



Visit Estes Park
The Destination
Marketing Organization
VisitEstesPark.com

Board of Directors Regular Meeting May 3, 2016 Minutes

Board Members Attending: Steve Kruger, Lindsay Lamson, Morgan Mulch, Jon Nicholas, Adam Shake, Scott Webermeier, and Cody Walker (Town Trustee Liaison)

Board Members Absent: Karen Ericson

Also Attending: Ken Arnold, Carrie Arnold, Paul Fishman, Tom Hochstetler, Katy Hochstetler, Tracey McGinnis, and Anthony Welch

Elizabeth Fogarty, President & CEO
Michael Bodman, Visit Estes Park (VEP) staff

The meeting was called to order by Chair Scott Webermeier at 2:02 pm.

Public Comment: Tom Hochstetler noted that there are developments that are rapidly changing the community, including a new Recreation Center, a fiber optic cable, and the proliferation of vacation home rentals leading to an acute shortage of workforce housing, which impacts business owners. Hochstetler expressed a concern that not all of the current vacation home businesses are paying their fair share of lodging taxes. He asked Visit Estes Park for a list of current lodging taxpayers that he could use to determine how many are paying.

Scott Webermeier replied that Visit Estes Park has been pursuing this issue for at least 4 years, but it's complicated for many reasons. The names of businesses, owners, and addresses can be different, making it difficult to determine who all the vacation homeowners are, many of which are already paying their lodging tax via a management company.

Elizabeth Fogarty added that Visit Estes Park, after Hochstetler's original call to her requesting a list of taxpayers, had consulted with the State's Department of Revenue and was advised that she cannot disclose a list of lodging taxpayers. Hochstetler replied that if Visit Estes Park cannot provide a list, he would demand it from the State himself, incur legal fees as necessary, and publish the results in the newspaper. He stated that, according to his interpretation of the law, he is entitled to this information.

Fogarty explained that Visit Estes Park is governed by a State statute. She added that Visit Estes Park works extensively with the State to make sure all lodging business in Estes are paying taxes, and the state has shared that as a DMO, VEP goes to more lengths to uncover any nonpaying lodges than most. VEP also works with the town to compare business licenses to lodging taxes paid and uses land records to find vacation homes. If someone calls Visit Estes Park and wants to advertise, staff refers them to Michael Bodman, the Office Manager, where business identifying information is confirmed ensuring that the business is in compliance with lodging tax requirements. Fogarty noted that the State does its own tax investigations and audits as well.

Adam Shake stated that one of the biggest problems is unlicensed vacation rentals, and that there's no good way to identify them. He noted that there are six unlicensed vacation rentals in his neighborhood alone who do not seem to be paying lodging tax.

Carrie Arnold acknowledged what VEP has done to grow the winter season, stated it had a large impact on their winter and spring revenues and appreciates all the staff and board are accomplishing.

Board Comment:

Shake stated that ATP management has been hired as a contractor for the Estes Park Economic Development Corporation (EDC) business incubator. He noted that there will be public meetings in town this week and encouraged attendance.

Lindsay Lamson indicated that there are outstanding non-approved minutes, still in limbo until we can find a date that the board can meet with Attorney Blair Dickhoner. He added that he is recording the Board meetings from now on for his personal reference, noting that previous comments made at Board meetings have been taken out of context and shared in a negative and detrimental way. He said he would make copies available upon request. Steve Krueger said he'd be interested in a copy of the recordings from Lindsay.

Shake asked for clarification: The Board voted to do abbreviated minutes but that does not preclude a recording? Webermeier replied that he consulted with legal counsel and confirmed that Lamson's personal recordings are allowed except in Executive Session.

A. Action Items

1. Approval of Agenda: Jon Nicholas moved to approve the Agenda, Morgan Mulch seconded the motion, and the Board approved unanimously.

2. Approval of Minutes from the April 19, 2016, Board Meeting: In the future, Nicholas asked that the EDC be referred to as the Estes Park EDC, not the EDC. Mulch moved to approve the minutes, Krueger seconded the motion, and the Board approved unanimously.

B. Discussion of Items and Reports

1. Town Liaison: Webermeier welcomed Trustee Walker as the new Visit Estes Park-Town Trustee Liaison. Walker stated that he has been in tourism for a long time, certainly depends on it, and that he is open to requests for information from the Town Board. Webermeier noted that Fogarty is a good conduit for information and encouraged Trustee Walker to share VEP updates during Town Board meetings beyond just when the next meeting is, to assist with sharing the work VEP does and also educate those who are not familiar with the District.

2. Mediation Follow Up: Webermeier is meeting with Restorative Justice on what the mediation process would look like. He has received three mediator names, and legal counsel has also pointed him towards JAG (retired judges) to allow options for Estes Park EDC and VEP to consider. Krueger asked about the timeframe, and Webermeier replied that it takes six weeks just to find out availability.

3. CEO Update: Fogarty opened the CEO update with the Financial Report. She noted that VEP's cash position is about the same as this time last year, thanks to strong lodging tax receipts in 2015 along with sound budget and financial management. Fogarty highlighted February lodging tax receipts are up 15% compared to last year and that winter season lodging tax receipts are up 8.44%. She added that VEP's interest rate had gone up to 0.05% from 0.01% at the Bank of Colorado.

Financial Committee person Lamson gave Walker a brief overview of the VEP budget. Lamson indicated that VEP is part of the town's annual audit. Lamson also noted that VEP has seasonal cash flow like the businesses in the community and manages its cash position accordingly. Fogarty added that VEP marketing is complemented by

the community's own marketing efforts from each of their individual businesses, so it's everyone working in unison toward a common brand that has elevated the destination, particularly during the winter campaign.

Turning to the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Report, Fogarty noted that VEP monitors effectiveness constantly and makes adjustments based on performance outcomes. PR indicators are down since VEP had massive coverage this time last year with major media outlets (e.g., Smithsonian, CNN, etc.) and that's a tough act to follow, according to Fogarty. She noted that a lot of last year's PR activity was tied to the centennial, but that some coverage has continued to flow through to this year due to the National Park Service Centennial, and also an aggressive winter campaign. Fogarty shared full-page paid ads currently running in major print publications, the most recent "best of" lists Estes has landed on, current Estes Park nationwide articles, and also the Stanley ghost sighting that went viral that was shared and supported via VEP channels including VEP's facebook (which received 1.2 likes, 537 shares, 137 comments and 130,916 ppl reached). She noted that Estes Park gets on "best of" lists through proactive pitching by VEP staff and agency partners. VEP asks for story ideas from partners through the Stakeholder eNewsletter which allows us more opportunity for coverage. Lamson asked that VEP look into increasing the budget for these activities to keep the momentum going.

Fogarty continued by mentioning that website users are up while page views and session duration are down. The decline in session duration is actually a good thing, according to Fogarty, because users are now being sent directly to the pages they're interested in, rather than going to the home page and being forced to navigate aimlessly from there. Jackrabbit lodging referrals continue to recover from a technical glitch when the website went responsive. Fogarty stated that VEP is researching a re-design of the VEP website. She added that eNewsletter subscribers are up and that social media is up as well.

Webermeier asked that the KPI report no longer include the town's tax receipts both with and without the new 1% tax increase, since it's no longer necessary. Fogarty explained the Visitor Center numbers were down because of the bathroom remodeling and expansion.

Fogarty gave a recap of the VEP Annual Tourism Summit. She presented feedback received via evaluations, all very positive. She thanked Trustee Walker and others for attending. Lamson commented that, on the issue of attendance, Fogarty gave over 106 Estes Area Lodging Association (EALA) members a presentation a few days before the summit and thus many EALA members didn't feel the need to attend Summit as well. Fogarty added that when people are happy and doing well, they often don't show up to these meetings and/or are too busy.

Fogarty stated that Abigail Huebner has been hired into the Partner and Group Development Manager position. Jean McGuire has been hired to do part-time temporary admin work. VEP may hire one more part-time temporary admin and one or two interns this summer as well.

Fogarty attended the meeting arranged by Frank Lancaster with Luis Benitez, the new Director of the Outdoor Recreation Industry Office under OEDIT. Fogarty contacted all trustee candidates post-election and thanked them for running and investing their time toward supporting the future of Estes Park. Fogarty mentioned that VEP designed the logo for the Town Centennial, the tree ring logo. Author Peter Kageyama is coming to Estes Park, sponsored in part by VEP, to talk about his book: *For the Love of Cities*. The book ties in well with the downtown planning initiative. VEP's Michael Bodman and Fogarty are presenting at the Visitor Center Ambassador training. VEP is now providing any event in District, a 2 month subscription to the Visitor Center racks for \$30. New lodging grid is still in process.

Fogarty is looking into possible grant opportunities via CO Parks & Wildlife to assist with much-needed trail reconstruction and maintenance in the national forest, which would provide for some much-needed relief to RMNP during peak visitation and popular trails.

Fogarty stated that she walked into all 120 downtown businesses over the last month, over a year since she last did the same thing in total. Fogarty handed out a special invite to each of them, encouraging them to attend Travel Buzz and the Roger Brooks webinar focusing on downtown and tourism. The businesses were very

supportive of VEP, shared that their revenue was up over the winter. They were very informed of what VEP does and is working on in partnership with them. Fogarty continues to pop in random businesses regularly throughout the year.

Fogarty stated that the April Travel Buzz was well-attended once again at Inkwel & Brew. The Duck Race is happening this Saturday, and she encouraged participation. VEP and EALA are partnering to hire Beth Headley again for the photo booth, and VEP's booth will be hosted by VEP staff. The Mountain Festival went well. 500 CO Blue Spruce tree plugs were handed out to attendees.

Event evaluation forms are now on the VEP website. Fogarty stated the forms will help in a variety of ways including a more efficient process, better understanding of the details of each event and also a fairer playing field with how VEP represents each event. She emphasized that VEP does event marketing, not event promotion. Shake asked if the event forms include town events, and Fogarty affirmed. The event form is a requirement if events want free marketing from VEP.

Fogarty shared that over 106 people were in attendance for the VEP presentation at the April EALA Dinner at Twin Owls, and an article highlighting that was in the Estes Park News and Trail Gazette. Fogarty noted that the last EALA dinner of the season is coming up at Della Terra and she encouraged attendance. Fogarty's next VEP presentation is at the Lutheran's men's club for their annual fundraiser. Brooke went to the History Colorado event at the museum, as we did last year.

VEP is continuing to reach out to school kids to encourage the Every Kid in a Park program. There are free backpacks, stuffed with cool items for kids and parents, at the Visitor Center for all 4th graders, including locals.

The get well, live well initiative is moving ahead, including VEP's submission in the Trail's quarterly wellness insert and VEP's presence at the Trail Rx program at each of the trailheads capturing both photo and video assets. Discover

Colorado Rally at the State Capitol went well in Denver with six stakeholders carpooling and representing Estes to CTO Director Ritter and other state representatives. VEP partnered with CTO once again for a facebook takeover that resulted in tremendous traffic to the VEP facebook page.

The Great Divide Heart of the World movie premiere that VEP helped organize sold out with all proceeds going to Rocky Mountain Conservancy.

International tourism continues to be a focus, with continued FAM trips to Estes organized by VEP and CTO, an Italy eBook app, and a Estes stakeholder International survey for guests.

Website lottery went well with four high-demand listings being included. Vacation Home Rental microsite continues to be researched to allow guests and vacation homes the design and search capability expected and represented by sites such as VRBO and HomeAway. Google Trekker is now live on the VEP website.

On vacation rentals, Fogarty noted that the first vacation home task force meeting took place, with Lindsay Lamson representing VEP, in attendance. VEP is starting to get calls from groups of more than eight who can't find a place to stay due to the new ordinance, even though it is not technically being enforced, vacation owners are still not wanting to break the rule. Fogarty shared that it is unfortunate Estes is losing families to other destinations due to the 8 person limit. Lamson noted that about 30% of vacation homes registered and licensed were nine or more.

Fogarty stated that VEP had done a survey for CDOT on the three proposed options (A, B, and C) for reconstruction of Route 34. Walker said he's hearing that Option B could be the top preference.

Nicholas moved to adjourn the meeting, Mulch seconded the motion, and the Board approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 4 pm.



Michael D. Bodman, Recording Secretary

DATE: 6-7-16



Scott Webermeier, Chair

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