

Visit the Santa Ynez Valley Board Meeting Minutes

January 9, 2025 – 9:00 a.m.

Alisal Ranch

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Linda Johansen at 9:00 a.m.

Board Members Present:

Kristopher McLaughlin, Kathleen Cochran, Stormie Strickland, Linda Johansen, Greer Araujo, Will Henry, Jim Flagg (via phone).

Board Members Absent:

Jonathan Rosenson, Jeff Hartman.

Public Present:

Monica Rueter, Sunshine Stricker, Anna Ferguson, Phil Carpenter, Michelle Olsen, Don Conner, Julie and Charlie Holland, Terri Simmons, Michelle Boss, Candice Libera, Olivia Uribe, Randy Murphy, and Will Adams.

Staff Present:

Shelby Sim, Brenda Ball, Danielle Laudon Ruse.

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items

Room introductions were conducted by Linda Johansen.

Action Items

1. Approval of the Board Meeting Minutes of December 12, 2024

- Motion to approve by Kathleen Cochran, seconded by Greer Araujo.
- Motion passed unanimously.

2. Grant for Consideration: Women Winemakers & Culinarrians Celebration

- Organization: Women Winemakers & Culinarrians Foundation.
- Event Dates: March 6-9, 2025.
- Requested Amount: \$5,000.
- Recommended Amount: \$3,500.
- Discussion: Sunny spoke on behalf of the event. The board discussed strategies for driving hotel bookings through their website.
- Motion to approve \$4,000 by Will Henry, seconded by Kristopher McLaughlin.
- Motion passed unanimously.

3. Sponsorship for Consideration: Santa Barbara Shootout

- Event Dates: February 7-9, 2025.
- Location: Happy Canyon Polo Field, Santa Ynez.
- Requested Amount: \$5,000.
- Discussion: VisitSYV is also sponsoring the Santa Barbara Showdown (February 1-2, 2025). The Shootout is a Stay & Play tournament, with hotels listed on their website.
- Motion to approve \$5,000 by Stormie Strickland, seconded by Jim Flagg.
- Motion passed with Kathleen Cochran voting no; all others in favor.

4. Revised Expense Policy

- Discussion: Linda Johansen thanked the Executive Committee (Jim Flagg, Kristopher McLaughlin, Jonathan Rosenson, and Linda Johansen) for their work on the revised policy.
- Motion to approve by Kathleen Cochran, seconded by Kristopher McLaughlin.
- Motion passed unanimously.

Financial Report

Presented by Kristopher McLaughlin, including a review of current financials.

Staff Report

1. Formation of the Marketing Committee

- Committee will meet on the second Tuesday of each month.
- Members: Jeff Hartman, Greer Araujo, Will Henry.

2. Upcoming Initiatives

- Restaurant Weeks 2025 (January 19 – February 1).
- Midweek Membership Club Promotion (January 12 – April 30).
- Website update.
- New board meeting location: The Landsby.

3. Upcoming Travel

- IMM New York (January 21-24) – Shelby Sim & Danielle Laudon Ruse.
- VisitCA Reverse Canada Mission, San Diego (February 10-12) – Cynthia.
- VisitCA Outlook Forum, Los Angeles (March 2-5) – Shelby, Danielle, Cynthia.

4. December Activity Report

Marketing Update

Presented by Danielle Laudon Ruse, covering media approach, social media channels, website updates, ad campaigns, SEO, and data tracking.

Old Business

- Linda Johansen congratulated Solvang on a successful Julefest and raised concerns about parking and infrastructure due to the increase in visitors. She recommended closing Copenhagen Drive to vehicle traffic during the holidays and encouraged more businesses to remain open on Christmas and New Year's Day. She also suggested creating a locals-focused week of programming.
- Randy Murphy noted that the city is working with the chamber to encourage local merchants to extend their hours during the holiday season.

New Business

- Shelby Sim discussed the purchase of Co-Star reports for STR data. The board confirmed that reports would be provided to all hoteliers who contribute their data.

Board Comments

- **Jim Flagg:** Reported a strong fourth quarter at Hampton Inn & Suites. Anticipates an increase in domestic travel and believes lacrosse tournaments will bring new repeat visitors. Suggested requiring event organizers to submit reports confirming bookings.
- **Will Henry:** Shared details of his recent trip to Baja and upcoming events at Pico, including a Valentine's Day celebration and the Fools Gold Wine Festival on April 1st.
- **Kristopher McLaughlin:** Reported strong Q4 and December results for The Genevieve, with the restaurant up 27%. The restaurant will be closed on Mondays and Tuesdays in January.
- **Kathleen Cochran:** Alisal Ranch had a successful Q4, exceeding budget in November and December. The River Grill had its best December ever. Expressed concern over the impact of fires in LA County, with guests seeking refuge.
- **Stormie Strickland:** Announced that Corque Hotel is transitioning to a Marriott Tribute Portfolio property, expected to open May 1, 2025. Corque and Hadsten House performed exceptionally well in 2024. Corque is offering a midweek rate for evacuees of the LA fires.
- **Greer Araujo:** Reported a great Q4 at Fess Parker Wine Country Inn. HVAC renovations are underway. Excited for upcoming plans at Epiphany.
- **Brenda Ball:** Working on optimizing HubSpot for email, CRM, and sales pipeline management.
- **Danielle Laudon Ruse:** Expressed excitement for Restaurant Weeks and the Midweek Promotion. Announced her upcoming move to Los Alamos and that she is expecting a baby girl in summer 2025.

- **Linda Johansen:** Congratulated the Women Winemakers & Culinarians Celebration team. Thanked staff and board members for their hard work and dedication. Applauded all communities for successful holiday programming.

After board comments, Solvang City Manager Randy Murphy introduced Olivia Uribe, a new management analyst assisting the city manager. They are working on emergency preparedness updates, grant opportunities, and a recreation master plan.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by Linda Johansen at 10:05 a.m.

Next Meeting

The next board meeting will be held on **February 13, 2025, at 9:00 a.m., The Landsby.**

*Prepared by Danielle Laudon Ruse
Vice President*

*Approved by Stormie Strickland
Secretary*