



# CALIFORNIA'S EASTERN SIERRA

MONO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM & FILM COMMISSION

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## MINUTES

### Economic Development, Tourism & Film Commission (EDTFC)

#### Regular Meeting via Teleconference\*

Tuesday, August 31, 2021 – 10:00 A.M.

\*As authorized by Governor Newsome's Executive Order N-25-20, dated March 17, 2020, this meeting will be held via teleconferencing with members of the Commission attending from separate locations. There will not be a physical location of the meeting open to the public. This altered format is in observance of recent recommendations by local officials that certain precautions be taken, including social distancing, to address the threat of COVID-19.

**Commissioners present:** Geoff McQuilkin, Michael Vanderhurst, Sarah Walsh, Steve Morrison, Scott Burkard, Wendy Schneider

**Commissioners absent:** Erin Wells

**Staff:** Alicia Vennos, Jeff Simpson, Liz Grans, Morgan Terrell

**Guests:** Supervisor John Peters, Supervisor Rhonda Duggan, Ken Harrison (KIBS/KBOV), Lauren Dore

1. Call to order.

Mr. McQuilkin called the meeting to order at 10:05 am.

2. Introductions and announcements.

Introductions were made. No announcements.

3. Opportunity for the Public to address the Commission.

No comments were made.

4. Approval of the Minutes of the June 29, 2021, meeting.

Michael Vanderhurst motions to approve June 29, 2021 meeting Minutes. Wendy Schneider seconds. All in favor, no abstentions; Minutes approved 5-0.

5. Monthly Financial/Budget report.

- a. FY 21-22 Budget. Ms. Vennos reported that expenditures are on track for the first two months of the new fiscal year, and she is currently awaiting the transient occupancy tax (TOT) report for 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

6. Economic Development and Tourism report.

USFS Forest Closure: Commissioners discussed the announcement made yesterday on

August 30, 2021, by the USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region to temporarily close all National Forests in California, effective Aug. 31, 2021, at 11:59 p.m. through September 17, 2021, at 11:59 p.m. The closure includes the Inyo National Forest in its entirety but not the Humboldt-Toiyabe for the time being. While the scarcity of firefighting capacity and resources is completely understandable, the immediate cancellation of all campground reservations, included those in the front country, hotel bookings, and the loss of Labor Day reservations on such short notice will have grave consequences for the local economy. The cancellation of major events and weddings, even those held in the front country, on Mammoth Mountain or at Convict or Silver Lake, for example, is beyond devastating to the organizers, registrants, bridal parties and their families and friends, as well as for all local businesses. Ms. Vennos will be working to find out about

potential exemptions and – for future – to have County involved in working with the Forest Service to develop a pre-planned “tier system” closure based on risk assessment and impacts.

- a. Central Sierra Economic Development District – Update on Mono County joining CSEDD. Mr. Simpson reported that staff had received an email from the Go-BIZ office (California Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development) suggesting there is potential for an Eastern Sierra CEDS. For now, staff is holding off on further action with CSEDD until more direction and discussions occur with regional and local partners, and the EDA.
  - b. Eastern Sierra Small Business Resource Center project. Ms. Vennos reported that active planning for this new business resource center for both Inyo and Mono counties’ small business community is underway. The location for the Business Resource Center will be Bishop, and the USDA-grant funded project is being spearheaded by Inyo County CAO Leslie Chapman. A consultant has been hired to assist with project planning. Ms. Vennos will attend the first “working meeting” on Sept. 22.
  - c. Collateral Update: 2021 Visitor Guide; Backroads Guide; Fall Color Guide; Fishing Map; Community Maps. Mr. Simpson reported that the South County Community Map is in the final stages of design and hopes to have it produced in about a month. Ms. Vennos reported that revisions to the Eastern Sierra Fall Color Map are in the works. Once fire season is over, she will arrange a meeting with the BLM to go over edits for the Backroads Guide. Mr. Simpson stated that the department will not be promoting anything now on Inyo National Forest land and will focus exclusively on what is currently open and safe.
  - d. Dispersed Camping Summit Update. Ms. Vennos mentioned that the *Camp Like a Pro* campaign seems to be working effectively. The map on the website still needs a little work, but overall, the campaign has had a good response throughout the community and has elicited positive comments and inquiries from other jurisdictions and counties in the State.
  - e. Local, State, Federal business assistance programs. Mr. Simpson reported that there are still grants and forgivable loans available. He provided information on the Employee Retention Program, in which businesses can apply quarterly making them eligible for the possibility of a 70-80% tax exemption. He added that SBA Disaster Loans are available for fire and Covid-19 disaster related impacts.
  - f. Update regarding application for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) CARES Act – CV1, 2, 3 for Microenterprise Financial Assistance Program for small businesses. Mr. Simpson reported they are still waiting on the CV2 & CV3 applications to be finalized. They are hoping the Standard Agreements will come through next month, so staff can roll out the CV1, CV2-3 programs within the next three months.
  - g. Community grant applications and timeline for 21-22. Ms. Grans reported that she is currently working on cleaning up the applications. She is working with IT staff to make changes on the QuickBase platform for the online application submission, and that staff is performing test applications. She plans on being ready for the roll-out towards the end of September, with the goal of approving grant funding allocations by Thanksgiving. Ms. Vennos added that she will send all the commissioners the application for review.
  - h. June Lake Jam Fest CEMF reimbursement. Ms. Grans said that she was notified by Janet Hunt that the June Lake Jam Fest will be canceled this year because of lack of registration due to COVID-related uncertainty. The organizers have spent \$1,772.44 of the \$2,000 they received from the Community Event Marketing Fund grant. They were able to grow their fanbase/outreach with these funds, so the expenditures still served a good purpose; however, they cannot proceed with the event given the lack of ticket sales. After some discussion, the Commissioners agreed that cancellations for reasons beyond the control of the event producer should not be grounds for penalty, and all expressed support for reimbursement. Mr. McQuilkin requested that a formal letter be sent to Janet Hunt stating this decision. Ms. Grans added that she will create a disclaimer on the applications for future instances if an event is forced to cancel.
7. Mono County Fish & Wildlife Commission update. Mr. Simpson reported that after presenting various options and research to the Board of Supervisors at its regular meeting of August 17th, the Board voted to dissolve the Fish & Wildlife Commission. From now on, all fisheries-related issues will be vetted through the Economic Development department, and presented as necessary to the Board of Supervisors. Mr. Simpson added that staff will work on developing a public application process to assist the Board in allocating available Fish & Wildlife Fine Fund dollars to applicable projects moving forward.

8. Film Commission update. Mr. Morrison reported that August 2021 has been their busiest August ever for film production, and they also had a very successful winter. The GMC and Motor Trend shoots have had to cancel due to the Inyo National Forest closure. Mr. Morrison and Ms. Vennos both wish to work directly with the Inyo National Forest to examine the potential for standardized shooting locations on the Forest, and to organize a meeting with Inyo NF to help simplify the permit process. Once fire season is over, she and Mr. Morrison will contact the Inyo National Forest permit coordinators/supervisors to begin discussions.
  
9. Project Status Update, including public relations, advertising/social media, websites, and tradeshow/conferences. Ms. Vennos shared that Mr. Simpson and Mr. Vanderhurst will be attending IPW in a few weeks in Las Vegas. Mr. Vanderhurst stated that US Travel and IPW are encouraging international delegate attendance by inviting attendees who can demonstrate that they are contributing to US economic growth, thus qualifying as essential travel. Mr. Simpson reported that he has been able to make higher quality appointments this year, and the Mono County and Mammoth Lakes presence will be noticeable. He added that many safety precautions are being taken with plexiglass screens, distancing, masks, and meetings will be by appointment only. Ms. Vennos said that with respect to consumer travel shows, staff anticipates attending the in-person Bay Area Travel & Adventure Show in October and the Fred Hall fishing show in Long Beach in March. As for social media, staff is pivoting to the current crisis and just trying to communicate clear and accurate information to the business community, residents and visitors. Ms. Grans reported that staff is also working on the website revamp and is getting close to launching Book Direct. She is also in process of updating the Film Commission website and Economic Development website as well. Mr. Simpson added that staff created and produced a fire restrictions flier to be distributed throughout the county, something that was requested by local businesses to help communicate the restrictions quickly and clearly.
  
10. Commissioner Reports:
  - Mr. Morrison reported that the Inyo National Forest closure has caused Mammoth Mountain to close for the season, including the Summit Party and all weddings. Organizers are holding an emergency meeting today to determine if the Gran Fondo will still proceed.
  - Mr. Vanderhurst said that the skate park, golf courses, and bike paths in Mammoth are all still open. Yosemite and Death Valley are still open as well. Mammoth Rock N Rye and Oktoberfest are still happening as planned. Advanced Air will start flying out of Hawthorne, Carlsbad, and Burbank 11/24/21.
  - Ms. Walsh reported that June Lake is in a turmoil of uncertainty due to the abrupt Forest closure. The community and local businesses are working hard to try and get questions answered for themselves and visitors. The Autumn Beer Festival is coming up as well as Leaves in the Loop, and for now both events are still happening. Businesses are all still currently open with Forest Service permittees applying for exemptions.
  - Ms. Schneider stated that everything is up in the air with the Inyo National Forest closure. It is possible the stewardship programs with Friends of the Inyo may continue. She added that Friends of the Inyo has offered to assist the Forest Service in any way needed.
  - Mr. McQuilkin shared that Lee Vining is also just trying to adjust to the changing closures. Bodie and two State Park access points to Mono Lake are still open. He will need to investigate if the Tioga Pass Race can still take place.
  
11. Call for agenda items for next regular meeting.
  
12. Adjourn the meeting and reconvene in regular session at 10:00 a.m. on September 28, 2021, via teleconference. Mr. McQuilkin adjourned the meeting at 11:45 am.