MINUTES
Visit SLO CAL Board of Directors

Visit SLO CAL Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, March 25, 2026
8:30am – 10:30am
Visit SLO CAL Office, 81 Higuera St, Ste 220, San Luis Obispo, CA

1. CALL TO ORDER
PRESENT: Kathy Kelly, Pragna Patel-Mueller, Clint Pearce, Amar Sohi, Jim Hamilton, Vic Popp, Nipool Patel, Hamish Marshall, Hemant Patel, Aaron Graves, Mark Eads, Toni LeGras-Price, Sean Dasmann, Kimberly Walker, Jed Bickel (arrived after Consent Agenda)

STAFF PRESENT: Cathy Cartier, Annie Braunschweig, Emily Rudge, Molly Cano

ABSENT: Britt Shuford, Lisa Belsanti

Call to order at 8:33am

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2. PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cartier shared a reminder of the Annual Bash on April 30 and announced that the SLO CAL Summit will be on October 29 at Madonna Inn Expo Center.

CONSENT AGENDA

3. Approval of January 21, 2026 Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
4. Approval of January 2026 Visit SLO CAL Financials
5. Approval of February 2026 Visit SLO CAL Financials

Board Discussion – None.

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

Motion carried: 14:0 (Bickel not present for vote)

CEO REPORT

6. Visit SLO CAL CEO Report

Cartier shared the February STR report which showed strong increases in most communities, particularly in the San Simeon/HWY 1 region due to the reopening of HWY 1. Cartier shared an email received from a Cal Poly EIM Department Scholarship recipient which thanked VSC for their contribution to her education. Cartier shared the Family Friendly Workplace recognition which was given by the SLO Chamber for the second consecutive year, and she announced the Spartan Race approval by the County Board of Supervisors which will take place on November 7 & 8, 2026. Cartier shared that the Cal Poly EIM Department is seeking mentors for a new mentorship program and the Cal Poly College of Agriculture will celebrate the 125th anniversary and will be celebrated the weekend of November 13 with former alumni being celebrated. Cartier shared a recap of the Cal Poly EIM auction which exceeded their fundraising goal with over $140K raised. Cartier highlighted the Cal Poly Break-a-wave rodeo event, which is seeking a new location and may take place in Avila. Cartier provided a recap of Visit California's Outlook Forum and shared that Visit California expects to announce Caroline Beteta's replacement by the end of June. Cartier highlighted a recent meeting with the City of Paso Robles and the City of SLO and a Waymo representative to further identify what it could look like to be considered as a Waymo eligible city in the future. Cartier highlighted her recent invitation by the WTTC to attend a CEO leadership cruise to Egypt in May, which while she is not attending, it speaks volumes to receive the invite as a smaller destination. Cartier shared a recap of the CalTravel Board meeting and retreat, highlighting that destinations' budgets across the state are forecasting flat to down for FY 27, and noted that World Cup bookings are strong in both San Jose and West Hollywood, and highlighted a new bill which requires that customer service representatives must be on the line within a specific amount of time after an AI chat bot provides initial service. Cartier shared U.S. Travel Association updates highlighting that they are working to help support payment of TSA workers and air traffic controllers, and the U.S. was the only country to lose international visitation in 2025; U.S. Travel Association is also working to prevent the proposed 5-year review of social media accounts. Cartier noted that the U.S. Travel Association projects $30.5B in economic impact is under threat due to geopolitical issues despite the upcoming World Cup, which provided significant economic impact gains in the 1994 World Cup. Cartier shared updates from SBP including flight schedule changes for Alaska, American and United. Cartier shared her upcoming travel schedule.

Board Discussion- Eads asked how VSC is leveraging the excessive TSA wait times in the airports. Cartier replied that VSC is continuing to advertise in all of the drive markets.
Popp asked if the reopening of HWY 1 is the cause for the strong February STR report. Cartier replied that it is the cause, and Paso was flat due to more rooms coming online. Sohi congratulated Cartier and the team for the Family Friendly Workplace recognition and improving the culture so significantly. Cartier thanked the team for their hard work and shared how much work the team can accomplish when turnover is not occurring.

Business Items

7. VP of Marketing and Communications Search Update

Cartier announced the recruitment of Ashlee Akers to replace Lisa Belsanti and the promotion of Molly Cano to Chief Marketing Officer. Cartier shared the new org chart which will be implemented once Akers is onboarded.

Board Discussion- Pearce commented that it is a great addition to the team.

8. Investment Portfolio Update

Braunschweig shared a quarterly update for the investment portfolio, highlighting moderate year-to-date performance. She also shared a breakdown of asset allocation, reflecting alignment with the VSC investment policy.

Board Discussion- None.

9. Executive Committee and Board Seats

Cartier shared a reminder of the current slate of Executive Committee Seats, of which the Chair, Vice Chair and Past Chair, will continue for another year based on the 2-year term for those seats that was implemented last year and highlighted the current vacant Board seats and the application process timeline. Cartier highlighted the seats up for renewal (Appointed: Hamilton, H. Patel, and At-Large: Graves, Patel-Mueller).

Board Discussion- Bickel suggested that Erik Mund would be a great candidate for the RV Park seat.

10. Marketing, Travel Trade & ESC 2050 Updates

Cano highlighted the Turns Well Taken campaign videos which are playing in the San Diego Airport and CTV on Hulu, Disney Plus and Netflix. Cano shared a campaign video manifesto which features every single community in SLO CAL. Cano shared an update on the Tapped into SLO CAL content series which includes Firestone Walker beer and will include 5 episodes and 4M impressions and shared a trailer video. Cano also highlighted a trailer video for the Visit California documentary film which tells the story of HWY 1 from the view of the road; Cano noted that VSC and See Monterey worked closely with Visit California on the creation of the documentary. Cano noted that Pensara is creating a video with Visit California which will feature other destinations throughout the state which will encourage travel to various destinations while visitors are here for the World Cup; Cano shared a trailer of the campaign video. Cano provided several sales team updates including a recap of the Hotel Beds campaign, the GetYourGuide webinar which is in partnership with Visit California which is the new platform to replace Tourism Exchange. Cano provided an update on the IPW planning and highlighted recent UK market activities. Cano highlighted an upcoming webinar for vacation rental owners, hosted by North American Vacation Homes, and VSC will also be creating a social media reel highlighting vacation rentals. Cano shared a recap of recent and upcoming sales team FAMs. Cartier shared several Earned Media updates including the TIME Magazine article featuring HWY 1. Cartier highlighted a recent UK influencer visit from Ben Ebbrell. Cartier highlighted social media engagement metrics. Cartier shared several ESC 2050 and Advocacy updates: the Avila Roundabout ribbon cutting ceremony, the L.A. minimum wage increase, and the L.A. hotel tax increase during the Olympics. Cartier shared updates from U.S. Travel Association including the ongoing lack of payment for TSA agents and the proposed 5-year review of ESTA applicants' social media accounts and the visa integrity fee. Cartier highlighted several updates on the Last Mile initiative which includes the SLO Safe Ride new shuttle service which has made progress, the City of SLO is conducting a feasibility study, and VSC's participation on the SLOCOG Steering Committee for the Regional Transportation Plan.

Board Discussion- Popp inquired about what the launch of the Highway 1 film will look like and where it will be played; Graves asked the length of the film. Cano shared that the film is about 35 minutes in length, and it will be played in domestic and international markets, but Visit California is still working on their communication plan for the launch of the film which will take place in May. Graves commented that the World Cup "Extra Time" video is such a huge testament to the region that SLO CAL is one of only four destinations featured in the video. Graves thanked the team for their diligence and strong partnership with Visit California. Cartier replied that the Visit California team commented that filming in SLO CAL was so seamless and easy due to VSC's strong relationships with partners in the region. Cartier noted that as the relationship with Visit California continues to strengthen, it has paid dividends in being included. Sohi inquired about if the U.S. Travel Association also has support from other organizations such as Brand USA, CalTravel and Visit California and if they can work together on the issues such as TSA agents being paid. Cartier replied that yes there is a broader connectivity between the organizations.

Cartier provided a reminder for the upcoming events and meetings.

ADJOURN 10:04 am