

**MINUTES**  
**SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM (SMTT)**  
**MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS - WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2021**  
**Virtually on Zoom**

**Call to Order:** Chairman Albin Gielicz called the meeting to order at 5:06 p.m.

**Roll Call & Self Introductions:** SMTT CEO Misti Kerns called for self-introductions. Board Members and those present provided brief self-introductions. The following persons were recorded in attendance:

**Board Present:** Chairman Albin Gielicz, Vice Chair Neil Carrey, Secretary Jan Williamson, Member Lauralee Asch, Member Darlene Evans, Member Shahid Kayani, Member Jeff Klocke, Member RoseMary Regalbuto, and City Liaison Anuj Gupta.

**Also Present:** SMTT President/CEO Misti Kerns, SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards, SMTT Director of Communications Cara Rene, SMTT Marketing Manager Mandy Eck and SMTT Marketing Coordinator Christine Emhardt.

**Absent:** Treasurer Younes Atallah (traveling on behalf of tourism) and Member Gerry Peck.

**Public Comment:** There was no public comment.

**City Manager Update:** City Liaison Gupta informed the Board of new leaders who have started work: City Manager David White and Police Chief Ramon Batista. The recruitment process for a new fire chief is ongoing and Interviews are happening. Joe Lawrence is acting as interim city attorney while an ad hoc committee moves forward with the recruitment process. Library director recruitment is underway as well. City Council received a year-end budget update with mostly minor changes; it also allocates existing funding for clean and safe enhancements. Gupta said that Police Chief Batista has heard that people want higher visibility of officers and has relayed that expectation down the line. To make progress on the unpermitted vendor issue, the city is using private security for downtown Santa Monica parking structures, as well as adding security, police presence, and barricades to the pier. The city is also looking to have increased personnel at pier entrance points and doing increased signage to inform on the dangers of unpermitted vendors. Vice Chair Carrey asked whether Santa Monica will require masks since LA County does. City Liaison Gupta responded that Santa Monica is following the County's guidelines. SMTT CEO Kerns asked about the city council's current ad hoc committees; City Liaison Gupta said there are ad hoc committees for city attorney recruitment, homelessness, the city hall mural (which is still under review), boards & commissions (to report on possible consolidation, membership, and scopes of the city's boards and commissions).

**Approval of the September 2021 Board Meeting Minutes:** Secretary Williamson presented the Meeting Minutes; Vice Chair Carrey moved to approve the minutes; Chairman Gielicz seconded the motion. At 5:25pm the motion carried unanimously with member Peck and Treasurer Atallah absent.

**Acceptance of the July 2021 Financial Memo:** SMTT COO Edwards presented the July 2021 Financial Memo. Member Regalbuto moved to accept the Financial Memo; Vice Chair Carrey seconded the motion. At 5:26pm the motion carried unanimously with member Peck and Treasurer Atallah absent.

**Acceptance of the August 2021 Financial Memo:** SMTT COO Edwards presented the August 2021 Financial Memo. Secretary Williamson moved to accept the Financial Memo; Member Regalbuto seconded the motion. At 5:27pm the motion carried unanimously with member Peck and Treasurer Atallah absent.

**SMTT Staff Updates:** SMTT CEO Kerns informed the Board that the sales team has been busy; in October there was an uptick in leads to 120 (about 30,000 room nights). Cvent (event marketing and management website) also brought 1900 room nights to Santa Monica in October. The sales team and various Santa Monica hotels are currently attending IMEX (the largest trade show in North America for meetings and events). Hotels are at 63.7% occupancy (as compared to 90% during AFM 2019 (American Film Market)). Average hotel rates are down as well, to about \$327 as compared to \$380 in 2019. Member Kayani commented that there has been a growth in searches

which will hopefully translate into increased bookings now that international travel is open. Furthermore, the lower quantity of bookings in the second half of November is likely due to the loss of AFM traffic. Kerns further mentioned that the sales team was in London recently meeting with 50 of the top buyers across the United Kingdom and Europe about how to restart leisure travel. Also, at IPW last month the sales team had 65 in-person appointments and 50+ virtual appointments.

Marketing Manager Eck informed the board that Visit California launched their “Meet What’s Possible” campaign at IMEX. The campaign aims to increase MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, & exhibitions) travel to CA and includes location-specific branding (including a Meet What’s Possible Santa Monica logo). SMTT has additionally produced a MICE booklet to use at shows to inform on what Santa Monica has to offer meeting professionals. The Extra Bedroom Program (a locals-only campaign offering discounted hotel rates for family, friends, & staycations for the holidays) has launched and will run through February 2<sup>nd</sup>. The campaign will be advertised through toolkits provided to participating hotels, postcards in local shops, school flyers, ads on local news outlets, and digital radio spots. Kerns added that the sales team will be attending various locations of Visit California’s Professional Meetings & Events Roadshow to promote Santa Monica for small-to-mid-size groups. By keeping our international offices open, we will be able to hit the ground running as international travel opens. The first international FAM (familiarization tour of Santa Monica) is happening this weekend with a writer covering luxury travel out of France. Vice Chair Carrey added that Visit California has many ads placed during college football games.

SMTT COO Edwards updated the Board that Cara Rene (Director of Communications) and Stephanie Nakasone (Global Sales & Services Manager) have started at SMTT. Interviews are currently happening to find a CMO, and a PR manager position will be posted soon. The operations team is preparing for a fiscal audit that is happening in December. A budget respread will be presented to the Board in January. As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, TMD rates increase by \$0.25 for Tier 1 and Tier 2 hotels, and \$0.10 for Tier 3 hotels. The ADR report is also in progress to verify any hotel tier changes. In December, TMD elections will take place to fill vacant spots (the process will take about six weeks). Santa MoniCARES’ SOCKtober sock drive exceeded its goal with 1500 socks collected to go to West Coast Care and The People Concern. Furthermore, the website and social media are being revamped, more events are coming in 2022, and lanes of work for the past few months are forthcoming. The PPP loan forgiveness request is 50% done, and SMTT is confident the loan will be forgiven as the parameters were closely followed. Repayment of the SVA loan started in July, and we are looking to fully pay it off by the end of this fiscal year.

**CEO Update:** Kerns updated the Board that Visit California is filming a commercial in Santa Monica at Loews that will air 30 minutes prior to the Superbowl game. Member Klocke added that a pre-game show for the Superbowl will be filmed on the pier. Kerns sought input before responding to the Pier Corporation programming priorities survey. Member Klocke raised concerns about safety at large events and mentioned that non-restaurant pier businesses don’t benefit. Chairman Gielicz mentioned wanting to find a way to have fun events without risking a wild crowd. Vice Chair Carrey agreed that smaller events would be better. Member Regalbutto suggested benefits of keeping the concerts but moving them off the pier. City Liaison Gupta added that the city would likely not support a large event at this time. Kerns commented that the general pier/beach challenges are too overwhelming for large events. Member Klocke agreed that more specific and beach-oriented activities (like Pier 360, ROGA (Run + Yoga), and the Wake Up with the Waves children’s series) have more benefits. He further recommends not bringing back the political debates, concerts, or holiday market as they use more resources and harm pier businesses. The overall group consensus is that while the Board would enjoy some pier programming to come back, it should be on a smaller scale and at appropriate times to enhance the overall Pier experience.

**For the Good of the Order:** Member Regalbutto informed the Board that Rotary meetings are back in Santa Monica and are being held in person at the Hilton each Friday. Chairman Gielicz said that for Small Business Saturday, Montana Ave is holding an Orange Balloon Sale with a record number of merchants participating. SMTT Director of Communications Rene informed the group that SMTT’s newsletters will be made more streamlined and defined in January; there will be a separate critical local information news bulletin including health updates. The January Board meeting is scheduled to meet in person.

**Adjournment:** Chairman Gielicz called to adjourn the meeting; Member Regalbutto moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Secretary Williamson and with all in favor, the meeting was adjourned at 6:23 p.m.