



**Humboldt County Visitors Bureau
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

March 23, 2021

MINUTES

Board of Directors: Present: Libby Maynard, *President*; Jeff Durham, *Vice President*; Ara Pachmayer, *Secretary*; Pete Oringer, *Treasurer*; Chris Ambrosini, Paul Beatie, Lowell Daniels, Jenny Early, Ken Hamik, Shannon Hughes, Justin Legge, Aaron Ostrom, Marc Rowley, *Ex officio*:
Absent: Supervisor Bushnell, Scott Adair.

- I. Libby called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.
All Directors made a quick introduction and check in.

- II. Approval of Minutes of February 24th meeting
 - a. Pete made the motion to approve the minutes as submitted.
Ken seconded. There were no additions, corrections or comments.
Ara abstained. The motion to approve the minutes passed.

- III. Board Committee Reports
 - Executive Committee: Libby reported on their first meeting. Previously, some Board members felt that the Exec Comm made too many decisions unilaterally. This new committee (Libby, Jeff, Ara, Pete, Ken) will bring any issues to the full board for discussion and decision making. This speaks to new clear channels of communication and organizational transparency. Jeff commented that with this smaller Board communications will be easier. Julie: email communications will be kept to a minimum and meetings on-topic to be respectful of everyone's time.

 - Financials: Julie noted that the most recent payables were high (\$25K) due to the contract payment to Certified for brochure distribution and the quarterly fee to SimpleView for the website. HCVB has received the \$21,700 PPP funds, and we are still waiting for word regarding the \$25K CalRelief grant. One upcoming cost will be for the Map&Guide and estimates are being gathered for the content edits and printing of 250K, with conservative spending through June 30th.

 - Advocacy & Funding: Jeff reported that the committee had met and securing funding is the first priority. Julie sent out copies of the current County/HCVB MOU, and also copies of Mendocino and Redding contracts so an updated scope of services etc. can be

developed to present to County Staff. As the Bureau would like to secure a commitment to increased funding by the end of June, this doc (with a budget) needs to go to County Staff by the end of April. Jeff spoke with Scott Adair and John Bartholomew (Tax Collector) to get information regarding TOT, and feedback. Jeff told the Board that the County cry poor and say they don't have funds. Humboldt County received over \$25M Federal COVID bailout funds. Scott said the pandemic revenue losses were not as bad as predicted. By investing in HCVB they are getting a high return on their investment. Need to drive that point home. John B does not think a TOT increase should be the first step to increasing revenue, rather the RV Parks and Campgrounds should be paying TOT which he believes may generate as much as 25% more. According to Scott, if HCVB receives a "significant" increase in funding over 3% (CPI) it would trigger the RFP process. John Bartholomew is an asset and ally.

Julie: Getting the RV Parks and Campgrounds to pay TOT will help but won't happen quickly. If an RFP goes out, the process will take many months and every marketing group in the county will apply. Julie had asked Scott if HCVB can receive a one-time amount (\$300K-500K) from the Feds COVID payout which would not trigger the RFP as it is not County money. If they agree, HCVB will use this as leverage to engage other cities and towns support. Need to be nimble and creative and think outside the County for support, for HCVB to have a better chance of long-term viability. Aaron enquired as to the percentage increase allowable. Around 3%. At the current rate of \$200K that is a \$6K raise.

Jeff: In a recent conversation, Scott told Jeff that if the decision is made to increase the TOT, it will be at least a 9-month process and has to go to the voters. If increase goes into the General Fund it will take 50% + one vote. If it is designated for HCVB it will take 66% to pass. Even though this would be a tax on visitors, tax increases are not popular with County residents. County Staff will make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors, so it is important that the HCVB Board members have one-on-one conversations with the Supervisors. Julie will develop five talking points so the messaging is consistent and on topic.

Julie voiced concerns regarding the County MOU and that Scott felt it was not a comprehensive scope of services. The Mendocino contract, worth \$1.4M, is 14 pages and very detailed, reflects a team of 20 people. As the County only gives \$200K they cannot expect the same services, and HCVB cannot expand services without an increase in investment. Julie noted that most are unaware of the present scope of services which is quite broad. The scope will reflect the funding needed to support the services.

Lowell: personal contact with the Supervisors is important. Rex totally supportive of the HCVB, and believes that cities should be supporting HCVB.

Marc: Scott has been wanting a more comprehensive MOU which could mean also want more control over HCVB. But will require significantly more funding. Also need to take a long hard look at the passthrough/gateway funding. Need to get a clear idea of what they are doing with their funds and what the impact is.

Aaron: Is HCVB going to go after funding from individual cities as well?

Jeff: Yes, however, need to get it from the County first then use that for leverage of other city councils.

Aaron: Not sure how get it from the county if we can't get more than a 3% increase

Jeff: Scott said because it's a "Purchasing Policy contract with major funding" will trigger an RFP and Julie commented that \$200K is not "major" funding.

Jenny: When ED of Garberville chamber, much of the County funding went towards operations, some events (4th July festival), in a few guides, some other advertising. Runs a Visitors Center and produces a brochure. Only VC in the area. Board voted to stop keeping track of number of visitors and inquiries.

Marc: Willow Creek has a Visitors' Center. No brochure at this time. 25 years ago SoHum made the case for receiving significantly more funds than other areas because a lot of TOT was generated from there. Supervisors developed the formula that still have today. Probably today, northern Humboldt generates as much TOT if not more than SoHum. May want to see a redistribution of that funding.

Aaron enquired if HCVB has any input into Gateway funds.

Marc: No. Years ago, the County decided to get HCVB to administer Gateway distribution. Do not take an admin fee. The time is now to review as we get through this financial crisis.

Lowell: Gateway funds gives a false picture of how much HCVB receives.

Julie: Would not like to see Gateways receive less funding, rather have a closer relationship with HCVB and support them with their marketing as per the marketing strategy. Need to keep focused on the Bureau and connect with the Supervisors.

Shannon: In agreement with Chris, Lowell and Pete, personally knows that sometimes working with staff can be a waste of time and, as timing is important, she agrees that direct communication with each Supervisor should be pursued.

- Marketing: Ken reported on the Marketing Survey sent out to 25 County organizations and individuals with the hope of getting many responses. Committee wants a sense of the landscape, what activities are going on, and work out how to take the lead with Supervisors. Give us more story to be able to say what is actually going on in the county right now, here is what we are proposing for campaigns and added funding, and the coordination of all marketing activities. Julie noted that it will be interesting to see who responds. Survey recipients included all Chambers, Lodging Alliances, Cities and independent contractors. This ties in with the work of the funding & advocacy committee. First time a survey has been done and when going to the Supervisors, strengthen our position, this is how the Bureau can work with all the players and regions and help them. This is a statement of intent that has not been enunciated before.

Lowell: Did all board members receive a copy of the survey? Some organizations that may perceive themselves competitors may be reluctant to answer some questions. Need to take responses and report to Supervisors. Tell them we are working with everyone in the county.

Jeff: Julie is proactive in working to further these relationships. Julie: Why is Bureau accountable to the County when other organizations are not? In answer to Chris' question regarding Lodging Alliance recipients, Julie said SoHum (John Porter), Northern Humboldt (Donna Hufford), Marc in Willow Creek, and Chuck.

- ED Report: Julie reported working with Visit California on a virtual travel media expo – expecting 75 “in person” meetings from the East Coast – promoting Route 299 from Redding to the Ocean. Doing follow-up on 197 lead from three expos since December. Currently working with two travel writers visiting with their families organizing family friendly activities. Just completed the Family Adventure Show with 900+ attendees. Working in partnership with the NCTC to follow up. The Hello Humboldt! Podcast is moving forward. Will set up a recording booth in the conference room with Paul’s help. Added three new people to the interview list: Cassandra from the Film Commission, someone from Arts/Culture and hopefully a Tribal representative. Receiving 5-8 inquiries a day from future visitors and people wanting to get married in the redwoods. The majority are from out of state. Currently creating a series of social media posts called “Kids Bucket List” of adventures.

IV: County Update: No report:

- New Meeting Date: As Board of Supervisors meet on Tuesdays, Michell and Scott are unable to attend, important for them to be here. Jeff inquired if the representatives rotate? Libby explained that Michelle was nominated by the Supervisors to represent them, and Scott is the staff liaison. Neither have voting privileges.
- First Thursday of each month, 11:30 – 1 pm. Next meeting May 6th.
Julie will transcribe and distribute the minutes soon after the meetings so everyone will be up to date.

V: Other: Next steps. Report needs to be to the County Staff by the end of April to get on the Agenda for the June BOS meeting.

- Julie will develop 5 talking points for Board members to take to each Supervisor. As Staff take the HCVB report, distill it and make recommendations, we need to be in front of the Supervisors with one message. If the deadline cannot be made, HCVB should request to postpone for a couple of months.
Chris proposed meeting Supervisors in person to get more accomplished. Will have better impact in person. Ken & Aaron maybe to talk with Mike Wilson.
Lowell emphasized the importance of talking points so all are relaying the same message. Julie will make sure that regional information from the marketing survey is included for added impact.
- Libby: The Humboldt Creative Alliance met with Scott Adair and John Bartholomew to discuss County arts funding that would go through the Bureau. As yet, nothing has been decided. The Alliance is an informal group representing and advocating for all County arts organizations, it was started as part of the CEDS in 2012. Funding will be awarded through a grants process for overhead funding as, during COVID, operational funds have been the biggest challenge for many organizations. Good for the Bureau to show a strong commitment to arts & culture, good for the arts. It is win/win.

IV: Libby adjourned the meeting at 11:48 am.