



CALIFORNIA'S EASTERN SIERRA

MONO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM & FILM COMMISSION

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MINUTES

Economic Development, Tourism & Film Commission (EDTFC) Regular Meeting via Teleconference* Tuesday, March 30, 2021 – 10:00 A.M.

*As authorized by Governor Newsome's Executive Order N-25-20, dated March 17, 2020, this meeting will be held via teleconferencing with members of the Commission attending from separate locations. There will not be a physical location of the meeting open to the public. This altered format is in observance of recent recommendations by local officials that certain precautions be taken, including social distancing, to address the threat of COVID-19.

Commissioners present: Geoff McQuilkin, Michael Vanderhurst, Sarah Walsh, Erinn Wells, Scott Burkard

Commissioners absent: Wendy Schneider, Steven Morrison

Staff: Alicia Vennos, Jeff Simpson, Liz Grans, Morgan Terrell

Guests: Supervisor Rhonda Duggan, Supervisor John Peters, Ralph Lockhart

1. Call to order.

Chair Geoff McQuilkin called the meeting to order at 10:10am.

2. Introductions and announcements.

Introductions were made. Ms. Vennos announced the Yosemite Gateway Partners meeting will be held April 8th and Yosemite National Park will provide an update on reservations and activities this summer. Mr. Simpson announced YARTS will operate the summer bus schedule again this year.

3. Opportunity for the Public to address the Commission.

John Peters announced his restaurant at the Bridgeport Inn is opening the following Thursday. Both he and Ms. Wells reported staffing shortages are especially challenging this spring for Bridgeport businesses. Supervisor Duggan reported that South County is buzzing in the wake of springtime and upcoming fishing opener.

4. Approval of the Minutes of the January 26, 2021 meeting. Tabled to next meeting.

5. Monthly Financial/Budget report.

- a. **Transient Occupancy Tax receipts for Quarters 1 & 2:** Ms. Vennos reported that Q 1-2 TOT receipts show an 11% decrease, year over year. A few weeks into the pandemic, TOT revenues for FY20-21 were projected to be a 30-40% loss, so a drop of 11% is significantly better than expected and reflects the busy summer and fall visitation from heavy in-state travelers.
- b. **FY 21-22 Budget calendar/TOT projections:**
Department budgets for FY21-22 must be submitted by April 9th and the County budget will be published May 10th. The budget workshop with the Board of Supervisors will be held May 17- 19 with the budget being published on June 4th. The budget hearing will take place June 15th at the BOS meeting. Working with Finance Director Dutcher, Tourism will receive an increase in TOT for tourism marketing over last year; however, this is a significant decrease from pre-pandemic – back to FY17-18 levels.

6. Economic Development and Tourism report.

- a. **EOC Joint Information Center/Economic Recovery Branch update:**

Ms. Vennos reported that the EOC is in the process of “right-sizing” and that the Economic Recovery group will meet now only as necessary; JIC and EOC will meet once per week. Vaccination clinics are going well and almost 60% of eligible persons in Mono County have at least one vaccine shot. Downward trend in positive cases bodes well for moving into the less restrictive Orange tier.

b. Collateral update - 2021 Visitor Guide; Backroad Tours Guide; Fall Color Guide; Fishing Map:

Ms. Vennos reported the 2021 Visitor Guide is being finalized. Staff analyzed the Visitor Guide purpose, design and costs and have decided that soliciting advertising is no longer viable or necessary. Ms. Walsh and Ms. Wells expressed approval and felt that the Guide would be more readable and less cluttered without advertising; the reduced number of pages and design costs will result in savings. The Commission was in consensus. Ms. Vennos also reported that the State Recreation Trails Program grant that has previously funded the Backroads Guide will not be available in time to replenish depleted inventory, so Tourism will budget to reprint it as it is an important and popular off-road educational piece. Additionally, it is time to reprint the Eastern Sierra Fall Colors Guide in partnership with Mammoth Lakes Tourism, Bishop Chamber of Commerce, Mono County Tourism, and Inyo County.

c. Dispersed Camping Summit update:

Ms. Vennos provided an update on the Dispersed Camping Summit, a group of local and regional agencies and organizations concerned about the negative impacts from increase in dispersed camping. An online, interactive map to show developed campgrounds and locations where dispersed camping is permitted (and not permitted) is being finalized. The Education Subcommittee is compiling priority messaging and other Subcommittees include Enforcement, Stewardship, and Infrastructure – Ms. Vennos will update the Commission on progress and deliverables.

d. Local, State, Federal business assistance programs:

Mr. Simpson reported on all available federal and state business assistance programs including the California Relief Grant (Round 6), Paycheck Protection Program (Rounds 1 and 2 ending this week), EIDL, Shuttered Venue grant, and a \$29 billion Restaurant grant (awaiting details).

e. Update regarding application for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) CARES Act – CV1, 2, 3 for Microenterprise Financial Assistance Program for small businesses.

Mr. Simpson provided an update on the CDBG Cares Act grant program. Mono County applied for CV1 in September 2020 and is currently working on application for CV2-3. The main issue is with how slow these programs are to confirm allocations and pay out to the businesses. Ms. Vennos informed that the funding has been allocated, so there is no reason it should be taking this long. Within the grants, CV1 has \$68,000 and between CV2 & CV3 there is \$234,000.

POSSIBLE ACTION: California Association for Local Economic Development (CALED) is encouraging non-entitled jurisdictions to write a letter to Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) regarding the ongoing delay of disbursement of funds to non-entitlement communities.

MOTION: Mr. Vanderhurst makes a motion to send letter to HCD. Ms. Walsh seconds. All in favor 6-0. No abstentions.

7. Community Support Grant Programs and Special Events -Liz Grans

Ms. Grans reported that Commission subcommittee reviewed the Community Event Marketing Fund (CEMF) grant applications and worked with staff to allocate funds based on the point system. Ms. Grans is currently working on getting all the agreement letters out. The approved grants for CEMF went out to three events in Bridgeport, three events in June Lake, two new region-wide events by Friends of Inyo and High Sierra Energy, and one event in Mammoth. Ms. Vennos stated that in the FY 2021-22 budget, Community Support Grants will be included as part of the operational budget, not a policy item. For the Performing and Visual Arts Grant, funding is allocated to the Mono Arts Council, Sierra Classic Theatre, Chamber Music Unbound, June Lake Loop Chamber’s events, and June Lake Loop Performing Arts Association. For the Historic Society Grant Fund (HSGF), the Mono County Historical Society, Southern Mono Historical Society, Mono Basin Historical Society, and Historic Benton Hot Springs were all funded.

8. Mono County Fish & Wildlife Commission update -Jeff Simpson

Mr. Simpson reported that staff is focusing on promotion of the new fishing regulations which were designed for increased protection of spawning fish and a sustainable fishery. There are no changes for the front-county lakes; streams and rivers are subject to revised regulations and the East Walker River will now be closed in the winter months.

9. **Film Commission update** – Alicia Vennos

POSSIBLE ACTION: Discuss recent vehicle commercial production and consider approval of communication/outreach requesting/advising that commercial film productions portray responsible outdoor recreation practices.

Ms. Vennos reported that she followed up on the recent Nissan Armada commercial which portrayed irresponsible off-road recreation; the filming took place on private property. The Commission agreed that communication with future film productions should include education and information regarding responsible, respectful recreation practices. Ms. Vennos will develop verbiage for the FilmMonoCounty.com website with County Counsel's advisement.

ACTION: The Commission agreed that the focus would be to move forward to ensure that film productions are educated on the importance of portraying responsible recreation behavior for the preservation of Mono County lands.

10. **Project Status Update, including public relations, advertising/social media, websites, tradeshow/conferences.**

Ms. Grans reported that there are no in-person tradeshow or conferences on the immediate horizon, but hopefully will resume in 2022. Ms. Grans also reported on the uploading of BookDirect platform to the MonoCounty.org website which will provide expanded online booking opportunities for all lodging partners.

11. **Commissioner Reports.**

- Mr. Vanderhurst reported that Mammoth Lakes Tourism is putting in a lot of work and \$100,000 to support the Mammoth Host Program, a multi-organization effort to be in place by Memorial Day weekend.
- Ms. Walsh reported that June Lake is bracing for another busy summer. Reservations are looking higher than normal, and she reported that there are some new businesses opening.
- Mr. Burkard reported that the Northern Mono Chamber of Commerce is working with the Walker community to recover and redefine itself following the Mountainview Fire. Restaurants in Walker are reopening, and they have a new vegan restaurant opening as well; however, there is frustration with lack of housing and with the increase cost of lumber and construction.
- Ms. Wells reported that Bridgeport businesses are starting to open; however, finding employees is a significant challenge. She mentioned Three 95 Mexican Café is unfortunately closing.
- Mr. McQuilkin reported that the Inyo National Forest Service is exploring options with the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center operation. For now, it will remain closed. Mono Lake Committee is currently open 5 days a week and hopefully 7 soon, but they are struggling with staffing as well.

12. **Call for agenda items for next regular meeting.** None.

13. **Adjourn the meeting** and reconvene in regular session at 10:00 a.m. on May 25, 2021 via teleconference.
Mr. McQuilkin called the meeting at 12:25pm.