

# Walton County Tourist Development Council Guidelines

## WALTON COUNTY TOURISM MISSION

The mission of the Walton County Tourism Department is to direct and manage activities that will strengthen the position of Walton County in the tourism marketplace, while also increasing the tourism economy of Walton County. The tourism department will manage and maintain our beaches as a primary attraction and serve as a responsible industry organization to take a leadership role in addressing issues that affect tourism and the quality of life in Walton County.

## CURRENT STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS AND STRUCTURE

Pursuant to Florida Statutes, the Tourist Development Council is to be comprised of nine (9) members appointed by the Walton County Board of County Commissioners (BCC), with the following requirements:

- A member of the BCC as designated by the Chairperson of the BCC;
- Two elected municipal officials, at least one of whom is from the most populous municipality in Walton County or sub-county special taxing district where the tax is levied;
- Six individuals who are involved in the tourism industry and who have demonstrated an interest in tourism development;
- Not less than three, nor more than four, shall be owners or operators of motels, hotels, recreational vehicle parks, or other tourism accommodations in Walton County that are subject to the tax;
- Not less than two, nor more than three, shall be individuals who are involved in the tourism industry and who have demonstrated an interest\* in tourism development, but do not own or operate motels, hotels, recreational vehicle parks, or other tourism accommodations in Walton County that are subject to the tax;  
\*Interest is defined as tourism-related business representatives in ownership, managerial-level positions in restaurants, retail, attractions, and destination marketing businesses.
- All members must be electors (registered voters) of Walton County, Florida. Terms shall be staggered of four (4) years each, with the exception of the BCC appointed seat.

Approved by WCBCC – 9/27/22

## SELECTION PROCESS

Pursuant to the criteria enumerated in Section 125.0104(4)(e), Florida Statutes and the policies of the BCC, the BCC shall appoint qualified members to serve on the Council of which three members shall be elected officials (one member from the BCC and two elected municipal officials). The remaining six members shall be qualified individuals from the tourism industry. The following is a recommended selection process for the six non-elected seats:

- Upon BCC approval of the process, notice shall be posted on the County’s website seeking qualified individuals interested in serving on the Council (seats 4-9) who meet the following criteria:
  - Registered voter in Walton County; and
  - Has not previously served on the Council for two full terms (8 years); and
  - Is either:
    - An owner or operator of a motel, hotel, recreational vehicle park, or other tourism accommodation in Walton County that collects or remits the tourist development tax; or
    - An individual that is involved in the tourism industry and who has demonstrated an interest in tourism development, but does not own or operate a motel, hotel, recreational vehicle park or other tourism accommodation in Walton County that collects or remits the tourist development tax.
- Individuals meeting the above requirements who are interested in serving on the Council shall submit a resume and completed application (“Application Package”) to the Tourism Department Director no later than 4 p.m. on the last day of application period.
- The BCC shall appoint a selection committee to review the Application Packages.
  - The selection committee shall consist of one member from County Administration, the Tourism Director and one additional member appointed by the BCC.
  - The selection committee shall be subject to Chapters 119 and 286 of Florida Statutes. Selection committee meetings shall be duly noticed, open to the public and minutes of the meeting shall be taken.
  - The selection committee shall meet on or about the second week of November, to review the Application Packages to ensure professional backgrounds correspond to the requirements and allocation of council positions and recommend appointment of Council Members (see “TDC Membership and Terms” below).

- The selection committee shall attempt to balance the geographic dispersion of its recommended slate of Council members to ensure all areas of the County are sufficiently represented on the Council.
- The selection committee's recommendations will be presented to the BCC for final approval at the second BCC meeting of November.

#### TDC MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS

- **Seat 1** - The member of the BCC selected by the Chair of the BCC who shall serve annual terms; with the ability to subsequent reappointments by the Chair of the BCC.
- **Seat 2** - An elected municipal official, at least one of whom shall be from the most populous municipality in the county; with said person to be nominated by their respective Board for the BCC to appoint. In the event a municipality should be created or come to exist in the sub-county taxing district (the area of Walton County South of the Choctawhatchee Bay), this seat shall automatically be designated to go to an elected official of the most populous municipality therein, to be nominated by the governing board of that municipality for the BCC to determine appointment. Appointments shall be for four (4) year terms. Elected officials are not subject to term limits.
- **Seat 3** - An elected municipal official, at least one of whom shall be from the most populous municipality in the county; with said person to be nominated by their respective Board for the BCC to appoint. In the event a municipality should be created or come to exist in the sub-county taxing district (the area of Walton County South of the Choctawhatchee Bay) this seat shall automatically be designated to go to an elected official of the most populous municipality therein, to be nominated by the governing board of that municipality for the BCC to determine appointment. Appointments shall be for four (4) year terms. Elected officials are not subject to term limits.
- **Seat 4** - A person who is involved in the tourism industry, has demonstrated an interest in tourism development, and is the owner or operator of a tourist accommodation(s) in Walton County that is subject to the Tourist Development Tax. This term shall serve through December 2026; and subsequent appointments shall be for four (4) year terms commencing thereafter.
- **Seat 5** - A person who is involved in the tourism industry, has demonstrated an interest in tourism development, and is the owner or operator of a tourist accommodation(s) in Walton County that is subject to the Tourist Development Tax. This term shall serve through

December 2028; and subsequent appointments shall be for four (4) year terms commencing thereafter.

- **Seat 6** - A person who is involved in the tourism industry, has demonstrated an interest in tourism development, and is the owner or operator of a tourist accommodation(s) in Walton County that is subject to the Tourist Development Tax. This term shall serve through December 2028; and subsequent appointments shall be for four (4) year terms commencing thereafter.
- **Seat 7** - A person who is involved in the tourism industry and has demonstrated an interest in tourism development but is not the owner or operator of a tourist accommodation(s) in Walton County that is subject to the Tourist Development Tax. Tourism Preference shall be given to applicants who are actively engaged in a tourism-related industry by evidence of the ownership or operation of a business within Walton County that serves tourists. This term shall serve through December 2026; and subsequent appointments shall be for four (4) year terms commencing thereafter.
- **Seat 8** - A person who is involved in the tourism industry and has demonstrated an interest in tourism development but is not the owner or operator of a tourist accommodation(s) in Walton County that is subject to the Tourist Development Tax. Tourism Preference shall be given to applicants who are actively engaged in a tourism-related industry by evidence of the ownership or operation of a business within Walton County that serves tourists. This term shall serve through December 2026; and subsequent appointments shall be for four (4) year terms commencing thereafter.
- **Seat 9** - A person who is involved in the tourism industry and has demonstrated an interest in tourism development. This person may be the owner or operator of a tourist accommodation(s) in Walton County that is subject to the Tourist Development Tax; engaged in a tourism related industry, or both. To the extent that multiple seats are vacant and due for appointment at the time this seat is likewise vacant and due for appointment, the BCC shall endeavor to fill Seats 1 through 8 in accordance with the applicable terms first, and then may, at its discretion, consider the appointment of the most qualified applicant not chosen for appointment to one of those seats for appointment to this seat. The intent hereof is to allow the BCC flexibility to appoint the most qualified person who has applied for a seat on the TDC, regardless of whether they qualify as an Owner/Operator or not. This term shall serve through December 2028; and subsequent appointments shall be for four (4) year terms commencing thereafter.

## STRUCTURE FOR TDC MEETINGS AND BOARD GOVERNANCE

- Meetings to be held every two months, or as requested by the Tourism Director or the BCC.
- The Chair of the Council will be appointed by the BCC.
- If an individual holds seat 1, 2 or 3 and for any reason is no longer an elected official, they no longer qualify for appointment and are therefore automatically removed from the Council. The process of replacing this member will begin immediately upon determining that seat will be vacated.
- If any Council Member has a change in employment, position, or business they are required to notify the Tourism Director and BCC immediately for evaluation of whether they can retain their seat.
- If any Council Member relocates outside of Walton County, they are required to notify the Tourism Director and BCC immediately for evaluation of whether they can retain their seat.
- The TDC, its Members, and all activities of the Council are required to comply with the Florida Sunshine Law. All appointed Council Members will receive annual detailed information and instruction regarding operating by the Sunshine Law.
- All Council Members are required to attend a Council Member orientation and training on BCC/TDC policies before they can take their seat.
- The Council and Tourism Department Staff will meet in the spring of each year to review the goals of the strategic plan and create new goals/budget for the next fiscal year.
- All Council meetings will be recorded, and minutes taken.

## COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

It is with the help of community-minded people that the Walton County Tourism Department has been successful in its role as the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) of Walton County.

Council members must act with the best interest of tourism success in Walton County and uphold the direction of the statute as his/her sole charge. This includes oversight of expenditures to ensure they are in line with the statute.

The Council shall continuously review expenditures of revenues from the tourist development trust fund and shall receive, at least quarterly, expenditure reports from the BCC or its designee. Expenditures which the Council believes to be unauthorized shall be reported to the BCC and the Department of Revenue. The BCC and the department shall review the findings of the council and take appropriate administrative or judicial action to ensure compliance with this section.

Outlined below are some of the responsibilities that come with the title of Council Member:

#### COUNCIL SPECIFIC DUTIES

- Support and give input into the performance of the Tourism Director.
- Approve and monitor financial statements of the TDC.
- Attend the Bi-Monthly Council meetings and one annual planning session.
- Council members are encouraged to participate in community meetings

#### AMBASSADOR OF GOODWILL

Council members are regularly asked to attend openings, ribbon cuttings, participate in community events and spread goodwill in the name of the TDC. Council members should always be an Ambassador of Goodwill on behalf of the TDC.

#### PUBLIC AND MEDIA RELATIONS

The Council will adopt a communications policy that will direct all press responses and outreach to the Council Chair and Tourism Director. This will ensure there is a consistent and proactive message for the media. Council members will not speak on behalf of the Council without express permission from the Council or the Tourism Director. This does not preclude a council member speaking to the media or in a public hearing as a member of the community.

When speaking to the public and the media, members of the TDC shall not represent their personal view as the view of the TDC. While all members may express individual opinions on action that has been taken by the TDC, any member doing so should clearly qualify that statement as an opinion, and therefore not necessarily reflective of the views of the TDC or the Walton County BCC.

#### ATTENDANCE AT COUNCIL MEETINGS

Council members are expected to attend all council meetings including strategic planning sessions, and council members shall also make every effort to attend the annual meeting and any TDC workshops. Members are required to attend 85% of the scheduled meetings (emergencies or illness will not be counted as absences) or it will be grounds for removal. Meetings are public meetings and are publicly noticed with minutes recorded. The Council must have a quorum (a majority of the Council) present at a properly scheduled meeting for official action (a vote) to be taken. Lack of a quorum will result in no action being taken.