



Walton County Democratic Party
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Ray Padgett, Chairman

What role do you feel the Tourist Development Council should play in regards to beach management, safety, maintenance and parks and do you feel that should be its sole focus? Do you feel the proceeds of the bed tax should be used to promote all of Walton County or primarily the beach area? Do you see a time when the TDC will have outlived the benefits it brings to the area?

The Walton County Tourist Development Council (TDC) has helped create and focus the image of Beaches of South Walton as an exclusive, high-end, family oriented group of communities along our coastline that feature the nation's best beaches, cultural events, fine dining and world class shopping. TDC staff polishes this image daily by cleaning the beach, building and maintaining walkovers, picnic areas and restrooms, and planting and restoring beach areas damaged by storms. All twenty-six miles of our beaches are awarded the Blue Wave Certification, America's first environmental certification for beaches. The TDC marketing message presents this picture to targeted vacationers across the country.

The TDC was established by referendum in 1986 and is governed under Florida State Statutes for tourist development tax. The TDC is composed of ten members with a staff of twenty-nine headed by Executive Director Kriss Titus. The Executive Director reports directly to the Walton County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) and the ten-member council acts as advisors to the staff and the BCC. Staff salaries, marketing and advertising, and beach maintenance and restoration are completely funded by the 4% bed tax imposed on all Walton County lodging units located south of Choctawhatchee Bay. The TDC 2003/2004 fiscal year budget is over \$14.5 million and is totally funded by visitors to south Walton. County ordinance, approved by the BCC, restricts the expenditure of this money to the taxing district in which it was raised – that part of the county south of the bay.

Because of the natural beauty of our beaches, family oriented community developments, and well-planned, sophisticated marketing, the growth and property values of south Walton County have skyrocketed. Nothing highlights the success of these efforts more than a comparison of Average Daily Rates between our county and neighboring counties. Walton County rental rates for 2003 were \$184 per night compared to less than ½ this rate for our neighboring counties.

The Walton County Democratic Party agrees with the establishment and function of the Walton County Tourist Development Council and believes it should be continued. They present a consistent, high-quality image of our beaches and provide daily maintenance and development to ensure that our beaches match this image of a world-class destination. We commend them on their success.

It is our understanding that the BCC is reviewing a possible change to the county ordinance restricting use of the bed tax funds to the taxing district itself. This review is intended to determine the possibility of using some small part of this money on promotion and community development in north Walton County. The entire county provides the infrastructure required to support our world class and ever increasing tourist industry. Our county provides roads, garbage collection, security, medical services and water needed for the on-going health and success of our beachfront industry. But most importantly, a large part of the 7,000 plus workers in our tourist trade live in north Walton County. The success of the TDC would not be possible without their dedication and effort.

We recommend the BCC modify the ordinance to allow expenditure of some part of the TDC budget in north Walton County. Further we believe the TDC should establish ties with community center boards of directors and volunteer fire departments in north Walton to obtain input and direction on promoting each community in a manner consistent with the overall promotion of our County. We believe such efforts will not only help improve north Walton communities but will also help tie our county together as one county made up of many diverse and interesting communities. All citizens and businesses will benefit from promoting our common interest so that we take pride in all of Walton county and still maintain our appreciation for the beauty and economic strength of our beaches.