



# MINUTES

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## Visit SLO CAL Board of Directors

### Visit SLO CAL Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 19, 2021

8:30am-10:30am

Embassy Suites, 333 Madonna Road, San Luis Obispo, CA 93405

Video Conference Option - URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83337389599>

Meeting ID: 833 3738 9599

Call-In Phone Number: (669) 900-6833

#### 1. CALL TO ORDER: Clint Pearce

**PRESENT:** Jed Bickel, Kathy Bonelli, John Conner, Mark Eads, Aaron Graves, Jay Jamison, Amit Patel, Hemant Patel, Nipool Patel, Clint Pearce, Victor Popp, Amar Sohi

**PRESENT (VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE):** Jim Hamilton, Toni LeGras, Sam Miller

**ABSENT:** Alma Ayon

**STAFF PRESENT:** Chuck Davison, Cathy Cartier, Annie Frew, Brendan Pringle, Kyla Boast

**Call to Order at 8:32am.**

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

None.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

Davison announced that Cathy Cartier has accepted the full-time role of Chief Marketing Officer at Visit SLO CAL, effective June 1, 2021. Cathy will continue to commute to SLO CAL for at least 2 weeks of each month, before fully re-locating to SLO CAL by the end of October 2021.

#### CONSENT AGENDA

3. Approval of March 17, 2021 Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

4. Approval of March 2021 Visit SLO CAL Financials

5. Approval of April 2021 Visit SLO CAL Financials

Public Comment – None.

Board Discussion.

**ACTION:** Moved by Conner/N. Patel to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Motion carried: 14:0  
Miller joined the meeting after the Consent Agenda item.

## **CEO REPORT**

### **6. CEO Report**

Davison thanked the Board members who attended the Annual Bash on May 5, 2021. Davison reminded the Board that Visit SLO CAL will be holding its bi-annual Advisory Committee meeting virtually on June 3, 2021, from 3:00-4:30pm, and encouraged Board members to attend so that they would be aware of the input provided by the elected officials and city managers from each community and offer feedback on suggestions and recommendations. Davison provided an update on the Oceano Dunes Economic Impact Assessment, noting that staff will work to solidify support from Arroyo Grande and Pismo Beach in the coming weeks, and will run a parallel track to vet potential agencies, review proposals with a small cohort of partners, and agree upon the agency conducting the scope of work. Davison provided an update on recent elected official outreach, and noted that Visit SLO CAL will be hosting its bi-annual Hospitality Owners Roundtable with Rep. Salud Carbajal on May 27, 2021 and a virtual Hospitality Owners Roundtable on June 9, 2021 with Assembly Member Jordan Cunningham. Davison outlined progress and next steps on the Events & Festivals Strategy recommendation from Experience SLO CAL 2050. The project scope for the Events & Festivals Strategy was sent to potential agencies in an RFP process, and staff is reviewing the proposals and identifying an agency who can successfully fulfill the initiative. He noted that based on Board direction and cost, Visit SLO CAL will obtain signed MOUs from each municipality prior to requesting proposal approval from the Board to assure the Strategy can be implemented. He also outlined progress and next steps for the Customer Service Training Program. Staff is currently reviewing proposals for consideration. Davison noted that Visit SLO CAL has created a landing page for open positions in the travel and tourism industry. He encouraged the Board to let staff know about open positions, and noted that, as agreed during the April Executive Committee meeting, Visit SLO CAL will not be putting advertising dollars toward this initiative. Davison informed the Board that he would be taking his sabbatical, one of the conditions of his contract renewal, from June 25-August 1. He noted that he is working with staff to develop a robust plan of action for the business while he is away, and noted that Cartier will be overseeing the business while he is away, and that Pringle will have specific areas of oversight and will be an additional contact during this time.

Public Comment – None.

Board Discussion.

## **BUSINESS ITEMS**

### **7. COVID-19 Impact & Response Update**

Davison provided an update on local COVID-19 response efforts. Over 245,000 vaccines have been distributed locally, and SLO County now has mobile vaccination sites available upon request. At the state level, over 20 million people have received at least one dose in California, and 16 million are fully vaccinated. The state plans to fully re-open on June 15, 2021. Davison noted that SB 93, a law that mandates the rehiring of workers in the hospitality and business services industries to offer new positions to qualified former employees laid off due to COVID-19, was signed into law and is effective through 2024. He noted that SB 285 – the California Tourism Recovery Act, which would support Visit California's tourism recovery efforts with \$45 million – was pulled from the Senate Appropriations Committee suspense file to include in the Senate budget proposal, but that Governor Newsom also announced last week that he will propose a \$95 million investment in Visit California's tourism recovery efforts. Davison provided statistics, at a national level, about travel spending and consumer readiness to travel. Davison provided an update on air service. He noted that Visit SLO CAL's application request for a targeted EIDL advance of \$10,000 was declined. Davison reviewed the updated cash flow projections for May through December 2021 and the STR report for April 2021 vs. April 2019, noting that ADR countywide was up 16.5 percent and demand was up 2.2 percent, despite a 9.8 percent increase in inventory.

Public Comment – None.

Board Discussion.

### **8. Camp Roberts Update**

A US Government project RFP in the works at Camp Roberts will require accommodations for thousands of proposed government contractors beginning May 10 for up to 12 months. Visit SLO CAL has raised concerns over infrastructure with local, state and federal government officials, including a call last week with Wade Horton, County CAO, and officials from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS). HHS revealed a general lack of details about this project, estimating the number of migrant children being served to be no more than 10,000, but likely between 2,500 and 3,000. Before the call, HHS had not considered alternative housing at Camp SLO, Mid State Fair Grounds, Cal Poly, or other locations, but are now reaching out. HHS could not speak to why workers were being contracted now as the activation of Camp Roberts as a location has not been finalized, and they would not expect children to arrive until July 1, 2021 or later, if a contract for Camp Roberts is even executed. HHS informed Visit SLO CAL that room contract would be at \$120 per night, and if anyone is paying more, it is likely brokers looking to sell the rooms back to the government. They also confirmed that the rooms are, in fact, tax exempt and will not be paying TOT or assessments. Visit SLO CAL is encouraging hotels not to accept this business based on summer demand yielding a higher rate, and because local governments need TOT funds to bring their communities back from the pandemic. Additionally, these workers would not be likely visiting local hospitality establishments the way traditional tourism visitors do, which could create significant challenges for local businesses. Davison noted as a positive that this would introduce a new audience of potential future travelers to the market, and local supply purchasing would occur locally, which could help other local businesses. Davison outlined Visit SLO CAL's response, including an email that staff sent to its list of lodging investors highlighting the repercussions of signing these room contracts. Davison noted that it is ultimately up to the hotels on whether they accept the business, but the cities would ultimately suffer the consequences, which is why we are encouraging them to request mitigation. Visit SLO CAL will continue to provide updates to investors as it continues to gain an understanding of the size and scope of this business, and will be sending an email to mayors and city managers to bring awareness to the issue, outlining the loss of revenue and subsequent impacts for each city. Additionally, staff is finalizing a strategic communications plan for investors, partners and stakeholders communication over the coming weeks.

Public Comment – None.

Board Discussion.

## **9. Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Tracking**

In June 2020, the Board approved its Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Plan. Davison reminded the board of the actions that Visit SLO CAL committed to in that Plan. He outlined progress to date. Three members of Visit SLO CAL Leadership Team are currently taking a 12-month EDI Masterclass through Destinations International, and staff is vetting agencies to conduct a staff, board and committee training, and create a training for onboarding of new Visit SLO CAL Board, Marketing Committee and team members. The marketing team has prioritized EDI through planned media campaigns and the EDI tracking matrix (included in the agenda packet), working with local EDI community-based organizations to ensure authentic voices for its social media campaigns, and featuring local travel and tourism businesses. All media campaigns remain focused on highlighting the destination, in this case through a different lens. He outlined some of Visit SLO CAL's recent campaigns, including Black History Month, Women's History Month, and AAPI Heritage Month, and noted some of the upcoming campaigns. Visit SLO CAL is also planning for an EDI audience and asset alignment study to inform product and service development, and provide information on tourism experiences that currently meet or exceed visitor expectations. He noted that this study would also be available as a co-op so that local destination partners can partner to gain insight into their individual community.

Public Comment – None.

Board Discussion. Sohi complimented Visit SLO CAL on continuing their EDI efforts, when for many this seemed to be short lived, for Visit SLO CAL it is clear it is still a priority.

## **10. Board of Directors Seats**

Davison outlined the status on the four appointed seats that are currently up for renewal. These include Jed Bickel (Pismo Beach), Victor Popp (Paso Robles), Sam Miller (Grover Beach) and the open seat for Arroyo Grande. Davison noted that the three renewing seats are in the re-appointment process, and that with no recommended candidate, the Arroyo Grande seat

will be held open. He noted that two elected seats are currently up for renewal - the designated B&B seat (currently held by Alma Ayon) and one at-large seat (currently held by Amit Patel). The application process opened on April 23, 2021, and closed on May 7, 2021, and Visit SLO CAL received six total applications, one of which arrived after the deadline. Davison reviewed the applicants (Alma Ayon, Sundance B&B; Amit Patel, New Horizon Associates, Inc.; Tom Halen, La Lomita Ranch B&B; Kevin Beall, PRG Hospitality Group; Leslie McKinley, SLO Lakeside Lodge; and John Maher, Motel 6 Atascadero and Motel 6 North). Davison noted that John's application arrived three days after the deadline. Davison noted that at the renewal of the Tourism Marketing District, the Board was expanded by four seats, two of which remained vacant to ensure a larger pool of qualified candidates (GMs and owners) at a time when they were not simply trying to weather the impact of COVID-19. Many investors are still focused on the rebound and now staffing issues. Davison noted that there is the option to hold a special meeting to elect the remaining seats later in the year or wait until the next Annual Meeting in May 2022. At their May 13, 2021 meeting, the Executive Committee recommended re-electing Alma Ayon to the open B&B Seat and re-electing Amit Patel to the open at-large seat on the Visit SLO CAL Board.

Public Comment – None

Board Discussion.

**ACTION:** Moved by Bickel/Popp to re-elect Alma Ayon to the open B&B Seat and re-elect Amit Patel to the open at-large seat on the Visit SLO CAL Board, and to hold the other two seats open, as recommended by the Executive Committee.

**Motion carried: 13:0:1**

**Hamilton departed the meeting prior to this item.**

**A. Patel abstained.**

## **11. Executive Committee Seats**

Davison outlined the current structure of the Executive Committee: Chair - Clint Pearce; Vice Chair - Hemant Patel; Secretary - Mark Eads; Treasurer - Aaron Graves; At-Large Member - Amar Sohi. New seats, once appointed, would be effective July 1, 2021 for FY 2022. At their May 13, 2021 meeting, the Executive Committee recommended the following slate: Chair - Hemant Patel; Vice Chair - Aaron Graves; Secretary - Mark Eads; Treasurer - Amar Sohi; Past Chair - Clint Pearce.

Public Comment – None

Board Discussion. Popp expressed gratitude to Pearce on representing the organization well as Chair for years.

**ACTION:** Moved by Popp/Jamison to appoint Hemant Patel as Chair, Aaron Graves as Vice Chair, Mark Eads as Secretary, Amar Sohi as Treasurer, and Clint Pearce as Past Chair.

**Motion carried: 9:0:5**

**H. Patel, Graves, Eads, Sohi and Pearce abstained.**

## **12. EDI Audience & Asset Alignment Study & Visitor Profile Study**

In order to inform our efforts in FY 2022 scope of work, staff is requesting the launch of two studies (an EDI Audience & Asset Alignment Study and Visitor Profile Study) prior to the end of FY 2021. Staff is requesting approval in advance of next month's FY 2022 budget review in order to get a head start on the work. Cartier noted the purpose and timeline of both studies. The EDI Audience & Asset Alignment Study would develop an understanding of what SLO CAL can authentically own for the diverse visitors it is trying to attract, and would have a co-op opportunity for local communities. The Visitor Profile Study would provide a profile of potential visitors and establish a baseline, identify motivations for current and potential visitors, develop visitor personas, and identify visitor perceptions. The last Visitor Profile study Visit SLO CAL conducted was in 2016 to inform the development of the brand. These would allow Visit SLO CAL and Mering to be more strategic in their marketing and advertising placement. Davison clarified that it is not a campaign effectiveness study. Proposals were

received for both on May 17, 2021, and the estimated budget (combined) for both studies would be \$198k if performed by the same consultant.

Public Comment – None

Board Discussion.

**ACTION:** Moved by N. Patel/Sohi to allow the President & CEO to negotiate agreements and fund an EDI Audience & Asset Alignment Study and Visitor Profile Study, at a cost not to exceed \$198k.

**Motion carried: 14:0**

### **13. Travel Trade & Marketing Update**

Cartier provided an update on Mering's progress as our agency of record. She noted that Mering completed four online focus groups with past visitors to test the brand tenets in May, and that the Focus groups featured participants from Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego and out-of-state. Research was designed to: 1) Understand top-of-mind perceptions of SLO CAL and the SLO CAL "lifestyle"; 2) Gauge reactions to a refined SLO CAL brand positioning expression/tenets; and 3) Probe holistic versus specific knowledge of the region and towns. Cartier reported out on the topline findings. Visit SLO CAL hosted four members of the Mering team on an immersion experience throughout the county, following the Marketing Retreat in April. Visit SLO CAL wanted to ensure Mering explored the entire county, and understood the differences between communities. Cartier also noted that Mering has outlined the key steps in the Phase I adoption of the House of Brands Strategy, which will be defined further in the FY 2022 Business & Marketing Plan. Mering will be in-market capturing new campaign assets from August 3-8, 2021, prior to the ad campaign launching in September. These costs will be included in the FY 2022 Budget presented to the Board at the June 16, 2021 meeting for their approval.

Public Comment – None

Board Discussion.

### **ANNOUNCEMENT OF CLOSED SESSION ITEM**

#### **14. Employee Dismissal**

#### **CLOSED SESSION REPORT**

No action was taken by the Board during Closed Session.

Davison noted upcoming agenda items.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Adjourned at 10:36am.