



# MINUTES

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## Visit SLO CAL Advisory Committee

### Visit SLO CAL Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 19, 2022

3:30pm – 5:00pm

Embassy Suites, 333 Madonna Rd, San Luis Obispo, CA, 93401

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER: Hemant Patel

**PRESENT:** Steve Martin, Heather Newsom, Matthew Bronson, Whitney McDonald, Ty Lewis, Erica Stewart, Derek Johnson, Scott Newton, Jim Lewis, Wade Horton

**ABSENT:** Lynn Compton, Lan George, Rachele Rickard, Daniel Rushing, Scott Collins, Jennifer Ford

**STAFF PRESENT:** Chuck Davison, Cathy Cartier, Tracy Campbell, David Fields, Emily Rudge, Jessie Borchin, Melissa Murray, Eric Parker, Trevor Lynch, Catherine Cropp, Camille Silvera, Theresa Nagai, Sophia Puliafico

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Toni LeGras, Amit Patel, Bryan Bonelli, Clint Pearce, Hemant Patel, Aaron Graves, Mark Eads, Vic Popp

**MARKETING COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:** Molly Cano, Terrie Banish, Joel Peterson, Jim Allen, Gordon Jackson, Nicole Moore

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Call to Order by Pearce at 3:33 pm.

#### 2. PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)

None.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

#### CONSENT AGENDA

#### 3. Approval of June 3, 2021 Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion.

**ACTION:** Moved by J. Lewis/Graves to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

**Motion carried: 10:0**

## **BUSINESS ITEMS**

### **4. Visit SLO CAL Update**

Davison outlined the updated 2021 economic impact of tourism numbers, highlighting stellar tourism statistics including a note that without state and local tourism revenue, each resident in the county would need to pay an additional \$1,751 in taxes every year. Davison noted that the day prior, the Board of Directors approved the FY 2023 Business and Marketing Plan and the FY 2023 Annual Budget and highlighted that the Board approved additional funding for investing in advertising from May 16 to June 30 due to investor concerns the market is softening, with a goal of helping July reach the fullest potential and offset the pullback in the market. Cartier shared an update on the Land of... campaign, noting the 8 -day production shoot last August which highlighted 22 local partners, 25+ locations, 9 restaurants, all 6 destinations. Cartier shared the .60 second brand video, illustrating the Land of... campaign and how it ties each community together. Cartier shared the House of Brands strategy and the creative for each destination which integrates each community's logo with the tagline of A Community of SLO CAL tying communities together while establishing identity. Cartier provided an update on the FY 2023 Marketing Approach which is focusing on research surrounding a Visitor Profile Study, EDI study, Competitive landscape and positioning, and visitor segmentation. Cartier highlighted the focus of cross visitation and shared new ads created to illustrate the possibility of visiting two or more communities in one day. Cartier shared an update on the SLO CAL Crafted program which launched in the fall and showcases local partners who can become SLO CAL Crafted Certified. Cartier requested assistance from the Committee for help adding more partners in specific regions such as Arroyo Grande, Avila Beach, Cambria, Cayucos, Grover Beach, Nipomo, Oceano, and San Simeon. Cartier shared that requests can be sent to [marketing@slocal.com](mailto:marketing@slocal.com) for potential partnership additions. Visit SLO CAL asked the following questions from the committee:

What feedback do you have on Visit SLO CAL's travel trade and marketing strategies for FY 2023?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. Newsom asked how the Committee can help encourage the public to participate other than sending an email. Cartier replied that there's a landing page on the website with a form to fill out. Stewart asked who the focus group was on the EDI Study and what the process was, as there are some trigger words. Cartier noted that VSC is doing a brand awareness study and will review it in June and July to reevaluate the study. Bronson commented that the cross visitation strategy makes perfect sense and works well, and shared his appreciation for the approach as there are so many offerings among our communities.

### **5. Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Conversation**

Davison highlighted that the day prior, the Board reapproved the EDI plan for the year and reminded the Committee that our lodging structure is inclusive but that we're taking this initiative to the next level, and more detailed research was shared in the agenda packet prior to the meeting. Cartier shared a graphic highlighting the cycle of if SLO CAL is a place people want to visit, it becomes a place people want to live, which then becomes a place people want to work, and a place where business needs to be; thus, proving that it all starts with a visit. Cartier shared the recent findings from the EDI Study, highlighting the highest and lowest rated attributes from four key groups of travelers: black travelers, Asian travelers, Hispanic travelers, and LGBTQ+ travelers. The overall results highlighted that most people across the groups do feel welcome and safe, and more than anything most people want to feel welcome and invited. Cartier noted recent VSC social media campaigns and blogs that celebrated diversity such as AAPI Month, Latinx History Month, Black History Month. Cartier shared recent positive community feedback received during Black History Month. Cartier noted to the Committee that if we can all lean into this notion, then it can help us become a more diverse and authentic community.

Visit SLO CAL asked the following questions from the committee:

What feedback do you have on Visit SLO CAL's EDI work?

How can we continue to partner with you on this important work and what does success look like?

Are there unintended consequences to this work that we need to be aware of?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. Newsom voiced her support for the work VSC is doing and we're doing a good job of making it a point to reach out to those diverse communities and incorporate into their daily lives, and that she feels SLO CAL is more diverse than the numbers show. She commented that it is important to highlight business owners that are diverse and maybe we need to be highlighting ethnic food that we take for granted such as Atascadero has excellent sushi, and you wouldn't normally think they'd have great sushi there. Davison stated he is proud of the work we're doing such as highlighting the Hayashi family and the major thing that has shifted in the last two years is that we are still telling the same story in that we want everyone to feel welcome, but we are now using different people to tell the story. Johnson commented that this is great work being done and he is happy to see how SLO CAL and the City of SLO can be aligned. Johnson noted the Cal Poly has the CPX survey to update staff and students and it includes questions about their experience in the campus and their communities; he is looking forward to seeing how we can measure and how we can get different groups to come here. He reminded the Committee of the previous year's program on Higuera Street that showed black leaders in the community and that people really do want to see themselves represented. Stewart shared her same sentiment as Newsom in adding local favorite restaurants and asking servers at restaurants where they like to eat, what they like to experience. She commented that she loved the demographics and sectioning shared, and that we are continuing to improve what we're doing. Cartier commented that we do have a culinary feature for FY 2023 and starting in July we'll be focusing on culinary all year long rather than only once a year during restaurant month. McDonald stated that there is potential for future avenues in that our region has history intertwined with different ethnicities and groups who have been here for a long time such as Natives and Indigenous people, families that have Japanese farmer roots. McDonald noted that something such as the anniversary of the Japanese internment camps can draw people to come see the history preserved and tell our story of diverse heritage, and how we highlight it. J. Lewis shared he is happy to see disabled people being included, reminding the Committee of a recent surfing competition for disabled people and how happy everyone was to see different people from all over the world. He commented on the feedback he received on how warm and welcoming everyone was and how we are an accessible beach community; we have good collateral to attract people and show we're a welcoming community. Davison responded that the EDI study was a great initiative, and the research was good, but it did note that the accessibility information was hard for visitors to find such as explaining how to get from the beach to the water; and we learned through that research that we can model better accessibility for both wheelchair and stroller access. Davison noted that our county wide trails initiative which is coming later in the year will feature ratings for both wheelchair and stroller access. Stewart asked if we are partnering with AllTrails. Davison replied that it is in phase 1 so hopefully by next time the Committee meets there will be more to report and that it will be important for each community to work with us and communicate with us what is available. He noted that phase 2 will have a mobile feature.

## **6. Experience SLO CAL 2050 Conversations**

Davison provided a progress update on the destination management strategy, ESC 2050, reminding the Committee that many of them sat on the steering committee back in 2017. The Events and Festivals Strategy focuses on maximizing economic impact and finding ways to move events into off-peak periods, for example moving the Arroyo Grande Strawberry Festival from being on Memorial Day weekend. Davison voiced his gratitude that phase 1 is now complete with 11 signatures from partners and stakeholders on a commitment to collaborate. Davison noted that the day prior, the Board approved the proposal for phase 2 for the analysis and development, in collaboration with MMGY NextFactor. Davison shared an update on the Customer Service Training program, highlighting that versions in both English and Spanish will be available, and it is a self-paced online tool with no cost to participants, and modules will include focus on EDI, lodging, restaurants, and experiential attractions. Davison highlighted the thematic routes initiative, sharing a recap of the three countywide trails already in existence that highlight the diversity of SLO CAL (Sustainable Wine Trail, Antique Trail, Brewery Trail) and a fourth trail is planned to highlight notable film locations throughout the county. Davison shared the ongoing mural trail plans which includes commissioning three new murals across the county.

Visit SLO CAL asked the following questions from the committee:

What overall feedback do you have on the direction of this work?

Where and how would you like to partner with Visit SLO CAL in the coming year?

How do you see this work differently post-Covid?

Public Comment.

Committee Discussion. Newsom commented on how the shift during Covid to people wanting to be outdoors and wanting more space, and how Atascadero has succeeded in providing outdoor seating and flexible space use. She thanked VSC for stepping up and developing trails that highlight wheelchair and stroller accessibility, which she noticed a lot on the campaign trail. Johnson shared how thrilled he was to see the Customer Service Training program and operators know how hard it is to find talent and how high turnover has been. Johnson posed the question of how the program will be incentivized, as it is already hard enough to train people in restaurants and hotels. Davison thanked Johnson for his support and replied that the easy part is building the program, the hard part will be implementation. Davison noted VSC will be asking for the Committee's, Board, and Marketing Committee's help with getting the program out into their communities, and the incentive will be a badge reward program with a second reward of being able to do the experiences in the county so the participants can know even more. J. Lewis shared that the destination management work was huge and so helpful. He asked if there is a way to see gradual progress and where there are leads as it is important to see who is leading and how to still preserve the quality of life for residents. Davison replied that the progress can be brought back and shared and that the belief is there is more capacity for many more visitors but at the right time, not necessarily the summer depending on the community, especially in south county, but we can create growth in off-peak times. Newsom shared that perhaps we need a visitor etiquette program to educate on things such as maintaining kindness, how to behave in a restaurant when there's a wait, how to behave as a visitor. Davison replied that VSC worked hard on that back during the litter crisis. Bronson voiced kudos to his colleagues in the room for their work over the years and that tucked away in the plan is cannatourism for Grover Beach. Davison responded that Visit CA has had discussions on cannatourism since the law was passed but that it is problematic for out of state tourists, and that the VSC Board has agreed to not focus on it for the time being, until more communities get involved.

## **7. Advocacy Efforts**

Campbell shared an update on the ongoing advocacy efforts- the 4 main topics being the Oceano Dunes SVRA Economic Impact & Mitigation Study, Resident Sentiment Survey, Lodging Per Diem Rate Adjustments, and Rural Residential and Incidental Camping. Campbell noted that regarding the Oceano Dunes, there is ongoing litigation, but the goal is to inform all stakeholders how it will impact everyone if it does close and how to mitigate the loss, and to create a stakeholder process if there is a closure. Campbell noted that VSC is working with Resonance Consultancy for the 2-phase economic impact analysis followed by workshop and planning development, with a project timeline of July – December. Campbell highlighted the upcoming Resident Sentiment Study which was last done in 2017, and will be done again to gauge how people currently feel about tourists and get a pulse after Covid. Campbell noted the sample size will be 1500 respondents and will adequately cover all municipal and unincorporated areas; the study is to be completed in off- peak season in both English and Spanish. Campbell shared an update on the lodging per diem rates and noted the recent meeting with Congressman Carbajal, along with the current development of a coalition letter in which multiple cities will be asked to sign to help get this across the finish line. Campbell noted addressing this at a state and federal level is required and the help from SLO CAL communities is needed. She also shared an update on the growing incidence of unpermitted, short-term camping sites which is mostly taking place on unincorporated areas and private residence land. Organizations such as Hipcamp are increasingly popular in SLO CAL and with the current County guidelines in place, TOT collection is not allowed. The County Board of Supervisors will hold a hearing on ordinance changes this fall, and there are outstanding issues of concern regarding health and safety requirements, in addition to TOT collection.

Visit SLO CAL asked the following question from the committee:

What feedback do you have on Visit SLO CAL's advocacy initiatives heading into FY 2023?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. J. Lewis shared that regarding per diem lodging rates, more can be done as he has State and Federal lobbyist on retainer and can tell them what the right argument is, and that is a more active approach. Davison replied that per the administration's request, we must start with the coalition letter. Newsom commented that North County has a growing Hipcamp popularity and it is important to do our research, and that if it's growing so fast, we should pay attention. Davison responded that we do need them to pay into TOT. Horton commented that to his knowledge, no county as adopted a Hipcamp policy. J.Lewis stated that there is more of an issue for VSC Board members, Pismo is working on water supply projects and that the biggest issue is hotel owners use the most water, and there is no further animosity than for restricting water use.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 5:01pm.