Ke'ena Kuleana Ho'opipa O Hawai'i
1801 Kal ā kaua Avenue
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96815
kelepona tel 808 973 2255
kelepa'i fax 808 973 2253
hawaiitourismauthority.org

SPECIAL ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
OF THE
HAWAIʻI TOURISM AUTHORITY
Thursday, January 22, 2026, 9:30 a.m.

Virtual Meeting

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Kimberly Agas (Co-Vice Chair), James McCully (Co-Vice Chair), Leah Belmonte, Mericia Palma Elmore, Terry Fischer, Joel Guy, Troy Lazaro, Danny Ojiri, Lānaʻi Tabura, Linda Wong
MEMBERS NON-PRESENT:	Chris West, Lisa Paulson
HTA STAFF PRESENT:	Caroline Anderson, David Uchiyama, Talon Kishi, Kendrick Leong
LEGAL COUNSEL:	John Cole

1. Call to Order

Co-Vice Chair McCully called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

2. Roll Call to Announce Name of Participating Board Members and to Identify Who Else is Present with Board Member if Location is Nonpublic

Mr. Uchiyama did the roll call, and all Board members were in attendance, except for Members West and Paulson, who were excused. Members who attended via Zoom were by themselves.

3. Opening Protocol

Member Lazaro did the opening cultural protocol with the E Hō Mai chant, written by Edith Kanakaʻole. This chant talked about asking for knowledge from above to grant us strength and wisdom.

4. Creation of a Strategic Plan Permitted Interaction Group to Discuss and Review Proposed Strategies and Tactics

Ms. Anderson opened the special Board meeting by thanking everyone for coming together on short notice. She stated that the purpose of the agenda item was to establish a PIG for the Strategic Plan. She first confirmed that all attendees had received the two staff reports related to this matter, requesting a show of hands or nod for confirmation, and offered to share her screen to display the reports if needed. She provided background, explaining that last spring the Hawaiʻi Tourism Authority issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the development of the Strategic Plan, which is intended for both the HTA and the broader industry. The Board selected Better Destinations to develop and write the plan, and Pacific Policy Research Center was engaged as facilitator for both the Strategic Plan and the Destination Management Action Plans.

Through this planning process, information and input were gathered from the community and industry via meetings and interviews; Better Destinations' Kathy Ritter and her team conducted interviews with all Board members, focus groups were held with staff, and additional interviews included industry leaders, legislators, other government officials at both state and county levels, and selected contractors. A survey conducted by Pacific Policy Research Center incorporated all feedback and input while assessing the current landscape and future outlook. Better Destinations worked with staff to develop strategies and identify actionable tactics. Ms. Anderson explained that the purpose of establishing the permanent interaction group is to collaborate with board members to review, evaluate, and identify any additional recommendations for the strategic plan before presenting it to the full Board for consideration, ensuring thorough oversight and comprehensive input throughout the process.

Co-Vice Chair McCully asked who the Pacific Policy Research Center was.

Ms. Anderson said they were awarded the contract for facilitation, that they are based in Hawaiʻi, and that the contract has been completed. Facilitation services have been completed, and they submitted their written report at the end of last year.

Co-Vice Chair McCully opened it up to the Board members for discussion and questions. There were no questions. He asked if that was the report provided that would be the basis for the PIG to start reviewing and going over.

Ms. Anderson said they could share that out with the PIG, all of the reports that were generated so far. This included the draft strategies and tactics that staff developed with Better Destinations.

Co-Vice Chair McCully asked for a motion to adopt; Member Elmore made a motion, Co-Vice Chair Agas seconded.

There was no public testimony or questions from the online attendees. Co-Vice Chair McCully asked if there was any follow-up discussion prior to the vote.

Co-Vice Chair Agas asked how long the PIG would be active.

Ms. Anderson said they would like to complete the Strategic Plan by the end of February and submit it to the Director for final approval. They are seeking the advisory Board's support and endorsement of the strategic plan, and then it goes up to the Director for his approval.

Co-Vice Chair Agas asked for the number of persons to be on the PIG.

Ms. Anderson believed there could be no more than 6 members, and she was awaiting confirmation from AG Cole.

Co-Vice Chair McCully said it was a short-duration PIG. He asked whether the full Board would then discuss and vote on that recommendation, and whether that would then be submitted to the Director for consideration.

Ms. Anderson confirmed that as correct.

Co-Vice Chair McCully asked whether it would be on the February agenda for the full Board to receive the PIG's recommendation.

Ms. Anderson said she would like to call a PIG meeting the following week, with a follow-up meeting thereafter.

Co-Vice Chair McCully asked whether the PIG would be reviewing the work Better Destinations has done since receiving its most recent contract.

Ms. Anderson said they are reviewing the work done by the staff and Better Destinations. They will develop draft strategies and tactics they want to run, share them with the PIG for review and consideration, and address any other recommendations the PIG has.

Co-Vice Chair McCully asked how the process differed from previous strategic plans.

Ms. Anderson said that now that the Board is advisory, the process is similar, but the time frame for setting up the PIG is shorter.

Co-Vice Chair McCully asked if prior strategic plans entailed contractors similar to Better Destinations to work with staff to develop the Strategic Plan.

Ms. Anderson confirmed that it was correct.

Co-Vice Chair McCully asked who the contractors were.

Ms. Anderson said that for the Strategic Plan, they had John Knox and Associates work with staff and the PIG for the plan. Prior to that plan, it was John Knox and Associates as well.

Co-Vice Chair McCully said the distinction is that Better Destinations was the contractor for the recent proposal to evaluate tourism.

Ms. Anderson said they were the contractor for the governance study that the HTA did two years ago. They did do an RFP process for the development of the Strategic Plan. And they submitted two to three proposals. They had an evaluation committee review it and, in the end, were awarded a contract to develop the Strategic Plan.

Co-Vice Chair McCully said the PIG was likely to be evaluating a Strategic Plan informed by that work, including the Better Destinations governance study, which recommended following a new model. He asked if they are incorporating that in the Strategic Plan.

Mr. Uchiyama added that part of the problem with this process was maybe that influence. When they reviewed it as staff, they saw several areas that were not being addressed, so staff edited the Strategic Plan and has gone back and forth with Better Destinations to get it more in alignment with what they feel is necessary to move the HTA forward and build confidence and credibility with the legislature. And that is why it has taken staff and better destinations a little longer to reach this point.

Co-Vice Chair McCully said that made some sense. His concern is that the PIG has a very tight window to complete this review. He asked if they could maintain some semblance of process integrity.

Ms. Anderson recommended that when they meet as a PIG and go through the timeline, they will be able to see the work that has been done with Better Destinations and then determine whether they need to expand the timeline for that.

Co-Vice Chair McCully said that it is fine.

Member Fischer added that he wished to share a few comments regarding the strategic planning process, noting that during the meetings to assemble the plan, he had been included alongside staff and, to his knowledge, was the only Board member participating in those working sessions. He explained that he worked directly with Better Destinations, participated in calls, and provided input while scrutinizing the draft plan. Although he had not reviewed the most recent revised draft following the last set of changes, he believed the plan was in a very good place and progressing on a solid track. Member Fischer noted that the original draft was based on extensive studies and research and was already quite comprehensive, and that following the comments and feedback from the meetings, the plan would now be handed off to the next committee, with much of the heavy lifting already completed. He shared these remarks to provide context, given his direct involvement in the process.

Ms. Anderson said they had Member Paulson and Member Fischer as the chair and vice chair of the Hoʻokahua Standing Committee Meeting. They were part of that discussion with the leadership staff.

Co-Vice Chair McCully thanked Member Fischer for being part of the discussion and for the involvement with Member Paulson.

Member Ojiri asked if the plan was distributed to the Board.

Ms. Anderson said it was not, as it was still in draft mode. This will be for the PIG.

Co-Vice Chair McCully asked about the quorum.

AG Cole said attendance has to be less than quorum in the PIG under the Sunshine Notice requirements, etc.

Co-Vice Chair McCully said the PIG is 6 or less. This is confidential and should be discussed only there.

There was a roll call and the motion passed unanimously.

5. Discussion and Assignment of Board Members to the Strategic Plan Permitted Interaction Group

Ms. Anderson explained that in the next staff report, staff were proposing, for discussion purposes, that the chairs of each standing committee serve as members of the PIG, while acknowledging members' time constraints and opening participation to any Board members interested in being involved in the strategic plan. Co-Vice Chair McCully clarified that the original concept envisioned the standing committee chairs— Co-Vice Chair Agas for Branding, Co-Vice Chair McCully for Administrative, Member Elmore for Film Production, Member Paulson for Hoʻokahua, and Member West for Sports Tourism—and stated his willingness to step aside to allow Mr. Fischer to participate given his prior involvement in the earlier discussions, suggesting that participation by both Member Fischer and Member Paulson would be beneficial, noting that other members were welcome to step forward to join the PIG if interested.

Member Fischer expressed his agreement and willingness to continue participating, noting that he was already deeply involved in the process. Member Guy expressed appreciation for the staff and contractor's work, emphasized the importance and scope of the Strategic Plan, and asked about the urgency of delivering the plan to Dir. Tokioka's desk in February, specifically inquiring whether staff could outline a backward-looking timeline from that target date to explain how the plan would be completed and delivered.

Ms. Anderson explained that the Board meeting scheduled for February 26 would be the target date for Board support and endorsement of the Strategic Plan, after which the plan would be provided to the Director for review and approval in the first or second week of March, depending on the Director's schedule, to move the plan forward within the first quarter of the year. She noted that at least two permitted interaction group (PIG) meetings would be held to ensure the group's comfort with the proposed strategies and tactics and acknowledged that the timeline could be adjusted if needed. Member Guy confirmed his understanding that non-PIG members would likely receive their first review of the plan around February 19 if the schedule aligned, which Ms. Anderson affirmed.

Co-Vice Chair Agas observed that there were currently five proposed PIG members and suggested adding Member Ojiri, a co-chair from the Branding Committee, to the PIG, while expressing openness to stepping aside if additional members wished to participate. She emphasized the importance of ensuring PIG members can attend meetings consistently, noted recent attendance challenges for some members, and stressed the need for timely, efficient meetings. She also pointed out that Members Paulson and West were not present at the meeting and expressed uncertainty as to whether they had confirmed their willingness to serve on the PIG.

Ms. Anderson said she did not have a chance to reach out to them.

Member Ojiri said that if a space is available, he would be happy to help.

Co-Vice Chair McCully thanked Co-Vice Chair Agas and stated that while Ms. Anderson's suggestion to include standing committee chairs in the PIG was reasonable, he supported starting with a fresh field given the current availability. He noted that Member Paulson and Member West, both committee chairs, were not present to confirm their schedules or availability, while Member Fischer was present and had agreed to participate, providing representation based on prior involvement. He acknowledged that Co-Vice Chair Agas, Member Elmore, and Member Ojiri were supportive of the effort and indicated that Co-Vice Chair Agas was also in agreement. Co-Vice Chair McCully stated that the group would proceed with the members currently available, identifying six potential participants: Co-Vice Chair Agas, Member Elmore, Member Fischer, Member Ojiri, Member Paulson, who was not present to confirm availability, and Member Wong, who had indicated willingness to participate if there was an opening.

Member Ojiri said he could be on the bench if needed.

There were currently five.

Member Guy said he could help.

Co-Vice Chair McCully said it could be decided on short notice, which was a benefit.

AG Cole said they need to name the PIG members when they form it, and they should not be able to swap out unless they reform it.

Member Ojiri named the PIG members: Co-Vice Chair Agas, Member Elmore, Member Fischer, Member Guy, Member Ojiri, and Member Wong.

Co-Vice Chair Agas made a motion for Board approval of the six names. It was seconded. There were no questions or discussion from the public.

Member Ojiri did the roll call, and the motion passed unanimously.

AG Cole confirmed that at the first PIG meeting they will determine who would be the chair.

Co-Vice Chair McCully asked which staff would be assigned to work on this.

Ms. Anderson confirmed it would be her and their planner, Kendrick Leong.

Co-Vice Chair McCully said they can work with Ms. Anderson to determine the scheduling for the first PIG. There is no quorum needed. AG Cole confirmed that as correct.

Co-Vice Chair Agas asked to set the schedule now, but they could not do that publicly.

Co-Vice Chair McCully said that Ms. Anderson would contact the PIG members to arrange the immediate resumption.

Ms. Anderson said they will stay online about the Strategic Plan PIG.

Co-Vice Chair McCully said it would be helpful if AG Cole stayed online to show courtesy to the Board members serving on their first PIG.
He adjourned the meeting.

Mr. Kishi adjourned the meeting and asked members to stay online to set up the schedule. But everyone else in the public was asked to exit the meeting.

6. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheillane Reyes

Sheillane Reyes
Recorder