

MEETING MINUTES
SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM (SMTT)
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2025
THE HUNTLEY SANTA MONICA – 1111 2nd St, Santa Monica, CA 90401

Call to Order: Chairman Atallah called the meeting to order at 4:44 PM

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 Jan Williamson, Member Darlene Evans and City Manager David White.

Also Present: SMTT President and CEO Misti Kerns, SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards, SMTT Chief People Officer Rachel Lozano, SMTT Vice President of Communications Lauren Salisbury, SMTT Vice President of Marketing Ashley Dowgwilllo, SMTT Director of Global Business Development Aleksandr Sigalus, SMTT Administrative Assistant Bella Cifuentes, City of Santa Monica Senior Civil Engineer Jason Hoang, City of Santa Monica Senior Civil Engineer Robert Zak, City of Santa Monica Principal Civil Engineer Selim Eren and City of Santa Monica City Engineer Alex Narzarchuk.

Absent: Member Shahid Kayani.

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

Approval of the November 12, 2024, Board of Directors Meeting Minutes: Secretary Asch presented the November 12, 2024 meeting minutes. Member Carrey moved to approve the minutes and Vice Chair Charlie Lopez-Quintana seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with Member Shahid Kayani absent.

Acceptance of the October, November and December 2024 Financials: Treasurer Ginsberg presented the August and September 2024 financial memos and cash basis documents. Chairman Younes Atallah moved to accept the financials and City Manager David White seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with Member Shahid Kayani absent.

Approval of the Fiscal Year End 2024/2025 Budget Respread & TMD Forecast: SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards presented the Fiscal Year End 2024/2025 Budget Respread & TMD Forecast. Member Jan Williamson moved to approve the budget respread and TMD forecast, and Treasurer Karen Ginsberg seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote with Member Shahid Kayani absent.

Pier Bridge Replacement Project Update: Senior Civil Engineer Robert Zak presented an update on the Pier Bridge Replacement Project, emphasizing the critical need to finalize contractor arrangements to maintain the project's schedule, with construction slated to begin in March.

The final bridge design phase is nearing completion and expected to conclude this summer, paving the way for construction to commence in fall of 2025. The approved design, endorsed by the City Council in June 2023, prioritizes minimizing impacts on historical structures. Specifically, the south side alignment will remain consistent, allowing for the incorporation of a wider sidewalk to improve pedestrian traffic and benefit businesses adjacent to the pier.

Design features include maintaining the current bridge slope, installing retractable bollards, and a complete off-site restoration of the pier sign, which will be reinstalled at an increased height. New lighting enhancements will be incorporated, carefully designed to preserve the existing aesthetic and minimize visual disruption.

During construction, pedestrian access will be maintained via a temporary bridge on the south side, stretching from Ocean Avenue to the pier deck. A 192-foot vehicle ramp will be constructed over Lot 1 to redirect traffic. Intermittent closures are anticipated; however, a dedicated pedestrian walkway will remain accessible. Additionally, the pier widening will extend as far as Bubba Gump restaurant in Santa Monica.

Public engagement efforts include ongoing informational meetings with businesses operating on the pier and in the adjacent areas, providing regular updates to the Pier Bridge Task Force.

Upcoming milestones include a presentation to the Pier Corporation Board and continued design development. Modifications to pathways will be reflected in updated maps, with comprehensive signage planned for all entrances to and around the pier. The project site will be enclosed with fencing featuring dust covers, and the team is exploring vinyl banner options. The pier sign will be temporarily removed for off-site restoration for the majority of the project's two-year duration. The redesigned sign will measure 20 feet wide and 18 feet 10 inches tall.

SMTT Staff Updates:

SMTT Vice President of Marketing Ashley Dowgwillo, updated the Board on SMTT's marketing initiatives, beginning with the successful "Extra Bedroom" Program (Nov 11, 2024 - Feb 10, 2025), in which 24 hotels participated in both 2023 and 2024 by offering discounted rates to residents hosting visitors.

Dowgwillo then highlighted the Cirque du Soleil Dedicated Content Program (Oct 19, 2024 - Jan 5, 2025), which leveraged the "Kooza" show with hotel offers and business discounts. This effort featured 48 business specials and three e-blasts reaching 15,915 recipients at a 34% open rate. In addition, dedicated pages for Holiday and New Year's events on santamonica.com attracted 2,804 and 2,103 visitors, respectively.

Turning to media campaigns, Dowgwillo reported that the Noble Studios campaign has driven 80,177 Partner Referrals year-to-date and 12,454 in December, primarily from CA, AZ, WA, NJ, and FL. Campaign performance is at 39% of its goal for Partner Referrals and 45% for Organic Search (July '24 - June '25). Paid search conversions are up 14% year-over-year, with the nightlife campaign experiencing a 199% year-over-year increase in conversion rate.

SMTT's Fall Media Campaign with Datary (Aug 15 - Nov 30, 2024) achieved 4.8M impressions, 8,133 clicks, and an 88% video completion rate. Concurrently, the Fall Media Campaign with Noble Studios focused on increasing weekday occupancy and positioning Santa Monica as a luxury destination.

Shifting to community engagement, Dowgwillo noted that Santa MoniCARES collected over 1,500 pairs of socks, 1,171 clothing items, and 183 food items during the Holiday Donation Drives.

Finally, Dowgwillo reviewed the wildfire messaging strategy, which was implemented in three phases: Phase 1 – Initial Response (January 16-23, 2025), Phase 2 – Dine LA (January 24 – February 7, 2025), and Phase 3 – Santa Monica is Open for Business (February 8 – March 3, 2025). SMTT produced footage emphasizing that Santa Monica is open and partnered with Visit California on the "Calling All Californians" and "California Love" campaigns, targeting drive markets via digital, streaming audio, and digital out-of-home (OOH) channels.

SMTT Vice President of Communications Lauren Salisbury, updated the Board on SMTT's recent communications efforts. Before the LA wildfires, SMTT secured substantial earned media coverage. In Escape, online coverage of Regent Santa Monica Beach achieved a Unique Visitor Metric (UVM) of 3,852,360 and an Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE) of \$35,634.33. The print version resulted in a UVM of 2,494,000 and an AVE of \$23,069.50. Additionally, Travel Leisure named Santa Monica the Best Beach City Destination in North America, contributing a UVM of 14,373,068 with an AVE of \$132,950.88.

Salisbury highlighted several successful FAM trips and media visits with influencers and media representatives, including Melissa Male (US), Christine Roberti (Offshore Magazine, Canada), Arushi Sakhuja (The Style List, India), Kristie Kellahan (Traveller, Australia), Edmund Vallance (Freelance, US), and Jamie Aranoff (SKI Magazine, US).

The Visit California ILTM Cannes/Paris media track resulted in 20 appointments with key global luxury media. SMTT also hosted a media dinner and networking events in Paris with 25 media representatives, in addition to a bespoke influencer event highlighting Santa Monica beach experiences. Content from these initiatives will be shared on social media, including an activation with Regent Santa Monica Beach.

Salisbury announced that Santa Monica's Brand Refresh won an HSMAI Bronze Adrian Award for Best Brand Campaign. She noted that Santa Monica Travel & Tourism earned 18 prestigious industry awards and accolades for the destination in 2024.

In response to the recent LA wildfires, Salisbury detailed SMTT's communications strategy, which included activating a crisis banner on santamonica.com, sending daily community newsletters, engaging on social media, issuing a press release about Santa MoniCARES, and publishing a blog post with specials for first responders and evacuees.

To rebuild a positive media narrative, SMTT launched a paid social media campaign featuring influencers The Goosby Twins (29.5K followers), Your Bucket List Guide (36.3K followers), and Megan Snedden (67.1K followers). Looking ahead, Salisbury outlined upcoming FAM trips and media visits, including Unzela Kahn from the Daily Express (UK) and a France Group FAM involving various outlets.

SMTT Director of Global Business Development Aleksandr Sigalus, updated the Board on key activities, starting with Signature Travel Week (Nov 11-14, 2024), where SMTT engaged with advisors to promote new hotel offerings. Sigalus additionally noted the Cook Islands FAM (Dec 2-3, 2024) hosted travel managers from Europe, followed by participation in the Virtuoso Continental Europe Forum (Dec 1-2, 2024) and ILTM Cannes (Dec 2-6, 2024).

Looking ahead, Sigalus announced the VCA Canada Reverse Sales Mission (Feb 10-12, 2025), the Dnata Roadshow Middle East (Feb 16-20, 2025), Connections Luxury Middle East (Feb 21-26, 2025), the UK Sales and Media Mission (March 17-21, 2025), and the Brand USA Route 66 European Roadshow (March 23-28, 2025).

Sigalus reported the Hotelbeds Marketing Campaign (Sept 2024 – March 2025) saw a notable 49% booking increase and added that Bonotel 2025 has early confirmed bookings.

Regarding group sales, Sigalus highlighted the Client Advisory Board (Nov 7-9, 2024), which hosted meeting professionals, followed by participation in the VCA PME Roadshow (Nov 12, 2024), ConferenceDirect Forum (Nov 13-15, 2024), and SITE SoCal Holiday Event (Dec 12-13, 2024). SMTT will attend the C&IT Agency Forum (Feb 6-7, 2025) in London, Sigalus concluded.

CEO Update: SMTT President and CEO Misti Kerns updated the Board on the Leadership Retreat held prior to the meeting. All SMTT staff participated in a "Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team" exercise, which indicated a score on a scale of 1-5. Key areas for improvement were accountability and conflict resolution.

SMTT President and CEO Misti Kerns, informed Board members that Symphony reports, providing an overview of recent tourism economics, would be distributed via email.

For the Good of the Order:

Adjournment: Chairman Atallah adjourned the meeting at 6:07 PM.

Next Board of Directors Meeting

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

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

OUR VISION

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

OUR 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.