

Tuesday, May 5, 2026
Monthly Joint Staff Meeting Minutes

Those in attendance included: Maura Gast, Susan Rose, Marianne Lauda, Lori Fojtasek, Matt Tungett, Wendy Foster, Kathy Levine, Lori Mansell, Lori Sirmen, Carol Boyer, Monica Soto, Brice Petty, Genesis Avila, Anabel Espinoza, Casey Villasenor, Kayla Perez and Elizabeth Agron.

Meeting began at 9:00 a.m.

Living Our Values Out Loud

- ICVB Executive Director, Maura Gast opened the meeting with values recognition and invited staff to share shoutouts.
- ICVB Accounting & Budget Director, Marianne Lauda thanked the team for celebrating her 40th anniversary and gave special thanks to Carol Boyer, Monica Soto, Susan Rose, Maura Gast, Brenda Lopez and others who helped with the flowers, signs and surprises.
- ICVB Office Manager, Carol Boyer recognized Brice Petty for a helpful AI training session. ICVB Senior Manager of Client Services and Events, Wendy Foster also said she had already used AI several times because of the AI training.
- Gast recognized Thomas Gandy, Genesis Avila, Anabel Espinoza, Lori Sirmen and the Marketing and Communications team for their work on National Travel and Tourism Week City Council gift boxes, including local sweets and tourism impact facts.
- ICVB Communications Manager, Lori Sirmen thanked Anabel Espinoza and Genesis Avila for helping with New York media gift boxes, including locally inspired food samples and customized graphics.
- ICVB AED, Sales and Services, Lori Fojtasek praised Genesis Avila for quickly creating the invitation, registration process and QR code needed for the upcoming FIFA training.
- Foster praised the energy, pace and quality of work coming from the Marketing and Communications team.
- ICVB Director of Sales, Matt Tungett thanked Kayla Perez for helping launch a client greeting program with food and beverage support.
- Gast congratulated both the CVB and Convention Center teams for receiving Fired Up Culture First Quarter Achievement Awards.

AI at Work

- Tungett shared that he used AI to search his calendar and organize interview dates for HR candidate documentation.
- ICVB Manager of Client Services and Events, Kathy Levine said she used ChatGPT to support a hospitality alert by checking group agenda and schedule information without needing to wait on client materials.
- ICVB National Sales Manager, Lori Mansell used ChatGPT to prepare talking points for a HelmsBriscoe podcast interview.

- ICVB AED, Finance and Administration, Susan Rose used AI to condense Fired Up training notes from several staff members into categories and 21 action items.
- Sirmen used AI personally to help organize dog insurance receipts, identify missed claims and create a clean list of items to file.
- Boyer used AI to summarize the top responsibilities from her job description for an administrative team assignment.
- Gast encouraged staff to keep prompting and refining AI outputs, noting that it could have helped build a stronger first draft of the Board Strategic planning deck. She also shared an example of training AI on sent emails so it can better match a writer's tone.
- Staff were reminded to lean into AI while continuing to verify the accuracy of any results, copy or analysis before using it.
- ICVB Technology Manager, Brice Petty explained that staff should choose the appropriate ChatGPT model rather than relying on instant mode for all tasks. He recommended the 5.5 Thinking model with standard effort for most work and noted that deep research mode can produce more thoroughly cited research when needed.
- Petty said monthly prizes will be awarded for AI usage, with the first winner to be announced at the next staff meeting.

Fired Up Initiatives

- Rose said Fired Up initiatives will be reviewed at the next joint staff meeting after she connects with Tom Meehan and Kayla Perez on the action items.
- The next Lunch and Learn is scheduled for May 14 and will include a presentation from Tom Gilbert as well as a tour of the 4A floor.
- Rose encouraged staff to take advantage of monthly coaching opportunities with Meg and shared that she completed Birkman training so she can serve as an additional resource as the organization continues Fired Up work.
- Gast thanked Rose and Perez for helping with the previous Lunch and Learn and said Juanita and David did a strong job sharing their work with staff.

Executive Director / ICC General Manager Report

- Gast reported that the Board Strategic Planning Retreat went well. Board committees will work through related items over the next three months, with the goal of having the Board adopt the plan by July and having it in place before the City Council budget retreat in August.
- A new strategic plan implementation fund is being created as part of the budget process. The fund is expected to begin with a placeholder amount and later support studies or projects that come from the plan.
- Gast said Al Zapanta is expected to become Irving's new Mayor after election results are canvassed. Staff should be aware that he may be less available than Mayor Stopfer because of his schedule, and prepared bullet points will be helpful when he is asked to speak.
- Gast reviewed City Council election updates, including changes to Council seats and a District three runoff.

- A farewell staff reception for Mayor Stopfer was scheduled for that afternoon from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on the third floor, with remarks at 3:30 p.m.
- Gast said a new free VIA circulator route is expected to begin in the Urban Center after the July 4 weekend. The route is planned to serve office buildings, hotels, the Convention Center, Toyota Music Factory and Water Street from approximately 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week.
- The circulator will not replace convention shuttle service. VIA will brand the vans, track ridership and adjust service as demand is learned. Route and app information will be shared once finalized.
- Gast also noted that VIA will restore the former DART 225 and 255 routes in mid-June with the same stops, timing and fares previously used by DART.
- Foster reminded the sales team that the Grapevine shuttle is running again and serves several hotels, including the Westin, DoubleTree, Sheraton and Marriott DFW, along with Main Street stops.

Sales and Services Report

- Fojtasek said there were no new hotels in the pipeline, but the Ritz-Carlton is adding useful event space by converting its sales office area into a new Terrace Conservatory and private dining space. The hotel also offered a possible hard-hat tour.
- Fojtasek also noted that Sandman is building another Sandman property next door, described during the meeting as a Signature Suites concept.
- Fojtasek welcomed Elizabeth Agron, National Sales Manager. Agron joined from the Westin DFW, completed orientation and has already started entering new work into the system.
- Tungett, Gast, Monty White and Sergeant Morales recently visited Athens Twilight in Athens, Georgia, to evaluate a criterium cycling event that could potentially come to Las Colinas in a future year. Tungett said the event was energetic, drew large crowds and required close coordination with police and emergency services.
- Tungett traveled to Sports ETA and reported productive calls, including confirmation that USA Judo plans to add a program.
- Donna Groves recently attended the HelmsBriscoe ABC event in Los Angeles and had strong appointments. A combined reception with partner destinations also had a good turnout.
- Rare Steak Festival is Thursday at Levy Plaza. Client tickets and need-to-know information will be distributed, and clients may be reimbursed for parking.
- Genesis Avila helped create the reminder and need-to-know flyer for Rare Steak Festival.
- Fojtasek said Irving and Grapevine are sponsoring a hosted buyer lunch at MPI in San Antonio for approximately 320 people.
- Mansell reported on TSAE Open, where she, Casey and Tom sponsored the welcome reception and connected with more than 200 attendees.
- Mansell and Breanna had two strong site visits, including a Texas Medical planning meeting that should create exposure to medical associations and corporate medical vendors.

- Mansell reported that TSPRA asked for a 2028 contract and is placing Irving into its regular rotation. The booking represents 1,665 room nights.
- Foster said Texas DMOs will be represented together at an MPI welcome reception in San Antonio with branded soccer balls, jerseys and a Road Station photo takeaway concept.
- Ray Murray's has moved to Water Street and includes a private dining room. INSO, a new Asian fusion concept in the former Walk-On's location, has also opened.

Services Report

- Levine reported that Oilfield Water Markets was in-house for a two-day event with registration support from two staff members.
- The Pilot Network was expected later in the week with approximately 1,000 attendees and no published lunch times, creating an opportunity for nearby Irving restaurants.
- Hall of Fame Dance Competition was scheduled for the weekend with approximately 1,500 attendees at the start of the competition.
- DFW Minority Supplier will be in-house the following week with approximately 1,000 attendees. The group will have two ribbon cuttings, and the CVB will provide badge holders, lanyards and ribbon-cutting support.
- Line Hall Summit is scheduled for the following week with approximately 900 attendees, and the CVB will provide registration assistance on the group's busiest day.
- Foster reported hotel-side servicing activity for Concentric at the Westin DFW, Federation of Airline Dispatch, Academy of Ozone Therapy at the Omni and Global Meetings Industry Day.
- Foster said the FIFA training invitation will go out to the Meet the Bureau invite list, and she will attend MPI board training at the Medal of Honor site construction location.

Finance and Administration

- Rose reminded staff to bookmark and use the CVB staff portal, the Team Irving portal and the board portal. She noted that staff can find HR resources, helpful links, department overviews, reading room articles, board agendas, packets and related presentations there.
- Gast clarified that the AI section in the reading room is primarily framed around community development impact, including data center-related articles, rather than day-to-day AI tips and tools.
- April expense reports are due according to the date Lauda distributed.
- Boyer reminded staff that it is a payroll week and asked everyone to submit and approve time early if possible. Approvals should be completed by noon Thursday so payroll can be processed before she leaves to help set up the fish fry.

Finance

- Lauda reported that the team is knee-deep in budget. The first draft was approximately \$2.5 million over budget, and departments have begun making cuts.

- Finance is also reviewing revenue and a new hotel tax calculation that will begin in October. Monica Soto is helping convert the current number into the new calculation.
- Lauda said the team should have a closer view of the actual budget by the next meeting.

Marketing and Communications

- Sirmen said half of the team was attending Simpleview Summit and that National Travel and Tourism Week press releases would be distributed to markets to highlight recent economic impact numbers.
- For Rare Steak Festival, the Instagram giveaway with Tim Vs Food had 1,651 comments and 400 shares as of the meeting.
- Sirmen said a FIFA watch party at Water Street is under consideration, contingent on costs for security and restroom trailers.
- A FIFA-related scavenger-hunt app is also being discussed. Sirmen plans to send information to Irving restaurant partners about the opportunity to participate.
- ICVB Graphic Designer, Genesis Avila said she has been testing the design request form for the past two weeks, gathering feedback and preparing to roll it out in the coming weeks.
- ICVB Marketing and Communications Coordinator, Anabel Espinoza said she is working on the National Travel and Tourism Week gift boxes. The hardest part is picking up items around Irving. She will take the offer and ask for help if assistance is needed with assembly.

ICC Building/Project Updates

- Perez reported that several mechanical repairs are underway in the building, including work related to boilers, escalators and elevator pads. Tom Gilbert will share more detail during the May 14 Lunch and Learn.
- Perez said the building is aging and the engineering team is helping manage expenses by sourcing parts and completing repairs internally when possible, rather than relying solely on outside vendors.
- Gast noted that this approach can create major savings when large parts alone cost tens of thousands of dollars before labor.
- Perez recognized Tom Gilbert and the engineering team for their work and encouraged staff to thank them when they see them around the building.

Meeting ended at 10:00 a.m.