



ACRA DEFY ORDINARY

ASPEN CHAMBER RESORT ASSOCIATION

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT | MEMBER SERVICES | SPECIAL EVENTS | VISITOR SERVICES

Board of Directors Meeting

Date: January 31, 2023

Aspen Meadows Resort

Present: Cristal Logan, Debbie Braun, Charlies Bantis, Jeff Bay, Matt Cook, John Rigney, Dave Ressler, Donnie Lee, Rose Abello, Henning Rahm, Patti Clapper, Nina Eisenstat, Andrew Ernemann, Heather Kemp, Michael Goldberg, Lisa LeMay, Justin Nyberg, Steve Skadron, Kathleen Wanatowicz, Justin Todd, Bill Tomcich, and Torre.

Absent: Alan Fletcher, David Baugh, Cari Kuhlman, Dan Bartholomew, Maria Morrow, and Heather Steenge-Hart

Staff: Eliza Voss, Alycin Bektesh, Sarah Reynolds Lasser, Nichole Henning, Jessica Hite, and Liz Watson

Guests: Ryder Fairbank, Cindy Welch, Maureen Poschmann, and Emmy Garrigus

Call to order:

Cristal Logan called the meeting to order

Approval of the October 25th Minutes:

Approved

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest:

None

Nominating Committee Update – Donnie Lee:

Donnie mentions a number of directors who have been reelected to their positions, including Jeff Bay in lodging, Maria Morrow in the professional seat, Heather Kemp in retail, Nina Eisenstat in service, and Michael Goldberg in the restaurant seat. Sam Barney has vacated his service seat, and Matt Cook has been appointed to fill that position. He lists the officers and directors for the year, including the recommended Vice Chair Jeff Bay, Treasurer Charlie Bantis, Assistant Treasurer Cari Kuhlman, and Secretary John Rigney. Additionally, there are several at-large seats, which have been filled by Justin Nyberg, Justin Todd, Charlie Bantis, John Rigney, Henning Rahm, Alan Fletcher, David Ressler, Mayor Torre, Patty Clapper, and myself as Chair Emeritus. Finally, there are several ex officio, non-voting members, including Snowmass Tourism's Rose Abello, Dan Bartholomew from the Aspen Airport, David Baugh from the Aspen School District, Debbie with the Aspen Chamber, Steve Skadron from Colorado Mountain College, and Bill Tomcich with Fly Aspen Snowmass. A motion was made to approve the appointments with no opposition.

Presentation: Transient Inventory Study – Ryder Fairbank and Cindy Welch of Inntopia

See [attached](#)

ACRA Annual Report – Alycin Bektesh:

See [attached](#)



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Chair Update – Cristal Logan:

Thank you to Justin Todd for hosting the meeting at the Aspen Meadows resort, where we're showing off the new Boettcher Building. During the director's comments, attendees are asked to say a few words about their background. Cristal highlights the pillars of the strategic plan and encourages everyone to use it as a resource when talking to people in the community. She also emphasizes the importance of thanking teachers, frontline workers, and service industry workers for their hard work. The Aspen Chamber team had a successful meeting with the arts and culture sector last week and discussed how the chamber can support these organizations and address challenges such as the high average daily rate of hotels, which makes it difficult for nonprofit businesses to find affordable accommodation. Despite this challenge, all winter programs at the institute and other arts and culture organizations seem to be well attended.

Sabbatical Update – Debbie Braun

Debbie has returned from her sabbatical in Alaska in November, where she was working to winterize and renovate her 65-year-old homestead with her husband.

Public Affairs Update – Alycin Bektesh:

The minutes from the most recent meeting were included in the November packet. For the upcoming election, there will be an interview with all candidates by Debbie on Grassroots. A Business Candidate Forum is scheduled for February 22 and is being organized in partnership with Aspen Rotary and ABOR's Young Professional Network. The forum will take place on Wednesday, February 22 5:30pm at Mountain Chalet Aspen.

Directors' Remarks:

Donnie Lee, the General Manager of The Gant, expects a strong summer season in the hotel industry despite a slightly slower pace compared to previous years. He attributes the slower pace to a delay in lead times and some uncertainty in the market. Winter is still expected to be full. He mentions the challenges faced by the hospitality industry during the pandemic, including crisis management and the emotional toll on frontline workers. He emphasizes the importance of taking a moment to be kind to each other and remember why they are in this industry.

Jeff Bay, the Managing Director for Haymax Hotels, is looking forward to the opening of two new hotels, the Molly Gibson and soon to be announced property in the former location of Hotel Aspen that Haymax Hotels will manage. He is concerned about staffing the new hotels due to recent staffing shortages in the area, which he has witnessed personally. Despite this, he is optimistic about the hotel projects and believes that Haymax's properties in another resort area are performing well due to an increase in demand for winter sports products. He mentions that Haymax has kept a core team employed and will bring them back for, but they will still need to hire around 50 more staff, both hourly and salaried. He mentions that there are complex conversations around transportation and commuting issues, and that properties like the Hofmann which is being developed in El Jebel may attract employees who do not want to do the additional 30 to 45-minute commute to Aspen and may be willing to sacrifice for better wages. He believes that the industry will have to be creative to remain attractive and find ways to efficiently get employees to their location. This is part of the larger conversation with the entrance test.

Steve Skadron, Vice President and Dean of Colorado Mountain Colleges Aspen and Carbondale campuses, is excited about the reinvestment happening at the Aspen campus and plans to share more details about it. He previously served as the city of Aspen's mayor and sat on the ACRA board from 2013 to 2019 and is honored to be back at the table, representing CMC.



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Justin Todd, General Manager at the Aspen Meadows. He has extensive experience in the hospitality industry, having worked in and around Aspen since the late 90's. He mentions that they have recently renovated some buildings on the campus, including the Bayer center, and are in the process of renovating the guestrooms at The Meadows, which will be completed by the end of April. They have plans to renovate the Walter Isaacson building starting in the fall of this year, and other buildings on the campus in the future.

Henning Rahm, General Manager of The Little Nell, mentions the strong winter they are having and the high staffing levels they are currently in. He expresses concern about future staffing shortages and credits the human resource department for putting in effort to fill positions. He also mentions the wage war in the industry and the challenges of retaining employees. He mentions that summer is slightly behind but looking promising and events like Gay Ski Week were a success and group business is carrying the weight.

Patti Clapper, a board of county commissioner, is starting her 21st year in office, having been reelected to her sixth term. She plans to retire in four years. A new nonprofit called "Aspen Fly Right" is distributing information regarding the airport. The county and advisory board are working to provide them with correct information. Patti and another Commissioner, Kelly McNichols Curry, are closely working with organizations across the state to come up with legislation to amend Tabor and the state constitution, to remove the prohibition on real estate transfer taxes. This would allow municipalities and counties to put before their voters a real estate transfer tax for various needs such as mental health, childcare, housing, public health, or public safety. Patti will keep everyone updated on this progress.

John Rigney, with Aspen Skiing Company, is excited about current conditions and occupancy is looking strong through March. ASC has recently opened a new multi-service building at Buttermilk, which combines ticketing, ski school, rentals, and retail all under one roof. They are also hosting several events like the World Cup Men's World Cup downhill and the NASTAR nationals in April. He mentions the normal complement of programming and events including the freeskiing event and the spring jam. He appreciates the collaboration across all aspects of the business sector.

Lisa LeMay, who holds one of the retail seats and runs several T-shirt shops in Aspen and Snowmass, reports that retail has been booming. The start of December was weak, but most retailers rebounded and the Christmas to New Year's period was significantly stronger compared to the previous year. January has been even stronger, with a return of international visitors from countries such as Brazil, Australia, Eastern Europe, and Italy, which has given a boost to the retail industry in the area. Overall, the year has been good for retail.

Torre, mayor of Aspen, gives an update on the City of Aspen. He mentions the upcoming election on March 7th and reflects on the work done by the city council over the past few years. He hopes that the city can adjust to the changes made, such as the land use code changes and the STR regulations. The mayor also mentions the positive energy in the city and the sales tax revenue looking good. He discusses the entrance to Aspen and the possibility of changes to HOV lane usage, and says the process will take input from the community and result in something the majority of the community can support. The project is in the planning stage. The mayor concludes by saying he feels great and wouldn't want to be anywhere else.



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Matt Cook, owner of High Mountain Taxi and recently acquired Valley Taxi. He has been in the logistics industry for almost 15 years, including with a private equity firm, as the largest shortline railroad holding company in the country. He acquired High Mountain Taxi in November of 2019 and has been working on upgrading the company to bring it into the 21st century by using technology and upgrading vehicles. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted his business, but he is seeing an increase in people looking for jobs and is looking forward to improving efficiency. He is excited to be a part of the chamber and this board for the next two years.

Rose Abello, the tourism director in Snowmass Village, is happy to continue serving on the board. She highlights the ongoing activities in Snowmass, including the Luminescence light show, the opening of a new restaurant at the Collective, and a packed events calendar. They have just hired a new group sales director and are finalizing their summer events calendar. Despite a decrease in occupancy numbers, Snowmass Village is doing well with busy restaurants and increased tax receipts. However, the decrease in occupancy has been misleading because of changes to the denominator due to closures of some properties. They are hoping for normalized occupancy numbers starting in February.

Nina Eisenstat, owner of Aspen Marketing and Communications, welcomes the new members to the board and is excited to collaborate with the talented local leaders. She congratulates staff for the Wintersköl event, which felt like things were back to normal, and John Rigney on the X-Games. She acknowledges the challenges faced by the service industry, particularly with recruitment and retention, due to competition for salary and benefits, and the lack of affordable housing. She suggests the board work together to come up with solutions to these challenges.

Michael Goldberg, of Belly Up and Matsuhisa, reports that restaurant sales and prices are up, but costs are also up, particularly with labor. The lack of advertising of Aspen as a destination during the off-season has resulted in some restaurants closing, and many restaurant owners feel that this is not serving them well. He expects to hear more from restaurants that would like to see a change.

Dave Ressler, CEO of Aspen Valley Hospital, welcomes the new board members and speaks about the impact of the end of the public health emergency for COVID on individuals' Medicaid eligibility. He also mentions the importance of maintaining low cost options for health insurance and notes the open enrollment period on the individual exchange from now until February 15th. He also congratulates the X Games and mentions the successful collaboration and communication with the new owners, MSP Sports Capital, for a safe and successful event.

Bill Tomcich, with Fly Aspen Snowmass mentions that the hybrid zoom meeting is working well. He brings up the issue of a difficult travel day for people trying to fly in and out of Aspen airport which was compounded with the closure of Glenwood Canyon. He then relays news from the airport director about an upcoming airport closure due to construction on the taxiway and de-icing ramp. The closure will be two weeks long instead of two months of phased construction during the peak of the summer to cause less disruption. The dates have not been picked yet but will likely be two weeks prior to Memorial Day weekend. Bill mentions the operation at the airport has improved compared to the previous year and he is working with the airport Advisory Board and safety committee to continue this improvement.



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Andrew Ernemann, from Aspen Snowmass Sotheby's International Realty, discusses the current state of the real estate market and how the market has recently taken a downward turn, leading to a 50% drop in the number of transactions from 2021 to 2022. Despite this drop, the average price for Aspen and Snowmass real estate has increased by 30 to 35%. The inventory levels for free market residential properties in Aspen have also doubled from a year ago. Short-term rentals have remained relatively stable compared to the sales drop. The average single family home price in Aspen is currently \$18 million, but this number is skewed by high-end sales in the market. The median price is closer to \$11 million.

Kathleen Wanatowicz, of Project Resource Studio, a project communications firm, plans to reach out to service community before the next board meeting. She is disappointed that Sam is no longer on the board as she believes the construction perspective is important. Kathleen reiterates Patti and Torre's comments about competing for federal infrastructure dollars in the area. She points out that the demographic of the area does not fit the bill for dedicated federal fund dollars and state dollars for infrastructure investment, so the community needs to be aligned with one voice and desire to secure these funds. This will require community alignment and political will to achieve these important infrastructure investments for the airport, roads, bridges, and other projects.

Justin Nyberg, with Holland and Hart, is a new member of the ACRA board. He was initially hesitant to join a chamber organization, but was impressed by the vision of the organization and particularly its Destination Management Plan. Justin has a background in journalism and is an outdoor sports enthusiast. He and his wife live in Aspen and he hopes to bring a balanced perspective to the board, incorporating his experience with city and county codes and his personal experience living in the community.

Heather Kemp, owner of Sashae Floral, has been on the ACRA board off and on over the years. She is serving this term as there were no other candidates but is thankful to be on the board. She notes that luxury retailers had a good December, but the local economy is hurting and they have priced themselves out for many people. She mentions that sales tax consumption reports show a 50% increase in the end of November 2022 compared to November 2019 due to the change in sales tax structure for online retailers. However, the accommodation sector was hard hit in November which affects local businesses. She would like to see more people in town in November as it would help local businesses and bring in money for services such as affordable daycare for locals.

Adjournment:

Cristal Logan adjourned the meeting.