



MINUTES

Visit SLO CAL Executive Committee

Visit SLO CAL Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 13, 2021

3:00pm

The Kinney SLO, 1800 Monterey St, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Video Conference Option - URL: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87521727683>

Meeting ID: 875 2172 7683

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

1. CALL TO ORDER: Hemant Patel

PRESENT: Mark Eads, Aaron Graves, Hemant Patel, Clint Pearce, Amar Sohi

ABSENT: Clint Pearce

STAFF PRESENT: Chuck Davison, Brendan Pringle

Call to Order at 3:06pm.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT (On Non-Agenda Items)

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

CONSENT AGENDA

3. Approval of April 15, 2021 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

4. Approval of March 2021 Visit SLO CAL Financials

Davison noted that the April financials were still being finalized prior to the agenda being sent, and would be shared at the May Board of Directors Meeting, but that they are included in the printed agenda packet for reference.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion.

ACTION: Moved by Eads/Graves to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Motion carried: 4:0

CEO REPORT

5. CEO Report

Davison thanked the Committee members who attended the Annual Bash on May 5, 2021. Davison provided an update on the US Government project RFP in the works at Camp Roberts. The RFP requires accommodations for thousands of proposed government contractors beginning May 10, 2021 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 after July 1, 2021, if a contract for Camp Roberts is even executed. HHS informed Visit SLO CAL that room contracts 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. 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 supply purchasing would occur locally, which could help other local businesses. 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, Davison outlined Visit SLO CAL's response to-date and next steps. He 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 Visit SLO CAL is encouraging them to request mitigation. Davison reminded the Committee 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 Committee 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. Proposals are due Friday, May 14, 2021 (tomorrow). Davison noted that Visit SLO CAL has created a landing page for open positions in the travel and tourism industry. He encouraged the Committee 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 discussed his plans for a 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; he 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. He requested feedback from the Committee on his sabbatical plan and timing.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion. The Committee agreed that when advocating on the Camp Roberts issue, it's important to message that it's not just about the hotels, but that it affects the communities in the county. The Committee agreed to Davison's plan of action for this sabbatical and the importance for him to take this time away from the business to refresh.

BUSINESS ITEMS

6. COVID-19 Impact & Response

Davison provided an update on local COVID-19 response efforts. Over 240,000 vaccines have been distributed locally, and SLO County now has mobile vaccination sites available upon request. At the state level, over 18 million people have received at least one dose in California, and 13 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 today (May 13, 2021) 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 the week ending May 8, 2021.

Public Comment – None.

Committee Discussion.

7. Chief Marketing Officer Update

Cathy Cartier (Tull) is currently operating as Visit SLO CAL’s Chief Marketing Consultant, through June 30, 2021. Over the past two and a half months, Cartier has hit the ground running, proving herself as a tremendous asset to the business, while gaining the respect of the team, the Board, Marketing Committee, local partners and agencies. Davison noted that she has gained buy-in and trust through face-to-face meetings with investors, partners and stakeholders, and has been instrumental in building next year’s Business & Marketing Plan. He added that she has moved the marketing segment of the business at a rapid pace to effectively launch the initiatives proposed for FY 2022. Based on the caliber of talent that Cartier has demonstrated at Visit SLO CAL and in her past roles, Davison noted that a change to the compensation structure would be required for her to join the team in the CMO role, with the goal of hiring her prior to the end of her contract, with a start date as a regular employee of June 1, 2021. He noted that through October, she would need to continue to travel back and forth from Virginia, being in SLO CAL a minimum of two weeks per month, and she would relocate here at the end of October, full-time. He noted that Cartier would be in SLO CAL for the length of his sabbatical. Davison asked the Committee for their feedback and blessing in moving in this direction. He added that while Committee approval on staffing matters is not required under his contract, an adjustment to the pay scale of this level is a budget item under Committee oversight and that based on Cartier’s previous role, he was seeking the Committee’s input and approval.

Public Comment – None

Committee Discussion.

ACTION: Moved by Eads/Graves to approve adjustments to the CMO compensation structure and approve the hiring of Cathy Cartier as Visit SLO CAL’s Chief Marketing Officer.

Motion carried: 4:0

8. Equity Diversity & Inclusion Tracking

In June 2020, the Board approved its Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Plan. Davison reminded the Committee 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

Committee Discussion. Sohi expressed his appreciation that EDI efforts have remained a priority for Visit SLO CAL, when for many this seemed to be short lived.

9. Board Member Selection Process

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 Maher'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 (owners and GMs) 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 if the Board does not want to fill them now. Davison asked the Committee to recommend a slate of candidates for the Board to consider at the May 2021 (Annual) Board Meeting.

Public Comment – None

Committee Discussion.

ACTION: Moved by Eads/Graves to recommend that the Board 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 remaining two seats open for future election.

Motion carried: 4:0

10. 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. Davison noted that staff is requesting that the Executive Committee recommend a slate of candidates for the Board to consider at the May 2021 (Annual) Board Meeting.

Public Comment – None

Committee Discussion.

ACTION: Moved by Eads/Sohi to recommend that the Board appoint Hemant Patel as Chair, Aaron Graves as Vice Chair, Mark Eads as Secretary, and Amar Sohi as Treasurer.

Davison noted that Clint Pearce would stay on as Past Chair.

11. Travel Trade & Marketing Update

Davison provided an update on Mering's progress as our agency of record. He noted that Mering completed four online focus groups with past visitors to test proposed 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. Davison 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. Davison 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 July 12-23, 2021 (adjusted after the meeting to 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

Committee Discussion.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CLOSED SESSION ITEM

12. Employee Dismissal

CLOSED SESSION REPORT

No action was taken by the Committee during Closed Session.

Davison noted upcoming agenda items.

ADJOURNMENT

Adjourned at 5:09pm.