



## Visit Estes Park

**Board of Directors Regular Meeting  
Wednesday, April 24, 2024 at 12:00 PM  
Via ZOOM Meeting**

Board Members Attending:

Chair Sean Jurgens, Vice Chair Deborah Gibson, Director Rich Chiappe, Director Pat Murphy, Trustee Kirby Hazelton and Director Nick Smith

Board Members not in Attendance:

Director Jerusha Rice

Others in Attendance:

Colleen DePasquale- Estes Chamber of Commerce

Kyle Patterson- RMNP

Dawn Wilson- Estes Park Trail Gazette

Justin Koroneos- Simpleview

VEP Staff:

Kara Franker, CEO

Michael Zumbaugh, CFO

Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger, COO

Heidi Barfels, CMO

Cindy Mackin, CSO

Rachel Ward Oppermann, Advocacy & Sustainability Director

Kendall Akin, Creative Manager

Dana Paiement, Senior Destination Development Manager

Colleen Sovey, Community Relations Manager

Claire Molle, Communications Manager

The meeting is called to order at 12:16 p.m.

SWEARING IN OF TRUSTEE KIRBY HAZELTON

Trustee Kirby Hazelton reads the swearing-in statement and is officially sworn into Visit Estes Park's Board of Directors.

CONSENT AGENDA & MINUTES:

Chair Sean Jurgens asks for a motion to approve the meeting agenda and minutes from

the previous meeting. Vice Chair Deborah Gibson moves to approve, Director Nick Smith seconds, motion passes.

#### CALL FOR TOWN BOARD UPDATES:

Trustee Kirby Hazelton provides updates from the Town Board. She starts by introducing herself to the board and reports that the Town Board welcomed new board members and the new mayor last night at the Town Board meeting. She says they also bid farewell to previous board members and are excited for the future.

#### BOARD MEMBER UPDATES

Vice Chair Deborah Gibson welcomes Trustee Hazelton to the board.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

There is no public comment.

#### WELCOMING VEP'S NEW CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER, CINDY MACKIN

CEO Kara Franker provides an introduction of Cindy Mackin and her experience at Visit Loveland for 13 years. CSO Cindy Mackin introduces herself and thanks Franker and the team. Mackin says she feels very welcomed. She says she has been continually impressed with VEP over the last 3 years at the level it has risen to, and she just really wanted to be a part of this team so she jumped at this opportunity. She says her passions and expertise from Loveland will be very valuable to this team. She says she has a passion for winter events and can't wait to get going with the stellar team. She says the team is not just good locally at what it does but at the state level and the national level as well.

CEO Franker explains that Mackin comes to us with a long list of ideas for holidays and is ready to start planning holidays right now. Franker says Mackin will also be helping VEP with lodger forecasting, an area in which Mackin is very experienced.

Director Nick Smith comments that he has really appreciated the work he has seen in Loveland over the past year, and asks how Visit Loveland was involved in arts in that community. Mackin says the arts were a huge focus for them at Visit Loveland. Franker explains how the new flow of the organization will work with Mackin's leadership added to the team.

## EX-OFFICIO UPDATES

Kyle Patterson gives updates from Rocky Mountain National Park. Patterson reports that National Park Week saw great success with 1700 people coming through the park on Sunday alone. She says as part of National Park Week, USA Today started highlighting a different park each week and she just did an interview with them about RMNP as well as an interview with AARP about being 1 of 5 accessible parks.

Patterson shares that in 2023, the park had 823,000 followers on FB alone and saw a 126 percent increase in engagement since 2022.

Patterson says there will likely be a proposal for an increase in camping fees from 35 to 45 and they will be receiving feedback about this over the next 30 days. She says this is comparable to surrounding campgrounds and explains that this funding is put back into the park and is critical. Patterson reports there will be 49 electric sites and Moraine Park Campground and they are proposing to increase this to 55 electric sites. She says the Fall River entrance project is continuing to move forward and is looking really nice. Finally, Patterson reminds the board that May 1 is just around the corner and timed entry permits will begin on May 24. She says there are some changes to the system this year with 60 percent of available reservations being released a month ahead of time and 40 percent released the day before which will be available at 7 p.m. rather than 5 p.m. based on feedback they have received from the public.

Trustee Hazelton asks Patterson about the construction project at headquarters. Patterson says it is for the waste water and water utility system in that entire area including Moraine Park campground, Beaver Meadows entrance and campground and other surrounding areas. She says the hope is that the seasonal housing units can be winterized and will be able to be used year-round.

CEO Franker says she received a note from John Schnipkoweit of the Economic Development Corporation saying they have two final processes and in the meantime, the rest is being handled by the Chamber of Commerce. Once these two activities are completed, the EDC will be dissolved.

Colleen DePasquale gives an update from the Chamber of Commerce. DePasquale reports that the Chamber is currently working on getting the BASE program going and have sent out surveys regarding the program. She says they will have an investor partner meeting and then will invite all partners and investors to give them an update in person about what the COC is doing. DePasquale says she and VEP's Rebecca D. Gelsinger are working on using some money from EALA to fund hospitality training from the American Hospitality Education Institute. Depasquale

says the Chamber will be getting Trustee Bill Brown as their liaison. She also says there will be an After Hours event tomorrow at Mad Moose and the Chamber will be holding their 5th anniversary party at Hunter's Chop House in May. She announces the annual COC golf tournament will be taking place on August 9 and says the Lodging Alliance meeting will be held on May 2 at Castle Mountain Lodge.

Director Nick Smith comments on his experience with the BASE program and says it was an incredible experience that he highly recommends.

### PROGRAM REVIEW:

1. CEO Kara Franker gives her report. She brings forth exciting updates regarding Estes Park's involvement in the Congressional Office for International Leadership program, revealing that the delegation specifically requested Estes Park as a destination on their itinerary. She extended an invitation to board members interested in joining this program. Franker also highlights the success of Earth Week celebrations and the informative roundtable presented by Visit Estes Park earlier in the week. Franker sheds light on the team's participation in industry events, including the Simpleview Summit, where she moderated a panel discussion alongside prominent figures in the tourism sector. She emphasizes how this shows Estes Park's growing influence in the tourism realm. Franker says VEP's Creative Manager, Kendall Akin, sat on a panel about AI at the eTourism Summit in Vegas at the beginning of the month.

Franker presents the timeline for the 2025 Operating Plan. She explains that this board approves it first, then the town and county approve it. Franker says June will be staff development of the plan. In July the plan will be brought to the board at which point they have 2 weeks to send feedback. After that, the staff will have 2 weeks to make updates. Board approval is in August with the presentation of the operating plan to the Town and County in a joint study session being completed by September 30. Franker says VEP can then collect feedback from the Country Commissioners and then will present it to the town and county by October to receive approval with the Public Budget Hearing being in November. She says the deadline for approval by both the town and the county is December 5th. Franker asks the board what they think of the timeline and if they have any suggestions. Chair Sean Jurgens says he is very happy with these dates being laid out ahead of time like this so that everyone is on the same page.

2. CMO Heidi Barfels gives the marketing update. Barfels highlights the transition to the summer advertising campaign with a focus on sustainable tourism. She reviews Earth Week marketing efforts, including influencer Nelson Holland's promotion and media coverage in outlets like Powder Magazine. Additionally, she discusses marketing for BigFoot Days with mentions of blogs and media coverage targeting the drive market. Barfels discusses PR narratives for 2024 and future plans to increase shoulder season tourism. Barfels asks Rachel Ward Oppermann to introduce VEP's new inclusion and sustainability pages on the website and emphasizes Visit Estes Park's commitment to these values. Oppermann also introduced an editorial she wrote for the 2024 Hike Rocky Magazine, highlighting the town's historical tourism role and collaborative sustainability efforts.

Barfels introduces Justin Koroneos of Simpleview, VEP's website, CMS and CRM supplier. Koroneos discusses Simpleview's main services CRM and CMS, SEO, Book Direct and Act On. He highlights the VEP's website performance metrics, including increased active users and website sessions compared to the previous year. Koroneos emphasizes Visit Estes Park's success in Book Direct referrals and explains Act On's role in email marketing. CEO Franker chimes in to clarify that the partnership with DTN for website ads is under the Simpleview umbrella, noting the success they've seen from this collaboration.

3. COO Rebecca D. Gelsinger provides updates on community relations efforts, including meetings with various stakeholders and initiatives like Fall River Village's transition to workforce housing and potential repurposing of SkyView Events Center into a child care center. She announces the return of the tramway and shares exciting news about local businesses, including You Need Pie's feature on America's Best Restaurants. Gelsinger also mentioned successful fundraising efforts during FDGD for the EPNRC and the Estes Park High School Band. She discusses upcoming programs like Estes Experiences during National Travel & Tourism Week. She says she is transitioning to operational matters as CSO Mackin has joined the team and expresses enthusiasm for her continued role with the organization.
4. Mike Zumbaugh delivers the financial report, highlighting positive short term rental metrics for March and an 18% increase in visitor center count compared to the previous year. He explains the timing of financial reporting, detailing the remittance of lodging tax revenues and presenting Total Tax Revenues. Despite a slight decrease in lodging tax

collections, Visit Estes Park remains ahead of budget expectations. Additionally, he discusses lodging tax breakdowns by type and presents graphs illustrating increased collections over the past six years. The Financial Statement of Activities shows a surplus ahead of budget, and funds from the transient inventory study are discussed, with \$18,000 allocated for the study to gain insights into lodger behaviors and preferences.

Chair Sean Jurgens comments that he is excited about this new reporting which will be an improvement from the Rocky Mountain Lodging report. Trustee Hazelton asks about the reserve policy and whether it is an operating reserve or a true reserve. Zumbaugh explains that any utilization above 25 thousand, a request must go through the board, and any under 25 thousand to be reported to the board. He says this comes up as a point of discussion each year as part of the budgeting process and that this is an ongoing discussion each year.

#### ACCEPTANCE OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Chair Sean Jurgens moves to accept the financial statements as presented. Director Rich Chiappe seconds. All vote in favor. The financial statements are accepted.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION PURSUANT TO SEC. 24-6-402(4)(f), C.R.S., TO DISCUSS PERSONNEL MATTER REGARDING THE CEO CONTRACT

Chair Sean Jurgens enters Executive Session pursuant to Sec. 24-6-402(4)(f), C.R.S., to discuss a personnel matter regarding the CEO contract. The board goes into Executive Session at 1:26 p.m. Executive Session concludes at 1:49 p.m.

#### VOTE ON CEO CONTRACT FOR KARA FRANKER

Chair Sean Jurgens asks for a motion to approve the contract for CEO Kara Franker. Director Nick Smith moves to approve. Rich Chiappe seconds. Trustee Hazelton comments that she will be abstaining from the vote today because she hasn't had enough time to review the information.

All board members vote in favor except for Trustee Hazelton who abstains. Motion passes.

ADJOURN:

The meeting is adjourned at 1:52 p.m.

Upcoming Meeting: May 23 at 2 p.m. via Zoom.

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Claire, Mollé, Recording Secretary

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Jerusha Rice, Secretary

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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