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Santa Maria Valley Tourism Marketing District (SMV TMD)

Advisory Committee Minutes

March 16, 2023

11am Santa Maria Inn

DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED

Advisory Committee: Cherag Patel, Ketan Panchal, Seth Foster, JP Patel

City Staff:

Chamber|Staff: Emily Kitts, Mark van de Kamp, Jennifer Harrison, Glenn Morris, Taz Dougherty, Cheryl Cuming

Guests: Caitlin Miller, FairPark

KPS3 | Team: Brittany and Rob

Call to Order by Seth at 11:19am

Roll call – Majority present.

Public Comment: None.

Presentation: None.

Consent Calendar (minutes, STR, TOT and financials):

Motion to accept consent items: Seth moved; JP 2nd. Motion passed.

Business Items

Discussion & Action Items:

FY 2023 | 2024 draft budget:

Cheryl share economic assumptions based on Oxford Economics' October US Tourism Outlook anticipating a mild recession in 2023, projecting .2% increase in overall occupancy and a \$4 increase in RevPAR. Increased in visitor growth in expected to be primarily international, and visitor spending anticipated to grow 4.5%. Jenn noted that this same growth was recently shared at the VCA Outlook Forum.

22 | 23 projected collections are budgeted at \$780,000, with 23 | 24 collections anticipated to be flat to 22 | 23 actuals – around \$850,000. Looking to increase our

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marketing investment by 15 – 18% over 22 | 23. Advisory board in support of this direction.

Excess Funds Deployment:

KPS3 proposed an investment of excess funds of \$75,000 to support a Fall campaign to boost mid-week business. JP asked how ROI would be measured, and Seth reiterated the importance of understanding the return to confirm whether the strategy is worth pursuing. Rob ensured them that the program would have KPIs that would be tracked and reported. It was asked how we can involve projects/programs at Vandenburg, Diablo and Morro Bay. AC supported this recommendation and KPS3 will develop the marketing strategy for 23 | 24 deployment.

Cheryl noted CHLA membership at \$20,000 annually and AC not interested in pursuing.

Information Items:

Brittany | KPS3 presented the February marketing report including:

- 44% increase in web sessions
- 575 hotel referrals – 5% increase despite a decrease in hotel pageviews
- Almost 250 new email subscribers
- Almost 400 new IG followers – most we have seen in a single month
- Influencer content generated 74.9m impressions
- Ranked #1 for wine tasting CA central coast
 - JP asked how many wineries involved and it was noted about 30. Jenn mentioned the importance of our relationship with Alison | SB Vintner's. Cherag noted increased interest in wine visitors and Jenn agreed based on improved stats on the Wine Trolley.

Rob and Brittany presented the strategic marketing approach for 23 | 24:

- Industry Trends
 - Google and Meta are top channels, others emerge to meet needs of younger travelers
 - ChatGPT AI
 - Search engines top choice for discovering things to do
 - Importance of influencers
 - Social media + vacation inspiration – primer media channel
- What's Been Working
 - Consistent growth in email CT rate and Open Rate is 60% (Industry ave: 40%)
 - 171 keywords in position 1 – 10 (31.5% increase), with 48 in position #1
 - Increased almost 3X from 2019 to 2023
 - Hotel referrals paid digital ads saw dramatic spikes during individualized campaigns like the Stimulus and Beat Inflation Vacation

- Marketing + Content Strategy Evolution
 - Connections | Brand Pillars – Conversations | Brand Offerings – Conversions | Hotel Referrals
 - Brand Pillars: Unique Wine Experience, BBQ Culture, Ideal Home Base, Real Value, Naturally unconstrained, Genuine heritage
 - Focus for new fiscal year: own and grow brand equity by leveraging owned content with intention to create stories that bring our brand pillars to life
 - Creating more content in less time while in turn maximizing our paid media budget for greater return
 - Anything and everything that contributes to the storytelling of our brand (SEM, PR, social, photo/video, influencers, SEO, remarketing, blogs, website pages, creative assets)
- Proposed FY24 Approach
 - Put content at the forefront
 - Shift our approach by eliminating full-fledged campaigns and focusing on 2 integrated, conversation-based mini creative campaigns, along with monthly data-driven content (hotel video example) to drive digital engagements
 - Seth suggested hyper focused targeted creative message based on market
 - Increase our raw paid media spend to better promote all of our content
 - Stay consistent with our top performing channels – SEO, PR and paid search
 - Continue to collect content with a focus on video
- Areas of focus
 - Grow our engaged/active email database
 - Increase our paid media spend to 40% of the totaling marketing budget
 - Expand SEO efforts to a new category
 - Secure more PR story/article placements in top-tier target media
- Questions | Discussion – Anything else you were hoping to see:
 - Hotel video for smaller properties
 - Elevated food & wine experiences focused on hidden gems

Overall the AC was supportive of the proposed approach and areas of focus for 23 | 24. The strategic plan will be developed based on this direction and presented for approval at the May meeting.

VB | TMD Director Report:

Jenn and Taz presented VB | TMD update:

- Citywide Event update: Proposal received being reviewed. Cherag confirmed the E&F scorecard will be used to assess value of possible future events.
- Group leads: CCAPP group meeting for 100 people. CalSAE annual board meeting hosting bid being submitted. Square dancing competition in April 2024 with 400 room nights.

- Event grants: Hancock Vit/Wine event, BBQ Festival and Kite Festival have been funded through the VB event grants.
- Manager's meeting on March 22 at 10am at Costa de Oro

Chamber Economic Vitality:

It was noted that CLIA offers a free membership to DMOs and JP supports having tools that will provide additional advocacy support in the future.

Opportunities with the Airport – immigration and direct flights to Mexico.

Updates:

Chairperson/Committee Member Reports:

JP shared his meeting with Chamber and City to share his vision on the benefit of including tourism and branding the city of SM. TOT is the 4th largest income generator for the City – around \$4.5million per year. JP provided a copy of his request, including:

1. Participation in cities new Vision and Mission Statement
2. City of SM support, participation and implementation of an economic development strategy
3. Expand the City's effort to develop tourism assets (use of its local parks for local events)
4. City of SM hire an Economic development manager

JP noted that he and Glenn chatted, and Glenn will take the lead on communicating between the Chamber, TMD and the City. JP is hoping to get more visibility within the General Plan for the tourism industry – goal is to generate demand to help all businesses grow. JP is anxious to move forward and get buy-in | endorsements from key partners and business owners. It was noted that the efforts of Jenn and Taz are making great progress, and JP thanked Mark for his support as he is excited to see what happens. Mark welcomed JP's input and noted the timing is perfect. Jenn noted that many collaborative efforts are already underway and can be expanded. Seth agrees the tourism industry needs to be more involved in how SMV looks in the future, and Cherag supports that we need to layout a plan focused on internal players so the Chamber can focus outward. A plan for future growth needs to be a key priority.

Future Agenda Item

- Alex Posada, Rec/Parks, Future Sports Venue plans
- 23 | 24 Budget and Marketing plan

Adjourn at 1:07pm

Next meeting: May 18, 2023 11am – 1pm