



**Humboldt County Visitors Bureau
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

MINUTES

Thursday, November 4th, 2021 • 11:30 a.m.

Present: Libby Maynard, Jeff Durham, Ara Pachmayer, Pete Oringer, Chris Ambrosini, Paul Beatie, Lowell Daniels, Jenny Early, Ken Hamik, Shannon Hughes, Justin Legge, Aaron Ostrom, Marc Rowley, *Ex officio*, Julie Benbow, *Staff:* Supervisor Michelle Bushnell, Scott Adair, County,

- I. Libby called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m.
 - o Welcome Guest: Travis Scott, ED Visit Mendocino

Julie introduced Travis who also serves as Treasurer for the North Coast Tourism Council. Julie spoke of the importance and value of the relationship with Mendocino that has highlighted similarities and differences in the challenges of destination marketing. Travis prepared a powerpoint presentation for the end of the meeting.

- II. Approval of Minutes of October 7th meeting
 - Shannon made the motion to approve the minutes.
 - Aaron seconded. There were no corrections, additions or comments.
 - The motion to approve the minutes as presented was passed unanimously.

III. Board Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Libby reported that the committee discussed cannabis rfp and the new space. The following agenda will cover these issues.

Financial Report: Julie reported that as the new meeting date is the first Thursday of the month, previous month financial reports are unavailable but will be forwarded when complete. Finances are stable, minimal expenses, the recent County TOT check for \$101K was deposited. No more expected income, however in January revenue for '22 Map & Guide will be generated, funds going towards the cost of printing and distribution.

Proposed move Advocacy & Funding to after Marketing Report - Jeff will be late joining the meeting. Discuss fundraising throughout the County.

Chris asked about the ARPA fund request HCVB made to the County in September.

Julie: The \$7M+ Fed recovery funds not been disseminated. No current news or information about the \$600K.

Supervisor Bushnell said it will be itemized and come before the Board in two weeks and then have a path forward.

Julie: A Fed grant for tourism available and will be helping Shelter Cove get funding for some infrastructure projects. May be some funds available for HCVB – looking into it. Grant needs approval from Supes, due date January 20, There will also be a small amount of money (\$23K) in '22 as HCVB is leading a feasibility study for a Blue Lake Rancheria project.

Lowell: Will it be an ongoing situation that the financials are not available at the meetings? Sending them out after the meeting does not allow for discussion and proper oversight.

Julie: Depends on the actual date. Anytime after the 3rd they will be available.

Lowell: if can have financials for the meetings, discussions and observations will benefit those who are familiar with interpreting financial statements, and those who are not.

Julie: Will ensure that financials are available for next meeting so there is not a two-month gap: Libby proposed reviewing and redesigning the statements in 2022 so they are easier to read.

Marketing:

Julie gave a short media analytics report (Facebook, Instagram and website). Local websites throughout the county are not bringing in any meaningful traffic and the only linking out from VisitHumboldt is to google maps. Previously, the Bureau website has received traffic from other county sites, and the Bureau website has links to all other areas, chambers and assets sites. Website visits - \$87K October down from 102K in September: 41,K new users – significant.

Most traffic organic – not done through google ad words. Traffic from Visit California traffic, (675 sessions October), VisitEureka did 19. Strategy to partner more with Visit California is working out as have huge reach and new content that we send them about Humboldt. Facebook and Instagram underscore marketing strategy – focus on 35 – 54 years olds. Facebook top geographical areas of interest are 300-500 drive range, and 70+% women. Not investing much money, our website is the strongest with over 1.2 M visitors a year. If we can connect with other websites, it will definitely be mutually beneficial.

It would be a good idea going forward to have an agreement with higher profile county websites to move traffic in both directions. Good time to engage with HSU – as change to polytechnic status will be great source of information for prospective students and parents. Paul noted that the Bureau website is the main referral site for Ferndale. 731 clicks over from visitredwoods to visitferndale in 12 months.

Julie: Bureau is most successful as a resource to other sites – including parks, restaurants, events, and accommodations. SoHum has two new websites: DiscoverSouthernHumbolt and Visitlostcoast.

Jenny – The Lost Coast site is supported by Mike Caldwell and partners, both relatively new.

Lowell: Great if can get other entities to link as Bureau has most robust site and they will definitely profit. Be foolish not to accept reciprocal and helps promote everybody.

May be some proprietary sentiment, need to let them know benefits.

Julie: Some are Chambers of Commerce, some specifically for tourists, either way want to offer a rounded experience. When we send visitors to Willow creek Chamber site, there is more specific business information than we have. Need to offer whole menu to visitors and let them choose.

Jenny: Enquired about Lynn Leishman been in contact about sharing links for DiscoverSouthernHumbolt and Visitlostcoast? Agree that all good for everyone.

Julie: Have links to SoHum but no info about lost coast. Happy to include it.

Marc: May just be a technical or staff issue. Should do a traveling road show and give each a presentation about benefits. A little reeducation.

Shannon: Confirm Willow Creek is linked? I will check with Anne and make sure.

Julie: It is a stipulation in the MOU.

Advocacy / Funding

Jeff: Had a very good meeting with Carl Ribaud, important for him to lead a session with stakeholders including Supervisors, town councils etc. so see they understand the value of tourism to all sectors of the community and potential it has.

Marc: Old HCVB had significant support and participation of towns and cities. Need to persuade cities of the value of HCVB. However, now is the time to consider other funding streams – maybe some appropriate corporate sponsors (outdoor adventure companies etc), while we go after traditional funding sources. Need to be more creative as require a significant amount more funding. Better have financial position secure for when tourists resume international travel. Right now, in a beneficial bubble but won't last and HCVB needs to be ahead of the situation.

Julie: Had positive discussions with Cassandra Heseltine, companies that shoot ads in Humboldt go through the Film Commission. Share contacts. Of many company ads on TV shot in Humboldt, communicate with them to see if interested especially in 422 project.

Lowell: Pierson's Lumber video ad of Humboldt is beautiful.

Ken: Julie's vision of combining economic development, community and tourism is crucial to all we do. Destination management shift is great especially in sustainable tourism. Important to show visitors and residents what is happening in the county.

Cannabis RFP:

This is a short synopsis of the lengthy discussion, covering the main points:

- Julie reported that Patrick George of KP Public Affairs had updated their original RFP. The HCGA Cannabis Marketing assessment brought up many Humboldt-centric issues that need to be addressed in the new RFP including what the brand will do to benefit all cannabis stakeholders. She will work with Ken to develop next text to address all issues. She commented that, this process for the Bureau is as a political and strategic process as well as a marketing one.
- Key part of the proposal will be a county-wide advisory panel.
- Shannon, as a Willow Creek based cultivator, voiced concerns regarding the previous strained relationship between the cannabis people and Bureau: Commented that, at the Trellis meetings heard Bureau submitting an RFP that could be construed as Bureau trying to take money away from them or be in competition. Optics of Bureau from cannabis community not positive.
- Jeff, referred to the HCGA letter to the Supervisors and asked how the optics can be changed, suggesting need to share Bureau work and information.
- It was agreed that direct communication with cannabis organizations to share our intentions, making sure aware of how this will benefit them needs to happen.

Transparency is so important. Have reasonable conversations. People looking for leadership.

- Cannabis growers may be members of HCGA or Willow Creek, many independent. Maybe reach out and see if possible to partner.
- Supervisor Bushnell commented that RFP will probably be submitted by cannabis orgs. Will be competitive process. Should meet with farmers to find out what they want and what their idea of cannabis tourism looks like.
- Bureau already met with Linsey in Willow creek and Laura in SoHum. Will reach out to Natalynne. The best RFP should win. Not personal, should go to the group that can do the best job for the county.
- Original KP RFP was specific about collaborating with HCGA and other groups and organizations. But need to know the market. Humboldt not the market, the supplier. To Get to know the market by talking to people in SF and LA. Our opportunity to show that Humboldt is very relevant in this market. Many conversations with Natalynne. Will continue to talk to the communities in this transparent process.
- Jenny commented that in SoHum many farmers are not represented by any group, do their own thing.
- Michelle confirmed that the RFP is a one time grant award.
- Agree do outreach to farmers to get feedback, in parallel to RFP. Shannon & Jenny help with outreach.
- Shannon unable to support motion if unable to accomplish going support of orgs that may be also submitting. Ensure that RFP includes language of intent to work with other organizations.
- Scott (County) shared some useful links and resources for the RFP. Will be conference call to answer questions. Peggy Murphy main contact. Competitive process to get abundance of great proposals from different parties.

Libby: Motion move ahead with work on RFP or not?

- Jeff: I make the motion to continue working on the RFP while continuing to reach out to the growers to work with them moving forward.
- Ken seconded the motion.
- Concerns about time to do a good RFP and have meetings. New version is well underway.
- Not known which other organizations will be submitting.
- Collaborations – moving towards this but it is a process.
- Bureau should support the cannabis marketing even if doesn't win award.
- Shannon unable to support motion with current optics an HCVB not being a cannabis organization.

Original motion tabled:

New motion:

- Shannon: The Bureau steps away from submitting an RFP for Trellis Funding and let cannabis-centric organizations take it on.

- Chris seconded the motion.

Role call: Vote YES will NOT apply: Vote NO will apply.

Motion did not pass:

Votes: 4 yes, 6 no, 2 abstentions.

The Bureau will submit the RFP for Branding & Marketing Humboldt Cannabis..

IV: 422 First Street: Moving this month. Julie happy to share plans and logistics.

V: County Update: No county Update.

VI: Other Business:

a. Report from Mendocino

Travis Scott

- As there was not time for Travis to make his presentation, and the information is very relevant and profound, he was invited to make it at a future meeting.
- Travis reported to the Board that, as the designated marketing agency & organization for Mendocino County tourism, VisitMendocino has been tasked to explore cannabis tourism and have engaged with Cultivar Strategies to bring that segment into our strategic marketing portfolio. The County Cannabis Associations in Mendo realize they are not marketers, they are advocacy and legislative groups and support letting VisitMendocino take on that task. Working in - partnership with them, but not going after specific funding for that. But as the DMO of record are taking it on.

b. Nov / Dec / Jan staff schedules

c. Board meeting dates for 2022

VII: The meeting was adjourned at 1:33pm.
