



# Pinellas County

## Staff Report

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File #: 25-1873A, Version: 1

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### **Subject:**

Revision to the Fiscal Year 2026 Elite Event Funding Recommendations from the Tourist Development Council.

### **Recommended Action:**

Approval of the Tourist Development Council's revised recommendation to fund 49 events through the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Elite Event and Destination Enhancement Funding Program (Elite Event Program).

- A total of 49 Elite Events were initially approved, totaling "up to" \$2,685,000.00 in recommended funding based on evaluation and scoring conducted by Convention and Visitors Bureau staff. The approved amount has since been revised to \$2,755,000.00 to reflect administrative actions totaling \$85,000.00.
- We are requesting an amendment to one Elite Event, the MLK Parade, to update the event owner due to a change in organizational leadership. The originally approved \$65,000.00 allocation remains unchanged; however, this amendment incorporates the Tampa Bay Collard Green Festival, a Category 3 event, under the same event umbrella.
- Funding for these recommendations is included in the FY26 Budget for Visit St. Pete Clearwater (Convention and Visitors Bureau Department) within the Tourist Development Tax Fund 1040. Funding for future years is dependent on approval in the annual County Operating Budget.

### **Strategic Priorities:**

Prosperity and Opportunity

3.2 Provide and promote tourism opportunities

### **Summary:**

With Board approval, CVB is requesting an amendment to one Elite Event, the MLK Parade, to update the event owner due to a change in organizational leadership. The originally approved \$65,000 allocation remains unchanged, and the amendment additionally incorporates the Tampa Bay Collard Green Festival, a Category 3 event, under the same event umbrella.

In addition to the amendment for the MLK Parade and Collard Green Festival, several administrative updates are provided for Board awareness:

The event previously listed as "Tide Fest" (\$15,000) was renamed and rescheduled by the organizer, requiring a new application. The updated event, "A Taste of the North," was administratively awarded \$15,000. Additionally, four other events were administratively awarded funding totaling \$70,000, including: Halloween on Central (\$15,000), St. Pete Country Fest (\$25,000), Treasure Island Kite Festival (\$15,000), and Paddy Fest St. Pete (\$15,000).

CVB staff will continue to administer the FY26 Elite Event Program, which provides funding to qualified high-profile and community events that meet the minimum criteria outlined in the Elite Event Program Guidelines.

**Background Information:**

Tourist Development Tax funds may be legally expended for an activity/event if that event has as one of its main purposes the attraction of tourists as evidenced by the promotion of the event to tourists, per Fla. Stat. 125.0104(5)(a)3. In enacting this authorization, Pinellas County’s Tourist Development Plan, Section 118-32 of the Pinellas County Code, authorizes the use of up to \$3,000,000 annually for the marketing of special events and programs, which funding is governed by the Guidelines adopted by the Board on February 25, 2025. Those Guidelines include the following criteria:

Category 1, \$150,000 - \$250,000: Elite Event that meets or exceeds 50,000 unique attendees, 15,000 room nights and 500,000 broadcast views.

Category 2, \$75,000 - \$150,000: Elite Event that meets or exceeds two out of the following three criteria - 50,000 unique attendees, 15,000 room nights, 100,000 broadcast views or planned PR/media coverage valued in excess of \$50,000.

Category 3, \$50,000 - \$75,000: Elite Event that meets or exceeds one out of the following three criteria - 20,000 unique attendees, 7,500 room nights, 500,000 broadcast views or planned PR/media coverage valued in excess of \$100,000.

Category 4, \$25,000 - \$50,000: Elite Event that meets or exceeds one out of the following two criteria - 10,000 unique attendees or 3,000 room nights.

Category 5, up to \$25,000: Destination Enhancement Event that meets or exceeds 5,000 unique attendees.

In accordance with the Guidelines, off cycle events that are evaluated and recommended for Categories 1-4 will be brought before the TDC for review with final approval by the Board. Events recommended for Category 5, Destination Enhancement funding, will be administratively awarded by staff.

On June 25, 2025, during the regular TDC meeting, staff presented the CVB’s recommendation to fund 49 FY26 events for a total of “up to” \$2,685,000 in funding. Additionally, Events applying outside of the application window may be considered if funds are available and may be recommended at VisitSPC’s discretion. Unallocated funds may be used for marketing purposes at VisitSPC’s discretion. Following discussion, the TDC unanimously approved staff’s recommendations.

Total Category 1 Elite Events: \$500,000  
Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg - \$250,000  
Valspar Championship - \$250,000

Total Category 2 Elite Events: \$675,000  
The ANNIKA Driven by Gainbridge at Pelican - \$150,000  
St. Pete Pride - \$150,000  
The St. Pete Powerboat Grand Prix - \$125,000

The Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival - \$125,000  
2026 Clearwater Offshore Nationals - \$125,000

Total Category 3 Elite Events: \$840,000  
Clearwater Jazz Festival - \$75,000  
Sanding Ovations, The Gallery of Sand - \$75,000  
World Champions Cup - \$75,000  
ReliaQuest Bowl Clearwater Beach Day - \$75,000  
Dunedin Highland Games & Festival - \$75,000  
St. Pete Bike Fest - \$75,000  
Reggae Rise Up 2026 - \$75,000  
Clearwater Sea-Blues Festival - \$65,000  
St. Pete Run Fest - \$65,000  
MLK Dream Parade - \$65,000 --- Now includes the Tampa Bay Collard Green Festival  
Festivals of Speed - \$65,000  
Tampa Bay Blues Festival - \$55,000

Total Category 4 Elite Events: \$300,000  
John's Pass Seafood Festival - \$50,000  
Savor St. Pete - \$50,000  
33rd Annual Spring King of the Beach - \$50,000  
NYE at the Pier - \$40,000  
Tampa Bay Barbeque Festival - \$40,000  
St. Pete Tacos & Tequila Festival - \$40,000  
Dunedin Mardi Gras - \$30,000

Total Category 5 Destination Enhancement Events: \$345,000  
32nd Annual Fall King of the Beach - \$25,000  
Holiday Lights in the Gardens - \$25,000  
American Stage "Into the Woods" the Musical in the Park 2026 - \$25,000  
OCC Invitational Bike Show - \$25,000  
SHINE St. Petersburg Mural Festival (contingent on receiving mural rights) - \$25,000  
St. Petersburg Distance Classic - \$25,000  
Winter Pride Saint Pete - \$25,000  
Multiple Events (Tampa Bay Brewers Alliance) - \$20,000  
SALSA at the District - \$20,000  
Dunedin Celtic Music Festival - \$20,000  
LOCALTOPIA, "A Community Celebration of All Things Local" - \$20,000  
Merry Beach Market & Holiday Festival - \$15,000  
Dunedin Pride Week - \$15,000  
Tampa Bay Empanada Festival - \$15,000  
Tide Fest - \$15,000  
Palm Harbor Festival - \$15,000  
Clearwater AquaX Grand Prix - \$15,000

1 Event Bundle for 6 events at the St. Pete Pier: \$25,000  
St. Pete Pier Fall Festival and Pumpkin Patch  
Piertoberfest

Tampa Bay Ice Cream Festival  
St. Pete Spring Festival & Easter Egg Hunt  
Paws on Parade  
Putt The Pier Holiday Edition

**Fiscal Impact:**

The allocated amount for the FY26 Elite and Destination Enhancement Events is \$2,755,000, which includes administrative actions previously approved. This amendment does not change the total allocation. It only expands the eligible use of the existing \$65,000 for the MLK Parade to also include the Tampa Bay Collard Green Festival, with no additional funding required.

Funding for these recommendations is included in the FY26 Budget for Visit St. Pete Clearwater (Convention and Visitors Bureau Department) within the Tourist Development Tax Fund 1040. Funding for future years is dependent on approval in the annual County Operating Budget.

**Staff Member Responsible:**

Brian Lowack, Director, Convention and Visitors Bureau

**Partners:**

Tourist Development Council

**Attachments:**

Elite Event and Destination Enhancement Funding Program Guidelines