

**AT A REGULAR MEETING OF THE TOURIST
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL HELD IN AND FOR GADSDEN
COUNTY, FLORIDA ON MAY 24, 2021 AT 4:00 P.M., THE
FOLLOWING PROCEEDING WAS HAD VIZ:**

Present: Carolyn Ford, Chair-Person of Tourist Interest – arrived late
Jeff Dubree, Tax Collector
Brenda Holt, County Commissioner
Keith Dowdell, Quincy City Commissioner – arrived late
Peter Patel, Tax Collector
Linda Dixon, Tax Collector – appeared by phone

Absent: Decorkus Allen, Havana Council Member

Staff Present: Georgette Daniels, Assistant County Administrator
Leslie Steele, TDC Director
Clayton Knowles, Attorney
Marcella Blocker, Deputy Clerk

Welcome

Commissioner Holt welcomed everyone back.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/ROLL CALL

Commissioner Holt asked for a moment of silence and led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the U.S. Flag.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Ms. Steele informed everyone the meeting was properly advertised and was sad to report the passing of member John Garcia unexpectedly on March 31st and Commissioner Decorkus Allen from Havana would replace Cathy Johnson.

Ms. Steele stated that Georgette Daniels, Assistant County Administrator, was present to help with the budget. Ms. Steele said they have had many discussions on hiring a marketing firm so they could be ready for opening and in addition to looking at funds and who would be attending conferences, etc. She asked Ms. Daniels to provide an update of their revenue, the Grant Development process and noted that Ms. Grace Robinson, Gadsden Arts Center & Museum, was present to present for their organization. She also stated a letter was submitted for the Tobacco industry.

a. Introduction Overview

Georgette Daniels, Assistant County Administrator, said they have been looking at the current budget to see where they were. She informed the members they had an annual budget for this fiscal year of \$170,000 and the majority of the revenue that supported that budget coming from Tourist Development Tax Revenue. She stated as everyone knew, they were in the middle of a pandemic, tourism was down and it has affected Gadsden County tourism as well.

Chair Ford appeared at 4:19 p.m.

She continued and stated that of the \$179,000 in revenue that was budgeted, \$135,000 comes from tourist development revenue and to date, have only received \$57,000 in revenue. The

larger portion of revenue that was budgeted for this year is coming from Fund Balance, monies that was left over from prior years. She said they were budgeted to pull in \$40,000 from Fund Balance and had not made that transfer as of yet.

Mr. Patel asked the balance and Ms. Daniels stated she did not have that number with her but could get the information for them. Mr. Patel asked, in the future, to have that information because they always kept a reserve for problems such as this. Ms. Daniels explained this was monies that was pulled from Fund Balance for this current fiscal year that was presented to them in the budget last year. Mr. Patel said every year they were putting some monies into the reserve and they were not putting anything into reserve but was taking some out and that was how it worked. If they had that information, it would help the members to decide.

Ms. Daniels said when they discuss the FY2021/2022 budget, she would have that figure so they would know what was available. She added she did not know what the revenues might be for next year as they were still somewhat restricted.

Ms. Daniels continued and stated that currently only \$8,000 has been spent in operating expenditures and said a portion of Ms. Steele's salary comes from TDC money. She said they had \$16,000 in salary and benefits that will be spent from the budget associated with that expense. She said that included the \$6,000 that was a grant to Gadsden Arts Center. She said funds were spent on masks and t-shirts and the t-shirts were for the "Love Where You Live" campaign and masks were promotional items associated with the pandemic.

She informed them there were things budgeted that have been spent such as the Shade Tobacco grant as well as the marketing campaign that Ms. Steele...

Commissioner Dubree asked about the revenue numbers and asked if the \$57,000 was for six months of revenue and Ms. Daniels said that was as of that day.

Keith Dowdell arrived at 4:24 p.m.

Commissioner Holt said when they are discussing numbers, they need to be looking at the numbers so they can "nail down" because the same conversation will come up at the next meeting. If they have what is in by today's date, they spend and where spent at, it will make it easier.

Ms. Steele informed them the report was run as of Friday (May 21, 2021) and the balance was \$170,500.01. She added last year was the first time she did the budget workshop and wanted Ms. Daniels to come in so they would know what was in their budget now. Also, they when they have the budget workshops to give their recommendations based on conversations with them and if they wanted to adjust, to see what they may want to do with the current funds they have and to get ready for the next budget cycle.

Chair Ford said it seemed the budget, which was \$179,341 was what they currently had and they had only spent \$8,000. She was told that was correct. Her question was, it seemed when they ended last year, where do they pick up the 2021 from October? Ms. Steele said the end of the last fiscal year was far different from this one because they were able to initially have some events and would need to look at the last budget sheet. Chair Ford said they could not start

until they look at what they ended last year. She further stated the carry-over funds should be noted. Ms. Steele noted that Mr. Price did the budget last year and this was the final budget they approved.

Commissioner Patel said also (inaudible) in revenue because what they presented that time is expected to be \$135,000 however they were down on the revenue and was why they needed to know what they have or what they could spend. He said they could not work anything on this until they knew the full (inaudible) and said that was how they ended last year, what they have and asked how could they go forward and could not make any kind of decision or relegate any funding to any of the organizations at this point.

Ms. Daniels said she understood and they will have more opportunities to being back information, this was to give them an overview of where they were currently.

Chair Ford said part of what came out last year was a portion of Ms. Steele's salary and the attorney and had a grant they took care of.

Ms. Steele said there were two grants they awarded to Gadsden Arts Center, \$6,000, and they have already expended their funds and they awarded the Shade Tobacco firm from Havana \$2,500, which they have not expended.

Chair Ford said that should have come from last year's budget and asked if they were looking at the new budget starting October 1st?

Ms. Steele said their funds was paid from the last fiscal year, this budget was the current budget they were operating in.

Chair Ford asked the close-out amount from last year. Ms. Steele said she needed to get with Mr. Price to find out what amount of funds were carried over from last year to be included in this year's budget.

Commissioner Patel said on one bid, they were pulling \$40,000 and Ms. Daniels said they made that decision when they were going through the budget last year. She stated they voted to use that to make up the revenue for this budget they were currently in, along with the Tourist Development tax money they get in.

Commissioner Patel said they did not use all that money. Ms. Daniels said that money was going to support all the expenditures.

Chair Ford said they needed to see that.

Commissioner Holt said they need to pull more documentation and they should be able to track it. She said as they all knew, they went over the meetings last year and Mr. Price had some problems with the numbers last year. Ms. Daniels and Ms. Steele were now trying to pull this together and they need more information from the office upstairs.

Chair Ford said she understood where they were but they did not have all the funds to work with.

Commissioner Patel said it was the budget from the last workshop.

Chair Ford asked if Ms. Daniels saw the bank account and how much money was left in the bank.

Ms. Daniels stated she did not know that would be asked as this meeting because this meeting was to be to give them an overview as to where they were currently and where they would like to go next year.

Commissioner Holt said to jot down the questions and they could meet again, and told Ms. Daniels and Ms. Steele they could also send them information by email. They would then be able to look at it and know where they are.

Commissioner Dubree said one thing they should consider was to try to establish where they want to go as the TDC and if they were ready to jump into tourism right now and start promoting events?

Commissioner Holt said some venues were being funded through the State and if they are getting funded there, they may not need funding from TDC because their revenues were not where they need to be.

Commissioner Dubree said as far as the funds go, they will have lower revenue coming in this year as opposed to last year. They also would not be spending as much money this year.

Ms. Daniels said when the budget was developed last year, they looked at trends of revenue coming in and things the Board wanted to spend money on. It was decided they would not get enough money from Tourist Development taxes to cover everything and it was decided they would pull a little bit from savings and put that with what they were getting in from revenue and that would be enough to cover all things they had planned in the budget, including marketing campaign, grants, special events, salaries, etc. She added that the taxes have been going down over the last couple of years with the pandemic. She said they could scale back the budget and not pull from revenue.

Commissioner Dubree said they will be spending less from this year's budget simply because they did not have a marketing firm and no events are scheduled and the money will not be spent by the end of the fiscal year. He said they should have funds because they did not spend anything last year.

Chair Ford said they were talking about two different things. She said they need numbers so they can see what was made last year. She wanted to know how much they actually had. Once they have that, they could make some sound decisions. They know they will not have as much money as last year because of the pandemic, but still need to know how much. Once they know what they have left, they can make sound decisions. She added they need to get events going in the community.

Commissioner Patel said they only have three months left in this year and they only used \$8,000.

Ms. Daniels said they have not transferred out Ms. Steele's money or the money for the attorney yet.

Commissioner Holt said they need the fund balance, revenue and expenditure amounts. She asked when they were shut down, did they pay the attorney. Mr. Knowles said they have not had any meetings and so they have not billed anything.

Ms. Steele said the Expenditure Budget shows a fund balance of \$27,380; the next line was Marketing Funds that they did not spend and the allocation was \$37,006 and Fund Balance allocation was \$24,506. If they looked at the Event Grants Funding and showed funded by 20% of the FY19 allocation and was \$37,006 and the fund balance allocation was \$17,008; funded by 40% of that allocation of \$74,011, the fund balance allocation was \$34,489. She said with the exception of one section of this budget, the fund balance allocations should be the same with the exception of the line in the Tourism and Marketing where they would be able to deduct the \$8,840.99 and will be able to give a more accurate amount of money that was left in the budget. She pointed out the Fund Balance allocation was highlighted in each section in yellow.

Ms. Daniels said the fund balance allocation was only \$40,000 total.

Ms. Daniels added that she would get with Mr. Price and this might be language that was left over from prior years.

Commissioner Holt asked where Mr. Price was and Ms. Daniels said was out sick today.

Ms. Steele said they still need to figure out the RFP for the marketing firm. Commissioner Patel asked for this year or next year. Ms. Steele explained even if they bring them in for part of this year to provide the plan for them to approve, they should set aside an amount they are going to expend for that. She further said the \$60,000 was for the whole year but they have to get started.

Chair Ford asked why he set aside 20% for allocations and in some places 40%. Ms. Steele said he walked them through the budget process last year and there was quite a bit of confusion about it. There were things during the process where they asked him to remove things. She said she needed clarity on the budget that they approved last year.

Commissioner Holt stated there were certain things regulated by the State as to what their money could be spent for. She said she was unsure if the percentages were correct but they do give clarity on some parts of the money that has to be spent. She asked when they were meeting again. Ms. Steele said they were scheduled to meet June 21st unless they want to meet before then. Chair Ford said they need another workshop.

Ms. Steele said they did not spend the \$90,000 last year for the marketing firm even though it was budgeted. They did have events and paid them out, paid out their two big ones but did not pay out the majority of the budget because they did not spend the \$90,000.

Commissioner Holt asked when they wanted to meet again. Ms. Steele stated they were scheduled to meet on July 21st and asked if they wanted to meet before then.

Chair Ford said they needed a workshop before they had the meeting and Commissioner Patel said with all the paperwork. Ms. Steele asked if they wanted FY18 and 19 and Commissioner Patel said only FY19 and bank balance and suggestion from her that what they might need the next three months to spend the money.

Commissioner Holt asked for Mr. Knowles to bring back any statutes regarding percentages of the spending, etc. She asked if they wanted any ideas for marketing events or wait until the next time.

Commissioner Dubree said he would like to see feedback from the members on what Ms. Steele said in bringing in a marketing firm in within this fiscal year to get the ball rolling.

Chair Ford asked if they were going to meet for a workshop in two weeks and could they have a list of marketing information. Ms. Steele said she could look at the process and said to Mr. Knowles they would have to do the RFP. Mr. Knowles asked if they had a contract with a marketing firm and Ms. Steele said the marketing firm they had quit.

Commissioner Holt asked who they had with the County now. Ms. Steele said they do a lot of marketing with Media 4 and Sachs Communication. Commissioner Holt said maybe they could get a discount. Commissioner Dubree said Sachs was the marketing firm a long time ago. Commissioner Dowdell asked if the RFP would be for the remaining months and doubted anyone would want to do it for a short time. Ms. Steele said they may could amend and piggy-back "Love Where you Live" campaign till end of the fiscal year.

Commissioner Dubree said the only problem he saw with piggy-backing was it was a short period of time and then you have to re-invent the wheel. He asked what would be the problem with not starting with the marketing firm when the fiscal year started, instead start it in August.

Ms. Steele said she wanted to see them do it and do it right. The biggest problem she saw in the tourism industry was they did not know what they were trying to advertise to come. They have not identified or re-identified their tourist attractions for quite some time. She said the Council could help her in identifying the tourist attractions that will bring visitors and generate bed tax for the hotels.

Chair Ford said before the pandemic, they said they would have a marketing firm come in and help plan.

Ms. Steele said that was a great idea and was needed and necessary to identify and do the plan and would make deliverables easier to obtain. She added that currently they had "Do Something Original" and that was not their marketing for TDC. They were part of VisitFlorida and paid GoDaddy every year for VisitFlorida and "Visit Gadsden" because that was what their website was. She asked if they wanted to do events the summer and put out an application?

Chair Ford said now the question asked if they could do that without a marketing firm? Ms. Steele said yes.

Commissioner Dubree said the primary purpose of the marketing firm was assisting them but was really doing the media buys for bringing everyday travelers into the county more so than the events.

Ms. Steele said when they do the next budget workshop, part of tourism is Pat Thomas Park and it needs new signs. Those are things that are not included in the budget and they may have to amend to put that in. She asked if they wanted to have another budget workshop in 2 weeks and asked about June 7th at 4:30 p.m.

Commissioner Patel asked that all information be emailed before the meeting so they can be better prepared.

It was decided that June 7th would be the budget workshop and the regular meeting would be June 21st. They need to work out a date with Ms. Daniels to work on FY21/22 budget. Ms. Steele will work with the attorney for an RFP for the marketing firm and will also do a press release for the process for special events.

Commissioner Holt said she knew they said to market the everyday travel, but felt they need to include events in there.

Chair Ford asked when marketing, could they market their own hotels to keep people here and not go to Tallahassee?

Commissioner Holt said if a major event, get hotels to hand out brochures.

Ms. Steele said TDC will have a big part to play in the 200-year anniversary for the County.

Commissioner Holt said they have in this area everything that can be included in the 200-year, the red Indian, black Indians, Spanish, English, slavery, everything that everyone would want to come see. That was one thing about the Spanish Trail coming through when its developed, it would come through this area going down U.S. 90, the Arsenal, and some of the fights were in this area and people would come to see.

Chair Ford said one thing they could look at, they were known for family reunions and they could set up in different parks and have big contests to bring as many people into the County as can. She said they need to identify who they are.

Ms. Steele said they were having an identity crisis and the hope was the firm could identify and help develop a plan and implement it.

Chair Ford said they need to tell the firm what they want and they need to train then in how marketing was done.

Commissioner Dubree said one marketing firm they used way back when Ron Sachs was hired, the first thing they did was have a branding workshop and orchestrated it all. TDC members were there along with different people from the community and all kinds of questions were asked. They were looking for the identity.

Ms. Steele told Ms. Robinson (Gadsden Arts Center) she would have more information for her and she would be able to speak at the next budget workshop.

Ms. Steele said one other thing they could to consider, if staying in Gadsden County, show the room key and might could get a discount or some type of gift. She also spoke with the Asst. Administrator, she is a baseball Mom, and when they had tournaments, they had to stay in the hotel that was sponsored with the tournament. Chair Ford said they may could associate with the fishing tournament. They need to figure out their niche.

Ms. Steele said they will come back in two weeks with their assignment and asked they start thinking about events that would work for TDC and what they can start doing for the two-hundred-year birthday.

Commissioner Holt said to google the Red Indians, black Indians, the Spanish, English and slavery and will be able to pull the groups together and would be good for their celebration.

Ms. Steele said they will take note and will bring back.

b. 2021-2022 Financial Outlook

Summary Highlight

- i. Revenue/Expenditures
- ii. Fund Balance
- iii. Tourist Development Grant/Special Events Funding
- iv. Marketing Firm

4. Next Scheduled Meetings

Monday, June 21, 2021
Monday, July 19, 2021
Monday, August 16, 2021

MOTION TO ADJOURN

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THE COUNCIL, THE WORKSHOP WAS DECLARED ADJOURNED AT 5:31 P.M.

GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

CAROLYN FORD, Chair
Tourist Development Council

ATTEST:

NICHOLAS THOMAS, Clerk