



VISIT FORT BRAGG STAFF REPORT

TO: Visit Fort Bragg Committee

DATE: June 15, 2026

DEPARTMENT: City Manager's Office

PREPARED BY: Isaac Whippy, City Manager

PRESENTER: Isaac Whippy, City Manager

AGENDA TITLE: Future Structure, Funding, and Strategic Direction of Visit Fort Bragg

RECOMMENDATION

Receive the staff report, discuss the future direction of tourism in Fort Bragg, and provide recommendations to the City Council regarding:

1. The long-term vision, goals, and priorities for tourism in Fort Bragg;
2. The role of Visit Fort Bragg in supporting tourism, destination management, visitor experience, events, and economic development initiatives;
3. Opportunities to strengthen marketing, visitor experiences, community partnerships, and year-round visitation;
4. Potential organizational and governance models to support tourism efforts moving forward; and
5. Future performance measures and funding priorities to ensure tourism investments are aligned with community goals and measurable economic outcomes.

Vision → Strategy → Role of VFB → Structure/Funding → Accountability

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this special committee session is to facilitate a discussion regarding the future of tourism in Fort Bragg and the role Visit Fort Bragg should play moving forward. Tourism remains one of the most important sectors of the local economy. The Committee is being asked to evaluate whether the current tourism structure, funding priorities, and performance measures remain aligned with the City's long-term goals and opportunities. The Committee's discussion and recommendations will help inform future City Council policy and budget decisions regarding tourism, destination management, marketing, visitor experience, and economic development.

Tourism is one of the most important economic drivers in the City of Fort Bragg and generates significant benefits for local businesses, employees, and municipal services. As of June 30, 2025, Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenue exceeded approximately \$3.2 million annually, making TOT the largest single revenue source within the City's General Fund. These revenues support a wide range of municipal services, including public safety, parks, recreation, infrastructure, economic development initiatives, and quality-of-life improvements.

Because tourism-generated revenues play such a significant role in the City's financial sustainability, the manner in which tourism resources are invested and managed has important long-term implications for the community.

Measure AA and Measure AB (2016)

In November 2016, Fort Bragg voters approved Measure AA and Measure AB. Measure AA increased the City's Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) rate from 10% to 12%. Measure AB was an advisory measure expressing voter preferences regarding the use of the additional revenues generated by Measure AA.

The advisory allocation approved by voters included:

- 50% toward promotions, events, and marketing for Fort Bragg;
- 25% toward Coastal Trail maintenance and security;
- 12.5% toward supporting establishment of the Noyo Center for Marine Science as a visitor attraction; and
- 12.5% toward special projects that support tourism and benefit the community, including improvements to local athletic fields and related community-serving amenities.

While Measure AB was advisory and not legally binding, it provided important insight into community priorities regarding tourism-generated revenues and demonstrated strong public support for investing in tourism, visitor amenities, and community assets.

Measure U (2024)

In November 2024, Fort Bragg voters approved Measure U, increasing the City's Transient Occupancy Tax rate from 12% to 14%. Measure U is projected to generate approximately \$400,000 in additional annual revenue for the City.

Combined with continued growth in tourism activity, Measure U provides additional opportunities for the City to evaluate how tourism-generated revenues can best support:

- Economic development;
- Destination marketing;
- Visitor experience improvements;
- Community events;
- Tourism-related infrastructure;
- Public safety services; and
- Community quality-of-life investments.

Nearly ten years have passed since the approval of Measure AA and Measure AB.

During that time:

- Tourism has evolved significantly;
- Digital marketing has transformed destination promotion;
- Visitor expectations have changed;
- Event-based tourism has expanded;
- Communities have increasingly adopted destination management strategies; and
- Competition among destinations has intensified.

At the same time, TOT has grown into the City's largest General Fund revenue source. As the City looks toward the next decade, an important policy question emerges:

How should Fort Bragg invest tourism-generated revenues to maximize economic benefit, support local businesses, enhance visitor experiences, and strengthen the community?

The purpose of this study session is to begin that conversation and explore whether the City's current tourism structure remains the best model for the future

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Visit Fort Bragg Committee

Visit Fort Bragg currently operates as an advisory committee of the City of Fort Bragg and provides recommendations to the City Manager and City Council regarding tourism-related programs, marketing initiatives, events, visitor attraction efforts, and funding priorities.

The Committee is comprised of:

- Two City Council Members
- Business representatives
- Tourism stakeholders
- Community members

The Committee provides recommendations to the City Manager and City Council regarding tourism-related programs, marketing, events, and funding priorities.

Current Tourism Investment Model (1% of TOT):

Program	Annual Budget
Marketing Contract (Idea Cooperative)	\$180,000
Events – Shoulder season Programming	\$100,000
Fireworks – 4 th July Celebration	\$35,000
City Staff Time	\$30,000
Total	\$345,000

THE IDEA COOPERATIVE

The City currently contracts with The Idea Cooperative to serve as Fort Bragg's tourism marketing agency. Under this model, the majority of tourism funding is dedicated to outsourced destination marketing and promotional services.

Services provided by The Idea Cooperative generally include:

- Destination branding and messaging
- Advertising campaigns
- Digital marketing
- Website management and content
- Social media support
- Public relations and media outreach
- Visitor attraction campaigns
- Marketing strategy and implementation

This model has allowed the City to access professional marketing expertise without maintaining dedicated tourism staff. It has also provided continuity in destination branding and promotion.

As part of this discussion, the Committee may wish to evaluate whether the current consultant-based model remains aligned with the City's future tourism goals and priorities, or whether a greater emphasis should be placed on areas such as event development, visitor experience improvements, downtown activation, business engagement, community partnerships, and destination management.

The question is not whether marketing remains important, it clearly does. Rather, the question is whether the current balance of tourism investments is achieving the outcomes the community and lodging establishment would like to see and whether alternative models could provide greater capacity, stronger partnerships, and increased economic impact.

VISIT MENDOCINO COUNTY (VMC)

As part of this discussion, it is important to understand the role of Visit Mendocino County (VMC). VMC serves as the countywide destination marketing organization responsible for promoting Mendocino County as a visitor destination.

Responsibilities generally include:

- Destination marketing
- Advertising campaigns
- Public relations
- Travel media outreach
- Visitor information

- Tourism research
- Brand development
- Industry partnerships

VMC receives funding primarily through the Mendocino County Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID/BID). The BID is funded through assessments paid by lodging establishments throughout Mendocino County and is specifically intended to support tourism promotion and visitor attraction.

As a result, Fort Bragg lodging operators currently contribute to:

1. The City's Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) 14%; and
2. The Mendocino County Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID/BID) 1%.

Today, Visit Fort Bragg and Visit Mendocino County generally operate as separate organizations with different governance structures and funding sources, although both share the common objective of increasing visitation and supporting the local visitor economy.

THE EVOLUTION OF TOURISM

Historically, tourism organizations focused primarily on destination marketing.

Success was often measured by:

- Advertising impressions
- Website visits
- Click-through rates
- Social media reach

While these metrics remain valuable, many communities have shifted toward destination management models that focus on broader economic and community outcomes.

Success is increasingly measured through:

- Event attendance
- Downtown foot traffic
- Hotel occupancy data
- Sales tax generation
- TOT growth
- Business participation
- Visitor satisfaction
- Repeat visitation

The goal is not simply to attract visitors, but to create experiences that support local businesses and strengthen the overall economy.

COMPARABLE TOURISM MODELS

Several successful California destinations operate through independent destination marketing organizations rather than advisory committee structures.

1. Sonoma Valley

Tourism efforts are managed through a destination marketing organization supported by tourism-related revenues and industry partnerships.

Focus areas include:

- Marketing
- Visitor services
- Event development
- Destination stewardship
- Industry engagement

2. Monterey County

See Monterey operates as the county's official destination marketing organization and is governed by tourism and hospitality stakeholders.

Responsibilities include:

- Marketing
- Visitor attraction
- Conference and group sales
- Tourism development
- Research and analytics

3. Carmel-by-the-Sea

Tourism promotion is coordinated through a dedicated tourism organization focused on destination branding, public relations, digital marketing, and visitor attraction.

4. Napa Valley

Visit Napa Valley operates as an independent nonprofit destination marketing organization funded through tourism assessment revenues.

Responsibilities include:

- Marketing
- Visitor services
- Tourism development
- Strategic planning
- Industry partnerships

Common Characteristics

These organizations generally share:

- Dedicated executive leadership
- Professional staff
- Industry participation
- Consolidated tourism funding
- Event development capacity
- Visitor experience initiatives
- Performance accountability

HOW DOES FORT BRAGG COMPARE?

Community	Governance	Leadership	Funding Model
Sonoma Valley	DMO Board	Executive Director	Tourism Assessments
Monterey County	DMO Board	Executive Director	Industry Funding
Carmel	Tourism Organization	Professional Staff	Tourism Revenues
Napa Valley	Independent Nonprofit	Executive Director	Assessment District
Fort Bragg (Current)	Advisory Committee	Staff/Consultant-Based	Approx. \$315,000

The Committee may wish to consider whether Fort Bragg's current structure remains the most effective model for the future?

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

Based on tourism research, stakeholder input, and the attached Strategic Marketing Plan, several opportunities exist to strengthen Fort Bragg's visitor economy and maximize the return on tourism investments.

1. Increase Shoulder Season Tourism & Overnight Stays

Fort Bragg's greatest opportunity may not be increasing peak-season visitation, but rather growing visitation during traditionally slower periods when additional visitors provide the greatest economic benefit to local businesses and lodging providers.

Potential opportunities include:

- Expanding existing shoulder-season events such as Timber & Tides Music Festival, Fort Bragg Blues Festival, Magic Market, Tacos & Brews, Oktoberfest, and cycling events.
- Developing new seasonal events and recurring activations that drive overnight stays.
- Creating lodging and experience packages that combine accommodations with attractions, dining, recreation, and local experiences.
- Expanding culinary, arts, cultural, harbor, and outdoor recreation programming.

- Increasing winter and holiday-related activities that encourage year-round visitation.

The goal is to generate additional overnight stays, increase occupancy during slower periods, and create reasons for visitors to return throughout the year.

2. Improve the Visitor Experience

As the Committee has considered recently on marketing that not only attracts visitors, but the visitor experience ultimately determines whether they return and recommend Fort Bragg to others.

Potential investments include:

- Wayfinding and visitor signage.
- Digital visitor guides and trip-planning resources.
- Downtown and Noyo Harbor connectivity.
- Public art, murals, and photo opportunities.
- Visitor information and welcome initiatives.
- Coastal access improvements and visitor amenities.
- Enhancements that encourage longer stays and greater visitor engagement.

The objective is to ensure Fort Bragg is not only a destination people discover, but one they remember and return to.

3. Strengthen Partnerships & Destination Development

Tourism success depends on collaboration among public agencies, businesses, lodging providers, nonprofits, event organizers, and regional tourism partners.

Potential opportunities include:

- Expanded collaboration with Visit Mendocino County.
- Stronger partnerships with lodging providers and hospitality businesses.
- Coordination with the Chamber of Commerce and downtown businesses.
- Joint marketing and promotional efforts.
- Development of visitor packages and experiences.
- Greater participation from local stakeholders in tourism initiatives.

The goal is to align resources and reduce duplication while maximizing the economic impact of tourism investments.

4. Increase Economic Impact & Accountability

As tourism-generated revenues continue to grow, there is an opportunity to place greater emphasis on measurable outcomes and return on investment.

Potential performance measures include:

- Hotel occupancy and overnight stays.
- Event attendance.
- Sales tax and TOT growth.
- Business participation.
- Visitor satisfaction.
- Website conversions and visitor engagement.
- Tourism-related economic impact.

The objective is to ensure tourism investments are producing measurable benefits for local businesses, residents, and the community as a whole.

5. Leverage Data-Driven Tourism Strategies

Modern destination organizations increasingly rely on visitor data, market research, occupancy trends, and performance analytics to guide investment decisions.

Potential opportunities include:

- Better understanding visitor travel patterns and feeder markets.
- Identifying high-value visitor segments.
- Tracking campaign performance and conversion rates.
- Measuring event and tourism-related economic impacts.
- Using data to guide future tourism investments and strategic priorities.

A data-driven approach can help ensure tourism resources are invested where they generate the greatest benefit for Fort Bragg and the Mendocino Coast.

6. Modern Destination Marketing & Storytelling

Visitor travel planning has changed significantly over the last decade. Today's travelers increasingly discover destinations through social media, digital content, travel influencers, online trip-planning platforms, and peer recommendations rather than traditional advertising alone.

Fort Bragg is uniquely positioned to benefit from visual storytelling due to its coastal scenery, redwood forests, historic attractions, harbor district, outdoor recreation opportunities, and authentic small-town character.

Potential opportunities include:

- Partnerships with travel influencers and content creators.
- Familiarization tours for travel writers and media outlets.
- Enhanced social media storytelling and video content.
- Development of curated itineraries and trip-planning resources.

- Partnerships with platforms such as Roadtrippers and similar travel discovery services.
- User-generated content campaigns highlighting visitor experiences.
- Promotion of seasonal experiences and hidden gems throughout the community.

The goal is to expand Fort Bragg's reach, increase destination awareness, and inspire future visitation through authentic storytelling and modern marketing channels.

Audience	Potential Channels
Bay Area Weekend Travelers	Instagram, Meta, Roadtrippers
Sacramento Families	Google Search, YouTube, Family Travel Blogs
Outdoor Recreation Visitors	Roadtrippers, AllTrails, MTB networks
Couples Getaways	Influencers, PR, travel magazines
Retirees	Email marketing, travel publications
International Visitors	VMC partnerships, PR, travel trade

OPTION 1 – EXISTING MODEL

Under the current model, Visit Fort Bragg functions as an advisory committee to the City Manager and City Council. The Committee provides recommendations regarding tourism marketing, events, and funding priorities. The City contracts with The Idea Cooperative to provide destination marketing, advertising, branding, and promotional services.

City Council

City Manager

Visit Fort Bragg Committee (Advisory Committee)

- Recommends Tourism Priorities
- Reviews Marketing Initiatives
- Advises on Event Funding
- Makes Recommendations to Council

Marketing Consultant (The Idea Cooperative)

Tourism Marketing
Advertising
Promotion
Branding

Primary Focus: Marketing & Promotion

Annual Budget: Approximately \$315,000

Leadership Model: Advisory Committee + City Staff + Consultant

Primary Strength: Local control and established structure

Primary Limitation: Limited capacity to implement tourism initiatives beyond marketing

Advantages

- Familiar governance structure
- Local control
- Minimal organizational changes

Challenges

- Limited implementation capacity
- Heavy reliance on marketing
- Limited staffing resources
- Less focus on destination management

OPTION 2 – CITY-LED DESTINATION MANAGEMENT MODEL

Under this model, tourism efforts would be more closely integrated with the City's Economic Development Program and supported by a dedicated Visitor Experience, Events & Social Media Manager. The idea is not to eliminate marketing, but to rebalance our investment so that more resources are focused on creating and enhancing the experiences that bring people to Fort Bragg in the first place.

Marketing services would continue through a contracted consultant, but under a more focused scope centered on branding, advertising, digital campaigns, and destination promotion. At the same time, the City would build internal capacity to better coordinate events, support local businesses, strengthen social media and storytelling efforts, and improve the overall visitor experience.

This model recognizes that tourism is about more than attracting visitors—it is about giving them reasons to come, encouraging them to stay longer, and creating experiences that make them want to return. Greater emphasis would be placed on event development, downtown activation, visitor experience improvements, and partnerships with organizations such as Visit Mendocino County, the Fort Bragg Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, lodging providers, nonprofits, and community event organizers.

A dedicated staff member could help bring these efforts together by serving as a central point of coordination, identifying opportunities to expand existing events, attract new events during the shoulder season, support local event organizers, and strengthen collaboration among community partners.

Structure

City Manager



Economic Development



Visitor Experience, Events & Social Media Manager

↓
Visit Fort Bragg Committee (Advisory)

↓
Marketing Consultant

The goal of this model is to maintain strong destination marketing while placing greater focus on visitor experience, events, community partnerships, and measurable economic outcomes. Success would be evaluated not only by impressions and clicks, but by event attendance, business participation, foot traffic, overnight stays, visitor satisfaction, and the overall economic impact generated for the Fort Bragg community.

Example Budget

Marketing: \$90,000

Events: \$100,000

Personnel: \$95,000

Fireworks: \$35,000

Advantages

- Greater implementation capacity
- Strong local control and accountability
- Increased focus on events and visitor experience
- Stronger partnerships with community organizations and businesses
- Better alignment with economic development goals
- More direct engagement through social media and local storytelling

Challenges

- Additional City staffing responsibilities
- Increased operational involvement by the City
- Reduced reliance on outsourced marketing may require a transition period
- Success depends on strong coordination among community partners

The goal of this model is to maintain effective destination marketing while placing greater emphasis on visitor experience, event development, community partnerships, and measurable economic outcomes. Success would be evaluated not only by impressions and clicks, but by event attendance, business participation, foot traffic, overnight stays, visitor satisfaction, and the overall economic impact generated for the Fort Bragg community.

OPTION 3 – FORT BRAGG DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION (DMO)

Create a new independent Destination Marketing Organization that combines tourism resources, funding, and expertise into a single professionally managed organization focused on destination marketing, tourism development, visitor experience, event programming, and economic impact.

This option is not a merger with Visit Mendocino County and does not transfer authority to VMC. Rather, it contemplates creation of a new organization with strong local representation and participation from tourism stakeholders.

Potential Participants

- City of Fort Bragg
- Visit Fort Bragg
- Visit Mendocino County
- Lodging industry representatives
- Business representatives
- Event organizers
- Tourism stakeholders

Potential Funding Sources

- Visit Fort Bragg funding
- Visit Mendocino County partnerships
- BID-supported initiatives
- Lodging participation
- Sponsorships
- Grants
- Event revenues
- Private partnerships

Potential Annual Resources



Potential Structure

DMO Board of Directors
↓
Executive Director
↓
Marketing & Communications
Destination Development
Events & Partnerships
Visitor Experience
Research & Analytics

Potential uses of the fund would be:

Allocation Summary — Reference Guide

#	Initiative	Share	Est. Budget
01	Locally Based Nonprofit DMO Structure	10%	~\$68,000
02	Destination Data & Insights (Pre-Campaign)	5%	~\$34,000
03	Website Conversion & User Experience	TBD	via reserve
04	Comprehensive Marketing Plan & Paid Media	30%	~\$204,000
05	Expanded VMC Strategic Partnership	5%	~\$34,000
06	TOT Investment Alignment	0%	no direct cost
07	Visitor Experience Improvement Program	10%	~\$68,000
08	Visitor Email Database & Trade Show Program	6%	~\$41,000
09	Lodging Partnerships & Off-Season Packages	8%	~\$54,000
10	Signature Events & Activation Strategies	8%	~\$54,000
11	PR & Earned Media Program	5%	~\$34,000
12	Content Engine	2%	~\$12,000
13	Reporting, Accountability & ROI Tracking	2%	~\$12,000
+	Flexible Reserve & Website Implementation	9%	~\$61,000

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Strategic Direction

1. What should be the primary role of Visit Fort Bragg over the next 5-10 years?
2. What are the most important outcomes the Committee would like tourism efforts to achieve?
 - Increased overnight stays
 - Stronger shoulder-season visitation
 - Higher TOT and sales tax revenues
 - More events
 - Improved visitor experiences
 - Greater support for local businesses

3. What opportunities exist to strengthen year-round visitation and increase economic activity?

Marketing & Visitor Experience

4. Is the current marketing strategy aligned with the City's goals and priorities?
5. What visitor markets should Fort Bragg focus on (Bay Area, Sacramento, families, outdoor recreation, couples, international visitors, etc.)?
6. What marketing approaches provide the greatest return on investment?
 - Digital advertising
 - Social media
 - Influencers and content creators
 - Public relations and earned media
 - Roadtrippers and trip-planning platforms
 - Event promotion
 - Partnerships with VMC
7. What visitor experience improvements, events or partnerships should be prioritized?

Organizational Structure

8. Is tourism primarily a marketing function, an economic development strategy, or a combination of both?
9. Which organizational model best positions Fort Bragg for long-term success?
10. How should tourism investments be balanced between marketing, events, visitor experience, destination development, and partnerships?
11. What recommendation should the Committee forward to the City Council?

For nearly a decade, tourism investments supported by Measure AA/AB have helped promote Fort Bragg and support the visitor economy. As tourism continues to evolve, the Committee has an opportunity to evaluate whether the current structure remains the best model for the future or whether alternative approaches could provide greater capacity, stronger partnerships, enhanced visitor experiences, and increased economic impact.

The purpose of this study session is not to select a preferred option, but to begin a strategic discussion regarding how tourism resources can best be utilized to support local businesses, strengthen the economy, improve visitor experiences, and position Fort Bragg for long-term success.

STRATEGIC PLAN/CONSISTENCY

This discussion supports several City Strategic Plan goals, including:

- Economic Development – Supporting local businesses, tourism, and job creation.

- Downtown Revitalization – Increasing visitation, activity, and business engagement.
- Fiscal Sustainability – Maximizing the effectiveness of tourism-generated revenues.
- Community Vitality – Supporting events, recreation, and quality-of-life improvements.
- Partnerships & Collaboration – Strengthening coordination among tourism stakeholders and community partners.

Tourism is both an economic development and quality-of-life strategy that supports residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

FISCAL IMPACT

No fiscal action is requested at this time. Current tourism-related funding totals approximately \$345,000 annually and includes marketing, events, and community celebrations. As of June 30, 2025, Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenues exceeded \$3.2 million, making TOT the City's largest General Fund revenue source. In 2024, voters approved Measure U, increasing the TOT rate from 12% to 14%, which is projected to generate approximately \$400,000 in additional annual revenue.

This discussion provides an opportunity to evaluate whether current tourism investments are aligned with community priorities and whether alternative organizational models could improve economic outcomes and return on investment.

Any future funding or organizational changes would be subject to City Council approval through the annual budget process.

ATTACHMENTS

- Visit Fort Bragg By-Laws
- Strategic Marketing Plan + Budget Allocation Proposal