

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (TDC)

The Indian River County (IRC) Tourist Development Council (TDC) met at **2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, November 19, 2025**, in the County Administration Building, Building A, Commission Chambers, 1801 27th Street, Vero Beach, Florida. You may hear an audio of the meeting, review the agenda or Minutes on the IRC Website.

Present were: **Chairman Joseph Flescher**, Indian River County Commissioner, District 2; **Vice-Chair Karen Mechling**, Interested in Tourist Development, Not an Owner/Operator; **Will Collins**, Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodations; **Linda Moore**, City of Vero Beach; **Nichole Johanson**, Interested in Tourist Accommodations (not Operator) Representative; **Amanda Owens**, Interested in Tourist Accommodations (not Operator) Representative; and **Jennifer Bates**, Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodations Representative.

Others Present were: **Kristin Daniels**, Office of Management & Budget Director; **Michael Zito**, Deputy County Administrator; **Ben Earman**, Director of Tourism & Marketing at Visit Indian River; **Krista Hoyt**, Visit Indian River; **Nicholas Sanzone**, Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce; **Jody Van Order**, Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce Operations & Tourism Assistant; **Kendra Bergman**, Coastal Connections; **Kevin Greene**, Play Treasure Coast; **Aaron Vos**, City of Vero Beach; **Todd Howder**, Vero Beach Air Show; **Jeff Devlin**, Vero Beach Air Show; and **Ashley Brown**, Recording Secretary.

Call to Order and Welcome

Chairman Flescher called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m. at which time it was determined there was a quorum present. He then led the pledge of allegiance and welcomed all those in attendance.

Additions/Deletions to the Agenda

The Agenda was approved with no edits revisions.

ON MOTION BY Ms. Moore seconded by Mr. Kite, the Council unanimously (8-0) approved the Agenda.

Approval of the Minutes of August 20, 2025

No edits or revisions were made.

ON MOTION BY Ms. Moore seconded by Mr. Kite, the Council unanimously (8-0) approved the May 21, 2025, Minutes as submitted.

Approval of the 2026 Meeting Dates

No edits or revisions were made.

ON MOTION BY Ms. Moore seconded by Mr. Kite, the Council unanimously (8-0) approved the proposed 2026 meetings dates.

Tourist Tax Revenue Update – Kristin Daniels, Office of Management & Budget Director

Ms. Kristin Daniels provided an overview of Tourist Tax collections through September 2025, noting that this report reflects the final revenues for the fiscal year. The new fiscal year began October 1.

She provided a brief recap of the Tourist Tax allocation structure:

- 1¢ of the 5¢ Tourist Tax was added beginning January 2025.

Of the total 5¢ collected:

- 2¢ is allocated to TDC-funded agencies,
- 2 ¾ ¢ to beach restoration,
- ¼ ¢ to the Jackie Robinson Stadium project.

Revenue Performance:

- Total collections for FY 2024–2025 exceeded the prior fiscal year by \$882,067, an 18.8% increase.
- Revenues exceeded the adopted budget by \$648,705, or 13.2%.
- While the fiscal year does not include a full 12 months of the newly implemented fifth cent, nine months of revenue were collected from that additional cent.

Monthly Revenue Trends:

Ms. Daniels presented monthly revenue comparisons. For every month in FY 24–25, revenues surpassed the previous year’s budgeted collections. After the implementation of the additional cent in January, monthly revenues were significantly higher than the prior fiscal year, and revenue collections exceeded budget projections each month.

Historical Performance:

The year-end collection total was \$5,564,956, establishing a new record high. The previous peak year was FY 2022–2023 with \$4.9 million collected.

Agency Year-End Balances:

A summary of year-end spending showed that agencies collectively returned \$24,968 in unspent funds:

- Chamber of Commerce (Vero Beach): \$3,487 unspent
- Chamber of Commerce (Sebastian): \$5,854 unspent
- Historical Society: \$10,892 unspent
- Coastal Connections: \$4,735 unspent (subject of the next agenda item regarding fund rollover)
- Historical data for the past four fiscal years was included for reference.

Council Discussion:

Mr. Kite requested that staff rerun the revenue graphs for January 1 through September 30 with an overlay showing collections with and without the additional one cent, to better assess tourism performance independent of the tax increase. Ms. Daniels agreed to provide this information for the February meeting, and to distribute the data via email in advance if available.

Councilmembers discussed the impact of the fifth cent, acknowledging that while the additional tax significantly increased revenue, tourism activity itself has also grown, particularly in February, March, and April. Chairman Flescher expressed appreciation to community partners and promoters for contributing to the County's strong tourism performance, despite the absence of a major attraction.

Clarification was provided regarding changes in allocations from prior years, noting that multiple adjustments make year-over-year comparisons more complex.

Conclusion:

Ms. Daniels asked if there were any further questions; none were raised. Chairman Flescher thanked staff and community partners for their ongoing efforts in supporting the County's tourism industry.

Coastal Connection's Request to Roll-Over Grant Award

Ms. Kendra Bergman explained that Coastal Connections is requesting approval to roll over approximately \$4,700 in remaining grant funds from FY 2024–2025. She provided background on the original grant request, which was intended to support the expansion of tourism efforts by developing a new one-week, all-inclusive eco-tourism experience designed to attract environmentally minded travelers to Indian River County.

She noted that Coastal Connections originally requested \$16,000, but due to funding constraints, was awarded \$11,000. The approved budget allocated funds primarily toward development of the new eco-tour program, with additional funds supporting existing sea turtle programs, including nighttime turtle walks and turtle dig experiences. Marketing efforts for the new program were coordinated in partnership with Visit Indian River County, which is why a separate marketing line item was not included.

Ms. Bergman outlined the details of the proposed program, which was planned for June and July to align with sea turtle nesting season. The program included small group sizes, lodging at a sea turtle-friendly certified hotel, and a series of interactive activities supporting local nonprofit partners. Although the program was promoted for several months and received over 1,000 page views, no registrations were received, and as a result, no funds were expended toward the new program during FY 2024–2025. All expenditures incurred were solely related to the existing sea turtle programs, and documentation was submitted to the Budget Office.

Ms. Bergman further explained that following the conclusion of the promotion period, interest was received from a potential participant for a 2026 trip. Tentative dates have been identified for June 23–28, 2026, and discussions have occurred with Visit Indian River County regarding promotion of the program in the upcoming year. She stated that Coastal Connections is prepared to move forward with the program but requires the rollover of the remaining funds to cover startup costs.

Ms. Bergman formally requested approval to roll over the unspent funds into FY 2025–2026 for use specifically for the eco-tourism program.

ON MOTION BY Mr. Collins, seconded by Ms. Bates, the Council unanimously (8-0) approved the rollover of Coastal Connections’ remaining FY 2024–2025 grant funds into FY 2025–2026.

Ms. Bergman thanked the Council for their support and consideration.

Request for Discussion: Vero Beach Air Show, Inc. – Tourism Partnership Opportunities

The Council received a request for discussion regarding potential tourism partnership opportunities with Vero Beach Air Show, Inc. Mr. Todd Howder, Vice President of the Vero Beach Air Show, addressed the Council first, followed by remarks from Lt. Col. Jeff Devlin, United States Marine Corps, Blue Angels Liaison and Acting Executive Director.

Mr. Howder provided a brief history of the Vero Beach Air Show, noting that the nonprofit organization was founded in 2011, achieved 501(c)(3) status in 2012, and held its first air show in 2013. He emphasized that the organization is fully volunteer-driven and community-based. Since 2014, the Blue Angels have performed at multiple Vero Beach Air Shows, with the exception of the COVID-related cancellation in 2020. Mr. Howder stated that the Air Show is one of the largest events in the community and is focused on driving tourism and “heads in beds.”

Mr. Howder shared that, based on the Air Show’s internal analysis, each event generates an estimated \$1.3 million in economic impact, with approximately \$6.5 million generated over the course of six shows. He highlighted the use of local vendors, volunteers, and significant hotel utilization associated with staging the event. For the 2024 Air Show alone, approximately 675 room nights were required to support performers, staff, and operations, excluding attendee lodging.

Lt. Col. Devlin provided additional context regarding the Blue Angels’ footprint, explaining that a typical spring show brings approximately 65 sailors and Marines to the community. He noted that Vero Beach is consistently well-regarded by the Blue Angels team and shared that, in December 2024, the Vero Beach Air Show was recognized as the “*Best Civilian Air Show of 2024*” by the U.S. Navy Blue Angels, selected from 20 civilian shows nationwide. He emphasized that this recognition reflects strong community support, hospitality, and event preparation.

Both speakers discussed the Air Show’s interest in exploring tourism funding opportunities through TDC. They acknowledged that the formal application deadline for the 2026 cycle had passed but inquired about the possibility of applying for available reserve funding for marketing-related expenses. They also expressed interest in participating in the formal funding application process for 2027, including potential off-year initiatives.

Council members and staff provided guidance on funding requirements, noting that:

- Funding is reimbursement-based only.
- Requests must be tied directly to tourism promotion and attracting non-local visitors.
- Salary and benefits are not eligible expenses.

A formal application with a clearly defined dollar amount, scope, and tourism-related purpose would be required for Council consideration and subsequent recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners.

Discussion emphasized that marketing-related expenditures are generally the most measurable and appropriate use of TDC funds, as they can be directly tied to increased visitation and lodging impacts. Staff encouraged Vero Beach Air Show representatives to work with TDC staff to prepare a detailed application and return to a future meeting with a formal request.

Conclusion:

Vero Beach Air Show, Inc. was advised to submit a complete funding application outlining proposed eligible expenses and tourism impacts for potential consideration at a future TDC meeting, with the understanding that any recommendation would ultimately require approval by the Board of County Commissioners.

No action was taken at this time; the item was discussion only.

Other Matters

Councilmember Ms. Bates provided an update on commercial air service at the Vero Beach Regional Airport. She announced that JetBlue service is scheduled to begin in December, followed by American Airlines service in February, which is expected to further increase tourism to the area. Ms. Bates noted that parking capacity will need to be addressed but expressed enthusiasm about the expanded airline options. She also shared positive feedback regarding Breeze Airways, noting strong passenger demand with daily flights to JFK and Boston, improving regional and international connectivity.

Visit Indian River County Update

Ben Earman, Director of Tourism and Marketing for Visit Indian River County, along with Krista Hoyt, Tourism Communications Manager, provided an update on recent accomplishments.

Mr. Earman reported that at the Florida Governor's Conference on Tourism, Visit Indian River County received two additional statewide awards, bringing their total to four awards over the past two years. The awards included:

- First Place in Specialty Marketing for the "Pawspport Trips to Indian River County" campaign, featuring Calvin the dog.
- Second Place in Television Advertising for the "This Is Indian River" commercial campaign, competing against major Florida destinations.

He also announced that the organization received an award from the Florida Association of Chamber Professionals for Best Communications and Marketing Materials in their budget category, recognizing their three destination maps.

Additionally, Mr. Earman presented the Council with new destination guides, released in October. He highlighted that the publication features user-generated content, local photography, comprehensive lodging listings, and countywide parks information. Councilmembers congratulated staff on the awards and quality of the materials.

Sebastian Chamber of Commerce Update

Nicholas Sanzone, representing the Sebastian Chamber of Commerce, shared updates including the release of their new destination map, which was designed in-house. He also announced that Britney Melchiori has been named the new President and CEO of the Sebastian Chamber. Mr. Sanzone highlighted early collaborative marketing efforts under her leadership, including trackable QR code advertising partnerships and upcoming promotions with the New York Knicks and Tampa Bay Lightning. Councilmembers congratulated the Chamber on the new leadership and initiatives.

Closing Remarks

Councilmembers extended Thanksgiving well wishes to staff and partners.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 3:08 p.m.

Next Meeting Date

The next Tourist Development Council meeting will be held on **Wednesday, February 18th, 2026, at 2:00 p.m. in the Commission Chambers of the County Administration Building “A”.**