



MINUTES

Visit SLO CAL Advisory Committee Meeting

Visit SLO CAL Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, June 6, 2024

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm

VSC Office, 81 Higuera St, Ste 220, San Luis Obispo, CA

1. CALL TO ORDER: 3:36 pm

PRESENT: Matt Bronson, Mark Dariz, Jenn Ford, Jorge Garcia, Lan George, Whitney McDonald, Yvonne Kimball (arrived after consent agenda), Jim Lewis, Matt Pontes (arrived after consent agenda), Dawn Ortiz- Legg, Zach Zimmerman

ABSENT: Steve Gregory, Ty Lewis, Stacy Inman, Matt Downing, Erica A. Stewart, Toni LeGras-Price, Jim Hamilton, Pragna Patel- Mueller, Nipool Patel, Britt Shuford

STAFF PRESENT: Cathy Cartier, Annie Braunschweig, Whitney Chaney, Emily Rudge

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Mark Eads, Aaron Graves, Amar Sohi, Jed Bickel, Bryan Bonelli, Hamish Marshall, Hemant Patel, Clint Pearce, Vic Popp, Amit Patel

MARKETING COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Sheridan Bohlken, Molly Cano, Michael Wambolt, Ashlee Akers, Jim Allen, Gordon Jackson, Stacie Jacob

Call to order by Mark Eads at 3:36pm

2. PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)

None.

CONSENT AGENDA

3. Approval of December 7, 2023 Advisory Committee Minutes

Public Comment – None.

Committee – None.

ACTION: Moved by **Ortiz-Legg/Dariz** to approve the Consent Agenda.

Motion carried: 9:0:2 (Kimball and Pontes arrived after motion item)

Business Items

4. Visit SLO CAL Update

Cartier provided a recap of the ongoing CEO search process, highlighting the key milestone dates, with Eads providing further information and details. Cartier noted a reminder for the upcoming SLO CAL Summit on September 25. Cartier shared the exciting news that Brooke Weisbecker and Mayla Lohnes have been selected as two recipients of CalTravel's 30 & Under Emerging Leader Award and will be recognized at CalTravel Summit in September. Cartier highlighted the recently approved FY 25 Business and Marketing Plan and walked the Committee through key areas of focus and each department's scope of work in the upcoming year. Cartier paused her presentation and welcomed Congressman Salud Carbajal to the meeting as he presented Visit SLO CAL with a congressional certificate supporting tourism for National Travel & Tourism Week. Carbajal thanked the group for all of their efforts for the tourism industry and asked what he can do to help support them, along with what challenges they are facing (see Committee discussion below). Cartier continued her presentation of the FY 25 Business and Marketing Plan, highlighting areas of focus in Paid Media, Earned Media, Social Media, Partnerships and Events, Sales, Advocacy, and Film SLO CAL.

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

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion.

Congressman Carbajal's discussion: Jim Lewis thanked Carbajal for his support, particularly with the per diem adjustments and the EDA grants. Sohi asked Carbajal about the ongoing efforts for the federal per diem adjustments. Carbajal replied that they are continuing to lobby for it. Cartier noted the efforts VSC has made with Visit California and See Monterey to advocate for federal funding for Highway 1 repairs. Carbajal agreed that it is a unique project, and California needs to advocate to the federal government. Sohi asked for an update on the H1 Visa status, noting that immigration and workforce is an ongoing challenge. Carbajal noted the need for a solid process and the need to be nonpartisan. Carbajal thanked the Committee and said he will do his best to represent them in Washington.

Visit SLO CAL Update Discussion: Ortiz-Legg noted that following Cartier's request during the State of the County event to ask locals to say "SLO CAL," many people informed her that they were unwilling to do so, but she personally likes the nomenclature, and it helps break us apart from Ventura or Monterey. Cartier replied that VSC recognizes it is a long goal, likely 8- 10 years, and we need to continue to have the conversation along with talking about the "why." Garcia commented that VSC should have regular media features talking about the positive highlights and ways we can all benefit from tourism. Cartier replied that we are now featuring regular ads in movie theatres, gas stations, and local news. Bronson voiced his appreciation for The Land Of... campaign and linking communities together and his love for the Unpacking video. Bronson asked if there was a way to purchase the Unpacking Suitcase, so that we could package experiences to sell to travelers. J. Lewis noted his appreciation for highlighting the staff, citing that turnover has been an ongoing issue in the past and he applauded VSC's efforts to enhance the culture and talent of the team; he acknowledged Cartier's efforts to make sure leadership is strong. Cartier thanked Lewis for his praise and highlighted that VSC is working to make staff feel valued in the same way we want visitors to feel valued; we want our staff to stay on the team and feel seen and heard. Cartier noted that it is unfortunate to say that she is currently the longest tenured staff on the team with only 3.5 years. McDonald commented that she hopes VSC values diversity as much as the City of SLO, it should be reiterated in the work and continue to make people feel welcome. Cartier replied that our EDI work underlines everything seen in the Business and Marketing Plan, and it is top of mind when we bring events to SLO CAL. George commented that there is a lot of information in the Business and Marketing Plan and a lot of marketing in it; viewing it from a City Council perspective, some people don't understand why they should spend money on sponsorships, how best to get all of the communities aligned and have one event? George noted that each community seems to work in silos, and when city leaders go to TBID meetings, it is not region focused, so we need to have more community leaders get on board and it would be helpful if VSC could make it more concise because it is confusing when a council member has only 15 minutes to digest it; how do we get everyone to work together? Cartier replied that VSC staff attend every TBID meeting, and we've been

working closely with our Marketing Committee members and our team to focus on just a few items rather than our whole scope and now that Whitney Chaney has joined the team, we have a lot of efforts in our plan to get things aligned from top down and bottom up. Cartier stated that the Events and Festivals Calendar is now pivoting due to the third-party vendor we'd selected is no longer the right fit for our needs. VSC has pivoted to make our calendar more robust, and we are currently working on what is most important for each community and how we can best communicate events with our visitors. Pearce commented that the Board structure is set up so that there is at least one Board member from each community to communicate back to its TBID and act as a community liaison. Ford requested that the presentation from today's meeting be distributed as it is each council member's duty to report back to the city council.

5. Advocacy Conversation

Cartier provided an update on the Highway 1 repairs and closures, noting the expected mid-July reopening at Paul's Slide, the late fall estimated reopening of Regent's Slide, and shared that a meeting took place on June 4 with Visit California, Senator Laird and Secretary Omishakin and key CalTrans officials to align state level support in advocating for federal funds for a long-term solution. Cartier shared a reminder of the changes to state lodging rates and a reminder of the new fee transparency law which will go into effect on July 1. Chaney highlighted a recent advocacy issue regarding liquor licenses: SB 1028 which would authorize ABC to issue up to 10 additional original on-sale liquor licenses for public eating places in the first calendar year following any year the county reaches the limit of on-sale general licenses; while this state bill failed at the May 16 hearing, it has since been resurrected by Assemblymember Bennett (Ventura County) and will provide 10 additional licenses for both Ventura County and SLO CAL. Chaney announced the recent launch of the advocacy toolkit on slocal.com, in effort to provide resources to support individual and group advocacy efforts.

What overall feedback do you have on these items?

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

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. Bronson applauded VSC's efforts regarding Highway 1 and shared how critical it is to keep it as a main area of focus. Ford commented that it is a struggle to get community buy-in when large events come to a community such as Ironman and the majority of the community is frustrated with tourism. Ford voiced the desire for a way to utilize a tool or find a way to help with events and community engagement, and noted she wants to see it be successful and it is a challenge to get community support. Cartier responded that the City of Pismo Beach has a great story with tourism helping to fund their new Police Station.

6. Experience SLO CAL 2050 Conversation

Cartier provided an update on the Regional Tourism Industry Workforce Plan which will involve partnering with REACH and the Cal Poly Economic Development Committee to establish a tourism industry working group. Cartier highlighted the upcoming plans for a working group for the Countywide Trails initiative which will focus on supporting sustainability, resident quality of life, and utilization of existing platforms such as All Trails to highlight less traveled trails throughout the county. Cartier provided an air service development update, highlighting that the Vegas flight returns on October 27. Cartier noted that SBP will begin to introduce larger planes due to the increased volume of full flights and new passenger records set, however SBP has reported that only 35% of travelers arriving and departing SLO CAL are using SBP and approximately 1,000 passengers per day are using other airports outside of SLO CAL. Cartier highlighted the Last Mile Transportation initiative which will involve the establishment of a working group to address transportation challenges to and from the airport to lodging.

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?

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. Ortiz-Legg commented that she appreciated the last-mile piece and asked if VSC would work with SLOCOG. Cartier confirmed that we would, and we hope to have as much collaboration and focus as possible to address the issue. Zimmerman commented that the City of Grover Beach just met with REACH to discuss workforce and tourism. He voiced support for advocating recruiting at high schools for vocational jobs as it's a great way to promote sustainable growth for the community. Garcia asked who is leading the airline development and voiced his desire for a direct flight to Chicago or Orange County. Cartier replied that she will be leading the airline development. Ortiz-Legg shared that would be helpful for VSC to update the Board of Supervisors as they want to know of issues going on and find ways to help (in reference to the last-mile issue). McDonald commented that Carbajal is needed to help with the last-mile issue. George stated that the last-mile issue is not on the City of Arroyo Grande's radar, but it is good to know that it's something that needs to be addressed, and perhaps solicit the TBIDs for help or look into regional van services. Sohi commented that the Atascadero TBID is looking into it as well. Eads closed the meeting by praising Cartier for her tremendous work for the past few months serving as the interim President & CEO.

Cartier shared the next meeting date- Thursday, December 12, 2024

ADJOURN 5:06pm