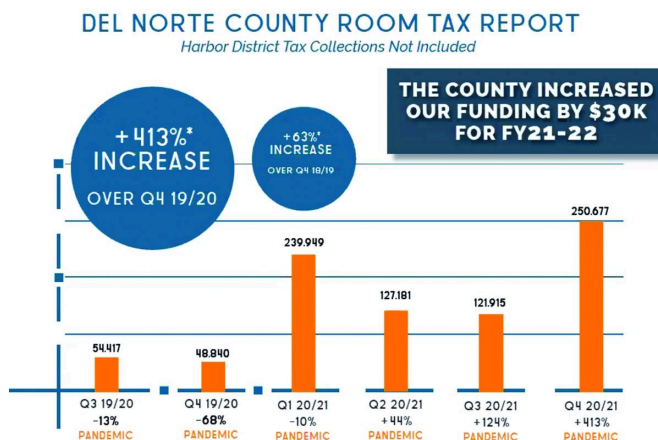


Harbor district tables vote to increase funding to visitor's center

January 15, 2022



A request from the Del Norte County Visitor's Bureau for an additional \$4,000 from the Crescent City Harbor District failed to receive enough votes that would have increased its marketing budget to \$10,000, and was instead tabled.

The 2-2 tie vote, with one commissioner having recused himself due to a financial conflict of interest, followed a report that showed a \$100,000 increase in room tax revenue compared to the year prior.

Cindy Vosburg, executive director of the visitor's bureau, said they were seeking an increase in funding to capitalize on gains made in new visitor counts and transient occupancy taxes over the past year.

"The more we push out story ideas to travel publications, travel bloggers, etc., the more recognition and media coverage we will receive," Vosburg said.

Lynette Braillard, of Lulish Design, delivered a presentation on behalf of the visitor's bureau prior to the vote.

"The Del Norte County room tax report at the end of quarter four, 2021, was up 413% over the previous quarter," said Braillard. "It was also up 63% over quarter four of 2018-2019, which was pre-pandemic."

Braillard added that the visitor's bureau marketing campaigns also made strides, citing a 157% gain to 217,000 web page views and 69,000 "engagements" - which include comments, likes and shares on social media.

“This current fiscal year, we are doing more influencer marketing,” Braillard said, adding that search engine optimization through a partnership with Visit California, as well as a targeted video campaign and software upgrade would also go live this year.

According to Vosburg, the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors recently voted to increase its contribution by \$30,000, for a total of \$114,340, funds of which are allocated as \$92,340 to the visitor bureau and \$22,000 to run the visitor’s center. Crescent City also contributes \$100,000, with \$18,000 being used to pay in-kind utilities and rent, \$72,000 to the visitor bureau and \$11,000 to run the visitor center.

“One of the things that I should point out is that we receive a benefit - via the TOT tax - because of Measure C,” said Commissioner Brian Stone, immediately after Braillard’s presentation. Measure C passed in 2018, and raised the TOT tax from 8% to 10%.

“It is one of the main reasons we have seen an increase in the actual TOT taxes, even while it’s been an off year,” Stone added. “If you take a look at the numbers they have produced for us and the large amount of increase that is there, it is primarily because of what they have done.”

Stone added that the TOT increase has brought the harbor district “close to what we need to pay” against a USDA \$262,000 loan that was used to repair the harbor after the 2011 tsunami.

“Thank you Brian, that put it really into perspective as to where we’re going to recover that money, and that was a question I had about what are we going to get for that \$4,000,” said Commissioner and Chair Rick Shepherd.

Shepherd then said he would entertain a motion to approve, then instead turned the matter over for public comment after those attending the meeting said they wished to speak.

“Four thousand dollars may not be a lot of money to you, but every penny you spend should be prioritized,” said Crescent City resident Roger Gitlin, adding that a 40% increase in funding was excessive.

County resident Annie Nehmer agreed, adding that she questioned whether the increase in room taxes correlated with the visitor bureau’s efforts.

“Nothing was mentioned about how tons of tourists flocked to Del Norte County because the rest of the state and areas were locked down and people were desperate to go somewhere,” Nehmer said.

“Thank you very much, that’s a point well taken,” responded Shepherd. “I was gonna mention that. I see a lot of tourism was up in coastal towns and it was because people weren’t flying.”

Commissioner Wes White then made a motion to approve the increase, which was seconded by Stone. However, Commissioners Shepherd and Gerhard Weber dissented, resulting in a tie vote. Commissioner Harry Adams recused himself because a business that he and his wife own - Stella’s Adventures - was mentioned several times during the presentation.

White then made a motion to table the request, which the commission approved.

