

**AT A WORKSHOP OF THE TOURIST
DEVELOPMENT COINCIL HELD IN AND FOR
GADSDEN COUNTY ON MONDAY, JUNE 15,
2020 AT 4:00 P.M., THE FOLLOWING
PROCEEDING WAS HAD, VIZ:**

Present: Carolyn Ford, Chair
Jeff Dubree, Bed Tax Collector
Brenda Holt, Vice-Chair, Commissioner Dist. 4
Cathy Johnson, Havana Council Member
Keith Dowdell, Quincy City Commissioner
Linda Dixon, Tax Collector
John Garcia, Bed Tax Collector

Absent: Peter Patel, Bed Tax Collector

Staff Present: Beth Bruner, Deputy Clerk
Clayton Knowles, County Attorney
Leslie Steele, Public Information Officer
Jeff Price, Sr. Management Budget Analyst

THIS WORKSHOP WAS HAD VIA ZOOM DURING THE COVID-19 SHUTDOWN.

1. Roll Call

At 4:05p.m. a quorum was had and roll call was taken by Deputy Clerk Bruner.

2. Presentations

Brenna Dacks, Regional Partnership Manager of Visit Florida, gave her presentation to the TDC. She stated she was going to share some of what Visit Florida was doing in response to the COVID-19 Update, and she shared her screen with the rest of the Council. She stated on the consumer side, COVID was going to have a lasting impact on the travel industry and the State's economy. Visit Florida was going to work hard to make sure they were meeting that recovery initiative. She further stated this would be one of the most significant economic recovery efforts they had undertaken. Between Blue Algae, Red Tide and the major Hurricanes that had hit Florida, they were no stranger to crisis response and were taking it on and taking it very seriously, and had a strong strategy moving forward. She stated the rebound strategy for consumers consisted of four phases. The first phase was going to be like during the crisis. (which was being phased out) That strategy was serving as an informational resource to consumers. She said they paused all paid media and focused on promoting to keep Florida on the top of minds so people think of Florida as their first option. She put up on the screen a screenshot of Visitflorida.com, and stated at the top, there was a COVID-19 informational ribbon where people could click to get information and be taken to a travel safety information page. It was updated consistently by the communications team with different resources and updates as it pertained to traveling to Florida. There was also County by County information. She further stated there were links to the Department of Health and the CDC and it was a main source of information for visitors and locals. From a social media perspective, she said they utilize social media to be top of mind and keep the top of mind awareness.

Rather than a come visit now approach, it was more about keeping the top of mind awareness, and sharing their partners content. (she showed examples) She said Visit Florida had a Florida Made initiative on Instagram, which ran the month of May, to promote local makers such as performers, or artists, and gave them the opportunity to get in front of an audience through Instagram to share their expertise, knowledge and their sounds. She said they sent an email to all of their DMO Partners (Destination Marketing Organization) like the TDC, to ask for content. There was an opportunity to respond and get the information to them so they could have been considered for one of the opportunities in the Florida Made Series. She stated there was a promotion in April to show appreciation for First Responders. They were trying to keep in market, in a positive and responsible way during that time of the crisis. She said they were now in Phase 2 and stated it was important to understand their phases did not align with the Governor's phases for reopening. When she said Phase 2, she was talking about Phase 2 of Visit Florida's marketing and rebound strategy for consumers. It would launch sometime in July, after the stay at home order was lifted. She stated people were still uncertain and a lot were not risking planning a Florida vacation, so they were focused on the in-state visitors for now. That Message was "Uniquely Florida", and there would be two tiers. The first tier would be the Florida Brand Message with a soft call to action. It would not be "Come to Florida", it would be more of a "Support Florida", consider traveling, positive vibes, stay in your home state and explore, considering there were places people who lived in Florida had not discovered. Tier 2 would take that to a different level, and focus on experience-based messaging and have a clearer call to action saying "Come Visit Florida". Phase 3 would be once people were feeling a little less uncertain and were feeling better about traveling. She stated they would move more into the domestic and international markets, focused more on domestic. They would not dive into international in a huge way, but still wanted a presence there and to put dollars into those markets. That in-state campaign would run through Labor Day and then it would be layered and moved into the domestic drive markets and as Phase 4 was moved into, it would focus on the fly markets and international travel. The message for the domestic campaign would be "The Power of a Florida Vacation." It would encourage people to come and Explore Florida and get that emotional connection between family and friends. She showed a snapshot of the phases she had talked about.

She stated there was a Webinar on visitflorida.org/library , that went deeper into the details of the campaign.

She further stated Visit Florida wanted the TDC to encourage local retailers, restaurants, hotels, campgrounds, and outfitters to sign up for a free web listing. There were 13 Million visitors to the Visit Florida site last year. The 10-minute application was the only investment they would have had to make at [Visitflorida.org/join](https://visitflorida.org/join).

She stated additionally, Visit Florida paused the Partnership Program and Welcome Center Program through the end of June, and the partnership was extended out through the end of June. Renewals were sent out for July, as well as August and September, however they were giving all partners the ability to defer their payment through September 30th in case they were still in a position where it was not feasible to pay.

Ms. Dacks said [Visitflorida.com](https://visitflorida.com) was to access information for visitors, and [Visitflorida.org](https://visitflorida.org) was to access information as an industry member. It was where all the benefits and resources were that were available to the TDC. It gave industry resources, and business re-opening tips. All research had been unlocked and was available to partners for free, however, if you were not a partner, you were not able to access the research. She stated there was also a COVID data dashboard. She stated that Jacob, the Research Director, expected hotel performance to creep up week by week and stated it would get better. Destination Analysts, a research company, had been doing weekly surveys on travel and COVID-19 and they referenced non-team outdoor recreation as being one of the safest activities, which was

great for Gadsden County with the great outdoor activity space. The survey stated that peoples first leisure trip would be small town and rural destinations, and it came in 3rd place. 1-Beach 2-City in metro areas 3- Small town and rural destinations, 5- State, local and regional parks. Gadsden County has great parks in the area and it would be good to incorporate that in the messaging.

Visitflorida.org had Webinars for free to all until the end of June. There was a new benefit unlocked for partners which was the Small Business tool kit. It would be available through the end of June and had a lot of different topics and research available. One she wanted to highlight was ‘Google my Business Essentials During COVID’, it was in PDF form and she said it would give some basics on Google my business listing, and there was also some Grant information. The Online Marketing Planner was a great way to see everything Visit Florida was doing and offering. There were some great instate programs and domestic co-op programs launching in response to the rebound that had a 1 to 1 match, Visit Florida was co-investing with the industries. If the TDC put in \$2,500, Visit Florida puts in \$2,500 and make the campaign last that much longer.

Commissioner Holt asked if Ms. Dacks thought Visit Florida would be able to market Gadsden County to tourists if the County came up with a great plan.

Ms. Dacks said yes, the TDC was a partner with Visit Florida and paid \$395 per year to be involved. That money allowed a website listing, vacation guide listing and Visit Florida would help leverage any type of marketing campaign.

Mr. Brown asked Ms. Dacks if she would speak more about dry traffic at stops on I-10.

Ms. Dacks said there were Welcome Centers on I-10 coming into the NW Florida Corridor, Capital Building in Tallahassee, I-95 and I-75 and they provided lobby display’s for free for partners. If the County Reserved a lobby area for Brochure distribution, it was free for 7 days a month. There was also a brochure Distribution Program, where the County could put their Brochure or Visitors Guide, there was usually a charge, but as a Rural County, there was no charge for Gadsden County and could have a complementary brochure space at each of the 4 welcome centers, a savings of \$400 per year.

Mr. Brown asked if there was a minimum number of brochures needed.

Ms. Dacks stated each welcome center varied, 1,000 to start at each location would make sense. She further stated the Welcome Center team would tell the TDC if they ran low.

Mr. Brown, referencing Co-op dollars, asked if there was an application for those dollars or was it automatic.

Ms. Dacks showed a screenshot of the on-line marketing planner at Visitflorida.org and stated the Rebound Programs offered had a 1 to 1 match available for any partner to participate, with no application, they were just matching funds. Everything from connected TV to in-state digital billboards, Expedia, and many more. She stated Visit Florida also had Social Programs on Snapchat, Pinterest and Facebook and stated they were available to any partner to participate. She further stated they were a shared brand landscape, meaning it was Visit Florida’s Brand that you would be plugging into. Other programs are the County’s Brand, and the County just needed to put the Visit Florida logo at the bottom of the County’s own advertising and in turn, the County could leverage some discounted rates. She stated she would be happy to be a resource if anyone wanted to talk about any of these, offline, she would be happy to be a resource.

Mr. Garcia asked if it was \$1,000 to put the brochure at a single Welcome Center.

Ms. Dacks answered no, \$127 plus tax for the year, per location, but the Gadsden County TDC would get it free.

Mr. Brown told Mr. Garcia they were referring to brochures with the number 1000. He stated it was a very reasonable amount.

Ms. Dacks said I-75 & I-10 Welcome Centers were re-opened, however, the Capital Building and the I-95 Welcome Centers were still closed. She was hopeful that in the next couple of weeks the Governor would permit to open the other two.

Over 2.7 million people went through Welcome Centers last year, research showed 34% of visitors modified or changed their travel plans based on information they picked up from the Welcome Center. She stated Gadsden County was right off I-10, and was a prime location to benefit from the visitor's using I-10.

Mr. Brown thanked Ms. Dacks for her partnership and guidance.

Barbara Karasek, CEO & Co-Owner of Paradise Advertising & Marketing, gave her presentation to the TDC. She stated the Marketing Agency was working on COVID recovery campaigns. Paradise believed in the Power of Plus, it was about the team. She stated with COVID, states and visitors were different with travel. She stated destinations needed to stay active and in front of their consumer base. The new normal would evolve and change, but Paradise must understand the customer. A soft message, she said was important during COVID. She stated Paradise crafted all new messaging to be calm and reassuring yet informative. Ms. Dacks asked, what can be done now? 8 of 9 clients paid advertisements had launched today. Paradise wanted to maintain consumer loyalty; they provided a tool kit to all DMO's back in April. On owned channels, make sure the website messaging for what was happening in the county was in real time. A chat bot was created and was successful and would be maintained. Organic social media, and proactive outbound messaging, was good for Realtime messaging. Virtual Events, in the County or Parks, like a wildlife expert, or chef. Virtual travel was a wish list of content for day trips, live sunsets. She stated engaging the audience with inspirational stories. Reassure when it was safe to travel and have outdoor activities. She stated email marketing kept on through COVID with proper messaging and everyone in the county was getting the same message. She further stated Paradise had updated my brand assets, created tool kits for everyone such as: Fun at home, Parks, Hotels, Restaurants. It was about pulling consumer back to the destination. With the website community connections, was being mindful of the community by giving back, dining to go, getting out into the fresh air and meeting neighbors. Activating what Paradise called "Amplifying and Activating your Locals." Develop social programs and overamplify the positive. Paid Media was to attract people to the website. People still wanted to travel. She stated inspirational videos with a paid social campaign behind it were what people were looking for. Email marketing was another way to stay active during COVID. Compassionate Outdoor, like billboards and earned media. Public Relations was very busy, Travel Writers were looking for story ideas or press releases, how to enjoy the destination from home, insights, make people feel safe, 1 in 5 are ready to travel. This would be the year of the road trip. Beaches were important but it was hard to even rent anything. More outdoor activities played into Gadsden County's favor. Most digital promotions were a Brand Campaign. Crisis Recovery plans showed a potential to rebound after crisis. Create assets (downloadable color books for kids) Parks and other attractions had opportunities to create a platform for Gadsden County. Key tourism drivers to stay true to were; Outdoor Adventure, Eco-tourism, Sports and Entertainment Events, Food and Dining, Arts and Culture. A great crisis recovery system, meant Paradise was ready to get Gadsden County back on the

road to recovery. She ended stating Paradise was looking forward to dialogue with the TDC to learn more about where the TDC saw the County going post COVID and how to get on the road to recovery. Mr. Brown stated the TDC would figure out where Gadsden County wanted to go next. When the TDC was ready to engage a partner, the partner would know what TDC would ask of them. He stated that partner needed to be someone who understood Gadsden County.

Mr. Garcia said the examples shown of different clients were nice, and asked if there were any clients similar to Gadsden County since there were no beaches here.

Ms. Karasek stated every client stood on its own legs, but Paradise did work with inland destinations like Ocala-Marion County, Seminole County, Little Rock, AR, Eureka Springs, AR, in the middle of nowhere. Paradise believed they could get to the soul of the destination, regardless of where they were, and that included Gadsden County.

Ms. Dixon asked what kind of things Paradise could do to help get people to Gadsden County.

Ms. Karasek said it was an opportunity to look at what consumers were looking for. She stated they were looking for a safe place, somewhere to unplug from devices, and fun outdoor activities. She stated Campgrounds and RV Parks were full in Florida. Paradise would be taking the County assets and the consumer mindset and marring them into the County destination. She said that would change over time but there was an opportunity to capitalize on what consumers were looking for. Whether they stayed the night or just took a day trip, at this time, any economic impact was positive.

Ms. Ford asked Ms. Karasek if she would send the power point to the TDC again. She stated, in the past, the Council said they would pull together and give Paradise the history of Gadsden County. Ms. Ford asked if Paradise could put together a brand for Gadsden County. The County wanted a different image for Gadsden County and the brand should be uplifting. Make it exciting to come to Gadsden. The County needed someone to help shape a brand. She stated Gadsden County did not have beaches but did have beautiful lakes on both sides of the County, was close to Tallahassee, and how can the county capture those things that pull into Tallahassee. Can we put together the research and visualize what the county would look like and would you help lay it out so people would want to come here.

Ms. Karasek said sometimes you had to build the plane while you fly it. She stated you could not miss out on marketing to your current customers with your existing brand while you were evolving and building a new brand. She said to turn positives into bigger positives, like fishing and golf, which were the most popular during COVID. Continue those positives and build out from there.

Mr. Garcia asked if he could see the Eureka marketing plan.

Ms. Karasek said she will ask them and get the info to Mr. Brown.

Mr. Garcia stated he was asking because he was concerned about picking someone who really understands that Gadsden County was different than the beach locations.

Ms. Karasek stated she would include a before and after and she thought the TDC would be pleasantly surprised how they got there.

Mr. Garcia stated Metrics, not Facebook likes, was what he wanted to see. Mr. Garcia wanted to hear about more than how many website hits there would be. He wanted to see them tie processes to results and tell the TDC how that got there. He stated the TDC was not interested in Facebook likes and Instagram hits.

Ms. Karasek stated she was glad to hear that because if the County wanted impressions and Facebook likes, Paradise was not the Agency for the County. Paradise cared more about the engagement and the

down-stream attribution. She further stated there was a Paradise Dashboard that showed, in real time, what was working and not working. She stated Paradise would show points of interest attribution and the end result was the overnight visitation and the tax collection. The by-product, was how were the restaurants and attractions, did they see value as well.

Mr. Brown stated like most good agencies, would you make sure KPI's (Key performance indicators) work for the plan.

Ms. Karasek answered yes, jointly, and ahead of time.

Mr. Dubree, referring to the drive market coming out of COVID, he asked what was the drive market in terms of distance.

Ms. Karasek said for smaller destinations it was 2-3-hour drive, Atlanta at the most. Consumers were afraid to travel too far if they had not been there before. Larger destinations, like Miami, had a drive market all the way up to the state of Indiana.

Mr. Dubree asked what the expectations were through 5 years in rebranding a County. He stated Gadsden County wanted a new image and to develop a brand and get it out.

Ms. Karasek stated it was a 10-year contract with Ocala. It started with a 5-year plan and would do another 5-year plan at the end of the first 5-years. She stated the annual plans went against the years of the plan. The brand was refreshed in year 1, the new brand was delayed because of COVID. Eureka Springs was 90-days for a rebrand. She offered to send a post-brand and re-brand from Eureka Springs.

Ms. Johnson asked what the customers thought about the performance of Paradise.

Ms. Karasek stated they were overwhelmed with gratitude. Pre-COVID was started in January and the clients loved the fact that Paradise was proactive with ideas. They also appreciated Paradise was on call 24/7 to make sure they were always available for questions.

Ms. Johnson asked if it was possible to get feedback from customers.

Ms. Karasek stated she would send testimonials.

Ms. Johnson said she liked the presentation and thanked Ms. Karasek.

Ms. Ford asked about the power point and Mr. Brown said he would get it to the council.

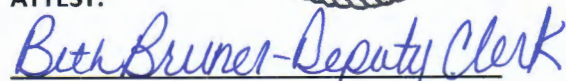
5:35 P.M. The Workshop ended and a Regular Meeting started.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA


CAROLYN FORD, Chair



ATTEST:


NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk