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ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
HAWAI'I TOURISM AUTHORITY
Thursday, December 18, 2025, 9:30 a.m.

Hybrid Meeting

Hawai'i Convention Center
Parking Level | Executive Boardroom A
1801 Kalakaua Avenue
Honolulu, Hawaii 96815

MINUTES OF THE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Kimberly Agas (Co Vice Chair), Leah Belmonte, Mericia Palma Elmore, Joel Guy (Zoom), Troy Lazaro, Danny Ojiri, Lisa Paulson, Lāna'i Tabura, Terry Fischer (Zoom)
MEMBER NOT PRESENT:	James McCully (Co-Vice Chair), Chris West, Linda Wong
HTA STAFF PRESENT:	Caroline Anderson, David Uchiyama, Talon Kishi, Jill Radke, Milton Lafitaga, Carole Hagihara, Lindsay Sanborn
GUESTS:	Toni Marie Davis, Allison Schaefers, Kara Imai, Lei-Ann Field, Teri Orton, Jennifer Chun, Carmela Resuma, Michael Carr
LEGAL COUNSEL:	John Cole

1. Call to Order

Co-Vice Chair Agas called the meeting to order at 9:33 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 conducted the roll call, and members were in attendance except for McCully, West, and Wong, who were excused.

3. Opening Protocol

Mr. Lafitaga recalled growing up doing tough farm work and learning from his father to recognize "salt of the Earth" people—humble, honest, reliable, hard-working individuals who form the backbone of society. He explained salt's historical value and symbolism (preserving and protecting), then connect that idea to the Hawaiʻi Tourism Authority (HTA) staff and the HTA advisory board: each is an important component, and together they can move forward to preserve and protect Hawaii's culture, people, and resources while strengthening their bond.

4. Approval of Meeting Minutes of the October 30, 2025 Advisory Board Meeting

Member Elmore moved the motion to accept the minutes, and member Paulson seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

5. 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.

6. CEO Report

Ms. Anderson provided a comprehensive CEO report, beginning with an overview of current staff activities and directing the Board to the written CEO report included in the meeting handout. She first highlighted Hawaii's visitor industry's overall performance and expressed appreciation to Ms. Chun and her team for their continued work in compiling and analyzing visitor statistics.

Ms. Anderson reported that the most recent available visitor data, from October, indicates that visitor spending remains strong. Total visitor spending increased by 5 percent, reaching $17.8 billion. Per-person, per-day spending also grew by 4 percent to $253. Additionally, state tax revenue generated by visitor activity is tracking at $2.5 billion, representing a 5 percent increase.

Despite these positive indicators, Ms. Anderson cautioned that both the visitor industry and the broader economy are approaching a pivotal period. She noted that market conditions are beginning to soften and that Maui continues to experience a long-term recovery. International markets are under additional pressure due to weaker foreign currencies relative to the U.S. dollar and the added strain of imposed tariffs. She further explained that air travel capacity is shrinking as airlines consolidate flight routes both domestically and internationally. Another significant challenge identified was the upcoming closure of the Hawaiʻi Convention Center in 2026–2027, which is expected to reduce citywide business and convention-related travel.

Ms. Anderson stated that, in light of these challenges, the HTA is actively evaluating how it can respond strategically to mitigate these conditions. She noted that later agenda items, including a presentation from the Hawaiʻi Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB), would outline actions being taken within the U.S. market to address these concerns.

Turning to organizational updates, Ms. Anderson shared that the HTA is currently recruiting for an administrative assistant position to support the finance and procurement team. She expressed appreciation to Mr. Arakawa for his ongoing work in stakeholder engagement, including collaboration with the Legislature and outreach to the visitor industry, as well as his efforts related to community and destination management.

Ms. Anderson emphasized that staff have been actively engaged in community outreach, participating in meetings across the islands to gather input and feedback for the Destination Management Action Plans (DMAPs). She thanked the Board members who attended these community meetings and acknowledged the efforts of Planner Mr. Leong and the destination management team for their dedication to listening to community and industry voices. She underscored the importance of this engagement as the HTA continues developing the DMAPs and expressed appreciation to consultants Ward Research and PPRC for their support in this process.

Regarding the Strategic Plan, Ms. Anderson reported that staff are continuing work on its development. While the goal had been to present the plan this month, additional time is needed, and the plan will instead be brought before the Board in January. Similarly, the timeline for completing the Destination Management Action Plans has been adjusted. Rather than being finalized in March, completion is now anticipated in April to allow more time for thoughtful review and consideration of the extensive community feedback received.

Ms. Anderson also thanked the brand management team for their collaboration with the global marketing team. She emphasized the importance of global marketing efforts to create demand, drive arrivals to the islands, sustain existing air seat capacity, and, where possible, increase capacity, particularly in light of anticipated economic challenges.

In closing her report, Ms. Anderson expressed her deep appreciation to the Board and staff. She noted that the end of the year is a time for reflection on accomplishments, lessons learned, and opportunities for improvement moving forward. She thanked Board members for their commitment and service to the Hawaiʻi Tourism Authority and acknowledged the staff's hard work during what has been a challenging year. Ms. Anderson concluded by wishing everyone happy holidays.

Co-Vice Chair Agas thanked Ms. Anderson for her report and echoed appreciation for the staff's efforts. She acknowledged that the holiday season is a busy and demanding time and expressed hope that staff would have an opportunity to spend time with their families.

Member Guy wished to express appreciation for the leadership's role, particularly in the DMAP process. He shared that he has been fortunate to participate in the process and has observed firsthand the team's extensive work within communities across the island. Member Guy noted that the team is relatively small yet tasked with managing a significant volume of information and community input. As someone who has contributed to that input, he expressed appreciation for the thoughtful way the team is processing and responding to community feedback and conveyed gratitude on behalf of the community.

No additional questions or comments were received online.

7. Presentation on the Status of the Hawaiʻi Tourism Authority and Hawaiʻi Convention Center Fiscal Year 2026 Budgets

Mr. Kishi presented the fiscal minutes and provided an overview of the Hawaiʻi Tourism Authority's Fiscal Year 2026 financial results covering the period from July 1, 2025, through November 30, 2025.

Mr. Kishi explained that the HTA's budget is organized into two primary components: the HTA operating budget and the Hawaiʻi Convention Center (HCC) budget. The figures displayed during the presentation reflected the HTA operating budget only.

He noted that the HTA operating budget is composed of six program IDs, which together total approximately $63 million. Mr. Kishi stated that he would not review each program line item in detail but would instead focus on the overall financial position. He advised Board members that a detailed version of the budget is included in the Board packet and encouraged anyone with questions to contact him or other HTA staff for further clarification.

Mr. Kishi reported that, as of November 30, 2025, total expenditures and commitments under the HTA operating budget amounted to $29,578,000. He clarified that this figure includes both actual expenditures paid to vendors and encumbrances. Encumbrances represent funds that have been set aside for executed contracts where formal agreements are already in place, even if payment has not yet been fully disbursed.

He further reported that the remaining unspent balance under the operating budget is $33,421,000. With the HTA approximately halfway through the fiscal year, Mr. Kishi indicated that spending is on track and that HTA expects to utilize most, if not all, of the Fiscal Year 2026 operating budget by year-end.

Mr. Kishi continued his presentation by reviewing the Hawaiʻi Convention Center (HCC) budget. He explained that the HCC budget consists of four primary line items: Operations, Repairs and Maintenance, Sales, and Transfer to Budget and Finance.

Mr. Kishi clarified that the "Transfer to Budget and Finance" line item represents a non-recurring appropriation. This transfer is being used to reimburse the Department of Budget and Finance in the amount of $11 million for Fiscal Year 2024 HCC operations. He emphasized that this is a one-time appropriation and that this line item is not expected to appear in future fiscal years.

He reported that, to date, the HTA is on schedule to fully utilize the HCC budget totaling $26,977,000. Mr. Kishi also noted that the HCC budget is funded through the Convention Center Special Fund.

Mr. Kishi further reported on the Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) appropriation, which totals $36,400,000.

Member Guy raised a question regarding the Regenerative Tourism Development budget, noting that the burn rate appeared slow and asking whether the HTA anticipates encumbering the remaining funds within the current fiscal year.

Mr. Kishi responded that he is confident the HTA will encumber at least $2 million. He explained that the Community Tourism Collaborative line item and the Foundational Technical Assistance line item together total slightly over $2 million. He stated that staff are currently working on a contract with the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA) to encumber these funds. In addition, Mr. Kishi noted there is an unallocated $1 million within the budget, and staff are working with the Executive Director to allocate those funds to another budget line item, with the goal of doing so within the next one to two months.

Co-Vice Chair Agas asked a question regarding the Capital Improvement Projects appropriation, stating that while Mr. Kishi indicated the HTA is on target to encumber and utilize the full $36.4

million, the detailed budget sheet did not reflect specific allocations. She asked for additional detail and emphasized the importance of ensuring that Ms. Orton has sufficient funding to address all necessary repairs at the Convention Center, not limited to the roof. Co-Vice Chair Agas noted the limited remaining time in the fiscal year, with approximately five to six months remaining.

Mr. Kishi responded that CIP funds appropriated in the current fiscal year carry a two-year expenditure window and will not lapse until June 30, 2027. He stated that, at this time, the funds are planned primarily for the Convention Center roof project and that the appropriation is expected to be fully utilized.

Co-Vice Chair Agas asked whether additional funds would be provided once the current CIP appropriation lapses in June 2027.

Mr. Kishi responded that funding beyond the two-year period will depend on the upcoming legislative session. He noted that a request for additional Capital Facility Program (CFP) funds has been submitted.

Member Paulson asked whether there is a specific budget line item for Destination Management Action Plans (DMAPs).

Ms. Anderson responded that within Fiscal Year 2026 funding, there are no funds allocated for DMAP implementation. She stated that the plans are expected to be completed in April and that the completed DMAPs will be submitted to the Legislature as part of the Fiscal Year 2027 funding request for implementation.

There were no online questions.

8. Presentation from the Activities & Attractions Association of Hawaiʻi (A3H) from their Executive Director Toni Marie Davis

Ms. Davis introduced herself and provided background information, stating that she has served as Executive Director of Activities, Attractions, and Tours Hawaiʻi (A3H) for the past 28 years. Prior to that role, she was a part-owner of the commercial charter boat Pride of Maui and had previously taught high school physics and math. She shared that she resides in Mākaʻua, within the ahupuaʻa of Hāmākua Poko near Kailua Gulch on the north-facing slopes of Haleakalā and expressed a strong sense of stewardship for the land she considers part of her children's legacy.

Ms. Davis outlined the purpose and structure of her presentation. She explained that the sector she represents is commonly referred to as "in-destination experiences," encompassing activities, attractions, and tours throughout the state, which she referred to collectively as "Hawaiʻi Experiences." She stated that her presentation would address who A3H is, the role of in-destination experiences globally and locally, the benefits these experiences provide to the visitor industry, the community, and the economy, and the current challenges facing the sector. She noted that a meeting with Dir. Tokioka in early December, helped facilitate the opportunity to present to the Board. Ms. Davis stated that A3H is seeking guidance from the HTA Board and management on the best approach to securing marketing support for resident-owned businesses within this sector.

Ms. Davis explained that A3H is a member-owned nonprofit trade association organized as a 501(c)(6), established in 1989. She stated that A3H represents Hawaiʻi-based activity, attraction, and tour operators and focuses on protecting, promoting, and communicating on behalf of its members. She noted that the organization emphasizes direct bookings with pre-arrival visitors, out of respect for on-island desks and local operations. A3H's board consists of two representatives from each county—Kauaʻi, Oʻahu, Maui, and Hawaiʻi Island—and includes leaders from a range of well-established operators, many of which employ more than 50 people.

Ms. Davis described A3H's role in lobbying for consumer protection related to the sale of activities and attractions and representing member interests at all levels of government. She also explained that A3H facilitates private forums and collective problem-solving among members, including addressing payment issues with agencies in a way that minimizes disruption to the broader industry.

She emphasized the organization's focus on direct bookings, stating that this approach improves visitor experience, increases accountability for customer service, retains more revenue with resident-owned businesses, and provides better data for destination management. She noted that third-party resellers often retain guest information, limiting operators' ability to communicate directly with visitors. Ms. Davis stated that influencing the path to purchase toward direct bookings could strengthen local businesses' stability without increasing visitor volume.

Ms. Davis described Hawaiʻi Experiences as hosts, guides, stewards, and educators who play a critical role in shaping visitor perceptions, ensuring safety, reducing resident-visitor friction, and protecting the destination. She noted that these businesses employ residents, retain profits locally, and often serve multigenerational repeat visitors. She emphasized that guided tour experiences help protect resources, elevate visitor experiences, and root tourism benefits within local communities.

Ms. Davis shared concerns raised by A3H members, particularly on Oʻahu and Maui, regarding declining guest counts and revenues. She stated that while overall visitor spending may appear strong, Hawaiʻi Experiences serve as an early indicator of underlying issues. Using DBEDT visitor statistics, she explained that while the data does not clearly isolate her sector, she combined categories including entertainment, recreation, dinner shows, cruises, and transportation to estimate that in-destination experiences contribute approximately $2.5–$2.6 billion annually in visitor spending (air-only), potentially closer to $3 billion when including cruise-related activity. She noted that small percentage changes in this sector translate into significant economic impacts.

Ms. Davis reviewed trends across islands, noting that Oʻahu and Maui account for approximately 70 percent of in-destination experience spending. She stated that while Kauaʻi and Hawaiʻi Island are currently holding steady, Oʻahu and Maui are experiencing noticeable declines in daily spending and participation in activities. She characterized this as a warning sign for the broader visitor industry.

Ms. Davis identified key challenges facing the sector, including mixed marketing messages, perceived overemphasis on high-end visitors at the expense of the middle market, labor shortages exacerbated by housing affordability, rising visitor costs, and compressed operating margins. She also referenced visitor sentiment, suggesting uncertainty about whether Hawaiʻi welcomes visitors, increased “self-guided” travel behavior, and a reduction in the number of activities visitors participate in compared to pre-COVID levels. She noted concerns that Hawaiʻi is becoming increasingly transactional and referenced broader policy and regulatory signals that may be contributing to this perception.

Ms. Davis emphasized the importance of education for both visitors and residents and called for greater alignment toward shared outcomes. She warned against a tourism model that eliminates middle-market visitors, citing parallels to challenges faced in other destinations.

Ms. Davis described A3H’s consumer protection and stewardship efforts, including the hawaiifund.org platform, which lists vetted member businesses that meet licensing, insurance, and permitting requirements. She explained that the platform promotes direct bookings and enforces quality standards. She also described the organization’s Shaka Gold virtual discount card, designed to help address visitor price sensitivity.

In closing, Ms. Davis stated that A3H is seeking opportunities to collaborate more closely with HTA to strengthen marketing support for resident-owned activity, attractions, and tour operators. She noted that A3H has tracking and measurement capabilities and expressed willingness to support data-driven initiatives. Ms. Davis thanked the Board for the opportunity to present, wished everyone happy holidays, and expressed hopes for a prosperous new year.

Member Paulson thanked Ms. Davis for her presentation.

Dir. Tokioka asked for additional information regarding the Shaka Gold Card, specifically how many cards have been sold or how many users are currently active, and whether the card is digital.

Ms. Davis responded that the Shaka Gold Card is valid for one year from the date of purchase and that detailed usage data is available in A3H's database. She stated that she could provide that information upon request. Ms. Davis confirmed that the card is fully digital and noted that it operates with minimal overhead, resulting in strong profit margins.

Member Paulson asked whether the presentation intended to seek a contractual relationship with the Hawaiʻi Tourism Authority.

Ms. Davis responded that she was not certain and explained that A3H's board had extensive discussions regarding the scope and purpose of the presentation. She noted that hawaiifund.org is not a new platform but has recently been redesigned to function as a neutral, "Switzerland-style" booking platform that allows direct booking regardless of which reservation system a business uses. She stated that A3H has been working with multiple booking platforms to integrate direct booking links. Ms. Davis indicated that she had previously been told that a contractual relationship was not possible, but expressed openness to any approach the HTA might recommend. She also reiterated concerns about resident-visitor tensions, particularly on Maui, and emphasized the need to move toward a more unified approach.

Member Paulson asked whether the topic should be referred to the Branding Committee for further discussion.

Co-Vice Chair Agas stated that she had been discussing the matter with Ms. Anderson and noted that the HTA's global marketing teams already promote certain experiences. She suggested that the Branding Committee may be an appropriate forum for further discussion.

Ms. Anderson stated that she would follow up directly with Ms. Davis after the meeting to explore potential partnership opportunities.

Member Fischer commented that the research data presented was highly valuable and noted that data-driven insights are essential for informed decision-making. He stated that while some of the trends are concerning, the information will be useful as the Board and its committees evaluate initiatives and strategies, particularly in light of post-pandemic conditions and external factors affecting visitor arrivals. He thanked Ms. Davis and encouraged her to continue sharing data.

Ms. Davis thanked Member Fischer and acknowledged Ms. Chun for the visitor statistics, noting the depth of analysis possible with the available data. She expressed concern that the lack of a clear industry classification limits accuracy and suggested that General Excise Tax (GET) data for resident-owned businesses could provide more precise insights into the Hawaiʻi Experiences sector.

9. Reports from the Standing Committees:

a. Administrative

i) Discussion and/or Action to Approve Policy #100-03 Code of Conduct Policy

ii) Discussion and/or Action to Adopt Board Resolution 2026-01 for the Delegation of Authority to Present Policy Positions

Member Guy reported on behalf of the Administrative Standing Committee, which met on October 20. He explained that the purpose of the committee was to advance the administrative and governance items necessary to support the Advisory Board's operational role. Two items were advanced from that meeting for consideration by the full Board. The first was Policy No. 103, the Advisory Board Code of Conduct, and the second was the Annual Delegation of Authority Resolution.

Member Guy introduced Policy No. 103 and stated that it establishes clear expectations for ethical conduct, conflicts of interest, and fiduciary responsibilities, consistent with state law and the Board's advisory nature. He noted that the Administrative Standing Committee recommended the policy for approval and that the Code of Conduct is typically reviewed and executed on an annual basis. When the Chair asked if there were any questions or discussion, Co-Vice Chair Agas stated that some Board members, including herself, are required to submit documents of this type to their respective government affairs offices for review before signing. Member Guy asked whether this requirement would prevent those members from voting in support of the Code of Conduct. Co-Vice Chair Agas responded that she could only speak for herself and that she could not vote on the matter at this time until the required review was completed. Mr. West then asked whether the item should be deferred to a future meeting. Mr. Kishi stated that discussion could continue if there were questions, but that approval or a vote could be deferred. Co-Vice Chair Agas added that deferral would also be necessary because she would need to sign the document in her role as Co-Chair.

Member Guy then provided context on the Annual Delegation of Authority Resolution, stating that, in his understanding, the resolution was intended to establish a framework allowing certain Board members to communicate with legislators on behalf of the organization during the legislative session. Co-Vice Chair Agas asked whether not approving the resolution at this time would hinder legislative engagement. AG Cole responded that it could, explaining that due to changes in law regarding the Department's authority and the Advisory Board's role, the resolution is needed to formally authorize Board members to communicate with the Legislature on behalf of the organization. He clarified that the CEO and Department Director would still be able to communicate with legislators, and that individual Board members could always speak to legislators in a personal capacity, but they would not be able to do so as representatives of the organization until the resolution was adopted. Co-Vice Chair Agas asked whether a January Board meeting was scheduled, and it was confirmed that one was. She suggested that the Board defer action until the January meeting, which would allow members time to review the documents while still aligning with the start of the legislative session.

It was agreed that both the Advisory Board Code of Conduct and the Annual Delegation of Authority Resolution would be deferred to the next Board meeting to allow sufficient time for review and preparation for a vote. Member Guy confirmed that the items would be brought forward for consideration at the January meeting.

A reminder was then issued to all committee chairs regarding committee description materials previously circulated by Ms. Anderson. Members were asked to review the information and send any proposed changes or comments to Mr. McCully and Ms. Anderson, with committee chairs specifically requested to submit their notes as soon as possible.

10. Discussion on Revisions to the Standing Committee Charters

11. Presentation and Discussion on 2026 U.S. Brand Marketing Efforts***

Co-Vice Chair Agas then announced that the Board would enter executive session to discuss U.S. Brand marketing information. AG Cole explained that the executive session was necessary so that the Board could receive and discuss information that must remain confidential to protect Hawaii's competitive advantage as a visitor destination, pursuant to Hawaii Revised Statutes Section 201. AG Cole noted that a motion and a second would be required to enter executive session. It was stated that AG Cole would join the executive session to provide further explanation. Following the executive session, the Board would briefly reconvene to summarize the outcomes and then adjourn the meeting.

Member Elmore motioned to go to the Executive Session, and member Paulson seconded it.

[Executive Session]

12. Adjournment

The Advisory Board members returned to the regular meeting at 11:36 a.m. Co-Vice Chair Agas reported that the HVCB presented its 2026 U.S. brand marketing strategy, and the Advisory Board engaged in robust discussion. She concluded the meeting at 11:37 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Sheillane Reyes
Recorder