



**Thursday, March 19, 2026**

**MINUTES: Meeting of the Board of Directors**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 1:02pm by Chair Cinde Cassidy. The Catalina Island Tourism Authority (CITA) meeting was held in the Founders Room of US Bank with in-person attendance.

**DIRECTORS PRESENT (19)**

Cassidy, Alkibay, Fornasiere, Bombard, Allen, Beach, Bergman, Bradley, Flathers, Garcia, Hohenstein, Ledebur, Leyva, Maistros, Rusack, Say, Skelton, Upton, Welham

**DIRECTORS ABSENT (0)**

**STAFF PRESENT (6)**

Luttjohann, Miller, Warner, Johnson, Hubert, Cook

**GUESTS (3) remote guest in *italic***

Heather Milburn, Tyler Wilson, *Lance Ware*

**PRESENTATION**

Lance Ware gave an update on AVX Networks Undersea Fiber Project. Ware thanked Love Catalina Board for the \$100K contribution and is moving to the next step. Leyva entered the meeting at 1:06pm. Catalina Island deserves better broadband as it affects tourism, healthcare, 911 and emergency services, business and commerce, and education. The cable route map showed adjusted route lines with a proposed landing site of Empire Landing and the exact Avalon landing site to be determined. Route lines were adjusted to avoid movement and obstacles. There has been real progress and momentum with a CPUC grant and the mainland landing site locked in place. The desktop study will be completed this month and a conversation with Catalina Island Company (CICo) is ongoing. The survey vessel, R/V Bold Explorer will map the final cable route in April/May 2026. Easement permits are expected to be issued in 2026-27 with cable going in the water, 2028. Ware is happy to be this far along. Cassidy asked about the map topography and Ware said the sub-sea topography has areas to avoid. Ledebur wondered what the on-island lines would look like. Ware stated they will most likely be aerial but underground will be used where possible. Bombard noticed the new map avoids Two Harbors as a landing site. Ware explained it is due to the many marine protected areas around the Isthmus. Cassidy said Ware will return for a quarterly update in May or June.

**BOARD CHAIR REMARKS**

Cassidy asked Rusack to share about himself and the CICo. Rusack said he is president/CEO for CICo and has been full time with the company since 2022. He worked as a zipline guide in 2010. The newly remodeled Pavilion Hotel reopens today. He believes the upcoming season will be good. On his own time, he likes to ride his bike in the interior and often spearfishes with his brothers.

Cassidy had Upton showcase her business, WetSpot Rentals. Upton said she was born in Brazil and moved to the island in 2014. She began working for Catalina Parasail and helped develop the brand. She and her husband bought WetSpot Rentals from his parents. The business often partners with Bleu World on volunteer community clean ups and is adding night snorkeling to their offerings. She works on the side to help other businesses with digital marketing. Upton is a mom with two kids and will represent Women's Forum at tonight's Mixer.

## **APPROVAL OF CONSENT ITEMS**

The minutes from February 26, 2026 Board meeting were presented for approval.

Motion for approval Upton, second Garcia; passed with abstentions by Flathers, Say, Rusack

## **DISCUSSION & POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS**

Policy 2.3.1 Annual Planning Cycle (Governance Committee)—Cassidy explained that each year in March the work plan cycle closes. She said new board member orientation is planned for June. Board training on the Brown Act is anticipated in conjunction with City of Avalon (COA). Maistros said a joint meeting with the CITA Board and COA Council is possible.

Policy 2.9.2 Board Recruitment—Cassidy encouraged thought on which type of businesses are needed for board representation. The nomination process should start now to find those with interest. Luttjohann mentioned, Bradley's term is coming to an end, Flathers, Alkibay and Garcia are eligible for a second term if they are willing. Bombard is eligible for another year as she became past chair with the departure of Stevenson. Cassidy is looking for nominations and Luttjohann said they must vote by the June meeting. Cassidy would like to move voting to the May meeting as June is too close to the installation in July. Luttjohann will send to the entire membership seeking interested individuals. Cassidy reminded the Board that if any business segment is underserved, please let Luttjohann know. Bradley read from policy 2.9 that was revised in October, "at the June Board meeting, the Board shall vote for officers to serve for the coming fiscal year." Cassidy requested the process begin and voting be held at the June meeting.

Audit & Financial Oversight Committee Update—Alkibay stated that outlined in Policy 2.10.3 the budget priorities are established for the next fiscal year at the March meeting for items on the 2.10.2 list. These policies are included in the Board packet. Luttjohann said the Board retreat can be held on alternate years and wanted discussion if one is desired in 26-27 fiscal year. Alkibay said it seems they would not do another until the 27-28 fiscal year. Cassidy requested the dress code for the upcoming Board retreat at Two Harbors. Hubert said to take into consideration the transportation there and back is aboard the Cyclone, a walk around the facility is part of the itinerary, no hikes are planned, and a jacket might be good for the boat ride. Luttjohann moved on to the Marketing Conference stating that it seems attendees wanted longer sessions. Miller gave cost estimates for 2026 with different scenarios including a cruise or a mainland competitor. Feedback she received was to continue this annual event in November with a longer day and include more content. She said that November 16-20 the Ovation of the Seas would cost \$850 per person and pricing might be negotiated with the Royal Caribbean. CITA would pay \$15K for staff and speakers. Another option was a meeting day on the day the ship calls on Catalina Island. This allows those unable to travel to participate for a portion of the conference and if speakers were not on the ship, that could lower costs. Carnival can be researched for availability and pricing. The Long Beach Breakers location could be a day trip with travel on the 7:50am and 5:50pm boats from and to Avalon. Their average room rate is \$300 plus \$175 to meet cost of speakers. Last year CITA paid \$9.7K but the room was donated and staff were here which kept the price down. Miller feels it is time to do something different and see what is offered for the price at competing destinations or aboard cruise ships. Alkibay asked what is gained by an off-island location. Luttjohann said it gives a perspective of what competing destinations offer for the cost. Say said members with businesses OT might find it easier to participate. Hohenstein recalled the good turnout at Terranea before COVID. Cassidy asked for a show of hands for those in favor of a change, away from Avalon and able to really focus. Miller stressed it is good to know your competition, reminding that some comment on Avalon's expensive prices. This provides an opportunity to see what is given for the cost. Hohenstein likes that a cruise allows one day of meetings and three days of fun. Alkibay left the meeting at 1:41. Skelton said that some can't go for four days and Beach agreed. Garcia would like to know the possibility of a day onboard a cruise ship for the conference and the ability to see how shore excursions are sold on the ship. Luttjohann said it might be possible as a stand-alone meeting or if some travel on the ship but he must earmark for the budget. Say listed other destinations like San Diego, Dana Point, Carlsbad, Laguna, or Coronado Island. Alkibay came back into the meeting at 1:45. Luttjohann will allocate \$10-12K to the budget for the conference.

The next Visit California Outlook conference is in Monterey and, in an effort to get better Board participation, Luttjohann is asking if CITA should pay the \$900 registration, but not hotel and transportation, for a few to attend. In the past, Board members have paid their own way. Bombard informed the Board that Visit California is better marketing wise and CalTravel is more advocacy. Alkibay is in favor of paying to get more there and Beach asked about the role of attendees. Luttjohann said it is educational with social moments when a group carves out time for a side bar. Fornasiere

added that these conferences are eye-opening with topics like how to relate to your target audience, and trends of the industry. Say said they offer tools to market your own business. Bombard attended the recent conference which had so much information on AI that a half a day was committed to it. Another topic was why people from other countries do and don't travel. Luttjohann said the money CITA budgets to spend for this could also stipulate that it is only for up to a certain number of people, only the Governance Committee, or only the first five that sign up. Hohenstein requested dates to get hotel rates from her properties in Monterey. Cassidy suggested an earmark of \$4.5K and depends upon how many go with each getting a percentage of the total. Say said it might be possible to register and CITA pay 50%. Alkibay agreed to shoot for \$4.5K.

Luttjohann said that New Board Orientation is generally done in-house. He asked for discussion if additional training should be provided. Cassidy believes the current system is working and Luttjohann should continue.

Luttjohann reminded that McGinty, Knudtson & Associates LLP was authorized to perform the annual Audit for three years at the last meeting. He asked if anything else should be added to the budget. Cassidy said the Board had varied interest and another meeting might be the place to discuss the budget. Alkibay said a smaller group makes it easier to discuss.

Luttjohann feels a visitor profile study is long overdue. The cost could be \$50K for a full-year study. He mentioned a possibility that stakeholders be asked to partner to lower the spend. Fornasiere said the last one was 2016-17 and that 2020 was planned but scrubbed due to COVID. Luttjohann believes new technology will be helpful. Maistros left the meeting at 2:01pm. Luttjohann asked for discussion on how to acquire more funds. Fornasiere suggested grants. Cassidy asked if it can come from TOT funds because a survey would help the entire business community. Say feels it ties in with TOT funds. Cassidy agreed it is marketing and supports an earmark in the budget.

Luttjohann said tech software is another on the list for discussion. A suggestion from the Board was to seek a proposal from Board Effect. At 2:04pm Maistros returned to the meeting. Fornasiere said that CI Health just changed to ZECK. Hohenstein said for those not IT savvy, ZECK is better and cheaper. Luttjohann will look into ZECK and come back for approval after the cost is known.

**Policy 3.3 Financial Condition & Activities**—Alkibay said the mid-year budget adjustments presented at the last meeting require approval. The budget adjustments were included in both February and March Board packets.

Motion for approval Hohenstein, second Fornasiere; passed with abstentions by Flathers, Say, Rusack

Alkibay presented Kind Traveler membership for approval. The sponsorship options are listed in the Board packet along with the impacts. Alkibay called for a motion on a single year or the two-year plan. Luttjohann explained funds make Catalina Island a partner destination and Kind Traveler is now global. Every adventure gives back is one program and The Avalon Hotel donates a portion of every stay to the Marine Mammal program. WetSpot, Scuba by Design and Compass Tours are also current participants with Courtyard Suites working on a contract. Say asked which organizations on the island benefit from the funds. Luttjohann said currently Bleu World and Marine Mammal, with Care for Catalina looking into becoming a beneficiary. Skelton wanted clarification if CITA membership allows businesses to join the program. Beach feels people love to give back and it doesn't mean a working vacation but giving back while experiencing adventures. Garcia wonders if local businesses benefit. Upton said conscious travelers look and call to book. Hohenstein reminded that for hotels the fee is added to each guest, not just guests interested in giving back and that is why her hotel does not participate. Luttjohann feels membership is worth \$12K in PR value alone. The discussion continued and Cassidy requested it be tabled until the next meeting.

**Internal Monitoring Reports**—Luttjohann introduced Policy 1.3, Public Policy and hearing no discussion advanced to Policy 3.4 Asset Protection. He feels a need to increase insurance coverage for budget compliance.

Motion to accept Policy 3.4 report and add protection to insurance policy by Say and second Bradley; passed unanimously

**Marketing & PR Report**—Miller announced foot traffic reporting indicates 3,486 on-island visits are from those exposed to media in February and visited through March 8. The look back window for January has concluded but the February window continues as this reporting is only eight days in. The CastAway campaign continues and to date has generated 16,256 island visits. Beach left the meeting at 2:28pm. Miller said our online AI assistant is picking up momentum with 108 inquiries since launching on December 1. She went over the top 10 most common questions saying key takeaways show interest is for upcoming events, where to stay, how to get around, and activity pricing. 805 Living Magazine is a

high-end regional publication targeting those with an average income of \$195K. 6,500 CITA Visitor Guides were polybagged and mailed with the publication to their subscribers in March.

Miller attended the Visit California conference and found that CITA is ahead of many of our competitors with utilizing AI and that includes larger resort areas. She also feels the website should be refreshed as it was last done four years ago. Tech changes daily and CITA must stay ahead. Beach said that Reddit is valuable and Chat GPT goes to reviews for its information. Miller asked AI for recommendations on the Marketing Conference locations; recommended were Catalina Island, then Breakers then a cruise. She will report back on Reddit.

Warner stated she is working trade shows; March 7-8 the Long Beach show was very busy. She heads to the Bay Area tomorrow for the March 21-22 show. Catalina Express has been a partner at all three, this opportunity is open to other businesses. Warner said the Visitor Guides were mailed with 805 Living Magazine, sent to hotels, yacht clubs, AAA offices and the Visitor Center continues to distribute guides. The map is in production with the first round of proofing complete. A total of 175K copies will be printed for arrival in mid-April.

Events Report—Cook said he has been busy. The Viva Catalina Mariachi Festival is planned for Sept 12. He spoke with promoters interested in scheduling comedy shows for multiple dates. The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of PADI is an event on the calendar for Sept 18-20.

Hubert confirmed Shred Day is April 20, 12-3 at Avalon Freight Services, and advance sign-up is required. April 23 is the Board Retreat at USC Marine Science Center, Two Harbors; the Cyclone is transport and a waiver is required. Taste Around Avalon will be May 28, 5-9pm with a kick-off on the stage. The Pride Celebration begins Friday night, June 12 and continues all day, June 13. US Bank is a sponsor and she is looking for any hotels willing to offer special rates. The summer concert series has three bands confirmed: June 27, July 25, and August 8. Conversation followed asking to look at moving the August concert to a later date if possible. Fixers scheduled include the Bleu World cleanups and the ServSafe classes in English and Spanish. Tonight's Mixer is from 6-8 at Catalina Canyon Resort conference room with 17 participating non-profit organizations.

Visitor and Member Services Report—Luttjohann presented a membership application for National Pacific Islander Education Network saying they will participate in the Mixer tonight so attendees can learn more.

Motion to accept the new member by Say, second Fornasiere; passed unanimously

### **GUEST & MEMBER UPDATES**

Fornasiere said the Catalina Island Health fair was moved and will return late April at the Yacht Club. She is working with Lola to hold a resource fair on May 7, prior to the Spring Art Festival. They can utilize the same canopies and make it more like a family festival. It is in the early planning stages for a small opera ensemble to perform in June at the museum.

Bergman announced a new exhibit is opening at the Catalina Museum for Art and History on April 18. She encouraged attendees to watch the COA Council Meeting and at the one hour and 17 seconds mark, discussion was about showing the work of 14 artists. She feels this event will bring visitors to view the installation.

Upton said WetSpot Rentals is open for the season. They now offer snorkel certifications with PADI guides.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Board, Chair Cassidy adjourned the Board meeting at 2:54pm.