



Visit Estes Park

**Board of Directors Regular Meeting
Thursday, February 22, 2024 at 2:00 PM
Via ZOOM Meeting**

Board Members Attending:

Chair Sean Jurgens, Director Rich Chiappe, Director Pat Murphy, Trustee Frank Lancaster and Director Nick Smith

Others in Attendance:

Kyle Patterson- RMNP
John Schnipkowitz- EDC
Bill Brown- STR discussion
Sean Maher- RRC Associates

VEP Staff:

Kara Franker, CEO
Michael Zumbaugh, CFO
Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger, COO
Heidi Barfels, CMO
Rachel Ward Oppermann, Director of Advocacy and Sustainability
Kendall Akin, Creative Manager
Dana Paiement, Senior Destination Development Manager
Colleen Sovey, Community Relations Manager
Claire Molle, Communications Manager

Meeting is called to order at 2:02 p.m.

CONSENT AGENDA & MINUTES:

Chair Sean Jurgens requests a motion to approve the agenda. Director Nick Smith moves to approve, Trustee Frank Laster seconds. The agenda and minutes are approved.

CALL FOR TOWN BOARD UPDATES:

There are no town board updates from Trustee Lancaster.

BOARD MEMBER UPDATES

There are no board member updates.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There is no public comment.

RRC ASSOCIATES 2023 VISITOR INTERCEPT SURVEY REPORT

Sean Maher of RRC Associates presents the 2023 Visitor Intercept Survey Report. The intercept survey was conducted in Estes Park, CO, from spring to winter 2023, capturing visitor profiles and experiences. The report shows that half of visitors to Estes Park come from Colorado, with proximity to the Front Range being a major factor. Most respondents (62%) had been to Estes Park before, with 40% being first-time visitors and 50% being day visitors.

Maher reports that Estes Park's Net Promoter Score peaked at 80% during the summer, indicating high satisfaction among visitors. Rocky Mountain National Park was the highest-rated activity with a 4.8 out of 5, while the overall Estes Park experience rated 4.7, indicating strong visitor satisfaction. Frozen Dead Guy Days drove a significant portion of visitors to Estes Park, with a Net Promoter Score of 25%. The Rooftop Rodeo had an excellent Net Promoter Score of 82%, indicating strong participant satisfaction.

Maher says the report showed half of respondents are from Colorado, with Texas, Illinois, California, and Florida as top out-of-state contributors to visitation. He says the Dean Runyan study from 2021 shows the average expenditure for overnight visitors in the area is \$242 per person per day, excluding lodging costs.

UPDATE ON BILL SB24-033 PERTAINING TO SHORT-TERM RENTALS

CEO Kara Franker reports that the legislative hearing of the bill has been postponed due to amendments, with potential impacts on the bill's passage. Franker reports that the Chamber of Commerce has decided to take a position opposing the bill. A discussion about the bill continues among board members as well as Bill Brown, who plans to attend the hearing.

EX-OFICIO UPDATES

Kyle Patterson of Rocky Mountain National Park provides an update on winter programs in Rocky Mountain National Park, including the popularity of ice fishing and Speaker Series events. She reports that wilderness camping permits go on sale March 1, which are extremely popular among wilderness campers.

John Schnipkoweit of the EDC provides an update on the merger between the Chamber of Commerce and the EDC. Schnipkoweit updates the group on the transition of the Chamber's economic development department, including reducing overhead and hiring a programming manager. The Economic and Workforce Development Council, assembled by the Chamber, had its first meeting with representatives from the County, investors, and non-investors and will meet monthly to set up programming.

PROGRAM REVIEW:

1. CEO Kara Franker gives her report. Franker discusses the preparations for the Frozen Dead Guy Days festival, including the selection of bands, advertising, and special events like the coffin races and the polar plunge. She mentions local faces in print ads and encourages the group to participate in the festival's activities, including the polar plunge. Franker discusses the strategy behind promoting events, highlighting the importance of consistently communicating with the target audience.

Franker shares the success of the organization's investment in artificial intelligence (AI), reviewing the newly launched Rocky Mountain Roamer with a positive response from the industry and increased efficiency within the team. Franker discusses the use of AI in tourism, including the development of an "AI army" to provide robust information on local businesses. She shares updates on the AI implementation, including the creation of a back-end system to teach the AI about local businesses and the upcoming release of white papers and legal guides. Franker also expresses concern about AI technology, particularly its potential to create fake voices and videos that could be used for malicious purposes.

Franker presents a new initiative, Community Initiative: The Next Phase of Estes Inspired. Franker explains the campaign aims to showcase the stories of visitors and locals, using authentic and inspiring imagery and storytelling, with a focus on Earth Week in April. Franker discusses the importance of highlighting the campaign's stories and tying them back to the operating plan, especially in August when Larimer County residents are more likely to be inspired. Franker discusses the importance of highlighting real stories of the people Estes Park, including the inspiring story of the mayor, an Olympian and audiologist.

Franker shares MMGY's Industry Outlook showing that events are in for travelers as well as human touch and authenticity. Franker says this is key when we are looking at our AI strategy. Franker reports that traveler enthusiasm is strong according to Longwoods International: American Travel Sentiment Study.

2. CMO Heidi Barfels gives the marketing update. Barfels showcases new winter ads that were released, featuring beautiful imagery of Estes Park and strong taglines, and the paid media report shows impressive performance metrics. Barfels discusses social media training for the community, blog content, and new website features. Barfels reviews upcoming PR hits and recent media coverage, including an article in Men's Journal and a podcast appearance on the Flightless Bird Podcast. Barfels reports the PR team is excited for upcoming media visits, including several influencers and a freelance writer, to try winter sports like split boarding and ice climbing.
3. COO Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger gives the Community Relations Report. Domenico-Gelsinger discuss the success of the first Community Roundtable for 2024, highlighting the diverse stakeholders in attendance and the initiatives presented, including Earth Week and event sponsorships. She updates the group on the "Wheel the World" project, including confirming partnerships with local businesses and creating itineraries for frontline workers. She provides an update on more VEP initiatives, including Earth Week coming up in April as well as the Beyond Program and Estes Experiences. Domenico-Gelsinger explains the lottery system for featured listings on the website, with a top 15 selection and waitlist for remaining spots. Domenico-Gelsinger reports that Group Sales for January saw 15 leads with an estimated 1300 room nights and over \$244,000 in economic value.
4. CFO Mike Zumbaugh gives the financial report. Zumbaugh reports January lodging tax revenue was up 4.6% compared to last year, with marketing efforts credited for the

increase. There is a brief discussion about the local economy's predictability and revenue performance, with a focus on monthly stay collections and budgeted revenues.

Zumbaugh reports that all visitor center visitation has been up for the past 7 months compared to the previous year. Zumbaugh says for total lodging taxes collected, with over \$5 million transferred over to the town, just .09% under the budgeted figure. Zumbaugh said he received a thank you note from the town for the spot-on budgeting. He reports that budgeted dollars were 9.6% behind for the month of December, but budgeted dollars were up 2.4% year-to-date.

Zumbaugh reviews tax collection percentages according to lodging category. He shows 6 years' worth of historical dollars compared against each other showing 2021 through 2023 being higher than the 2019 levels. Zumbaugh reports the year-end financials show a net revenue surplus over expenses, with no reserve utilization necessary.

ACCEPTANCE OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Chair Sean Jurgens asks for a motion to accept Financial Statements. Director Rich Chiappe makes a motion to accept the financial statements. Chair Sean Jurgens Seconds. All vote yes. The financial statements pass unanimously.

PRESENTATION OF NEW BOARD PORTAL

Zumbaugh presents the board portal he has created for board members to access information, including public documents like budgets and operating plans. Zumbaugh shares his screen to demonstrate the portal. He explains the portal was created for easy access to board meeting information, including monthly packets and meeting requirements language. Zumbaugh says he wants to make it easy for others to access information by providing a one-stop shopping source and is open to improving the portal based on feedback.

ADJOURN:

The meeting is adjourned at 3:40 pm.

Upcoming Meeting: March 28 at 2 p.m. via Zoom.

Claire, Mollé, Recording Secretary

Jerusha Rice, Secretary

DATE: _____

DATE: _____

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