



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

Monday, August 26, 2024 • Via Zoom

Present: Ken Hamik, Molly Blakemore, Ara Pachmayer, Justin Legge, Jenny Early, Shannon Hughes, Carlton Nielsen, Lisa Sundberg, Sam Wedll. Julie Benbow, *ED*

Absent: Lowell Daniels

1. The meeting was called to order at 3:30pm
2. Update & Disclosures
 - a. In response to the County's belief that they own the website and marketing assets, HCVB hired a contract lawyer to ascertain legal ownership and copyrights. HCVB is the sole owner of the website, which is the county's most valuable marketing asset.
 - b. HCVB does have up-to-date BOD insurance.
 - c. Discussion of how change in economic development staff may impact situation.
3. County Gateway & HCVB Contracts.

Directors voiced concern regarding the lack of a promised contract, and no communication with the County.

 - a. County has sent a new lengthy and complicated contracts to Gateways, developed without the knowledge of the BOS. Concerned that BOS plan on micromanaging and eventually defunding them. Bureau has developed and maintains close reciprocal relationships with the Chambers.
 - b. Concerns voiced regarding the County BOS and staff not knowing the full spectrum of services that HCVB provides, and no professional ability to undertake them successfully. Directors questioned if the County decision to hire an outside company to do a Travel & Tourism Survey is politically motivated.
4. Three possible future scenarios were presented for discussion:
 - a. Take no action – scorched earth – facing defunding on December 31st which will result in reduction of tax funding coming into county, small businesses suffer, return on investment from third biggest county economic revenue driver will dip.
 - b. Persuade BOD to not spend TOT dollars on outside company to do a marketing assessment. HCVB has all the tools and contacts, and have marketing experts on Board. County give HCVB one more year of funding and we do the survey. Solicit input from all county stakeholders
 - c. New road map – for the benefit of all stakeholders and businesses that depend on tourism. Promote HCVB website as major asset, pursue alternative funding sources, and sever contractual relationship with the county.

Discussion: Best case scenario: HCVB receives one more year of funding – time to do the survey/analysis and help the county develop a realistic course for moving forward. Any pause in marketing will negatively impact the economy and Humboldt will lose ground to Mendocino and other destinations with redwoods and similar tourist assets.

As the County is looking at a \$14M budget shortfall, it does not make or economic sense to use marketing funds to do a tourism survey. Any disruption in marketing will result in reduced tax revenue and travel spending. The BOS will be directly responsible for any negative outcomes to the economic health of the county.

It was suggested that HCVB ask the BOS what they want and figure out how to give it to them.

Rather than try to recreate what is already successful, go to county, request they develop a new recommendation to continue funding for one year. Leave the survey to the local experts.

Directors representing two Gateways voiced concerns regarding the county contracts they had received and a reluctance to sign them, citing their own contract conversations and concerns about future funding.

- Advocacy and Engagement: Outreach to the business community to communicate the potential impact of Supervisors decision and to request support in the form of contacting their supervisor. It was agreed to start polling partners, stakeholders, chambers and other interested parties for their input and concerns, then presenting findings to the BOS.
- It was recommended that a press release be developed with the feedback received from stakeholders and partners.
- It was recommended that a meeting with the Travel & Tourism Ad Hoc Committee be requested asap.
- Several motions were proposed, however it was agreed to clarify the motions and email to the Directors for a vote. The motions were sent on August 28, 2024.

Motions: The following two motions were each proposed by Sam and seconded by Carlton:

MOTION ONE:

HCVB Board of Directors request that the Board of Supervisors resume funding HCVB for the fiscal year July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025 to continue tourism marketing endeavors; and HCVB will conducting a Tourism Asset Survey (study) in conjunction with county partners including Chambers of Commerce, Gateways, businesses, and other stakeholders.

MOTION TWO:

The Board of Directors will engage with stakeholders and businesses throughout the county, especially those dependent upon tourism revenue, to gather concise input and feedback regarding the impact of defunding HCVB might impact on their business and the economy.

Contingent upon the Supervisors response and community feedback, a press release may be prepared.

The motions passed with eight (8) Yays and two (2) Abstentions.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40PM.

