



TULARE COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING NOTES

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2022
ZOOM MEETING**

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| Meeting Called to Order: | 1:05 pm by Patrick Hamblin |
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| ATTENDANCE |
| PRESENT: BJ Motko, Bridgette Davis, Damaris Menchaca, Donna Sims, Mary Dieterle, Michael Cortez, Michelle Hart, Oma Mansfield, Patrick Hamblin, Tricia Stever Blattler |
| ALTERNATES PRESENT: |
| EXCUSED ABSENCE: Donna Grigsby |
| UNEXCUSED ABSENCE: Amy Shuklian |
| GUESTS PRESENT: Mary Jungwirth, Cassie Heffington, Ameet Nagra |

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGENDA / <input type="checkbox"/> DISCUSSION: Approve a Resolution Allowing Remote Attendance at Future Meetings | | | |
| Discussion: None | | | |
| Motion: | Approve a Resolution Allowing Remote Attendance at Future Meetings | | |
| 1st: | Tricia Stever Blattler | 2nd: | Oma Mansfield |
| Vote | Yes: Unanimous | No: | |

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| PUBLIC COMMENT |
| None |

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGENDA / <input type="checkbox"/> DISCUSSION: Review and Approval of minutes from Meeting on August 11, 2022 | | | |
| Discussion: None | | | |
| Motion: | Approve the minutes of the Advisory Committee Meeting on August 11, 2022 | | |
| 1st: | Tricia Stever Blattler | 2nd: | BJ Motko |
| Vote | Yes: Unanimous | No: | |

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGENDA / <input type="checkbox"/> DISCUSSION: Discussion of and Election of Secretary | | | |
| Patrick has the Chair and Donna has the Co-Chair. So, is anyone else interested? Mary takes all of the minutes. She prepares them and then she will forward them to the Secretary for a quick review. Tricia said she is willing. | | | |
| Motion: | Appoint Tricia Stever Blattler as the Secretary | | |
| 1st: | Michelle Hart | 2nd: | BJ Motko |
| Vote | Yes: Unanimous | No: | |

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| <input type="checkbox"/> AGENDA / <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISCUSSION: Comments from Advisory Committee Members | | | |
| BJ asked which Donna was here since there was no last name listed. Donna Sims is here. | | | |

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| <input type="checkbox"/> AGENDA / <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISCUSSION: Update from Animal Services on Activities of Tulare County Animal Services | | | |
| Cassie said they continue to drown like every other shelter around. She just had a Coalition Summit meeting yesterday with a few of the Central Valley shelters and has been hearing the same from everyone. Our intakes are still high. Pre-covid levels high. August almost 600, September about 500 and so far for October almost 250. And that's just 13 days of October. That is a large majority of large breed dogs. We have 40 kennels for large breed dogs and one dog can be housed per kennel, maybe two. We are taking in as many dogs as we have kennels every few days so they are trying to get them out as fast as humanly possible. But they have had some pretty sad days around here. No one's getting adoptions. Dogs aren't moving. It's that time of the year where things tend to slow down as far as adoptions go. | | | |

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We are not seeing the usual typical seasonal slowdown of intakes that we usually see as far as kitten season and puppy season. We are continuing to see big litter of puppies with large numbers, like eleven to twelve puppies. That does not bode well for future years. And also, litters of kittens are continuing to come in.

Clinic HQ is a computer program that a large percentage of clinics use. They did a study of over two hundred high volume spay and neuter clinics, and during the covid time period it seemed that their calculations were that 2.7 million spay/neuter surgeries did not happen that would have otherwise been scheduled, if clinics maintained their same schedule that they usually would have throughout that period of time. So, the next few years are going to be really rough in this industry. They just are and we're just going to weather the storm and keep rocking it. Her staff are amazing. She has no lazy employees.

We did hire another new officer, so we have three new officers that are in training. We have two lead officers that are doing phenomenal things with training. They're going to training. They're doing online trainings. So, they work their way up. But they had to hit the ground running and get going. One of the new officers is actually a kennel staff who's been here for a very, very long time and moved over to being an officer and is doing a phenomenal job. And then the other one is brand new to the industry completely. So, he is definitely in training but learning very quickly.

Oma asked why are there many dogs being turned in? Cassie thinks it is a combination of a whole bunch of things, mostly Covid related. We saw a sharp increase when the eviction moratorium lifted. The sheriff's office is doing a ton of evictions that are backlogged from pre-covid and a lot of those people acquired animals during the pandemic when they were locked at home. A lot of them are just leaving them there, or dumping them in orchards, or letting them open the gates and roam. We are also seeing a large number of returns. Owner surrender requests from people who acquired animals that either they now can't care for because they're not at home or they have severe separation anxiety or behavior problems from a lack of socialization during that period of time. All kinds of things and then a lack of spay/neuter resources during that time. So, because nothing got fixed, we're seeing giant litters of puppies and they are large breed dogs that have large litters to begin with. Lots of German shepherds, Malinois, huskies, and we're still seeing kittens. And now of course, we see the random brown country dog that happens when you mix everything together for several generations. It's just a mix of many, many factors that all came together in the perfect storm.

This last week San Francisco SPCA visited and did a lot of surgeries. For the last two days we were doing surgeries with two surgeons. We did over ninety surgeries in two days, lots of dogs in our tiny little building. So that was phenomenal. We had a great time, and it was absolutely insane, but they plan to come back and do it again. They're writing a grant to Cal for All Animals, which is the money that the Governor gave to be facilitated by UC Davis Koret shelter medicine program. She thinks it's like fifty million dollars over the next five years to fund shelter and rescue animal welfare programs. So, they are applying for money through that program to do some large scale spay/neuter in this tri county area, Tulare, Kings, and Fresno and to start some pilot programs which sounds fantastic.

They are also the grant giver for our x-ray machine. The grant for our diagnostic equipment through San Francisco SPCA. So, we should be getting an x-ray machine here in the next few months. Hopefully by that time Dr. Myhal comes back we will have diagnostic equipment and abilities which will not only save the county and the shelter some money on diagnostics that we currently have to send out, but also be able to provide immediate diagnostic care to some of these animals that are coming in, hit by car or potential foreign bodies, broken limbs, broken bones, all of that stuff. And we'll also assist in humane investigations and be able to provide more accurate information on cruelty cases as well.

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Candace has been extremely busy with foster programs for kittens and for dogs and also planning some events. So, we will be at the Apple Festival in Springville and have some dogs up for adoption then. Barks and Brews is doing an event at the Tulare outlet. I think BJ is going to be there. They did not put our log on the flyer, but we will be there and have dogs up for adoption as well. So, we have another adoption event through Best Friends coming up in December. Everyone is working like crazy. Other than that we're utilizing relief veterinarians to just keep up with our adoptions. We have Dr. Breech coming every other Saturday to just do our adoptions and foster to adopts. San Francisco has come twice. They will come at least once or twice more.

We have had a few vets that were interested in relief vet, but they were turned down by the big box companies that bought out their clinics and said that was in violation of their non-compete that they signed when working for their clinics. So, I think we're going to start seeing that a little bit more with these big box companies buying out our little clinics is that they're not going to let them do side work. So that was something that happened this week. We were notified that these two vets would not be able to work for us because that would be in violation.

Tricia mentioned that she popped in a few weeks ago and dropped off some treats. She saw Pilo for a moment heading out to a call and his face just lit up. She could tell that he was really excited to be moving into this new leadership role. She's excited for him and excited for Cassie that she has such a motivated team right now. Everyone is just hustling, hustling, hustling and trying to get through a constant barrage. Cassie said she had a fantastic group of officers right now and they are all working really well together. They all come together on calls when needed and she's very proud of the work that they're doing.

BJ just wanted to expand on everything that Cassie was saying about the climate right now because she has twelve years in the identical demographic so obvious her rescue mirrors what you're seeing. But this frightening thing to her right now is that they're seeing this incredible lack of tolerance. People have no patience or tolerance for their animals. They are no longer forgiving of their little quirks and things that are happening. Their return rate is the highest it has ever been. And she's talking about dogs that have been in an adoptive home for ten years that are being returned to them because of behavior issues. It's frightening. They're answering the same questions. She feels like they regressed a whole generation and there is also that incredible lack of humane education because nobody has time. Schools aren't in session. She thinks that they're kind of back to square one and she would like to help with anything that she can. She has had a talk with her team today about how they can move forward with more education and outreach and public visibility. So, count them in. If there's something that they can assist with. They're literally only taking two or three dogs a week because they can't move them fast enough to open up any kennel space.

Patrick thinks this ties into the next item on the agenda for discussion, education. So that might be a good jumping point to have a quick round table discussion if we wanted on some key ideas that are hot topics within the industry that we may want to start looking at if we could collaborate and provide assistance to Animal Services as an Advisory Committee.

AGENDA / **DISCUSSION: Education**

Discussion: Tricia would certainly echo BJ's observations. She has seen it in a large breed rescue group as well. We're struggling with all of the same issues with big dogs. It's just really hard to warehouse them. We don't want to warehouse them. We want them all in homes with families and fosters. We often have the challenge that getting humane education messages into schools and then into the public is always kind of trying to suck water through a straw when what we want to have is a firehose to broaden our message. To include the fact that we all say that mental health issues and domestic

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violence issues and the fallout of Covid and the crazy inflation are all contributing to this dumping of your animal phenomenon that we're seeing right now. It would be neat to get some of the professionals in the county that are in the behavior and mental health services to bring us under their umbrellas to see how we can do some humane animal education and outreach using some of those partnerships where there tends to be a lot more resources and financial support.

She's just trying to figure it out. We know domestic violence and we know mental health and we know inflation or all factors that are dumping, causing animals to come in in terribly neglectful ways. And there's got to be other resources in our county that are trying to figure out ways to address these same challenges. Just looking to see where we could ride on their coattails because she thinks they're better funded often times than we are in the rescue world. BJ feels like one killer of dogs right now is apathy because the attitude towards dogs has fallen so far down the list of priorities that people don't have the energy. They don't have the mental capacity to deal with these issues. They're trying to get kids in school and put gas in the car. She doesn't think that people are aware of how serious the problem is.

Cassie said that one of the things they were talking about yesterday at the summit is what is the message. Because we're trying to get people to come and adopt. Come take pets. Or is the message don't get rid of your pets or don't get pets if you can't keep them? Or spay and neuter, but you can't find spay and neuter and the access to care is something that's being dealt with on a national level and a state level. There's some big people who are working on trying to increase access to care and trying to increase access to things like spay and neuter. But what are we wanting the public to know? Are we wanting them to know how to take care of the animals they already have? Are we wanting them to increase the money we want? Whatever message we provide, we have to be able to provide them the ability to do that. There's never an answer. It's always the unending questions and the drowning. It's pretty much the shelter way of life right now, the drowning and the questions. How do we even begin to look at the next ten years of our lives?

Patrick goes along with some of the things he's heard, especially with behavioral health. These types of things in addition to our growing homeless population and the challenges we face in those areas. Animal Services is unique and lucky. And the fact that it does fall under the umbrella of the Health and Human Services Agency who encompasses a lot of those areas, and we could definitely link together with other programs. We did have an executive team round table about a week and a half ago and right now it is one of the largest struggles that we are facing as a whole globally, which is those who worked in the health care industry or those who were responders during the pandemic are now suffering from PTSD. We are seeing our behavioral health numbers skyrocket on usage or need for services. We have seen a significant shift because people have gotten so used to being at home and isolated from people. Now you are starting to see that shift of how people interact with each other and that carries over into a shorter fuse with pets. It's just going to be a domino effect and we're going to be feeling it for the next few years.

BJ asked if we were to create a spokes dog, a character that sorts of represents the message that has some kind of a forum whether it's a blog or a column in the newspaper or something that has universal readership. Patrick liked the idea. Especially if we want to start outreach and targeting especially in our rural areas. We have to educate the families by educating the children. And in order to educate the kids we're going to have to keep their attention, so we would have to identify some type of spokesman or mascot. At one time we were distributing coloring books. Now we are starting to get to a point that we're able to go back in and engage schools.

Candace has created a few flyers and some coloring pages to put into a coloring book. So, we are gathering up all of that material so that this late fall or early winter, then we will have the ability to maybe breathe. If things slow down like they usually do, then we can start pushing that a little bit more.

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She's working hard. Cassie talked about a grant giving them the ability to hire a community outreach person for the central valley. Someone who is shared between the tri county area. Somebody who is embedded in these communities, maybe not even in an animal related way, to begin with but just embedded in the communities and able to be bilingual and communicate with people, so that we can start targeting some of these areas we have been wanting to target for the past few years but haven't had the bandwidth to do so. She has some ideas on where to start with Tulare County and they plan to do some targeted vaccine clinics and Spanish to work with some targeted education in those communities as well. There are other organizations that do something called "Lock the block" where they start in like one block in one of these communities and they work through that block to address issues in the community with their animals. And fix fences and provide spay and neuter and provide vaccines. And they're talking about training lay people to give basic parvo distemper vaccines, things that are not rabies. Training lay people in our communities to be able to be that resource hub, where people can go and get their puppies vaccinated. We are going to spay the mom and we're going to vaccinated all of the puppies. Lay people can do those things. They're working legislative wise to see how to make that work. It would not be through the county. It'd be through SF SPCA. So, we wouldn't obtain that liability, but we'd be working in partnership with them. So, lots of good things happening, good discussions that came out of yesterday, lots of exciting things, but until they are approved for the grant, not for sure things.

BJ asked if most communities have somebody that just does outreach. Cassie mentioned that community partner type organizations partner with other nonprofits and agencies to do some of that work. Tricia said a lot of that's done in kind of a model called wraparound services. She knows they have a community care coalition that has been meeting throughout the last two and a half years. It would be great to somehow get Animal Services on their radar as well. Patrick said that Cassie or Mary could reach out to that group and see if they would allow Animal Services to be invited to one of the meetings and it would be good to talk to Rosemary with United Way and 211. Tricia said the community care coalition is big. They meet every Thursday by zoom. She can get Cassie the information. Animal Services is another one of our support wraparound services for people going through crisis and those other areas. We need upper leadership to help bring us to that table and show that animal care and welfare is another component of a healthy community that we want to make a priority as we're providing all these wraparound services for all of these other crisis intervention programs.

Michael shared something on that subject. Fresno Unified applied for a grant last year and some of the data they looked at was about women in domestic violence situations. And in some instances, they don't leave the home because the shelters won't take animals. So they continue to suffer in that household from the abuse of the husband or another male because of the care of the pets in the house. We need to work with shelters to get the message to shelters to give them the capacity to care for animals. Cassie thinks there is some legislation being proposed to give incentives to homeless and domestic shelters to create a more pet friendly atmosphere. There's money attached to that so hopefully that will assist in that. Animal Services agencies are strapped with the responsibilities that they currently have. We already take in animals for what we call a PC hold. Basically, a hold if somebody gets arrested or someone goes into the hospital and doesn't have anybody to care for their animal. That's a fourteen day hold but that takes up the kennel that other dogs can't have and it's just a temporary stop gap and it's not available in all situations. It's when law enforcement calls us out to deal with something. That's something that would need to start at the legislative level and work its way down to our local community organizations.

Michelle asked Cassie if she could get some numbers like they did last time. Cassie said that she can provide them to Michelle. Tricia had written a piece for her September newspaper and then shoved it out to a few media outlets as well. She knows the Valley Voice and Exeter's Foothill Gazette paper carried her column. It made her a tiny bit nervous when a new reporter reached out and they were

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going to write their own piece. They ultimately did print her piece. Cassie said they did come out and do interviews and took photos. She took most of her information from Tricia's piece which was fabulous. Tricia has the benefit of having her own newspaper as the County Farm Bureau, but she really wanted to send it out as just a citizen in the community that cares about the behavioral, mental, health, environmental and socioeconomic constraints. One article certainly doesn't serve as a magic bullet. That kind of content has to be pushed out to lots of different places over and over again. She's glad it brought a little positive recognition to Cassie and her team. That's always her goal. Patrick said the article was fantastic.

Oma remembers when she was young, and a lot of kids really liked making cartoons. They were very creative. She wonders if anyone knows a young person who does that for fun. And these days it needs to be on the internet. Not necessary in newspapers because it seems to her that people don't read anymore. Can we get somebody who would be interested in doing that, if only for their resume or college application? Just wanted to throw that out there to think about if you've come across anyone.

AGENDA / DISCUSSION: Update from Ag Advisory Committee on Deceased Animals

None

AGENDA / DISCUSSION: Update from Ad-Hoc Committees

By-Laws: Patrick said due to everything else going on he has not been able to convene a meeting of the By-laws committee. He is still planning on doing it. Probably what he'll do is get a word document, lock it and send it to those on the committee. Let them take a look at it. A couple of key highlights from there is the overall membership structure of the Advisory Committee. He thinks through the by-law revision process or update, we'll probably be looking at making some changes to the structure. Possibly deleting two of the positions and then taking a couple of them that we can't fill or have had trouble filling and making them at-large because those are easier to recruit for and bring on. Those will probably be some of the things that are initially redlined and presented to the Committee for consideration.

Membership: We did have two applications that were received over the course of the last few months. They were sent to myself and then to Donna Grigsby. I have included some notes because I wanted to make a recommendation today. He hasn't heard back from Donna but the recommendation on one is to fill Laurie's position is to take her alternate and move her application forward to fill one of the Rescue Group/Partner slots and that would take care of that one.

We did receive an application from someone who lives in District 2 in early March and was interested in being a district representative and if Donna agreed, they were going to make the recommendation today to present that individual's application and name to the Board of Supervisors for consideration as a District 2 representative. That leaves us, in light of Ivy's resignation, a District 3 representative that will need to be filled now and an At-Large member will need to be filled. So, we still are needing to recruit for additional members. Patrick asked if that is something they need to take any action on. Ameeet doesn't think so. She doesn't remember them doing that in the past. The by-laws don't require it. Patrick likes keeping everyone apprised of what's going on and the challenges they face, so that's why he wanted to present the information. He will coordinate with Mary Jungwirth on forwarding those two applications with the designated spots that we would like them to be considered for to the Board of Supervisors and hope that they can get those positions filled before our next meeting.

Volunteer: No members yet on the committee. Patrick asked if anyone was interested in being on the Volunteer Committee. They'll go ahead and see if they have some at the next meeting. Hopefully these positions get filled between now and then and we'll get some enthusiasm towards that Volunteer committee. Hopefully we could get a volunteer to lead the Volunteer committee.

New Committees: None

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AGENDA / DISCUSSION: Suggestions of Committee Alternates

Discussion: None

AGENDA / DISCUSSION: 2023 Schedule of Meetings

Discussion: Patrick sees that we only have one meeting left in 2022 and the 2023 schedule of meetings. So, are we going to go ahead and continue under the same structure? Is everyone comfortable with the every other month that we have been doing? Tricia said it is a valuable opportunity to hear updates about the shelter work. She's not sure that we as a committee or an advisory body are really moving the ball for Cassie or her team on critical tasks and getting things done. She still considers herself someone new to this committee. So, she's looking for a little feedback of what is the expectation of us? It's great to get together and share our war stories about the rescue world and give Cassie a pat on the back. She likes to be part of advisory bodies that are actually able to help move the ball and maybe make Cassie's life better and her team's life better. What is it we really want this advisory body to be? And is it about creating policy or just being a sounding board for all of the bad things that are happening in the animal world. She needs some guidance. How does she be a better advisor to this body.

Patrick said the recommendation was to create the Advisory Committee because Animal Services in Tulare County has had a rather unique history behind it. We felt that we needed an external body that we had to report to that were constituents that we weren't reporting solely to as an administrator. The process then was to provide support to Animal Services by ways of the ad hoc committee or subcommittees. I think a lot of you came on to the Advisory Committee within the last two years which was a very unique time. From the standpoint of our shelter gates were closed. We could not bring volunteers in. We could not go out to the community and have events. Key positions were not filled. We had a hiring freeze, so it was just a continuous wall put in front of us on moving a lot of initiatives forward. I think now we can start looking at some of those key functions to where, like some of the connections with the schools, to where we would actually get students who were performing their community services hours out at the shelter. Some of those connections were actually made through our advisory committee members who had children themselves that attended certain schools or were involved with certain school activities and that was a huge help for quite a while again, up until we had to shut everything down. The education piece was trying to help with any type of graphic arts work or come up with educational ideas. We used to do an annual report to the Board of Supervisors. We haven't done one again because of Covid. We plan on doing one soon.

We'll be making adjustments to our by-laws for the committee. We may need letters of support from the Advisory Committee. Cassie and Patrick were talking the other day that our ordinances may need a fresh set of eyes and reviews based on changes at the state level and changes in industry standards. So, in these types of situations, we usually try and create a committee that will help review any proposed changes or solicit and identify key areas that need to be looked at within those documents. And then when the times comes to go to the Board, to make recommendations to the Board on the Advisory Committee in support of those types of items. Covid has really impacted a lot of what this committee was initially formed to do. Now that we are starting to get key pieces in place, and especially if we start looking at engaging the community and looking at Animal Services being introduced into that wraparound structure that is driving a lot of our decision making as an agency. We need to look at the person as a whole, including their lifestyle, which if it involves pets, how do we best service across the board? By getting them access to low cost spay/neuter, vaccinations, those types of stuff. Patrick thinks that 2023 is going to be the opportunity for this committee to actually start doing what it was intended to do and what it was doing at the beginning. Before we had to go to this wonderful zoom structure and not be able to go out to the shelter.

Tricia didn't want to just meet for the sake of meeting, and she wanted to make sure they've got a lot of us on here that have a rescue connection. So, we are kind of in the same trenches and see and

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experience a lot of what Cassie and her team have to experience. But she wants to help focus this agenda in this committee to the best of her abilities. She knows they are still kind of dealing with the Covid paralysis and virtual world and all that. She is looking forward to engaging in some of those policy conversations, reviewing ordinances, figuring out how they put resources into your toolbox, so your toolbox grows, and relations are leveraged to benefit the county. Patrick said most of the times when talking to people about Tulare County, they just think of one town such as Porterville. They only realize those large, incorporated cities. People are oblivious to everything we have within our county, and those really small pockets that tend to be where you see a lot of the issues with animals. Especially with the running at large and stuff. Hopefully at time point in time, we'll be in a situation that we are able to go back out into those communities and do some of the vaccine clinics and do that large, targeted approach as Cassie has talked about. Those will be key areas where he thinks the Advisory Committee will be very beneficial to the operation and getting people to help. When you go into the community that type of vaccine clinic is a lot different than giving vaccines at the shelter. It takes a lot of manpower. Based on that, do we feel that right now every other month is still a viable structure and then in 2023 we will really assess what this community committee will look like moving forward.

Tricia said that the County Agriculture Advisory Committee has gone to a quarterly meeting, and they often end up cancelling one. So, then it becomes almost a six-month gap between meetings. She just wants to be mindful that meeting on a structured schedule is helpful so she can plan her months. If we get them too far apart past four- or five-month intervals, then she thinks that they just become irrelevant, and this stuff just drops off our radar. So, she thinks that every other month for now is good as they work towards a more robust plan of work in 2023. Patrick agrees with that. Originally it was monthly and then they moved to every other month because our meetings were getting down to like twenty minutes. But now with some of the conversations and open discussions, we're now getting back up to that hour long, if not a bit longer meetings. So, I think that every other month is a good structure. I also agree Tricia that if we start spreading it out too far then we're going to start losing any type of momentum or a quorum to be present. Michelle asked if they needed to vote on the calendar. Patrick said we're not changing it. We had established every other month. If we decided to make changes to it, then we would have to add it as a vote actionable on our December agenda.

AGENDA / DISCUSSION: Additional Comments

Discussion: None

AGENDA / DISCUSSION: Adjourn meeting @ 2:02 pm

Motion: *Adjourn Meeting @ 2:02 pm by Patrick Hamblin*

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| 1st: | Tricia Stever Blattler | 2nd: | BJ Motko |
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| Vote | Yes: | No vote | No: |
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