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

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
HAWAIʻI TOURISM AUTHORITY
Thursday, August 28, 2025, 9:30 a.m.

Hybrid In-Person & Virtual Meeting

Hawaiʻi Convention Center
Parking Level | Executive Boardroom A
1801 Kalākaua Avenue
Honolulu, Hawaiʻi 96815

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR BOARD MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Kimberly Agas, Leah Belmonte, Mericia Palma Elmore, Terry Fischer, Joel Guy, Troy Lazaro, James McCully, Danny Ojiri, Lānaʻi Tabura, Christian West, Linda Wong
MEMBER NOT PRESENT:	Lisa Paulson
HTA STAFF PRESENT:	Caroline Anderson, Jadie Goo, Talon Kishi, Jill Radke, Carole Hagihara, Lindsay Sanborn
GUESTS:	James Tokioka, Laci Goshi, Jennifer Chun, Aaron Salā, John Knox, Cathy Ritter, Carmela Resuma, Teri Orton, Jessica Lani Rich, Allison Schaefers
LEGAL COUNSEL:	John Cole

1. Call to Order

Ms. Anderson called the meeting to order at 9:34 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

Ms. Sanborn conducted the roll call, and members were in attendance except for Members Paulson who was excused.

3. Opening Protocol

Member Lazaro gave the opening cultural protocol. He shared huliʻau, which means to turn or to transform something from what we see into something new. He gave his wishes to this Advisory Board to take what was done in the past and turn it into new light and new life. He performed the kuʻmulipo chant.

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 June 26, 2025 Regular Board Meeting

Member McCully moved the motion to accept the minutes, and Member Agas seconded it. The motion was carried unanimously.

6. CEO Report

Ms. Anderson informed Advisory Board members that the CEO Reports for both July and August 2025 were available in their information packets.

Ms. Anderson introduced the HTA staff who were present, beginning with the office of the President/CEO, by recognizing Ms. Jill Byus Radke, the Public Affairs Officer, and Ms. Carole Hagihara, the Executive Assistant and Board Liaison.

Ms. Anderson asked Mr. Talon Kishi, the Acting VP of Finance, to introduce the HTA staff responsible for Finance and Procurement. Mr. Kishi presented Accounting Specialist Ms. Maile Caravalho, Procurement Manager Ms. Tracey Fermahin, and Procurement Specialist Ms. Kristen Colburn.

Ms. Anderson introduced the Acting Chief Brand Officer, Ms. Jadie Goo, and asked her to present the staff of the Branding Department. Ms. Goo presented Senior Brand Manager Ms. Christina Tuchman, Administrative Assistant for Branding and Marketing Ms. Trishia Mendoza, and the Brand Manager for Branding and Marketing, Ms. Jennifer Bastiaanse.

Ms. Anderson introduced the planning team, consisting of Planner Mr. Kendrick Leong and

Administrative Assistant for Planning Ms. Michele Shiowaki.

In addition, Ms. Anderson presented the Administrative Assistant for Destination Stewardship, Ms. Mei-Lin Bruhn, Brand Manager for Stewardship, Ms. Dede Howa, Brand Manager Ms. Lindsay Sanborn, Brand Manager for Sports Mr. Milton Lafitaga, and Destination Manager for Oʻahu Mr. Blane Andrade.

Ms. Anderson recognized the online presence of other destination managers: Ms. Patty Ornellas for Kauaʻi, Ms. Meagan DeGaia for Maui and Lānaʻi, Ms. Kui Adolpho for Molokaʻi, and Mr. Matt Sueda for Hawaiʻi Island.

Ms. Anderson introduced Ms. Jennifer Chun, Director of Tourism Research at the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism (DBEDT), mentioning that Ms. Chun's team provided visitor data necessary for the development of the HTA strategy. Ms. Chun thanked Ms. Anderson for the opportunity to attend the Advisory Board meeting and introduced the team members accompanying her.

At the request of Ms. Anderson, the Director of DBEDT, James Tokioka, addressed the Board members, stating that he was already acquainted with a number of them and expressing his appreciation for their willingness to step up and become part of the new Board. The Director believed that working for the progress of the Hawaiʻi tourism industry would be an exciting experience involving collaboration with sister agencies such as the Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB), the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA), and Kilohana. Understanding that this first meeting was like the first day of school, on behalf of Gov. Green and himself, Dir. Tokioka welcomed members to the HTA Advisory Board, and stated his conviction that their skills and dedication to the State and people of Hawaiʻi would be of great value to the Board.

The Director added that members of the previous Board would notice several differences due to the change in status of the Board, implemented by SB1571, passed by the legislature and signed into law as Act 132 by Gov. Green, from a policy-making body to an advisory body. However, that did not imply that members' input was less appreciated or less significant to decisions made by the HTA. The Director stated that DBEDT and the Governor's office were fully committed to this Board and to all its members.

Dir. Tokioka informed the new members that over 50 people had applied to be part of the Board. Those who were not selected had been informed by email and had been thanked for putting their names forward as part of this process. They had been encouraged to remain engaged with the Hawaiʻi visitor industry. The Director congratulated the selected members and noted that the skills and values they brought to the Board were greatly appreciated.

The Director commented that it was important for Advisory Board members to know and talk about how to be better stewards of what they do. He added that gaining the trust of the legislature and the Governor would be the key to the success of this Board. Each Board member brought their own skill set to collaboration, aiming to achieve excellence.

The Director thanked the Advisory Board members and stated not only that he looked forward to working with each one, but that he valued each one's input and looked forward to moving ahead in the best possible way. He expressed his prayer that God would bless everyone.

Ms. Anderson thanked Dir. Tokioka, and asked each one of the Advisory Board members to introduce themselves.

- **Member James McCully** stated that he was a farmer from the Big Island representing the small agritourism niche. He had been involved in his community since the early 1980s and was currently the Chair of Banyan Drive Hawai'i Redevelopment Agency on the Big Island. Member McCully informed Board members that, having had several years of experience on the HTA Board, he was grateful to have been reappointed by the Governor and looked forward to working with the other Advisory Board members.
- **Member Christian West** stated that he was President of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and had been born and raised in Hawaiʻi. He added that the ILWU was the largest private union in the State of Hawaiʻi, and its role was to fight for improvements in working class benefits, wages, and working conditions, as well as to try to stop the outward migration of local families. He believed that these changes would make Hawai'i a better place for everyone. Member West looked forward to serving on the Advisory Board and collaborating with the other members. He thanked the Governor for his confidence in allowing him to continue to serve.
- **Member Troy Lazaro** stated that he had a halau with about 160 students, was a kumu from Kauaʻi, and was proud to be kanaka. He was excited to be part of the Advisory Board, conscious of his stewardship of all things Hawaiian for the people of Kauaʻi, as well as his responsibility to preserve, to perpetuate, and to be an arm to those who could not facilitate stewardship and ceremonies. As a steward of hula, the Hawaiian language, and all things cultural, he was honored to be part of the Advisory Board.
- **Member Danny Ojiri** stated that he was a Senate designee who had resided in Hawaiʻi for 45 years. He was honored to be part of the Advisory Board, and highlighted the importance of supporting the tourism industry as a driver of the Hawaiian economy, but noted that this had to be done in a balanced way. Member Ojiri looked forward to being part of making that happen both for the industry and for the Board.
- **Member Lānaʻi Tabura** stated that he originated from Lānaʻi and was in the entertainment business, with both a cooking show and a travel show. He commented that he had been traveling the world over the past ten years and had worked with various tourism authorities. He was excited and grateful to be part of the HTA Advisory Board.
- **Member Linda Wong** stated that she was the President of World of Aloha and had been involved in City and State government for some years. Over the past 25 years, she had been involved in the Japanese wedding business, and her family owned and aimed to preserve the

Kahaluʻu Fish Pond, which was listed on the State Register of Historic Sites. Ms. Wong had a feeling for Hawaiian culture and preservation and looked forward to learning much through working with the other Advisory Board members.

- **Member Joel Guy** explained that he was the Executive Director of Hanalei Initiative, and thanked Speaker Nakamura for expressing her trust in him by allowing him to be part of the service of the State. Member Guy looked forward to working with the Advisory Board members and the HTA staff, since he was inspired by these individuals. He had been grateful to be part of an organization that worked on visitor and resource management. He characterized this work as remarkable and stated that he hoped to bring some of these transformative practices to the thought processes on the Advisory Board.
- **Member Terry Fischer** stated that he was President of Polynesian Adventure Tours, and owned Luʻau Kalamaku at Kilohana Plantation (Kauaʻi). He pointed out that his organization also operated two other tourist transportation companies on the mainland serving 12 separate locations from San Diego, Los Angeles, Orange County, San Jose, Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Calgary, Alberta Canada. Member Fischer noted that the transportation business provided diverse perspectives for all these different markets, as it served as a conduit connecting visitors with hotels, attractions, and destinations. He was happy to be part of the Advisory Board and looked forward to collaborating with the other members.
- **Member Mericia Palma Elmore** stated that she was Executive Director of the Screen Actors Guild and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) Hawaiʻi. She added that she had been in the industry for over 40 years and was honored by and thanked Dir. Tokioka and Gov. Green for their confidence in her. Member Elmore taught media and film ethics in the University of Hawaiʻi system and looked forward to contributing her insights from the education and film sectors, as well as learning from the other Advisory Board members. Member Elmore also obtained her law degree from the University of Hawaiʻi William S. Richardson School of Law.
- **Member Leah Belmonte** stated that she had been born and raised in Hawaiʻi and was currently the Director of Human Resources (HR) for Mahi Pono. Member Belmonte had served in the office of the previous Governor, had been the Governor's representative for Maui County, and had twenty years' experience in the hospitality industry, where she began her professional career. Ms. Belmonte added that it was an honor and a passion for her to serve the hospitality industry in the State on the HTA Advisory Board, and she thanked the Governor for providing her with that opportunity.
- **Member Kimberly Agas** began by stating that she was the General Manager at Aulani Disney Resort and had worked with some Advisory Board members previously. She looked forward to working with the new Board members. She appreciated the team selected by the Governor and Dir. Tokioka, and believed the team could make a difference.

Ms. Anderson introduced AG Cole, who stated that he had been part of the Attorney General's (AG's) office for almost four years so far, with the HTA as his client for three of those. He had previously had a variety of experiences, working with clients that included UH, the Public Utilities Commission, legislators, and the Governor. AG Cole looked forward to working with all the Advisory Board members.

Ms. Anderson presented the CEO's reports, focusing on the most recent report, dated August 2025. She presented slides showing four priority areas on which the HTA staff were concentrating, and noted that these actions were outlined in the Strategic Tourism Management Plan, which was tied to the HTA budget.

1. **Strengthening and diversifying tourism's overall contribution to the Hawaiʻi economy.**
   Coordinated market-appropriate branding and marketing activities for the global marketing teams were led by Ms. Goo and her team, with the primary aims of stabilizing the U.S. and Canadian domestic markets, as well as revitalizing the high-spending international market, including reentering the Taiwan market and increasing demand for sustainable, regenerative, and experiential travel. The team was also working on the Meetings, Conventions, and Incentives (MCI) business over the next two years.

2. **Advancing destination stewardship for Hawai'i**.
   This was the responsibility of the stewardship team, particularly in relation to destination management, focusing on hotspot areas, with the aim of maintaining and improving a positive visitor experience. A further aim, which was a concern for the Governor, the legislature, and the Director of DBEDT, was to develop the sports portfolio. The destination stewardship team aimed to build the capacity of small businesses and community organizations, develop the destination management app, and identify hotspot priorities.

3. **Improving interagency visitor industry and community collaboration and coordination in destination management, workforce development, and the creative industry.**
   This would include the film industry, DBEDT's Hawaiʻi-made program, and agritourism. The planning team working on these objectives aimed to compile documents that would navigate this period. Ms. Anderson reminded Board members that the strategic plan was to be completed by the end of 2025, and she expected that the Advisory Board would provide guidance on compiling this plan. Ms. Anderson added that Ms. Cathy Ritter and Mr. John Knox were present in the meeting and were to help compile the strategic plan for the HTA. Ms. Anderson thanked them for their work and noted that they had already interviewed some Advisory Board members while planning to conduct further interviews. She added that strengthened communication brought benefits to both the work of the visitor industry and the community.

4. **Execution of essential repairs on the rooftop terrace deck of the Hawai'i Convention Center.**
   Ms. Anderson explained that this was a very important project, especially for the MCI market, and construction was on track to begin on January 2, 2026, and to be completed at the end of 2027.

In response to a reminder from Member McCully that new members might be unfamiliar with some acronyms, Ms. Anderson explained that MCI referred to the “Meetings, Conventions and Incentives” market.

Ms. Anderson recognized the presence of representatives of several of the HTA’s major contractors:

- **Dr. Aaron Salā**, the President/CEO of the Hawaiʻi Visitor and Convention Bureau (HVCB). Ms. Anderson expressed her appreciation for Dr. Salā and his team, which provided the HTA with the Hawaiʻi Tourism USA, MCI, and Island Destination Support Services contracts.
- **Ms. Carmela Resuma**, representing Kilohana, the agency providing support services for the destination stewardship programs. Ms. Anderson thanked Ms. Resuma and her team for their work.
- **Jessica Lani Rich**, representing the Visitor Aloha Society of Hawaiʻi (VASH). Ms. Anderson thanked Ms. Rich and her team for their assistance for visitors who encountered problems during their stay.
- **Ms. Teri Orton**, the General Manager of the Hawaiʻi Convention Center.

Ms. Anderson noted that the HTA staff had been working hard on a variety of projects, and at the moment, they were preparing for the next round of Destination Management Action Plans, the Tourism Strategic Plan, and updates for the Tourism Functional Plan. Several community meetings had been held, along with advisory group meetings for the destination management action plans, aimed at receiving information from the visitor industry and the community about their perceptions of tourism’s future, with the hope that this input could be used to inform the plans in the process of development.

Regarding destination stewardship, Ms. Anderson highlighted the ʻUmeke programs, which were community-based projects aimed both at bridging visitor-resident interaction and also at creating community economic development while enabling visitors to experience interactions with both residents and Hawaiian culture.

With respect to sports, Ms. Anderson noted that Mr. Lafitaga had been holding discussions with sports entities that might potentially come to Hawaiʻi.

The brand marketing team was working with the market and educating visitors upon arrival about the available activities. The team also ensured protection of the Hawaiʻi brand while developing solid plans for the revival of some domestic and international markets.

Ms. Anderson thanked Mr. Kishi and the fiscal team, including their two procurement specialists, whose work was invaluable in administering the many contracts awarded by the HTA.

7. Discussion of Standing Committees and Nomination of Committees and Members

Ms. Anderson referred Advisory Board members to their information packets and noted that the function of standing committees was to enable the Board to operate more efficiently and to provide guidance on relevant subject matter. She noted that Gov. Green and Dir. Tokioka had recommended the establishment of two new advisory standing committees: these were Sports Tourism and Film Production Tourism. The HTA staff believed that three existing standing committees should continue to exist: Administrative, Branding, and Hoʻokahua Hawaiʻi.

Noting that some members of the Advisory Board had met one another for the first time during the course of this meeting, Dir. Tokioka noted that it would be difficult for them to make proposals about standing committee membership. HTA staff had suggested that members should inform Ms. Anderson and Ms. Hagihara which committees they would like to serve upon. A vote could be taken to approve the suggested committees. Members could send an email with their top three priorities for membership of standing committees, and in the subsequent Board meeting the committees could be constituted. AG Cole confirmed that this did not violate the Sunshine Law.

Ms. Anderson suggested that an email poll be conducted.

Dir. Tokioka outlined the functions of each of the suggested standing committees:

- The new Sports Tourism Standing Committee would advance Hawaiʻi's position as a premier destination for sports-related travel and events, and would also provide strategic guidance on initiatives to leverage sports tourism towards economic impact, enhancement of the destination's brand, support of local, national, and international partnerships, and strengthening of community wellbeing.
- The new Film Production Tourism Standing Committee will guide initiatives to promote Hawaiʻi through film and television, with integrated marketing to encourage both economic development and the positive, authentic representation of the State of Hawaiʻi.
- The Administrative Standing Committee would oversee the recruitment, hiring, and contract terms of the President/CEO, and would also be responsible for making recommendations related to the evaluation of the President/CEO.
- The Branding Standing Committee would oversee the strategic review, evaluation, and recommendation regarding the HTA's branding and marketing initiatives, programs, and activities supporting the authority's vision, mission, and strategic objectives, with particular focus on destination branding and the meetings, conventions, and incentives market.
- The Hoʻokahua Hawaiʻi Standing Committee would provide strategic guidance on destination stewardship, perpetuation of Hawaiian culture, development and enhancement of visitor experiences, and workforce development. The committee would be responsible for creating and implementing the HTA strategic plan, as well as the destination management action plans, and updating the tourism functional plan. This committee would also consider community priorities and visitor industry needs while assessing the social and economic impact of tourism.

Dir. Tokioka suggested that during the subsequent Advisory Board meeting, members might discuss the number of members constituting each committee. He added that formerly each committee had six members, sometimes resulting in attendance being reduced to three. However, the Director had been encouraged by the enthusiasm of the present Board and suggested that in the email poll, members could submit their suggestions about the number of members on each committee.

Referring to the Permitted Interaction Groups (PIG) which had been used previously by the Board in addition to the standing committees, Member McCully noted that in the past, such PIGs had been set up for processes such as the search for a new CEO or legislative issues. He explained that a PIG would contain fewer than a quorum of members but more than two, noting that PIGs were covered by the Sunshine Law, with which he believed members who had previously worked in public groups would be familiar. Member McCully reminded Advisory Board members that some PIGs were also likely to be constituted, and these could be very time-consuming.

Dir. Tokioka referred to the search for the new President/CEO, noting that Members McCully and Agas had been part of the PIG created by the previous Board that had conducted the search for the CEO. The Director added that Ms. Anderson and he had been in discussion over the past two weeks with the search company, Bishop & Co., which had obtained more than 400 applications for the post. Advisory Board members would be provided with details of the top ten applicants and would also receive a confidential Excel file containing the names of all 400 applicants. He reminded Advisory Board members that the primary responsibility of this body was to select and submit to the Governor the new President/CEO, after which the Governor would submit the proposed President/CEO to the legislature for approval.

Member Agas suggested to members that selecting three committees on which to serve was probably a good choice. She added that in the past, some committees had failed to achieve a quorum, so meetings could not take place. If each member were to suggest three committees, they would be likely to serve on three, given the importance of obtaining a quorum for meetings.

Dir. Tokioka added that members might even suggest serving on four committees.

Ms. Sanborn stated that a question had been received from a member of the online audience, as follows:

> "What is the timeline of the selection of the President/CEO?"

Dir. Tokioka responded that there was no time period. Given that the Advisory Board was new, that some names had been submitted as long as eight months ago, and that members of the community were aware of this search, further applications would not be prohibited. He pointed out that there might be individuals who had been unwilling to submit their resumes previously but now wished to do so. All these considerations implied that Dir. Tokioka could not answer the question with certainty and would be unwilling to suggest a date that eventually would not be achieved. He added that the salary and some other issues had changed since the search first began, and this had to be taken into consideration. However, he believed that the Board would want to move forward with hiring.

8. Nominations, Selection, and Appointment of the Board Chair and Board Vice Chair of the Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) Advisory Board of Directors

Ms. Anderson called for nominations for the Vice Chair of the HTA Advisory Board, and Member Agas proposed Member McCully.

Member McCully responded that he believed that it would be wise initially to have co-vice chairs, and he nominated Member Agas. He explained that it was necessary for a Board member to be based in Oʻahu during legislative sessions, or when there were activities involving the HTA on this island. During his time on the Board, he had realized that it would have been helpful for him to have a base on Oʻahu. He would be happy to serve as a vice chair, but believed it would be better to have someone on the island serving in this post. He asked AG Cole to confirm that there was no restriction on such a process.

Dir. Tokioka thanked Members McCully and Agas for their contributions and repeated his assertion that some Board members had met one another for the first time during this meeting, so it would be difficult for them to select and nominate a chair and vice chair. The Director added that he believed that it was important for members who had previously served on the Board to take on these roles. Given that Members McCully and Agas had always been dedicated to the work of the HTA and had been very involved in committees, the Director believed their nominations were an excellent start. He asserted that as the Board went along, members could consider who would serve as chair of the Board, but it would be better not to elect a chair right at the start. He believed that the nominations were appropriate and thanked the members for their contributions.

Member McCully repeated Dir. Tokioka's assertion that the Board was new, members were just getting to know one another, and were familiarizing themselves with the new Advisory Board of the HTA. It was essential for the Board to quickly proceed to its primary function, the selection of a new President/CEO, and those familiar with this process could be appointed to the PIG. With respect to guiding the Board, it had previously been found to be very difficult, and at best awkward, for a new member to step in as the Chair at their first meeting. Member McCully's advice was that members should become acquainted over the course of a few meetings before electing a new chair. Quoting the proverb, Member McCully commented that while new brooms were said to sweep clean, old brooms could also function well, and he and Member Agas were the "old brooms" on the committee.

In reply to a question from Member West, Ms. Anderson proposed a motion to nominate Members Agas and McCully as Co-Vice Chairs, and Member West seconded the motion.

Ms. Sanborn conducted the roll call vote, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Ms. Anderson congratulated the two new Vice Chairs and stated that the vote for a new chair would take place at the subsequent meeting.

Dir. Tokioka responded that there was no need for haste, and the Advisory Board would decide whether to elect a Chair at the subsequent or the following meeting.

9. Discussion of the HTA Advisory Board By-Laws

Ms. Anderson referred to the information handout, noting that establishing bylaws was essential to ensure effective and transparent governance. She reminded members that on May 29, 2025, Gov. Green had signed SB1571 into law as Act 132. One of the results of this Act was to designate the HTA Board as an Advisory Board, and this meant that the Board's bylaws had to be updated. Based on Act 132, she and Deputy AG Cole had proposed some changes to the bylaws, and these had been provided to Board members so that they could be discussed in more detail at the subsequent Board meeting. Ms. Anderson asked for input from AG Cole.

AG Cole stated that these suggestions had been adapted from the previous bylaws with some suggested amendments from former Board members and were open to modifications or questions either today or at subsequent Board meetings.

Member McCully responded that, given the importance of the bylaws and the freshness of the statute that necessitated their revision, he believed it was important to assign the review and amending of the bylaws to one of the standing committees, most appropriately the Administrative Standing Committee covered by Section III.

AG Cole agreed that this made sense and suggested that the amended bylaws be discussed at the subsequent meeting and reviewed by a standing committee.

Member McCully asserted his belief that it would not be appropriate to make changes during the present meeting.

Member Guy asked whether it would not be preferable to set up the advisory committee sooner rather than later, since the work of searching for a President/CEO had to start at once.

Ms. Anderson responded that this could be done as soon as the results of the poll were available. A Board meeting could be called earlier than October. She asked members to feel free to reach out to her with any questions or suggestions, adding that when the various committees were formed, there could be further discussion of the bylaws in the standing committee.

In reply to a question from Member McCully, Ms. Anderson confirmed that an email containing a list of the various standing committees would be sent out to members. She added that HTA staff had enquired whether any other committees were to be established.

A request was made for the bylaws to be made available in Word format to enable members to comment or make edits on sections.

10. Adjournment

Ms. Anderson thanked the new Advisory Board members for volunteering their precious time to help the State of Hawaiʻi, the people of Hawaiʻi and their visitors, adding that the HTA staff appreciated their presence and looked forward to collaborating with them.

The meeting adjourned at 10:36 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheillane Reyes

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Sheillane Reyes
Recorder