targeted audience. She commented that they were continuing their seasonal remarketing strategy and had updated the landing pages for winter and spring, noting that they were the top performing landing pages ranking in the top 10 of the total pages of the Lake County website; furthermore, paid media was a primary driver generating 96 percent of users to these pages. She said that they were targeting people who had already been to the website by focusing on seasonal activities and events within the destination.

Ms. Wells discussed their public relations (PR) efforts, and mentioned that there had been 47 outbound pitches and five secured stories, and that their team attended the International Media Marketplace conference in New York City in January 2026 and were able to speak with top tier journalists about Lake County, including the following: Ms. Jennifer Prince would be featured in *Southern Living*; Ms. Jennifer Juergens with *Meetings Today* was looking for golf information and was told about Mission Resort + Club; and Ms. Kirsten Harrington with *Modern South* was looking for new ideas to pitch, noting that they shared information about the City of Mount Dora's boat parade with her. She related that they hosted Mr. Tim Cotroneo, a writer for *Travel Dreams Magazine* and *Golf Vacations Magazine*, for a press trip on January 14 through 17, 2026 resulting in much published coverage, and that they hosted Ms. Prince on March 10 through 14, 2026 resulting in two secured assignments. She commented that the travel media trends for 2026 included America 250, local/micro road trips, and quirky stories.

Ms. Klein discussed what was happening next, and said that they would be expanding their target market campaign to the Cities of Tampa and Jacksonville during May through June 2026 since the City of Miami campaign had been very successful, and that they would be running ads across Nextdoor, Meta, and display ads, and introducing streaming audio.

Ms. Wells stated that they would be hosting Sarah's Outdoor Adventures in April 2026 at Lake Louisa State Park where she would be glamping, horseback riding, kayaking, and doing some u-pick, opining that this was a great theme park influencer partnership that would drive users to hopefully come stay in Lake County if they were attending a theme park or extend their stay to discover a different side of Central Florida. She relayed that they finally filmed the athletes from Star Athletics for the "Get Off Track" three-part episode series that showcased the partnership that Discover Lake County had with Star Athletics and showed them horseback riding at Lake Louisa State Park, experiencing a Cat Boat Tour in the City of Mount Dora, and interacting with children at the track for a community involvement day. She mentioned that they were currently editing this, and that the first episode would air on May 1, 2026; furthermore, they saw this campaign having longevity and spin-offs.

Ms. Klein indicated that they were going to lean into the sports events association side to advertise for the Star Athletics episodes by working with Sports ETA, which was a network of over 180 sports planners, to do a three-part series with them. She relayed that this audience responded well to the stories behind the venues, and that they wanted to make sure they were telling these stories

while utilizing the athletes for that hook; furthermore, each campaign would include an email, a podcast feature, and paid social ads.

Mr. Christian Slupe questioned if Azira Display was for the performance tactics.

Ms. Klein replied that Azira focused on geolocation data, and that they were using that for the UCF Athletics campaign to get the real time data of people at the games and also on the paid social side to target people who have been to theme parks.

Commr. Smith asked how they came up with the percentage algorithms for the Madden benchmarks of the top performing tactics.

Ms. Klein explained that they took all the campaigns that Madden was running across all the destinations and aggregated that benchmark for paid social ads and search ads, which was higher than the general travel benchmark, giving the example that the paid social general travel benchmark was 0.9 percent but the Madden benchmark was 2.3 percent. She said that they updated those quarterly against real time metrics, which was the reason the percentage changed frequently.

Commr. Smith inquired which were the least performing tactics.

Ms. Klein responded that they turned off and optimized away from anything that was lower performing on paid social or through any of the Google campaigns.

Commr. Smith commented that it would be nice to see those so they could see what was working and what was not. He then mentioned that the slide about the IMM Conference showed that the in-person media connections was 23 and asked what that meant.

Ms. Wells said that this was how many individuals they were able to connect with while at IMM.

Councilmember Strange mentioned that her interpretation of the slide regarding Lake County visitor behavior that discussed promoting parks was that 75 percent of the people who responded to this were within 50 miles of Lake County, and asked if it made sense for them to promote parks if 75 percent were locals, even though they were getting more engagement and driving more people from a tourism perspective.

Ms. Wells clarified that 54 percent were residents, and that they were only speaking to areas within a 50-mile radius, such as the City of Orlando, and not to Lake County residents. She said that they could look at how it shook out on the back end of the paid media efforts for Meta and then could continue to exclude certain geos; however, they knew that the Cities of Jacksonville, Tampa, and Orlando continued to be the key drive-in markets they were targeting. She expressed that this was just overall visitation and not just paid media efforts.

Councilmember Strange suggested adding another bar showing the overall visitation.

Ms. Wells stated that this data was pulled directly from Zartico, but that she could see if they had that specific information; additionally, she could see if their data team could compare the information to Zartico and see if they could overlay it.

Councilmember Strange mentioned that at the prior meeting she brought up the question of whether they could collaborate with the different cities and tag them on social media, and asked if they were doing that or if there was something the Cities could do. She opined that since the City of Clermont's Facebook page had 40,000 followers, they could promote what Madden was sharing.

Ms. Wells said that they could start having the influencers include a tag to the business or city for whatever activity they were planning to do.

Mr. Ritchie opined that this would probably help with engagement as well.

Councilmember Strange questioned what the big picture was with the track and field program that was mentioned.

Ms. Wells explained that since they had a strong partnership with Star Athletics, they felt like it would be easy to get their foot in the door to start promoting sports marketing from a leisure standpoint and also to the sports planners; additionally, they wanted to capitalize on the fact that this year was the year of sports and was currently a big trend. She related that track and field would not be the only focus, but they wanted to start there and see how the Star Athletics campaign performed, noting that they could then pivot from a leisure and sports planning focus.

Mr. Ritchie said that in the initial stages with Sports ETA, they would make sure they were advertising the facilities in Lake County while touching on the influence that the Star Athletics team would bring, and that they would then continue to differentiate those advertisements with Sports ETA.

Commr. Smith opined that the Star Athletics athletes at their level were essentially professional influencers, and that it was fantastic when they talked about where they lived and what they did for leisure activities. He also said that he did not mind that they were promoting Lake County to residents within a 50-mile radius because they still bought food and gas, which was supporting the local economy.

Ms. Wells stated that they would make sure the first episode was sent to the TDC when it aired, noting that it would be pushed out through Google video and would go on YouTube.

Commr. Smith suggested that Mr. Ritchie could reach out to the individual economic development directors within each city to have them push it so it reached more individuals.

Councilmember Strange opined that they could put this on Amazon and maybe FloTrack.

Ms. Wells agreed, adding that they wanted to start with this, and that down the road they could amplify it through Connected Television (TV).

Mr. Ritchie relayed that he had been having conversations with USA Track and Field regarding their USA Track and Field TV which he would discuss more during his presentation.

GREATER ORLANDO SPORTS COMMISSION

Ms. Lindsey McBride, Associate Vice President of Events, Operations and Business Development for the Greater Orlando Sports Commission (GO Sports), mentioned that for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-2026 year to date (YTD), they had closed out 16 out of the 29 events and were on track to have over 15,000 room nights when they closed out the rest of the events, noting that they were doing well and were on trend with the previous year. She stated that they recently hosted the Major League Fishing Tackle Warehouse Pro Circuit in February 2026, and that they worked with Madden Media to ensure the social posts had the right information that Lake County wanted to focus on; furthermore, this event had been viewed over 10 million minutes and would be broadcasted on VICE TV on September 6, 2026. She related that the Florida Anvil Ultra Triathlon, which was a 36-hour triathlon, was hosted at Lake Louisa State Park in February 2026, and that it had athletes competing from across the world, adding that she would be working on extending this contract since it only went through the following year. She commented that the iKon Boats Tailgate Tour was also hosted in February 2026, and that it was a smaller event that launched out of Hickory Point in the City of Tavares; additionally, the Spring Thunder on Lake Dora, which was a vintage race boat regatta, was hosted at Wooten Park in the City of Tavares in March 2026. She indicated that press releases were recently distributed announcing that The Big House was selected to host NXTPRO basketball events in May and July 2026, and that the Horizon League Golf Championships would remain in Lake County at Mission Resort + Club through 2029. She stated that their upcoming events included the following: the Horizon League Men's and Women's Golf Championships in April 2026; the NXTPRO Puma Shoe Circuit in May 2026, which would have over 1,500 athletes at The Big House; the Professional Disc Golf Association Tim Selinske US Masters Championships in May 2026, which would have over 500 athletes and utilize the disc golf trails in the Cities of Eustis, Tavares, and Clermont; and the NCAA DIII Men's Golf Championships in May 2026, which would have over 225 athletes from out of state. She said that for their business development travel, staff was planning to attend the Sports ETA Symposium in April 2026, and the Big 12 Annual Meetings and SportAccord World Sport and Business Summit in May 2026. She mentioned that Mr. Brent Nelson, Executive Vice President, Business Development and Sports Tourism for GO Sports, attended the Sports Commission Large Market Meetings in January 2026, which was where many of the larger sports commissions came together to discuss best practices and what was happening industry-wide, and that Mr. Jason Siegel, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for GO Sports, was invited by the Orlando Magic to attend the Global Games Mission Trip in London, England and Berlin, Germany in January 2026, noting that this was the first time the NBA hosted games overseas in an effort to continue bringing international sports events to the region. She discussed their business development prospects, and stated that they had a site visit at the National Training Center in the City of Clermont for the 2031 and 2033 Men's and Women's Rugby World Cup, and that the construction for the Susan Street Sports Complex in the City of Leesburg should be completed by the end of August or early September 2026, noting that there had already been many calls from prospective clients in regards to holding

events there. She relayed that she was hoping to have more of an update on the NCAA bid process by the next TDC meeting, and that the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.) was looking to bring back their High School and College events as well as the B.A.S.S. Open in January 2027, commenting that she hoped they could have those events back to back during two weekends.

OFFICE OF TOURISM

Market Analytics

Mr. Ritchie mentioned that the cumulative TDT YTD collections were \$1,819,597 through January 2026, which was slightly down from the previous year by 0.01 percent, commenting that the next few months were the stronger months of the year and they were anticipating an increase. He indicated that they had seen a significant increase in the TDT collections through February 2026, and reported that online platforms contributed to 59 percent of the collections and hotels/motels contributed to 41 percent; furthermore, collections for short-term rental properties continued to be strong. He said that the Windsor Cay Resort in the Four Corners area was 50 percent completed, and he opined that this was making a significant impact. He relayed that hotel occupancy was at 63 percent, which was down 13.8 percent from the previous year, and ADR was at \$110.99, which was down 4.76 percent from the previous year. He commented that he had spoken with Ms. Cindy Staley regarding hotel occupancy, ADR, and revenue, and asked if she wanted to speak on this.

Ms. Staley said that quarter one had been very strong for Mission Resort + Club as they were seeing an impact in hotel occupancy, restaurant revenue, and golf, adding that they had their strongest month ever in March 2026.

Mr. Ritchie stated that the occupancy for short-term rentals had increased by six percent, that ADR had increased by almost seven percent, and that the average stay was five days. He related that he was forecasting the ADR to be anywhere from \$350 to \$400 per night going into the summer, which was roughly about \$100 above where they were the previous year, opining that short-term rentals were carrying them through this year.

Administration and Budget

Mr. Ritchie showed the promotional activities budget for FY 2026 at just over \$3.6 million, and stated that they had spent roughly \$1.3 million YTD and had encumbered just under \$700,000 with about \$1.6 million remaining, noting that this was very strong for the remaining year. He relayed that this included contracted events, TDC event sponsorships, co-op marketing opportunities, advertising and publications, and promotional items.

Tourism Updates

Mr. Ritchie remarked that for FY 2026 quarter two event sponsorships, they sponsored 53 events which brought in around 23,000 room nights and about 344,000 visitors. He relayed that their office recently transitioned to the Destinations International Economic Impact, which was the gold standard of economic impact calculators within the industry, and that they would be using this with the new Event Sponsorship Program. He showed pictures of various staff activities, and indicated that he attended the Destinations Florida Tourism Day in the City of Tallahassee and met with Senator Keith Truenow, Representative Nan Cobb, and Representative Taylor Yarkosky. He said that he spoke with them about things that were happening in Lake County, and that they were

pleased with where Lake County was headed with sports tourism. He commented that he and Mr. Josh Hester, Sports Tourism Manager, attended the Sunshine Sports Council Innovation Think Tank in the City of Tallahassee and worked with some of the sports tourism event operators and colleagues within the industry, adding that this was an opportunity for them to learn about best practices, what was happening in the industry, and how they could adapt to that. He stated that they also attended the Destinations International Marketing and Communications Summit. He commented that they helped sponsor the World Athletics XC World Championships in the City of Tallahassee, which had roughly 450 elite athletes from 50 countries competing, noting that this was the first time this was held in the U.S. since the mid-1980's, and that it was televised on NBC. He mentioned that there was another event the next day with USA Track and Field, and that they were able to keep their signage up for more brand exposure. He relayed that they sponsored Montverde Academy's MAIT Invitational for the second year, which had teams from the States of Florida, Texas, California, and Georgia, and that there was much media exposure during this, noting that they were potentially looking at a larger partnership with them. He mentioned that they attended the Major League Fishing Tackle Warehouse Invitational, and that it was very well attended. He mentioned that they partnered with the Lake County Library System to have Ms. Twanisha "TeeTee" Terry, Star Athletics Olympic gold medalist, share the two children's books she had written at the W.T. Bland Public Library in the City of Mount Dora, commenting that this was the only library in the country that had her books available for check-out. He listed the top 10 quarter two event sponsorships based on projected economic impact, and stated that for co-op marketing, they had seven new campaigns with four partners, which were Dash Sports, Summer Sports Events, Erica's Tea Room, and Orlando Cat Café, with print, digital, out of home, and expo/tradeshow marketing. He showed the quarter three upcoming events, and pointed out that the largest events were the Leesburg Bikefest, Professional Disc Golf Association Tim Selinske U.S. Masters, NXTPRO Puma Shoe Circuit, and the NCAA DIII Men's Golf Championships. He related that the NXTPRO event in May 2026 would bring 125 boys teams, and that the event in July 2026 would bring roughly 225 girls teams, noting that this would also be a major college showcase with about 100 NCAA college coaches recruiting that talent. He also showed a list of the next TDC meeting dates for 2026, and mentioned that they were hosting an annual ethics training course on May 14, 2026 for the TDC members who wanted to attend, commenting that everyone needed to complete this training by the end of 2026.

NEW BUSINESS

USA TRACK AND FIELD PARTNERSHIP

Mr. Ritchie recalled that through their partnership with Star Athletics, they were able to partner with USA Track and Field the previous summer at the U.S. Outdoor Championships in Eugene, Oregon. He said that in December 2026 he met with their Chief Marketing Officer where they discussed the future of this partnership as well as the partnership with Star Athletics and came up with a long-term partnership that was structured as a tourism marketing investment. He mentioned that the core sponsorship benefits would be broadcast exposure with two commercial spots per broadcast on NBC, Peacock, and USA Track and Field TV with the potential of having hundreds of thousands to even millions of viewers, which would generate anywhere from \$500,000 to \$1 million in earned media value; additionally, they were hoping to include the "Off The Track" episodes on USA Track and Field TV during the events. He related that there would be branding

on the track and finish line tape, and that there would also be sponsor mentions during the competitions, noting that anywhere from 3,000 to 20,000 people would be attending the events. He stated that the Outdoor Championships would be held in July 2026 in New York City, New York, and that there would be two Grand Prix events before that in May and June 2026 in Los Angeles, California and College Station, Texas. He indicated that this partnership went through 2028, and that since the Los Angeles 2028 Summer Olympics was a big focus, there was the potential to bring teams to Florida; furthermore, GO Sports had been working with the international federations to bring teams here to train before they went into the Olympics. He opined that this was a huge opportunity, and said that they were requesting \$150,000 per year for 2026-2028 for a total of \$450,000.

Ms. Bartolowits clarified that the agreement stated that there would be three events per year not just three events in total.

Mr. Ritchie confirmed that there would be nine events in total, and that for 2026 it was the Outdoor Championships and the two Grand Prix events; however, starting in 2027 they were going to look at the Indoor Championships as well, which were always in New York, and that they would then be able to choose a Grand Prix event.

Ms. Staley asked where these events were all located.

Mr. Ritchie replied that the Outdoor Championships would be in New York City this current year and in Eugene, Oregon in 2027. He said that they have not announced the location for the 2028 event; however, that started to lean into the Olympic trials. He mentioned that they had been talking through what that would look like as there was the potential for Lake County to be included in that, but noted that this was controlled by the Olympic committee.

Commr. Smith asked how much the request was for the first Outdoor Championships that they sponsored.

Mr. Ritchie answered that it was \$75,000.

Commr. Smith questioned if there was a tangible benefit to these sponsorships.

Mr. Ritchie stated that USA Track and Field provided data and analytics from the event they sponsored the previous summer, and that they had roughly \$375,000 in earned media during that time. He commented that the objective was for brand exposure.

Commr. Smith inquired if Madden Media thought that the views or clicks resulted in anything positive for Lake County from their \$75,000 commitment.

Ms. Wells opined that it did.

Councilmember Strange commented that she would like to see this built out even further so they could maximize what they could do in the sports market, opining that USA Track and Field was

an extremely powerful, well recognized, and well respected brand in the sports world which could open doors to the endurance sports and sprint sports. She mentioned that South Lake County was the home of the fastest man and woman in the world currently, and that the City of Clermont was the home of the last four fastest men in the world. She remarked that this could be powerful if they could leverage it to affect all sports.

On a motion by Councilmember Strange, seconded by Mr. Slupe and carried by a vote of 7-0, the TDC approved to support the USA Track and Field partnership with fiscal impact not to exceed \$450,000.

AROUND THE HORN

Ms. Gigi Lemon stated that The Big House had been doing well and that every weekend they had exceeded 80 to 90 teams during their events, noting that this coming weekend there would be 160 teams coming for a basketball event. She mentioned that she had been working with GO Sports to bring the NXTPRO events to their facility, and that while it had been stressful at times, she was excited about these two events. She relayed that the athletes and their families have been enjoying being in Lake County.

Mr. Ritchie mentioned that they had to do a sweepstakes as part of their agreement with UCF Athletics where they offered a stay package, and that it became one of the top three sweepstakes that they had ever done with roughly 512 entries, 128,000 impressions on social media, 201,440 impressions on FanServ ads, and roughly 340,922 total impressions. He pointed out that 312 people opted to receive emails, and that there were public address system (PA) reads during the February 6-8, 2026 baseball games.

Commr. Smith asked if a winner had been picked yet.

Mr. Ritchie answered that he thought so, noting that staff was putting a package together for the winner.

Commr. Smith opined that it would be nice to reach out and congratulate the winner and welcome them to Lake County.

Councilmember Strange indicated that the City of Clermont recently hosted several large events, including THE Spring Games, Pig on the Pond, a rowing event, and the Great Clermont Triathlon, which was the longest standing independent ultra-distance triathlon. She mentioned that she would have the final numbers for THE Spring Games relatively soon, as they were still waiting on information from their media sponsors and the housing numbers from the teams and fans. She related that having the Windsor Cay Resort close by had been a large boom for them, as they had probably pulled around 40 teams in to Lake County that normally would have stayed in the ChampionsGate area. She stated that she was interested in learning why vacation rentals in the State were down while in Lake County they were up. She relayed that the City of Clermont recently hired a firm called DPZ CoDesign to create a comprehensive plan that focused on placemaking, and that because of this, The Urban Guild, which were the best placemakers in the

world, would be coming to Lake County in November 2026. She opined that this was a great opportunity for them to showcase Lake County, and that they would be able to provide ideas and suggestions on getting people to stay here. She mentioned that the Lake County Rowing Association brought in two events to the City of Clermont, including the Florida Scholastic Rowing Association (FSRA) Central District Championships, which was a high school event, and the Collegiate Regatta, which had some big names competing. She commented that during one of the events, a boater cut across the race course in a way that was quite dangerous, and that she wanted to discuss how this could be addressed so it would not happen again in the future.

Commr. Smith suggested speaking with the police chief for the City of Clermont to have them dispatch their marine patrol on the lake during these events to create a safe zone, noting that this was what the City of Tavares did during these types of events that worked very well.

Mr. Hendrick commented that the Lake County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) also had marine patrol and could provide support as well. He then stated that the Sand Court Experts hosted a tournament for the University of South Florida in the City of Clearwater a few weekends prior, and that he was able to bring the Water Monster, which was a portable water station that was stored at Hickory Point Park, to use during this event. He related that it had a large Discover Lake County logo on it, and that all the players and coaches were able to see this logo. He indicated that this coming weekend they, along with the Sand Ballerz, would be hosting a large beach volleyball tournament for the junior club teams, and that over 110 teams were registered; furthermore, Mr. Phillip Dalhausser, a professional beach volleyball player, was bringing his club, and that he planned on autographing some volleyballs for the charity event that was part of this. He related that some of these teams were coming as far away as Puerto Rico. He remarked that during the same weekend, the Lake County Water Authority (LCWA) would be co-sponsoring the kids' fishing clinic at Hickory Point Park, which had been happening for at least 10 years, commenting that the Teen Sportfishing Association was also involved in this.

Mr. Slupe stated that Lakeridge Winery has had a great start to the year, and that they had brought back a couple of events that they had not had since before the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), including WineFest, which was a three day festival with live music and 65 vendors. He said that there were over 6,800 attendees, many of which were from out of town, and that this was the biggest WineFest they ever had. He related that the other event was a car show the following month with over 150 cars and just over 2,300 attendees, adding that the proceeds to this benefitted the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post in the City of Clermont. He mentioned that Blues at the Winery, which would have live music, was being held at the end of April 2026, and that Jazz on the Vineyard Green, which would also have live music, wine tastings, and 60 to 65 vendors, would be held at the beginning of May 2026. He commented that they changed some of their marketing on social media and had posted many behind the scenes videos, which had been very successful. He also indicated that they welcomed a daughter to their family on January 24, 2026.

Commr. Alan Reisman mentioned that Leesburg Bikefest was happening at the end of April 2026, and that he would like to set up a meeting with Councilmember Strange, Mr. Ritchie, and the City of Leesburg's Planning and Zoning Director so they could discuss how to attract a community similar to Windsor Cay Resort to this area.

Ms. Staley relayed that quarter one was very strong for Mission Resort + Club, and that they were seeing great results from the Conquistador Bar and Restaurant since it had been refurbished from the El Conquistador and La Margarita restaurants. She mentioned that they had been hosting some travel writers on a smaller scale than what Madden Media was doing, and that they had seen some good articles written, noting that one person in particular was doing an article on behalf of the owner of Mission Resort + Club that focused on Lake County as a county and community. She indicated that they would be hosting some upcoming events with Horizon League, NCAA, and the Sand Ballerz, and that their corporate office would be hosting their 75th anniversary at Mission Resort + Club. She said that they had a food service arm of their company, and that they handled the food service for Montverde Academy. She commented that CFHLA supported the TDT and was a great advocate for the local communities, and that through their adopt-a-school program, Mission Resort + Club adopted Lake Hills School in the Town of Howey-in-the-Hills.

Commr. Smith thanked Mission Resort + Club for taking a huge leap of faith with sponsoring the Sand Ballerz, noting that it was turning out to be a great thing. He then asked if the rooms were all sold out.

Ms. Staley confirmed they were since they also had some in-house events as well, adding that she hoped some rooms would be free for the next event.

Commr. Smith opined that Madden Media and GO Sports were doing a great job even with the current economic issues they were having. He said that people were still coming into Lake County, and that it was inspiring to know that their money was being spent wisely; furthermore, he appreciated that they provided them with the facts even though he could be a bit hard on them. He opined that THE Spring Games was absolutely phenomenal and maybe the best one yet, commenting that he hoped it would grow bigger and better as they moved forward. He congratulated Ms. Lemon on bringing the NXTPRO basketball events to The Big House as it was a premier deal. He stated that the Candy Land Showdown, which was a sand volleyball tournament hosted by the Sand Ballerz, was the largest tournament to have ever been held at Hickory Point Park, and that there would be 110 teams and many family members and friends coming in support; furthermore, there would be food trucks, which would make it more like a festival. He remarked that Mr. Hendrick had put a lot of his own personal time, energy, and money into this and asked for nothing in return, and he thanked him for that.

Mr. Ritchie mentioned that he and Commissioner Smith had been having meetings with the Sand Ballerz group for the last three years, and that their goal was for them to grow.

Commr. Smith relayed that the Sand Ballerz started off in the City of Tavares with two courts, which then expanded to three courts, and that now they were using over 21 courts over a two day period bringing in teams from all over the country and some outside the country. He said that they only had two tournaments per year, and that they gave a lot of the money back to charities. He mentioned that in the current year, the charity was Powerhouse Youth Project, which was an organization who helped struggling kids have a purpose in life and know where they were going after high school; additionally, a few years prior they gave to the Lake County Animal Shelter and

promoted pet adoptions. He commented that this was not just a volleyball tournament, it was a whole community who brought the best out of people, and that he was glad to see them in Lake County. He mentioned that Mr. Filipponi was not at the meeting because he was sick, and that the current day was National Fresh Tomato Day.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to be brought to the attention of the TDC, the meeting was adjourned at 3:57 p.m.