



EXPLORE BUTTE COUNTY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Tamba Sellu, President
Courtyard by Marriott, Chico

January 15, 2026
Time: 1:00 pm - 3:30 pm

Matt Reed, Treasurer
Butte County Fairgrounds, Gridley

Kate Pinsonneault, Secretary
Hotel Diamond, Chico

BCAG Board Room
326 Huss Dr, Board Room, Chico, CA 95928

Jason Olivares
Oxford Suites, Chico

Ashley Dekellis
STVR Operator, Chico

Melissa Schuster,
Chapelle de L'Artiste Château & Retreat,
Paradise

Sareena Merchant
Hampton Inn, Oroville

Natalie Sheard
STVR Owner, Oroville

Aaron Wright
CA State Parks, Oroville

Megan Kurtz
CSU Chico

Megan Gaddis
Community at Large

Agenda

Public Notice Information: In accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act, EBC agendas are available for public review outside the BCAG Board Room at 326 Huss Dr, Building Et at least 72 hours prior to each meeting. The agendas are also posted on the EBC website at explorebuttecounty.com. Questions on agenda items may be directed to Nichole Farley, EBC Executive Direction, at nichole@explorebuttecounty.com.

MISSION: Explore Butte County inspires people to discover Butte County, creates tourism opportunities that contribute to economic vitality, and builds community through partnerships.

VISION: Explore Butte County champions a diverse and flourishing tourism industry, making it THE must-visit destination in the North State.

VALUES: Authenticity. Innovation. Stewardship. Equity. Fun.

BRAND POSITION: The Explorer - Adventurer, Pioneer, Seeker, Open-minded, Resourceful, Tolerant, Ambitious, Down to Earth, Authentic, Determined, Outdoorsy

1. OPEN MEETING - 1:02 PM

Attendees: Tamba Sellu, Melissa Schuster, Megan Kurtz, Natalie Sheard, Aaron Wright, Jason Oliveras, Sareena Merchant, Megan Gaddis, Katie Pinsonnault, Nichole Farley, Lucia Mercado, Angelina Matey, Ashley Baer

Absent: Matt Reed, Ashley Dekellis

Ron L (Paradise), Heather Johnson, Katie Simmons

2. CONSENT CALENDAR - Motion to approve: Melissa Schuster, Second - Jason Oliveras

2.1. [Approve Minutes from November 19, 2025 Board Meeting](#)

2.2. [Approve 2026 Budget Committee Minutes from December 9, 2025 - spelling error noted by Tamba](#)

2.3. [Approve October 2025 Financials \(with authorization to update for TBID assessment revenues attributed to October\)](#)

2.4. [Approve November 2025 Financials \(with authorization to update for TBID assessment revenues attributed to November\)](#)

2.5. [Employee Bonus & Incentive Pay Policy simplification](#)

3. 2026 FISCAL YEAR PLANNING

3.1. [2026 PROPOSED BUDGET](#) (Nichole Farley)

A draft of the [2026 Proposed Budget](#) is attached for discussion.
Supporting [annual contracts](#) included in the Budget.

Annual Contracts: Madden Media, AirDNA/Kalibri Lodging Data, Hubspot, National Travel Center, VisaVue, Langler

Recommendation: Approve the 2026 Proposed Budget and supporting annual contracts.

This is the same budget that was approved in December, Nichole is coming back to the board to provide contracts and more details.

78% of the budget goes into marketing and sales expenses, with 10% in administration.

2nd budget classes are reserves – Would like to keep \$5,000 in the website for Hubspot and \$38,000 in destination management to redesignate the Feather River Bayway as a Cultural Bayway Federally and State.

Another would be the Cooperative Programs. Butte365 has a goal to make \$35,000 this year which would be spent on marketing and sales, Butte365 community calendar expenses, and innovation through education opportunities.

Deferred microfunding throughout cities would be 7k for Paradise, 15k for Oroville, 3k in county, and 2k in Gridley.

Travel Chico will get 120k from the City of Chico Microfunding and another 20k from the City of Chico 2025/2026 Contract. Expenses include 124.4k in marketing and sales, 10k in microfunding, and 5k in administration.

Annual Contracts include – Madden Media at \$275k, AirDNA/Kalibri at \$18k, Visavue Spending Data at 8k, Hubspot at 25k, National Travel Center at 40k, and Langlers at 50k.

Questions and Comments:

Melissa – What are our reserves with that \$35,000 transferred?

Natalie – What is the jurisdiction's 2.5% fee? A: It's the administrative fee that the cities keep for collecting from our members.

Tamba – What is the return on investment that we are getting from Madden Media? A: We are seeing a slight increase in revenue, but more than anything our destination awareness is going up significantly. With destination marketing organizations it is a challenge to see a return on investment since we are not the final sale. Tamba: We need to see a higher occupancy rate. A: Staying flat in comparison to the dips that

most destinations are seeing is a reflection of the visitors that are being driven to our area. Sareena: It may be helpful to specify our conversion based campaign since we don't have a way of tracking success of the campaigns at the moment. A: Hubspot might be the missing key to answer exactly this! Since it tracks the customer journey and can inform us where the interest shifts in order to target our marketing efforts.

Megan Gaddis – With the business education programs, will these be accessible for the members of the partners? A: Yes! We want these programs to be for the businesses in our county.

Motion to Approve – Kate, Second – Aaron

3.2. 2026 - 2028 PROPOSED STRATEGIC DIRECTION (Nichole Farley)

The strategic direction for Explore Butte County from 2026 to 2028 is centered on championing a diverse and flourishing tourism industry to make it the North State's must-visit destination, while inspiring discovery and building economic vitality through partnerships. To achieve this, the plan outlines three focus areas: expanding and diversifying visitor experiences, innovative and experiential marketing, and improving access to experiences.

Recommendation: Adoption of the 2026-2028 Strategic Direction

We identified 3 core areas for goals to guide us through the next 3 years. 1. Expanding & Diversifying Visitor Experiences, 2. Innovation & Experiential Marketing, and 3. Improving Access to Experiences.

This Will be Accomplished by:

1. Creating a recruitment-ready portfolio of venues, trails, and facilities that supports event bidding, multi-city hosting, and long-term partnership development with state and regional sports organizations. Partner with existing events to expand, and/or curate large, experiential countywide events (e.g., outdoor adventure weekend, arts & culture showcase, endurance sports festival) that highlight Butte County's landscapes, talent, and identity.
2. Collaborate with established outdoor media or gear brands (Wildsam, AllGear, Outside Magazine). Host a large-scale installation at a major event to showcase Butte County's outdoor culture and engage attendees. Evaluate the destination's enhanced credibility, influence, and quality of visitor engagement generated by high-profile partnerships and experiential activations.
3. Leveraging technology to track the visitor journey to increase demand and motivate trips while strengthening the digital access to key attractions within the county.

Questions and Comments:

Megan Kurtz – Does EBC have a ChatGPT feature? A: Not yet, because they are expensive and are a high commitment for staff to train the bot before being able to launch it. But it is a recurring conversation within Ashley and Nichole. Tamba: We are in an era where the customer wants an immediate response!

Motion to Approve – Tamba, Second – Megan

3.3. 2026 ANNUAL STAFF GOALS & OBJECTIVES (Nichole Farley)

Review and approval of the 2026 Annual Staff Goals, aligned with the adopted 2026–2028 Strategic Direction and focused on measurable outcomes related to visitation, economic impact, community benefit, and organizational sustainability. The goals establish a standardized KPI framework to support accountability, performance evaluation, and strategic oversight by the Board.

Recommendation: Adoption of the 2026 Staff Goals and Objectives

Executive Director Goals:

Advance high-value partnerships focused on outdoor sports events that leverage existing trails, venues, and outdoor recreation infrastructure across Butte County.

Launch a Regional Marketing & Public Relations Campaign.

Work with local jurisdictions to support the licensing of short-term vacation rentals and the consistent collection and remittance of the Butte County Tourism Business Improvement District (BCTBID) assessment.

Lead Strategic Implementation of the 2026–2028 Strategic Direction.

Increase Stakeholder Communication and Engagement.

Marketing Director Goals:

Manage and execute innovative outdoor adventure marketing campaigns with Madden Media, including the successful delivery of the Bike Trail Pass booklets.

Accessibility: ADA Inclusion: Expand inclusive content

Implement HubSpot to track and improve visitor conversion across the pre-trip digital journey.

Lead the execution of the Explore Butte County Brand Refresh and ensure consistent implementation across all digital and print assets.

Accessibility: Digital Trail Access: Create immersive end-to-end experience guides for 5-10 high-priority trails across Butte County.

Community Engagement Goals:

Launch Inclusive and Authentic Digital Campaigns

Build tourism support within Butte County and expand engagement outside of Chico. Focus on Oroville and Gridley.

Streamline Event Submissions and updating the backend platform for Butte365

Cooperative Marketing Program & Monetization of Butte365.

Launch of Content Collective Group

Travel Chico Goals:

Amplify Seasonal and Signature Events

Create and Launch Four Original Content Series : Leverage Hubspot to Encourage overnight stays

Identify and maintain accurate, up-to-date business records on key restaurant and retail businesses in Chico to support targeted outreach, partnership development, and onboarding of Butte 365 partners.

Strengthen Travel Chico Brand Identity and Engagement

Enhance itineraries & guides

Support trailhead access and engagement

Questions and Comments:

Megan Gaddis – What are the efforts to update business profiles? A: We don't necessarily have business partners, but staff are working on person to person communication in order to better understand our market and how to properly market.

Aaron – Have we looked into the housing market to see how they market and engage the public? A: No, we have not, but that sounds like a wonderful opportunity to partner.

Jason – The data we are getting from Visa spend, who on the team is looking into these numbers and deciding how we use that information?

A: That's where Madden Media comes in, they review the numbers and adjust spending based on where it is necessary to shift spending.

Tamba – How long have we had Butte365? Is it independent now? A: We are going into the 3rd year, but this will be the first year we move into it being self-sustaining.

Motion – Aaron, Second – Jason

4. BOARD UPDATES & PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is invited to address the Board regarding any non-agenda items at this time. Time is limited to three (3) minutes per speaker. The Board may not take any action on public comment.

Kate P – We are doing a really cool Valentine's dinner at The Grill, a 3 course celebration of the Chef's seafood centric theme. Also opening up a pop-up speakeasy in the wine cellar, opening in Spring. Motrin VIP Limo is in Yuba City and wants to be more in the Butte County market! He has a lot of buses with up to 15 passengers. He is open to providing transportation for events.

Sareena Merchant – The bar at Hampton Inn in Oroville is officially open! We are looking into ways to market it. I am also looking forward to being in the meetings with Madden Media and adding how I can.

Ashley Baer – Networking Hours are scheduled for 2026! The February meeting will be at the Butte County Fairgrounds with presentations from Nichole Farley and Matt Reed. The first influencer of the year is coming in March. All of the hotels should have gotten an email to a partner, this is a marketing opportunity.

Holly CARD – Spring Jamboree and Kite Day kick off our events season in March. We are looking forward to the opening of the Aquatic Center in Fall. The team is still crunching numbers on the Chico Ice Rink, we lowered the pricing and saw 40% more visitors, however the rain really dipped into our profits.

Katie Simmons – EBC is a great partner to connect us with the tourism industry to better understand how to move forward in a way that benefits both parties. Opening the conversation for the crossover between disaster and tourism.

Heather Johnson – ODBA just hosted the 2026 leadership workshop with the board of directors and Ashley Baer was in the conversation. The decision is to pull away from hosting the amount of events that we do and shift focus to creating bigger campaigns that cover downtown Oroville as a destination. The focus will shift back to events in October with the Farm to Fork Dinner and Holiday Events.

Pat Macias – monca had a great NYE Party and we are currently looking forward to the Snow Goose Festival. March 21st we are hosting a Gala at the commercial building at the Silver Dollar Fairgrounds.

Nichole Farley – I will be going to NY next week to meet with People's Inc to join in a roundtable discussion with Visit Ca and also be tabling at IMM - meeting with 20 journalists & creators. We have all staff trips planned for the year to help build our skills, plus meeting new potential partners.

Natalie Sheard – In conversation with partners at the moment to renovate the Historic Inn in Downtown Oroville to be a boutique hotel.

Megan Kurtz – Chico State is expecting 13,000+ attendees which is up from last Spring. For every dollar that the State has invested in Chico State, that \$1 is converted to \$5 which is reflecting that our CSU is a good investment for the State of California. On December 11th, there was a transportation committee with District 11 and we had a low turnout, so we are inviting them back in hopes that we have a larger turnout.

Melissa Schuster – The Burnt Barn Distillery Co will be all about bourbon in 2026! We are currently not distributing, but we are hoping to open up for distribution by the 4th quarter.

5. CLOSED SESSION - 2:15 PM

5.1. EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS (Tamba Sellu)

The Board will review the 2025 employee performance outcomes, including the Executive Director's annual performance evaluation and related compensation considerations, and assess recommended employee bonus awards tied to Board-approved goals. Action may be taken to approve Executive Director compensation adjustments and 2025 staff bonuses.

6. REPORT ON CLOSED SESSION

EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS: Approval of staff bonus and 5% cost of living adjustments to salaries. No action taken on Executive Director's annual performance evaluation and related compensation consideration.

7. ADJOURNMENT