

Memo

To: Hernando County Board of County Commissioners
From: Tammy J. Heon
cc: Jeff Rogers, County Administrator
Date: 3/6/2023
Re: Tourism Projects for BOCC Approval

At the January 26, 2023, meeting of the Tourist Development Council (TDC), the Council voted to approve additional spending in FY 2023 to fund several key initiatives. These initiatives are items that will greatly benefit the County's tourism marketing efforts and/or improve the visitor experience. Having budgeted very conservatively during the pandemic, while enjoying two record years of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections, the department has a sizeable reserve that will allow for these expenditures.

Monument Signs

The highest priority item is monument signage to be located at the key entry points for the County. Having created the brand Florida's Adventure Coast, Brooksville-Weeki Wachee several years ago, it is time we installed proper signage so that visitors know when they've arrived. Staff and the TDC would like to place signs on SR-50 westbound, S-41 north and southbound and US-19 north and southbound, US-98 and at the I-75 exit 301. Initial quotes show the signs will cost approximately \$20,000 each; the TDC has approved spending of \$139,552 for the signs. The County's DPW will assist with locations and right-of-way details. The project will go out to bid to ensure the best pricing for the signs and installation.

Digital Technology and Tools

As technology continues to blur the lines between marketing and advertising, having the appropriate tools available to service the customer when and where they want is more important than ever, particularly online and across all platforms. AI powered chatbots are the answer. With all the content on floridasadventurecoast.com digitized and indexed, an AI powered chatbot will provide responses to a potential visitor's inquiry, pulling the content directly from our website. In addition, it serves up the responses in such a way as to drive the visitor further into the web site where they will discover more. The TDC has approved up to \$28,000 for an AI powered chatbot for floridasadventurecoast.com.

A digital passport will allow the Visitors Bureau to both gamify The Mermaid Tale Trail, offering points and prizes for check-ins and photo posts. The passport will be available on FloridasAdventureCoast.com at no charge. Visitors will sign up for the passport, providing their first-party data which will allow for additional communications and marketing initiatives. Additionally, the digital passport can be programmed to sell specific packages and will be critical to maximizing our efforts with Visit Florida to develop and market Adventure Travel within Florida. The TDC approved \$17,000 for the purchase and installation of a digital passport program.

FloridasAdventureCoast.com

Staff has identified additional areas development on floridasadventurecoast.com. Content needs include expanded media/press pages, including forms for vetting press and influencers requesting FAM Tours; a partner portal where we can provide training, information on grant funding and co-op advertising programs, and any research completed on behalf of the destination.

In addition, having secured the URL “DestinationMermaids.com” staff would like to build a microsite that will direct visitors to each of the opportunities to view mermaids, whether the live shows at Weeki Wachee Springs State Park or one of the Mermaid Trails.

The TDC voted to approve \$20,000 for additional website development.

Main Street Lighting

The TDC is working with Brooksville Main Street to provide year-round decorative lighting around the courthouse and Main Street area. Most successful downtown areas have found creative ways to illuminate their streets and public venues to improve safety, visibility, and the aesthetics of the downtown area, improving wayfinding and creating safe spaces for interaction and engagement. The TDC has approved up to \$10,000 for the project, with a requirement that funding, and expenses are to be shared by Brooksville Main Street and/or the city and the business community. Research is underway to find the most appropriate long-term solution for lighting.

Media Outreach

Staff would like to add media marketplace events to the public relations efforts of the department to generate more earned media. With the number of journalists and influencers that serve the travel space, a media meet-up is an extremely effective way of reaching many of them at one time. The Southeast Tourism Society’s (STS) event will include 50 journalists, all vetted and approved by STS. Each will visit our booth, see a video, hear our top stories, and leave with ideas and inspiration to develop a story or feature on Florida’s Adventure Coast. Staff has requested \$3,000 for this media meetup.

International Marketing

Post pandemic, international visitation to the US is again on the rise. During the pandemic, Miles Media (the official marketing and media partner for Brand USA), built an online Global Media Marketplace which functions like a digital trade show. Having a profile in the Marketplace will provide us with access to the travel trade, specialty training sessions and the international travel media. We will provide the materials and Miles will build our online portal, allowing us to reach out to international markets and provide our information to them. Staff feels this is an affordable way to begin reaching out to the international market; \$3,500 is requested.

In addition, the Global Media Marketplace, the TDC has approved, social media campaigns for the UK and Germany, two of our top international markets. The TDC approved up to \$17,000 for social media campaigns targeting these countries.