# DeSoto County

## Tourism Development Council

## Meeting Minutes - Draft

**Tuesday, June 9, 2026** **1:30 PM**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Trent Anthney called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

**Present:** Trent Anthney, Judy Wertz-Strickland, Zac Varner and Megan Cutler

**Absent:** Pam Ames, Summer Lempenau, Sanjay Patel and Jerod Gross

**MINUTES APPROVAL**

**Minutes for the April 21, 2026 TDC meeting**

Tourism Development Council members reviewed the minutes from the April 21, 2026, meeting. Ms. Wertz-Strickland made a motion to approve. Vice Chari Varner seconded the motion. All approved.

**REGULAR BUSINESS**

**Bed Tax Revenue Update**

Ms. Guffey presented the March 2026 bed tax revenue. The March bed tax revenue showed a 2% increase compared to March of the previous year; however, significant declines of 21%, 32%, and 57% were seen earlier in the year.
Council members discussed possible reasons as to why numbers have been down compared to the previous year.
Members cited high fuel prices, general cost increases, and reduced travel frequency. Seasonal patterns were also noted with strong bookings around New Year's and Presidents' Day, but a "slower than expected" spring. Members noted that low river levels during the spring had been an effect on activities and bookings. Mr. Varner stated that his sales were down approximately 10% during that time.
Mr. Anthney stated that a significant portion of his business comes from Florida's east coast (Miami/Fort Lauderdale), with tourists seeking rural experiences and river activities like fossil hunting.
TDC members discussed a potential tourism marketing slogan: "Far enough away to be different and close enough to be doable."
Mr. Anthney also noted that tourists are coming to DeSoto County and other small, rural towns to get away from the city.
Based on Council's recommendation, staff agreed to explore cross promoting with Davie Rodeo and other rodeos.

**Discussion of Marketing Matching Grant Revisions**

The Council discussed amending the tourism marketing grant resolution to allow funds to be used for market research that would benefit the entire county, not just individual businesses.

Ms. Guffey stated that there is approximately $15,000 to $20,000 in the Marketing Matching Grant budget that is currently unspent, adding that the amount does not carry over to the next fiscal year.

For the Marketing Matching Grant, a proposed language addition was discussed: “Market research that benefits and can be used by the entire county may also, at the TDC’s discretion, be approved.”

Ms. Cutler made a motion to approve adding the following language to the Marketing Matching Grant: "Market research that benefits and can be used by the entire county may also, at the TDC’s discretion, be approved.” Ms. Wertz-Strickland seconded. On the item, discussion continued.

Mr. Varner noted that the Council is on language at this point in the meeting, asking members if they would like to amend the motion to say, "as long as the language is approved by everybody?"

Mr. Varner continued stating that the motion had been amended to state that, "As long as the language is approved, we’re going to push that marketing grant money can be used for the research."

Mr. Varner asked staff to present the final language at a future meeting. Depending on the language, Council members can then approve the revisions.

Ms. Wertz-Strickland made a motion to approve the amendment to the original motion. Ms. Cutler seconded. All approved.

Ms. Guffey noted that a draft of the amended language will be circulated for legal review before a final vote by the TDC.

As part of this agenda item, there was a discussion to increase the maximum grant award from $3,000 to $5,000.

A separate motion was made by Mr. Varner, and seconded by Ms. Wertz-Strickland, to increase the maximum grant award amount from $3,000 to $5,000. All approved.

**Discussion of Marketing Opportunities**

To the Council, Ms. Guffey presented tourism marketing opportunities at Punta Gorda Airport (PGD). The goal is to capture airport traffic using destination dining guides with QR codes for tracking.

Mr. Anthney made a motion for staff to spend up to $200 per month on literature distribution at all three brochure kiosk locations at PGD for 12 months. Ms. Cutler seconded. All approved.

**Beautification Project update**

Due to time restraints, this item was tabled for a future meeting.

## PUBLIC COMMENTS

n/a

## COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Ms. Wertz-Strickland noted that the Arcadia Bed and Breakfast is reportedly for sale, with limited breakfast service due to sprinkler system requirements.

## STAFF COMMENTS

Ms. Guffey noted that Sleep Inn & Suites in Port Charlotte reached out to staff to discuss a partnership for overflow lodging during major events. Staff will pursue the conversation.

Mr. Sutphin noted that historic house John Lee Haus Inn, owned by Pia and Thomas Crone, is now operating as a wedding venue within the city limits. The owners are still renovating the second story where the inn portion of the business will take place.

Ms. Guffey stated that the TDC currently has eight of its required nine members. The state statute requires two elected officials from the City of Arcadia. Staff has contacted the city to request an appointee.

## ADJOURN

Mr. Varner made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:55 p.m. Ms. Cutler 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.