

Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Humboldt Lodging Alliance,

Wednesday, July 29, 2015

Red Lion Hotel, Eureka, California

Present: Chris Ambrosini, Lisa Cosoletto, Lowell Daniels, Audrey Archibald, Jeff Durham, Gary Stone, Marc Rowley, Brad Laws, Kelly Martin, Shailesh Patel, Tony Smithers

Guests: Sandy Scott, Frank Whitlach, Matt Kolbert, Cameron Tyler

The meeting was called to order at 1:05 pm and began with introductions.

The first order of business was announcement of the 2015 board election results. For brevity, only the board seats that changed are reported here:

- Kelly Martin (Eureka) replaced Bob Gafford
- Lisa Cosolotto (Arcata) replaced Alex Stillman
- Sharrie Larson (Fortuna) replaced Pritesh Patel

All of the remaining board members on the ballot were returned for another two-year term.

The Executive Committee then presented their proposed slate of HLA board officers for the coming year. Their recommendation was to keep the same membership on the Executive Committee to assure continuity of leadership with the many projects and “moving parts” being worked on—with the addition of Shailesh Patel to the Executive Committee as a member-at-large. This slate was approved (Rowley/Laws/unanimous).

Jeff Durham inquired about board members who missed a lot of meetings—could they be replaced? Tony Smithers said that the bylaws of the Humboldt Lodging Alliance empower to board to remove members for non-participation.

In discussion of board matters, it was agreed that the times for all HLA meetings would be shifted from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm, instead starting at 12:00 pm and concluding at 2:00 pm.

Next, the board minutes of the April, 2015 meeting were examined and approved (Cosolotto/Daniels/unanimous). The agenda for the current meeting was also approved.

Tony Smithers next presented the financial report for June 30, 2015 (fiscal year end), noting significant balances in all accounts due to assessment revenues running ahead of budget. In discussion, Marc Rowley warned that the City of Eureka was looking to cut its destination marketing spend with the Convention & Visitors Bureau, a move foreseen at the formation of the HCTBID. Shailesh Patel said that the tourism & hospitality industry has to stand up to the cities to demand a fair return on the funds that it collects on their behalf. “Tourism is the new fish in the pond,” said Kelly Martin. Jeff Durham added that we (HLA/HCCVB) need to proactively go to the cities with our plans, not wait passively. After this discussion, the financial statement was approved (Stone/Laws/unanimous).

The next order of business was a presentation by representatives of the California Welcome Center Arcata, made by the Executive Director and board president of the Arcata Chamber of Commerce (Sandy Scott and Frank Whitlach, respectively). Whitlach began by reporting the conversation going on at the Arcata chamber: Is the welcome center a valuable asset to the Humboldt tourism industry? In his welcome center overview, Whitlach said that the center receives 15,000 visitors annually, and they realize that they have to “grow that number or get out of the business.”

Whitlach said that one-third of welcome center visitors stay another day in the area and spend more. “It’s a service for the entire county, not just Arcata,” he said. The chamber of commerce is separating the chamber and the welcome center in their budgeting, and the welcome center needs to become more self-sufficient and play a bigger role in Humboldt tourism. He said the chamber is working with the City of Arcata to try and arrange bridge funding while they figure things out. “We believe the Humboldt Lodging Alliance countywide is the place to go for funding,” Whitlach said.

In discussion, Marc Rowley suggested that “we round up the visitor centers in the county, the bureau and the HLA and talk about whether brick-and-mortar visitor centers are delivering enough bang for the buck.” Lowell Daniels suggested that the Arcata welcome center should be funded by the Arcata committee of the HLA with their pool of Community Tourism Funds. Gary Stone commented that the Arcata Welcome Center’s location is hard to find, to which Shailesh Patel agreed.

It was suggested that the City of Arcata needs to put up additional signage to make the welcome center more visible. Jeff Durham said “Cities need to step up first, then we can think about providing some support.” Marc Rowley observed that an overall master plan for tourism in Humboldt County could be a useful thing to have.

Kelly Martin asked Mr. Whitlach what the welcome center planned to spend the money on—the answer was ongoing operation of the welcome center. Chris Ambrosini said that one of the problems was that the content and layout of the welcome center is largely controlled by Certified Folder Co.

Frank Whitlach concluded by saying the Arcata Chamber would have a plan in place by the end of the year, whichever way they go. They were working with the HCCVB hospitality committee for support. Chris Ambrosini suggested that they contact the Arcata HLA committee for funding. At this point, the topic was tabled with no action taken.

The Agency Report was then made by Matt Kolbert and Cameron Tyler of Misfit. Included in their report were the following items:

1. Creative Campaign Library is active and being added to regularly.
2. The Advertising Campaign was in full swing with digital and print components. Among the most positive metrics are the completed views of video pre-roll, which Kolbert explained was a short (15 sec) advertisement that plays before a requested video starts to play on Youtube, for example.
3. It was agreed that the monthly marketing report produced by Misfit would be forwarded to the entire board of directors.

Kelly Martin voiced the question on everyone's mind: What about results? How do we know the campaign is effective? Mr. Kolbert explained his agency's focus on audience reach and engagements as the most relevant metrics in a campaign that is largely digital. Marc Rowley asked whether Misfit had ever implemented a conversion study. Yes, Kolbert replied, but people are complex.

The print advertising, character development of the "White Rabbit," and the front desk kit were also gone over as part of the Misfit presentation, which concluded with an update on website development—which had been slightly delayed but was on track for a late October launch.

Lastly, Marc Rowley spoke about the work of the HCCVB hospitality committee. "The hospitality end of our destination and product will need funding," he said. We are instigating a necessary conversation about tourism—what is the vision? How can we get everyone to cooperate?

Chris Ambrosini cautioned that the HLA needs to stay a-political. Shailesh Patel said that other businesses need to step up and contribute. Rowley: "the cities need to understand that lodging and tourism are largely driving their growth." Patel: "the casinos have also seen huge growth."

With no further time, the meeting adjourned at 3:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Tony Smithers