

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM (SMTT)**  
**REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2024**  
**SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM – 2427 Main Street**

**Call to Order:** Chairman Atallah called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

**Roll Call & Self Introductions:** Chairman Atallah called for self-introductions. Those present provided brief self-introductions. The following persons were recorded in attendance:

**Present:** Chairman Younes Atallah, Vice Chair Charlie Lopez-Quintana, Treasurer Karen Ginsberg, Secretary Lauralee Asch, Member Neil Carrey, Member Shahid Kayani, Member Jan Williamson and City Manager David White.

**Also Present:** SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards, SMTT Chief People Officer Rachel Lozano, SMTT Vice President of Communications Lauren Salisbury, SMTT Director of Marketing John Lendman, SMTT Client Services Manager Alyssa Dorn and SMTT Administrative Assistant Bella Cifuentes.

**Absent:** No one was absent.

**Public Comment:** Chairman Atallah called for public comment. There was none.

**City Manager Update:**

The City Manager David White provided an update following the recent election, highlighting a significant council turnover with onboarding efforts for new members underway. Two tax measures and one advisory measure were passed: Measure F modernizes the business license tax, exempting businesses grossing under \$100,000, and increasing the rate for corporate headquarters to 0.25%, effective January 1st; Measure QS raises property taxes for school repairs and upgrades; and Measure K introduces a parking facility tax for private facilities, designated for public safety, also effective January 1st.

The Fairmont Miramar project has passed the landmarks commission, and the opening of the Regent was celebrated in September. The city received an \$8 million grant under Proposition 47 for diversion programs, likely named "SaMo Bridge," and is partnering with Exodus to create a regional "safe landing" center for interim housing and mental health care.

An amendment has been adopted to facilitate the opening of new businesses downtown, and plans are in motion to establish an entertainment zone on the promenade. Construction will bring 26 new businesses, including a Google flagship store and a Holey Moley golf club, along with 25 new digital wayfinding kiosks in neighborhoods.

Cirque du Soleil's Kooza has received positive feedback, and the city is deepening its partnership with Frieze to enhance arts in Santa Monica. A task force of department heads will discuss the federal election's implications for the community and necessary proactive measures.

A community meeting on the airport conversion project is set for December 7th at Memorial Park from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. to present guiding principles based on community input. Carrey raised inquiries about the Olympic plans, with no updates available. White also noted the Kiwanis-sponsored scoreboard at Belmar Park is expected to be completed by early January.

The new council will be seated on December 10th, with a reception and swearing-in at 5 PM, followed by the council meeting at 5:30 PM.

**Approval of the September 18, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting Minutes:** Secretary Asch presented the September 18, 2024 meeting minutes. Member Carrey moved to approve the minutes and Member

Kayani seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with all members present.

**Acceptance of the September 2024 Financials:** Treasurer Ginsberg presented the August and September 2024 financial memos and cash basis documents. Member Williamson moved to accept the financials and Member Carrey seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with all members present.

**SMTT Staff Updates:**

SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards provided the committee with an update on the Marketing side of SMTT. Edwards expressed gratitude to all participants who contributed to The Extra Bedroom Program Survey. Edwards announced that, based on community feedback, the program will run from Monday, November 11, 2024, through Monday, February 10, 2025. Edwards informs the committee that The Extra Bedroom Program aims to attract hotel business during the shoulder and holiday seasons by offering discounted rates to Santa Monica residents hosting friends and family. This initiative serves as a valuable community relations opportunity, allowing locals to experience the various hotels in Santa Monica while enhancing awareness of these properties through special offers.

SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards provided insights into the Book Direct campaign, which ran from July 1 to September 30. Edwards highlighted the top five cities generating referrals including Los Angeles, Las Vegas, New York, Phoenix, and San Jose, along with the top five states being California, Arizona, New York, Texas, and Washington. She highlighted significant growth in sessions from San Francisco (+2%), New York (+17%), and Dallas (+20%), while Los Angeles experienced a decline of 9%. Engagement metrics also showed that San Francisco and New York both recorded a 9% increase in site engagement. Lastly, Edwards reported to the committee that, for September, the combined referrals from the Book Direct initiative reached 15,551, consisting of 13,750 onsite partner referrals and 1,801 direct bookings.

Edwards provided insights on SMTT's Fall Media Campaign with Datafy. Edwards explained that the campaign aimed to draw visitors to Santa Monica lodging properties through a multi-faceted approach including blended video, prospecting display, native display, and retargeting display. From August 15 to October 19, the campaign achieved 3,462,266 impressions, a unique reach of 542,300, and 6,119 total clicks.

Edwards additionally informed the committee on SMTT's Fall Media Campaign in collaboration with Noble Studios. Edwards explained that the goals for this campaign centered around increasing year-over-year growth in the ratio of weekday to weekend occupancy, driving traffic during shoulder seasons, enhancing overnight bookings, and positioning Santa Monica as the premier luxury beach-city destination. Edwards highlights that multiple channels were used as tactics, including out-of-home advertising, Connected TV, Condé Nast Traveller, TripAdvisor, Expedia, Google Discovery & Display, Meta, and Search.

Edwards provided the committee with an executive summary of SMTT's fall campaign with Noble Studios. Edwards explained that despite challenges from industry pressures affecting both organic and paid traffic, the campaign secured 28% of the fiscal year partner referral goal, slightly below the expected level of 33%. Edwards noted the addition of two new channels in October, alongside a 52% month-over-month increase in media spending. Edwards then highlighted the website performance in October that revealed a 9% year-over-year decrease in site sessions, primarily driven by declines in organic and direct traffic. Partner referrals also dropped 21% year-over-year, with the largest decline in direct traffic at 40%. Edwards explained to the committee that despite a year-over-year reduction in media spending by 26%, paid search and Meta advertising showed positive results, generating 594 "clicks to Book Direct" conversions and demonstrating strong engagement metrics. Edwards provided the committee with a review of the key performance metrics regarding this campaign, for the fiscal year 2024-25. Edwards stated that as of month three, the actual count for partner referrals reached 45,481, equating to 22% of the annual goal of 204,950 referrals. Lastly, Edwards highlighted that supporting key performance indicators for organic sessions totaled 229,616, representing 26% of the goal, while paid sessions counted at 30,636, or 20% of the goal.

SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards addressed the objectives of the Santa Monica Travel & Tourism Co-op from October 1 to November 15, which focused on driving visitation for early fall and appealing to high-value visitors. Edwards highlighted that the target audience segments for this initiative included past high-value lodging visitors, hotel look-alikes, and retargeting of competitors' hotel guests outside Santa Monica. Edwards explained to the committee that with a total investment of \$10,000, the campaign is expected to generate approximately 1,250,000 impressions and 2,500 clicks.

SMTT Vice President of Communications Lauren Salisbury, shared recent media coverage with the committee, highlighting a segment from CTV Vancouver that featured Santa Monica in its "Perfect California Itinerary." The segment celebrated the 115th anniversary of the pier and showcased activities like volleyball and surfing lessons, along with SMTT's incentive bags.

Salisbury announced to the committee that Santa Monica has received the Gold Travel Weekly Magellan Award for Best Destination Marketing Website, bringing the total number of awards for the year to 16. Salisbury also recapped the successful Visit California Los Angeles Media Reception held on October 10 at the Intuit Dome, which was attended by 86 top media representatives and influencers, including members from the Los Angeles Times and ABC 7.

Salisbury highlighted SMTT's recent Australia Sales & Media Mission, which featured a media lunch in Melbourne with 10 journalists and a Pilates event in Sydney that attracted 8 journalists. Salisbury additionally recapped several completed familiarization (FAM) trips and media visits from Australia and Canada. Notable attendees included Jami Savage from CTV Vancouver, David Dickstein from Southern California News Group, Olivia Stren from The Toronto Star, Mike Yardley from NZME Newspapers, Kate Mendonca from National Post/Canada.com, Rob Longley from The Toronto Sun, and Susan Bugg from Escape. Looking ahead, Salisbury outlined upcoming FAMs and media visits, which include influencer Melissa Male, Christine Roberti of Offshore Magazine, a "What's New in Luxury" India Group Press Trip, Kristie Kellahan from Traveller, freelance journalist Edmund Vallance, and Jamie Aranoff from SKI Magazine.

Finally, Salisbury provided the committee with updates on SMTT's social media performance, reporting an engagement rate of 0.52% on Instagram (a 4% increase since August), with followers rising to 57,000 (a 2% increase). Facebook engagement remained steady at 0.13%, with impressions significantly up to 1.2 million (a 72% rise from August), and on X (formerly Twitter), the engagement rate reached 0.08% (up 33% from August), with followers at 40.8k (up 0.5% since October).

SMTT Chief People Officer Rachel Lozano, informed the committee about recent global business development activities at SMTT starting with the successful Canada Sales Mission that took place from September 10 to 12. During this mission, SMTT Director of Sales Ozzie Otero led the SMTT team in Vancouver, where they engaged with 40 trade clients, including travel advisors and meeting professionals, alongside representatives from prominent local hotels such as Shutters on the Beach, Hotel Casa del Mar, Sandbourne Santa Monica, and Regent Santa Monica Beach. Following this, Lozano shared insights from SMTT Director of Sales Ozzie Otero's participation in the Visit California Luxury Forum held from September 15 to 17 in Newport Beach. Here, Otero had the opportunity to meet with 16 premier luxury travel advisors through two days of personalized, one-on-one appointments, showcasing Santa Monica as a desirable destination.

Lozano then highlighted SMTT Director of Global Business Development Aleksandr Sigalus's attendance at the ILTM North America trade show in The Bahamas from September 23 to 26, where he met with 46 of the region's most exclusive luxury travel advisors in collaboration with ETC Hotels. Lozano additionally informed the committee about the Australia Sales & Media Mission, which SMTT Director of Global Business Development Aleksandr Sigalus led from September 30 to October 4. This mission spanned three cities, Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney, enabling SMTT to engage with both trade and media representatives. Local hotel partners, including Shutters on the Beach, Hotel Casa del Mar, Sandbourne Santa Monica, and Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows, accompanied SMTT on this mission to strengthen Santa their collective presence in the Australian market.

Lozano reported on the Brand USA Travel Week U.K. and Europe event, which SMTT Director of Global Business Development Aleksandr Sigalus attended from October 21 to 24 in London. SMTT partnered with Greater Palm Springs to hold 38 one-on-one appointments with U.K. and European buyers, discussing essential trends and future opportunities for increasing visitation to the United States.

Lozano informed the committee about SMTT's Halloween Sales Calls held on October 31, during which the SMTT team met with travel agents and meeting planners from First in Service, H.I.S. International, Altour and Milken Institute joined by partners from The Ambrose Hotel, Shutters on the Beach/Hotel Casa del Mar, The Cottage Santa Monica, Sandbourne Santa Monica, Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows and Hyatt Centric Delfina/Viceroy Santa Monica.

Looking ahead, Lozano announced SMTT's participation in Signature Travel Week from November 11 to 14 in Las Vegas, where they anticipate meeting with over 32 advisors across two days of appointments while presenting updates on new hotel offerings and activities. In the realm of group sales, Lozano highlighted SMTT Director of Sales Ozzie Otero's attendance at IMEX America from October 8 to 10, where Otero engaged in over 60 meetings with MICE professionals in collaboration with local hotels and attractions. Additionally, Lozano shared that SMTT successfully hosted a FAM (Familiarization) trip for Team Landers from ConferenceDirect, showcasing Santa Monica's hotel collection to 12 meeting professionals.

Lozano additionally shared SMTT's return of our 2<sup>nd</sup> Client Advisory Board that occurred November 7 to 9, gathering 13 meetings and events professionals to immerse them in Santa Monica and gather their valuable feedback. Edwards concluded by highlighting SMTT's upcoming Group Sales, the Visit California Minneapolis Roadshow on November 12 and the ConferenceDirect Forum in Orlando, FL, from November 13 to 15, where SMTT will continue to network with meeting professionals and corporate clients, enhancing their presence in the industry.

SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards provided the committee with an update on the success of SMTT's 2024 VolleyWeen charity event. The event raised an impressive total of \$7,500 for charity, with over 50 attendees. Edwards highlighted that among the notable guests, were volleyball legends Sinjin Smith and Hagen Smith, along with a surprise appearance by NBA player Dwight Howard, who is currently participating in this season's Dancing with the Stars. Lastly, Edwards informed the committee that the funds raised during VolleyWeen will be directed towards supporting the Santa Monica College Basic Needs Fund, which focuses on enhancing student food security, as well as benefiting The People Concern and Westside Food Bank.

**CEO Update:** There was none.

**For the Good of the Order:**

SMTT members thanked attendees for their support.

Members discussed SMTT's Familiarization Tours (FAMs) and site tours and how these help Santa Monica Travel & Tourism market the destination and benefit local businesses.

Darlene asked about enhancing perceptions of parking for Cirque du Soleil's Kooza. Lauren shared that the PR team is addressing this with content like "How to Visit Santa Monica for Kooza," which offers parking tips and focuses on positive messaging to improve visitor experiences.

**Adjournment:** Chairman Atallah adjourned the meeting at 6:23 p.m.

**Next Board of Directors Meeting**

Wednesday, January 8, 2025

**MISSION STATEMENT**

Santa Monica Travel and Tourism (SMTT) works to strengthen our local economy by enhancing and promoting our community as a distinctive, compelling and welcoming travel destination.

**BRAND PROMISE**

Santa Monica...an unforgettable beach city experience filled with eye-catching people, cutting edge culture and bold innovations. It's the essence of the California lifestyle.

**VISION STATEMENT**

To ensure Santa Monica is recognized as the premier beach city destination in the world.