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A VIEW FROM HARBOR STREET

April 3, 2016

Continuing A Smooth Tourism Transition

By Sam Taylor, Deputy City Manager



City Manager's Note: *Tourism is an integral part of the community and we want to continue to enhance Morro Bay as an amazing destination. This year we will transition from a contracted relationship with the Morro Bay Tourism Bureau, a private, non-profit, for the City's tourism promotions and marketing and will instead have staff working directly under the City's umbrella. We're excited for this transition and are appreciative of the hard work of the Bureau to make it happen well.*

I've invited Deputy City Manager Sam Taylor, who manages the City's economic development efforts, to discuss the transition more.

Morro Bay is a wonderful place to live, work, and visit. As part of our overall economy, tourism plays a huge role in providing funds the City uses to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Transient Occupancy Taxes – collected when someone stays in one of our amazing local hotels – make up our second largest revenue stream and help us pay for filling potholes, police and fire protection, maintaining our parks, and more.

We all know that tourism is a crucial part of the economy, and while we're working on an Economic Development Strategic Plan that looks at ways to diversify our economy, we absolutely cannot ignore tourism and the role visitors play in making Morro Bay the place it is.

City staff have been coordinating with Bureau staff for a few months on a transition to this new model for tourism promotions and marketing. We're excited to say that most of the employees from the Bureau will remain on board with the City to keep the move smooth. The transition does bring one change in that we will be seeking a new tourism manager. As I write this, our advertisement for this position is posted on the City website and numerous other places to find this new hire.

We're very intent on making sure that we coordinate with our tourist-related industries on these issues, and so we'll be working with the Tourism Business Improvement District Advisory Board especially on finding this new person. We hope to have this Tourism Manager working sooner rather than later as we begin to move from the slower "shoulder season" for tourism and in to our busier summer months.

As we move to direct management of City staff for tourism marketing and promotions, it's important to know that much remains the same about these endeavors as before the move. We still have TBID Advisory Board members providing important input on our activities.

The TBID played the major role in the selection of our new marketing and public relations firm – Mental Marketing – and we're so glad we could work with this awesome group of hotelier and general community volunteers to find the right agency for Morro Bay. The City Council spoke very positively about the collaboration on the selection when they received the advisory board's recommendation, too.

We're working right now with the Tourism Bureau on the upcoming 2016-2017 Marketing & Sales Plan. This annual plan provides the strategy for how we market to various tourist segments. This plan will be presented during the upcoming Tourism Bureau Stakeholders meeting at the Inn at Morro Bay. This meeting helps ensure that the local hoteliers and other community stakeholders (the Bureau has invited representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and Merchant's Association to attend as well) understand how we market Morro Bay in order to both enhance TOT collections but also to benefit the hoteliers, who collect the TBID assessment from their guests on the community's behalf. The TBID also directly reviewed the projected budget for tourism promotions and marketing next year and that preliminary budget is included in the marketing and sales plan. Those figures will be utilized within the City budget, which the City Council will approve in June and will begin on July 1 with the new fiscal year.

Moving forward, we'll continue to build partnerships and City Manager David Buckingham and I hope to meet with hoteliers on a routine basis in order to make sure everyone is seeing increased dialogue and partnership. The Bureau staff will also move in to City space at 695 Harbor Street by the end of this month, a move that will save thousands in rent and provide an opportunity for better collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce as well.

Tourism helps make Morro Bay the place that it is. And we'll keep working together to make sure that we have the right strategy for this community in place to keep visitors coming. The only right way to build that strategy is with partnership with our hoteliers, other tourist-related businesses, the community, and other tourism entities in the county, state, and nation. I believe we're showing that, through this transition, we're already ensuring those partnerships continue.

We always welcome input from all in the community. Want to share your thoughts? Email City Manager David Buckingham at dbuckingham@morrobayca.gov or me at staylor@morrobayca.gov.

Note: This editorial first appeared online in the Bay News on April 3, 2016.