



**SARASOTA COUNTY SPORTS COMMISSION
Minutes of January 18, 2012 Meeting**

Present: Patrick Calhoon, Lucy Nicandri, Brent Alexander, Suzanne Anderson, Joseph DiPuma, Richard Dorfman, Dr. Joanne Fava, David Pierce, Brad Robbins, Spencer Sobczak, Robert Whitford, Jim Wormley, Ed Wyatt

Excused Absence: Rob Butcher, Timothy Mulqueen, Ben Pinegar, Shauna Ruby, Laura Williams.

Unexcused Absence: John McCarthy.

Staff in attendance: Jason Puckett, Deborah Ericson, Stephanie Grosskreutz, Janis Holland

Public in attendance: David Brenner, Commissioner of Town of Longboat Key and TDC member.

Chairman Pat Calhoon called the meeting to order and introduced himself. He then invited other committee members to introduce themselves and describe their connections to sports. It was noted that this committee and the SCVB voluntarily complies with the Sunshine Laws and Public Records Laws.

Jason Puckett, Director of Sports, presented the Minutes of the previous committee meeting held on August 22nd to the committee for correction or amendment. The minutes were from the first committee meeting and were sent to attendees via email. There were no corrections offered by committee members. An email was sent to the committee members on October 31st through our database software regarding approval of sponsorship of the USSSA event for November 18-20, 2011. Mr. Puckett presented an accounting of electronic votes on this sponsorship, resulting in 11 votes in favor, 0 not in favor, 4 abstentions and 5 non-responses.

Jason Puckett gave an update of current events, noting that nine have been cancelled (as listed on the Events Summary). Upcoming events include: Sarasota Half Marathon, Sarasota Baseball Classic, Sarasota Open, Southeast Regional Rowing Championships, ASA State Qualifier, and Offshore Grand Prix, among others. Upcoming site visits include: US Rowing Masters Championships, SRAA Rowing Championships, and USA Triathlon Collegiate Championships.

Future sports events include the Rev3 Triathlon. Revolution 3 Triathlon originally was envisioned for Longboat Key and downtown Sarasota, but because of logistical problems, now is being laid out from Venice to Charlotte County. It is a mile and a half swim, a 56-mile bike ride and a 13.1-mile run. This event requires coordination with and approval by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the U.S. Coast Guard, the Cities of Venice and North Port, and Charlotte County. Over 1,000 participants are expected. The Sports Commission may look to its members to serve on subcommittees to assist with this event, including help with obtaining approvals from these various entities.

There was a discussion of a beach soccer event that could be held at Ed Smith Stadium in early October 2012. It is connected with FIFA, the international governing body for soccer, but is put on by a private company that would require underwriting by the County of any financing shortfall to the extent of approximately \$500,000. Although this event would generate good exposure for Sarasota County, the logistics of having the County involved in the procurement process, the approval process timeline and the insurance requirements will be obstacles to the event. There was a question about why a beach soccer event would not be held on Siesta Beach, and the response is that the beach is not wide enough and there is not sufficient parking there to accommodate participants and spectators. Also, there was a question about number of potential attendees, but we do not have that information. The main obstacle to the event is its request that Sarasota County provide insurance, instead of the event organizer providing it. Ed Smith Stadium has the infrastructure to accommodate the event.

Jason Puckett reviewed the suggested allocations for the remaining approximately \$30,000 in sports sponsorship funds, making the following points:

- IMG (Manatee County-based) is asking for funding for various events but is willing to guarantee a room nights will be booked in Sarasota County for SCVB-sponsored events. The Bradenton Area CVB has realized the benefit of sports sponsorships and is meeting with the SCVB to work out co-sponsorship arrangements to benefit both counties.
- USSSA cannot currently afford to pay its own way at this time and requires sponsorship money, but these events are growing.
- All events generating under 20 room nights were not considered for sponsorship.
- Big Ten Match Play competition asked for \$14,500 for a media buy, but it is a Manatee County-based event and costs well beyond what the SCVB could or would sponsor.
- Snowbird Baseball Classic, although Charlotte County-based, would be satisfied with a \$1,000 sponsorship (although it asked for \$10,000) and will generate 3,000 room nights in Sarasota County, which is a good ROI for a \$1,000 investment.
- The Sarasota Xplosion basketball event takes place at ten different locations and will generate a good quantity of room nights.
- The Miss Sarasota USSSA tournament in Englewood will generate room nights in Venice and surrounding areas, filling a need for south county events.

The Chairman asked the committee for a vote on the sponsorship recommendations totaling \$21,500. Richard Dorfman moved to approve the sponsorship allocations; Spencer Sobczak seconded the motion. Suzanne Anderson abstained from voting. The motion passed.

Next, Jason Puckett asked committee members for their thoughts and comments on the white paper sent to them prior to the meeting. He briefly reviewed the purpose of the white paper – how to increase our market share of sports events – and the findings therein. Niche sports must be pursued, traditional sports must be supported and facilities for them improved, underutilized assets must be enhanced so they will be used more, and emerging sports must be encouraged. Chairman Calhoon said we must encourage our elected leaders to support sports and we must show them the value to the community of sports. The County Parks and Recreation Department needs resources to maintain its facilities. Other comments were:

- educate elected officials about the importance of investment in sports facilities
- venues operated separately from Parks & Recreation
- Parks & Rec staff time is spent putting out fires
- reviewing leasing structures of local leagues

- educate residents with traffic concerns about what the benefits are to them (tax revenue generated, for example)
- halo effect
- county needs to dedicate more resources.
- vocal minority opposition co-opts benefit to majority
- YMCA Aquatic Center is seeking funding for upgraded amenities (no new pool)
- softball is huge
- need of indoor facility
- BMX is staying put
- Legacy Trail is not a good site for a triathlon
- Benderson Park is not only for rowing

Robert Whitford provided a quick update on the status of Nathan Benderson Park, noting that construction of Cattlemen Road and the north pond is concluding and they are ready to expand the lake to 2,000 meters now. It will be ready for the April 2,000 meter event. He added that building out the facility is occurring in layers, allowing for it to be used while construction continues.

Discussion of white paper issues continued with a focus on under-utilized assets, such as the Fairgrounds (under lease for approximately 50 more years), Babe Ruth Fields (needing upgrades and parking), Payne Park (RFQ in progress for additional utilization). Other discussion included a potential Sarasota Sports Festival, and the problem with insufficient hotels and restaurants in Englewood for events there. The white paper will go next to the SCVB Board of Directors, then to the Tourist Development Council, then to Board of County Commissioners. There were suggestions that semi-annual league meetings be held and that the Sports Commission do a presentation to local sports organizations to educate them about sports opportunities and needs.

Next, the committee participated in a SWOT analysis of sports in Sarasota County, with comments as follows:

Strengths

- facilities, figure out the way to have users benefit owners
- beaches, overall destination is family friendly
- hotels, restaurants
- destination generally
- human capital
- potential school board facilities
- weather
- diversity of events
- boutique sports
- demographics – variety of ages and income levels

Weaknesses

- need for more facilities
- existing leases and organizational control of facilities
- over use of fields
- funding for operations and capital funding
- lack of indoor space

- lack of education of public regarding benefit of sports
- negative public perception
- lack of hotel rooms, especially in south county
- communications issues

Opportunities

- master calendar showing facilities and usage (also would illustrate excessive usage)
- communication among organizers
- corporate support
- niche sports, including internationally
- better education
- national sponsors
- accessibility to local government
- partnerships to provide benefits to all

Threats

- competition from other destinations
- state of economy
- lack of new or renovated facilities
- partnership with facilities
- event experience
- customer satisfaction
- lack of community support
- breaking habits
- air lift

Due to lack of time, it was agreed that the agenda item of Sports Commission sub-committees and task forces would be discussed at the next meeting on April 11, 2012. The committee will also discuss the location of current sports facilities and assets, to identify areas of need for future development.

The Chairman called for a motion to adjourn. Suzanne Anderson moved to adjourn the meeting; Dave Pierce seconded the motion. The motion passed by acclamation.