



CALIFORNIA'S EASTERN SIERRA

MONO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM & FILM COMMISSION

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DRAFT MINUTES

Regular Meeting of Tuesday, August 28, 2018 – 10:00am

Lee Vining Community Center - 296 Mattly Ave. Lee Vining, CA 93541

1. Call to order. Commission Chair Geoff McQuilkin called the meeting to order at 10:04am.
2. Introductions and announcements.
Commissioners: Chris Long, Geoff McQuilkin, Michael Vanderhurst, Sarah Walsh, Wendy Schneider
Staff: Alicia Vennos, Jeff Simpson, Liz Grans
Other: Jennifer Halferty (District 1 Mono County Supervisor), Bob Gardner (District 3 Mono County Supervisor), Jack Benham (Sheet News)
3. Opportunity for the Public to Address the Commission.
Jennifer Halferty notified the Commission of the joint meeting and workshop happening this evening in Bishop, CA between the Town of Mammoth Lakes Council and Inyo County Board of Supervisors to discuss regional airport options. Alicia Vennos thanked the Commissioners for their time, insight, feedback and support as volunteer Commissioners.
4. Approval of the Minutes of the July 31, 2018 meeting.
MOTION: VANDERHURST MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED (correction: under Sarah Walsh's Commissioner Report, change "June Lake Women's Club" to "June Lake Little Loopers"); SECONDED: SCHNEIDER.
APPROVED 5/0, no abstentions.
5. Monthly Financial/Budget Report.
For several years, the transient occupancy tax (TOT) for all four quarters has gradually increased. Overall, there has been a 53% increase in TOT in the last seven years. Staff are anticipating a slight decrease this summer quarter due to wildfires, smoke, and road closures. Staff shared the department's financial report. Next month, staff will share a more detailed budget. The budget amendment process was rescheduled to October 2, 2018. It's unclear at this time if this meeting will be a workshop only, or when the budget amendment is adopted. Any community members concerned about funding for programs are welcome to speak to the Board.
6. Economic Development and Tourism Report:
Smoke, wildfire, and road closure impacts have impacted Mono County in the last few weeks. The Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center and a few other businesses have reported August shortfalls of 10- 30%. Vanderhurst: businesses in Mammoth Lakes were also negatively impacted; many international visitors changed their travel routes and stayed on the West side, skipping Yosemite and the Eastern Sierra. In response to these issues, staff has been working with the Visit California "crisis support team" (CST), which is reacting to several wildfires across the state, as well as coordinating a response with other western-states also affected by smoke and fires. Staff has also been working with the other Yosemite gateway destination marketing organizations (DMOs) on messaging and other campaigns (#YosemiteNow) to encourage visitors to return to the area. Locally, as conditions slowly improve in Mono County, staff has increased messaging (social media advertising, e-newsletter, etc.) to try boost end of summer and fall visitation. A housing workshop scheduled for the September 18th Board of Supervisors meeting. Jennifer Halferty noted that a toolkit, including feedback from the housing survey, was shared with the Board to help guide the workshop with some actionable items to help with housing issues.
 - a. **Discuss possible stakeholder "open house" events.**
Typically, the Commission and staff have hosted at least one outreach/educational/training or "open house" type event per year. Last year, staff and the California State University Bakersfield Small Business Development Center hosted an "Access to Capitol" training, and previously hosted events such as the State of the County, Visit California's Global Ready program, etc. Staff and the commission did some brainstorming for a "thank you" type

event for stakeholders, perhaps with a few short talks or presentations. Walsh thought a social media training presentation might be useful. Schneider commented to consider an in-person workshop or training that is also recorded and available as a webinar or video for those unable to attend. The format, what agencies and what topics (tourism, economy, unemployment, housing, schools, etc.) should be included, as well as timing, were discussed.

b. Discuss niche marketing strategies and tactics.

Staff and the Commission discussion regarding what niche markets to target, specifically the craft brewing industry, since it's a strong visitor attractor, as well as travelers with dogs.

c. Review grant funding applications and discuss possible revisions. Due to time constraints, this item was tabled until the next meeting.

d. Discuss upcoming printing/paper cost increases for 2019 Visitor Guide, and potential fee increase for advertising rates. ACTION: Review and determine fee increase for advertising space in 2019 Visitor Guide.

The paper industry has seen a large increase in pricing, and so the visitor guide production cost will be impacted. Advertising typically covers the cost of production and printing (50,000 guides in 2018). Staff is also considering expanding the guide by eight pages (this is the minimum number of pages to add in order to increase the guide's size) to include important information on sustainable tourism messaging, wildfire safety, and shoulder season itineraries. Advertising space pricing has been the same for the last five or six years, but due to the increased paper cost and additional pages, an advertising space fee increase needs to be considered. The Commission's recommendation was to be very clear on why the fee is increasing, that the fee goes strictly to the cost of production and printing (not into the general fund, etc.). A consultant hired by the Mono County finance department is also analyzing County fee structures and, at some point, the visitor guide advertising fees will be reviewed. ACTION: MOTION MADE BY VANDERHURST TO CONTINUE RESEARCHING THE ADVERTISING SPACE FEE INCREASE; SECONDED BY SCHNEIDER. APPROVED 5/0.

e. Report on progress regarding research projects including Business Retention & Expansion Survey, Economic Impact and Visitor Profile Study, Visa View report, and County economic profile. The summer visitor survey has ended. Fall will be the final survey season and will begin at the end of September. Lauren Schlauf, the consultant hired to administer the survey, joined the meeting by phone and gave a quick overview of the survey to the Commission. Staff shared the VisaVue report for quarter 2 domestic and international Visa spending in Mono County by zip code. Domestic and international year-over-year spending is up overall.

7. Dewatering of Mono County Ranchlands and Habitat. ACTION: Consider approval of a letter to Mayor Garcetti opposing the dewatering of Long Valley and Little Round Valley by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Due to time constraints, this item was tabled until the next meeting.
8. Fisheries Commission Report: Update from Mr. Simpson regarding the Mono County Fish & Wildlife Commission. Due to time constraints, this item was tabled until the next meeting.
9. Film Commission: Update on filming activity and productions in Mono County. Ms. Vennos is working on scheduling a meeting with the Inyo National Forest regarding the film permitting process.
10. Project Status Update:
 - a. Collateral
 - b. Public Relations
 - c. Advertising/Social Media/E-Newsletter: 175,000 Facebook followers and almost 25,000 Instagram followers.
 - d. Website
 - e. Tradeshows & Conferences: CALED Rural Summit Exchange on September 25-26th in Tehachapi, CA.
11. Commissioner Reports: Due to time constraints, the Commissioners did not share reports.
12. Call for agenda items for next regular meeting.
13. Adjourn the meeting and reconvene in regular session at 10:00am on Tuesday, September 25, 2018 at 74 N. School Street Annex I, Bridgeport, CA 93517.