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ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
HAWAIʻI TOURISM AUTHORITY
Thursday, October 30, 2025, 9:30 a.m.

Hybrid In-Person & Virtual Meeting

Hawaiʻi Convention Center
Third Floor, Room 323AB
1801 Kalākaua Avenue
Honolulu, Hawaiʻi 96815

MINUTES OF THE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT:	James McCully (Co-Vice Chair), Leah Belmonte (Zoom), Mericia Palma Elmore, Joel Guy, Troy Lazaro, Danny Ojiri, Christian West, Linda Wong
MEMBER NOT PRESENT:	Kimberly Agas (Co-Vice Chair), Terry Fischer, Lisa Paulson, Lānaʻi Tabura
HTA STAFF PRESENT:	Caroline Anderson, David Mr. Uchiyama, Talon Kishi, Jill Radke, Carole Hagihara, Lindsay Sanborn, Amalia Kartika
GUESTS:	Sen. Kurt Fevella, Laci Goshi, Jennifer Chun, Jeffrey Essinger, Aaron Salā, Tom Mullen, Cathy Ritter, Carmela Resuma, Allison Schaefers
LEGAL COUNSEL:	John Cole

1. Call to Order

Co-Vice Chair McCully called the meeting to order at 9:31 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

HTA Chief Administrative Officer Mr. Uchiyama conducted the roll call, and members were in attendance except for Members Agas, Fischer, Paulson, and Tabura, who were excused.

3. Opening Protocol

Member Lazaro gave the opening cultural protocol. Sharing the concept of working together and continuously building upon what was accomplished, he referred to the white Paʻakai, Hawaiian salt from Kilohana, the purest substance used for blessings and Lāʻau Lapaʻau (healing), the result of people working together. He ended with Oli Pale and expressed his wish that the HTA would never forget its vision and would look to the past, stewarding what it could so that future generations would prosper.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully also shared the metaphor of salt with tourism, reminding Board members that salt was one of the earliest means of value because it could preserve food, although it could easily disappear in the rain and return to the earth. Tourism in Hawaiʻi was similar in that it was a precious thing that preserved lives, but, for the same reason, it could disappear. Therefore, it was the Board's *Kuleana* to bear in mind the possibility of losing such a precious thing.

4. Report of Permitted Interactions at Informational Meetings or Presentations Not Organized by the Board Under HRS section 92-2.5(e)

There was no input on Permitted Interaction Groups.

5. Approval of Meeting Minutes of the August 28, 2025, and September 11, 2025 Advisory Board Meetings

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully asked whether members had been able to review the minutes of the previous meeting and encouraged them to take enough time to review the written minutes, given the importance of their accuracy. There was no discussion on the minutes.

Member Elmore proposed a motion to accept the minutes, and Member Lazaro seconded it. Mr. Uchiyama conducted the roll call vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully asked Mr. Uchiyama to ensure that the minutes reflected that he was presiding over Board meetings as Acting Co-Vice Chair.

6. CEO Report

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully introduced the HTA President/CEO, Caroline Anderson, who expressed her appreciation to the members for their attendance at the meeting. She also expressed gratitude to the HTA staff for their tireless efforts, noting that their contributions were reflected in the CEO report.

She highlighted key issues that had been addressed over the preceding two months since the last meeting. Among these was the Hawaiʻi Convention Center (HCC) rooftop project, which had entered the contracting phase. Swinerton Builders had been selected as the contractor, with a projected start date of January 2, 2026.

Regarding brand marketing, Ms. Anderson invited Dr. Salā, the President/CEO, and Mr. Mullen, the Chief Operating Officer, of the Hawaiʻi Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB) to provide a brief update on the progress of the Maui Recovery Campaign. Both HVCB leaders expressed their appreciation to the HTA for facilitating the project's operation and execution.

Mr. Mullen regretted that he had been unable to upload his presentation to the CEO and promised to share the available information. He reminded Board members that the campaign had been divided into four major components —wholesale, direct booking, social media, and public relations —valued at $6 million, of which a major portion of the budget had been allocated to wholesale. As of September 2025, the plan was for campaign tactics to focus on consumer channels from July through December 2025, with many tour operator channels being concentrated in the September–October timeframe. Packages offered a minimum of 20% added value, and to date, the campaign had generated approximately 38,000 incremental room nights annually.

The following growth in year-over-year occupancy rates in West Maui had been observed:

Month	2024	2025
July	57.9%	66.2%
August	50.8%	61.2%
September	49.8%	61.1%

Mr. Mullen noted that October data reflected a similar upward trend.

He added that, in terms of direct bookings, the campaign had achieved over 105 million impressions, with 222,000 users navigating to the special offers page, where Maui businesses had extended direct booking incentives to visitors.

Mr. Mullen noted that the social media component had targeted travelers in the Los Angeles and San Diego markets via Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. This effort had generated 29.3 million impressions, 4.7 million video views, and over 90,000 clicks on the special offer page.

The public relations campaign was to include a series of media visits, with Entertainment Tonight scheduled to return to the Lailei area from November 5–9, 2025.

Mr. Mullen admitted that the market remained challenging but noted that many tactics were still underway and that preliminary assessments indicated these efforts were proving effective.

Dr. Salā reported that incoming data suggested the Maui Emergency Marketing Campaign was achieving its objectives, but he added that industry feedback indicated that while Maui had benefited from targeted assistance, the broader state remained in urgent need. Dr. Salā reminded Board members that the original $10 million budget had been reduced to $6 million, and he proposed reinstating the $4 million shortfall, citing continued market weakness in the first quarter of 2026. He emphasized the need for an immediate infusion of energy and expressed hope for renewed engagement with wholesalers to bolster performance in early 2026.

Dr. Salā recommended revisiting the plan presented to the Board by the HVCB in early 2025, which proposed three market saturation campaigns in calendar year 2026 with a total budget of $10 million. He noted that the most successful outcomes had been observed through Expedia and Costco, both of which focused on direct sales, thus indicating the strength of the FIT (Free Independent Traveler) market. Dr. Salā suggested that saturation campaigns in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and potentially the Pacific Northwest could significantly drive sales. Based on current trends, he asserted that a robust campaign funded above the base budget would be critically important to the State’s economic recovery.

Dr. Salā added that the HVCB was proud of their creative campaign currently underway and reiterated that an additional $4 million would be essential to secure sales in the first quarter of 2026. The HVCB also advocated revisiting the incremental campaign strategy through market saturation in calendar year 2026 to support the State's continued economic viability.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully invited Board members to ask questions and recalled that several members had been unavailable for the previous robust debate on fund allocation. He asked whether the decisions made at that time had effectively supported Maui’s recovery and progress toward pre-crisis tourism levels, rather than the alternative strategies considered.

Dr. Salā responded affirmatively, stating that the approach had been appropriate given the critical situation on Maui. He explained that the HVCB’s contract with HTA typically operated at a higher level of the marketing funnel, but the campaign had required a shift toward direct conversion tactics. Although this was not the HVCB’s standard practice, the organization had received clear direction from HTA and had executed their program accordingly.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully summarized the strategy as emphasizing “heads in beds” rather than brand elevation.

Dr. Salā concluded by noting that with visitor volume now increasing, there was a pressing need to reinforce the brand. He observed that the brand’s perceived value had diminished compared to five years prior and emphasized the importance of integrating direct conversion efforts with initiatives to elevate brand quality.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully reminded Board members that any entity requesting funding from the legislature, as the HVCB had done earlier in the meeting, must demonstrate a clear cause-and-effect relationship supported by measurable outcomes. He regretted the absence of bar charts to make the improvement in occupancy more apparent.

Dr. Salā responded that the HVCB was prepared to provide additional data upon request.

Ms. Anderson thanked Dr. Salā and Mr. Mullen for their presentation and proceeded with the CEO report.

She reported that the tourism conference held in September received positive feedback and was attended by many Board members. More than 560 people had attended the conference and the active participation of both the visitor industry, and the broader community had been much appreciated. Attendance exceeded that of 2024, and Ms. Anderson extended her thanks to Board members for their attendance and to the diligent efforts of the HTA staff who organized the event.

Ms. Anderson noted that the HTA was developing both its Strategic Plan and Destination Management Action Plans (DMAPs), with destination managers and the HTA planner engaging with communities to gather input from residents and industry stakeholders. Ms. Anderson expressed her confidence that the data collected would support the development of actionable plans in collaboration with the advisory groups assigned to the DMAPs. She noted that Ms. Cathy Ritter, the consultant assisting with the Strategic Plan, was present at the meeting and informed the Board that the draft plan would be circulated for review the following month.

Board members had no questions, and Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully thanked Ms. Anderson for her report.

7. Action on Requested Changes to Standing Committee Memberships

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully initiated a discussion on the selection of members to the standing committees, recalling that membership of the standing committees had been established at the meeting held on September 11, 2025, but adding that since then several changes had been requested, as follows:

- Member Belmonte had requested to step down from the Film Production Standing Committee
- Member Tabura had requested to step down from the Branding Standing Committee.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully emphasized the importance of maintaining sufficient membership on each committee to ensure quora for meetings, inquiring whether any members had reviewed their schedules and could commit to filling the resulting vacancies.

- Member Lazaro volunteered to join the Film Production Standing Committee.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully reminded the Board that such commitments were binding and added that, as Chair of the CEO Search Permitted Interaction Group (PIG), he had asked Co-Vice Chair Agas to serve on the committee, making the PIG complete with six members. Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully expressed his belief that Co-Vice Chair Agas would bring valuable professional and cultural experience to the group.

He noted that there was still a vacancy on both the Administrative and Audit Standing Committee (AASC) and on the Branding Standing Committee (BSC), while he believed that the Film Production Standing Committee (FPSC) could also accommodate one additional member. The response regarding the Hoʻokahua Committee was inaudible.

Referring to earlier remarks by Dr. Salā about the Maui Recovery Campaign and the challenges facing the Hawaiʻi brand, Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully asked members whether they could serve on the Branding Standing Committee.

- Member Elmore volunteered to serve on the Branding Standing Committee, thereby completing the committee rosters.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully asked staff to confirm that they had recorded the updated committee assignments.

Following a brief pause in the recording, Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully requested that the record reflect the following updates: Member Elmore had been added to the Branding Standing Committee; Member Lazaro had been added to the Film Production Standing Committee; and Co-Vice Chair Agas had joined the CEO Search Permitted Interaction Group (PIG).

Member Guy proposed a motion approving the changes in committee membership and the motion was seconded by Member West.

Mr. Uchiyama conducted the roll call vote, and the motion was carried unanimously.

8. Report of the Branding Standing Committee of their meeting held on October 8, 2025

Member Ojiri, the Chair of the Branding Standing Committee (BSC), reported on the meeting of October 8, 2025 at which Members Agas, Lazaro and Fischer were present. Member Ojiri was excused from the meeting because he was taking part in a Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (DBEDT) business mission in Japan with Governor Green, Dir. Tokioka, Senate President Kochi, and other legislators. Member Ojiri promised to give Board members more information about the trip later.

All nine global marketing teams (GMTs) participated in the October 8 meeting under the direction of Acting Chief Branding Officer Goo. Member Ojiri added that the full presentations could be accessed on the HTA website, noting that each presentation aligned with sustainable, responsible, regenerative tourism principles that would benefit Hawaiʻi. Each presentation provided an overview of market-specific target segments, focusing on high-value, mindful travelers, with each plan tailored to the marketing conditions and industry maturity of the respective source countries.

Member Ojiri emphasized that there were no uniform solutions and noted that the BSC reviewed all the plans and engaged with each team, obtaining answers to thoughtful questions and feedback on programs. The committee members emphasized the importance of longer stays for visitors, the authenticity of the message, and spreading the message and its promotions to all the Hawaiian Islands. Mr. Uchiyama expressed concern about the year's short-term booking pace, asking the GMTs to monitor it and report to him accordingly.

Member Ojiri gave a brief summary of the presentations of the nine GMTs.

Europe

Ms. Amy Thomas reported on developments in the European market, noting that a collaboration had been established with the British Museum. This institution received about 6.2 million visitors annually, with plans underway for an exhibition exploring the historical connections between Great Britain and the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi, beginning with Captain Cook's landing in Kona in 1778, which marked the onset of European interest in the Hawaiian Islands.

Canada

Mr. Colin Wood described the Canada market as particularly sensitive to messaging from the White House and explained that Hawaiʻi Tourism Canada had implemented strategies to reinforce Hawai'i's image as a welcoming destination and differentiate Hawaiʻi from the continental United States. He observed that while some Canadian travelers expressed discomfort with the broader United States, they tended to view Hawaiʻi more favorably.

Oceania

Mr. Darragh Walshe expressed optimism about a projected 5.7% increase in arrivals, bringing the total to approximately 205,000 visitors. He noted that half of this business consisted of repeat travelers, suggesting that the remaining 50% were first-time visitors, to whom marketing efforts would focus. The aim would be to attract a new generation of experienced, mindful, and high-spending travelers, with women over 50 also identified as a high-value demographic. Mr. Walshe believed that the Oceania market was stabilizing to serve higher-quality spending visitors better. He added that the collaboration with Sea Cleaners was to continue.

Japan

Ms. Ayako Ishiwari outlined a two-pronged strategic approach to the Japanese market, emphasizing the importance of both short-term initiatives to support immediate conversion and medium- and long-term efforts to strengthen the brand. Three key market segments were targeted: affluent travelers, active seniors, and a new generation of first-time visitors to Hawaiʻi. Ms. Ishiwari noted that senior travelers were being encouraged to extend their stays and explore multiple islands.

Korea

Ms. Irene Lee had reported that the Korean market was emerging from a period of political uncertainty following the impeachment and imprisonment of the former president. She noted increased optimism regarding Korea's economic outlook despite challenges with airlift capacity, particularly since Hawaiian Airlines was scheduled to cease operations in Korea effective November 2025. However, Ms. Lee was confident that Korean Air, Asiana Airlines, and hybrid carrier Air Premia would compensate for the reduction, with additional carriers, including Trinity Airways and Jin Air, showing strong interest in expanding service to Hawaiʻi by late 2026 and early 2027. Hawaiʻi Tourism Korea actively collaborated on sports marketing initiatives and worked closely with the Honolulu Marathon to promote the Korean market.

China

Mr. Denis Suo highlighted the collaborative campaign involving DBEDT, the Hawaiʻi Coffee Association, and tourism stakeholders. The initiative aimed to position coffee not merely as a souvenir but as a meaningful memory and tourism tool. Mr. Suo noted that the market remained cautious about messaging from the White House and that efforts were underway to counter these perceptions by emphasizing Hawaii's welcoming stance in contrast to the continental United States. He added that sister state relationships with both Guangdong and Hainan would be leveraged to support these efforts.

Taiwan

Mr. Andrew Koh stated that efforts were underway in Taiwan to reestablish the relationship with the Hawaiʻi brand following a multi-year pause. Initiatives to reconnect Taiwanese consumers with Hawaiʻi included cultural engagement through hula performances and the pursuit of direct flight opportunities.

Meetings, Conventions, and Incentives (MCI)

Mr. Ojiri invited Ms. Lynn Whitehead, Vice President of Global MCI Sales for Meet Hawaiʻi, to provide a remote report from IMEX Las Vegas.

Ms. Whitehead greeted the Board members and provided a brief update on IMEX, reporting that two weeks previously Meet Hawaiʻi had hosted its inaugural Lūʻau Hawaiʻi, not as a performance, but as a cultural gathering. Members of the local Hawaiian community in Las Vegas, including musicians, hula artists, and cultural practitioners, were invited to join Hawaii's partners at a welcoming event held before the start of IMEX. Ms. Whitehead described the gathering as simple yet powerful, designed to foster authentic connection to Hawaiʻi through culture and aloha rather than entertainment.

Ms. Whitehead explained to Board members that the vision for Lūʻau Hawaiʻi was to make it an annual signature tradition—a networking event that would unite partners, elevate Hawaii's presence, and celebrate the people and values that make Hawaiʻi unique. This foundation of aloha had enabled Meet Hawaiʻi to deliver one of its strongest showings at IMEX to date.

Board members were reminded that IMEX America remained the largest global meetings and incentives trade show, with a strong U.S. buyer base and continued importance for Hawaii's MCI business. More than 17,000 people and 6,000 buyers from more than 62 countries attended IMEX 2025, with approximately 92,000 scheduled meetings taking place over the three-day event, enabling Hawaiʻi to make a stronger impact.

Meet Hawaiʻi was represented by 38 partners across all islands, and the Hawaiʻi team collectively conducted approximately 900 appointments, generating an estimated 600 qualified leads for future MCI programs.

A major milestone achieved during the event was the signing of a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the HVCB and the Singapore Tourism Board. This innovative trans-Pacific alliance aimed to connect U.S. Pacific Asian markets and position both Hawaiʻi and Singapore as gateway destinations for U.S.-based associations expanding internationally. The partnership included joint positioning as global association hubs, collaboration on marketing and educational initiatives, and shared client introductions to support international bids.

Ms. Whitehead concluded by noting that the success of Lūʻau Hawaiʻi, combined with the energy at the Hawaiʻi booth, had generated meaningful visibility and momentum for Hawaiʻi, reinforcing its role as a trusted, world-class meetings destination grounded in culture, connection, and community.

Mr. Ojiri thanked Ms. Whitehead for her report and introduced a presentation by Dr. Salā on behalf of the HVCB.

Dr. Salā noted that 80% of total arrivals originated from Hawaiʻi Tourism USA, adding that the HVCB's plan differed from those of other GMTs in that it constituted a branding contract rather than a direct sales contract. He explained that the need to elevate the brand's quality was underscored by the fact that consumer demand was largely driven by cost, which is why the HVCB had created "Ola Hawaiʻi" as the foundational concept for the brand.

Member Ojiri read a section from Dr. Salā's executive summary, stating that the 2026 U.S. Brand Marketing Plan was more than a marketing roadmap but represented a strategic reset. Hawaii's future did not lie in competing on cost and convenience, but in cultivating a market position rooted in authenticity, integrity, and relevance. The HVCB's plan aimed to engage Hawaii's target travelers on platforms that mattered, telling stories that resonated, and being designed to ensure that Hawaiʻi remained not only competitive but compelling in a crowded global landscape. Together with the HTA and the communities it served, the HVCB presented the plan as both a promise and a participatory invitation to build a tourism future that would sustain Hawaii's people, protect its places, and inspire the world.

Mr. Ojiri remarked that this presentation provided the best possible conclusion to his marketing review.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully commented that the Board had been fortunate to receive valuable reference and context from Dr. Salā and Mr. Mullen before Mr. Ojiri's report. He expressed interest in understanding how to effectuate the concept that the Board's role was not advertising, but branding.

9. Report of the Film Production Standing Committee of their meeting held on October 16, 2025

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully introduced Member Elmore, Chair of the Film Production Standing Committee (FPSC).

Member Elmore thanked Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully and confirmed that the FPSC had achieved the full complement of members. She expressed appreciation to Member Lazaro for joining the meeting and stated that the committee had begun its October 16th meeting by reiterating its mission. Members agreed that it was important to define the purpose and objectives of this newly formed committee.

The committee had entered Executive Session to discuss the plan for the Hawaiʻi Film and Television History Museum, the proposal for which had been shared with the HTA staff and was shortly to be distributed to Board members.

Member Elmore outlined the three primary components of the proposal. The first component involved a multiphase approach, beginning with the development of popup exhibits that could be deployed quickly, efficiently, and at low cost. After consultation with Dir. Tokioka and the DBEDT team, venues such as the Hawaiʻi State Foundation on Culture and the Arts and available space at the Capitol Modern (the former Hawaiʻi State Art Museum) had been proposed. One suggested project was a popup exhibit centered on the series "Chief of War," which had generated significant current interest. The committee also discussed other productions with historical and cultural relevance, such as "Lost" and "Lilo and Stitch," as potential candidates for inclusion in the initial phase.

The second component of the proposal would involve establishing a film grant fund to support local talent and filmmakers, to be developed in collaboration with the HVCB and aligned with the theme "Hawaiʻi stays with you." The proposal envisaged local filmmakers producing short films inspired by the theme introduced at the recent tourism conference.

These short films would be showcased by small, targeted film festivals whose organization would comprise the third component. These festivals would be held in strategic locations to draw attention to Hawaiʻi as both a cultural destination and a viable location for film production, reinforcing the message that Hawaiʻi is not only a place to visit but also a thriving filmmaking hub.

Member Elmore noted that the proposal comprised 12 pages and would be shared with Board members in the near future after its review by the HTA staff.

Member Elmore stated that the forthcoming motion would address the budgetary implications of the proposal, explaining that it had been drafted by HTA staff in collaboration with the Dir. Tokioka of DBEDT. The recommendation was for the HTA staff and the DBEDT Director to continue evaluating the proposal in partnership with the DBEDT Director, with the proposed funding source being the HTA's unallocated brand marketing funds, with an initial allocation of $200,000 designated for the pilot filmmaker grant program.

Member Elmore proposed a motion to approve the recommendation of the Film Production Standing Committee and Member Wong seconded the motion.

Mr. Uchiyama conducted the roll call vote, and the motion was carried unanimously.

10. Report of the Administrative Standing Committee of their meeting held on October 20, 2025

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully, serving as Chair of the Administrative and Audit Standing Committee (AASC), presented the committee's report.

He noted that Vice Chair Guy and Members Belmonte, Elmore, and Paulson had been present Members Ojiri and Lazaro had attended as non-voting participants. He thanked them for their attendance and encouraged all Board members to participate in as many committee meetings as possible. The HTA staff in attendance included Mr. Uchiyama, Mr. Kishi, and Ms. Kartika while Dir. Tokioka had joined as a guest.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully referred members to the nine-page meeting minutes. The committee had reviewed the proposed charter for the AASC, and the draft bylaws prepared by HTA staff, consistent with the approach taken for all standing committees. The committee also reviewed previous bylaws and the historical roles of the AASC, noting that in the past the AASC had been responsible for establishing and executing audits to ensure financial integrity, enforcing a code of conduct related to financial matters, and addressing legislative and governmental affairs.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully noted that the only responsibility proposed in the draft charter was the recruitment, hiring, contract terms, and evaluation of the President/CEO. The committee recommended extending the bylaws proposed by the HTA staff to include the CEO and also that the AASC retain oversight of both the bylaws and legislative and governmental interactions, as it had in the past. Although most legislative matters would be assigned to the legislative PIG, the AASC could maintain oversight in this area.

Regarding the ongoing CEO search, Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully reported that a draft letter had been reviewed by the committee and distributed to all Board members. If approved, the letter would be forwarded to the Director of DBEDT for transmission to the list of nominees provided by Bishop & Company. The firm had referred 23 applicants from a pool of over 300 to the Board for consideration. The list of names would not be disclosed, and the version received by the committee did not include contact information, which remained with the DBEDT

Director. Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully invited Board members to suggest amendments to the draft letter.

He further reported that the CEO Search PIG had been fully constituted with the participation of Member Agas. While the Board might offer recommendations to the PIG, its primary purpose would be to review the parameters of the previous search. If possible, the PIG would also interview with the Bishop & Company search manager to gain insights and suggestions. Although the firm's contract had expired, Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully had spoken with the individual, who expressed willingness to assist with the ongoing search and to engage in discussions with the PIG.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully noted that the CEO Search PIG was not subject to the Sunshine Law and therefore was not bound by formal notice periods for meetings. This flexibility would allow the PIG to act more swiftly, and it was expected to meet prior to the November AASC meeting.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully referred to an additional attachment included in the Board members' meeting materials, explaining that, historically, the Board had annually drafted and approved a resolution delegating authority to present HTA's policy positions. While the President/CEO was statutorily designated to represent HTA to the legislature, the resolution had traditionally authorized additional representation at the federal, state, and county levels. This often included the Board Chair or a designee, such as the Chair of the legislative PIG. The resolution also outlined HTA's legislative priorities for the upcoming year and was typically drafted by staff and approved by the Board.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully suggested that the resolution should be reviewed at the December 18, 2025, meeting of the Advisory Board, undertaking to confer with AG Cole, Ms. Anderson, and Dir. Tokioka and confirm that the matter remained appropriate for discussion and approval by the Board at that meeting.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully proposed that the next AASC meeting be scheduled for November 11, 2025, and recommended that all Board committee chairs attend. He noted that, as the bylaws defining the respective committees were to be discussed, it was essential for each chair to participate in the deliberations. He commented that committee functions need not be limited to the initial draft of their respective charters, as members might wish to propose additional responsibilities, and went on to report that he was collaborating with the Vice Chair of the AASC on definitions, in recognition of the necessity of articulating the nature of an advisory board to ensure that future members, who would not have participated in the current discussions, could understand the legislative intent. He indicated that discussions with the legislature and the DBEDT Director were planned to clarify the amended Statute 201(b).

Member Guy proposed a motion to disseminate and forward the draft CEO search letter to the DBEDT Director for distribution to the list of 23 applicants recommended by Bishop & Co. Member West seconded the motion, Mr. Uchiyama conducted the roll call vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

11. Discussion and/or Action on Advisory Board Roles & Responsibilities

In collaboration with Dir. Tokioka, the HTA staff had developed a draft recommendation for discussion, scheduled to appear on the agenda for the December 2025 meeting of the Advisory Board. This item overlapped with ongoing discussions at the AASC and previous Board meetings and Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully requested that any comments be brought to his attention by Board members for inclusion in the deliberations.

He reminded members that an advisory board was distinctly different from a governance board. The HTA Board had previously held decision-making authority and its decisions had been binding on HTA staff, but the Board now functions as an advisory body, offering non-binding suggestions and advice with the objective of providing support rather than direction.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully introduced the concept of PESTEL, a stakeholder-based framework for boards referring to political, economic, sociological, technological, environmental, and legal dimensions. He explained that this stakeholder-based approach defined the advisory role the Board was now expected to adopt, encompassing community and economic interests as well as political representation. He suggested that this framework could serve as a lens for forward movement.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully stated that the agenda item would be postponed until the December 2025 meeting and that all Board members would receive the draft recommendation by email to serve as a basis for further discussion. He asked whether any member had additional matters to raise.

Member Wong asked whether the CEO search process was to be reopened, given that changes had occurred since the position was first advertised in 2024.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully acknowledged the question and noted that circumstances had changed, observing that the more than 300 applicants who had applied in the previous year had done so under unfavorable conditions, whereas the situation in 2025 was markedly different. He emphasized that the HTA had evolved, and the President/CEO position now carried greater authority. Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully reiterated that the Board's sole responsibility was to make the appointment, a matter of significance given the uncertainty surrounding the upcoming legislative session. He concurred with Member Wong's observation that changes had occurred since August 2024, when the initial applications had been received, and stated that it was incumbent upon the Board to revisit the question. He affirmed that the CEO Search PIG would consider this matter.

Member Wong stated that she was in favor of reopening the application process to attract a broader and more current pool of candidates.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully responded that this raised the question of whether funds would be used to resume the previous search or initiate a new one, noting that such decisions should not rest solely with the CEO Search PIG but must also be considered by the full Board, as they fell within its *kuleana*.

Member West, who had served on the previous Board, also expressed support for reopening the search, noting that the prior search had taken place under a cloud of uncertainty that might have discouraged some candidates. He suggested that those individuals might now be willing to reconsider. Given the importance of selecting the most qualified candidate, Member West believed that a fresh start was appropriate. He was uncertain about the funding of this exercise but questioned whether the Board could afford not to pursue a renewed search. He endorsed Member Wong's proposal and reiterated his support for a fresh approach.

Member Lazaro recommended utilizing the existing pool of applicants, citing the investment already made in identifying those candidates, and arguing that it would be fiscally irresponsible not to consider them. He commented that it was important to give these candidates a fair opportunity and noted that candidates willing to serve under the previous administration were likely to be even more motivated to work with the current leadership. He added that applicants for a CEO position typically understood their qualifications and contributions and were not entering the process speculatively. He concluded that reviewing the existing shortlist was in the best interest of both the HTA and the State.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully commented that this discussion illustrated the range of perspectives provided by the Board's diverse composition. He emphasized that it was incumbent upon the Board to evaluate the current applicants and to use the vetting process as a learning opportunity. He suggested that this experience could inform future searches, particularly if none of the existing candidates met expectations. In that case, the job description for the next search would need to be refined. He concluded that reviewing the current shortlist could either result in the selection of an excellent CEO or lead to a more effective search process in the future.

Member Guy expressed support for exploring how the most qualified candidate could be selected for this critical position, and reminded members that this was the sole decision the

Board was authorized to make, yet it carried significant implications and was likely to have a broad ripple effect in supporting the tourism industry statewide. Referring to the draft letter, Member Guy asked whether expanding the search would affect communication with the current shortlist.

Member Elmore, noting that she was new to the Board and preferred to listen rather than to speak at this time, echoed Member Guy's comments and observed that if a new search were to be launched, the letter to shortlisted candidates would need to be amended. She asked whether the individuals on the shortlist had been informed of their status.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully responded that the candidates had not yet been notified, and the draft letter would serve as their first notice.

Member Elmore stated that if the candidates had already been informed, they should be advised that the search was to be reopened and that they were no longer the definitive top 23, as new applicants were to be screened. She emphasized that the CEO search was a matter of vital importance and expressed appreciation for the points raised. From a fiscal responsibility standpoint, she acknowledged Member Lazaro's earlier remarks regarding the investment already made and indicated a preference for considering the existing candidates before initiating a new search.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully stated that when the CEO Search PIG convened, probably during the following week, he would ensure that Bishop & Company was represented to provide a professional recruiter's perspective in the context of November 2025. He noted that individual Board members could contribute constructively in either open or executive sessions and clarified that the PIG would not report to the Board until its final report was issued, at which point a CEO would have been selected and the PIG would be dissolved.

Member Elmore referred to Member West's comment and emphasized that while she was uncertain about the previous focus of the CEO search, it was clearly now essential for the incoming CEO to have strong relationships with the legislature. She asked whether this had been a prior focus and expressed hope that the selected candidate would be rooted in the community and capable of protecting both the tourism industry and the Board through legislative relationships.

Member Ojiri, who was also new to the process, stated that he found the discussion informative and raised two key concerns: the process needed to be completed and done correctly. Referring to Member Wong's earlier comment, he noted that a year had passed since the position was first advertised. He asked whether the Board was required to engage a third-party recruiter, given the associated costs.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully confirmed that there was no obligation to do so.

Member Ojiri observed that the pool of qualified individuals was limited and questioned whether a third party was necessary if the Board was specifically seeking someone with strong legislative relationships.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully agreed, remarking that the Board would not be seeking a global academic figure—such as a world leader from the University of Paris—to relocate to Hawaiʻi and build relationships with the governor and legislature.

Member Wong stated that, given the existing applicant pool, the Board should begin by evaluating the 23 shortlisted candidates. If none met the desired criteria, the Board could then either conduct its own search or seek additional applicants. She concurred with Member Lazaro's earlier point about assessing the current shortlist for alignment with community and legislative relationship requirements.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully reminded members that, as an agency attached to DBEDT, the Board was bound by procurement responsibilities. Accordingly, all actions would require review and approval by AG Cole and Dir. Tokioka to ensure compliance. He then informed members that Sen. Fevella was in the audience and invited him to contribute to the discussion.

Sen. Fevella acknowledged the desire to make changes but emphasized that funds had already been expended in selecting the 23 applicants. He recalled that previous hearings had underscored the importance of completing the selection process and expressed opposition to prolonging the process, stating that the 23 shortlisted candidates should be informed that the HTA intended to reopen the search. He noted that the funding for the CEO position had not changed and that the existing applicants should therefore continue to be considered. While recognizing that the Board's composition had changed, he asserted that the responsibility for selection and evaluation now rested with the new Board. He believed that it would be unfair to the 23 candidates on the existing shortlist for the search to be reopened and advised against informing them of such a decision. The Senator reminded the Board that the legislature expected the new President/CEO to assume office as soon as possible.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully thanked Sen. Fevella and asked whether any Board members had questions for him. Hearing none, he expressed appreciation for the Senator's remarks and called on Member Belmonte.

Member Belmonte agreed that the existing 23 candidates should be considered before proceeding further, particularly in light of the investment made with Bishop & Company. She also concurred that the draft letter should clearly reflect this position.

Upon being asked for clarification by Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully, Member Belmonte explained that her intent was to indicate that the search could be reopened if no suitable applicant was identified within the existing shortlist.

Member West asked whether the shortlisted applicants were aware of their status as part of the group of 23. Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully confirmed that they were unaware of this. Member West responded that, following this discussion, the Board now had that knowledge.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully reiterated that the applicants themselves would remain unaware until they received the formal notification by letter, and Member West responded that, at that moment, no one knew who comprised the group of 23. Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully corrected the figure, stating that the shortlist now consisted of 22 individuals, as one applicant had informed DBEDT of their decision to withdraw from consideration.

Member West commented that this development supported his earlier point that circumstances had changed significantly. Expressing support for retaining the original shortlist due to the financial investment made in its development, he added that members of the previous Board were aware that a cloud had lingered over the HTA, and this context needed to be considered. Member West acknowledged that “fresh start” might not have been the most appropriate term, but he supported reopening the search and expanding the process to include the existing shortlist. He suggested that there might be qualified individuals who had previously declined to participate but are now interested.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully responded that he hoped to receive input from the Bishop & Company executive on the criteria and parameters used to develop the original shortlist, noting that the alignment of those criteria with the HTA Board's interests in 2024 was unknown. He was also uncertain whether emphasis had been placed on selecting a unifying figure or a results-driven leader.

Member Ojiri agreed with this assessment and emphasized the need to review both the previous parameters and the current criteria. He noted that the context one year prior had been markedly different and cautioned against perpetuating outdated expectations. He stated that any new hire should represent a fresh perspective, regardless of whether the individual came from the existing shortlist. He stressed the importance of evaluating whether the original parameters remained applicable to present-day requirements.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully asked AG Cole whether such a review would be limited to the CEO Search PIG or could be discussed within the AASC, where broader participation would be possible, and AG Cole suggested that the Bishop & Company manager could be invited to attend the AASC meeting, thus allowing all members to pose questions to them directly.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully thanked AG Cole for the suggestion and stated that he would inquire about the manager's availability for the next AASC meeting and adjust the schedule if necessary.

Member Elmore, referring to Sen. Fevella's earlier concern about timeliness, asked about the timeline for the original CEO search.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully responded that the intended completion date had been December 2024. However, the timeline was not met due to several factors, most notably the legislature's decision to review and amend the HTA's structure. He explained that this had made it difficult to conduct a viable CEO search, as the process risked exposing applicant identities and information in a manner that could be detrimental. He emphasized that the HTA had a duty to protect the confidentiality of individual applicants.

Member Guy expressed appreciation for the shift in focus from the shortlist to the position's criteria. He stated that this was a critical consideration for both the CEO Search PIG and the Advisory Board. Acknowledging that many changes had occurred since the search was first launched, he asked about HTA's aspirations for the incoming leader. Member Guy agreed that legislative strength was essential and had repeatedly been emphasized. He hoped the selected leader would be capable of building strong relationships within communities to address challenges, thereby reducing the pressure on the CEO to persuade legislators. He stated that the effectiveness of the organization's work would speak for itself. Member Guy welcomed the discussion on parameters and expressed interest in learning about the criteria used by Bishop & Company through a meeting with the recruitment manager. He expressed his hope of gaining insight into how the recruitment criteria could be refined to reflect current priorities, noting that the Strategic Plan was to be published soon and emphasizing the importance of selecting a candidate capable of implementing it.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully expressed appreciation for the depth of the discussion. As Chair of both the AASC and the CEO Search PIG, and serving as Co-Vice Chair of the Board, he acknowledged that many considerations were involved and stated that he would confer with the HTA staff.

Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully stated that he would review the implications of the motion approving the dissemination of the draft letter with HTA staff and the DBEDT Director in light of the discussion that had just taken place. He confirmed with Mr. Uchiyama and AG Cole that the vote on the motion had been taken.

12. Adjournment

Thanking members for their time and dedication, Acting Co-Vice Chair McCully adjourned the meeting at 10:56 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheillane Reyes

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Sheillane Reyes
Recorder