



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

Wednesday February 24, 2021

**MINUTES**

Present: Marc Rowley, Chris Ambrosini, Paul Beatie, Lowell Daniels, Jeff Durham, Jenny Early, Ken Hamik, Shannon Hughes, Pete Oringer, Aaron Ostrom, Libby Maynard, Michelle Bushnell (Supervisor, District 2), Scott Adair (County), Julie Benbow (Staff)

Absent: Justin Legge, Ara Pachmayer

1. Marc called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m.

As there are five new Board members, Marc invited the Board to introduce themselves.

Marc recognized the Directors who recently transitioned off the Board and acknowledged their years of service: Barbara Groom, Cathy Kunkler, Laura Lasseter, Meredith Maier, and John Porter. Marc told the Board that he will be staying on the Board in an ex officio advisory role with no voting privileges.

2. Approval of Minutes of January 28 meeting

- Paul made the motion to approve the minutes as submitted. Lowell seconded.

Marc asked for any additions, corrections or comments.

Chris asked for his comment (Page 1) to be changed from:

*Chris noted that in his research boomers are spending more and that this strategy is wrong to: boomers are spending more and are an important target audience.*

The motion to approve the minutes as amended was unanimously approved.

New Board members abstained from voting.

Chris voiced his appreciation of Julie's thorough minutes.

3. Board Business

- Julie: HCVB by-laws state that Executive Leadership is comprised of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. The Nominating Committee (Marc, Paul, Justin and Pete) called board members and developed the slate: Board President – Libby Maynard, Vice President – Jeff Durham, Secretary – Ara Pachmayer, and continuing as Treasurer, Pete Oringer.

Marc invited other nominations. Chris asked for clarification for the number of Board Members and members of the Executive Committee. Julie: 12 (twelve) Board members

and initially a five-member Executive Committee including the Chair of the Marketing Committee (yet to be named). The Chairs of each Committee (Marketing and Ad Hoc Advocacy & Funding) serve on the Executive Committee.

Julie, noting current organizational changes and transition, asked if the Officers terms of service should be one or two years.

Marc requested Board input. Shannon spoke to her positive experience of serving on a board with a one-year terms, noting it as an opportunity for newer members who have gained knowledge to step up, and officers can stand again.

Aaron noted that a two-year term has been the standard and the position requires a level of commitment. In response to Jenny's question regarding the by-laws, they specify a two-year term.

Chris spoke in favor of a two-year term to give new board members time to get up to speed. Aaron asked for clarification regarding Directors' and Officers' terms. The by-laws state, Directors serve three years, with one third of the Board stepping down every year. Due to the Bureau challenges, the previous Board voted to keep the members during the transition period.

Marc clarified a two-year term for Officers and a three-year term for Directors.

The motion to adopt the slate of Officers: Aaron proposed motion. Chris seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

Marc suggested that the Executive Committee meet and determine the number of Members. All agreed.

- Marc noted that the work of the Marketing and the Advocacy & Funding Committees is of extreme importance as the Bureau funding needs to be stabilized. Asked how she envisions the Committees, Julie recognized Aaron's contribution as the previous chair of the Marketing Committee, citing the need for the committee to be made up of members with marketing expertise and to include Jason Baxter, the Bureau's marketing consultant, and maybe also invite other County marketing professionals (Allie Heemstra Jones, Trinidad). Julie acknowledged Jenny and her marketing business.
- Marc: The Bureau has a tradition of having non-directors to serve on the Marketing committee. He noted that the committee needs to hit the ground running: as vaccines are administered and the pandemic subsides, our rural county competitors are going to be throwing everything they have into promoting themselves as preferred destinations, and Visit California has an aggressive campaign schedule that Humboldt needs to participate in.
- Julie reminded the Board of Senator McGuire's upcoming Town Hall meeting regarding the \$45M in the state budget to go to Visit California to stimulate travel recovery. VCA is being heavily lobbied by San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, the theme parks and convention centers to receive a large portion of this funding. While rural counties will have a voice in the funding, Humboldt needs to not only know what is happening in the County but also the external relationships that will help HCVB make strategic decisions about where our marketing dollars are invested so our voice doesn't get drowned out by other rural communities or the gateway cities.

Ken: Humboldt is a great destination because space and smaller population gives a competitive advantage.

Lowell observed that \$45M for Visit Ca is significantly less than their usual budget, and he voiced his concern regarding electing non-members who do not support the Bureau's mission and work onto committees, reminding them that this situation had caused problems in the past.

Chris asked if the \$45M is an additional amount to Visit California's budget. Julie confirmed this.

Marc asked Julie if she had anyone in mind who may want to lead the Marketing Committee. Julie and Aaron had worked well together. Aaron responded that he enjoyed working on the committee and would like to serve as a member but not the Chair, but would happily support anyone else. Aaron voiced interest in also serving on the Funding committee. Paul, when asked if he would Chair the Committee, cited a busy schedule but an interest in sharing his marketing knowledge as a member of the committee. Shannon and Ken voiced interest in serving on the Marketing Committee with Aaron and Jenny, and Julie proposed Ara be invited.

- Marc said Jeff Durham had agreed to chair the Advocacy & Funding Committee. Jeff described his recent six-year term serving on the Yountville town council where he learned the importance of both communication and advocacy, and he believes it is all positive and now is the time to connect with the Supervisors, local council members, and community members to educate them to the value to them of the Bureau.
- Marc voiced his interest in serving on the Advocacy & Funding Committee, stating the importance to build bridges and relationships with all the funding entities in Humboldt County to bring the funding levels back. Marc proposed a meeting in the very near future to decide the make up of the two committees. Chris voiced interest in joining both committees. Marc encouraged the board to think about which committee they may want to serve on as this is where the real work is accomplished, and it can be stimulating and exciting as we have the opportunity with this new board to be extremely dynamic and move the situation forward.

Directors will all receive an email asking for their committee interests. Julie will follow up to schedule committee meetings in the very near future. Libby, as Board President, will be ex officio on all committees.

#### 4. Financial Situation

- Julie: Current accounts have \$220K+ which will cover all operational expenses through June 30<sup>th</sup> (a monthly burn rate of \$18K+ contracts of \$2500). The Marketing Committee will discuss moving on production of the next Redwood Coast Map & Guide (\$50K), and also updating the website. With energized funding and marketing committees, Julie projects that funding for one, maybe two or three more years will be secured in the next few months, ensuring Humboldt will become equal to neighbors in Shasta and Mendo who have significant marketing budgets.

Pete noted that moneys (\$25K) is moved into the checking account to cover monthly bills and maintain a \$20K balance. Due to Julie's judicious spending, as of December 31, there is \$417K in the savings of which \$115K is reserve. This also

includes the passthrough funds. Chris asked for the current financials be sent to all board members.

Julie has requested financials for February 28 and will send them out when received. Currently there are two staff on payroll, with contracts for Jason Baxter (consultant) and Jason Connolly (podcast developer).

Jeff asked what the timeline for the County funding is. Julie thought that the Bureau has another year on the County contract of \$200K+- per annum.

Scott responded that the contract ends on June 30<sup>th</sup> 2021. (A copy was posted in the chat for Directors to access). There is a minimum 21-day agenda review process to get an item on the Supervisors agenda. If the Bureau wants to renew or change the terms of the current contract, the process should begin in mid-May. Staff draft a report and attach a recommended amended contract for review. Scott proposed considering requesting an extension to allow the Bureau to develop a more comprehensive document with updated scope of services and funding for the Supervisors' approval. Lowell proposed the Advocacy & Funding Committee start on this immediately. Jeff asked for a copy of the full contract for review by the Board.

- Future Funding Strategy: This will be a top priority for the Advocacy & Funding Committee, and Chris has ideas for developing a funding formula to present to the cities. Need to develop a case and messaging to take out to the cities. Marc noted that, when the message and presentation has been developed, the different entities will understand the importance of Humboldt being competitive. Must make it a compelling story.

- Future Meeting Schedule

Julie asked the Board to discuss and decide a meeting schedule so financial reports and committee reports can be sent out in advance.

Ken proposed that the Board should meet once a month to keep all members up to date with what is going on.

It was unanimously agreed that, until further notice, the Board will meet monthly on the third Tuesday of every month at 10 am. The next meetings will be held on: March 16<sup>th</sup>, April 20<sup>th</sup>, May 18<sup>th</sup>, June 15<sup>th</sup>

## 5. ED Report

- Julie convened a North Coast Tourism Council meeting with Senator McGuire. He is a strong advocate for the rural counties and having a personal relationship with him is very good for the Bureau and Humboldt.

Attended the two-day Visit California Outlook Forum, the annual state of the industry conference. Very different from 2019 when tourism numbers were the highest ever. Industry projections are that, when people have been vaccinated, consumer confidence will return resulting in a tremendous surge in tourism, statewide and national. International will be slower. Humboldt needs to be ready. Anecdotal information shows that many accommodations, especially vacation rentals and cabins, are already seeing a bookings through the summer. Julie commented that Humboldt needs to be a premier destination, while considering the infrastructure and residents sentiment.

Marc: Fundamental in tourism is that it has to be good for the communities and tourists.

Ken read the Marketing Executive Summary that aligns the community, tourism and economic development, a shift from promoting communities to building communities. If people here are happy, the visitors may want to move and open businesses here.

Julie: Very good meeting with Natalynne from the Humboldt County Growers Alliance and assured her of Bureau support: when they have an idea or a plan, will work with them to promote and market it on all platforms. This also goes to the Willow Creek Growers Alliance and the other groups in the County. This is not just cannabis, but Arts & Culture communities etc.

Shannon: Was not in the loop about the HCGA letter and comments at the Supervisors Meeting. Pleased that communication has happened and some of the misinformation discussed. She is not part of the Willow Creek Cannabis Alliance but, being passionate about natural resources, is a supporter of all industries in Humboldt County including cannabis.

## 6. County Update

Scott urged the Board to review the full contract, noting the services section of the County agreement (section a and b), commenting that it is fairly light in comparison to other counties that have a wider and more detailed scope. Scott offered to get other samples of contracts. Julie will request copies of the contracts for Mendocino and Shasta and Jeff will get others for comparison.

## 7. Other/Questions/Comments

Ken: This is going to be a big year. Reported he is working on a big project in San Francisco involving Humboldt cannabis and a tourism.

Julie offered to meet with the new Board members one-on-one to answer questions and share information.

Marc formally presented the meeting gavel to Libby wishing her the best, and commented that working with Julie has been "crazy," noting that she is a true champion for the bureau, always does research, and comes up with new information.

Libby said is looking forward to working with this exciting Board, knowing that everyone is ready to dig in make this transition into a new reality. Looking forward to this coming two years.

Lowell thanked Libby for stepping up and acknowledge Marc for his tremendous leadership.

Chris was concerned that Marc was no longer on the Board and hopes that he will attend all the meetings noting he has been a Bureau champion keeping everyone's interests in mind, playing fairly and worked to ensure the Bureau is moving forward.

Libby adjourned the meeting at 1:57pm.