



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

MINUTES

Thursday January 28, 2021 • 12:00 to 2:00 pm
Via Zoom

Present: Marc Rowley (Chair), Chris Ambrosini (Vice Chair), Pete Oringer (Treasurer), Paul Beatie, Justin Legge, Aaron Ostrom, Lowell Daniels, Libby Maynard, John Porter, Julie Benbow (Staff)
Absent: Barbara Groom, Cathy Kunkler, Laura Lasseter, Meredith Maier

I. Marc called the meeting to order at 12.05.

- Introduction of Supervisor Bushnell: Marc reported that the Board of Supervisors appointed Michelle Bushnell from Southern Humboldt as the HCVB liaison. Julie & Marc met with her last week, she understands what the Bureau does and is very pro tourism. Scott Adair will attend our meetings as County Staff.
- Marc made the motion to move agenda item IV: Board Business forwards to follow the approval of minutes for the ballot report from Keith Crossley (from HCVB accounting firm Cunningham, Malone & Morton). Marc commented that, due to the storms and power outages, the process had taken a lot of effort by everyone. Pete seconded the motion. Motion unanimously approved.

II. Approval of Minutes of July 29, 2020 meeting

- Pete made the motion to approve the minutes as submitted. Lowell seconded.
- Lowell commented that the minutes recorded that the board agreed to leave any changes to the Board until after the marketing plan had been adopted. Julie verified that the marketing plan had been adopted. John commented on the marketing plan stating the primary target audience is the 30 – 45 yr olds with boomers being secondary. He inquired as to source of the information. Julie responded that it was based on most recent travel and tourism research. John reported that majority of his guests are boomers. Chris noted that in his research boomers are spending more and that this strategy is wrong. Julie noted that boomers are important but the younger travelers (pp 11-13) definitely not ignoring boomers but are targeting the younger people. Paul noted

that different marketing strategies were required for each demographic. Julie commented that the new marketing committee will be tasked with finalizing the plan.

- The motion to approve the minutes was unanimous.

III. Board Business: Election of Directors

- Marc introduced Keith Crossley to report on the vote. Julie thanked Keith for facilitating the process.
- Keith explained that there were nine seats available on the board. There was a tie on the lower end so another vote was required. Keith said he would send everyone an email to vote for two of three candidates.
- The directors elected: Chris Ambrosini, Jeff Durham, Ken Hamik, Shannon Hughes, Libby Maynard, Aaron Ostrom and Ara Pachmayer. The three runners up: Chris Brannan, Lowell Daniels and Jenny Early.
- Keith requested the Board to send him an email or text with their vote so the results could be shared before the end of the meeting. All Board members received the email voting information.

IV. Financial Situation: December 31st Finance Report:

- Pete noted the current balance due to conservative expenses.
- Julie: reported on the revenue and expense totals; Revenue = 396K+, expenses \$188K, Marketing \$108K – however this includes the County gateway funding. \$92K was distributed throughout the county, actual marketing expenses are \$16,500.
- With personnel, rent, insurances, contracts, monthly expenses are \$15K. Recently applied for CalRelief grant of \$15K, will be considered in the second round. Also applied for PPP funding for \$21,700. This is the first time 501(c)6 organizations have been eligible. This could be income of \$35K for payroll over the coming months which will allow more dollars to go towards marketing.
- Need to begin work on the Visitor Map & Guide which will cost @ \$50K including printing of 250,000 copies and distribution. Review budget to make sure we can safely spend that amount.

Funding Updates/Supervisor meetings:

- Marc: Marc and Julie met with with Supervisors Bass and Madrone. Meeting was positive, but they were very explicit that everything is up in the air, and budget totals have not as yet been collected. 2020 was not the financial devastation projected and many are reasonably optimistic that HCVB may receive more funding. All Supervisors spoke of the importance of the Bureau's work and understand the importance of increased funding.
- Chris inquired if the County funding was a percentage of TOT. Julie responded yes, the Bureau and the Gateways receive a set percentage which has not changed for many years, and the logic behind the amounts Gateway receive is a mystery. Southern Humboldt receives a significant amount more than the other areas.

- Julie noted that the Bureau is the only county DMO and what the Gateways are investing their funds in is unknown, but they do not have marketing experience or staff.
- Julie raised the subject of going to the cities and towns for funding – and the need to develop some kind of equation or formula based on the number of hotel rooms, or by giving each room a value and applying it across the county. Work with Chris and maybe a small committee to develop a formula. Same formula and have better success. Get a list of TOT contributing accommodations. Important to let the county know that going after other funds. Must be realistic. Julie said she would reach out to colleagues in other counties to see if they use a formula.
- Marc – definitely the most important focus is to secure funding and let everyone know the value and importance of marketing and how collectively we can compete but not individually.
- Marc: Julie will be making presentation to the Board of Supervisors on February 9th. Just a report on the last months endeavors, it will not be a request for increased funding.
- Chris: Should we attend and comment?
- Julie: It is the required six-month report but there will be a public comment period and it would be good for the Bureau if some of the board members made positive comments. Julie agreed to send the Board a reminder with the Agenda and log in information the day before.
- Lowell: Asking cities to pay per room is not equitable as room rates differ, perhaps should do a percentage of the total TOT then applied to each jurisdiction – more equitable. Percentage of TOT, nothing to do with average daily rate. This includes vacation rentals etc.
- Marc_– clearly the County does not have a handle on the AirBnB, Vrbo numbers. We may need to help. County not getting the return of collections for the unincorporated areas.
- Marc reminded the Board to vote.
- Julie: Currently participating in the virtual International Media Expo – meeting media one-on-one, writers and influencers. Will have a total of 19 meetings.
- Moving ahead with podcast called Hello Humboldt, developing marketing to get some buzz prior to going live. Goal of doing eight or ten episodes and will be looking to get some sponsorship.
- Marc: Travel and tourism may be very strong this year, and supervisors have some interesting projects to support tourism.
- Julie: North Coast Tourism Council will meet on February 11th. Senator Mike McGuire will be joining for thirty minutes, if anyone has any questions let J know and she'll make sure they are put to him.

V. Next Meeting: February

- Marc: Need to get the new board focused and make a list of priorities. Lot of challenges and opportunities.
- Julie: Need to vote in a new slate of officers, discuss time and frequency of meetings.
- Marc noted that his guests want early check-ins and late check outs. Many more people traveling with pets. Chris reported the same phenomena at his hotel.
- Justin: KEET PBS is coming out with a Bucket List show about local people doing things they have always wanted. He took people for a guided tour of Fern Canyon.
- Paul reported that KEET produced a series of concerts, "Live from the Old Steeple" and Bureau and HLA underwrote the production. The series has been airing on KEET for the past months and in April will be available to national PBS stations, which will mean more exposure and a much wider audience. Paul is looking for a major sponsor to get more well known artists and expand reach. Julie commented that she has asked KEET if the Bureau can have a link on website and YouTube for the concerts.

VI. Final Ballot Report

- Keith reported the outcome of the final election: Lowell Daniels and Jenny Early were elected.
- Keith presented the full list of the newly elected Directors.
Chris Ambrosini, Lowell Daniels, Jeff Durham, Jenny Early, Ken Hamik, Shannon Hughes, Libby Maynard, Aaron Ostrom, Ara Pachmayer
- They will be joined by Justin, Paul and Pete to make up the twelve Directors of the HCVB.

Pete: Motion to approve the slate of Directors as presented. Paul seconded.

The motion was unanimously adopted.

Marc Thanked Keith for his service.

Chris: Will Marc be staying on? Yes, as non-voting, ex officio.

In response to Chris' question, Julie confirmed that the election was done according to the By Laws. Julie told the Board that the By Laws will be revised to reflect organizational changes.

Julie thanked everyone for their support over the past year, acknowledging that despite the challenges there had been valuable discussions and input, road ahead is positive. She also acknowledged John leadership and proposed he remain as advisor as the Bureau m moves forward.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:15pm.