

**MEETING MINUTES  
SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM (SMTT)  
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2023  
LE MERIGOT SANTA MONICA – PACIFIC I & II ROOM**

**Call to Order:** Chairman Carrey called the meeting to order at 5:15 PM.

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

**Board Present:** Chairman Neil Carrey, Vice Chairman Younes Atallah, Treasurer Charlie Lopez-Quintana, Secretary Darlene Evans, Member Lauralee Asch, Member Kera Blades-Snell, Member Karen Ginsberg, Member Shahid Kayani, Member Jan Williamson, City Liaison David White.

**Also Present:** SMTT President/CEO Misti Kerns, SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards, SMTT Senior Director of Communications Lauren Salisbury, SMTT Director of Marketing Mandy Eck, SMTT Director of Global Business Development Ozzie Otero, SMTT Assistant Manager of Client Services Alyssa Dorn, Downtown Santa Monica, Inc. CEO Andrew Thomas, Santa Monica Chief of Police Ramon Batista, SMPD Captain Rudy Flores, SMPD Lieutenant Jerry Leyva, Ambrose Hotel General Manager Danielle Goller, Shore Hotel General Manager Inessa Udovchenko, Shore Hotel Director of Human Resources Wilmer Baliton, Montana Avenue Merchants Association Treasurer Kara Taub, North of Montana Association Chairman Bruce Leddy.

**Absent:** Member Jeff Klocke.

**Public Comment:** Chairman Carrey called for public comment. Bruce Leddy, the Chairman of the North of Montana Association, came forward to discuss putting energy toward restoring the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium to its original purpose. Having a viable venue downtown would be a boon to residents and visitors, he said. The movement to do this is called Save the Civic, which can be found at [savethecivic.org](http://savethecivic.org). He said the retrofitting that's necessary for the building can be accomplished with a private entity. Leddy hopes that those present will support this effort.

**Downtown Santa Monica, Inc. (DTSM) Update:** DTSM CEO Andrew Thomas presented an update focusing on three items: public safety, events/activations, and economic development. On the topic of public safety, he said the DTSM Board evaluated their services agreement with the City and determined a need to start a 1-year pilot program to launch private security in the downtown area. Through an RFP process, a vendor has been selected and DTSM is finalizing the contract negotiations now. The expected soft launch for this program is in mid-October. Thomas also commended partners at the City for their help.

On events and activations, Thomas reviewed the success of recent events like their PRIDE event, outdoor movies and al fresco dining. He also listed upcoming events like Dia de los Muertos celebrations and the holidays including Santa Monica ICE returning for its second year back since the pandemic. DTSM sees a good amount of foot traffic from these events.

On economic development, Thomas said DTSM is working with City partners to get use out of underutilized spaces, including a rooftop cinema activation on the top of Parking Lot 8. New businesses have opened, and vacancies are down to 23%, mostly large storefronts on the 1200 block. They have also welcomed pop-ups like Barbie World and a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles activation. Thomas responded to a question from Secretary Evans that Parking Lot 3 will soon be affordable housing. He added there will be some new amenities at ICE this year as well, including s'mores.

Member Lopez-Quintana asked about information-sharing and how to best get more tenants downtown. Thomas answered that DTSM shares leasing information and activations to increase interest in the area. DTSM also informs the community of updates from the City, such as any zoning changes and the recently

streamlined leasing processes. They also source news stories focusing on how easy it is to lease in the area and City Manager David White added there will be more stories coming from the City's side as well.

**Santa Monica Police Department (SMPD) Update:** SMPD Chief Ramon Batista expressed gratitude for the City Council's support. He also said that it has been expressed at community meetings that residents want to see more of the police, which helps with officer morale, and asked those present to say hello to officers when they see them. Chief Batista also commended SMPD's proactive approach to noticing when something is off about a situation as well as encouraging friendly community relations.

He then presented statistics, including that calls for service have reduced 7.6% (over 5,000 calls fewer than 2022), and that the majority of Part I crimes in the city (of which there were only 149 total) were cases of theft. SMPD has created a unit to proactively work theft cases and SMPD has also increased their visibility in business districts, including with overtime, which has helped prevent mob robberies.

Part II crimes are up 10% from last year, but there are still fewer instances than pre-pandemic, and these numbers could also just indicate that officers are more proactively engaging with problematic situations, which leads to more arrests. Chief Batista added that it's important to him and the SMPD that the community feels safe at events like the pickleball tournament downtown.

The Directed Action Response Team (DART), established through Measure Clean & Safe, has had 1,760 calls for service, 165 arrests, and 85% of these were officer-initiated, showing officers' proactive attention to concerns. 237 encampments were addressed through SMPD's partnership with Public Works. Chief Batista said the 311 app is the best way to report a variety of concerns, from encampments to downed palm fronds or reporting other needed City services.

The Homeless Liaison Program (HLP) Team has had 1,451 calls, 713 of which were self-initiated. The team includes two mental health clinicians and is building relationships with the unhoused community. They work closely with Santa Monica services to offer resources to the unhoused and have made 1,102 referrals to service assistance. Chief Batista added that they are moving ahead with creating a larger mental health response team to be able to cover seven days a week.

Secretary Evans asked for clarification on community engagement, and Chief Batista responded that SMPD team members go out to community meetings and are very active in giving advice, tips, etc. SMPD is also working on getting professional staff back to pre-pandemic levels, as well as starting a neighborhood watch program.

Vice Chairman Atallah asked whether crimes are concentrated in the same areas as they were previously and Chief Batista responded that SMPD has been addressing the downtown area with relationship-building, attending meetings, connecting with restaurants and local businesses to build trust that SMPD will show up when called. Calls from businesses in DTSM are prioritized and there are active cameras in the area; SMPD is being intentional with allocation of staff and using technology for quick response times. Captain Flores added that crimes are mostly still in the downtown area, though there are some scattered elsewhere. Every couple weeks a large SMPD all-hands meeting allows them to share information and consistently update their plans and officer allocation based on the current distribution of crime in the city. They set up operations to focus on the times and locations where crime is occurring, including overnight. Lt. Leyvas added that business owners should report crime, even if they think SMPD is too busy, as it allows them to adjust their plans and officer allocation.

Ambrose Hotel General Manager Goller asked if there's a system to share notices with hotels to keep an eye out for individuals who have committed a crime. Chief Batista said it would be a great idea and it would need to be developed.

Member Williamson asked for an update on Metro end of the line concerns, and Chief Batista said he walked though the train line with the Sheriff's office, under whose jurisdiction Metro falls, to show our concerns and the Sheriff's office is more visible now, proactively get on the train to enforce the fare, and there seem to be fewer people being dropped off at the Santa Monica terminating station.

Finally, Montana Avenue Merchants Association Treasurer Taub said that, considering the recent incidents of theft on Montana, businesses there have a WhatsApp group as sometimes the shoplifters go from one store to the next down the street. Lt. Leyvas said that there are more patrols in the Montana area recently to help with this issue.

**City Manager Update:** City Manager David White informed the Board that a lot of investment starts with hotels. Santa Monica's hotels led the economic recovery, and now there is active construction on projects downtown and continued reinvestment in our commercial corridors. City Hall is also recruiting for open positions, including Director of Transportation, and asked that those who need anything from the City be patient and reach out to White if they need help finding who to connect with at the City.

Some long-term initiatives the City is working on include Olympics '28 (coordinated by Community Partnerships Manager Melissa Spagnuolo and Assistant City Manager Susan Cline), The Santa Monica Blvd. & Ocean Ave. project, and the Fairmont Miramar project. There is also a team who has come together, including consultants, for a unique method of planning the future of the Santa Monica Airport. There will be a public engagement approach with a panel of about 40 community representatives for an inclusive and diverse panel who will be tasked with reimagining and rethinking all the Airport could be. Member Williamson asked how the panel will be selected, and White responded that they are thinking about the spectrum of the constituency who should be at the table and will perform outreach via a multitude of methods to invite community members to apply. Rather than using funds to do community surveys and the like, funds will then be more available for opportunities like stipends for panel members' childcare to allow the panel members to truly engage as community representatives.

Also on the horizon, the City will hold a kickoff meeting on September 23, 2023 for a social justice and racial equity project to create citywide equity. The meeting plans to represent all who live here and even used to live here with in-person and virtual options for joining. There will be listening sessions as part of this project as well to learn how to embrace all community members. Member Williamson said the City doesn't currently have an active cultural plan and asked whether there were plans to reactivate it or create a new one. White responded that there is a new Recreation and Parks Department that is looking for a Director, and once hired that Director would be a good contact for more information on this topic.

**Approval of the July 12, 2023 Board Meeting Minutes:** Secretary Evans presented the July 12th meeting minutes. Secretary Evans moved to approve the minutes and Member Lopez-Quintana seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously with Member Klocke absent.

**Acceptance of the July & August 2023 Financials:** Treasurer Lopez-Quintana presented the July and August 2023 financial memos. Vice Chairman Atallah moved to accept, and Secretary Evans seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously with Member Klocke absent.

**SMTT Staff Updates:** SMTT Director of Marketing Mandy Eck updated the Board that Santa Monica was voted "Favorite Beach Town, Southern California" for the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive year by Trazee Travel, a top resource for travelers 25-40. Two SMTT staff attended the ceremony to accept the award. At US Travel Association's ESTO, SMTT CEO Kerns presented on the Experience Management Plan and Strategic Plan in a special CEO session. The biggest takeaway from the event was that AI is the future of destination marketing. Finally, the Extra Bedroom program will be running from November 13-January 29 this holiday season to attract hotel business in the shoulder season.

SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards then presented on Santa Monica's coverage in the media, including three articles in Parents Magazine. SMTT also hosted familiarization tours for media from LUXE Magazine, Luxury Travel Magazine and The Review Magazine. Upcoming media visits are planned with Esquire, Marie France, West of the City Magazine and Travel Guides (an Australian television show).

SMTT Director of Global Business Development Ozzie Otero informed the Board of events and trade shows SMTT attended, including Virtuoso Travel Week where SMTT met with 178 luxury-focused travel agents

and partners. Coming up, SMTT will be hosting CANUSA Touristik for a FAM in September, joining the CalTravel Summit in Monterey and attending ILTM North America in partnership with ETC Hotels.

SMTT COO Edwards presented for SMTT's Operations Department. There are three SMTT recipients of CalTravel's 30 & Under Emerging Leader Award, the Responsibilities Matrix that outlines employee responsibilities for current employees and new hires is in the works, and an email migration to Office 365 will occur in September. In September, a delegation of officials from our sister city Mazatlán visited and our team gave a presentation on the impacts of tourism in Santa Monica. In October, SMTT looks forward to starting the I Am Santa Monica workshop program back up for local businesses and their employees, and American Film Market (AFM) will be in town now at a new location: Le Meridien Delfina. Also coming up in October is Santa MoniCARES Volley-Ween, a fundraiser for local charities and great opportunity for local businesses to team-build with some friendly competition.

SMTT's Visitor Services Department has participated in local events like the Fourth of July parade, National Night Out with SMPD and the Open Main Street weekends. SMTT also installed new security systems in all Visitor Center locations and the Visitor Center team welcomed almost 7,000 guests in July and August, selling over \$12,000 in SMTT branded merchandise.

**CEO Update:** SMTT CEO & President Misti Kerns presented the Board with information about the California Heritage Museum's Flea Market and highlighted the importance of supporting local nonprofits. Kerns also informed the Board that SMTT is moving forward with the branding exercise and will come back to the Board in November with what direction we plan to go in for the brand, including drafted mission and vision statements. SMTT's visitor guides and new map are expected to come out in the fall. SMTT is also running several off-season campaigns and putting emphasis into fall campaigns. She also said that new flights to LAX are being slowly added, but airlines are still having staffing issues and more people are traveling internationally.

SMTT is also starting with using Symphony for the Dashboard project, which will help with getting analytics more readily as campaigns are running. This should show a better value for our resources moving forward. SMTT is also meeting with the Chairs of the Experience Management Plan in October and will roll it back out thereafter with a new informational newsletter, a committee portal for discussions and updates, breaking down actionable steps and more.

**For the Good of the Order:** Chairman Carrey called for any items for the good of the order. Member Blades-Snell announced that the Santa Monica History Museum is honoring Misti Kerns this year on Sunday, October 1, 2023 from 5-8 PM at the Santa Monica Bay Women's Club. She asked the Board to please attend and said that sponsorships are still open. Member Blades-Snell also informed the board that the Santa Monica Black Lives Association, now in a new space (2,700 sq feet) is holding its first black-tie Unity Gala with sponsors deciding who in their organization to honor; multiple honorees can be put forward. This will take place on Friday, November 10, 2023 at 6:30 PM at the Santa Monica Bay Women's Club. Chairman Carrey added that the Kiwanis Charities of Santa Monica approved the new 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary scoreboards for Belmar and Los Amigos Parks and gave a \$70k donation to the City for this purpose.

**Adjournment:** Chairman Carrey adjourned the meeting at 6:58 PM.