



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

MINUTES

Thursday, September 19, 2024 • 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Via Zoom

Present: Ken Hamik, Jenny Early, Molly Blakemore, Lowell Daniels, Shannon Hughes, Justin Legge,

Ara Pachmayer, Lisa Sundberg, Sam Wedll, Julie Benbow, *ED*

Absent: Carlton Nielsen

On September 18th 2024, Director Jenny Early sent an email to the HCVB Board of Directors resigning from the Board citing a conflict due to her position as President of the Board of Southern Humboldt Chamber of Commerce and their contract and funding with the county.

I. The meeting was called to order at 11:35 am.

Roll call was taken. Directors checked in.

Shannon made a statement to the Board: As the Director of the Willow Creek Chamber that depends on county funding, it is a conflict of interest to also serve on the Bureau Board at this time. So, as a subcontractor for the county, Shannon respectfully stepped down as a director from the HCVB Board. She is fully supportive of the Bureau and its work, and wants to remain in contact.

II. Public Comment: There were no public comments.

III. Approval of Minutes of July 18th meeting and the Special Meeting August 26th

Molly made the motion to approve the minutes as submitted.

Sam seconded the motion.

The motion to approve the minutes as submitted passed unanimously.

Ken addressed the previous discussion regarding a press release. HCVB will release one when the time is appropriate, The businesses and community do not have a clear understanding of the scope of marketing services and the resulting positive economic impact for Humboldt. He emphasized the value to not only the visitor but also to the members of the communities whose quality of life is improved due to the tax revenue from visitor spending.

Julie gave a short overview of the daily interactions with the public, (including working with Cal Poly and St. Joes supplying relocation information) and with travel industry partners (Visit California, Brand USA, NCTC). The Bureau is also the main (only) distributor of brochures.

Ken: Considering the recent staff changes in Economic Development, Directors were asked for comments/input regarding the relationship with the county and HCVB's future.

Question: How can we (HCVB Board) best educate the BOS and Ad Hoc Committee about the negative impact of replacing HCVB's 40+years with an RFP – or work out how we can collaborate and offer solutions.

Sam proposed pursuing both a collaboration with the county and independent funding –through advertising on the website or newsletter and going to tribes to partner/collaborate.

Ara discussed future role of HCVB as the county DMO and reiterated the need to secure funding.

Justin noted that, not knowing the county's future plans, important for HCVB to maintain a cordial relationship with the county.

Lowell voiced concerns regarding the county's lack of communication. Both he and Molly expressed support for the continued existence of HCVB and the work.

Lisa reported that Indigenous Tourism is a major focus currently – tribes need local tourism opportunities – worth exploring.

Jason agreed on the importance of keeping positive relationship with the county, but recommended focusing on engaging with partners who have a long term vision – like the tribes or large business that have something to gain for marketing Humboldt. Need to repackage HCVB and the current marketing model. Great value in the organic traffic to the existing website. With a small investment a tribe or business would love to have access to the website traffic, 60K Facebook followers, 18K Instagram followers. Changing the way HCVB does partnerships and put focus on finding those prospects who see opportunity for positive impacts and long-term partnerships. Doable if we set an initial goal of 6 months – in that time frame find out what the county is doing or planning to do.

Julie reported that HCVB has enough funds to pay all expenses for the next three months. Need to start pursuing funding opportunities immediately. Noted that the Bureau has a negative reputation in some areas – much from previous leadership and its close relationship with the HLA. Had discussions to refocus the Bureau to be more of a tourism marketing organization and change the name. This situation with the county may be the perfect time to seriously consider this total rebirth.

Lowell reminded the Board that the original organization received some funding from most of the towns. Model failed due to lack of total participation. Eureka pulled funding followed by the others leaving the county as the primary funding source. That is when the areas split and became siloed. Not sure how Bureau can get all those entities to come together.

Sam: The tribes be good partners work together to build experiences that visitors would like. Bring tribal stories, culture and history with the places (Trinidad, Blue Lake etc).

Lisa reiterated reaching out to the tribes and let them know what is happening. Seek a relationship– part of the process and active participant, not just sponsor. Trinidad Rancheria may be very interested. The Yurok are doing a good job on promoting experiences for visitors – should talk with them. There are tourism dollars available and get tribal sponsorship. Have a bigger voice. Describe the crisis, the opportunity and how they can participate. Develop tribal tourism infrastructure, anchor the programs and stories.

Next steps:

Ken stated that the county does not have the staff or knowledge to do take over the Bureau's work. No contract has been received nor clarification of the situation from the County, so need to be proactive: Contact them and ask for an update and a meeting. Also propose developing a joint press release emphasizing the importance of tourist revenue for businesses and towns throughout the county. If no response, HCVB will go in a different direction. Send the message today and ask for a prompt response by Monday.

Julie emphasized the importance of being proactive. Will develop some talking points for different funding scenarios, and a 6-month budget including contract commitments.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:48 pm.

Next Meeting: November 21, 2024