



DeSoto County

Tourism Development Council

Meeting Minutes - Draft

Tuesday, October 14, 2025

1:30 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Anthney called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m.

Present: Trent Anthney, Meagan Joseph, Pam Ames and Summer Lempenau

Absent: Jerod Gross, Sanjay Patel, Judy Wertz-Strickland and Zac Varner

MINUTES APPROVAL

Minutes for August 19, 2025

TDC members reviewed the minutes from the August 19, 2025, meeting. Ms.

Lempenau motioned to approve the minutes, Ms. Joseph seconded. All approved.

REGULAR BUSINESS

Bed Tax Revenue Update

Ms. Guffey stated that revenue has been declining for five consecutive months. July was down by \$578 (6%), May was down 32%, and March was down 22%. She added that the revenue source is a 3% bed tax collected by the state, and the data received is always two months behind.

Ms. Joseph stated that a potential reason for the decline is the lack of work crews, which were present in previous years due to hurricane recovery efforts.

Ms. Guffey added that the Tourism Department has approximately two years' worth of reserves, and all marketing funds come from the bed tax, not from DeSoto County property taxes.

Chair Anthney questioned whether or not the steep revenue drops in March and May could be a reporting error by the state's Department of Revenue. He did add that contacting them can be difficult.

Advertising and Marketing Review

TDC discussed previous advertising and marketing efforts, as well as future efforts to pursue.

A key theme was addressing questions from a "tourist brain" perspective, anticipating the needs of visitors who are new to the area and its environment. It was suggested to create a dedicated section on the VisitDeSoto.com website for visitor tips, covering topics like wildlife, fishing, and other local phenomena.

Regarding print advertising, Ms. Guffey stated that two photo ads were approved for the Visit Florida Vacation Guide.

Ms. Guffey added that a boosted Facebook post for the Peace River reached 14,619 people with 19,469 views, skewing heavily toward the 65 and over demographic. A boosted video ad for the rodeo also performed well with the 65+ age group, achieving 16 and 17 cents per click. Past campaigns have targeted Orlando, Tampa, St. Pete, Sarasota, and Fort Myers.

Chair Anthney suggested the future boosted posts target Florida's east coast, specifically, from Broward to Hialeah and down to Florida City to attract new visitors. Ms. Guffey added that staff would boost posts for the upcoming Arcadia Bike Fest.

Council members agreed that marketing efforts should focus on attracting "staycation" visitors from nearby regions, such as Lee County to Tampa. It was determined that the county does not have the budget or competitive attractions to effectively market to out-of-state tourists.

A proposal for a quarter-page ad for \$1,650 in "Travel Taste and Tour" magazine was discussed. The offer included a claimed reach of 1.2 million readers and social media promotion, which some members felt was "too good to be true." TDC members discussed pursuing advertising with Travel Taste and Tour Magazine.

Ms. Lempenau made a motion asking staff to pursue advertising opportunities with the magazine, Ms. Joseph seconded. All approved. The motion was approved on the condition that a trusted industry contact first confirms the legitimacy and value of the publication.

The promotional budget for Fiscal Year 2026 is \$65,000.

TDC members also reviewed a draft map brochure currently being designed by company 365 Degree Total Marketing. Group members noted inaccuracies such as images showing mangrove tunnels and a manatee, which are not representative of the local river environment. They also noted language and misspellings throughout the brochure. Staff informed Council Members would take their notes back to the company for further development of the brochure.

Burt Reynolds Memorabilia - Gene Kennedy Presentation

This agenda item was tabled for a to-be-determined future meeting; however, it was briefly discussed during staff comments.

"A Land Remembered" Television Show

Ms. Guffey informed Council Members that a filmmaker from Tampa is creating a TV series based on the book "A Land Remembered."

Contact has been made with the producer-director to encourage filming in DeSoto County, as the book features Arcadia and DeSoto.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

n/a

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Council members agreed that widespread construction has been a major issue, making it difficult to travel around town.

Ms. Guffey mentioned Tourism staff's "Worth the Wild" campaign as a marketing effort to address the travel difficulties.

Internet and phone service reliability was debated. One local campground has not had Wi-Fi for customers since 2017.

Ms. Joseph stated that some long-time residents have a negative perception of the area's growth, and there is a need to better communicate the benefits of tourism.

STAFF COMMENTS

Ms. Guffey stated that Gene Kennedy is seeking a downtown space to open a Burt Reynolds memorabilia museum.

Ms. Ames added that there are currently 16 vacant buildings downtown. Ms. Ames was asked about YiYi's Restaurant being closed. She said the restaurant is temporarily closed but expects to reopen after around two months.

Mr. Sutphin stated that the owner of Oak Street Deli is selling the business to the operators of the Broken Spur Diner; it will be renamed "Broken Spur Deli."

ADJOURN

Chair Anthney asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:48 p.m. Ms. Lempenau made the motion, Ms. Joseph seconded. All approved.

NOTE: For quasi-judicial matters, any party desiring a verbatim record of the proceeding of this hearing for the purpose of an appeal is advised to make private arrangements for the production of a

record and anyone wishing to present documents or other written evidence to the Board must provide

eight (8) copies of the written material. If special accommodations are required in accordance with

the Americans with Disabilities Act, individuals should contact the County Administrator's Office by

calling 863-993-4800 at least forty-eight hours prior to the hearing.