



Visit Estes Park

Board of Directors Regular Meeting
Thursday, November 30, 2023 at 2:00 PM
Via ZOOM Meeting

Board Members Attending:

Chair Sean Jurgens, Vice Chair Deborah Gibson, Secretary & Treasurer McShan Walker, Director Pat Murphy, Trustee Frank Lancaster and Director Jerusha Rice

Others in Attendance:

Colleen DePasquale, Chamber of Commerce
John Schnipkoweit, EDC

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 asks for a motion to approve the agenda and minutes. Director Pat Murphy moves to approve the agenda and minutes, Vice Chair Deborah Gibson seconds, all vote yes, motion passes.

CALL FOR PUBLIC COMMENT:

There is no public comment.

BOARD MEMBER UPDATES:

Vice Chair Gibson shares that a guest at her lodge from NYC shared with her staff how beautiful the lights look in town this year and Gibson shared a video from the guest where he talks about how impressed he is with the holiday lights.

CALL FOR TOWN BOARD UPDATES:

There are no town board updates.

EX-OFFICIO UPDATES

John Schnipkoweit gives an update from the EDC saying they are working with the Chamber of Commerce to streamline efforts. He says they have their annual investor meeting next week. He says they have put out all of the documentation about how the relationship with the Chamber of Commerce will be structured and are optimistic that this will continue moving forward. Schnipkoweit says they normally would have started their programming in October but is a bit later due to operational training. He says they have done some preliminary interviews with programming managers, and if things go well with investors in the next 30 days, they can get the hiring process started in January and get programming going. He says the goal is to have a 1-month to 1.5-month segment structure for the programming.

Colleen DePasquale with the Chamber of Commerce gives her update. She says the Chamber has two remaining events for this year, the first being Sip 'n Shop, which will take place at the Barrel on Friday, December 1, and the other being the annual Chamber of Commerce Gala which will be held at the Ridgeline on Thursday, December 7. DePasquale says they are working on revamping the Estes Next program for 2024 to really appeal to young professionals and are working on putting together a committee of young people to help with this effort.

PROGRAM REVIEW:

1. CEO Kara Franker gives her report, starting by giving kudos to the Visit Estes Park team, and especially Dana Paiement, for handling the logistics and planning of the Christmas lights. She says the lights have also led to a lot of engagement on social media. Franker announces that Visit Estes park is receiving two awards in New York City from the HSMAI Adrain Awards. Estes Park will receive a Bronze Adrian Award for its winning entry, "Bringing Frozen Dead Guy Days Back to Life," in the Public Relations/Communications Special Event category, and a Silver Adrian Award for its winning entry, "Standing up for Workforce Housing & Childcare," in the Trending-Environmental, Social, Governance category. Franker reports that the news about the Sundance Film Institute snuck in the day before Thanksgiving and is remaining lowkey for now, although the VEP team is looking forward to learning more.

Franker announces that Estes Park was accepted into the Colorado Dark

Sky Certification Mentor Program, which will provide us with 70 hours of free consultation to learn more about how to get Estes Park on the dark sky map. A discussion continues among the board about preserving dark skies and how previous efforts in this area have been well received.

Franker tells the board that they and their families are invited to VEP's holiday dinner, which will take place on December 15 at The View Restaurant.

Franker presents an update on the upcoming Family Day and Sweets Stroll taking place on December 16 in Bond Park as part of Catch the Glow Holiday Season. She explains the event and that Hallmark movie star, Nikki DeLoach will be in attendance for a meet and greet. She says there will be a Visit Estes Park tent with heaters where the team will be handing out prizes for the Sweets Stroll. There will also be a stage for Mayor Wendy, Nikki DeLoach and Santa. She says the Town Trustees and County Commissioners have also been invited to the event. Franker encourages the board members to attend the event.

Franker provides an update on the upcoming Frosty Beer Fest taking place in Bond Park on December 9, also a part of Catch the Glow Holiday Season. She says there will be lots of craft beer and wine as well as live music and games.

Franker moves on to review some of the new Catch the Glow collateral and creative which VEP has been sharing on digital channels. She presents the holiday flipbook guide that Kendall created as a way to make event information easier to find and read for guests. Franker says the team can email a link to the guide out once again and Kendall is welcoming any feedback so that VEP can continue to create these guides in the future if people find them helpful.

Franker provides a review of the Tree Lighting Ceremony and the Catch the Glow parade, which took place over the past few weeks, saying both events looked fantastic.

Franker announces more recent achievements, saying VEP has received another grant as part of a regional collaboration with other Northern Colorado destinations to promote regional winter activities. Franker also announces that Destinations International picked up one of Visit Estes Park's podcast episodes, Indigenous Connections.

Franker finishes her report by sharing U.S. Travel Key Insights. She highlights that enthusiasm to travel remains at record levels yet higher costs are weighing on American's decisions and that perceptions of economic pressure and uncertainty are starting to impact travelers' mindsets. Franker shares some examples of that data, which shows nearly four in 10 say now is not a good time to spend money on travel vs. 28% who believe it is. Additionally, 40% say the expense of travel is the top travel deterrent preventing Americans from traveling as much as they would have liked in the past six months, and affluent, urban and younger travelers are more optimistic about their current financial situation and will likely continue to prioritize travel.

2. CMO Heidi Barfels begins the marketing report. She starts off by asking VEP's Rachel Ward Oppermann to talk a bit about her experience at two events she recently attended.

Oppermann says she attended CU Boulder's Masters in Environment networking event with students who are interested in weaving sustainability into their work and were eager to learn about Visit Estes Park's sustainability efforts. Oppermann says she also attended the League of Women Voters' sustainability panel where she had the chance to speak about everything VEP is doing in the realm of sustainability.

Barfels then asks VEP's Kendall Akin to discuss her experience attending Visit Denver's annual partnership meeting. Akins says she had a blast and learned about the future of travel among changing populations.

Barfels provides an update on ticket sales for Frozen Dead Guy Dyas saying tickets went out that day to a select group with the idea to sell them in waves. Barfels also announces that VEP has released the Frozen Dead Guy Days documentary.

Barfels provides insight on recent advertising campaigns and creative, including a partnership with Travel Zoo which involved putting Estes Park all over their social media and website. Barfels shares data from this campaign that 60-percent of clicks from this campaign drove traffic to the lodging page on Visit Estes Park's website. Barfels also shares some of the recent blogs the team has written to promote the holiday season as well as some reels the team has created to promote Catch the Glow season. Barfels concludes her report by reviewing some recent national media coverage for VEP and its partners including articles in Travel + Leisure, the New York Times and Purewow. Barfels also shares her appearance in an episode of the podcast, "Roundtrip," in which she

discusses how Visit Estes Park is using AI to improve visitor experience.

3. COO Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger gives the Community Relations Report. She starts with a review of various community events the VEP team has attended throughout the month including a meeting with the Trailborn team and the opening of the new cryonics museum at The Stanley Hotel and DEI's (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) workshop sessions, which VEP's Colleen Sovey attended.

Domenico-Gelsinger reviews some recent local media coverage including an article about the Rocky Mountain Conservancy in the Trail Gazette, as well as articles from VEP's Claire Molle and Kendall Akin which were also featured in the Trail Gazette. Domenico-Gelsinger provides oversight of some new local businesses including Jeep Jeep Tacos and Estes Valley Vacation Rentals.

Domenico-Gelsinger provides updates about Catch the Glow season, saying 482 people have signed up for Glow in the Park Family Day and 274 people have signed up for Frosty Beer Best. Domenico-Gelsinger says the marketing team also helped create an email for lodgers to send to their guests about Catch the Glow Holiday Season. She says there are currently 478 people signed up for the Holiday Passport with 45 businesses participating.

Domenico-Gelsinger concludes her report with a review of the group sales numbers showing 13 group leads received in October, equating to 1,379 requested room nights with an estimated economic value of \$228,340.

4. CFO Mike Zumbaugh gives the financial report starting with the Rocky Mountain Lodging Report, showing that Estes Park is ahead of state metrics in average daily rates and revenue per available room for the month of October and is ahead of the state year-to-date for average daily rate. Zumbaugh presents the Symphony dashboard reports and says he is working to add the state of Colorado information to this dashboard as well.

Zumbaugh presents the Visitor Center count showing October 2023 as 6 percent ahead of 2022 and 16 percent ahead year-to-date.

Zumbaugh shares that approximately \$4.5 million has been passed through for workforce housing and childcare programs from 6E funds.

Zumbaugh reports for September lodging taxes, we were up 2.1 percent from 2022 but did not include information from one property that had not been submitting its lodging taxes for several quarters, which will push the numbers above this figure. Year-to-date, Visit Estes Park is down 1.7 percent from 2022.

Zumbaugh shares a comparison to the budget, showing VEP is 3.8 percent ahead of the year-to-date budget.

Zumbaugh concludes his report by sharing some new information that is available on the dashboard that shows breakdowns of lodging tax collections among different categories and shares a review of lodging tax revenues by month.

2024 PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

CFO Mike Zumbaugh shares the 2024 budget review. He shows that 79 percent of Visit Estes Park's proposed budget is coming from the original 2 percent lodging tax and the additional 10 percent portion of the new 3.5 percent 6E lodging tax is giving Visit Estes Park 14 percent of the budget. Web listing sales are contributing to six percent of the budget, and investment interest comes down to 0 although there is still \$12,000 budgeted for this.

Zumbaugh shows the proposed budget broken down by department with the marketing department having a 57 percent share of the budget, community relations and advocacy having a 25 percent share, and administration and sales and stakeholder services each having a 9 percent share of the budget.

Zumbaugh shares the proposed budget expenses breakdown by type with 65 percent going to program expenses, 32 percent going to personnel and related expenses and 3 percent going to indirect expenses.

Zumbaugh shares a summarized version of the full proposed 2024 operating budget with a note that he has also sent out a more detailed version and encourages the board to bring forward any questions they may have. He notes that for 2023, there was originally a budget for the utilization of reserves totaling \$590,000 for brand identity development and creative and production work from outside vendors, which VEP did not end up utilizing to the extent originally planned. So VEP will instead request these reserves on an if-needed basis, which is why there is such a drastic change showing from 2023 to 2024.

Zumbaugh says the overall budget for personnel costs has gone down as VEP removed an unfilled position but has increased the cost for additional conferences, and VEP experienced an increase in insurance premiums as well as a 4-percent salary increase for merit and cost of living has been budgeted. Zumbaugh requests any questions on specific line items.

Trustee Frank Lancaster asks what the deadline is for submitting the budget to the state. Zumbaugh double-checks and informs the board that the budget needs to be completed by December 31, 2023 and submitted by January 31, 2024.

Public Budget Hearing concludes.

CEO Kara Franker shares that for January, the board will need to vote on leadership positions for the 2024 year if anyone would like to volunteer for that. She also says that Director Pat Murphy and Secretary McShan Walker's positions are up in December so there will be discussion about these positions moving forward. Franker says she has also invited Steve Lane to talk about some ideas for The Slab property which may lead to some good discussion of what could be possible here and this may be a great opportunity for a private developer to take on.

ADJOURN:

Trustee Frank Lancaster asks how much the lights in town cost Visit Estes Park. CEO Franker says they cost \$130,000 which does not include the Bond Park activation pieces. Visit Estes Park is being reimbursed for the town to pay \$100,000 of this, and then Visit Estes Park will put in another \$30,000 to boost this.

Lancaster comments that he enjoyed the Frozen Dead Guy Days documentary as well as the lights in town.

Vice Chair Gibson says the RMNP open house was very well done and various proposals can be seen online.

The meeting is adjourned at 3:12 pm.

Upcoming Meeting: December 14 at 2 p.m. via Zoom. This meeting will include the final budget approval vote.

Claire Mollé

Claire, Mollé, Recording Secretary

DATE: Dec 14, 2023



[McShan Walker \(Dec 14, 2023 15:30 MST\)](#)

Mcshan Walker, Secretary

DATE: Dec 14, 2023










November 30, 2023 Board Meeting Minutes_final

Final Audit Report

2023-12-14

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