

Yosemite/Mariposa Tourism Bureau Minutes
Meeting
October 19, 2011
Mariposa County Board of Supervisors Chambers
5100 Bullion St., Mariposa, CA 95338

Meeting was called to order by Kevin Shelton @ 1:40 p.m.

Board Members Present:

Donna Brownell (Arts Council)
Brian Bullis (Mariposa County Fairgrounds)
Donna Davis (The Redwoods)
Jonathan Farrington (Tenaya Lodge)
Donna Nassar (B&B's Secretary) Secretary-Treasurer
Doug Shaw (The Yosemite Bug)
Kevin Shelton (Yosemite Resorts) Vice President

Excused Board Members:

MaryAnn Huff (Chamber of Commerce)
Dan Jensen (DNC) President

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Roger Biery, EDC
Donna Sisson, YNP

Absent Ex-Officio Members:

Teresa Castaldi
Candy O'Donnell-Browne
Marilyn Lidyoff

Staff:

Jeffrey Hentz – Executive Director

Julie Guyton – Administrative Assistant

Visitors:

Vicky Saracino (Hotel Jeffery & Motorcycle Road tours)
Kevin Cann – (County Supervisor)
Lester Bridges (Chamber of Commerce)

➤ **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Vicky Saracino – Hotel Jeffery and Motorcycle Road Tours: Saracino planning event for motorcycle riders from all over coming to Yosemite on bikes. They are planning an event at Hotel Jeffery. She also advised that Forrest Monk from Hotel Jeffery is interested in joining the board. Saracino asked what needed to be done for this to happen. Hentz stated that Monk would need to attend meetings and announce his intentions. By the second meeting he could be voted in, but he must attend a certain number of meetings per year. Hentz stated that he encourages Monk to attend the next meeting in January, 2012.

Roger Biery, EDC: Biery is in the process of finalizing the arrangements with Townsend Public Affairs. If you remember, the Tourism Bureau offered a \$10,000 retainer if the County matched. The County approved this in their budget. The EDC has signed a memorandum of understanding; we should be getting that \$30,000 check soon. Once this is done, we will start collecting money from the private sector. The kick off meeting will be October 31, 2011. Biery stated he would be attending this meeting as will be Jeff Hentz, Kevin Cann, and Brian Bullis. They have already been successful in getting the Safe Route to School Grant. They are working on the gymnasium and Community Center grant. Another project we are working on with them is the new Conference Center and Sports Complex. Hentz then told Kevin Cann what an outstanding job he did getting the financing approved.

Cann stated that when this was first presented, we looked at \$10,000 for six months, but by putting together a little more strategy we were able to secure \$30,000 from the County, so with matches we can get a year's worth of funding. We are trying to strategize for next year's budget cycle to see how best to maximize this. I think they have already earned their money for this year, because they were the real driver behind the Safe Route to School Grant, with no county match. This was a Golden Grant.

Hentz then stated he hoped they will assist in Discover Yosemite Project as well. The Tourism Bureau will be walking every step of the way with this project. The decision was made that the EDC should day to day babysit this program. You couldn't have a better person than Roger Biery to run this. Cann stated they are also a general lobbying firm. They have offices in Sacramento and Washington DC. With an issue like the fairgrounds, we can unleash them on that. They have all the contacts that we would need. We can take advantage of it.

Donna Sisson – YNP: The dates of the Merced River Plan: A flier was passed out that showed all the upcoming workshops.

Oct. 27, 2011 5-8 PM – El Portal Community Center, El Portal, CA

Oct 28, 2011 1-5 PM – Wawona Community Center, Wawona, CA

Oct 29, 2011 10-4 PM – Garden Terrace, Yosemite Lodge, Yosemite National Park

Nov 7, 2011 10-4 PM – Garden Terrace, Yosemite Lodge, Yosemite National Park

Nov 9, 2011 5-8 PM - The Palm Room, San Francisco Film Centre, San Francisco, CA

For more information about the Merced River Plan visit:

www.nps.gov/yose/parkmgmt/mrp.htm

35 of the most complex issues of public concern will be discussed at these workshops. Meetings will be interactive and educational. There will be a chance to interact with staff directly. Topics include: High Sierra Camps, camping, parking and traffic. There will be impact and developmental issues as well. A lot of people ask what is different. The mandate is the same, research is similar. The big issue is public input and public opinion and the needs of the community. The dialogue is very important. Another thing is there will be some site drawings for visual representation. Please try and come and pass the word.

➤ Action Matters

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Approval of the previous minutes

Shelton asked for a motion to approve the previous minutes from 8/17/2011, with the following corrections:

a) *Saracino asked for Hotel Jeffery to be spelled correctly in the minutes.*

A motion to approve the minutes with the above correction as noted, was made by Farrington and seconded by Bullis, motion passed.

2. TREASURER REPORT – Approval of the Treasurers Report

Nassar advised that everything adds up. Hentz stated that the finance committee consists of Donna Brownell, Donna Nassar and Roger Biery, and Dan Jensen is copied all the financials. It was sent out for review and any comments made back from them are taken into account and adjusted as necessary or at least answered. These

statements are for July and August. September statement will be ready this week but not in time for this meeting. The report also shows income statement and balance sheet. We are healthy. We are maintaining reserve. We always have the money ready when needed for upcoming campaigns or action items. We also included P&L. We are ahead for collections from last year. We collected more money than budgeted. We are 10% ahead. We received the largest check in the history of the Tourism Bureau last month, \$166,000. This will show in the next statement. We had an all time record August, 1,600,079.00 in collections. We are 22% ahead for the first two months. We anticipate September to be very strong.

Shaw stated that he would like to see the travel and entertainment reimbursements broken up. After further discussion with Shaw, Brownell and Hentz, it was decided to break up the expense report for account 6004 to include: travel: airline vs. mileage, entertainment, and lodging.

Shelton asked for a motion to approve the Treasurer's Reports, a motion was made by Donna Davis, and seconded by Doug Shaw, the motion was passed unanimously.

3. RFP – Visitor Center -

A) RFP Mariposa Visitor Center Submission:

Hentz stated that this has been in discussion for a few years, completing the cycle of the marketing of destination Yosemite/Mariposa. Right now the Tourism Bureau is doing 2/3 of this, promotion and communication and what is called push and pull, bringing the consumers into our destination. Hentz said the last missing piece is that we are not welcoming them, we are not touching and feeling them and making sure that that message we delivered is the first thing they experience when they get to our destination. For us to do that, Hentz continued, we had talked about the Tourism Bureau taking over the Visitors Center, which is common for all Tourism Bureaus around the country. One of the main reasons, is it controls the experience; it makes the experience and the message consistent when they come into the Welcome Center. Hentz also stated that he looks at this as a very cost effective opportunity to understand more about the customer, collect intelligent data about the customer. He stated this will make the Tourism Bureau smarter, quicker in reacting to changing customer demands, needs and habits. The Tourism Bureau can change as needed or continue to do what is working and not changing things based on other factors that are environmental or financial related to the economy. Hentz stated since 2008, the County has had the Chamber of Commerce run the Visitor's Center. This year it is up for RFP. Hentz stated that Rick Benson's office moved up the timeline for the RFP to this month. Hentz said he hoped it would have happened early next year. Hentz recommends that this is the time for the Tourism Bureau to proceed with the RFP. He has already prepared it and is ready to submit it tomorrow afternoon. Hentz recommends that the Tourism Bureau would take over the Visitor's Center, but would continue to let the Chamber manage it for the Tourism Bureau for six months.

Biery stated he wanted to know the rationale behind the County's decision to change how this operation was run? He also wanted to know why the date change was so radical.

Hentz responded that there was very minimal required in the RFP. He also stated that this does not include Coulterville Visitor's Center, just Mariposa. He felt it would be better to start with the Mariposa Visitor's Center and then look down the road at Coulterville and other locations. Hentz went on to say the original RFP came out in mid September and had a 20 day turnaround. The due date was pushed to October 21, 2011. Hentz stated that he would prefer it be next year.

Biery inquired if it would be better to wait for next year and have time to get everything in order, that way this can be planned out in advance.

Cann stated that the County got some criticism about this. He stated that in the past the County has given a sole source contract. It is government money, tax money, and should have the opportunity for competition. The County wanted to see if there would be any competition. Cann stated that he felt there was competition between the two visitor's centers and that it might be better to separate them. If the bidders felt like running them together, that would be great. Cann further stated that there is no justification for doing this sole source.

Shaw stated that he thinks it is an excellent idea, great marketing base for the County. If it is done right he feels the County we can obtain a lot of goals.

Bridges stated that this is not a simple thing.

Hentz went on to say that the Tourism Bureau is ready now. He stated that he has already identified one or two people for this position. This is a position for a multi-tasker. Hentz stated that too many leads are being dropped, too much is getting by. Hentz stated that he has identified leads; outreach Yosemite Welcome Centers, one being at Bass Pro Shops. Opening a very large welcome center here would have significant impact on our destination. We are moving into a different level of marketing as a tourism bureau. He further stated that we are not competing with Oakhurst or Sonora. We are competing with Lake Tahoe, Las Vegas and Mammoth. We have to market in a different way. We need to look at other sources of revenue to do this. Hentz stated that by buying Yosemite.com is how we will accomplish this. It's the way of the future.

Brownell and Shaw both stated that the topic must go back to the Visitor's Center. Brownell asked that before asking for a vote from the Board, we need a budget, goals, timeframes and measurable outcomes prior to submitting the RFP, and said that taking over the Visitor's Center with no staff hired and trained is putting the cart before the horse. Hentz responded that we could be making money on this operation, to which Brownell responded, then make an agreement with the Chamber, and give them a percentage – 1 % is better than zero.

Biery stated that we are committing to \$150,000, who knows if the money will be there? Cann stated that the terms on the contract states it will be up Sept 30, 2012. It will be up for a new RFP then. In the future, Cann went on to say that one year extensions can be added to the new contract. Nassar was concerned that if the Tourism Bureau commits to hiring someone for this new position, what if next year we don't get the contract again.

Hentz stated that as part of the new marketing, we need to maintain positive revenue, and we are looking at different strategies. Hentz went on to say that we can start to

market the way other advancing markets are which are membership and sponsorship driven. There is a long term strategy. Hentz advised that his strategy for the visitor's center is to take it over but have the Chamber continue to run it for six months while everything gets evaluated. Hentz advised that if the Tourism Bureau waits until next year to file the new RFP, then the bureau will be behind almost two years on acquiring the visitor's center. Hentz said it needs to be done now so we can start evaluating how it is run and see what needs to be changed.

Brownell brought up how many employees will the visitor's center need and what about benefits.

Hentz said just full time employees would get benefits, but most of the employees would be part time or temporary employees.

Brownell then discussed having to buy new computers for the Visitor's Center and was concerned on the costs involved.

Bridges commented about the computer in the Visitor's Center now. He said they tried to get visitors to fill out surveys about their trip and they just don't want to do it. They want to talk to a live person, ask questions and get directions. There is not enough money in the budget to have enough people in the center to answer questions when it gets busy.

Bullis asked Hentz if he had spoken with the Chamber about working with the Visitor's Bureau for six months, and Hentz replied no, because they too are submitting an RFP.

Biery advised that if the Chamber is going to run the operation for six months, and the contract expires in nine months, then why rush into it at this time?

After a lengthy discussion in the room as to how to handle the RFP, it was decided to ask Rick Benson for an extension until Jan 31. This would allow the legal council to review all the documents and would also allow the board to research all factors.

Motion to ask for extension to January 31, 2012, and if that isn't accepted, then a committee of 3-5 members will have the board's permission to make a decision by this Friday's deadline. A motion to approve this was made by Bullis and seconded by Brownell. Motion passed.

The committee will be Brownell, Farrington and Shaw.

B) New Staffing Requirements:

Hentz stated that this new position will be a hybrid position, a marketing-sales development position. This position will manage both the Visitor's Center and the Tourism Bureau. The idea is a marketing sales manager. Hentz advised that resumes are coming in, but there nothing that stands out. Hentz stated that if we could tie in the visitor's center as a part of marketing and visitor services, we could get a candidate who could potentially be a director in this position. Add a higher wage to \$75,000 to make it a director of marketing/visitor services.

4. Amgen Race 2012 – Mariposa Stage Requirements:

Hentz stated that when Amgen came through Mariposa a few years ago, he was able to develop partnerships with AEG Sports. Two years ago the Tourism Bureau put a strong effort into bringing Amgen to Yosemite, it was unsuccessful. Hentz stated he has stayed in contact with AEG and Amgen every six months, behind the scenes, to bring the race to Yosemite. Hentz received a call at the end of September, stating that a deal was very close in bringing the race to Yosemite. Hentz said he immediately made a conference call to Kevin Cann and Jim Allen with AEG Sports and discussed

general ideas such as stage finish, starting in one city and ending in another, next day stage start. The finish stage is a big deal. He stated we are looking at 30,000-100,000 people. The race is not permitted by Yosemite, but it is expected any minute. Hentz further stated that there would be costs associated with this, the key things to focus on are on pages 33-44 in the Amgen handout in packet. Hentz further stated that there are hotel requirements, 500 rooms committed as complimentary. He said negotiations were on going with AEG that they will pay for the rooms and that they have committed to this. Hentz said he was working with Rick Benson and Brian Bullis with logistic issues. \$21,000 would be needed for food, media events, team dinners, lunches, etc. Sponsors would be needed. Hentz stated that the Tourism Bureau would allocate some funds towards the meals. He said the goal would be to have all meals sponsored with donations or prepaid. Hentz said that the dates would be May 14th: Set up, May 15th finish in Mariposa, May 16th: start in Yosemite. Hentz stated that the minimum would be 10,000 tourists. Cann commented that Mariposa could handle 10,000 but 20,000-30,000 would blow the equation. Hentz went on to say that the crowds would be spread out through the town of Mariposa and the Mariposa Fairgrounds. Hentz stated he had all the costs for the fairgrounds, and that he asked the County to guarantee services. Biery commented that this is huge! Brownell asked what the proposal would be to get the funds. Hentz commented that it was coming out of the reserve fund. Brownell stated \$10,000 not to exceed \$20,000.

A motion to approve this amount was made by Brownell, seconded by Cann. Motion passed.

Brownell inquired about the need for additional law enforcement. Hentz stated that contracts would be made with Cal Trans, CHP, and MCSO. Nassar stated that she would announce this at the B&B meeting at the end of this month. Hentz stated that everything should be known by the end of the week.

5. Yosemite.Com – Update: Hentz stated that there was a timeline in the packet. He said he has spent a lot of time on this between the Fresno and San Diego teams. He stated that we were a little behind schedule. The marketing committees are supporting this with feedback. Some of the marketing committee is providing information and some are not. Hentz stated that we are in good shape. Hentz said this is going to be an encompassing site. Hentz then went into detail about the site map. He stated it is hard to read due to being in pdf form. The wire prints will come back with reviews in two weeks, and the goal is to have this launched between January 21-25th Hentz stated that he has since taken out a huge banner on the front of Yosemite.com that states “Order your free vacation planner”. It was launched a week ago. He said he paid \$300.00 for that right. He went on to say that we can track the leads we get, it will be a good first time test.

Biery stated he is really impressed. Hentz said he hired the right company, and things are moving along.

Shaw stated that he liked things too, but was worried that this site could define the Visitor’s Bureau in the end. He stated that he is worried that this will be a mass market tool. He wants a local person(s) doing the writing content. He doesn’t want someone from Cupertino answering questions about Mariposa or Yosemite. It is very important to have a local feel to this. He feels for very little expense we can do this right.

Davis stated that she thought the website was fluent. It needs to adapt as the climate changes. Even though what we are doing is very aggressive, it's giving us a starting point. She further advised that we can adjust the ad as we go. She further stated that it must be an overall effort from everyone on the board.

Shaw: Every website of this nature has to have talent, who filters this information?

Hentz went on to say that yosemite.com is not a mariposa site, it is a regional site.

Farrington advised we have two different things going on. We have our side, which is meant to do all of those things. Yosemite.com gets a million unique visitors. We are taking on a url that is an advertising opportunity to take something that gets a lot of traffic. It is going to be more than a transactional site, it's going to be a revenue creating site as well. He went on to state that he doesn't want everyone to get confused over what our site does now and what yosemite.com is meant to be.

Biery stated that it would be wrong to take on too much, because that's when you fail. He said what he is most concerned about the approach is architecture of the site and balance of content management. He said he has visited some sites that were so insulting with their advertising. He went on to say that the advertising being done is very tasteful and classy. He thinks people will be willing to stay on the site. He thinks we have struck a nice balance. He further went on to say that specific content will change constantly. It must change to stay fresh; the search engines must be constantly updated and must be genuine to the user. Hentz went on to say that advertising is secondary; it has to be content driven. This is a useful site for the region. The Home of Yosemite site is a local site. We are on the hook to manage the content from here on forward.

Hentz stated that if anyone has any updates, to please email, call or come in the office to tell him, so that he doesn't have to hear them secondhand.

6. Marketing Updates & Discussion –

Hentz advised that the ad campaign is in its fourth week and is doing very well. The Yosemite Tourist California is doing very well. It is not as extensive as the spring campaign, it's four weeks. We have invested about \$100,000 but we are getting back in returns well over what was expected. He advised the campaign consists of print, online, radio and TV. TV partners are CBS and CW in the Bay Area, NBC Central Coast and Monterey north, NBC Santa Barbara, Oxnard and up to Pismo Beach. The unique visitation to the website from the California resident program is off the charts. All hotels participating have received extensive traffic and bookings. He stated that this is our first attempt at a Co-op, with just under 700,000 subscribers. Hentz showed the board a sample ad that ran in the San Jose Mercury News. There is a great response from these ads. This is tied in with our Yosemite Tourist California, taking advantage of the great California Resident deals. He advised that 9,000 leads were generated this week... The feedback is outstanding from the public. Hentz went on to say that he received a phone call from Jim Henson from the Bay Area. He was having a hard time booking a trip, and noticed some mistakes online. Hentz advised that he worked with him and resolved the problem, and Mr. Henson couldn't believe that someone with Hentz's title would take the time to help him. He booked the trip. Another citizen from Santa Barbara was having trouble with a search engine, when that was fixed, she told all her friends in her retirement community and they are all booking trips now. That 55 + demographic is huge for the bureau. The ad in the Mercury News was a package that is costing about \$120,000, but this includes 13 other newspapers as well, such as San Mateo, Contra Costa and Alameda. Hentz stated that a radio campaign is underway with KCBS Radio 740 AM, which covers 60 % of California. Part of the campaign is

that the radio station would outreach to their listeners and do a survey for the bureau. One example of the survey was asking what route they would take to Yosemite. Hwy 140 was the most traveled. That is important data we are receiving.

Hentz said he just finished a travel show with KCRA Channel 24 out of Fresno. Alex Delgado has a daytime daily show called "Valley Today". He stated we did a one hour show that talked all about Yosemite and Mariposa. He was able to discuss lodging, museums, etc. The show was invaluable and cost us nothing. Other news stations from Fresno came up also. The theme was snow boots to flip flops, and how Yosemite is the Valley's playground.

Hentz updated social media. We have just fewer than 40,000 followers. Between Yosemite Park and us, we have 100,000 followers.

Hentz also stated we have great coverage from Australia. Two weeks from now there is a media group coming from Australia. They will be here for four days, going all over the county and Yosemite Park. This will happen the week of Nov 1-5. The following week will have a group from China in conjunction with Disney coming here. There will be four tour operators and media from Nov 8-10.

Hentz showed an article from a Sacramento magazine to the board.

7. YMCTB Staff Re-Structuring Plan Update – Hentz advised there was a lot of response for the Admin position. We will be finishing up with the interviews hopefully next week for the position. We have received some responses for the marketing/sales position. He advised that he doesn't want to hire someone who is not familiar with our area.

Hentz stated he had the tax returns available. They are on time and no penalties. He advised that Eric Oster said everything looks great.

Comments from Board and Staff:

Farrington: The shows are busy and great! IMAX

Sisson: AMGEN question: Are end stage and starting stages separate? Hentz advised that the tour will come through Mariposa twice. They will transport to Yosemite to start again. They take care of logistics. They are working with Yosemite executives and Department of Interior. Hentz advised last year, Lake Tahoe took a huge hit due to snow both days.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 4:24 PM.

Closed Session: The Closed Session began at 4:30 PM.