

# Oregon Tourism Commission Meeting

May 11, 2021

## Zoom Meeting and YouTube Live

**Commissioners present included:** Scott Youngblood, Nigel Francisco, Don Anway, Maria Ponzi, Richard Boyles, Kenji Sugahara, Mia Sheppard, Lucinda DiNovo, and Greg Willitts.

Chair Youngblood calls the Commission meeting to order at 9:02 am and notes that the virtual public meeting meets state mandates.

### **Chair Remarks:**

Chair Youngblood introduces himself and asks each Commissioner to do the same. Todd Davidson, CEO of Travel Oregon, also introduces himself.

Chair Youngblood notes that it has been 14 months since the COVID-19 pandemic began and today the meeting will focus on Travel Oregon's plan forward. He states that there have also been positive outcomes in the last year. Chair Youngblood shares that Ponzi Vineyards officially became part of the Bollinger Family portfolio and thanks Commissioner Ponzi for helping put Oregon on the map for world-class wines.

Commissioner Ponzi shares that she had lunch with the Bollinger family, along with Todd Davidson, last week. She states that it is a bittersweet development for her family in passing the torch on their business. She states she is excited for the future of wines from the Willamette Valley.

Chair Youngblood shares that Ninkasi's Better Living Room (BLR) will be opening in time for Memorial Day and congratulates Vice-Chair Francisco.

Chair Youngblood shares that Commissioner Sheppard just completed a month-long rafting and fishing trip through the Grand Canyon. Commissioner Sheppard notes that the Grand Canyon is a magical place but the rivers in Oregon will always be number one.

Chair Youngblood asks if the other Commissioners have any other highlights to share. There are no additions.

### **Public Comment:**

Chair Youngblood states that on Monday April 26, 2021, the Oregon Tourism Commission meeting notice was posted online with a public comment form. The comment that was submitted has been shared with the Commission and will be posted on the Travel Oregon industry website and made part of the public record. Chair Youngblood acknowledges the one comment submitted to the Commission, by Scott West, and his desire to honor the Travel Oregon professionals whose positions were cut in 2020. Chair Youngblood notes the thousands of tourism professionals that have lost their jobs this year and notes the contributions they made to our lively tourism industry. He thanks Scott West for the comment.

### **Commission Business:**

Chair Youngblood asks if all Commissioners received and reviewed their financial and commission packets.

All answer yes.

Chair Youngblood asks if there are any corrections or comments to the February 23, 2021 meeting minutes.

There are no comments or corrections.

Chair Youngblood asks for a motion to approve the February 23, 2021 commission meeting minutes.

Commissioner Ponzi moves to approve the February minutes and Commissioner DiNovo seconds the motion. The February 23, 2021 meeting minutes are adopted by unanimous consent and will be posted to the Commission page on the Travel Oregon industry site.

Chair Youngblood notes that each year the Commission undergoes a process to review Travel Oregon CEO, Todd Davidson. The process will begin in earnest in the coming weeks led by Vice-Chair Francisco. Chair Youngblood asks if the commissioners have any questions or comments about the CEO evaluation process.

There are no questions.

### **Financial Update**

Chair Youngblood thanks Vice-Chair Francisco for reviewing the financials with the Travel Oregon accounting team prior to today.

Vice-Chair Francisco states that the most up-to-date financials have been shared with the Commission in the meeting materials and that the May deposit of \$3.3 million brings Travel Oregon to 103.4% of the adopted 2019-2021 budget. He states there is still one deposit remaining that will be made prior to the end of the biennium. He states that Todd will share a more in-depth review of current and future financials later in the meeting. He notes that the last 14 months have been extremely challenging and states that the Travel Oregon staff have done a fantastic job this year through the hardship of losing colleagues.

### **Reports, Updates & Discussions:**

Chair Youngblood asks Todd to share the draft strategic plan and budget for 2021-2023.

#### **Draft 2021-2023 Strategic Rebuild Plan and Budget**

Todd shares a PowerPoint presentation on the draft Rebuild Strategic Plan and Budget for the 2021-2023 biennium. He shares Travel Oregon's mission, vision, values, and equity statement. He notes that there are three phases of response to the pandemic: mitigate impact, rebuild industry, and transform tourism. The rebuild plan will be revised after six months based on a transformational strategy. He notes that there are critical uncertainties in Oregon's tourism supply chain and tourism demand.

Todd introduces Staj Olsen, Travel Oregon's Strategic Project Manager. Staj shares findings from the 2020 Tourism Stakeholder Survey, which occurred in October 2020 and received over 1200 responses.

Staj also shares findings from the 2021 Stakeholder Engagement Sessions which occurred in six of the seven Oregon regions and ended in March of 2021. These sessions allowed regions to share their draft strategic plans and tactics for 2021-2023 with their regional stakeholders and allowed Travel Oregon to share the two-phased strategic planning approach Travel Oregon is undertaking. Staj thanks everyone who participated in these engagement sessions and notes that there will be more of these engagements as strategic planning continues.

Todd thanks Staj for her work on Travel Oregon's strategic planning process and her time today. He shares that Travel Oregon's objectives are to continue to support the tourism industry's rebuild from COVID-19 and build a transformational strategic plan for the future. He states that Travel Oregon's imperatives have been modified and now include leading with a racial equity lens. He shares Travel Oregon's desired outcomes and key actions for each imperative. These are posted on Travel Oregon's industry website and will remain available for public comment. At the June Commission meeting, the Commission will vote on adoption of this rebuild plan. Todd notes the importance of the Travel Oregon team, the tourism industry, and the Commission in reimagining Travel Oregon's organizational design and assessing existing business practices for the upcoming Transformational Plan. He shares the 2021-2023 draft biennial budget totaling \$62,564,000. Todd notes that Travel Oregon will bring a further revised budget to the June 2021 Commission meeting for adoption.

Todd asks the Commissioners if they have any questions and notes that any industry partners can submit public questions or comments on Travel Oregon's industry website.

Chair Youngblood opens the public hearing on the draft 2021-2023 Strategic Rebuild Plan and Budget. On Monday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, the meeting notice was posted to the Commission meeting webpage including the agenda, the draft Strategic Rebuild Plan and Budget, the public comment form and instructions, and the link to this meeting's livestream. There were no requests for live public testimony on the draft for today's meeting. The public comment phase remains open through May 18 and Chair Youngblood invites the industry to submit comments. Chair Youngblood closes the public hearing.

Chair Youngblood states that he is optimistic that Oregon's tourism industry will see economic improvements sooner rather than later.

Commissioner Sugahara states that as a member of the AAPI community he truly appreciates the emphasis on DEI and the thoughtfulness in the approach. He asks if Oregon is prepared for travel to return at a faster rate than expected. He states that Todd mentioned visitor management initiatives and asks if there are examples Todd can share. Additionally, he asks if Travel Oregon is keeping their databases up to date with the high number of closures across the state to ensure visitors do not encounter closures unexpectedly.

Todd thanks Commissioner Sugahara for his comments and questions. He states that Travel Oregon wants all visitors and members of the industry to know they are welcome here. He notes that there is a tremendous amount of work for Travel Oregon still to do. Todd states that some destinations most likely feel more ready to welcome visitors than others. He states that generally the lodging industry is very ready to welcome visitors and have proper Covid-19 safety protocols in place that have resulted in no traceable cases from hotel properties in Oregon. Similarly, Todd notes how well the restaurant industry has embraced changes to operations to ensure safety of guests. Todd acknowledges that Travel Oregon's Take Care Out There messaging was specifically implemented to educate visitors and Travel

Oregon staff continue to ensure that all information on Travel Oregon's pages are up to date to convey the best and safest information for visitors. Todd notes that Travel Oregon's social media channels have targeted certain areas of Oregon to send messaging around destination management practices as well.

Commissioner Sugahara thanks Todd.

Commissioner Ponzi emphasizes Todd's point that Take Care Out There messaging helps educate residents and visitors on keeping Oregon's destinations safe and clean. She notes that Oregon is known for responsible and respectful outdoor recreation and wants to ensure that we continue to message this as visitation increases. Commissioner Ponzi also notes that the Portland region has suffered greatly during the COVID-19 pandemic. She asks if Travel Oregon is doing anything to support Portland specifically.

Todd thanks Commissioner Ponzi for her comment and question. Todd states that the Portland region has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. He notes that the grant program that was just announced did take into consideration communities that were disproportionately impacted while awarding funding. He states that Travel Oregon is considering how to best market the Portland region specifically to help drive visitation in addition to featuring all seven regions. He also notes that members of the Travel Oregon team have volunteered with SOLVE to cleanup downtown Portland. Travel Oregon continues to work with ORLA, Travel Portland, SOLVE and other organizations to continue to support the Portland region.

Commissioner Boyles acknowledges the importance of leading this plan with DEI and acknowledges the changeability of our industry and world right now. Commissioner Boyles asks Staj and Todd to speak to the slide on desired outcomes and clarify ensuring the tourism industry to be a viable economic contributor to the state's economy and how this will equitably be achieved across the regions. He continues by asking how the key actions were developed.

Todd states that the regions may each recover differently as they have each been impacted differently by the pandemic. He notes that Travel Oregon's focus is on ensuring that the rising tide does raise all ships. He states that Portland is an important gateway for all visitors, including the international visitor, who enters the state through Portland International Airport (PDX) and travels to other regions. He emphasizes the importance of Travel Oregon's grant program and co-ops, promotion online and on social media, with the goal of disbursing visitors more widely and throughout the year.

Commissioner Boyles notes that Todd's answer sounds like Travel Oregon's typical nimbleness and does not speak to a change in programs or budget spend.

Todd states that part of the equitability of the recovery will result in intentional spending in some areas. He expects the Commission will see focused efforts on recovery in certain regions.

Staj clarifies Richard's question on the Travel Oregon team's efforts in creating the key actions. She notes that some of the key actions have been in progress for quite some time. Staj states that Travel Oregon underwent a public RFP process to hire a strategic partner, which resulted in hiring Destination Think. She states the Travel Oregon leadership team, directors, and key staff members have helped inform the key actions through multiple planning sessions, the internal DEI taskforce meetings, and partnerships with Tamara Kennedy-Hill and Scott Winn. The wording of the key actions was written by Staj, Todd, the Travel Oregon Communications team, and Destination Think's Chief Strategist.

Todd thanks Staj. He offers an additional example to Commissioner Boyles through mentioning the regional stabilization fund and the equitable distribution of additional funds to regions with larger impacts from the pandemic.

Commissioner Boyles thanks Todd and Staj for their answers and notes his satisfaction with the process Travel Oregon has undergone.

Commissioner Anway states his concern of the impacts the tourism industry will see due to the shortage of employees. He notes that his company would open their restaurant seven days a week, but they do not have the staff capacity and are not seeing applications come in.

Todd notes that this is an excellent point, and that Travel Oregon has heard this from partners in the industry through many avenues. He notes that this is a part of the strategic plan and certain members of the Travel Oregon staff are working with industry partners to see how Travel Oregon can make a positive impact on the tourism workforce.

Chair Youngblood commends Commissioner Anway for bringing this topic to light and states that it is on his mind as well. He thanks Todd for his commentary.

Chair Youngblood recesses the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

Chair Youngblood reconvenes the meeting at 10:28 a.m.

### **Travel Oregon Strategic Planning Process Update**

Todd discusses that the strategic planning cycle is continuous as travel and tourism is continually changing and adapting. He introduces Staj to present on the next phase of strategic planning that will result in the Transformational Plan.

Staj shares a PowerPoint presentation including a timeline of the two-phased strategic planning approach. She notes that immediately after the June 15, 2021 Commission meeting, where the Rebuild Strategic Plan will be adopted, there will be a Stakeholder Planning Workshop run by Destination Think on June 16, 2021. Registration is separate from the Governor's Conference and details will be shared with the industry via Travel Oregon's industry newsletter. This will be followed by a series of engagements from June to December 2021 including, one-on-one interviews with stakeholders, stakeholder racial equity lens trainings, staff one-on-one interviews, staff survey, Commission engagement at the fall 2021 meeting, seven regional co-creation labs, stakeholder focus groups with tribal entities, BIPOC communities and the RDMOs, and finally a staff co-creation lab. This will be followed by the Transformational Strategic Plan implementation in early 2022.

Todd asks the Commission if there are any questions. There are no questions and Todd thanks Staj.

### **Public Affairs and Legislative Session Update**

Todd introduces Sara Morrissey, Director of Public Affairs and Industry Communications.

Sara shares a PowerPoint presentation including federal and state public affairs updates that have occurred since the last Commission meeting in February. She shares details on the Covid-19 Relief American Rescue Plan providing \$1.9 trillion in total to restaurants, tourism and outdoor recreation projects, the State of Oregon, EIDL advance program, and the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant Program. She states that Destination Capitol Hill occurred on March 17, 2021 and Travel Oregon and

partners advocated for federal policies that support the tourism industry. The Joint Ways & Means Committee met on April 30, 2021. The House Special Committee on Wildfire Recovery met on April 12, 2021 and Travel Oregon presented on state programs that can be helpful for communities that experience wildfire. Also on April 12, 2021, Travel Oregon met with the Governor's Office on a responsible date to launch the Welcome to Oregon Again campaign and settled on launching the campaign on May 12, 2021. However due to the increase in COVID-19 case counts and counties moving to the Extreme Risk category, Travel Oregon has decided to launch the campaign on June 1, 2021. Sara shares that the Department of Revenue has launched a local transient lodging tax collection program which combines state and local lodging taxes on a single tax return. Sara shares updates on state bills that Travel Oregon is tracking, including those that Travel Oregon has submitted letters of support for. The 82nd session of the legislature has been challenging due to Covid-19 and will end on June 27, 2021. Travel Oregon did not pursue any bills in this session, however there were some bills proposed affecting Oregon's transient lodging tax. Sara states that Travel Oregon is happy to announce that none of these are moving forward and Governor Brown continues to view Travel Oregon as the best steward to distribute these funds for the tourism industry's recovery. Sara notes Travel Oregon's increased efforts to educate staff and regional partners on updates from the legislative session.

Todd thanks Sara for her presentation and asks the Commissioners if there are questions.

Chair Youngblood thanks Sara for her constant efforts and communications on behalf of Travel Oregon and the industry.

Commissioner Sugahara thanks Sara for the presentation and asks what EDA stands for.

Sara states that EDA is an acronym for the Economic Development Administration.

### **Advertising and Marketing Update**

Todd introduces Kevin Wright, Vice President of Global Marketing, to present on an advertising update.

Kevin shares a PowerPoint presentation on the upcoming advertising and marketing efforts being taken by Travel Oregon. He notes that Travel Oregon has taken a 16-month pause from inspirational marketing. Over this time, Travel Oregon has focused on three key pillars through partnerships with the Governor's Office, OHSU, and OHA, including public safety, business resiliency and stewardship. He notes that Travel Oregon is excited to begin inspirational marketing again to build back Oregon's market share. He shares a two-phase approach to marketing travel in Oregon. The first phase includes the Welcome to Oregon Again campaign plan and timeline, regional direct investment co-op, and support of Travel Portland through promotion of Top Chef season 18. Kevin shares details of phase two of Travel Oregon's marketing plan including details and updates to the Only Slightly Exaggerated 3 (OSE3) campaign, the DEI focus groups that contributed to the creation of the campaign content, and the resulting takeaways.

Todd thanks Kevin and asks if there are any questions.

Commissioner Willits notes the encouragement to get the COVID-19 vaccination prior to traveling as part of the Welcome to Oregon Again campaign. He encourages emphasizing this point as much as possible, as it will lead to a quicker recovery for our industry and notes that he has not seen this emphasized much elsewhere. He asks to hear an example of a weird Oregon road trip that Kevin

mentioned. He also asks if the Park Ranger Melissa is the same park ranger that forwarded a message to Travel Oregon about the OSE campaign.

Kevin states that in the last meeting he participated in with the Governor's Office, there was an emphasis on educating the public on the benefits of vaccination and notes the decline in the public's desire to be vaccinated. He states that Travel Oregon is sharing information from Oregon's health experts. He also notes that Ranger Melissa is the park ranger that shared her letter at a recent Commission meeting. Kevin states that he will need to get back to the Commission on sharing the weird road trip ideas.

Commissioner Willits thanks Kevin and notes that members of the public may have religious reasons for not receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. He notes that this could play a role in Travel Oregon's messaging.

Todd shares that in a national study, those that identify as travelers were more likely to have received or plan to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Commissioner DiNovo thanks Kevin and the marketing team for their work. She asks if masks will be featured in the Only Slightly Exaggerated campaign, as she believes we will be using masks for the foreseeable future.

Kevin notes that the Only Slightly Exaggerated campaign positions Oregon as an escape from the stress of the real world and describes the challenge Travel Oregon had in deciding if masks and social distancing would be featured in the campaign. He states that the campaign will feature masks and social distancing where it feels appropriate to represent our new reality responsibly.

Vice-Chair Francisco states that he loves seeing the focus on DEI in the upcoming strategic plan and the focus within OSE3.

Kevin thanks Vice-Chair Francisco and notes he is proud of the work and acknowledges Travel Oregon still has work to do.

Commissioner Sugahara states his love for the creative. He asks if Kevin's background on Zoom is from OSE3.

Kevin states that his background is inspired by the OSE3 campaign but is a work of Bob Ross.

Commissioner Ponzi thanks Kevin for showcasing red wine in OSE3 and asks if his Zoom background is of Three Sisters.

Kevin states that he does not know but suggests that Travel Oregon should create new Zoom backgrounds inspired by OSE3.

Todd thanks Kevin and notes there are no further questions.

### **Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP) Guidelines Update**

Todd introduces Teresa O'Neill, Vice President of Strategic Partnerships, and Kate Sappell, RCTP Project Manager.

Teresa shares that she is excited to be joined by Kate Sappell today as Kate does instrumental work on the RCTP team and Harry Dalgaard is out on paternity leave. Teresa shares a PowerPoint presentation

noting updates to RCTP guidelines, including that Travel Oregon is removing the July 1 invoicing date from the RCTP guidelines, which allows RDMOs to begin work once their plans are approved and provides funding to partners as quickly as possible.

Kate provides examples of the updated language in the guidelines, which can be found on Travel Oregon's industry website.

Todd thanks Kate and Teresa and asks if there are any questions from the Commission.

Chair Youngblood states that this is a small but mighty act to benefit our regional partners. He expresses gratitude to Teresa, Kate, and their team.

### **2021 Governor's Conference on Tourism Update**

Todd introduces Lisa IteI, Director of Strategic Partnerships.

Lisa shares a PowerPoint presentation regarding the upcoming 2021 Oregon Governor's Conference on Tourism. Lisa notes that the 2020 Governor's Conference was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 conference will be virtual due to current COVID-19 guidelines. She states that the conference will return to an in-person format in 2022. This year's conference will be free for partners to attend. There are currently 350 registrants. Lisa shares an overview of what the conference will entail, including the achievement awards and the run of show. Lisa shares two clips of content that will be featured at the conference, featuring Elyse Kopecky, Shalane Flanagan, and Susanne Schmitt. Lisa shares details of Travel Oregon's partnership with Burgerville and Doordash to promote local restaurants for lunch for attendees during the conference. The 2022 Governor's Conference on Tourism will be March 14-16, 2022 in Sunriver.

Todd thanks Lisa and asks if there are any questions.

Commissioner Willits notes how exciting it is to see Susanne Schmitt in Germany expressing excitement to visit Oregon. He notes that he would love to share the video with his staff after it becomes available.

### **Closing Remarks**

Chair Youngblood thanks all the staff presenters today. He notes that despite the events of the last year, he is inspired by the body of work presented today and the hope that the days ahead will be brighter. Chair Youngblood thanks all the Commissioners for their time today. Chair Youngblood opens the floor for Todd to provide closing comments.

Todd thanks the Commissioners, the Travel Oregon staff, and the regional partners and industry stakeholders that help inform Travel Oregon's plan and the tourism industry's future.

Chair Youngblood provides one last reminder that the draft Strategic Rebuild Plan is available for public comment on Travel Oregon's industry website until May 18, 2021.

The next Commission meeting will be held in conjunction with the Governor's Conference on Tourism on June 15, 2021.

Chair Youngblood adjourns the meeting at 11:42 a.m.