



Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Thursday, Sep 18, 2025
Hampton Inn & Suites

Call to order: 8:03 AM

Introductions of Board Members and Board Nominees with a closed-door discussion and vote held to approve new members.

Report on posting of the agenda: Executive Director Johnson announced the agenda was posted on Friday, September 12, 2025, at 5PM at the California Welcome Center, 8155-6 Arroyo Circle, Gilroy, CA 95020.

Roll Call: Michelle Carlen, Dave Peoples, Jeff Orth, Mark Jacobsen, Cameron Childers, Larry Imas, Mike Patel, Brent Bonino, Mattie Scariot, Kelli Jones, Eric Gebhardt, Trevor Van Laar.

Absent: Terrence Fugazzi

Staff: Executive Director- Frank Johnson, CWC Manager- Susan Childers, Tourism & Community Engagement Coordinator- Mary Gurries Bejarano.

Public Guests and Advisors: Jane Howard, Victoria Valencia, Mike Conrotto

Introduction of Jonathan Bohnenberger as a Visit Gilroy Board Member Nominee.

Motion to accept Jonathan Bohnenberger as a Visit Gilroy Board Member

First: BM Eric Gebhardt

Second: BM Mark Jacobsen

Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Frank Johnson delivered a summary regarding the potential electronic billboard that is proposed for Gilroy. Noting that Visit Gilroy has previously voted to take no position on this issue in past years, Frank Johnson advised against supporting the billboard, citing limited benefit for tourism, pricing for local businesses may be an issue, potential for drawing business out of Gilroy and in his opinion, the aesthetic of an electronic billboard impugns the image of Gilroy along HWY 101.

Mike Conrotto presented a proposal for an electronic billboard to be installed south of the car dealerships with visibility from HWY 101. The City of Gilroy would receive a percentage of advertising revenue, with limited free space offered to nonprofits. Proponents of the sign assert that it is good for local businesses and tourism. The Visit Gilroy Board discussed potential benefits and concerns.

No vote taken for Visit Gilroy to take a stance on the electronic billboard issue. The board packet contained material from Mike Conrotto and a page with potential points against the billboard.

Motion by Michelle Carlen to create a volunteer study group of Board Members to meet separately to gain further understanding on this issue

First: BM Michelle Carlen

Second: BM Larry Imas

Opposed: Kelli Jones

Motion passed. At this time, group members include Michelle Carlen, Eric Gebhardt, and Mattie Scariot.

Nominate/Vote for Visit Gilroy Board Officers: Secretary and Vice Chairs

Motion to nominate Dave Peoples continuing as Secretary of the Board:

First: BM Eric Gebhardt

Second: BM Michelle Carlen

Motion passed unanimously.

Motion to nominate Mattie Scariot as the Vice Chair of the Board:

First: BM Mattie Scariot

Second: BM Eric Gebhardt

Motion passed unanimously.

Consent Calendar

Motion to approve Board Meeting Minutes from Aug 21, 2025, and August 2025 Financials:

First: BM Dave Peoples

Second: BM Mark Jacobsen

Motion passed unanimously.

August 2025 Google Analytics Report and August Marketing Activities – ED Frank Johnson: Website traffic is up 30% this month. Our e-newsletter has a 26% open-rate; our latest e-newsletter was sent to 11,000 recipients with a survey that generated minimal response; Mary will share a link with Board Members. Blog stats are down 30% due to a web address change during our website transition earlier this year. Our Tamal Festival social media reel reached nearly 2M combined views across platforms, one of the most successful pieces of content positioning Gilroy as a visit-worthy destination.

Old Business

Follow-up with Gilroy Gardens displaying non-Gilroy hotels: Gilroy Gardens has voted to keep things as-is; this is a revenue-generating item.

New Business

New Winery Brochure trifold & social media – A new piece of print media shining more light on Gilroy wineries, as a companion piece to the Wineries of Santa Clara Valley wine map that will now be distributed from the California Welcome Center and the Hotel and Hospitality partners.

Increased fee at Heritage – Our interest rate at Heritage bank will be 1.5%.

Reporting with the City – Multiple reports including financial data will be prepared by ED Frank Johnson for the City of Gilroy.

Possible TOT increase & Sep 15 City Council meeting – The City of Gilroy has proposed raising the tax to increase tourism funds. Hotels will opt to support or not support this increase. Knowledge earned during this audit period of Gilroy hotels has raised points that will affect the way Gilroy hotels choose to support this increase or not.

Visit Gilroy Audit Update – Started 2 years ago, this voluntary audit process is close to 1 year behind schedule, but very close to completion. Following this, a new audit process will be initiated.

Nov & Dec meetings – Following discussion, the November Board meeting will be moved up one week to November 13, 2025, and the December 2025 meeting is canceled.

Staff Reports

Visit Gilroy Executive Director's Aug 2025 Report – Frank Johnson: No additional report items.

CWC Gilroy Manager's Aug 2025 Report – Susan Childers: We had 1,163 visitors in August (down 17% YoY) and generated \$3,833 in sales from 170 transactions (down 15% YoY). Performance at 125% of monthly budget and 131.5% of annual budget. Gilroy visitors accounted for 83% of sales; out-of-state and international visitors 17%. We hear many positive comments from local visitors at the Welcome Center. Top international visitors from China, Germany, and Japan. Japanese visitors noted high travel costs due to current currency rates. Distributed 1,764 pieces of collateral. We have refreshed inventory for our popular garlic plush - 148 sold in 2024; these retail for \$9.99. Spirit Halloween is now open at Premium Outlets. Tesla chargers continue driving increased foot traffic and purchases.

Tourism & Community Engagement Coordinator Aug 2025 Report – Mary Gurries Bejarano: Working with Verdin Marketing to refresh several print media items. Special thanks to Frank and Karina for assisting in distributing 1,510 pieces to hotels and hospitality partners in August. We're planning a social media giveaway contest for some Northern California Renaissance Faire tickets to boost engagement and highlight Gilroy's proximity to the event. Website updates in progress with new pages for group travel and wedding parties, showcasing local and regional attractions to position Gilroy as a central hub for group travel.

Board Member Reports

BM Michelle Carlen: Networking at Noon is next Wednesday, hosted at The Neon Exchange. Our first Lunch and Learn series for our members was a success with our marketing manager, Cristina Cortes, on Social Media Marketing. Our next session is October 14 at noon, Michelle will speak on Harmony in the Workplace. Gilroy Chamber of Commerce has a Mixer on Oct 6th, 5:30 PM at Pinnacle bank.

BM Jeff Orth: Geofencing data from Thursday night Downtown Live concerts shows consistent attendance of 4,000-5,000 people, contributing economic value to the city and downtown area. A new sandwich shop is scheduled to open downtown soon. The Beer Crawl is scheduled for October 18th, with encouragement for community participation. These events are helping Gilroy residents rediscover downtown while attracting new visitors to local businesses and offerings.

Victoria Valencia: No report

Jane Howard: No report

BM Cameron Childers: Summertime park operations are wrapping up and launching straight into seasonal events with Great Big BOO!

BM Larry Imas: The Wineries of Santa Clara Valley participated in the Chamber's Networking at Noon event and we poured wine for attendees. Proposed Santa Clara County rural zoning amendment changes are causing great concern in our wine industry. More information is needed to assess options and rally support.

BM Jonathan Bohnenberger: No report

BM Mike Patel: The Northern California Renaissance Faire is happening now through mid-October, and hotels are benefiting.

BM Mattie Scariot: Stepped out early; no report.

BM Kelli Jones: No report.

BM Eric Gebhardt: High temperature weather was not helpful for attendance of the first weekend of the Northern California Renaissance Faire. Looking ahead to 2026 hotel booking, group reservations for weddings, sports, etc., look decent with overflow potential from the surrounding areas.

Chair Trevor Van Laar: No report.

Adjourned: 9:35 AM