



## Visit Estes Park

Board of Directors Regular Meeting  
Thursday, September 28, 2023 at 2:00 PM  
Via ZOOM Meeting

### Board Members Attending:

Chair Sean Jurgens, Vice Chair Deborah Gibson, Secretary McShan Walker,  
Director Pat Murphy and Director Jerusha Rice

### Others in Attendance:

Kyle Patterson- RMNP  
Colleen DePasquale- Chamber of Commerce  
John Schnipkoweit- EDC  
Trail Gazette  
VEP Attorney

### 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

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, Secretary McShan Walker seconds. Motion is approved.

### CALL FOR PUBLIC COMMENT:

There is no public comment.

### CALL FOR TOWN BOARD UPDATES:

There are no Town Board updates as Trustee Frank Lancaster is not in attendance.

### BOARD MEMBER UPDATES:

There are no board member updates.

## REPORTS:

1. CEO Kara Franker announces that Visit Estes Park has a plan in place for the looming possibility of a government shutdown saying VEP will follow guidance from Kyle as well as promote messaging which will encourage guests to still come to Estes Park even if the park is closed. Franker also shares a plan to share messaging with other Northern Colorado partners. Kyle Patterson begins the update on RMNP saying the park is still very hopeful that the government will not shutdown. Patterson says they oftentimes would not get direction until midnight on September 30, so she does not have any updates yet and cannot speculate at this point what the shutdown would look like. Patterson says as soon as she has any information she will share it with this group as well as park employees.

Vice Chair Deborah Gibson asks if there has been any discussion with Governor Polis about assistance to keep the park open if the government does shutdown. Patterson says we have had state support in the past, but the federal government is looking at when and if they would take state funds, but we don't know yet if that would be a possibility this year.

Vice Chair Deborah Gibson asks if there is any way of cycling the Timed Entry to make it a little looser during weekdays during the shoulder months. Patterson says she thinks this is a great conversation to have and would love to think through what this would look like for the future and to think through what these communications would look like.

Patterson says they have been doing a lot of news stories on the elk rut and fall colors so hopefully we have seen some of the great publicity there. Patterson adds the Secretary of the Interior has been visiting the park for the last two days highlighting the Moraine Park Campground project for the American Outdoor Act. She concludes saying that Fall River Entrance construction is continuing and Old Fall River Road will be closing for the season on Tuesday and they will be sharing information about how they will then open it up for other users such as bicyclists.

Vice Chair Deborah Gibson adds she is wondering if other organizations

in the state such as chambers of commerce and tourism organizations have been reaching out to Governor Polis about assistance with funding if there is a government shutdown. CEO Franker says tourism is on the Governor's forefront because he will be at the Colorado Governor's Tourism Conference that evening. Patterson assures the group that RMNP is in very close contact with the Governor's office about the situation.

2. John Schnipkoweit of the EDC gives a quick update on the proposed new mission and direction of the EDC. Schnipkoweit says their board did approve so they now have new mission of assisting businesses in scaling a robust workforce and cultivating a diverse economy in the Estes Valley. He says the primary focus right now is the robust workforce piece and how can they assist businesses within the constraints of geography and population starting with hospitality businesses. Schnipkoweit says the preliminary metric is looking at an increase of job openings filled by local or returning seasonal applicants. He says with this new change and focus, they want to change the programming so it is for smaller cohorts in shorter time frames and they are currently recruiting a program manager for the accelerator program.

3. Colleen DePasquale gives an update from the Chamber of Commerce saying the Chamber has some upcoming fun events as things slow down including a bowling tournament on October 19, the Community Gumbo Dinner on November 2, and nominations for First Annual Chamber Awards are also open. DePasquale says she received an email from Val Thompson of You Need Pie about changing the funding for J1 students, but the Chamber is digging into it and is struggling to find all the details that go with it. She asks that anyone let her know if they know more about this or if there is a concern about funding for J1 students.

#### PROGRAM REVIEW:

1. CEO Franker gives a VEP program review. Franker says almost all of the VEP staff is currently at the Colorado Governor's Tourism Conference. She says Rachel and Rebecca started the conference off by volunteering at for the Leave No Trace program picking up trash. Franker says she also got to see all three county commissioners at the event who will also be at the award's ceremony tonight where VEP is up for an award for Frozen Dead Guy Days for the best tourism initiative. Franker says COO, Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger is currently on the stage giving a talk at the

conference and Director of Advocacy and Sustainability, Rachel Ward Oppermann gave a talk earlier in the day about crisis communication adding this conference has been a great time for VEP and its team to shine.

Franker explains she and VEP's attorney determined that the board will not be able to hold the executive session or vote on the finances today because the agenda was not provided 24 hours in advance of the meeting. Franker says she apologizes and says she wants to protect the organization by not charging through with an executive session because it would not be the proper thing to do.

Franker continues her report saying VEP is hosting the Community Roundtable, next week on October 3rd. This will be the opportunity for partners to meet face-to-face about the holidays and what we will be doing.

Franker says it has been great seeing the Isabella Bird campaign come together with various events. She reviews some of the Isabella Bird events including the Twin Sisters hike with Full Potential Wilderness, the Longs Peak Reunion, Jackie Pualani Johnson at the Historic Park Theatre and "Thunder is the Mountain's Voice," at the YMCA from the Fine Arts Guild of the Rockies. Franker says VEP is hosting a reception at both shows at the Historic Park Theatre and the YMCA. Franker shares some of the blog content the team has created about Isabella Bird as well as some of the paid social media for the campaign. Franker shares some of the media coverage VEP has generated about Isabella Bird including an article in Smithsonian Magazine. Franker says this shows how important it can be to show the history and culture of the destination and is a perfect example of why VEP is using this as a storytelling mechanism to pay homage to our history.

Franker shares some VEP's recent advertising efforts with stats from ad campaigns with Travel + Leisure, Afar Magazine and a TravelZoo email blast covering the upscale and luxury audience.

Franker shares VEP's recent website performance which outperformed all DMO averages for organic sessions with the average organic engagement rate around 60-percent and VEP organic engagement rate at 71.36-percent.

Franker reviews a partnership with AudioEye, a project implemented by CMO Heidi Barfels as VEP continues to improve accessibility and inclusivity making it easier for all to use the website and plan their trip.

Franker reviews some recent social media highlights including a reel about fall which gained VEP 288 followers and received over 101k views and 6k likes, making it the organizations highest all-time performing reel so far.

Franker shares recent media coverage of Estes Park including an article in CNN and Women's Day Magazine.

Franker shares recent efforts of the Community Relations team starting with a list of all the partners the team has interacted with throughout the month and how they are tracking these interactions. Franker says they are super excited about Lumpy Ridge Brewery's new tap location.

Franker shares some stats from the Beyond Campaign which encourages guest to go out into town and try some of the local businesses. Franker also reviews VEP's event sponsorships including Pumpkins and Pilsners.

Franker concludes by sharing the Estes Park Visitor Center count showing August being 18-percent ahead of 2022 YTD with 237,762 in August 2023 compared to 201,719 in August of 2022.

2. CFO Mike Zumbaugh gives the financial report beginning with the total lodging tax collections showing the YTD pass through to the town for the childcare and housing initiative with 2.8-million having gone to the town for the initiative. Zumbaugh continues with the lodging tax revenues, showing August is down 2.2-percent for the month compared to 2022 and down 2.4-percent YTD at 1.8 million dollars. Zumbaugh reports VEP is ahead of budget by 2.1-percent saying VEP did reduce budget in expectation of 2023 to be softer and is thankful they did in order to stay within budget for spending. Zumbaugh says YTD, VEP is ahead by 1.8-percent in collections. Zumbaugh shares a graph comparing lodging tax revenues by year showing 2023 is staying on track with the typical flow of the year and will have August numbers in a couple weeks.

Chair Sean Jurgens states he has a question wondering if the Workforce Housing and Childcare Plan would be able to be approved before the VEP Operating plan is approved since it does depend on funding from the VEP Operating Plan. CEO Franker says this is a fantastic question that is probably best answered by Attorney Kramer, the town's attorney.

CEO Kara Franker reviews upcoming meetings saying it will not be the usual

cadence with a normal board meeting in October followed by a budget hearing on November 30, and the final budget vote on December 14.

Franker says anyone who would like to be involved with the votes on October 24th is invited.

Franker says she will find out everyone's availability so that VEP can properly notice the Executive Session with 24-hours notice and move forward with that content.

ADJOURN:

The meeting is adjourned at 2:39 pm.

Upcoming Meeting: Regular Board Meeting on October 26, at 2pm, 2023 via Zoom.

*Claire Mollé*

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Claire, Mollé, Recording Secretary

*McShan Walker*

[McShan Walker \(Nov 2, 2023 11:21 MDT\)](#)

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Mcshan Walker, Secretary

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

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










# VEP September 28, 2023 Board Meeting Minutes\_final

Final Audit Report

2023-11-02

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