



MINUTES

Visit SLO CAL Advisory Committee

Visit SLO CAL Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Friday, February 14, 2020

3:00pm

Embassy Suites

333 Madonna Road, San Luis Obispo, CA 93405

1. CALL TO ORDER: Clint Pearce

PRESENT: Matthew Bronson, Scott Collins, Lynn Compton, Red Davis, Tom Frutchey, Erik Howell, Derek Johnson, Desi Lance, Jim Lewis, Steve Martin, Heather Newsom, Rachele Rickard, Guy Savage

ABSENT: Jim Bergman, Lan George, Heidi Harmon

STAFF PRESENT: Chuck Davison, Lisa Verbeck, Michael Wambolt, Derek Kirk, Brendan Pringle, Ashley Mastako, Kelly Brickey, Haley Cahill, Kim Caldwell, Marc Nieporte

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Jed Bickel, Victor Popp, Clint Pearce

MARKETING COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Molly Cano, Gordon Jackson, Danna Stroud

Call to Order by Pearce at 3:04 pm.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Davison pointed out that Committee members were provided with handouts on the coronavirus, its impact on travel to California, and the expected bounceback. He noted that the bounceback to California is expected to be immediate once travel fully opens back up.

CONSENT AGENDA

3. Approval of June 13, 2019 Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion.

ACTION: Moved by Martin/Lewis to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Motion carried: 11:0:1
Lance abstained.
Howell arrived after the vote.

BUSINESS ITEMS

4. Strengths and Opportunities

Davison reviewed the purpose of the meeting, noting that during the Tourism Marketing District renewal process, staff has fielded questions on what Visit SLO CAL will be doing over the next ten years and where the additional funds will be directed. This led to the organization's engagement with Coraggio Group to facilitate a "listening tour" ultimately informing its strategic planning process, which will define the organization's trajectory for the next three years. He noted that on February 6-7, 2020, Visit SLO CAL held Investor/Stakeholder/Partner listening sessions in the four regions of the county (South County, San Luis Obispo, North Coast, North County). He introduced Matthew Landkamer, Principal, Coraggio Group, who would facilitate the meeting. Landkamer noted that this Advisory Committee session would be focused on the municipal perspective and would also highlight the similarities and differences in the feedback provided in the Investor/Stakeholder/Partner sessions.

Landkamer facilitated a conversation around the following questions:

What are the greatest strengths of Visit SLO CAL?

What holds Visit SLO CAL back from accomplishing its mission?

What are the most important strategic opportunities for Visit SLO CAL to pursue?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion.

In response to the question, *What are the greatest strengths of Visit SLO CAL?*:

Lewis noted that Visit SLO CAL now enjoys strong government support, is now competitively funded against other sets of the market, and has brought SLO County together under a unified message and vision. Bronson noted that Visit SLO CAL has a track record of results. Collins noted that the Visit SLO CAL team is great at advocacy at the regional and state level. Johnson highlighted Visit SLO CAL's data-driven marketing campaign and how it uses data to drive its business decisions. Savage noted that its strong partnerships, such as its partnership with the SLO County Regional Airport, are critical. Newsom noted that Visit SLO CAL has a strong brand. Popp noted that it provides great data for individual cities, that they could not obtain on their own. Bickel said that it is inclusive and listens to viewpoints from many sectors and all of the communities. Johnson noted that in addition to the organization's efforts, cities make substantial investments from their general fund on items that impact both residents and visitors. Compton concurred with Johnson with regards to projects at the County level. Frutchey said he appreciates how Davison has worked hard to build strong relationships with the cities, and noted that the organization's strong municipal support is the result of these efforts. He added that with tourism as the second largest industry in the county, government officials have a vested interest in the organization's decisions. Lewis noted that while government officials are cognizant of the fact that the assessment is funded by lodging investors and that the lodging-based Board of Directors makes the decisions, the city and county governments are the guardians of the community and believe they should be driving and participating in the key conversations, and that they desire to be greater partners. He pointed to the Destination Management Strategy (Experience SLO CAL 2050), as an example, noting that much of the plan will need to be implemented by government, and that the city managers approved it in the hopes that they could get more involved. Newsom added that government officials don't want to bring outside influence on their communities that would impact quality of life. Frutchey noted that government hears criticism on both sides of the spectrum—some encouraging them to get out of the way, but also some saying that too many hotels are being built. He noted that government ultimately creates the environment in which hotels can be successful—government works together with the lodging community, and both have a role. Pearce reaffirmed that it's important that everyone should have a say so

that the organization can course-correct as soon as possible. Davison added that the organization would not have been successful in the renewal if the local governments had not leaned into the process. Compton noted that she appreciates Visit SLO CAL for the work they do because the County simply doesn't have the time to focus on these things. Johnson added that there should always be a healthy tension between government and the lodging industry and that government needs to be an active partner in order to truly be successful. Davison noted that he hoped that Visit SLO CAL's efforts are always seen through the lens of positive intent from the perspective of government officials. Compton complimented Visit SLO CAL as always respectful of government officials' time. Frutchey noted that another strength is that Visit SLO CAL has a significant amount of discretion in its budget which enables the organization to react more quickly than government can and is able to focus its resources in areas that benefit all of the communities.

In response to the question, *What holds Visit SLO CAL back from accomplishing its mission?:*

Newsom and Lewis noted that Visit SLO CAL's broad scope can hold it back. Lewis added that he worries that the organization might get paralysis from having a small staff and so many items on which to focus. He also acknowledged that Visit SLO CAL receives enormous pressure from all communities to do more for each community, which can hold it back. Martin noted that he didn't think much was holding the organization back, other than minutia. He added that it's time for Visit SLO CAL to be bold, step up and take its place in the world. Johnson noted that the organization's scope can be overwhelming, and that there is work to be done on the visitor experience piece, as visitors currently might have an asymmetrical experience depending on where they go in the county. He added that there is some tension about overtourism. Martin noted that comments about the government staying out of tourism are a bit offensive because the primary role of government is gauging the temperature of what tourism is bringing to the county. Compton added that government officials are the ones who get the pushback, and she highlighted issues like workforce housing that government is asked to solve. Martin noted that he considers himself an educational instrument when he receives negative feedback from residents about tourism and will remain so as long as he agrees with the direction of the industry. Lance noted that she believes it's important for government officials to hear the voices of tourism and be able to point out its community benefits. Compton noted that residents appreciate the fact that SLO County is a rural county, and want to keep it that way. Compton and Newsom pointed to overtourism, and Newsom noted that you don't know what overtourism is until you reach it. Johnson noted that the resident-first perspective of the Destination Management Strategy is going to go a long way in accomplishing its objectives. Frutchey noted that it will be important for the hospitality industry to be truly involved in the activities that the government is getting involved in.

In response to the question, *What are the most important strategic opportunities for Visit SLO CAL to pursue?*

Johnson noted that there has been a lot of private sector investment in the tourism industry, and that Visit SLO CAL needs to make sure that these investments are successful and that existing investments are as well, which means increasing demand. He added that Visit SLO CAL should try to prioritize the feedback from the survey and not try to solve everything at once. Lewis noted that many new upscale properties have opened recently and Visit SLO CAL should take advantage of opportunities to lift those up. He also asked how Visit SLO CAL can take advantage of new fly markets in the off-season. Additionally, he noted that drive markets are likewise huge for the county, and are largely untapped, and that he would like to see more key influencers talk about the region. Compton and Newsom noted that a major convention center bringing big groups during less busy periods of the year would be a major opportunity. Bronson noted that Visit SLO CAL could be more intentional about connecting the dots throughout the county, and leveraging its existing amenities in the process. Johnson pointed to bringing more shoulder season and midweek demand as an opportunity. Newsom noted that when flights open back up for Chinese visitors, Visit SLO CAL needs to get ahead of it. Martin asked if Visit SLO CAL has a defined retargeting strategy. Davison replied that it does, and he elaborated on it, but acknowledged there are gaps with retargeting from lodging investors. Lance noted that Visit SLO CAL can work to make it easier to get from point to point throughout the county. Frutchey pointed to the need for culturally-responsive amenities, and the need to distinguish the community from other communities that international travelers can visit (e.g. as a China-ready destination). Martin noted the importance of implementing foreign payment systems (like UnionPay) in the county so that all visitors can withdraw and spend money here.

Visit SLO CAL Scope Feedback

Landkamer facilitated a conversation around the following questions:

What existing Visit SLO CAL roles, programs or activities do you expect to see become more robust?

Are there new roles, programs, or activities that you hope Visit SLO CAL will take on?

Are there any roles, programs or activities you think Visit SLO CAL should stop?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion.

In response to the question, *What existing Visit SLO CAL roles, programs or activities do you expect to see become more robust?:*

Newsom pointed to branding, being a key part of the tourism funnel, and partnering with Visit California. Martin noted that improving relationships between hotel groups and government; community engagement and education; and opening ATM networks to international visitors to help them gain access to their money in-market would all be areas he would like to see become more robust. Lewis said he's looking forward to Visit SLO CAL becoming bold with its brand. He said he likes how Visit SLO CAL has delved into communities and helped make events more impactful, noting the SLO CAL Open and AMGEN Tour of California as examples. He also noted that he hopes it can help bring back bigger opportunities to the local communities and that the organization can have even bigger branding and marketing. He said that Taste Washington was a great opportunity, but that he felt that the communities represented were homogenized too much, and that the individual communities need to be highlighted. Lewis also asked if the lodging industry was missing out on small corporate and incentive sales and retreats. Davison responded that the Board has been very bold in funding a sales manager role, in advance of new funding, that will be starting February 24, 2020, to specifically target groups like this. Johnson noted that Visit SLO CAL's work in doing the branding and marketing that TBIDs can't do and their partnership with local TBIDs could become even more robust. Frutchet noted that Visit SLO CAL could show the unique attractions and lodging that the region offers, participating in the tourism funnel in reverse.

In response to the question, *Are there new roles, programs, or activities that you hope Visit SLO CAL will take on?:*

Lance said she would like to see the organization host more bloggers and influencers, as that industry has exploded. Newsom pointed to geotagging and geofencing efforts. Johnson said the organization should focus on sustainable transportation, tourism management strategies and the environmental impact of tourism. Newsom noted that advocating about connecting bike trails through a countywide trail system would be a role she hopes Visit SLO CAL would take on, and Bronson added that Visit SLO CAL could help find ways to get people out of single occupancy vehicles through means such as a bike share or trolley service. Howell noted that he would like to see Visit SLO CAL target different ethnic groups, sexual orientation groups and other diverse groups in their marketing efforts, and Frutchet noted that targeting different age groups will be important as well. Frutchet added that Visit SLO CAL should set a bold community-wide goal for tourism and the economic benefits of tourism.

In response to the question, *Are there any roles, programs or activities you think Visit SLO CAL should stop?:*

Johnson noted that Visit SLO CAL should stop trying to do everything at once, and instead, prioritize. He clarified that Visit SLO CAL should continue doing the things it is doing, but should be choosy about the new initiatives it takes on. Lewis added that it should transition to more of a coaching role in the implementation of the Destination Management Strategy.

5. Comparison to Investor/Stakeholder Conversation

Landkamer provided an overview of how investors, stakeholders and partners responded to the same questions during the listening sessions that were held February 6-7, 2020, and provided key insights from some of the early returns of Visit SLO CAL's Strategic Direction 2023 Survey. He facilitated a conversation around the following questions:

Where are the areas of greatest alignment between groups and how can we take advantage of those?

What represents a difference in perspective and what can we learn from that?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion.

In response to the question, *Where are the areas of greatest alignment between groups and how can we take advantage of those?:*

Martin noted that both groups agreed that elected officials should be involved in distributing information and in advocacy. Howell noted that he thought Pismo Beach residents would rather not see funds go to housing instead of tourism. Frutchet asked if Howell believed Pismo Beach residents would be against advocating for affordable housing in North County or just Pismo Beach. Howell noted that they just wouldn't see it as tourism's role. Lewis argued that subsets of the Advisory Committee should be working with the Board three to four times a year to move initiatives forward. Frutchet noted that in his opinion, this Advisory Committee Meeting was the best Advisory Committee Meeting that Visit SLO CAL has had. He asked Davison if it would ever be helpful for cities to come to the Visit SLO CAL Board and explain how government operates in this space. Davison suggested that it might be helpful to do a half-day retreat, and have cities share how they work and how they can work together with lodging.

In response to the question, *What represents a difference in perspective and what can we learn from that?:*

Johnson noted that it's tough to have a "one size fits all" perspective between the two groups. Frutchet noted that there might be more differences than similarities between the investors/stakeholders/partners and the government officials, and that he's okay with that. Martin noted that the groups interface well on housing and transportation because they have a vested interest; however, he pointed to the areas of data collection, marketing and experience curation as areas that the City of Paso Robles doesn't get involved in. Davison used the example of Morro Bay's TOT report data as an area that other municipalities could follow. Frutchet asked how the Advisory Committee would be able to get the information from these sessions back in a digestible form. Davison responded that Landkamer is going to be developing the takeaways from the survey and listening sessions into a document that will inform the strategic plan (Strategic Direction 2023). Landkamer added that Coraggio Group would be summarizing each of the meetings and the survey takeaways, and rolling it all up, pulling out the common themes that Visit SLO CAL should consider focusing on. All of the information collected would be provided at the back of the report.

Landkamer asked for parting thoughts from the Committee. Frutchet noted that city officials have asked to be involved in the design of the next ten years, and suggested that cities should get a seat at the table to provide input to the Board of Directors. Davison asked, by way of example, if after the Board prioritized its Destination Management Strategy recommendations, would it be helpful to field test those recommendations with the municipalities. Frutchet suggested that the Board make a tentative direction and take it back to the cities, and Lewis added that these are the government leaders who control each destination. Collins applauded Visit SLO CAL for its efforts in listening to government officials throughout the Destination Management Strategy planning process and TMD renewal process, noting he had not seen that in Denver and Santa Cruz during his time there. He stated he appreciated Visit SLO CAL for always doing its best to offer a seat at the table. He told the Committee that he just wanted to recognize the listening that Visit SLO CAL has done.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 5:03 pm.