



Visit Estes Park

Board of Directors Regular Meeting
Thursday, October 24, 2024 at 2:00 PM
Via ZOOM Meeting

Board Members Attending:

Chair Sean Jurgens, Vice Chair Deborah Gibson, Director Pat Murphy, Director Rich Chiappe, Treasurer Jerusha Rice

Others in Attendance:

Colleen DePasquale - Estes Chamber of Commerce
Scott Moulton - Estes Park Housing Authority
Joan Hooper- League of Women Voters
Carlie Bangs- Town of Estes Park
Tina Valdecanas-Clarity of Place
Bob Fulton-Estes Park Duck Race
Ryan Bross- Bank of Colorado
Michael Martelon

VEP Staff:

Mike Zumbaugh-Interim CEO and CFO
Cindy Mackin- Community Engagement Director
Rachel Oppermann- Marketing Director
Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger- Operations Director
Dana Paiement- Destination Development Senior Manager
Claire Molle- Communications Manager
John Berry- Photographer
Kendall Akin- Creative Manager

The meeting is called to order at 2:03 p.m.

CONSENT AGENDA & MINUTES:

Chair Sean Jurgens requests a motion to approve the agenda and minutes from the previous board meeting. Director Pat Murphy moves to approve, and Director Jerusha Rice seconds. All vote in favor, agenda and minutes are approved.

CALL FOR TOWN BOARD UPDATES:

Trustee Kirby Hazelton is not in attendance, so there are no town board updates.

CALL FOR BOARD MEMBER UPDATES:

There are no board member updates.

CALL FOR PUBLIC COMMENT:

There is no public comment.

EX-OFFICIO REPORTS

Colleen DePasquale announces the upcoming Chamber Bowling Tournament and Gumbo Dinner. She shares that the alliances, including the lodging and wedding alliances, are resuming activities and provides an update on several initiatives to anticipate with the upcoming Base program.

Carlie Bangs reports the successful closing of the Mountain Top Childcare facility earlier this month. She indicates that the team is now focused on securing funding and grants, as well as organizing efforts for the upcoming year.

Scott Moulton from the Housing Authority shares positive news regarding the successful closure of Fall River Village and Beaver Brook. He reports that nine out of the nineteen units have been committed, with initial leases set to begin on November 1. Moulton notes that operational control of Fall River Village will not transfer until November 18, with the aim to commence leasing at that property by December 1. He expresses that there is significant enthusiasm in the community regarding these developments and the competitive rental rates, contributing to a positive local impact.

DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP PLAN PRESENTATION:

Tina Valdecanas from Clarity of Place presents a Destination Stewardship Plan, aiming to ground future VEP Operating Plans in the values of the defined imperatives. She explains that the Destination Stewardship plan serves as a long-term guiding framework. Valdecanas emphasizes that VEP has been a leader in this area, highlighting the importance of building on this established excellence.

She outlines the identified imperatives, which focus on continuing current initiatives while also introducing proactive strategies to invite broader community support for sustainability efforts. These strategies include fostering growth in sustainability that preserves the values and character of the destination.

Valdecanas introduces a new implementation and engagement tool called WayFinder, which was developed by Miles Partnership. VEP is able to utilize this tool at no cost, providing a way to track progress in destination stewardship. She underscores that this initiative serves as a reminder to the community that everyone has a role in this effort, not just Visit Estes Park.

ESTES PARK DUCK RACE PRESENTATION

Bob Fulton presents a partnership proposal between the Estes Park Duck Race and Visit Estes Park. He highlights the value of the Duck Race in raising significant funds for charity and attracting visitors from the drive market. Fulton requests that Visit Estes Park support the event with marketing efforts to ensure it receives as much attention as other local events.

Communications Manager Claire Molle outlines the approximately 96 hours she has dedicated to marketing updates in previous years. Marketing Director Rachel Oppermann explains the typical approach Visit Estes Park takes to promote events. Director Rich Chiappe inquires about the potential to create a “Duck Week” in Estes Park, aiming to attract visitors specifically for this event. Fulton notes that the concept of a weekend-level event has been under discussion for some time and indicates their operational plans to significantly enhance the level of activity and engagement for visitors compared to previous years.

The board continues to explore the possibility of expanding the event and its potential impact on attracting visitors. It is decided that staff will brainstorm additional resources to support the event and report back to the board. Sean Jurgens suggests formulating a more specific request regarding the needs of the Duck Race. Fulton proposes that existing tasks for the Duck Race could be swapped for other tasks that might be more beneficial in terms of staff time.

Vice Chair Deborah Gibson expresses interest in seeing a marketing plan from the Duck Race team that outlines how additional support, combined with brainstorming from Visit Estes Park staff, could be utilized. It is agreed that the Duck Race team and staff will collaborate to develop this plan. Cindy Mackin adds that she has secured approval to bring a giant light-up duck to George Hix Plaza. Chair Sean Jurgens states that once this information is presented at a future meeting, the board can establish an action item.

PROGRAM REVIEW:

1. Mike Zumbaugh, Interim CEO of Visit Estes Park, announces that VEP's Operating Plan was approved by the Town on October 8 and will be presented to the County on the 29th. He congratulates Rachel Oppermann on her promotion to Marketing Director following the resignation of Chief Marketing Officer Heidi Barfels. Oppermann expresses her excitement about the role, acknowledges the challenge of filling Barfels' shoes, and shares her gratitude for the mentorship she has received and the opportunity to advance. Zumbaugh explains the adjustments to the staff title structure, noting that Chief titles have been right-sized to Director to enhance the organization's reputation within the community. The only remaining "Chief" title will be that of the CEO. He announces that Claire Molle will be leaving the team, and VEP has hired a new Communications Manager, Papae Litchfield, who will begin her role next week. Litchfield brings 27 years of experience in the Travel & Tourism industry from her previous position at Chattanooga Tourism. Zumbaugh presents the Destination Stewardship plan developed by the Colorado Tourism Office, which includes the formation of a new task force focused on music tourism. He notes that Kendall Akin will represent this initiative in Estes Park.
2. Rachel Oppermann presents the marketing report, beginning with an overview of the Fall/Winter Marketing Strategy, which details the campaigns planned for the upcoming seasons. She shares examples of creative materials supporting these campaigns, including "Catch the Glow," "Frozen Dead Guy Days," and the upcoming winter initiatives. Oppermann introduces the new Explore NoCo Campaign, developed in partnership with other northern Colorado destinations, which targets travelers at Chicago O'Hare airport through both physical display ads and geo-targeted digital ads, encouraging them to leave the Midwest and visit the mountains during the winter. She showcases the refreshed Catch the Glow logo and highlights the new centerpiece: a giant pixel pine tree. Oppermann discusses various promotional materials for Catch the Glow, set to launch on November 4. She presents an example of the latest e-blast from the winter campaign, featured in Travel + Leisure, and shares updates on new holiday website content. Additionally, she shows a sponsored gallery page from TravelZoo, part of a paid campaign aimed at leisure travelers, which includes numerous mentions of local partners. Oppermann also highlights social media successes from the past month, featuring posts about the aurora borealis, a reel on the loop, and a reel showcasing fall colors. Kendall Akin provides the year-in-review report for the Rocky Mountain Roamer tool. She presents usage statistics, noting that most interactions originate from the website, with WhatsApp as the second most popular channel. Akin observes a significant increase in usage following the launch of paid media promoting the tool and

shares insights into the top topics users inquire about. She also highlights collateral provided by Guide Geek for lodgers and the Visitor Center. Claire Molle announces press coverage highlights from the month, including features in 5280 and Thrillist. She recounts her experience at the Colorado Tourism Office's Winter Media Reception on October 23, where she pitched both Catch the Glow and Skijoring to interested Colorado media partners.

3. Cindy Mackin presents the community relations report, outlining the events VEP is sponsoring for the month, including a Christmas Block Party in collaboration with The Grey House and Macdonald Book Store. She announces a Frozen Dead Guy Days booth scheduled for Halloween and introduces the Beyond Fall program. Mackin provides updates on holiday activities, securing the Reindeer Walk, and finalizing details for tree installation. She notes that the caisson for the tree will be constructed in Bond Park on Monday, with the tree installation planned between November 11 and 13. Additionally, 26 partners have already signed up to participate in the snowman scavenger hunt. She mentions the team's collaboration with the Bull Pin to utilize parade decorations as a sponsorship donation for their holiday-themed bar and activations. Mackin shares details about international FAMs that visited through the Colorado Tourism Office, including the Marco Vasco group from France and a MegaFAM from the UK hosted by BrandUSA. Dana Paiement discusses her work with Wheel of the World, noting that VEP has sponsored 10 businesses to be featured on the website in 2024, providing essential information for travelers with disabilities. She announces that VEP's page on the site is now live and that she has applied for a grant from the Colorado Tourism Office to add 23 more partners and hopes to include hiking trails in the future. Paiement mentions the confirmation of a Dark Skies study session with the Town Board, highlighting its significant benefits for astrotourism and its potential to enhance sustainable tourism.
4. Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger presents the liaison meetings she has attended, including those with the Estes Nonprofit Network Board, the Economic Workforce Development Council, and the Chamber of Commerce. She highlights upcoming events, such as the Chamber Bowling Tournament, Community Gumbo Dinner, National Philanthropy Day, Sip & Shop, and the Chamber's Awards & Gala. Domenico-Gelsinger announces that the VEP holiday gathering will take place on Sunday, December 8, at the Bull Pin, and will share further details as they become available.
5. Mike Zumbaugh presents the financial report, indicating that overall lodging taxes have increased for the year, although September figures are down compared to the previous year. The visitor guest count exceeds 63,000, reflecting a 5.5 percent increase

compared to 2023. He notes that lodging tax collections for August 2023 are behind but do not include several large lodging properties that failed to remit their reports. Zumbaugh states that when these estimated figures are included, the total actually shows an increase of more than 6 percent compared to September 2023. Vice Chair Deb Gibson inquires about the impact of the fires on visitation. Mackin responds that retailers have indicated the August fires significantly harmed their business during that month. Zumbaugh confirms that this decline is also evident in sales tax figures for August. He adds that lodging tax revenues are ahead of budget projections for August 2023 and year-to-date. He shares a breakdown of lodging tax categorized by type and presents a graph of lodging tax revenues. Finally, he reviews the financial statements for August, noting that VEP is on a positive trajectory concerning expenses and budgeting as the year concludes.

ACCEPTANCE OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION ON FINANCE DIRECTOR CONTRACT

Treasurer Jerusha Rice says she would like to have an Executive Session to discuss the Finance Director Contract.

Jurgens move to enter the executive session using to the official executive session language. Jerusha Rice seconds. All vote in favor. The meeting moves into Executive Session.

Upon exiting the executive session, Director Rich Chiappe moves that Jurgens draft, negotiate and obtain agreement and signature for an employment contract with the fiance director subject to items discussed in the executive session. Rice seconds. All in favor. Motion passes.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Vice Chair Gibson brings up an email on winter advertising and asks Director Chiappe about his winter bookings beginning in January 2025. They are not looking good for Chiappe or Gibson's properties. There are larger market factors. November and December 2024 look really good for both. Chiappe urges staff to look ahead and do what they can to boost bookings January through April 2025.

Chiappe goes on to task staff with looking into reviving the branding of Hidden Valley. The words hidden, valley and ski aren't trademarked by anyone. He would like staff to look into trademarking it and incorporating Estes Park's outdoor winter recreation opportunities and ski history in VEP marketing. This conversation leads to a discussion about VEP staff meeting with Rocky Mountain National Park staff about Park promotion by VEP.

Chair Jurgens finishes the meeting by reviewing upcoming VEP Board Meeting dates, states that he and Director Mackin will ask the County Commissioners to vote on VEP's 2025 Operating Plan on October 29 and that the first meeting of the CEO search committee will be held on Monday. The search committee is Brain Hauser, Mayor Gary Hall, Commissioner Shaddock-McNally, Deborah Gibson and himself.

The meeting is adjourned at 4:02 p.m.

Upcoming Meeting: Thursday, December 5, at 2 p.m.

Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger,
Recording Secretary

Jerusha Rice, Secretary

DATE: _____

DATE: _____