

Board of Directors Meeting

Date: August 27, 2024

Limelight Aspen

Present: Cristal Logan, Cari Kuhlman, Donnie Lee, Dan Bartholomew, Debbie Braun, Patti Clapper, Matt Cook, Nina Eisenstat, Michael Goldberg, Heather Kemp, Lisa LeMay, Henning Rahm, Dwayne Romero, Julia Theisen, Justin Todd, Bill Tomcich, Torre, Brenda Wild, and Pete Yang.

Absent: Jeff Bay, John Rigney, Alan Fletcher, Justin Nyberg, Dave Ressler, Steve Skadron, Heather Steenge-Hart, and Maria Ticsay.

Staff: Jennifer Albright Carney, Alycin Bektesh, John Clay Davies, Jessica Hite, Julie Hardman, and Eliza Voss.

Guests: Rob Ittner, Kelly McNicolas Kury, Kris Mattera, Michael Miracle, Kenny Smith, James Spencer, Josie Taris, and K2.

Call to order: Cristal Logan called the meeting to order at 8:41 AM

Approval of the July 30th Minutes: Approved

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest: None

Community Coalition for a 21st Century Airport: George Newman and Ann Mullins presented an overview of the current state and future plans for Aspen/Pitkin County Airport. George began by explaining the background of the Airport Layout Plan (ALP), which the FAA requires to be updated every 5-6 years. The most recent update in 2016 triggered an environmental analysis that found no significant impacts. However, community concerns arose over an 80-foot runway shift included in the plan. In response, the Board of County Commissioners initiated an unprecedented community process, involving 121 volunteers over 16 months. This process culminated in the "Common Ground Recommendations," which the Board approved in 2020. Ann then discussed the formation of the Community Coalition for a 21st Century Airport, a group of local leaders and residents committed to supporting the ALP. The coalition's mission centered on promoting four key goals from the Common Ground Recommendations: enhancing safety, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, managing growth, and reducing noise at the airport. They believed these improvements were crucial for the community's well-being. George highlighted the significant opportunities presented by federal funding available until 2026 through the Infrastructure Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. He warned that without an approved ALP, the airport risked losing FAA funding, which could have severe consequences for its operations and the local economy. Ann reinforced this point, explaining that failure to modernize the airport could lead to increased unpredictability and potential "sterilization," severely limiting its capacity and affecting the broader community. The speakers also addressed the challenges of managing airport growth while balancing environmental concerns. They pointed out that new aircraft, such as the Airbus A220-100, could significantly reduce noise and emissions. However, they stressed that without the necessary infrastructure updates, including runway and terminal improvements, the airport would struggle to accommodate these advancements. In their call to action, George and Ann urged the Aspen Chamber Resort Association to support and endorse the ballot initiative for airport modernization. They emphasized the importance of a well-informed electorate and robust community backing to secure federal funding and ensure the airport's future viability. The presentation concluded with a Q&A session, where the speakers addressed concerns about the impact of new aircraft, the timeline for improvements, and the necessity of maintaining FAA funding to achieve the airport's modernization goals.

Aspen Fly Right: Amory Lovins presented his perspective on the future of the Aspen/Pitkin County Airport, emphasizing the need for a cautious and well-considered approach. He expressed concerns about the potential consequences of allowing larger planes at the airport, arguing that it could lead to an influx of older, dirtier, and noisier aircraft. Lovins questioned whether the FAA's forecasted passenger numbers for 2050 were compatible with the community's values and quality of life. He highlighted the importance of timing in decision-making, suggesting that aviation is in such a state of flux that making significant airfield changes in this decade could be premature and potentially harmful. Lovins explained that his organization, Aspen Fly Right, is a community-funded, science-driven group that supports the airport but opposes overdevelopment and unnecessary expansion. Lovins also addressed safety concerns, noting that private planes are responsible for most accidents at the airport, and that the current airfield layout, which has been in place for 25 years, has not presented safety issues that would necessitate a redesign. He emphasized the need for transparency in the airport's operations and criticized the handling of the FBO (Fixed Base Operator) contract, suggesting that it could lead to a significant transfer of wealth from the community to private equity shareholders. Lovins proposed that the community could achieve its environmental goals by focusing on fossil-free flight and waiting for emerging technologies in aviation, rather than rushing to expand the airfield. He argued that the financial analysis conducted by Aspen Fly Right showed that the airport does not need FAA grants to fund improvements, as the revenues from the FBO contract could cover the costs. He concluded

by advocating for a more patient approach, allowing the airport to modernize in a way that aligns with the community's values and environmental goals, without rushing into unnecessary expansions driven by federal grant deadlines. Lovins urged the community to engage in an informed dialogue about the airport's future and to explore alternatives that do not involve expanding the airfield for larger planes.

Chair's Comments: Cristal Logan provided an update on the Aspen Chamber's plans following the recent presentations about the airport. She expressed her satisfaction with the presentations and mentioned that a press release would be issued to summarize the discussions. Logan noted that the Chamber had been holding sector-specific Zoom meetings with business leaders to present resources available on their website and to allow for questions. These meetings featured resource guests like Bill and Dan, who were very helpful, and had good participation from members. She encouraged board members to continue outreach to their sectors and to inform them that if they have any questions or feedback, they should contact the Chamber. Logan also mentioned that the Chamber had included presentation links and information about past and future outreach in the September 2 newsletter, along with a survey regarding the airport issue. She highlighted that the Chamber would discuss in the September meeting whether to take a stance in support of the airport issue or continue with education and outreach. Logan also emphasized the importance of employers ensuring that their employees are registered to vote so they can participate in the upcoming process. She briefly touched on the Chamber's support for the affordable and workforce housing mill levy, which is being referred to the ballot in response to the significant feedback from businesses about the importance of affordable housing. Finally, she reminded everyone about the upcoming "Afternoon Blend" event on September 19 and encouraged attendance.

President's Comments: Debbie Braun expressed her excitement about the board meeting and emphasized the importance of staying engaged and curious about the airport discussions. She encouraged board members to reach out to their constituents to ensure they represent diverse opinions and not just their own. Debbie and Alycin offered their assistance in setting up meetings or connecting board members with the right people. Debbie also announced that Alycin would be leaving the organization for a job with Pitkin County's communications department. She praised Alycin for her outstanding work, enthusiasm, and contributions, and mentioned that Alycin would stay on through the next board meeting to help complete the airport discussion. Debbie mentioned plans to do Grassroots TV shows focused on voter turnout, the airport issue, and housing, and possibly hosting an election forum in the fall to broaden the conversation. She shared that she is currently working remotely from Alaska and is available to be contacted if needed.

Nominating Committee Update: Cristal Logan provided an update from the Nominating Committee. She noted that due to Jeff Bay's departure from his position at HayMax, Donnie Lee has been appointed to fill the lodging seat vacated by Jeff, with Donnie's term running until December 31. Jeff Bay has also been appointed as an ex officio member until the same date. There is currently a vacant seat held by the Aspen School District, and Cristal hopes that Tharyn Mulberry will accept the invitation to join the board, replacing David Baugh. Next month, the committee will reach out to board members up for re-election to gauge their interest in running again. The report in the packet shows that six members are up for re-election, and Debbie will be making calls to these members. The board elections will begin on October 1.

Directors Comments:

Donnie Lee began by thanking Alycin for her service and expressing that she will be missed. He mentioned that the summer season has been good, with continued strong last-minute demand that is expected to carry into the fall. While it's still early to predict the winter season, he noted that projections suggest another strong winter, assuming there is adequate snowfall. Donnie also thanked the organizers for arranging the presentations, noting that they were very informative and provided a lot of information to digest.

Torre emphasized the importance of maintaining respect and civility in discussions, especially when dealing with differing opinions on infrastructure issues faced by both the county and the city. He acknowledged that Aspen has many highly charged, type-A personalities and encouraged everyone to work together rather than against each other. Torre also mentioned that with Labor Day weekend approaching, it feels like summer is winding down, even though it already seems like fall. He reminded everyone that he is available for comments on various topics, including the entrance to Aspen, and invited people to contact him at Torre@aspen.gov. He also sent a greeting to Debbie, wishing her well in Alaska.

Dwayne Romero expressed that Alycin will be missed but congratulated her on her new position with the county, noting it's great that she'll still be nearby. He mentioned that he has joined the citizen committee for the county-led mill levy affordable housing initiative and is optimistic that it will gain momentum. Dwayne also noted that he has reached out to Tharyn Mulberry about the ex officio position on the board for the Aspen School District superintendent.

Patti Clapper thanked everyone for listening to both sides of the airport issue, mentioning that she attended one presentation at the Jewish Center on Main Street and appreciated having both perspectives. She encouraged anyone interested in understanding the Home Rule Charter, which was approved by Pitkin County voters in 1978, to reach out to her. Patti clarified that the commissioners are not seeking additional power but are simply asking to reconfirm what the Home Rule Charter already provides. She mentioned the upcoming ballot questions, noting that discussions will continue at the next meeting, which will start at noon with a light agenda before moving on to the mill levy and bonding questions. The latter involves using enterprise funds from the landfill for its expansion, which will also be on the November ballot. Patti highlighted that the two airport questions are still under discussion and could be finalized or adjusted in the meeting. She invited anyone interested to join the conversation, either via Zoom, phone, or in person, noting the newly installed doors in the meeting room to accommodate overflow. Finally, Patti addressed Alycin, expressing excitement, as both will be working closely together at the county.

Dan Bartholomew expressed his enthusiasm about Alycin joining the county and mentioned that he looks forward to working with her. Regarding the airport, he provided an update on the recent pavement evaluation, noting that a spring closure of at least four weeks will be necessary. The exact dates are still being determined as they need to coordinate with airlines and engineers. Unfortunately, this closure will likely extend over Memorial Day due to weather and temperature constraints that aren't conducive to pavement construction earlier in the season. Dan explained that the FAA has pulled entitlement grants for pavement repairs because the current repairs aren't lasting the required minimum of 10 years. The repairs being made are only lasting around 24 months, which the FAA does not consider a good use of federal funds. As a result, further closures are expected until the runway can be fully replaced and shifted, which will resolve the issue in the long term.

Pete Yang expressed appreciation for the educational sessions about the airport, noting that topics like the airport and Castle Creek Bridge are common discussions around the office. He emphasized the importance of being informed. On the banking side, he mentioned that they are expecting a rate reduction next month.

Nina Eisenstat echoed Pete Yang's sentiments, emphasizing the value of hearing both sides of the airport issue, as it enhances credibility and helps address the many questions in the community. She noted that whether it's clients, dinner conversations, or visitors, having direct information is very beneficial. Nina shared that during a recent listening session with Cristal, Matt, Dwayne, and herself, nonprofit and service members participated, asking thoughtful questions and sharing concerns. One poignant comment came from a solo business owner worried about the potential impact of an airport closure on their ability to stay in business. Nina highlighted the importance of keeping members informed about these issues. She also mentioned that Breeze Richardson from Aspen Public Radio might be organizing a forum on the airport issues, which is something to keep in mind. Finally, Nina congratulated Alycin on her new role with the county, expressing happiness for her but noting that Alycin will be hard to replace on the board. She acknowledged that while Alycin's departure is a loss for the board, it is a significant gain for the county.

Henning Rahm echoed Donnie's comments about the summer season, noting that while it was very successful, it may not have reached the occupancy levels seen during the period between COVID measures. He mentioned that his team is counting down the remaining weddings as they look forward to the fall. Winter predictions are challenging, with reports varying widely—some suggesting significant challenges due to high travel costs to the U.S., while others indicate positive pacing ahead. Henning also noted that it's budget season, and discussions are ongoing. He mentioned that he and Donnie plan to meet with other GMs to ensure there is strong communication around local topics and to keep the conversation going.

Bill Tomcich began by expressing his sadness at Alycin leaving the chamber but looked forward to continuing to work with her at the county. He then addressed a question from Torre about carbon emissions, mentioning that Google Flights now shows the carbon emissions per passenger for various flight options, indicating how they compare to the average. For example, flights on Air Canada's A220 from Denver to Toronto or Montreal show about 22% lower emissions per passenger compared to the average. Bill noted that flights out of Aspen generally have emissions that are 32% to 41% higher than average due to the inefficiency of regional jets. He mentioned that the only aircraft currently flying in the U.S. that achieves a 30% or more emissions reduction per passenger is the Airbus A321neo, especially in Frontier's high-density 240-passenger configuration, which can achieve a reduction of about 32%.

Finally, Bill shared that July was a record month for Aspen Airport in terms of passenger enplanements, up 15% over the previous year, largely due to Delta's new flights from Atlanta and Los Angeles. He also mentioned that the fall schedule will be robust, with Delta and United continuing year-round service from multiple hubs. He highlighted the upcoming inaugural flight of the Embraer 175 into Aspen on December 3, which he plans to be on.

Lisa LeMay thanked Alycin for significantly improving communication between ACRA and its members, expressing deep appreciation for her hard work and congratulating her on her new job, though noting that she will be sorely missed. From a retail perspective, Lisa described the situation as a mixed bag but emphasized the busy period ahead in September, particularly on weekends, due to weddings, leaf peepers, and events. She expects downtown Aspen to remain active until the second week of October. Lisa also advised everyone to carry information about relevant websites to share with others during heated conversations, as it's better to direct people to accurate sources than to provide potentially incorrect information. She highlighted the importance of guiding people to the right resources for informed discussions.

Julia Theisen mentioned that Snowmass is preparing for a busy Labor Day weekend. She noted that Saturday is already sold out, but tickets are still available for Friday and Sunday. She expressed her hope to see everyone there.

Matt Cook praised the listening sessions from the previous week, describing them as fantastic and well-organized. He expressed his appreciation for the effort put into them and mentioned that he would love to see such sessions continue in the future.

Cari Kuhlman echoed earlier comments, expressing that the sector check-ins were really good and suggesting that more participation would be beneficial in the future. She recommended planning the check-ins in a way that allows different businesses to choose a convenient time, possibly through a poll, to increase participation. Cari noted that her call had limited attendance and emphasized the importance of getting more people involved in these sessions.

Brenda Wild thanked Alycin for her work and mentioned how much she has learned from recent conversations. She emphasized the importance of continuing these valuable discussions. Brenda also provided an update on a special legislative session currently underway, where there is discussion about potentially reclassifying residential properties as commercial for tax purposes. She noted that this could have detrimental effects and mentioned that efforts are being made at the state level to oppose it. Brenda briefly touched on real estate stats, mentioning that the average closing price in Aspen is \$14.5 million, with 38 closed sales and an average of 200 days on the market this year.

Adjournment: Cristal Logan adjourned the meeting at 10:30 AM