

August 20, 2013
Public Testimony to Lane County BCC
RE: Destination Marketing Contract



My name is Kari Westlund and I serve as president and ceo of Travel Lane County. Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment this morning on the agenda item regarding destination marketing.

I urge you to select option # 2, the status quo option, and renew Travel Lane County's contract for a typical three year period, including annual reviews and termination rights. This option is supported by the following:

1. In the past two years Lane County has seen all time records of transient room tax and lodging revenues. Smith Travel Research reports that Lane County room demand is up 6.9% year to date through July, compared to 2.3% growth nationally and 5.1% growth for Oregon overall.
2. The strong health of the local hospitality sector, which has been consistently mentioned by economists Tim Duy and Brian Rooney, clearly negates the premise and sense of urgency stated in the agenda memorandum before you.
3. Travel Lane County website traffic grew 50% in the program year that just ended, driven by our advertising, social media and content optimization. Social media relationships, mobile site traffic, room night and delegate confirmations are all up.
4. To relieve us of advertising, social media, and the official destination web site essentially guts our marketing program and renders us ineffective in achieving our mission of increasing overnight visitors for Lane County. While we take no issue with the recommendations of the agency selected by the review committee - they endorse our brand positioning, they suggest speaking to markets by niche interest, they urge social media communications, a robust web site and mobile - the reality is that we already do what they propose, we do it very well, and we do it for less money and with local employees.

5. Just recently, the TRT Task Force strongly endorsed Travel Lane County's work as exceptional and recommended maintaining the 2.1 point allocation to destination marketing. Citizen volunteers, County staff, Travel Lane County staff, and many businesses and organizations spent significant time and energy participating in these meetings.
6. A three year contract will allow time for the new County Administrator to examine our programs and outcomes, decide whether or not to recommend if room tax allocations need to be looked at again and then allow for an appropriate process. With annual reviews and termination rights, if you choose to make changes before the end of three years, you can.
7. 550 businesses across Lane County invest in our work, providing a 26.5% match for your \$1.7 million allocation of room tax to destination marketing. A for-profit agency will reduce your allocation by the amount of its profit margin, and media placement commissions, which we do not pay.
8. We are two months in to the fiscal year and have a redesign and upgrade of our web site waiting, budgeted to phase over two fiscal years. We cannot begin that work under a one year contract.
9. Advertising and web design services should be contracted by your destination marketing organization, not separately. The committee recommendation would damage the effectiveness of destination marketing for Lane County and it would take years to rebuild it. This has been proven many times over by other communities who have de-funded their local non-profit destination marketing organization.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and for the opportunity to serve Lane County over these many years. It has been our organization's great honor and we hope to market Lane County for many years to come.