



## Visit Estes Park

**Board of Directors Regular Meeting**  
**Thursday, March 28, 2024 at 2:00 PM**  
**Via ZOOM Meeting**

Board Members Attending:

Vice Chair Deborah Gibson, Director Rich Chiappe, Director Pat Murphy, Trustee Frank Lancaster and Director Nick Smith

Others in Attendance:

Colleen DePasquale- Estes Chamber of Commerce  
Tina Valdecanas- Clarity of Place  
David Holder- Clarity of Place  
Patrick Smyton- Tourism Economics

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

The meeting is called to order at 2:02 p.m.

CONSENT AGENDA & MINUTES:

Vice Chair Deborah Gibson asks for a motion to pass the agenda and minutes. Director Pat Murphy moves to accept and Director Jerusha Rice seconds. All vote yes. The agenda and minutes are approved.

## CALL FOR TOWN BOARD UPDATES:

Trustee Frank Lancaster reports that the town got the January sales tax report in, showing that sales tax was down 8.3 percent compared to last year, but also shows that lodging tax was down 30 percent in January. However, several large filers were delinquent, which skews this number. Lancaster says the Town Board discussed some issues with Bed & Breakfast licensing, and a discussion about short-term rentals and bed and breakfasts continues. Lancaster announces that the Town Board election is next week.

## BOARD MEMBER UPDATES

There are no board member updates.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

There is no public comment.

## EX-OFFICIO UPDATES

Colleen DePasquale gives an update from the Chamber of Commerce. She says the Estes Next program has brought in some young business people to create some events, one at Creativity Cabin, one doing Spring Cleanup with the Town and Rotary and one doing a group climbing course with KMAC. She says The Chamber is turning 5 this year.

## REPORT FROM CLARITY OF PLACE

Tina Valdecanas gives an update on where Clarity of Place is with a project helping Visit Estes Park to balance tourism initiatives with preserving community values. She says they are taking known changes expected in the community and making sure VEP is bringing forward the mission of Estes Park's tourism economy while protecting this place we all know and love. She reviews the specific goals of the plan according to changes in travel behavior and destination products. These goals were taken from the 2024 Operating Plan. David Holder chimes in to share how Clarity of Place will help the team implement these goals and objectives in order for success. Valdecanas says they are in the process of building the plan, which will be shared either at the next board meeting or individually. She says Clarity of Place will also make sure that it is implemented in bite-sized pieces, and the next step is to develop messaging and added programming to accomplish the goals.

## PRESENTATION OF NEW SYMPHONY DASHBOARD FROM TOURISM ECONOMICS

Patrick Smyton from Tourism Economics presents the new dashboard to the board. He demonstrates how to manipulate various filters on the dashboard to access all the data conveniently. He explains that the purpose of the dashboard is to make data easily accessible to all board members. He provides a quick overview of the functionalities of the dashboard and conducts a crash course to familiarize everyone with using and navigating the dashboard. CEO Kara Franker says summary data from the dashboard will be added to the monthly board report for members who may not have time to delve deeply into the dashboard. Vice Chair Deborah Gibson inquires about incorporating weather comparisons into the data. Smyton confirms that weather can be incorporated. Trustee Frank Lancaster suggests that local businesses may be interested in accessing this data. Smyton says that the summary report will be publicly accessible on the VEP website. CFO Mike Zumbaugh explains that VEP's Rachel Ward Oppermann is working on making the dashboard summary available on Visit Estes Park's Transparency page. The next steps are for the board to try out the dashboard and provide feedback.

## PROGRAM REVIEW:

1. CEO Kara Franker gives her report. She reviews the snow messaging the team pushed out ahead of Frozen Dead Guy Days. She discusses the work VEP's Claire Molle and John Berry did with crisis control as well as Claire's news appearances leading up to the event. She reviews what a huge success FDGD was, especially when it comes to fixing the challenge we had with the lines the previous year. She says the lines had no issue this year, with double the food trucks and beer and a different layout. Franker says they have been asking the community about their opinion of the event, she says the reviews from businesses that participated have been fantastic. She says we have to plan for bigger crowds next year as well as plan for the visitor experience. Franker asks the board to share how they thought the event went from their perspective. Director Nick Smith says it was about as good as an event like that gets from both a vendor and a festival-goer standpoint. Vice Chair Deborah Gibson comments that all of the winter

events that VEP has been doing create an overall sense that Estes Park is open all year round. Franker reviews the team's involvement with the Polar Plunge and showcases the FDGD flipbook made by VEP's Kendall Akin. Franker reviews the influencers who attended FDGD and some of their content. Franker reviews the Chamber of Commerce Women of Impact initiative, which included Vice Chair Deborah Gibson, RMNP's Kyle Patterson VEP's COO Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger, all as women of interest. Franker reviews policy updates saying the STR bill is still stalled with no movement on it, but there has been movement on other things, which she will put together an email with all this information and send out.

Franker explains the Marketing Advisory Committee which is something a lot of other destinations have, saying this will be our catalyst. She wants to put together bylaws for a committee for the community for lodging, dining, attraction arts, etc, with a chair that will report to this board. Franker announces the Tourism Summit coming in May which the VEP team is now planning. Franker says there will be a breakfast and a reveal of the annual report and then there will be breakout sessions where folks can get together based on topic and give real feedback. Franker encourages anyone who has ideas about what content they would like to see to send it to her quickly. The date for this is set for May 29.

2. CMO Heidi Barfels gives the marketing update. She shares sneak peeks of things the team has been working on, including Undiscovered America TV, which came during FDGD and featured several local businesses. She reviews information about the host and the trip and things he did in town. She says the show will talk about Estes Park as a year-round destination and the episode will show twice this year, once in April and once in August. This will hit drive and fly markets. Barfels reviews the Estes Inspired Campaign photoshoot and the next phase of the campaign which discusses the really extraordinary people who live in Estes Park. Barfels reviews a new program we have joined through Miles Partnership called AI Opener for Destinations Group. She says CEO Kara Franker is serving on this as an expert as well as the marketing team's Heidi, Kendall and Rachel are a part of it. She says this is really cool because we are a trailblazer in this area and can talk about all the things we are already doing, in a realm that is new to a lot of people. Barfels reviews her representation of VEP on Harnessing AI in Marketing as part of this group in front of audiences all over the country. She showcases a recent Snowcat photoshoot with Estes Park Outfitters. Barfels reviews paid media and paid social from the month which is still pushing winter with our new ads and the markets they are hitting. She says the ads are doing two times better than the industry average. Barfels reviews the huge amount of content we have going out for

Earth Week as well as some of the blog content we have going out previewing spring. Barfels reviews media coverage from the month, including Territory Supply and InsideHook which both came from writers we have hosted. She reviews upcoming PR hits, including Smithsonian, BBC, Forbes and more.

3. COO Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger gives the Community Relations Report. She says the team has connected with 113 stakeholders throughout the month. The team connected with the Holiday Inn as well as Vista Host. VEP's Colleen Sovey attended MIC in Denver, which is the Meetings Industry of Colorado Meetings Industry Council of Colorado conference. Domenico-Gelsinger reviews partner news, including that the Dunraven and Village Pizza have permanently closed, but a new restaurant, Ember, will be going into where the Dunraven is. There will also be a new bagel shop in Village Pizza's location. New businesses include Thin Space, Krush Photography and Ray's River Rentals. She reports the work done on event sponsorships, including the 8th Annual Estes Park Studio Tour and the Universal Consciousness Festival.

Domenico-Gelsinger presents an in-depth itinerary for Earth Week and the events we are planning during the week, including the upcoming roundtable. Rebecca reviews the Beyond Program saying VEP had about 144 offers, with top performers being Qi Lounge, Rams Horn and AITEAtude offers doing particularly well. CEO Franker talks about the new up-and-coming chocolate factory, which she expects to be incredible.

4. CFO Mike Zumbaugh gives the financial report. He reviews short-term rental reports for February 2024 and says VEP is still seeking lodging reporting options. He presents the Visitor Center count which was down 10 percent from last year but up since 2019 numbers. He reviews the January lodging tax revenues which were down 8.7 percent for 2023 in lodging taxes compared to last January and the budget was down 3.3 percent compared to last January. Zumbaugh says lodging tax collections show the "vacation" category reporting very high. He reviews a graph showing the lodging tax dollars still above 2019 numbers. He says the report now shows revenue dollars as well. Zumbaugh adds that VEP Zoom backgrounds are now available for everyone to use which are available in the board portal.

#### ACCEPTANCE OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Vice Chair Deborah Gibson asks for a motion to approve the financial statements. Director Nick Smith moves to approve, and Director Jerusha Rice seconds. All vote in favor. The financial statements are accepted.

REQUEST TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION

Director Pat Murphy moved to enter Executive Session pursuant to Sec. 24-6-402(4)(f), C.R.S., to discuss a personnel matter regarding the CEO Contract. The motion was seconded by Director Rich Chiappe. All vote in favor. The board goes into Executive Session at 4:01 pm and concludes the executive session at 4:44 pm.

ADJOURN:

The meeting is adjourned at 4:48 p.m.

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

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Claire, Mollé, Recording Secretary

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Jerusha Rice, Secretary

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

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