

Visit the Santa Ynez Valley Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
December 11, 2025
The Landsby, 9:00 a.m.

Call to Order

Linda Johansen called the meeting to order at **8:57 a.m.**

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items

Candice Libera thanked Visit the Santa Ynez Valley for the organization's continued work and impact in the community.

Board Members Present

Camden Wirick, Will Henry, Linda Johansen, Kathleen Cochran, Jeff Hartman, Jim Flagg, Stormie Strickland

Board Members Absent

Kristopher McLaughlin, Greer Araujo

Staff Present

Shelby Sim, Brenda Ball, Cynthia Gonzalez, Danielle Laudon Ruse

Public Present

Anna Ferguson, Candice Libera, Gretchen Baldwin, Alvie Whitaker, Megan Friend

Action Items

Approval of November 13, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes

Will Henry motioned to approve the minutes. Kathleen Cochran seconded. All in favor. Motion approved.

Financial Report

Kristopher McLaughlin (absent)

Shelby Sim reviewed the financials on Kristopher's behalf.

Action Item: Approval of 2026 Budget

The proposed 2026 budget was reviewed and recommended by the Budget Committee (Kristopher McLaughlin, Linda Johansen, Jim Flagg).

Linda Johansen thanked Shelby and Danielle for their work preparing a strong draft for the Executive Committee. Linda motioned to approve the 2026 budget as presented. Stormie Strickland seconded. All in favor. Budget approved.

Action Items: Grant Requests

Linda reminded the board that for **2026**, the maximum grant award has been temporarily reduced to **\$3,500**, with a focus on prioritizing paid marketing efforts.

Cal Coast Sports Ventures, LLC – SB/SY Winter Showdown

January 31 – February 1, 2026

Requested: \$5,000 | Recommended: \$3,500

805 Lacrosse Project – Santa Barbara Shootout

February 6 – 8, 2026

Requested: \$5,000 | Recommended: \$3,500

Kathleen Cochran motioned to approve both lacrosse grants at the recommended amounts. Camden Wirick seconded. All in favor. Motions approved.

Garagiste Wine Festival – Garagiste Events Inc.

February 6 – 8, 2026

Requested: \$6,500 | Recommended: \$3,500

Linda Johansen motioned to approve the recommended amount. Will Henry seconded. All in favor. Motion approved.

Staff Report**Presented by Shelby Sim**

- **Destination Guide Reception Recap:** December 4, 2025
- **Billboard Update**
- **Employee Handbook Update**

- **Upcoming Travel:**

- IMM North America, New York City – January 20–22, 2026 (Danielle)

- **November Activity Report**

Marketing Update

Danielle Laudon Ruse

Reviewed media approach, social channels, website updates, and current ad campaigns.

Sales Update

Cynthia Gonzalez

- Reviewed current leads and sales activities. Scheduled an online destination presentation for **14 meeting brokers** in Spring 2026
-

Old Business & New Business

Old Business:

Linda shared that the Budget Committee met on November 21 and circulated a staff compensation recommendation to the board. The compensation plan was approved on December 1, 2025.

New Business:

Shelby proposed shifting the previously discussed January planning meeting to **Fall 2026**, given that the 2026 budget is already set. The focus of the future planning meeting will be **TBID renewal** and **Taste of the Santa Ynez Valley** planning. The TBID renewal occurs in July 2027, with groundwork to begin in 2026.

Board Comments

Jim Flagg:

December is performing very well at Hampton Inn & Suites and is expected to exceed last year. Q1 is pacing softer and weather dependent, but outlook remains positive.

Jeff Hartman:

Highline Adventures had a strong Thanksgiving and record-setting Black Friday. End-of-

December performance looks solid. Shared concerns that 2026 demand may soften slightly. Asked about World Cup opportunities in 2026 and 2028. Shelby shared Visit California is exploring pre- and post-fam trips.

Kathleen Cochran:

River Grill's Winter Wonderland is open and performing well. Open for dinner Sunday–Thursday with family-friendly pricing. A renovation, name change, and relaunch are planned for next year.

Linda Johansen:

Congratulated Kathleen and Alisal Ranch for receiving *Best Business* at the Solvang Chamber Awards.

Stormie Strickland:

Holiday décor at Hotel Corque has driven strong lobby traffic. Performance remains strong.

Will Henry:

Pico and Lumen are performing well through the holidays. Wine sales are strong. Dinner theater production at Pico opens this evening.

Camden Wirick:

Shared that his properties can participate in a **Buy 2, Get Third Night Free** hotel promotion if we want to proceed with a valley wide promotion.

Brenda Ball:

Provided an update on HubSpot rollout. The first venue information email resulted in **19 responses within 48 hours** and two meeting inquiries. Goal is scalable growth without additional staffing.

Cynthia Gonzalez:

Noted improved data retention and streamlined follow-up through HubSpot. Will send holiday greetings to industry contacts before year-end.

Danielle Laudon Ruse:

Expressed gratitude to the staff and board. Thanked Shelby for assembling a strong and supportive team.

Shelby Sim:

Shared appreciation for the board's leadership and generosity. Noted continued growth and sophistication of the organization.

Linda Johansen:

Thanked Candice Libera for Julefest leadership and Anna Ferguson for extensive media

coverage. Recognized Sunstone owner Teddy for his generosity to the community. Thanked Jim Flagg for his instrumental work on policies, procedures, and compensation, helping elevate the organization. Congratulated Kathleen on her new granddaughter, Jolene.

Shelby Sim:

Recognized Linda Johansen for receiving a **Humanitarian Award**, noting her exceptional service and impact on the community.

Adjournment

Linda Johansen adjourned the meeting at **9:47 a.m.**

Next Meeting: January 8, 2026 | 9:00 a.m. | The Landsby

Prepared by Danielle Laudon Ruse, Vice President & CMO

Approved by Stormie Strickland, Secretary