



**Humboldt County Visitors Bureau  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

**November 20, 2019, 12:00 to 2:00 pm**  
River Lodge Conference Center, Fortuna

**MINUTES**

*Present:* Chris Ambrosini, Paul Beatie, Lowell Daniels, Barbara Groom, Laura Lasseter, Meredith Maier, Pete Oringer, Aaron Ostrom, Marc Rowley (Chair), Scott Adair (Director, County EconDev). Staff: Julie Benbow, April Hagans Kristin Kearns

*Absent:* Cathy Kunkler, Justin Legge, Libby Maynard, John Porter. Supervisor Rex Bohn

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The meeting was called to order by Marc Rowley at 12:06 pm.

The minutes of the October 23 meeting were reviewed. Lowell commented that, while the content was fine, there were some issues with grammar and typos. The Lowell made a motion to approve the minutes with the corrections, seconded by Pete (*Unanimously approved*).

**Sales Report**

April reported on the Arboriculture board and planning committee visit and working with them to identify numerous diverse experiences for their large group. Potential income: \$11,000 on activities, \$20,000 on accommodations. The Family Nature planning visit was successful. It will be a multigenerational group of around 300, with projected spending of \$60,000+ .

On Tuesday November 22, the Bureau co-hosted a wedding industry mixer with NCJ for 40-50 attendees. It was an opportunity to introduce them to the Bureau and support we can provide. The HCVB website is the #1 portal for find information about Humboldt County destination weddings. 50/50 out of area and locals.

**Executive Directors Report**

Membership: As of November 15, there are 121 Bureau members. Staff is doing outreach to those who members who are in arrears.

Staff: Julie introduced Kristin Kearns, who works 2 days week updating events on the website. Charlotte has returned to fill in for Genie. She will work four half days each week.

Marc reported on the general state of tourism, comparing Humboldt to national trends. Some northern California regions are trying to stay connected including the Redwood Empire – Siskiyou and Shasta. All counties are experiencing very similar challenges and are in disarray. Humboldt is not alone. All areas are adjusting their strategies to utilize trends in social media, but realize they still need to have relationships and partnerships with other areas. As the HCVB moves forward, we need to maintain and strengthen these relationships, and take the lead.

Pete remarked upon Governor Newsom's interested in rural regions like ours and the economic challenges. He suggested the need to be proactive and develop a plan that can be presented to the state for matching grants.

## **Events**

Staff and Board members entered into a discussion regarding the parameters for listing countywide events on the website. Events are updated monthly and the information is needed a month in advance. While any entity can enter the details of an event online, priority is given to those events of interest to visitors. Staff also use the Insider, Lost Coast Journal and other sources for information. Laura mentioned the Northern Lights festival – a longtime Southern Humboldt event, which is not mentioned. Staff reminded all Board members that they can submit any and all events, however it is not the responsibility of the staff to solicit information. At the beginning of each month, members receive a four-page PDF calendar of events by date distribution to their guests.

Lowell commented how informative and useful this service is.

Laura reiterated her previously stated issue with the map & visitors guide and urged all updates to the printed marketing materials and website to be reviewed prior to going live. Julie reminded the Board that all marketing channels including the map and guide, adventure brochures and website are in the process of being reevaluated. Their success and relevance will be part of the new marketing strategy and plan, and a draft will be available for discussion and input by the Board and interested partners and stakeholders.

Marc reminded the Board that much is dependent upon funds, and that keeping marketing trends and visitor intent and desires front and center should dictate what format the information takes. He also commented that this is the time for the Bureau to take everything it has done in the past and blow it up. The Bureau needs to be relevant and not bound by tradition. The contemporary traveler is utilizing print less and is more dependent upon digital information and social media.

Chris commented that some print is still relevant. Boomers like print. He urge everyone to remember that HCVB mission is to market the tourism assets of Humboldt County – it is a marketing organization and not in the advertising business – people prefer not to be inundated by ads. He would like to see a greater emphasis on attractions and less selling ad space to members. Bureau should put efforts into marketing assets.

Aaron told the Board that, as part of doing research for the new marketing plan, the multitude of marketing tools currently being used by the Bureau are being reevaluate through different lenses, but the Bureau cannot and should not can't be everything to everyone.

Julie wrapped the discussion up by saying that Kristin would send the Board members information as to how to include and event and would also add all of them to the monthly events PDF mail list.

Scott reminded the Board of the importance of outreach to county partners and stakeholders to educate them as to our work and successes.

## **Report to the Board of Supervisors & Presentation**

Julie reminded the Board that the Bureau would be presenting the 6-month report to the Board of Supervisors on December 10<sup>th</sup>. They had all received a copy of the report, submitted on November 12<sup>th</sup> and will receive a copy of the statement to be read to the Supervisors which will include regional economic impact highlights. As per the Visit California 2018 tourism economic impact report (prepared by Dean Runyan & Assoc.), Humboldt County has a 36.6% share of total regional spending for the North Coast.<sup>1</sup>

The top three industry segments for Humboldt County travel spending are:

\$ 124 M Food Service • \$ 96 M Accommodations

\$ 57 M Arts, Entertainment & Recreation (including all outdoor activities)

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<sup>1</sup> North Coast: Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino and Lake Counties.

A discussion ensued regarding the role of the regional Chambers and Main Street organizations whose focus is to develop and support local businesses, but many also do “tourism marketing.” It is understood that the Bureau markets the entire county and its assets outside the county to attract external tourist dollars.

### **Marketing Committee**

Aaron noted that Jason Baxter has been hired as marketing consultant to bring a fresh voice and outside knowledge to the process of developing a strategy and three-year plan. The Bureau cannot be everything to everyone – to this end a short survey will be sent to partners/stakeholders and members to find out what their perceived challenges and areas of need are not being met by the present Bureau. Currently an internal marketing audit including marketing tools, publications and dollars spent is being undertaken. Part of this audit is doing comparables with other DMO’s budgets and marketing plans/outcomes. Plus, the current membership model is being examined with research into including food service and focused experiences (beer/wine, entertainment) etc. Julie noted that plans are being made for the Bureau to hold partner/member/stakeholder meetings around the county.

### **Financial Report**

Pete noted that the pledged funding from Arcata, though billed in September, had not been received. As most of the marketing dollars are not being spent, HCVB expenses are reasonable. Additional funds from the HLA’s and cities are expected.

Chris reiterated that the Bureau should develop a funding equation with the expectation that all cities – including Eureka – will participate. The Bureau needs show the direct value to all the communities.

Marc reported that the northern unincorporated taxes are only slightly less than SoHum, and commented that really successful DMO’s receive majority funding from the private sector, with Lodging Alliance and tax support as ancillary.

The Bureau will present alternative funding models as part of the Marketing plan to the Supervisors focusing funding on serving the whole county, not just certain areas.

### **Other Business**

Laura commented that the Bureau is not sufficiently promoting Southern Humboldt tourism assets. Julie responded that it is the Bureau’s job to promote the whole county, however recent national press included significant articles in the New York Times (Fern Canyon) and the Wall Street Journal feature about the Lost Coast. The role played by the Bureau in getting the WSJ placement was discussed, and it was agreed that it takes the involvement of several parties to fulfill this level of marketing, and the Bureau’s main role is to promote multiple experiences and not necessarily focus on individual assets.

It was agreed that there will be no meeting in December, and as of January 2020, meetings will be bi-monthly.

The meeting adjourned at **2:07 p.m.**

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*Minutes prepared by Julie Benbow*