MINUTES
Visit SLO CAL Advisory Committee Meeting

Visit SLO CAL Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, December 12, 2024
3:30 pm – 5:00 pm
VSC Office, 81 Higuera St, Ste 220, San Luis Obispo, CA

1. CALL TO ORDER

PRESENT: Jim Lewis, Yvonne Kimball, Jamie Maraviglia, Matt Downing, Ty Lewis, Matt Bronson, Whitney McDonald, Jorge Garcia, Stacy Inman, Matt Pontes, Mark Dariz (Pontes and Dariz arrived after consent agenda motion)

ABSENT: Steve Gregory, Zach Zimmerman, Carla Wixom, Dawn Ortiz- Legg, Erica A. Stewart, (Zimmerman term ended shortly before meeting, new City Council member not selected yet)

STAFF PRESENT: Cathy Cartier, Annie Braunschweig, Molly Cano, Lisa Belsanti, Emily Rudge, Kristen Carlson, Matt Halvorson

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Jim Hamilton, Hemant Patel, Clint Pearce, Amar Sohi, Mark Eads, Aaron Graves, Jed Bickel, Kimberly Walker, Vic Popp, Hamish Marhsall (arrived after consent agenda)

MARKETING COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Ashlee Akers, Leann Standish, Jacqui Clark-Charlesworth, Courtney Pene, Lynette Sonne, Stacie Jacob, Terrie Banish, Michael Wambolt,

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Call to order by Mark Eads at 3:34pm

2. PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

CONSENT AGENDA

3. Approval of June 6, 2024 Advisory Committee Minutes

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion.

ACTION: Moved by **Pearce/Graves** to approve the Consent Agenda.

Motion carried: 9:0

Business Items

4. Visit SLO CAL Update

Cartier welcomed Molly Cano to the team and highlighted the current VSC organizational chart. Cartier provided a recap of SLO CAL Summit, noting that lodging supply is increasing in the next few years, and more visitors are needed to maintain occupancy and revenue; she shared that TOT remains volatile and below 2021-2022 levels. Cartier shared that the budget reforecast is currently in progress, showing an estimated shortfall of $400k, with some programming being cut but deficit spending will remain to keep the ad budget intact. Cartier highlighted the Tourism Economics co-op which will help with the lodging forecast and economic impact and will be handled as a region not by community, thus costs will be shared with those who wish to participate. Cartier highlighted the initial findings from the Tourism Economics Lodging Forecast: supply is the primary driver of current challenges, with inflation and spending habits shifting; high-income households remain strong and low-income household recovery will continue to lag. Cano shared several marketing updates regarding the Unpacking campaign (episodes 2 and 3), and showed the Sustainability series videos highlighting Camatta Ranch and Niner Winery. Cano noted the upcoming new brand campaign in the new fiscal year which will continue the theme of "people, pace and place." Cano shared several takeaways from the recently completed ethnographic research study. Cano shared a sales team update which will continue to focus on education, increasing bookable product, and increasing SLO CAL awareness in the UK. Cano highlighted the new sales team video and shared an update on the Visit California global campaign and content feature.

What feedback do you have on Visit SLO CAL's plan for the balance of FY 2025?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. Garcia inquired about a previous conversation about possibly selling the Unpacking experiences at SBP airport and if there's been any progress made on that endeavor. Cano replied that many of the experiences are linked via the VSC website, however several are still not bookable online. Cartier stated that there will be a landing page on the VSC website so the visitor can link directly to the business. J. Lewis praised the collaboration across destinations and the campaign's local discovery aspect. Cartier praised the destination partners, as they gave helpful suggestions about experiences in their communities that VSC was unfamiliar with. Cano replied that it is an example of radical collaboration. Kimball asked where the Unpacking content lives. Cano replied that it lives on the VSC website and through a paid media campaign. Garcia praised the work and how it encourages multiple stays in the region; he asked how VSC can be leveraged to do the things each community can't do at the city level such as build a whole itinerary (show how long each activity takes, how far in advance to book, where to stay) and have tools such as a guest welcome package in hotel rooms. Cartier replied that long-form storytelling is the next step with Unpacking. Bronson stated that he uses AI to plan itineraries. Cartier replied that Matt Halvorson on our team is doing a lot of work with AI and an integration is in progress. Bronson raised concerns about using reserves and the revenue shortfall this year and asked if there is a prediction for a flattening for the next few years. Braunschweig replied that VSC is working toward a break-even budget and there is an expectation that volatility will settle down; the Tourism Economics forecast suggests a steady healthy rate for the next few years. T. Lewis asked if the challenges are seen state-wide. Cartier replied that they are state-wide, and that Visit California cites election impacts and delayed international travel recovery. Cartier reminded the Committee that bookable product is a huge component to help offset the challenges, and to please encourage each community partner to establish it locally. McDonald asked what kind of outreach is being done and how each community can help facilitate that. Carlson responded that since October, two workshops have been held on Tourism Exchange which will help connect them with the platform and educate them but there is trust needed to build adoption. Cartier stated that VSC can set up a training offsite and offer direct team training or partner support.

5. Advocacy Conversations

Belsanti highlighted the continued partnership with Visit California on HWY 1 which focuses on communicating and highlighting the open areas. Belsanti shared recent VSC support for more type 47 liquor licenses, in partnership with the California Distillers Association. Belsanti noted the upcoming work to widen HWY 101 between Shell Beach and Pismo, highlighted the ongoing challenges with visa wait times, and noted that according to the U.S Department of Labor, by 2033, 1 in 8 jobs will be in leisure and hospitality.

What overall feedback do you have on these items?

Where and how would you like to partner with Visit SLO CAL on this work?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. J. Lewis shared the new "entertainment zone" law that is being considered in Atascadero. Sohi asked what the Board of Supervisors involvement is regarding the type 47 liquor license issue. Jacob responded that there is a need for a local champion and that Napa has had success with it in the past, and that more licenses are needed due to demand. Pontes asked if representatives Addis or Hart are involved, Jacob responded that they are not, but there is an upcoming call scheduled with Hart. McDonald suggested that the changes to immigration policy will be another advocacy item to watch. Cartier replied that it will be closely monitored and there's a strong need to protect the industry.

6. Experience SLO CAL 2050 Conversation

Belsanti shared an update on the Workforce Development working group, the Last Mile working group, and the Sustainability working group. Belsanti highlighted that Countywide Trails will be pushed into the next fiscal year, but VSC will continue to focus on awareness and use existing platforms. Belsanti noted that SLO CAL Welcome will be inactive from December 2024 to July 2025 due to platform updates. Cartier shared several air service development updates, noting that the Vegas flight is performing well, the Dallas flight service will be briefly paused (not performance related), and there is an upcoming opportunity for a route planner FAM which would help bring new flights to SLO CAL.

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

Where and how would you like to partner with Visit SLO CAL?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. Inman asked if the airport size and aircraft type will impact obtaining new routes. Cartier responded that it will be challenging if they are 737 aircrafts, so it would likely be more direct point to point flights on carriers such as Breeze. Cartier acknowledged the frequent attempts in the past few years to complete the Countywide Trails initiative and it has been delayed, but four working groups in one year was slightly overly ambitious. Bronson commented that he appreciated the focus on tangible items and with such a big vision, and it requires long-term planning. Eads stressed the importance of the Workforce Development working group, especially with all the new hotel inventory coming in the next few years. Cartier shared that during a recent conference she attended, there was an interesting panel on Waymo, and that could be a feasible solution for the Last Mile challenges that the region is facing.

Cartier shared the next meeting date: May 29, 2025

ADJOURN 4:55pm