



Visit Estes Park

Board of Directors Regular Meeting
Thursday, June 27, 2024 at 2:00 PM
Via ZOOM Meeting

Board Members Attending:

Pat Murphy, Nick Smith, Kirby Hazelton, Jerusha Rice, Sean Jurgens, Rich Chiappe, Deborah Gibson

Others in Attendance:

Joan Hooper- League of Women Voters
Greg Rosener
Kevin Benes- Running Wild Estes Park
Ryan Bross- Bank of Colorado
Tim Phillips- Fine Arts District
Suzy Blackhurst

VEP Staff:

Kara Franker, CEO
Michael Zumbaugh, CFO
Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger, COO
Heidi Barfels, CMO
Cindy Mackin, CSO
Rachel Ward Oppermann, Advocacy and Sustainability Director
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 2:01 p.m.

CONSENT AGENDA & MINUTES:

Chair Sean Jurgens requests a motion to approve the agenda and minutes of the board meeting. Vice Chair Deborah Gibson moves to approve, Chair Sean Jurgens seconds, and the motion passes.

CALL FOR TOWN BOARD UPDATES:

Trustee Hazelton reviews the Tuesday night Town Board meeting. Hazelton reports that the Town Board approved the Construction Impact Grants. She says applications are due tomorrow, June 28, 2024. She reports that 41 applications have been received for direct impact and 26 applications for the marketing match were reported as of Tuesday night. Hazelton says she received some follow-up questions about the annual report that she will pass on to VEP CEO Kara Franker and reviews the discussion about the request for a printed visitor guide as part of the strategic planning session request from the visitor services team at the town. Hazelton reviews the town's discussion of the Fall River Village property, which requires specific use of the 6E funds to help procure the property. She says she is happy to discuss this further with anyone and that it is very exciting for the community. She says the town did approve a provisional strategic plan for 2025 and will now go to sketching out the budget and capacity before the final strategic plan is produced.

BOARD MEMBER UPDATES:

There are no board member updates.

CALL FOR PUBLIC COMMENT:

Greg Rosener joins for public comment. He comments that the event center on the Fall River Village property is not separated from the sale of the rest of the property. He says there have been many moving parts, and the clock is being chased to accomplish this within the first week of September. Rosener says Scott Moulton is doing a great job taking charge of this. He says there was no vote on Tuesday by the Town Board, but if this is successful, the town will have 91 affordable housing units in their possession by January 2025. He thanks the Trustees for being able to look past the complexity of this to move the process forward.

Rosener moves on to comment on the Town Board Meeting on Tuesday. He goes on record as someone with a marketing background to commend the Visit Estes Park Board for supporting the staff in moving the direction we are moving in the digital world. He disagrees that print is the way to go and isn't how things work anymore. He says print might have value when people are here, but when it comes to getting people to Estes Park, the digital world is where the money needs to be spent. He says that Visit Estes Park has been doing this fantastically. He comments that print ROI is not possible to track. He says his reason for his comment is that if he was a staff member of Visit Estes Park, he would not feel supported by the Town of Estes Park Board meeting on Tuesday evening.

VOTE FOR NEW EX-OFFICIO BOARD MEMBERS

Chair Sean Jurgens asks for a motion to approve Carlie Bangs and Scott Moulton to be able to be ex-officio members of the Visit Estes Park Board of Directors. Director Rich Chiappe moves to approve, and Vice Chair Deborah Gibson seconds. The motion passes and Bangs and Moulton can be added as ex-officios.

EX-OFFICIO UPDATES

Kyle Patterson provides updates from Rocky Mountain National Park. She announces that Old Fall River Road is opening to vehicles on Sunday. She says on June 13, RMNP sent an update out about major updates happening including Moraine Park Campground which is expected to remain closed this summer/fall season due to construction delays. She says Fall River Entrance construction should be completed later this summer. She says they are breaking ground on the Grand Lake kiosk station as well as seasonal housing that was lost in the East Troublesome Fire which will be located where the existing park housing is. Patterson reports that they started the artist in residence program again which is getting great coverage and highlights and says that they are playing around with two end dates for the Timed Entry Permit Reservation system based on research. She said the park has been receiving fantastic coverage about timed entry permit systems.

Colleen DePasquale provides updates from the Chamber of Commerce. She says that the Chamber has added an event coordinator staff member who has already started. DePasquale reports that the Chamber is doing a ribbon cutting at Ride-a-Kart next Tuesday. She reports that there are currently 50 grants for the direct impact construction grants and about 40 applications in for marketing matching funds. She says the direct impact applications are due tomorrow and the marketing match is on a first-come-first-served basis.

DePasquale says they are working on the BASE program for the fall and a sprint program. She says they have received the enterprise tax zone credit, and the Chamber

is in the last steps of absorbing the EDC.

PROGRAM REVIEW:

1. Kara Franker gives the CEO Report. She reviews Governor Polis being in town to sign two bills at The Stanley Hotel. Franker reviews the big news of the RFP for Boulder to host Sundance Film Festival starting in 2027. She says Sundance will announce their three finalists very soon. Franker says this could mean a boost for all of the surrounding areas. She says there are a lot of additional things that will be announced as things progress. Franker says the VEP Operating Plan will double down on art, culture, and film. Franker says John Cullen is resurrecting the Stanley Horror Film Festival.

Franker provides an update on the construction marketing campaign the team has been working on. She explains how much the team has sprinted on this as a reaction to the need expressed at a town board meeting. She says the VEP staff deserves so many accolades for pulling this together so quickly in-house. She shows some of the new art for the campaign, including some great new photos from John Berry and a new video about using the Trolley made by VEP staff. She also discusses a shoot her family did with the staff showcasing parking at the parking garage and then taking the Riverwalk into town. Franker reviews the Retail Rally as a great example of folks in the community stepping up. She reviews the Estes Explorer Savings Pass through Bandwango. She shares new blog content and social media content supporting local businesses, as well as the construction podcast, which is currently in progress. Franker presents the "Thank You Street Campaign," which will involve filling canvas bags designed by a local artist filled with treats and print pieces. VEP will have friendly faces handing them out throughout town and thank people for visiting. She says it is kicking off at the Rodeo Parade, and the street team will also be at the Larimer Country Fair, which has several other dates set throughout the summer. Franker says the team is still working on a map.

Franker discusses the Estes Inspired campaign. She says it was a reaction to Larimer County Commissioners asking for a campaign to make folks from the Front Range feel like locals. She shows the portraits and story content from the campaign. Franker says the idea was that this was supposed to launch in August but will now be launched sooner to go along with the construction campaign.

Franker reports on the 2024 Short-Form Video trends. She says we are working on increasing our presence on YouTube Shorts and even on Reddit. She reviews Forbes and Talker Research information, exploring whether social media is the new Google, which means that we need to stay up on our social media game.

Franker addresses that she and some of the team went in front of the Board of

County Commissioners with the annual report and says they received fantastic feedback. Franker says VEP will be going back in front of the Town Board with the Visitor Intercept Study along with the experts from the study since there wasn't time for that part of the presentation.

Franker reviews the discussion of VEP producing a print visitor guide. She explains the background of the print guide and the decision to partner with Vacationland after listening to some concerns. Franker says the board then discussed and decided to invest in Vacationland. She says she understands the argument about needing a print piece that isn't Vacationland. She asks the board to start thinking about wanting staff to do the research on what it would cost to put together a printed guide.

Vice Chair Deborah Gibson interjects to say that Rams Horn decided to stop producing their own brochure, and she is surprised that so much emphasis is being put on print. She says creating their brochure took away from other priorities and funds that were more productive. Chair Sean Jurgens says that they still use brochures, but the number they produce has gone down significantly.

Director Rich Chiappe echoes Gibson, saying they don't use any print in their marketing. Chiappe says Visit Estes Park is supposed to be the experts in what works and what doesn't. He says Visit Estes Park executes excellently every year on marketing strategy, which seems like advice from someone who doesn't know as much about marketing as VEP. Chiappe says he is very pleased with VEP's knowledge and expertise, and level of execution.

Trustee Hazelton says she doesn't think there is a request for Visit Estes Park to produce a visitor guide. She says the town received requests from visitor services staff, who said they received requests for a printed guide. Hazelton says the Town Board considered Visit Estes Park as part of this solution but that there is no request for Visit Estes Park to produce its own guide. She says the VEP staff should engage with the Visitor Center staff to determine what is needed.

Chair Jurgens says this should be discussed staff to staff and brought to a meeting if something needs to be budgeted. Franker says she believes the VEP staff has a great relationship with the town staff and will work to see if we can see where the communication on this can be improved.

Franker says she will email out the date that she will go in front of the Town Board with the Visitor Intercept Study as soon as she has it.

2. CMO Heidi Barfels presents the marketing report, beginning with a presentation of the Estes Inspired video. She says VEP's John Berry has been working on this

very hard since the March photoshoot. Barfels plays the first Estes Inspired video for the Visit Estes Park board. Barfels gives a review of the NoCo campaign being led by Longmont which will run at Chicago O'Hare Airport. Barfels reviews Statista Report showing that US Travel came out with a stat showing that Booking.com and Expedia are the most widely trusted booking engines in the United States. She showcases the campaigns VEP currently runs with Expedia and presents the results of the Expedia campaign, with 378 total room nights booked and \$168-thousand due to the campaign. Barfels shares the Epsilon Net Economic Impact Report, which shows fantastic spending due to the ads. She reviews some specific statistics on where money was spent. She also shares the demographics that came with the campaign results. Barfels previews the launch of ads for Rocky Mountain Roamer, VEP's AI Travel Assistant tool.

Barfels announces that we have reached 100k followers on Instagram and shares a reel staff made to celebrate. Barfels shows other social media highlights, including reels and posts meant to support local businesses in every way possible. Barfels reviews a media trip hosting Lily Yu who produces content about deaf travel. She reviews the content Lily produced and the activities she was able to participate in and contributed to our efforts to showcase accessible experiences. Barfels reviews national media coverage from the month, including Reader's Digest and a piece in Travel + Leisure in which Dawn Wilson's Estes Park photo had the lead image.

Barfels reviews @ClairefromEstes. She explains that these pages are a secret tactic to help Google prioritize our videos. Google's AI is changing the search results page to prioritize videos and see things with a real face. She explains that there is also a YouTube and TikTok page to try to help Google prioritize our videos. CEO Franker jumps in to clarify that VEP owns this page so the money is not boosting Claire's page, but is remaining under VEP's ownership.

VEP's Claire Molle reviews her time at the Public Relations Society of America Travel & Tourism Conference in Greenville, SC which provided a fantastic networking opportunity with other PR professionals as well as travel writers and offered highly educational sessions.

3. Dana Paiment kicks off the Community Relations report with a review of her time at the CSAE conference. Paiment reviews a list of all the partners the team connected with over the month in order to check in and get them involved. Paiment shares partner news including Lazy B closing, the tramway reopening, the Trailborn Season Kick-Off, and the opening of Spice Rack. Paiment reviews some of the events that were approved for event sponsorship. She reviews the results and success of Estes Experiences with 116 participants and 36 different experiences they could choose from. She presents the results of the Beyond

Program from May with 1800 click-throughs and 83 special offers.

Paiement passes it on to Rachel Ward Oppermann for the stewardship report. Oppermann discusses the presentation she was able to give to Cliffs of Moher, discussing all the things that VEP does to amplify RMNP's Timed Entry Permit information. She says this was recorded and presented to the group as part of a larger report. CEO Franker chimes in to say that the county commissioners are really looking for destination stewardship.

4. CFO Mike Zumbaugh presents the financial report, beginning with short-term rental data, showing all three metrics up for May, but ADR and Occupancy being down compared to last year. He says that the Visitor Center count is up 20.9 percent. Zumbaugh presents the total lodging tax revenues showing the April lodging tax collections which are just the two-percent collections so that VEP can accurately compare prior years. Year-to-date for April was up 2.7 percent compared to last year and down .6 percent year-to-date. VEP is up 12.6 percent compared to budget and up 5.4 percent for year-to-date figures. Zumbaugh reviews 2024 lodging tax collections by category. Zumbaugh reviews the financial statements showing that VEP is \$188-thousand ahead of projections.

Zumbaugh presents a teaser of results from the transient inventory study. He says the purpose was to take a look at all lodging properties and look at the types we have, how many, how many total people can we sleep, etc. He says 65 percent of the professionally managed units gave us data and the remaining data from those that did not respond was scraped from online sources. The results showed a total of 6,236 total units which can sleep 33,000 people in the local marketing district. He says this is a sneak peek and he will share the final version soon.

ACCEPTANCE OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

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

TIM PHILLIPS REPORTS FROM THE FINE ARTS GUILD OF THE ROCKIES

Tim Phillips, President of the Fine Arts Guild of the Rockies, presents Encore, the idea of building a theatre and performance venue in Estes Park. He says this initiative has previously failed for various reasons. Phillips says there are two

theatres in the design, but also has an aspect of an interactive immersive experience. He says this is another way to draw people to Estes Park. Phillips explains that interactive means the floors, walls, and ceilings are all incorporated as well as the tactile experience of the guest. Phillips says these experiences are extremely profitable. He showcases Santa Fe's Meow Wolf to show the success of an immersive experience like this. Phillips showcases the plan for Encore also showing the prospect of an amphitheater in the area that is currently Stanley Park to accommodate local festivals in a venue much larger than Performance Park. He shows a plan for the layout of the theatre and immersive experience which would be roughly the same size as Meow Wolf in Santa Fe. He concludes by explaining that this provides another reason for people to visit Estes Park which could increase visitation from younger audiences.

Director Rich Chiappe asks what the cost is and who is financing the facility. Phillips says all they have asked the town for is the land at Stanley Park. Phillips says the money will come from grants and private funding, low-interest-rate loans, a one-million-dollar pledge from someone in Estes Park, and other individuals who have expressed an interest in supporting it. Phillips says the fairgrounds is concerned about sharing the space and the parking space.

REVIEW OF SKIJORING

Chair Sean Jurgens starts this discussion by disclosing that he and Director Nick Smith have been a part of this idea since the beginning and have filed their conflict of interest with the State of Colorado.

Nick Smith explains what Skijoring is and how the idea came to be as well as partnering with Kevin Benes, who produces foot race events through his company, Running Wild in Estes Park, and could help coordinate the event. Smith passes the presentation onto Kevin Benes.

Benes provides an overview of the event, showing that it is a three-day event that would take place in January to provide economic support during one of the slowest times of the month. He presents a video to showcase skijoring, which combines skiing with horseback riding. He says this is one of the fastest-growing relationships in the United States. Benes says Skijor USA wants to partner with Estes Park. Benes reviews the benefits, including location and lodging. Benes says this is a one-event rodeo that happens in winter. He says his team is committed to local first for all vendors and will provide donations for scholarships for students in Estes Park. Benes presents the goal of boosting visitation in January and the event's business model. Benes says the bottom line is asking for a 3-year grant today to take care of production expenses, giving the event 3

years to focus on production and putting on a quality event.

Benes moves on to show the plan to not need the money anymore after 3 years of funding. Year 1 will be the inaugural event. Year 2 will establish the event and ramp up sponsorship sales from sources other than local businesses. Year 3 will add other events, such as mutton bustin and a vendor market inside the Events Center.

Benes presents the cost estimates and asks for funding. The total comes to \$93,000 a year in grant money plus marketing support for the 2025, 2026, and 2027 events. Benes presents a list of businesses that said they would support Visit Estes Park, providing funding for this.

Visit Estes Park's CFO, Mike Zumabugh, asks what will happen with extra dollars between years 2 and 3. Benes says the point of this is to project the worst-case scenario, knowing that Visit Estes Park can only budget for the next year. Zumbaugh asks how the ticket sales will factor in. Benes says the ticket price they are looking at is roughly \$15 a ticket, and they are looking at a 50/50 split between his company and SkiJor USA. Vice Chair Deborah Gibson thinks skijoring would be cool and perfect for Estes Park.

Director Rich Chiappe asks Zumbaugh how this compares to other grants from Visit Estes Park. Zumbaugh explains that this is more significant.

Zumbaugh asks if there are any legal ramifications with some of the money going to prize money. Discussion continues and CEO Franker says the team will double-check with counsel. She explains that if the board does want to move forward with this, then VEP will involve their attorney.

CMO Heidi Barfels asks what the marketing support ask entails and what dollars are being asked for there. Benes says he did not include the marketing in the \$93,000 ask and would ask VEP what the recommendation would be for the monetary ask regarding marketing funds.

CEO Kara Franker says this could be a very heavy pull for staff because of the time and ask involved in the marketing, so it will be helpful for staff to know as soon as possible.

Director Rich Chiappe says he would want a staff review and recommendation to be sure that the staff's request is obtainable. Chiappe asks if there is any opportunity to walk it back. Benes says he really needs the go-ahead for next year today.

Franker explains that this is a question: would the board be willing to dip into reserves for 2025, given that we don't have the funds for 2024 to pay for right now. Zumbaugh agrees that paying this year from reserves is an expense this

year so that Benes can pay for the things he needs to pay for. Franker explains that VEP purposely doesn't do the budgeting until after the summer, so it would make the most sense to take from 2024 reserves for this.

Benes says he wants to roll out some guerilla marketing at the rodeo, so he will need funds to be approved for this meeting. Franker says she is okay with not delaying the board vote to take from 2024 reserves and then taking more time to craft a contract if this will be multi-year.

CMO Heidi Barfels says we have to consider the marketing price that will play into this. Franker estimates \$30,000 in marketing for this, which would allow for social and digital programmatic marketing. If there is a want for TV and anything else, the marketing budget would need to go higher.

Director Rich Chiappe asks if we will still be safe in our reserves if we report this, and Zumbaugh says we would still be above our numbers if this is approved.

Director Nick Smith adds that other elements will bring costs down as things come into place and become more proficient over time. Smith says the next visit is to the Town of Estes Park, which can help take some dollars off the top if it provides a venue, for example. Smith says there is a lot of opportunity to underpromise and over-deliver with this as the years go by, although it will likely cost the whole amount the first year.

CEO Franker says she would like to see events that extend into the evening in order to keep people here overnight. Benes says the plan is to mimic the Frozen Dead Guy Days model and encourage businesses to host events to keep people here before and following the skijoring event.

VOTE TO PURSUE SKIJORING OPPORTUNITY

Vice Chair Deborah Gibson asks for a motion to take up to \$60,000 plus recommended marketing dollars, as determined by staff, out of 2024 reserves to pursue the 2025 event. Director Rich Chiappe seconds the motion. Directors Nick Smith and Sean Jurgens abstain from voting due to a conflict of interest. All other board members vote yes. The motion passes.

The meeting is adjourned at 4:29 pm.

Upcoming Meeting: July 25 at 2 p.m. via Zoom.

Claire, Mollé, Recording Secretary

Jerusha Rice, Secretary

DATE: _____

DATE: _____

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