



**Humboldt County Visitors Bureau
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

May 6th Meeting Minutes

Present: Libby Maynard, Jeff Durham, Ara Pachmayer, Chris Ambrosini, Paul Beatie, Lowell Daniels, Jenny Early, Ken Hamik, Justin Legge, Aaron Ostrom, Marc Rowley (*Ex officio*), Julie Benbow (*Staff*), Supervisor Michelle Bushnell

Absent: Pete Oringer, Shannon Hughes, Scott Adair (*County*)

- I. Libby called the meeting to order at 11:35 a.m.
All Directors made a quick introduction and check in.
- II. Approval of Minutes of May 6th meeting
 - a. Jeff made the motion to approve the minutes as submitted.
Ken seconded. There were no additions, corrections or comments.
The motion to approve the minutes passed.

III. Board Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Met on March 16 and discussed talking points that HCVB will taking to the Board of Supervisors.

Financials: Julie reported that HCVB has enough funds to see some projects completed by the end of the fiscal year (June 30) and a cushion for the start of FY21/22. Current unrestricted balance of \$238K, with monthly spent rate including operations, payroll and contracts of \$20K.

She told the Board of the importance of keeping Humboldt front and center of rural CA destinations and asked them to consider and approve investing funds in digital/online campaigns to launch after Memorial Weekend: one to target Chico, Sacramento, Redding and Phoenix – “Be Cool. In Humboldt,” and another targeting families with kids: “Family Adventures.” Want to hire contract marketing help for campaigns and Map & Guide update. Now is the time to do own campaigns and rely less on Visit California and NCTC to promote us. Would like to end fiscal year with some great marketing to carry Humboldt through the summer.

Jeff – Want to know details of expectations and outcomes for this expense.

Jeff: Motion to approve \$20,000 for contract marketing personal and campaigns.

Ken seconded.

Chris commented that HLA is running a campaign through second week of June outside the area and noted that Memorial weekend not a good weekend to start – county is busy. Start in June. He noted it was hard to approve motion without a budget and details. He also asked if JB had someone in mind to hire.

Julie: Campaigns slated to start in June. Reach to include Phoenix as a new market and service to ACV. Then run all campaigns July, August and into September - the months predicted to see the greatest visitor traffic. Will put together a bullet point marketing plan and goals for approval. Has a designer/marketer in mind, worked for Julie in design and marketing at the Zoo. On a contract basis. Board take a provisional vote now.

Vote: Unanimously passed with clarification budget and outcomes.

Advocacy & Funding: Jeff reported that the funding talking points are being developed. Will get the information to the Board, priority being meetings with the Supervisors prior to June presentation. He met with two Fortuna councilmembers, spoke about HCVB. He noted that the history of the Bureau and some misconceptions are still out there. Part of advocacy is telling what we are doing and sharing positive outcomes.

Marketing / Survey / Analytics: Ken noted that the ED report was filled with important information creating a snapshot of all the positive things the Bureau is doing and this is a good document to share.

Julie made a short report on the county marketing survey results: Invited 26 orgs to participate including Chambers, LA's, Main Streets, Cannabis Alliances, Humboldt Made, Eddy Alexander. Received 19 responses (76%). Question: 5 reasons why people visit Humboldt County – 'Redwoods' was the number one answer (100%), followed by 'outdoor experiences', 'culture' and 'cannabis'. Right now, there is not a lot of cannabis tourism, but it is definitely on the radar. Humboldt has a wide range of experiences to offer all ages. *Some results*: 50% of organizations have only one staff person to provide many services, especially Chambers that run visitor centers: Marketing budgets range from TBD, 13% its complicated, 13% minimal: 62% have a marketing plan, 56% do their marketing themselves. In rating the success of marketing efforts, 13% did not know, 56% said OK. The respondents who are happy with their marketing efforts are the ones with a full staff and professional help. While all respondents have websites, 38% do not know monthly traffic, other numbers range from monthly visits of 10 to 40,000 (HLA). 44% spend no budget on Facebook or Google ads. With a staff of six, Eureka Chamber has great results for their social media.

This data comes as no surprise, except that so many do not have the capability to do analytics – the results of which should inform all marketing and campaigns. This is where the Bureau can provide support: to create campaigns with them, push them out on Bureau platforms and theirs, do the analytics. It will be cohesive; all regions will be promoted to audiences outside the county.

Julie invited Jenny to share her experience as ED of the Garberville Chamber and a one-person operation with a Visitors Center.

Jenny: As a one-person operation at the Garberville Chamber, there are many tasks - events to put on, member recruitment and engagement, mixers, outreach to the coast, producing ads and marketing. And run a visitors' center. Social media for anyone who doesn't understand it, is very time consuming. It is hard for one person.

Julie: This is where the Bureau can help. A future meeting with the gateway ED's will gauge their responses to Bureau helping. One strength of Bureau – getting national articles and media attention which we can bring to regional festivals and events.

Jenny: Collaboration would be huge especially promoting events. If we can get visitors to each region, everyone benefits. The Bureau Instagram and Facebook reach is amazing.

Jeff: As a chamber, do you feel your role is primarily to promote businesses? Or do you promote to visitors? In Fortuna, they turned the visitor website off because the attractions (Avenue of the Giants etc.) are not within the city limits.

Jenny: Fortuna is a TBID. Garberville is not incorporated. Not sure when Garberville opened a visitor center, Chamber mainly a resource for the business community but wears a lot of hats.

Marc: The Bureau needs to assist and augment the work of the regional Chambers which is 180 degrees from where we started decades ago when Bureau job was to market outside the county to stay out of the way of the Chambers. Most communities do not know how to market and are ineffectual. Willow Creek has maybe a couple of businesses interested in visitors. Bureau needs to sit down with these chambers/communities and ask what they need, then present our services. County has all different messaging which important for identity of different communities. Bureau can bring cohesion/professionalism. Very challenging, but exciting time.

Lowell: Agree that important to draft ideas to present to different groups and regions. Will be a negative if they think the Bureau is trying to take over. Be very clear in helping not interfering. Get everyone on the same page.

Jenny: As to Marc's comment, there are two different campaigns for Southern Humboldt. All have the same goal - to benefit the community. Agree the challenge for Bureau is to create a cohesive group – most not even working together in own communities. Need to start by building

solid relationships and connections with areas that don't feel acknowledged or heard. Show what Bureau has done and its value.

Ken: Agree. Take the Bureau value proposition to participants. Data and analytics important. Cannabis tourism component is really intense—destination marketing includes cannabis experiences. Creating a Cannabis Trail map with historic landmarks, and a new retail location in San Francisco showcasing Humboldt cannabis products. Some deep and strategic thinking about Humboldt cannabis going on and will report back later.

Aaron: Survey demonstrates the need to help these smaller entities with their marketing. We can definitely help these communities, good direction but do they want our help?

Julie: Gateway Chambers receiving County funding sign an MOU specifying expectations for marketing and other services that one-person operations cannot realistically fulfill. Having a website without promoting it is not effective. The Bureau website gets 100K+ visitors a month and directs traffic to other sites for specialized regional information. Challenge is going to be how Bureau builds confidence with County stakeholders who have inaccurate pre-conceived ideas of what Bureau does and its value to the county.

Lowell: We want a new website but cannot jeopardize huge number of current visitors. Need to be able to drive traffic to regional websites. HLA website does not get any real traffic.

Julie: 'Redwoods' is the driver for most searches.

Lowell: Matched names of referrals from 'visitredwoods' and all turned into reservations.

Ara: How many filled out survey. Julie: 76% response rate.

Ken: Important word – partnerships. We want to add value and help regions succeed.

Julie: County is investing in these communities but not supporting them being successful. Bureau can market regional assets outside the county and attract more tourist revenue.

ED Report: Reached out to Visit California to get an advanced copy of the 2020 Direct Travel Impacts Report (Dean Runyan). Humboldt County annual numbers: 40% decrease in overall spending. Went from \$484M in 2019 to \$279M. Tourism service industries support a lot of jobs throughout the county (food service – 47% decrease) many are minimum wage. Need to support hardest hit sectors, food service, arts, culture and entertainment.

Lowell: Dean Runyan takes numbers from STR report which not every hotel participates in.

Chris: For accommodations, biggest loss in March, April, but rest of the year up. Numbers accurate.

Marc: Lull in March/April, but up rest of year. A percentage were essential workers. Need to discuss the AirBnB and vacation rental sector which has been huge driver.

Jeff: This data, distilled, needs to present to Supervisors to support our case. Discussed with JB getting STR report to share. Important to use and share data.

Libby: Performing arts was down 90% for income. Museums & galleries all shuttered. Recent Federal Shuttered Venue Fund opened then immediately closed down due to too many applications all from orgs with a loss of 90% of income. Humboldt has been devastated.

Paul: Old Steeple income down 85%. Unable to log into Shuttered Venue Operator grant. The closing of both Ferndale Rep and Old Steeple had great impact on hotels and restaurants.

Planning on doing test concerts summer and fall to try out new ticketing and protocols. Orange tier, if require proof of vaccination or negative test, venue can have 35% capacity – 97 people.

Libby: If invest \$1 in arts & culture and live theater, get minus \$3 return.

IV. County Update - no County update.

V. Other:

Jeff: Future agenda item: review name of the Organization.

VI. Next Meeting

Thursday, June 3rd at 11:30am.

Julie: Will send talking points and budget out next week. Need to be on board with what we are saying and budget justification. Start scheduling meetings with Supervisors.

VII. Meeting was adjourned at 12:56 pm.
