



Visit Estes Park
The Destination
Marketing Organization
VisitEstesPark.com

Board of Directors Minutes June 16, 2015

Board Members Attending: Bill Almond, Karen Ericson, Jon Nicholas, Adam Shake, Scott Webermeier

Also Attending: Elizabeth Fogarty, President & CEO
Visit Estes Park Staff Suzy Blackhurst

Kyle Patterson, Public Information Officer, Rocky Mountain National Park

Public Comment. None.

Board Comments. None.

A. Action Items:

1. Approval of Minutes from May 19, 2015 Regular Meeting

Jon Nicholas moved that minutes from the May 19, 2015 meeting be approved. Adam Shake seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

B. Discussion Items and Reports

1. Rocky Mountain National Park Report – Kyle Patterson

Kyle Patterson said May visitation was up 17.8 % over May, 2014. Year to date, visitation to Rocky is up 21.7%. Kyle reported that June has also been very busy, with ranger led programs seeing as many as 40 participants, and tour busses coming through the park. Because of the June activity, the Park will reassess timing to begin shuttle bus operations prior to the 2016 busy season. She said celebrating the Park's Centennial is likely contributing to the increase in visitation. She said Glacier National Park saw a 15% increase in visitation during its Centennial and for several years thereafter. She reported that significant snow remains at high elevations.

Since the last meeting with the board, the Park Service has been talking with the Town and CDOT to make sure the Park is engaged with both and encouraged variable messaging. Two signs will be used: the pull-out on U.S. Hwy 36 near the Visitor Center parking lot area, and the other across from the Catholic Church. She said they would be experimenting with signage that is destination-driven, directing drivers to Fall River Road via Hwy. 34 and those headed for Beaver Meadows/Bear Lake to the Hwy. 36 entrance. She said a press release highlighting the messaging systems would be issued by the park by the end of the week.

Patterson distributed copies of the summer newspapers.

She also answered questions about a recent incident where a visitor shot an elk while in the park. The individual involved in the shooting posted information about the incident on Facebook and Kyle noted that the incident is still under investigation. Patterson said that recent legislative changes provide that while the park is an "open carry" area and people can have concealed firearms, discharging firearms in the park is not permitted.

2. CEO Report – Elizabeth Fogarty

Elizabeth Fogarty noted the following:

- Elizabeth pointed to key indicator areas that are showing decreases, saying while the duration of visits on VisitEstesPark.com has decreased, all the other website performance barometers, including Jackrabbit, indicate guests are finding the information they need faster. She noted that while digital visitor guide use is down, users have both a digital and print guide this year. She also noted the drop in visitor guide mailings from 2012 levels when the ad program was based on bubble cards. Jon Nicholas asked that future key indicator reports footnote the town's voter-approved, increased 1% sales tax collections.
- Fogarty noted that the partner & group development manager position remains open, and she is hoping for additional resumes.
- Some monies are being shifted for more in-market marketing for rodeo promotion that includes cards in Eve's Brochure Rack and working with the Lodging Association to generate more engagement.
- Winter Park and Frasier have begun using the phrase "base camp for Rocky Mountain National Park." Fogarty will be reaching out to those destinations through Grand Lake and Grand County to let them know they are using Visit Estes Park's campaign phrase.
- Following the last meeting, it was decided not to approve a rack card display for an app on Rocky Mountain National Park through the Visitor Center because another provider came forward with the same idea and app developers have the ability to sell their apps through other venues. There was concern that the Visitor Center would get over-run with app rack cards.
- Fogarty attended the public EDC Avalanche presentation where Avalanche presented a handful of industries to look at and grow in Estes Park to support a year-round economy. The group's final stage will be to present a strategic plan with goals for the EDC and methods on how to reach them. Jon Nicholas said Avalanche would be meeting with the EDC from Oct. 19 through 21.
- Website sales are going extremely well with most businesses renewing their contracts or increasing their contract. At this point, Visit Estes Park's share of contract renewals has increased to \$20,000 above last year's collections.
- Backbone Media has been awarded a contract to work for Breckenridge. Elizabeth noted that she has shared with the company her disappointment and concern. She has reviewed our contract with Backbone and found nothing about competitors in the document. She noted that most agencies do work with competitors and while there are cons to that, the more destinations served, the more the agency has to offer clients. Backbone has been notified that at this point, Visit Estes Park doesn't have enough information to make the team and the board comfortable. Backbone has been asked to specifically outline the digital strategies used and how they will be managed. Backbone has been notified that Visit Estes Park does not want to share a new employee recruited from Visit Oregon. Backbone has agreed to review the status of the account and will report back to Elizabeth.
- Information Elizabeth learned while attending the Adventure Travel Trade Association conference included:
 - REI is interested in increasing guiding operations here and talked with Elizabeth about private campgrounds in the Estes Park area, as they already have guided trips in RMNP.
 - Adventure travel is the fastest growing tourism industry.
 - On the Arts District Steering Committee

- Brand USA is debuting a national park film at IMAX theaters. Nicholas noted that Colorado has hired an individual who will head outdoor recreation. Elizabeth confirmed he is working for the Office of Economic Development and International Trade.
- Met Krista Muddle – Partnership Coordinator for the Intermountain Region of National Parks.
- Some national parks are hiring urban rangers to meet with people on the streets in urban settings to create awareness and excitement about visiting national parks.
- People are looking for deeper, customized experiences. There was talk that DMOs are slow to react to that movement. Also vacationers are somewhat intimidated by the great outdoors, if they have not grown up with that experience. DMO's need to start creating safe environments where people find them less intimidating.
- Outdoor gear does directly correlate to adventure tourism – Which is a benefit of having Backbone as a partner.
- There was significant talk about tourism being seen as aligned with economic development. There is a need to coordinate work to avoid duplication.
- A massive trend, similar to Uber, is emerging where individual bloggers, work through portals to pick up customers at the airport, dine with them, and take them for tours throughout the destination while the guest is on vacation. In the past, governments and laws have defined industries, but now private enterprise is moving forward and government is having to adjust. Customer wants a deeper and richer experience and wants it customized just for them.
- Most people won't go outside unless they have someone to take them. The outdoors is intimidating.
- One campaign that caught a lot of media attention is "grandparents stay free."
- Three unique things are needed to catch attention for PR efforts. Elizabeth gave the example of a new distillery in Carbondale. A new distillery wasn't enough of a story. The distillery added to the package by adding a rooftop bar, five high-end hotel rooms and using slanted glassware. THAT'S a story!
- Virtual travel will not replace travel, but it does get people excited about visiting a destination.
- The future now is looking only one year ahead with deliverables one year out because marketers need to be agile.
- The CADMO conference will have sessions on DMO websites, vacation rentals, and will feature a guest speaker from last year's DMAI conference who will lead a hands-on exercise where each participant will go through DestinationNext for their particular destination and then get next steps.

3. Financial Report – Suzy Blackhurst

Suzy Blackhurst presented the financial report which included a written report, balance sheet and P&L.

4. Update – Board Applicant Interviews

Adam reported that four applications for the vacant board position had been received, but two of the interested people did not meet residency requirements. Interviews were conducted with Morgan Mulch, Marys Lake Lodge, and Steve Kruger, Solitude Cabins. Visit Estes Park representatives don't vote following the interviews, but they do act as advisors and answer questions during the process. The Town's interview team was Trustee Ron Norris, Trustee Bob Holcomb and Town Clerk Jackie Williamson. The recommendation to the Town Board will be to appoint Steve Kruger to the position. The appointment will be effective for the July 7 meeting.

5. Quarterly Committee Reports

Adam Shake distributed the community involvement matrix and asked board members for changes. Jon, Bill Almond and Scott Webermeier were noted to be involved with EALA; Jon was noted as a participant in the Association Forum; Jon and Scott are both members of the EDC; Karen Ericson asked that League of Women Voters be added to the list of organizations, she also is on the Restorative Justice board, is a police department volunteer, and is involved with EVPC, Downtown Business Partners and EALA. It was noted that organizations where there are no connections, such as QUOTA, also should be noted. Steve Kruger will be added to the matrix.

Also discussed was the potential of asking voters for an increase in the lodging tax. The consensus was that a ballot issue this November would not occur. It was decided that the issue would be discussed at the September board meeting.

Karen is working with Elizabeth to draft governance structure and guidelines, including a process for consequences should the guidelines not be followed.

Discussions about potential board nominees will remain on agendas for quarterly reviews. Bill said he believes it is critical that the lodging sector is represented on the board. Jon suggested that four out of seven of the board members should be from lodging. Scott suggested having a conversation with the Town Trustees about LMD Board needs would be appropriate. Elizabeth suggested inviting potential board members to meetings and possibly finding a leader from the vacation home rental sector to serve. Karen asked for names of those who have applied in the past.

6. Next Meeting Agenda


Bill noted that the next meeting would include the induction of Steve Kruger. Elizabeth will work to schedule board orientation.

7. Other Business

Elizabeth recognized the work Suzy has done to help secure a location for motion picture filming being considered for a fall shoot.



Suzy Blackhurst, Recording Secretary



Bill Almond, Chair