



# ACRA DEFY ORDINARY

ASPEN CHAMBER RESORT ASSOCIATION

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## **Board of Directors Meeting**

**Date: January 27, 2026**

**Aspen Meadows Resort**

**Present:** Donnie Lee, Dwayne Romero, Cari Kuhlman, Cristal Logan, Jeff Bay, Debbie Braun, Patti Clapper, Matt Cook, Nina Eisenstat, Alan Fletcher, Michael Goldberg, Lauren Heath, Diane Jackson, Noemi Kiss-Baldwin, Tharyn Mulberry, Rachel Richards, Mindi Safchik, Steve Skadron, Jennifer Slaughter, Julia Theisen, Maria Ticsay, Justin Todd, Bill Tomcich, Peter Waanders, and Pete Yang.

**Absent:** John Rigney, Heather Shapard, and Brenda Wild.

**Staff:** Jennifer Albright Carney, John Davies, Savannah Grant, Julie Hardman, Nichole Hellinger, Jessica Hite, Karina Keller, and Eliza Voss.

**Call to order:** Donnie Lee called the meeting to order at 8:37 AM

**Approval of the November 25th Minutes:** Approved

**Disclosure of Conflict of Interest:** None

**Nominating Committee Update:** Donnie Lee provided a Nominating Committee update and reviewed the slating of officers and at-large board seats for 2026. He noted that several board members are elected by their respective constituencies and appointments were being announced for the record only, with no board approval required. These included Justin Todd (Lodging – White Elephant Aspen), Cari Kuhlman (Finance – Vectra Bank), Brenda Wild (Real Estate – Berkshire Hathaway), Dwayne Romero (Service – Romero Group), Lauren Heath (Service, Seat Two – Rocky Mountain Connections), and Mindy Safchik (Retail – Kiton Aspen). Additional board members recognized included John Rigney and Noemi Kiss-Baldwin (Aspen Skiing Company), Tharyn Mulberry (Aspen School District), Alan Fletcher (Aspen Music Festival & School), Jennifer Slaughter (Aspen Valley Health), Patti Clapper (Pitkin County), and Aspen Mayor Rachel Richards. Donnie Lee also acknowledged the ex officio board members, thanking them for their continued service, including Diane Jackson (Aspen Airport), Julia Theisen (Snowmass Tourism), Bill Tomcich (Fly Aspen Snowmass), and Steve Skadron (Colorado Mountain College). He then reviewed the positions requiring board approval, including three at-large board appointments made by the chair: Jeff Bay (Fernwood Management), Matt Cook (High Mountain Taxi), and Pete Yang (Alpine Bank). Donnie Lee presented the 2026 Executive Committee, consisting of Donnie Lee as Chair, Dwayne Romero as Vice Chair, Cari Kuhlman as Treasurer, John Rigney as Secretary, and Cristal Logan as Chair Emeritus. Committee chair appointments were also presented, with Justin Todd as Marketing Committee Chair, Cari Kuhlman as Finance Committee Chair, Donnie Lee as Executive Committee Chair, Maria Ticsay as Public Affairs Committee Chair, and Cristal Logan as Nominating Committee Chair. A motion was made and seconded to approve the at-large board appointments, executive committee slate, and committee chair appointments. The motion passed unanimously, with no opposition.

**Aspen Forward 2026 – 2030 Vision & Mission Update:** Debbie Braun presented the final update on the Aspen Forward 2026–2030 Vision and Mission as part of the organization’s new strategic plan. She reviewed the planning process, which began in July and included a staff retreat and SWOT analysis in October, a board working session in November, and a vision and mission “dot exercise” designed to surface board values and priorities rather than finalize language. Debbie emphasized that the goal of this phase was alignment and preference testing, with the finalized strategic plan to be presented for adoption in March. Debbie summarized the key findings from the dot exercise, noting that board feedback strongly favored vision language centered on a thriving Aspen community, human connection, and community-centered values, while more visitor-forward or marketing-oriented language resonated less. Similar themes emerged in the mission discussion, with emphasis on connection, trusted information, destination management, partnerships, and economic vitality as outcomes of doing the right work rather than leading concepts. She explained that the recommended updates to the vision and mission represent a refinement—not a departure—from the organization’s current North Stars, reflecting the need for stewardship, communication, partnership, and community support over the next five years. Two vision options were presented for discussion, both keeping “Aspen thriving” at the forefront, with one emphasizing people feeling connected, welcomed, and supported, and the other focusing on community stewardship and shared purpose. Board members discussed the aspirational nature of a vision statement, the balance between clarity and flexibility, and the importance of broad language that can be defined further through mission, goals, and objectives. A straw poll showed a narrow preference for the first option, with discussion indicating interest in potentially blending elements of both. Debbie then reviewed the current mission statement and introduced two updated mission options—one emphasizing connection through trusted information, destination management, and partnerships, and the other focusing on supporting Aspen through clear communication, meaningful partnerships, and destination management. Board discussion highlighted the importance of aligning the mission with how the organization achieves its vision, supporting economic vitality, balancing community and visitor needs, and potentially merging elements of both options. Feedback from both in-room and virtual participants showed a slight preference for the second option, with consensus that a combined approach may best reflect the Chamber’s responsibilities. Debbie concluded by outlining next steps, including refining the vision and mission language based on board feedback, circulating updated drafts for individual input, and using February to integrate all strategic



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documents and draft initial goals. She noted that the new strategic plan will function as a living work plan, with goals reviewed every six months via a dashboard rather than a static multi-year document. The board will receive the final annual report for the current five-year plan and the proposed Aspen Forward 2026–2030 plan in March for adoption.

**Chair’s Comments:** Donnie Lee noted improved conditions with recent snowfall, while acknowledging that overall snow conditions across the western United States remain less than ideal. He reported that lodging is currently pacing down and experiencing softer demand, though the Aspen Skiing Company has done an effective job managing available terrain. Donnie observed that many visitors continue to enjoy groomed runs and are spending time shopping, dining, and engaging with the community, resulting in generally positive visitor experiences despite lower overall volume. He noted that the reduced number of visitors is being felt across the community but expressed optimism that continued snowfall could improve the remainder of the season and positively influence summer conditions as well. Donnie concluded by wishing everyone a Happy New Year and noting that the organization is off and running.

**President’s Comments:** Debbie Braun began by first congratulating Aspen Skiing Company on a successful X Games, noting the strong visibility and positive reception of the event and concert series. She also announced and congratulated Eliza on her promotion to Senior Vice President of Destination Management, highlighting Eliza’s leadership in developing and implementing the destination management plan. Debbie explained that destination management now integrates visitor services, special events, marketing, and group sales into a more cohesive, visitor-facing structure. Debbie shared that ACRA is launching sector meetings in 2026 with board members and their respective constituencies, beginning with discussions focused on transportation and the upcoming airport closure. She emphasized that public-facing discussions about the airport closure should occur after the summer season to avoid confusion, while noting that significant behind-the-scenes work is already underway to identify transportation solutions, including rental cars and bus services, to ensure seamless access to Aspen. She also discussed the work of the Community Coalition for 21st Century Transportation, which is expanding its focus to valley-wide transportation solutions. ACRA plans to share a condensed presentation of the coalition’s findings during sector meetings and gather member feedback to help shape future decisions. Debbie thanked board members and staff for coordinating the sector meetings, and noted that agendas and resource support will be provided to facilitate productive discussions. She stressed the importance of early and clear communication to prevent misinformation and ensure member needs are understood. Debbie concluded with an update on ACRA’s potential office space acquisition, noting challenges with the Obermeyer building and the identification of an alternative, lower-cost option. She shared that the Facilities Task Force would be convened to evaluate next steps, emphasizing a fiscally responsible approach given economic uncertainty related to the airport closure. She closed by congratulating new board members and welcoming their participation.

**Directors’ Comments:**

**Cristal Logan** introduced herself as Vice President at the Aspen Institute, overseeing year-round community programs, and welcomed new board members, expressing enthusiasm for working together. She shared that the Aspen Institute has had a busy winter season, highlighting the continued success of the Advancing Women’s Health Series, which recently drew more than 420 attendees. Cristal also noted strong participation in winter programming and positive feedback from visitors, including many first-time guests, who have been impressed by the Aspen experience and skiing conditions. Cristal provided an update on airport-related planning, noting that the Aspen Institute is actively engaged in internal discussions to prepare for the 2027 closure. She explained that the organization is currently entering group booking windows for that summer and is taking care to ensure potential groups are fully informed about the airport closure before contracting, emphasizing the importance of transparency and proactive communication.

**Dwayne Romero** introduced himself as a longtime Roaring Fork Valley resident and representative of the Romero Group, noting his previous service on the ACRA board as an ex officio member during his time as a city councilman. He welcomed new board members and shared observations from the service sector, drawing on data from properties his company owns at the Snowmass Mall, which includes 26 restaurants, retailers, and rental shops. Dwayne reported that while businesses are experiencing reduced revenues due to low snow conditions, the impacts have been uneven and generally manageable, ranging from single-digit declines to some businesses performing on par with prior periods. He emphasized a positive overall trend, noting that businesses are adapting, remaining resilient, and continuing operations without widespread layoffs. He also highlighted efforts by landlords to support tenants by sharing in challenges and avoiding becoming a primary cost burden, which he described as an encouraging sign for the service economy. He concluded with personal remarks recognizing Carter Kuhlman, a high school senior and son of board member Cari Kuhlman, for receiving dual nominations to both the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the U.S. Naval Academy. Dwayne praised Carter’s accomplishments and commitment to service, briefly sharing his own background as a West Point graduate and noting his family’s continued military service.

**Steve Skadron** introduced himself as a representative of Colorado Mountain College. He shared several updates from CMC, beginning with the launch of a new Center for Civics, Education, and Engagement, funded through a federal Department of Education grant. The center focuses on ethical leadership, civic dialogue, and strengthening democracy through academic programs, faculty and staff development, and community partnerships, with the goal of reinvigorating constructive community conversations in mountain towns. Steve also highlighted



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the continued growth of CMC's community kitchen program, noting strong participation in cooking and wine classes, including a popular wine series led by Louisa Goldsmith. He described the program as a successful and engaging community offering. Finally, Steve provided an update on concurrent enrollment, emphasizing its growing importance at CMC, where approximately 42 percent of total enrollment now comes from high school students earning college credit. He noted significant progress at Aspen High School, with concurrent enrollment growing from zero students in prior years to 49 students currently, and a projected 300 students this coming fall. He credited collaboration with school leadership and CMC faculty in expanding the program and shared that the CMC Board has authorized grant funding of up to \$50,000 per school district to support concurrent enrollment, reinforcing CMC's commitment to partnership and access to higher education for local families.

**Pete Yang** introduced himself as Senior Vice President of Lending at Alpine Bank, noting his 19 years with the organization and more than 25 years living in the Roaring Fork Valley. He shared brief personal background information about his family and noted that this is his third year serving on the ACRA board. Pete highlighted Alpine Bank's deep roots in the Roaring Fork Valley, noting that the bank was founded locally by Bob Young, whose passing in December was a significant loss. He emphasized Alpine Bank's strong commitment to supporting the communities it serves, describing it as one of the largest philanthropic organizations in the state. Pete underscored the bank's ongoing dedication to supporting nonprofits and the broader community, in addition to the business sector, and expressed his continued commitment to supporting the local business community through his role on the board.

**Jeff Bay** introduced himself as a long-serving ACRA board member, noting more than a decade of involvement, including previous service representing the lodging sector and his current role as an at-large member. He shared that he now works in estate management and represents the second-homeowner community, providing a different and valuable perspective. Jeff emphasized the importance of ensuring this segment's needs and impacts are considered as the organization moves forward, and expressed pride in ACRA's work and leadership, which has motivated his continued service. Jeff reflected on the current winter season, noting limited skiing due to snow conditions but highlighting the opportunity it has created for him and his family to more fully engage with Aspen's cultural offerings. He shared positive experiences attending performances and dining in town, gaining a renewed appreciation for Aspen from a visitor's perspective rather than as a daily commuter from the Mid-Valley. He also raised awareness of broader valley impacts, particularly the effects of development and housing pressures in the Mid-Valley, referencing large proposed housing projects and the importance of understanding how up-valley decisions affect down-valley communities. Jeff further discussed feedback he has heard from the private aviation and second-homeowner community regarding congestion and operational challenges at the private airport, noting growing questions and uncertainty related to future airport changes. He encouraged consideration of how these issues could influence visitation patterns, seasonal residency, and philanthropic support, and thanked the board for their time and commitment.

**Matt Cook** introduced himself as owner of High Mountain Taxi and noted that this is his second term on the ACRA board, having previously served in a service-sector seat. He shared updates from the transportation sector, highlighting High Mountain Taxi's expansion across the Roaring Fork Valley, including the acquisition of Valley Taxi three years ago, which connected operations in Vail, Aspen, and Glenwood. He noted that a significant portion of the Glenwood operation focuses on Medicaid transportation and acknowledged ongoing challenges within that space. From a business performance perspective, Matt described his company as a strong indicator of visitor traffic, reporting that Aspen bookings in December were down less than one percent year over year, while other service areas tied more closely to ski activity experienced greater declines. He noted that January has trended down further, reflecting a reduced number of visitors consistent with what other sectors are experiencing. Matt also shared that High Mountain Taxi is in the midst of a major technology transformation, incorporating new systems and AI-driven tools. He noted that while he was previously skeptical of AI, the technology has proven to be highly capable and is expected to deliver meaningful operational improvements. He anticipates the rollout beginning in the coming weeks and expressed optimism that these advancements will benefit not only his organization but the broader community as services expand and evolve.

**Michael Goldberg** introduced himself as a longtime Aspen resident of 37 years and a principal in the local entertainment and hospitality sector, including Belly Up Aspen and the Matsuhisa and Yuki restaurants. He shared background on his family's involvement in the business and emphasized his deep ties to the community. Michael highlighted the challenges facing the hospitality and restaurant sectors, noting that current conditions—driven by low snow and uncertainty surrounding the 2027 airport closure—are creating significant strain, particularly for locally owned restaurants. He shared anecdotal evidence of sharply reduced reservations and expressed concern about the vulnerability of small, independent operators amid increased competition and economic pressure. Michael emphasized the critical importance of workforce transportation, noting that many hospitality employees commute from down-valley communities as far as Rifle, and that existing transportation challenges threaten workforce stability. He stressed that without reliable transportation solutions, core service businesses cannot operate effectively. He also underscored the need for clear communication, advance planning, and coordinated leadership—particularly from the Chamber—regarding alternative transportation and preparation for the airport closure, noting that many businesses are already making booking and operational decisions well in advance. He further reflected on post-COVID demographic shifts,



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observing that many new residents have become valuable, engaged members of the community, while also acknowledging the pressures this has placed on housing and costs. Michael encouraged continued dialogue with government and stakeholders to better understand business realities, including operational challenges such as parking enforcement and its unintended consequences for nightlife and service workers. He concluded by reaffirming his belief in Aspen as a uniquely special place to live and work, while urging thoughtful, collaborative approaches to sustaining the community and its economy.

**Patti Clapper** provided an update on airport planning and county operations, emphasizing the seriousness and urgency with which the airport closure and transportation impacts are being addressed. She noted that construction activity will begin in 2026, with equipment visible in airport obstacle-free zones as staging work ramps up ahead of the planned nine-month airport closure in 2027, anticipated to run from the end of ski season through November. She stated that significant preparatory work will occur in 2026 to support an efficient construction timeline and reiterated confidence in meeting established deadlines. Patti explained that extensive transportation planning is underway, including analysis of current air and ground travel patterns, coordination with regional airports such as Eagle and Grand Junction, engagement with Denver International Airport, and discussions with Congresswoman Diana DeGette to help mitigate impacts on DIA and the I-70 corridor. She shared that she will travel to Washington, D.C. in February to seek federal funding to support the project. Patti emphasized the importance of collaboration with the business community, noting concerns about ensuring lodging, restaurants, and retail remain viable during the closure, and committed to sharing more detailed information as plans become more concrete. She also briefly updated the board on county matters, including the ongoing search for a new county manager and the unexpected appointment process for a new county commissioner. Patti noted that her final year in office will be active, marking her 24th year of service, and reaffirmed her commitment to working closely with the business community to minimize disruption and support economic stability while advancing construction of the new airport.

**Alan Fletcher** introduced himself as President of the Aspen Music Festival and School, noting that the upcoming summer will be his 21st and final season in that role. He shared that the festival is the largest classical music teaching festival in the world, bringing approximately 1,000 students, artists, and faculty from more than 40 countries to Aspen each summer. Alan noted that planning for the 2027 airport closure is a significant consideration for the festival, particularly given the volume of international and domestic travelers it serves. He expressed cautious optimism, explaining that many participants are already accustomed to flexible travel arrangements and that a clear, well-communicated alternative—such as flying into regional airports with scheduled bus transportation—could provide reassurance and consistency. He also raised concerns about the potential impact on the broader tourist audience and seasonal residents, noting that while financial support may continue, reduced physical presence in Aspen could affect attendance and community vibrancy. He concluded by welcoming new board members and expressing appreciation for being part of the Chamber, noting that he has found the experience both valuable and enjoyable.

**Jennifer Slaughter** provided an update from Aspen Valley Health, highlighting several significant leadership and program developments. She announced the appointment of Dr. Richard Becker as the new Chief Executive Officer following an extensive search process that began with the planned departure of former CEO Dave Ressler. Dr. Becker began his role this week and brings more than 35 years of healthcare experience, including leadership roles in public health, community hospitals, and most recently as an executive at Northwell Health in New York. A board-certified anesthesiologist and critical care physician, Dr. Becker and his wife, Dr. Rachel Becker, a practicing psychiatrist, have relocated to Aspen and are already actively engaged with the organization. Jennifer emphasized Aspen Valley Health's continued commitment to advancing access to high-quality care for both residents and visitors. Jennifer also shared updates on the growth of the health system's primary care services, announcing the addition of Dr. Megan Hiles, a new internist with 12 years of experience, most recently leading a longevity and wellness program at National Jewish. Dr. Hiles will support the expanding primary care practice and contribute to the evolution of Aspen Valley Health's wellness-focused services. In addition, Jennifer highlighted an upcoming Aspen Valley Health Foundation fundraiser and educational event scheduled for February 26 at Hotel Jerome. The event will feature a symposium on health, wellness, and longevity, including a discussion on the gut microbiome with a leading Stanford expert, interviewed by Dr. Kovar. The evening will include participation from physicians across the health system and marks the third installment in the organization's health symposium series.

**Maria Ticsay** introduced herself as the professional sector representative and a long-serving board member, noting her 13 years on the ACRA board and her role as Chair of the Public Affairs Committee. She welcomed new board members and expressed appreciation for the collaborative nature of the group and the opportunity to learn from fellow members. Maria shared thoughts on the upcoming sector listening sessions, emphasizing the importance of allowing sufficient time for members to be heard. She noted that past sessions were valuable but sometimes limited by the amount of information the organization wanted to convey, and she stressed that constituents often attend with specific concerns they want to voice. Maria underscored the importance of ACRA serving as a trusted, two-way source of information, particularly regarding the airport closure, while acknowledging that many details remain unresolved and vary significantly by sector. She highlighted that different sectors have different timelines and levels of impact, and expressed concern about whether those



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distinctions are being clearly communicated. Maria noted that while the professional sector may be less directly affected, other sectors—such as restaurants—face more immediate and significant challenges. She emphasized the need to manage expectations transparently, even when definitive answers are not yet available, and encouraged thoughtful communication that acknowledges uncertainty while reinforcing ACRA’s role as a listening and information-sharing organization.

**Rachel Richards** provided an update focused on transportation policy, regional planning, and the ongoing work of the 21st Century Transportation Coalition. She alerted the board to a potential statewide ballot initiative backed by the Colorado Contractors Association that would redirect Colorado Department of Transportation funding exclusively to roads, eliminating funding for mass transit. She emphasized that such a change would be highly detrimental to resort and rural communities that rely on transit systems and noted efforts underway to alert other resort communities and advocacy organizations. Rachel clarified recent media coverage of the 21st Century Transportation Coalition, explaining that its report represents first-phase findings rather than final recommendations and that meaningful next steps must include engagement with down-valley communities and commuters. She emphasized that proposals such as fare-free buses are neither imminent nor simple to implement, citing RFTA’s analysis showing that fare-free service would require significant increases in buses, drivers, housing, maintenance facilities, and long lead times. She noted that improved frequency and reliability, rather than fare elimination, are the most effective drivers of ridership. Rachel also outlined structural and legal constraints, including voter-approved restrictions on bus lanes, federal grant requirements, long-term agreements granting Rafta control of the BRT lanes, and funding challenges faced by Garfield County, which have affected regional transit support. Rachel discussed findings from recent fare-free transit experiments, noting that increased ridership was largely tied to shopping, dining, and recreation rather than commuter use, and that surveys did not adequately test willingness to fund fare-free service through taxes. She stressed that congestion management has reached a point where incentives alone are insufficient and that the region faces “20 pounds in a 10-pound bag” conditions. While no immediate road tolling or drastic measures are planned, Rachel emphasized the need for honest conversations about future mobility tradeoffs, workforce commuting, parking policy, and congestion impacts on resident and visitor experience. She concluded by reiterating that transportation solutions will require long-term planning, regional cooperation, and careful balancing of community needs.

**Tharyn Mulberry** thanked ACRA and the community for their support of the school district’s November referendums, noting that the district is already putting those resources to work. He shared that planned investments include development of an innovation center, improvements to theater and athletic facilities, and a major focus on housing. Tharyn noted that the district’s \$95 million bond passed, with the first \$50 million tranche moving forward this spring and construction planning beginning in March 2026. He emphasized the district’s commitment to creating new housing rather than displacing existing residents or affordable units. Tharyn also spoke to the importance of collective preparation for upcoming transportation and airport-related challenges, offering the school district’s support and resources, including the potential use of its large parking lots as part of broader community solutions. He stressed the value of visible progress and momentum on transportation and mitigation efforts, noting that tangible action helps build community confidence and avoids a sense of stagnation. Tharyn concluded by reaffirming the district’s willingness to collaborate and be part of the solution as the community navigates these changes.

**Bill Tomcich** provided an update focused on airport planning, airline capacity, and regional travel conditions. He acknowledged the significant discussion around the airport and emphasized that while planning is actively underway behind the scenes, it is still premature to announce specific airline or transportation plans. Bill explained that airlines typically finalize schedules no more than 331 days (approximately 11 months) in advance, meaning meaningful planning for the 2027 closure—particularly for the peak summer months of June through September—cannot be finalized until that window opens. He expressed confidence that, if demand exists, major carriers including American, United, and Delta will add capacity and potentially new routes into Eagle and Grand Junction. Bill noted that discussions are ongoing with multiple ground transportation providers, including advanced conversations with Landline, a Fort Collins-based company interested in supporting inter-airport connectivity. He also addressed general aviation, explaining that private jet traffic and Arrow flights have viable alternatives through the Rifle Airport, where Atlantic Aviation already operates facilities. Shifting to current business conditions, Bill observed that while Aspen is experiencing softer demand due to low snowfall, conditions are notably stronger than in other mountain destinations such as Vail, where large portions of terrain remain closed. He emphasized that Aspen Snowmass has maintained high-quality skiing across nearly all terrain pods through effective snowmaking, describing this season as one of the most challenging since the mid-1970s yet still a product the community can be proud of. Finally, Bill shared insights from the rental car sector, noting that major providers such as Hertz are already preparing for the 2027 closure. He highlighted that rental companies have developed robust one-way vehicle programs between Colorado mountain airports, resulting in strong availability and competitive pricing—an approach that has performed well during recent seasonal airport closures and is expected to scale effectively in 2027. Bill concluded by welcoming new board members and noting his long-standing involvement in the community and with Fly Aspen Snowmass.

**Diane Jackson** provided brief remarks noting ongoing airport planning efforts and thanking Bill Tomcich for effectively covering recent updates related to airline scheduling and transportation. She acknowledged connectivity issues and expressed appreciation for the board’s



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patience as planning continues. Diane shared that an updated “road show” presentation is being prepared and will be taken back to the airport board, with the intent of sharing clearer details on process and next steps as they become available. She reiterated that timing for more concrete information aligns with the airlines’ 11-month scheduling window and emphasized that the team recognizes the need for answers and is actively working toward providing them.

**Nina Eisenstat** introduced herself as a marketing and communications professional and longtime City of Aspen resident, sharing her experience working with both public and private sector clients on strategic communications. She welcomed new board members and expressed confidence in their contributions, and congratulated Eliza on her promotion, noting the value of integrating destination marketing with visitor services. Nina commended the Aspen Forward strategic planning work, praising the proposed vision and mission themes and acknowledging the thoughtful process behind them. She noted that the options presented were strong and deserving of continued refinement. She also expressed support for the upcoming sector listening sessions, echoing the importance of allowing sufficient time for member feedback and encouraging broader participation across sectors. Finally, Nina addressed airport-related concerns, noting that she has received questions from her sector and appreciates being kept informed as plans continue to develop. She suggested that an up-to-date, concise information summary would be helpful for board members to reference and share as appropriate.

**Julia Theisen** introduced herself as Tourism Director for the Town of Snowmass Village, noting she is approaching two years in the role and previously spent a decade at ACRA as Vice President of Destination Marketing and Management. She welcomed new board members and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to remain engaged with ACRA’s work. Julia also commended Debbie and the team for the Aspen Forward vision and mission process, noting that the strong support for both options reflects the quality of the work and that further refinement will bring it to completion. Julia provided an update on Snowmass tourism trends, reporting that occupancy continues to trend slightly downward, particularly in March, while January and February remain relatively stable. She noted that room rates are up, resulting in relatively flat overall revenue, but expressed concern about the impact of fewer visitors spending more on lodging and less on restaurants and retail. She added that last-minute booking patterns persist and may help fill some gaps, with snow conditions remaining a key factor. She also highlighted a major development update in Snowmass, noting that an application has been submitted for the complete redevelopment of the Viewline property into a Ritz-Carlton. Julia described the vision as exciting and transformative for Snowmass, while acknowledging uncertainty around timing and potential overlap with the airport closure. She noted that the project is early in the planning process and will require extensive review, and concluded by acknowledging both the opportunities and challenges ahead for Snowmass Village.

**Noemi Kiss-Baldwin** thanked the board for the warm welcome and shared that she is excited to be serving as a new board member representing Aspen Skiing Company through Limelight Aspen. She noted that lodging performance trends are consistent with what others are experiencing, with a strong December and January and February supported largely by group business. She shared that March is shaping up to be more uncertain due to its heavier reliance on transient visitation and an increase in last-minute bookings, which makes forecasting more challenging. Noemi expressed interest in learning more about airport transportation planning and noted her willingness to support the organization as those efforts continue.

**Lauren Heath** introduced herself as General Manager of Rocky Mountain Connections (RMC), a locally founded destination management company established 35 years ago. She shared that she has lived in the Roaring Fork Valley since 2009 and expressed her appreciation for the community. Lauren provided an update from the destination management and group business perspective, noting that January and February have been strong months for group travel, while March is trending slower, with some softness also beginning to appear in summer bookings. Lauren emphasized the importance of transparency with clients regarding the airport and future transportation plans, noting that her team is actively sharing available information to ensure groups can make informed decisions. She shared that RMC is already receiving inquiries and leads for 2027 and stressed the importance of protecting both clients and the broader community as planning continues. Lauren also highlighted a positive experience partnering with Colorado Mountain College’s community cooking class program for a group event and expressed interest in continuing to promote that offering.

**Mindi Safchik** introduced herself as Senior Sales Advisor at Kiton and noted that she has lived in the Roaring Fork Valley for 25 years, where she raised her daughter. She shared a retail sector update, noting that luxury retail has experienced a strong upward trend this season, which she attributed in part to visitors spending more time shopping during periods of limited skiing. She acknowledged that this experience may not be consistent across all retail sectors. Mindi expressed hope that ongoing airport and transportation planning will support continued stability across restaurants, lodging, and retail, and noted that businesses are adapting through strategies such as increased consignment sales. She concluded by expressing appreciation for the opportunity to serve on the board and her willingness to support the organization in any way she can.



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**Justin Todd** introduced himself as Managing Director of White Elephant Aspen and shared an update on the property's construction and opening timeline. He noted that the hotel is in the final stages of construction, acknowledging the ongoing challenges of building in the Roaring Fork Valley. While an early February opening had been planned, he confirmed that the February 3 target will not be met and that the opening date remains dependent on several outstanding factors. Justin expressed appreciation for the property's owners, who have continued to retain and support team members during the delay. Justin also spoke to broader lodging trends, noting that hotels are already operating within the booking window for 2027, making accurate and timely information regarding the airport closure and transportation planning critical for future sales and guest communication. He shared December performance data for Aspen, reporting that occupancy was down 9.1 percent year over year, while average daily rate increased by 6.5 percent, indicating fewer visitors but higher spending per guest.

**Cari Kuhlman** introduced herself as Senior Vice President and regional market president at Vectra Bank, noting the bank's long history in Pitkin County and her own 34 years in the Roaring Fork Valley. She welcomed new board members and congratulated Eliza on her promotion. Cari shared that she serves as both Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee, and noted that fourth-quarter financials will be reviewed at the next committee meeting. She reported that the board recently approved the budget and praised Debbie and the staff for their strong financial management, noting that their work makes her role straightforward. Cari also reflected on her long history of board service, having served multiple terms over the years. Cari highlighted the opening of the new Paul JAS Center through Jazz Aspen Snowmass, encouraging board members to support the venue and noting its distinct role in the community's music and cultural landscape. She concluded by expressing deep appreciation for the members of the 21st Century Transportation Coalition, recognizing the significant time, effort, and courage required to engage in difficult conversations about congestion and transportation solutions. She emphasized that the coalition's work reflects a genuine commitment to problem-solving, not punitive measures, and thanked participants for investing in the future of the community.

**Adjournment:** Donnie Lee adjourned the meeting at 10:38 AM