



**Humboldt County Visitors Bureau
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

MEETING MINUTES

July 29, 2020 • 12:00 to 2:00 pm • Via Zoom

Present: Marc Rowley (Chair), Chris Ambrosini, Paul Beatie, Lowell Daniels, Cathy Kunkler, Laura Lassetter, Justin Legge, Libby Maynard, Aaron Ostrom. Julie Benbow (Staff)

Absent: Barbara Groom, Meredith Maier, Pete Oringer, John Porter, Scott Adair (County)

The meeting was called to order at 12:04 pm by Marc Rowley.

Guest Introductions: Niki Rose from SHCVB, and Jason Baxter, Bureau marketing consultant.

Approval of Minutes. The January 22, 2020 meeting minutes were reviewed. There were no additions or corrections. Libby made the motion to approve the minutes as submitted. Chris seconded. Laura abstained, unable to access them and review. Board voted and the motion was carried.

(Julie reported that the Bureau server had been down impacting emails. Some documents were sent to Directors from her personal account. She will resend any documents again as requested.)

2019-2020 Year-end Finance Report In Pete's absence, Julie reviewed the reports noting that, due to personnel changes, a tight rein on expenses and no significant investment in bought media or advertising, the Bureau ended the year in the black with cash assets of \$200+K, and \$116K in contingency funds. (EOY Financials prepared by Cunningham, Malone & Morton)

2020-2021 Budget: Julie reviewed the proposed budget and narrative submitted to the Board for review.

- The major concern voiced was the source of funding. It was discussed and agreed that tourism is an essential and major component of economic recovery, so asking the County to increase its support makes sense. It was noted that, pre COVID, Scott had indicated that more funds would/maybe available. Julie stated that increased support would allow the immediate implementation of the marketing strategy and work with all the regions can begin. It was emphasized that Humboldt is delivering marketing with an equivalent impact as Mendocino whose budget of \$1.5M is 4 times greater than Humboldt. The Marketing Strategy enunciates a very strong case for for funding and the subsequent economic benefits to the County.
- Aaron asked if an additional \$200K was enough. Julie responded that she will be meeting with Scott and ask for more funding which will support stronger marketing efforts
- Laura questioned the projected income amount and sources. Julie answered that the number was based on FY 19/20 income from regional Lodging Alliances and towns. Meetings will be



scheduled to present the marketing strategy investment that will have a positive economic impact. Lowell noted that each region has control of its own LA funds and can be designated as desired.

- In response to Laura’s inquiry about the current HLA “Standing Tall” campaign, Julie reported that the campaign will be shared with the Bureau and promoted through its digital platforms.
- Marc reported that Julie and Chuck (HLA) have had a series of meetings to explore a possible collaboration to share assets and get the brand and consistent messaging out with no duplication of efforts or dollars. The conversations are in the early stages
- Libby commented on the clear and reasonable budget, noting that all budgets are “best guess” documents and likely to change.

Motion: Libby made the motion to approve the draft 2020/2021 budget. Lowell seconded.

- Discussion ensued: Laura voiced her concerns citing a too much speculation for the income and the possible negative impact of COVID.
- Chris voiced concerns about hiring staff during this period and the need to terminate the website contract. Julie assured the Board that, as delineated in the Marketing Strategy, the current contract will be concluded in three months, enough time to get the Strategy adopted and design new more flexible and dynamic website, with significantly reduced hosting costs. Julie noted that, depending on the level of funding, staff will be brought on to ensure Humboldt has a presence in state and national marketplace by first quarter of 2021. Julie is currently doing all the marketing/outreach etc. Now is the time to invest it in creative either as contract labor or PT employee. The budget does not include trade shows or event/groups hosting.
- Marc reminded the Board that the Budget and Marketing Strategy need to be living documents able to pivot quickly if necessary and repeated the motion to adopt the budget.

Vote: The Board voted to approve the budget as a live document. Laura opposed, citing too much speculation for funding.

Marc proposed moving Agenda item #5 Board Business – forward

Motion: Motion to move Item 5 up to Item 3b1.

Vote: Lowell made the motion. Cathy seconded. Board approved the motion.

Directors Terms of Service: Marc reminded the Board that the time for elections had passed. Stating that the Bureau is at a crossroads and asked if Directors would be comfortable keeping board membership as is until December. The Bureau currently has 13 voting members, 10 who have termed out. (Bylaws state that HCVB can have between 9 and 14 board members).

- Aaron remarked that 14 is too many, and Chris posed the question: if the Bureau is no longer a membership organization, how would an election be facilitated.
- Discussion ensued: Many organizations do not have members. Directors could seek nominations from the community. Laura inquired if in an emergency change could be made to the By Laws re: being a membership organization so members do not have to elect a new



Board. Libby responded: A Board can go down to a minimum of 2(in all state bylaws). Those remaining can proceed to appoint and create a new Board.

- As these are important issues, Paul proposed freezing all board positions pending approval of marketing strategy and securing funding.

Motion: To leave any changes to the Board of directors until after the adoption of marketing plan.

Vote: Lowell made the motion to adopt. Aaron seconded: Board unanimously approved the motion.

Prior to leaving the meeting at this time, Lowell voted in favor of adopting the marketing strategy.

Executive Director Update : Julie had no additional comments on her report however she reported her recent completion of a grant request to Visit California for 20/21 funding: VCA have had a dramatic reduction in funding (tourism related partners and hotel tax), closed overseas offices and changed their focus of marketing from 80% international to state and domestic. HCVB is pushing content to them to share through their digital platforms.

2020/2023 Marketing Plan: Presentation & Discussion

Julie introduced Jason Baxter, hired as the Bureau’s marketing consultant, who brings a wealth of international marketing knowledge and experience. She noted that the Marketing Strategy is a strong, well researched document. *(A more detailed version of Jason’s presentation is available).*

- Jason outlined the research undertaken including meetings with the marketing committee, Scott, some chambers and other ‘competitive’ organizations and regions to determine what is currently being done collectively to promote northern CA, and how can Humboldt county differentiate itself from other counties that have more funding. The Marketing Strategy is not a branding exercise, rather a shift in focus so HCVB can do a better job targeting people that we know have the best chance getting here, and how we can do a better work together with the regions make sure there is no duplication of effort or wasted funds.
- Who is traveling? Research included talking to people in related industry collecting data focusing on what people are doing now for travel (trips less travelers who may have wanted to visit SF or Portland are now skipping cities and get away from people – want kayaking, fishing, hiking and have a good meal etc. This strategy is based on doing a better job of thinking about serving the interests and desires of these visitors by creating a quarterly marketing plan that each region will have input into.
- The Target audience (pp 10-12) is no longer boomers who are spending less and do not return. Marketing dollars need to be invested wisely and directed to those targets and the creative content developed with their interests in mind. Regions provide content and ideas. An online system will be a management tool for all regional entities to submit material.
- Funding levels (pp 20): It is important that the Bureau become more sustainable and independent. A new custom website includes moving all existing content (6 weeks) and is a project that need to focus on right away – and get all regions set up on shared platform;
- \$453M industry not run by a small staff - staff of one. From a business investment perspective, the County needs to support these efforts in a much bigger way: the surrounding counties have 2–4x times funding and are not showing any better results. (pp 5).



- Jason stated that this document is not a detailed marketing plan, it is an organizational and marketing strategy not a branding job. It is the Bureau's job to get the word out on a national and international level outside the area. Over the past years, the Bureau's consistent marketing efforts in getting stories and videos put together and to the right media means that Humboldt is still reaping results. People are continually running across stories in national media long after publication and it aggregates over the years. This is fundamental - getting all the right material to the right people, done by one group (Bureau) that looks out for interests of all. Bureau has the connections/relationships and the ability to get significant media traction and successfully promote and support each region and their specific assets.
- Paul commented that, as a business owner, Ferndale does not have the budget or expertise and the Bureau promoting regional assets to a national and international audience is of great value. Cathy agreed, noting that the Bureau has the reach and expertise to get word out and do target marketing to compete with all other counties.
- Funding and Staffing: Jason noted that in order to be successful the Bureau has to invest in the right professionals/specialists who can be trusted and be accountable (analytics etc.) to the in-house team. Quarterly reporting will allow for changes if needed. A Marketing Committee, made up of members from all regions, will hold their region accountable for getting material to the Bureau.
- In response to Chris's comment that this document is not a detailed marketing plan, Jason agreed: It is strategic overview and the #1 goal is to show what the county is investing in, what expected from stakeholders involved – how to work together and not waste money on redundant work. It also discusses the Bureau's past weaknesses and presents a new format for working differently. It is not based on guesswork, rather solid data. Bureau will be more effective based on the level of funding. Without the Bureau working at this level, every region, town etc. will be on their own. Much of what the Bureau does cannot, and is not done by any other agency in the County.
- Membership: (pp 6) Laura brought up the issue of promoting businesses and assets even if they are not members. Aaron noted that, without a membership model, the Bureau can support each region when they propose their assets.
- Julie reminded the Board that there were and are no written policies or procedures for membership which has created some negativity and bad feelings over the years.
- Laura noted the struggle with membership over the past two years and recommended moving away from membership to no membership to be able to support county as a whole.
- Marc asked the board if: anyone have strong concerns going in this direction, acknowledging that the details need to be worked out.

Motion: To adopt the Marketing Strategy as a live document.

Vote: Aaron proposed: Cathy seconded. Marketing Strategy adopted.



- Laura and Aaron requested a vote regarding HCVB remaining a membership organization noting that the marketing plan asks question re membership (pp3) as it is part of the plan.
- Jason commented that membership has been one of the sensitive issues Bureau has always had (public, perceived). With a membership model there is a conflict of interest can't get away from.
- Chris voiced concerns regarding stopping membership citing the many county orgs that are membership based and just promote their members. Laura said that SHCVB is no longer a membership org. Julie commented that Bureau can work with all membership orgs and be the non-partisan umbrella org.
- Chris noted that it may bring more unnecessary negativity to HCVB, meaning that it will be very hard to represent every business in the County with current staff levels and even with increased staff levels. Aaron said there is more to gain by putting the onus on regions to participate with the Bureau.

Motion: In cohesion with marketing strategy plan and for its success, HCVB should navigate away from being a membership organization to non-membership organization and represent the county as a whole, region by region.

Vote: Laura made the motion. Paul seconded. Chris opposed. Motion approved.

Board of Directors: Terms

- Aaron asked how best to move forward, should remaining 3 members in good standing nominate new directors? Should a new board format be researched?
- Marc proposed that this discussion be tabled until the marketing strategy and funding have been approved by the County. When we know we have funding and plan, can proceed with who will be the leadership.

Vote: Motion: To freeze the existing Board until approval of marketing plan by county and funding has been secured.

Paul made the motion. Aaron seconded. Motion approved.

Marc noted that now is the time to get the County on board with the Marketing Strategy and funding, and make the case for the Bureau to the Supervisors.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:16pm.