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TDC Chairperson

GADSDEN COUNTY
TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

MEETING MINUTES
October 17, 2016 at 3:30 P.M.
Edward J. Butler Governmental Complex

Present:

Keith Dowdell, Vice – Chair (arrived late)
Lee Garner
Jeff DuBree
Brenda Holt
Joe Munroe
Carolyn Ford
Sonya Burns, TDC Administrative Assistant
Joe Bouch, 78 Madison
Attorney David Weiss
Beryl H. Wood, Deputy Clerk

Absent:

Peter Patel, Chair of TDC
Jerrold Holton
Matt Thro

1. **Pledge of Allegiance/Roll Call**

Jeff DuBree, called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. with a quorum present and then led in the Pledge of Allegiance. The deputy clerk led in roll call of the Council.

2. **Amendments to and Approval of the Agenda**

There were no amendments to the agenda.

UPON MOTION BY MR. GARNER AND SECOND BY MR. MUNROE, THE COUNCIL VOTED 5 – 0, BY VOICE VOTE, FOR APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AS STATED.

3. **General Business**

a. **Approval of Minutes (September) Peter Patel, TDC Chairman**

UPON MOTION BY MRS. FORD AND SECOND BY MRS. HOLT, THE COUNCIL VOTED 5 – 0, BY VOICE VOTE, FOR APPROVAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 19, 2016 MINUTES.

b. Events Sub-Committee Appointees, Peter Patel, TDC Chairman

Ms. Burns said at the last meeting they asked that a sub-committee be formed to organize events. Those who volunteered were Mrs. Ford, Mr. Patel, Mr. Munroe and the alternate Mrs. Holt.

UPON MOTION BY MR. GARNER AND SECOND BY MRS. HOLT, THE COUNCIL VOTED 5 – 0, IN FAVOR OF THE NAMES PRESENTED FOR THE EVENTS SUB – COMMITTEE.

c. Youth Sports Complex, Beth Kirkland and Jake Whitfield

Beth Kirkland of the Gadsden County Development Council (GCDC) discussed the Youth Sports Complex for a competitive youth sports complex. She said it would be located along Interstate 10. She said discussion has occurred among many players in the County.

Keith Dowdell arrived at this juncture.

Jake Whitfield, Redhills Sports Group, SFA/SFM, he did a power point presentation that described this project. He said this would bring new development. He said they made a lot of good relationships throughout the County. 1st class waterpark and sports complex would be a great asset to this county. He said this would be for first class tournaments and destination type touring. He urged the County to take advantage of the location, which is unique.

Why Gadsden County?

- Access from I -10 and Hwy 90
- 20-25 minute drive from key local markets
- 4-6 hours drive from major metro areas
- Accessibility to local members/participants

Economic Impact

He said by doing the bed tax increase it would eliminate the county having to bond. He said it would be co- terminus lease agreement with a private source, they finance everything and in return it is spread out over 30 years. He said they would finance for however many years and after it is paid the keys will go back to the County. In order for this to be possible, the best way was for the county to raise bed tax from 2% to 5% and apply to annual lease payment. He said they would not have to apply for a bond.

Mrs. Ford asked about the flexibility of the facility and the Economic Development to Gadsden County.

Mr. Whitfield said there communities are where building facilities and county come together. He talked about the “Stay to Play”; hotels in Gadsden County would need to fill first before they go outside the County. He said they would be working with housing agency to help fulfill this. It would be supply and demand.

Mrs. Ford asked about economic impact with transportation. Would there be a spin-off business or jobs.

Mr. Whitfield said we envision this being a great partnership with schools in Gadsden and McDonalds, etc.

Mrs. Holt discussed the \$600,000 with a 6% interest rate. She asked was there a penalty for early payoff.

Mr. Whitfield said no. He said they recommended from the start that the County enter into MOU or a LOI to begin the process. He said it would not hold County liable in any way. It just means you are ready to begin discussion to see if we can come to an agreement. He said an LOI would enable them to identify the land upfront and focus on the land. It shows them that Gadsden County is serious. We are simply recommending that you increase your bed tax and some type of letter of intent or a memorandum of understanding to begin the negotiation process to determine if this is in the County best interest to move this forward.

Mrs. Holt asked about the top of the building, the life span.

Mr. Whitfield said it was 30 plus years, air supported structure. He said the only thing County is responsible for annually is annual lease payment. He said there would be a leasable space in building 2 a portion would go to the County (5,500 space is leasable).

Mr. Garner said with the additional space such as restaurants, ziplanes, bowling, arcade, waterpark, etc.

Mr. Whitfield said Midway is the key to selling with the parents, especially those coming from Tallahassee.

Mr. Munroe said this area makes up a lot. It's up to Gadsden County to capture Tallahassee while they are here.

Mr. Whitfield said this facility will bring business such as restaurants.

Mr. Dowdell said he was in support of this project. He said this is "what they are looking for." He discussed raising bed taxes, how do you suppose we sell this to the people and how much do you think we will generate.

Mr. Whitfield said maybe additional an \$180,000 (\$200,000 - \$250,000) in bed taxes. He said the Commission would vote, handle marketing increase and educate folks on the tax.

Mr. Dowdell asked how we market to the people. We have to be careful about saying raising taxes. "Where will we get funds to make annual payment?"

Mr. Whitfield said it will require an annual lease payment; it can be structured however County wants, after 30 years. This should not become a political playground. It is a tremendous resource for youth in sports.

Mrs. Ford said the issue in her eyes would be the money, how do we benefit.

Mrs. Holt asked Attorney Weiss what they could do and not do. She also asked that he state the Florida Statutes.

Attorney Weiss said he did speak with Mr. Whitfield and they discussed the financing options. At a hundred thousand foot level as in terms of a financing mechanism to do this. He said they discussed a lease, where there is no obligation from the County from year to year. In generally, as long as the County is not locking itself in for more than one year from a budget prospective then if the County determines it serves a public purpose. He said from budget year to budget year you make a decision to put whatever money you want in the budget. He said as long as there is no consequence to the County as a result of that, and then this will work. He said as far as the Tourism Development Tax is very specific per FL statute 125.0104 subsection 5A 1A in terms of what you can use it for. One thing is publicly owned & operated convention centers, sports stadiums, sports arenas, coliseums or auditoriums within the boundaries of the County. As you may or may not have heard, publicly owned and operated is the first part of that. I'm not sure if a lease of the facility would qualify as publicly owned and operated. He said there are Attorney General Opinions construing this particular provision that says if you're not publicly owned and operated you can't use tourism development tax revenue. He said they need to look at this a little harder, publicly owned piece is what concerns him.

Mrs. Holt said if they pay \$600, 000 do they not own it.

Mr. Whitfield said it is a sales/lease agreement with Municipal Acquisitions. He said as it relates to the Tourism Development Tax Dollars, what we are saying is there are certain instances where you cannot use some of that, to apply directly to this. He said they are saying it is equivalent of those dollars that would be used. He said this is where they sit down with the attorney.

Mrs. Holt said this is a good idea, but can we sale it to the Commissioners. Can it be sold in a marketing plan, who sells it and how is it pushed. She said they will look at, is this a good idea and if it is legal.

Mr. Whitfield said Mrs. Holt had some valid points. He said if this where a bond, if they were floating a bond over 20 to 30 years, your own the hook for that bond. He said in this case it is up to the County Commission annually rather or not to appropriate x amount of dollars to this lease. He said the alternative if you choose not is: "The County says this is not working out in our favor. You go back to Municipal Acquisitions and say we are not going to appropriate the necessary dollars for the annual lease payment and they in return would say, can they spread out the lease payments from 30 – 99 years, to lessen the amount or whatever to keep you in tack." He said that would be their 1st option and the 2nd is they take over the building and then they own the land free and clear, including the building. He said they would then decide whether they keep SFM as the management company and run it ourselves, turn building into warehouse or sale all the parts. At the end of day the County is not on the hook anymore.

Mr. Dowdell asked was there any way that FAMU, TCC and FSU could be tied into this project.

Mr. Whitfield said no. He said that would be illegal for them, they can't have an amateur sports market.

Mrs. Holt asked on the bond the contract that says you are obligated to pay that amount back every year plus whatever interest you bond at. Why would we not be able to do this and not be tied into a contract? Why can't they say they are going to pay \$600,000 a year for the County? She you are saying we can't obligate the budget, but we can on a bond.

Attorney Weiss spoke on specific source of funding. He said if they are going to issue a bond based on general revenue, then it requires a referendum vote. He said you would have to take it to the entire public for voting. He said with the roads, that was a specific source of funding. He said if you have a specific source of bonding that is not a general revenue bond, then it doesn't require a referendum. Like the road paving, the specific source was the gas tax.

Mrs. Holt said she was all in with the project, just trying to figure ways to generate the annual lease payment. She asked who would be responsible for the property taxes and it was determined there were no property taxes on the land.

Mr. DuBree asked are they looking at other counties.

Mr. Whitfield said they are looking at Jefferson County. He said they want to see who is coming to the table and who is willing to negotiate.

Mr. Dowdell asked Beth Kirkland to lead contact with the EDC to market idea among municipalities with a point of contact.

Mr. Whitfield said this community facility, but they are there to bring heads in beds. He said this way the pressure is removed from the county. He said the private operator will decide what events come inside the facility.

Mrs. Holt said if each municipalities at least buys into this project it would make it easier to market to the Commissioner's to agree or not. She said they would need something from their districts.

Mr. Whitfield said there is a facebook page they can send the next step.

Mr. DuBree said he was in favor of pursuing the discussion.

UPON MOTION BY MR. GARNER AND SECOND OF MRS. FORD, THE COUNCIL VOTED 6 – 0. BY VOICE VOTE, FOR THE YOUTH SPORTS COMPLEX TO MOVE ON TO THE COUNTY COMMISSION FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION.

Mr. Whitfield said he would send presentation and facebook page to Ms. Burns.

d. Approval of FY 2016-2017 Marketing Recommendations, Media Plan(s)

Joe Bouch, 78 Madison advertising and Marketing, thanked the Council for a productive year and introduced his wife. He commented on the packet with a summary of what they did last year and it included marketing recommendations for 2016-2017. He outlined the mission: The mission of Gadsden County's Tourism Development Council is to foster, develop and promote a sustainable tourism product, thereby bringing more people (visitors to the area, getting them to stay longer, and to spend money. He also presented the media plan, Dashboard: Website, Discover Gadsden, Gadsden County Tourism, Gadsden County Tourism Print Advertising, Facebook and Google Ad Campaigns, E – Blasts to Florida Travel and Life Magazine Subscriber, Florida Travel and Life's E – Newsletter, FloridaTravelLife.Com Digital Display Ads, Outdoor (Billboard) Advertising, Gadsden County Tourism Rack Brochure, Gadsden County Tourism Pocket Brochure, "Do Something Original" T-Shirts, "Do Something Original" Tradeshow Banners, U.S. 90 Resource Guide. He said next month

he would be able to have year to year to measure. He said the vision is “Do Something Original” to become town centered.

Mrs. Ford left at this juncture.

Mr. Dowdell left at this juncture

Mrs. Ford returned at this juncture.

Mr. Dowdell returned at this juncture.

Mr. Bouch said the budget is almost identical to last year. We increased in some areas and decreased in some, additional in Southern Living and added AAA Living Magazine.

Mrs. Ford committed on the African – American Directory that she is working to publish. She advised it would be ready for print and would be forwarding it to Mr. Bouch.

Mr. DuBree asked about the co-ops (AAA and Visit Florida) and Rack cards at the welcome centers.

Mrs. Burns said they do have them at all of the rest stops located along I-10.

Mrs. Ford asked if they considered the 850 Magazine, they have a lot of local people featured.

UPON MOTION BY MR. GARNER AND SECOND BY MRS. FORD, THE COUNCIL VOTED 6 – 0, BY VOICE VOTE, FOR APPROVAL OF THE FY 2016-2017 MARKETING RECOMMENDATIONS.

Mr. DuBree commented on bed taxes being lower this quarter than usual.

Mr. Bouch responded travel is low, due to presidential election and zinka, but he was not sure. He would have to look into the bed nights.

e. Approval of FY 2016-2017 Strategic Plan

Ms. Burns presented the 2017-18 Strategic Plan for the Gadsden County Tourist Development Council. It’s basically the same plan as last year, but with the addition of the new numbers.

She answered Mr. DuBree’s question concerning the bed tax. She said she received the numbers from Mr. Price and he receives them from finance and they receive them from the state. She said Gadsden County does not collect their own bed tax.

Mr. DuBree said if they go the route of increasing our bed tax, then we need to place the burden on the County Tax Collector to collect it. He said that way it could be enforced and he would be able to tell where it is coming from. It would show who is paying and who is not.

Mrs. Burns said a couple of years ago that was entertained with the Tax Collectors Office and he said he didn’t have the staff to take on that responsibility.

Mrs. Holt stated that the break out of who is paying is important.

Mr. DuBree said one concern was no system for bed nights. Focus should be trying to get heads in beds. He commented on scoring system with the application that favored events that produced bednights. He said he would like to see some type of system placed in there. He commented on the latest Fishing Tournament, which was approved, but they had to make it a TDC sponsored event. He said they booked so many rooms until if you have not already booked, you won't be able to get a room. He said a part of the problem was it was FAMU homecoming weekend as well, so some of the hotels are booked. He reminded the Council the focus should be to put heads in beds.

Mrs. Holt said that is a scheduling problem. She said it should be a priority to look at the scheduling of items by having a calendar.

Mr. DuBree suggested an incentive could be given to receive more funds. For example, if they scheduled an event on an already scheduled event, if they move the event up or down a weekend we may be inclined to give more funds. He suggested a scoring system that would evaluate them into another bracket of potential funding.

Mr. Bouch said in the original plan they highlighted. He said there would have been a committee and they outlined how the criteria would read, it would have been a point system.

Mrs. Burns said it was discussed, but not implemented in the last plan. She said what was added was the sheet they had to fill out for the bed nights, a bed night certification. She said she explains to each person that requests an application that the event can't be on a home football weekend for the major universities or any other community planned event.

Mr. DuBree said he would like for the new application to have the point system on it and it never did. He said he would like to see it a part of this plan.

Mr. Munroe said he would like more time to go over.

Mrs. Ford suggested that it be tabled also.

UPON MOTION BY MR. DOWDELL AND SECOND BY MR. GARNER, THE COUNCIL VOTED 6 – 0, BY VOICE VOTE, TO TABLE UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING TO DISCUSS THE BED TAX TABULATION.

Mrs. Burns asked that they email her suggestions and she would get them to Mr. Bouch.

Attorney Weiss suggested creating a proposed point system.

f. Items of discussion from Council members (no vote items)

- Mr. Munroe announced the 2016 Porch Fest this Saturday, October 22, 2016 – Downtown. He said he would be talking to Tallahassee based developers that have property listed in Quincy about their marketing of Quincy. He said he had talks with the owner of a large downtown building across the street from the courthouse about apartments and a restaurant on the first floor.

- Mrs. Ford said she had started a visioning process for Gadsden County. She said they will go out and do focus groups throughout the county. She said they will get voices from the grass-root community, on how they see Gadsden in the future.
- Mr. Garner talked about how successful the Native Pow – Wow Festival was this past Saturday, October 15, 2016. He said they had over 30 different mixes of Indians. He announced this was the Final Friday, October 21, 2016 of the Main Street activities from 6-10pm for Chattahoochee. He said they are also gearing up for Christmas and planned to have downtown decked out.
- Mrs. Holt discussed the CDBG grant for Stevens School for \$500,000. She said they would apply for funding to bring facility up to standards starting tomorrow at 8:00 am. Mr. Munroe said Rosalyn Smith and he went through the records on Stevens School and he gave brief history. Mrs. Ford said it was also the old health center for African – Americans and many other projects. She said hopefully the mural project, which was moving slow, would soon begin.

4. **Public Comments (3 Minutes)**

There was no additional public comment.

5. **Adjournment**

**THERE BEING NO ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, THE CHAIR DECLARED THE MEETING
ADJOURNED AT 6:20 P. M.**

GADSDEN COUNTY, FL

JEFF DUBREE, ACTING CHAIR

ATTEST:

BERYL H. WOOD, DEPUTY CLERK