



DeSoto County

Tourism Development Council

Meeting Minutes - Draft

Tuesday, April 21, 2026

1:30 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Anthney called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m.

Present: Summer Lempenau, Pam Ames, Judy Wertz-Strickland, Sanjay Patel and Trent Anthney

Absent: Zac Varner , Jerod Gross and Megan Cutler

MINUTES APPROVAL

Minutes for February 10, 2026

Council members reviewed the minutes from the February 10, 2026 TDC meeting. Ms. Ames made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Wertz-Strickland seconded. All approved.

REGULAR BUSINESS

Bed Tax Revenue Update

Ms. Guffey stated that Bed Tax Revenue results showed a decline of 61% in January 2026 (\$12,746.56) compared to January 2025 (\$32,939.72).

Mr. Patel added that revenue at Oak Tree Hotel was down in March by more than \$20,000.

Chair Anthney stated that tourism across Florida is down due to rising fuel and goods costs, adding that statewide shortfalls have been reported in Tallahassee.

Ms. Ames stated that the April Bike Fest drew approximately 7,000 people downtown; however, construction was not a sole deterrent. She added that attendees included higher-income visitors. Members noted the need to convert event attendees into overnight stays.

There was also discussion of the recent Pioneer Day at the Turner Agri-Civic Center. Attendance appeared good, but no official numbers were available at the time of this meeting.

Members discussed creating shared advertising templates that promote local activities (canoeing, fossil hunting) with lodging, leveraging existing websites and social media. There was also discussion of voluntary business participation with possible discounts (10–20%) to incentivize extended stays -- “Stay another day” concept.

Members also discussed developing package concepts with (Sunseeker Resort) Aileron Golf Club with adventure and downtown packages, including upriver canoe trips, horseback rides, airboat, swamp buggy, and downtown activities. Also to work with downtown stores and help prepare them ahead of promotion proposals.

TDC members agreed that packaging and cross-promotion are favored to

cost-effectively encourage longer stays and that staff should continue developing adventure and downtown packages.

Discussion of Google Ads project

Members discussed Google advertising as a method of promoting tourism in DeSoto County.

Chair Anthney stated that staff should prioritize awareness and impression share with social media (Instagram/Facebook), target by age/interests/location, test multiple small ad variants to achieve lower CPC and build traffic.

In general, members agreed that staff should proceed cautiously with CPC control, specific local keywords (“DeSoto,” “Peace River”) mixed with select generics, as well as to avoid overly generic poor-performing terms, such as, “antiques.” Staff should monitor clicks vs. sales.

Chair Anthney also expressed the importance of claiming the "Visit DeSoto" Google Business Profile to manage information and support campaigns.

Members also discussed staff creating a plan for six-month social media pilot at \$500 per month focused on Instagram and Facebook. Ms. Guffey stated that vendors are under consideration, including Maris West & Baker, Tayloe Marketing, SEO Sarasota. Other suggestions included Black Dog and Kevin McNulty for budget-friendly options.

If under budget, leftover funds may support additional experimentation, such as event-timed hotel promotions ahead of Sebring.

Members encouraged staff to proceed with pursuing the planned \$500 per month pilot.

Proclamation for National Tourism Week, May 3-9, 2026

Ms. Guffey acknowledged the upcoming National Tourism Week Proclamation, planned for the May 12 DeSoto County Commission meeting at 9 a.m. National Tourism Week runs from May 3–9.

Beautification Efforts on Major Access Pathways into the County, City.

Ms. Guffey presented a beautification project planned to be spearheaded by the Economic Development and Tourism department.

Members agreed that staff should coordinate with Arcadia Main Street, the downtown organization has undergone cleanup efforts downtown.

Members agreed that staff should pursue low-maintenance, coordinated beautification aligned with maintenance commitments and sponsorships, as well as efforts to fix damaged signage, plan phased improvements and communicate timelines.

Review of Ordinance Amending Tourism Development Tax Plan

Ms. Guffey stated that staff would like to amend the tourist development tax to allow for a broader reserve to use beyond marketing while staying within the Florida statute, adding that an example would be to include facility repairs at the Turner Agri-Civic Center, which is a venue for tourism-driving events.

Members requested that Tourism Development Council maintains oversight of fund usage.

Ms. Ames made a motion to approve the ordinance amendment request. Ms. Wertz-Strickland seconded. All approved.

Review of Arcadia Rodeo Association Marketing Matching Grant Application

TDC members reviewed the Marketing Matching Grant application from the Arcadia Rodeo Association. Members agreed that the organization met the advertisement requirements of the grant.

Ms. Ames made a motion to approve the grant application; however, more details will have to be provided before the County Commissioners may approve the application.

Ms. Wertz-Strickland seconded. All approved.

TDC members also discussed raising the \$3,000 marketing grant cap and decided to revisit the change at the June 9, 2026, TDC meeting.

Review of DeSoto Historical Society Pioneer Day and BBQ Marketing Matching Grant Application

Due to lack of required documents. Members encouraged staff to work with the DeSoto Historical Society to provide the appropriate documents listed in the grant application.

Ms. Ames made a motion to deny the application. Ms. Wertz-Strickland seconded. All approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

n/a

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Ms. Ames discussed Arcadia Main Street's recent work with Placer AI with a package priced at \$8,000, down from \$25,000. Members asked staff to explore grant funding (marketing matching grant) and updating grant language to include marketing research/platforms.

Chair Anthney suggested identifying key attractions and/or events such as Peace River Canoe Outpost and fossil hunting, which can draw visitors from 100 to 200 miles away. He also suggested focusing ads on activities, via Google and social media, to support local hotels and restaurants.

Members also suggested exploring co-funded ads with local businesses contributing to activity-focused campaigns.

Ms. Wertz-Strickland mentioned Nuggets RC Raceway and exploring ways to incorporate the company with the Arcadia Main Street bike fest to drive attendance. She also noted Eco-Tourism opportunities at Twin Creeks Ranch.

STAFF COMMENTS

Ms. Guffey stated that staff is pursuing an ongoing bird watching promotion with prepared guides. She also noted that Turner Agri-Civic Center will be hosting free Sunday movie events for families throughout the summer.

TDC members encouraged staff to explore advertising at Punta Gorda Airport, as well as Sunseeker Resort and Aileron Golf Club with the goal of developing adventure and downtown Arcadia packages for visitors.

It was also noted that the June 9, 2026, TDC meeting will be held at the new Arcadia Main Street office, 17 North Polk, Arcadia, FL.

ADJOURN

Ms. Ames made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:10 p.m. Ms. Wertz-Strickland 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.