

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**SANTA MONICA TRAVEL & TOURISM (SMTT)**  
**SPECIAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**  
**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026**  
**SHUTTERS ON THE BEACH – 1 PICO BLVD SANTA MONICA, CA 90405**

**Call to Order:** Chairman Lopez-Quintana called the meeting to order at 5:08 PM.

**Welcome New Board Member:** Chairman Lopez-Quintana announced that Jessica Rincon, Managing Director of Sandbourne Santa Monica, will be joining the Board of Directors next meeting as a Member.

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

**Present:** Chairman Lopez-Quintana, Vice Chairman Jeff Klocke, Secretary Karen Ginsberg, Member Neil Carrey, Member Darlene Evans, Member Lauralee Asch, Member Jan Williamson, and City Manager Oliver Chi, who arrived at 5:12 PM.

**Also Present:** SMTT Chief Executive Officer Misti Kerns, SMTT Chief Operating Officer Evan Edwards, SMTT Vice President of Marketing Ashley Dowgwilllo, SMTT Vice President of Communications Lauren Salisbury, SMTT Director of Global Business Development Aleksandr Sigalus, SMTT Director of Sales Ozzie Otero, SMTT Executive Assistant Haylee Miller, Pier Bridge Replacement Project Public Outreach Manager Madison Viola, and City of Santa Monica Civil Engineering Associate Mareia Mazed.

**Absent:** Treasurer Simon Fricker and Member Tim Defuria were absent.

**Public Comment:** City representative Madison Viola provided an overview of the Santa Monica Pier Bridge Replacement Project, which includes the demolition and reconstruction of the existing 80+ year old bridge connecting Ocean Avenue to the Pier. The project aims to modernize infrastructure while maintaining full access to the Pier, including all businesses, attractions, and restaurants throughout construction. To support continuous operations, a temporary pedestrian bridge and vehicle ramp are being constructed, with completion anticipated in 2027 ahead of the Olympic Games. Key milestones include removal and refurbishment of the Pier sign in May, followed by bridge demolition beginning in July. Construction is currently focused on foundational work, temporary access structures, and ongoing traffic reconfigurations.

Viola also highlighted current and upcoming impacts, including traffic detours, temporary lane adjustments, and an anticipated eight-day closure of Appian Way during demolition, which will require robust communication and alternative parking strategies. Enhanced signage, wayfinding, and marketing opportunities for Pier businesses are in development, alongside expanded outreach efforts including email updates, direct notifications, and coordination with navigation platforms. SMTT Board Members emphasized the need for clearer, more visible signage and proactive communication to mitigate confusion, while reinforcing the primary message that the Santa Monica Pier will remain fully open and accessible throughout the duration of the project. Sign up to get constructions news and updates about the Santa Monica Pier Bridge Replacement Project at:

[https://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/manage/optin?v=001TlspZilSazejFAc4WW7\\_W5KY28zjIMUm9nnfJuBZJPg0ZbwrpbOyw0vFrKkvJun9VzjqvUjxU1Uo7D5MFbHhONWleLFzzbb5GF3GpvT14g%3D](https://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/manage/optin?v=001TlspZilSazejFAc4WW7_W5KY28zjIMUm9nnfJuBZJPg0ZbwrpbOyw0vFrKkvJun9VzjqvUjxU1Uo7D5MFbHhONWleLFzzbb5GF3GpvT14g%3D)

**Approval of the January 14, 2026 Meeting Minutes:** Chairman Lopez-Quintana presented the January 14, 2026 meeting minutes. Member Carrey moved to approve the minutes, and Member Ginsberg seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote, with Treasurer Fricker and Member Defuria absent.

**Acceptance of the December & January Financials:** SMTT COO Edwards presented the December and January financials. Member Carrey moved to accept the memo, and Member Evans seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote, with Treasurer Fricker and Member

Defuria absent.

**Approval of the Draft Operating Plan, Budget & TMD Forecast:** SMTT CEO Kerns presented the draft operating plan, budget, and TMD forecast for final approval. Member Carrey moved to accept the draft operating plan, budget, and TMD forecast, and Member Asch seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously through a roll call vote, with Treasurer Fricker and Member Defuria absent.

**City Manager Update:** City Manager Oliver Chi provided an overview of an upcoming realignment efforts, highlighting progress over the past six months and a shift toward operationalizing improvements across all departments and commercial corridors citywide.

Chi noted key accomplishments including expanded public safety deployments, capital improvements, enhanced maintenance and landscaping, streamlined permitting, and the reopening of library services. Public safety metrics showed significant gains, with Part I crimes down 12.5% year-over-year, arrests up 23%, traffic citations up 102%, and proactive policing activity up nearly 10%.

Chi also emphasized that the city remains financially stable, and the city is on track for a structurally balanced budget, though some uncertainty remains around the expiration of a joint-use agreement and potential future funding measures.

To support long-term economic growth, Chi shared plans to prioritize revitalization efforts, including the creation of a one-time economic development fund and expansion of enhanced maintenance and operations beyond downtown to key corridors such as Montana Avenue, Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica Boulevard, Main Street, Ocean Park Boulevard, and Pico Boulevard.

Chi also highlighted upcoming initiatives to support businesses, including proposed fee reductions, expanded entertainment zones, and revised parking programs with validation incentives. Additional enhancements include the launch of a Real-Time Crime Center, increased technology and surveillance tools, and a new downtown police substation.

Looking ahead, Chi noted several major items coming before Council in April, including agreements related to a beachfront music festival, FIFA activations in Santa Monica, and continued planning for the 2028 Olympic Games.

**SMTT Staff Updates:** SMTT Vice President of Marketing Ashley Dowgwillo opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and sharing updates on new brand photography developed in partnership with 62 Above. The refreshed assets emphasize a lifestyle perspective of Santa Monica, with an increased focus on luxury offerings to support global sales initiatives.

Dowgwillo provided a preview of the redesigned [santamonica.com](http://santamonica.com) homepage, which prioritizes booking functionality, user-generated content, hotel integrations, neighborhood exploration, and curated itineraries. The updated site is designed to drive conversions by placing "Reserve Your Stay" prominently with integrating real-time hotel booking capabilities.

Dowgwillo shared that the Spring Staycation Campaign is currently live, targeting Los Angeles County residents, with participation from 21 hotels and running through April 13.

Visitor data from December through early February indicated approximately 900,000 visits from over 50 miles away, with overnight visitors accounting for 35% of total visitation and an average stay length of two days. The most visited areas included Downtown Santa Monica, the Pier, and the Third Street Promenade. Average in-market visitor spend was \$168 per trip, with top feeder markets including New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Seattle-Tacoma and Dallas-Fort Worth were identified as high value markets based on higher per-trip spending.

Dowgwillo reported that organic website traffic increased 7% month-over-month and 6% year-over-year, with top search queries including "Santa Monica," "Santa Monica Pier," and "things to do". Activities and all sized events continue to play a significant role in driving website traffic, reinforcing SMTT's event

marketing strategy.

Dowgwillo introduced the implementation of the Scrunch platform to monitor brand sentiment across AI search tools, noting over 4,000 search appearances since December. Insights from this platform are being used to refine website content and improve discoverability.

Dowgwillo revisited the 2025 Expedia campaign, noting it generated nearly \$4.5 million in revenue, approximately 12,000 room nights, and was supported by a \$75,000 investment. Based on its success, SMTT plans to launch a new Expedia campaign from April through July, supported by Visit California with a 25% match, and expected to generate approximately 3.4 million impressions.

Dowgwillo highlighted ongoing Route 66 Centennial marketing efforts, including placements in Visit California's road trip guide and the installation of themed light pole banners throughout the destination. She encouraged hotel partners to develop Route 66-themed experiences and packages to capitalize on increased demand and media interest.

Dowgwillo also emphasized the importance of event-driven marketing, highlighting upcoming and anchor events including the Santa Monica International Jazz Festival, U.S. Women's Open, SMTT Vice President of Communications Lauren Salisbury shared public relations and media updates, emphasizing Route 66 as the top-performing media narrative. Salisbury reported over 100 media engagements across International Media Marketplace events in New York, London, and Paris.

Salisbury highlighted major media initiatives including a television feature and radio broadcasts with Peter Greenberg, as well as ongoing global press coverage across outlets such as National Geographic, The Telegraph, and HELLO! Magazine.

Salisbury reported that SMTT generated over \$4 million in earned media value from November through February. Upcoming media opportunities include a Today Show segment focused on Route 66 and multiple international press trips.

Salisbury also noted that Santa Monica was recognized on Tripadvisor's Best of the Best Beaches list. On social media, impressions increased 63.4% and engagement rose 8%, with event-related and food content driving the highest performance.

SMTT COO Edwards also presented an update on Film Santa Monica, launched September 1, which has more than doubled film permit activity year-over-year and generated over \$200,000 in revenue for the city. A new online database has been introduced to connect production companies with local hotels and businesses, creating additional revenue opportunities.

SMTT Director of Global Business Development Aleksandr Sigalus highlighted continued engagement with international markets through sales missions, FAM trips, and trade shows. SMTT participated in activations across New York, Germany, Canada, Mexico, Paris, and London, emphasizing key markets such as the UK, France, Germany, and Mexico.

Sigalus also reported strong performance from international co-op campaigns with Visit California, achieving an 8% increase in bookings year-over-year, with notable growth from India, Japan, Australia, and the UK. Upcoming initiatives include participation in IPW, ILTM Cannes, and additional FAM trips and roadshows.

SMTT Director of Sales Ozzie Otero shared updates on the upcoming Goldenvoice music festival, anticipated for September 2026. The two-day beachfront event will feature approximately 20 artists and premium ticket offerings, with hotel packages playing a central role in initial ticket sales. SMTT is working closely with event organizers to ensure hotel inclusion in packages and to maximize economic impact for the destination.

Finally, Dowgwillo and leadership facilitated a stakeholder discussion regarding upcoming brand campaign messaging. Two concepts, "Welcome World" and "Welcome to Santa Monica" were presented, with feedback indicating a preference for emphasizing Santa Monica more prominently in messaging,

particularly for domestic audiences. SMTT will conduct additional consumer research before finalizing campaign direction.

**CEO Update:** SMTT CEO Kerns provided a high-level overview of current tourism trends and organizational priorities, noting mixed performance across key international markets. Kerns shared that visitation from Mexico is up approximately 8%, while Canada has declined by roughly 20%, and overseas markets overall are down 2.5%, reflecting broader global travel challenges and shifting economic conditions.

Kerns emphasized the importance of closely monitoring these trends and adapting SMTT's strategies accordingly, particularly as international travel demand remains uneven. She noted that insights from U.S. Travel and Visit California continue to inform SMTT's approach, including new tools such as a Route 66-themed passport initiative that will soon be distributed to support visitor engagement.

Kerns also highlighted planning efforts for the upcoming SMTT Tourism Summit scheduled for June 4, 2026. While a venue is still being finalized, she confirmed that key speakers—including SMTT's research partner and representatives from U.S. Travel—are already secured, along with participation from the mayor.

Additionally, Kerns underscored the importance of aligning marketing strategy with current global sentiment, referencing internal discussions around campaign messaging and the need to balance bold branding with sensitivity to evolving perceptions of U.S. travel. She noted that SMTT is investing in consumer research to guide final decisions and ensure messaging resonates across both domestic and international audiences.

Kerns concluded by reiterating SMTT's commitment to maintaining Santa Monica's position as a premier, welcoming destination, while continuing to adapt to market conditions and leverage upcoming opportunities tied to major events and long-term tourism growth.

**For the Good of the Order:** Chairman Lopez-Quintana called for Good of the Order comments. There were none.

**Adjournment:** Chairman Lopez-Quintana adjourned the meeting at 7:14 PM.