

Board of Directors Meeting

Date: July 25, 2023

Zoom

Present: Cristal Logan, Jeff Bay, Cari Kuhlman, Donnie Lee, Rose Abello, Dan Batholomew, Debbie Braun, Matt Cook, Nina Eisenstat, Andrew Ernemann, Alan Fletcher, Michael Goldberg, Heather Kemp, Lisa LeMay, Maria Ticsay, Justin Nyberg, Henning Rahm, Dave Ressler, Steve Skadron, Justin Todd, Bill Tomcich, Torre, and Kathleen Wanatowicz.

Absent: John Rigney, David Baugh, Patti Clapper, and Heather Steenge-Hart.

Staff: Jennifer Albright Carney, Susan Bantis, John Clay Davies, Savannah Grant, Julie Hardman, Jessica Hite, Sarah Reynolds Lasser, and Liz Watson.

Guests: Julie Bielenberg (The Aspen Times), Sarah Roy (Red Brick Center for the Arts), and Jeanne Souldern (Aspen Daily News).

Call to order: Cristal Logan called the meeting to order at 8:31 AM

Approval of the June 27th Minutes: Approved

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest: None

Public Art Plan: Sarah Roy, the director of the Red Brick Center for the Arts, presents the city of Aspen's first ever formal public art plan, which is being led by her organization. She begins by explaining what public art is, emphasizing its accessibility, transformative power, ability to create opportunities for gathering, and its diverse range of forms, from sculptures to performances. Roy explains the role public art plays in celebrating a town's uniqueness and expressing its cultural heritage, and points out that Aspen doesn't currently have a formal public art plan. In response to community demand for more public art, the city council approved the Red Brick Center's proposal to develop a program. For this initiative, the center hired two consultants, Jill Stillwell and Kendall Peterson, who have extensive experience in public art planning. The plan is twofold, consisting of a visioning aspect and policies and guidelines for managing public art. The guidelines would address issues such as artist selection, community partnerships, art maintenance, and purchasing guidelines. The visioning work involves creating a vision statement to outline Aspen's ambitions for its public art plan and shared goals to guide the selection of artworks and artists. Community input is essential for this process, and Roy describes several engagement strategies they're implementing, including community events, a survey, focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and public events around town. The goal of this comprehensive plan is to create a unique public art program for Aspen that reflects the community, creates connections, and celebrates its vibrant arts and culture scene. She emphasized that they are currently in the visioning stage and have not yet planned how to fundraise for this endeavor. Once the plan is drafted, it will be presented to the council by the end of the year or the beginning of the new year, pending the council's approval. Sarah pointed out that funding could come from a variety of sources such as taxes, grants, private donations, or community partnerships. For example, their previous street mural project was funded by the Aspen Ideas Festival and supported by the city. She also welcomed the idea of involving art lovers and second homeowners in the community who may wish to contribute. Torre clarified that this would not necessarily be a funds-intensive program. The focus is on collaborations and partnerships rather than commissioning expensive artworks. He suggested the budget could range from \$10,000 in a given year. Lastly, Sarah mentioned a survey and upcoming focus groups for everyone to participate in, to garner further community engagement and input.

Chair's Comments: Cristal Logan begins by acknowledging the enjoyable summer underway, highlighting the strong audience presence and a variety of exciting events. She recalls a particularly successful open house and lecture that explored the work of Herbert Bayer and encourages everyone to visit the Bayer Center's new exhibit. She also shares disappointing news that Charlie Bantis has resigned from the ACRA board, where he has been a member for more than 20 years. Despite the significant loss, she reassures everyone that Charlie is not leaving the community. Cristal announces the appointment of Cari Kuhlman, who is stepping into Charlie's role, leading the finance committee. She thanks Cari for taking up the responsibility. Finally, Cristal mentions that she and Alan are maintaining regular communication with other arts and culture leaders. They are learning to navigate the new norms of event attendance and are trying to understand what people are now attracted to. Despite this being a learning curve, she believes everything is going well as they move into the future.



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President's Comments: Debbie Braun begins by expressing relief that Charlie Bantis, despite stepping down from the Board and Finance Committee, will remain with the Public Affairs Committee, an area where his input is greatly appreciated. Next, she shares the exciting news that Sarah Lasser, a dedicated team member for over a decade, has been promoted to Vice President of Business Development. Braun praises Sarah's exceptional dedication and skills in managing memberships, sponsorships, and partnerships. Acknowledging that membership dues are the bulk of the organization's budget, Braun appreciates Sarah's significant contributions and expresses confidence that Sarah will continue to bring fresh ideas and even greater success. Braun also shares that the Pitkin County Commissioners have taken a step forward in advancing the Aspen Airport layout plan. She defers to Dan and Bill for more detailed updates on the next steps. Lastly, she underscores the need for comprehensive public outreach to ensure members understand what's going on with the airport and how they can get involved. She mentions that more survey work and policy statements around the airport and the layout plan are forthcoming, hinting at a busy period ahead for the Public Affairs team.

Public Affairs Committee Update: Debbie Braun gives an update on behalf of Donnie Lee. The Public Affairs Committee met on July 13 and followed up with a conversation with Mark Hunt. Jimmy Marcus reviewed the status of downtown development projects and gave an overview of the community vibrancy effort along the Cooper Street Walking Mall, including public art opportunities and potential live entertainment. Michael Miracle of the Aspen Skiing Company presented a concept for a holistic transportation system, taking into consideration the AABC, the Lumberyard housing proposal, and the Aspen Pitkin County Airport. The committee had mixed reactions to the proposal, especially around balancing convenience, speed, and a high-quality transit experience. The Committee has also been working on a policy Reference Guide. They've surveyed members on important issues, with workforce and business development, transportation, and housing emerging as the main focus areas. Policy analysis from a business perspective has been created on these topics, found on pages 10, 11, and 13 of the packet. Braun asks the board to review these statements, add comments if needed, but notes they're not looking for major changes as these reflect members' feedback. The statements will be posted on the Public Affairs website along with resource guides. The action item for the board is to review the statements and send comments to Braun, Donnie, Alycin, or Cristal. They plan to finalize the statements in their next Public Affairs meeting and hope for board approval in August. Braun encourages the board to share this information with their constituents so that members feel represented.

Directors' Remarks:

Torre begins by greeting everyone and noting that the summer season is going well. He mentions interesting business trends: citywide tax collections are up by approximately 4%, and local businesses such as restaurants, retail, and experiential vendors are performing well. On the other hand, he notes a decline in the luxury retail sector. He observes a change in how people are spending their time and money compared to previous years, even though the town seems busier than ever. Torre encourages the chamber to contemplate these shifts and invites them to share any input on downtown and business matters by reaching out to him via email at torre@aspen.gov. He wraps up his comments by acknowledging the heat and his day job as a tennis teacher, expressing his enjoyment of what Aspen has to offer this summer and appreciating the great energy in town.

Alan Fletcher shares that the Aspen Music Festival and School is midway through their summer season and it's going exceptionally well. He highlights a few upcoming events: A concert dedicated to the works of John Williams is taking place tonight. While tickets have sold out, he encourages attendance for an exciting experience involving elements like lightsabers. The renowned Audra McDonald will perform with a full orchestra a week from Thursday. This is special as she usually performs with smaller groups, making it a unique opportunity to hear her accompanied by a larger ensemble. Next Sunday, they will showcase a piece they commissioned from composer John Luther Adams, known for his environmentally focused and site-specific works. This event will occur outdoors on their Meadows campus and is free of charge. He mentions successful collaborations with other institutions such as the Institute at Ideas, Dance Aspen, Jazz Aspen, and Theatre Aspen. He also highlights an upcoming Mariachi Day, which will feature 12 community partners and a performance by the folklorico of the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. This event, also free, will take place late in the afternoon at the tent and will feature taco trucks.

Cari Kuhlman expresses gratitude to Debbie and Cristal for entrusting her with the role previously held by Charlie on the Finance Committee. She humorously notes that she has succeeded Charlie before, at Vectra Bank, and now with ACRA, and is looking forward to the opportunity. She jests that, luckily, her new role isn't dependent on her proficiency with Zoom, referring to an earlier chat mishap. Cari also congratulates Sarah on her recent promotion.



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Bill Tomcich discusses the misperception that the airport layout plan is geared towards larger planes and growth, stating that the demand for this is not coming from him, airlines, or anyone else that he can see. He emphasizes that the current 70-passenger jets are aging and will soon need replacement, with forecasts indicating that the majority of flights will still be served by 70-passenger jets through 2042. The plan is to introduce a larger aircraft, the Airbus A220-100, in 2032, an airplane that fits well with Aspen's airport and is already in use in Salt Lake City. Bill goes on to explain that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has agreed to make the Airbus A220-300 the critical design aircraft, even though it may not work at Aspen airport due to its extra weight. He strongly denies plans for significantly larger aircraft or growth. Tomcich mentions the forecast of 1.3% compounded annual growth rate of passenger employment, comparing it to a weather forecast, which is never guaranteed to be right. He insists that the FAA accepting this forecast makes sense and commends the consultants for their job in putting it together. Regarding the airport's current situation, Bill informs that the summer flights are in good shape despite weather disruptions. An extra daily flight has been added to the Denver-Aspen schedule due to United Airlines realizing the benefits of morning flights during the summer. He also mentions extended flights through the end of September and into October due to strong performance. Bill addresses concerns about high fares, stating they have relaxed quite a bit. He reveals that American Airlines' Austin flight is available for as low as \$160 each way throughout September. Responding to a question about the Aspen layout plan, he clarifies that the plan is not about lengthening the runway, but rather about widening it for safety and increasing the runway-taxiway separation. He emphasizes that any delays in this process could potentially undermine the common ground recommendations.

Heather Kemp begins by congratulating Sarah Lasser on her promotion within the organization, expressing her excitement for Sarah's new challenges and adventure. She praises Sarah's leadership qualities, noting how she has always looked up to her. Heather also expresses her sadness at the departure of Charlie from the ACRA board, commenting on his insightful commentary and thoughtful questions. She then shifts to discussing retail trends, noting that July has been an energetic month, which is particularly positive as they were down for the year. The clientele coming into the store has been easygoing and know what they want. Speaking on other service businesses like O2, they've also been busy with classes selling out, and the instructors are thrilled. She observes that despite the rush, the workforce seems to be keeping pace, possibly due to the rest they had during the offseason. Heather concludes by mentioning her plan to stay as busy as possible and possibly close for a few weeks in October when some hotels shut down.

Michael Goldberg discusses the current state of the restaurant industry, observing a slight decrease in numbers from the previous year. He suggests that increased menu prices due to higher costs of goods and transportation could be a factor, but he doesn't believe that this is the main cause for the decrease. Instead, he argues that the comparison should be made with 2019, rather than with the post-COVID euphoria year of 2022, when people were willing to spend more freely. Goldberg notes that most people he's spoken with report higher numbers than in 2019. He also shares that hiring has been easier this year, especially in the restaurant industry, specifically for server positions. Switching topics to the airport issue, Goldberg addresses concerns about runway expansion. He emphasizes that the terminology can be misleading and is not about lengthening the runway. He commends an explanation given by Bill, particularly about the future likelihood of the Airbus A200 becoming commonplace. Goldberg believes this is a more realistic and environmentally friendly future for aviation, instead of the current trend towards turboprop aircraft. Lastly, he disputes the idea that battery-powered electric aircraft are the future, calling it 'fool's gold', and refers to numerous articles discussing the pitfalls of electric aviation. He suggests that there needs to be a unified response to the term 'runway extension' due to the negative connotations it has picked up.

Rose Abello starts by congratulating Sarah on her new role and then proceeds to highlight a number of events taking place in Snowmass. On Tuesdays, they have bike nights and sunset gatherings at Elk Camp, and the rodeo, which has been selling out, occurs on Wednesdays. On Thursdays, they have concerts that have been well-attended due to good weather. Free ice cream is offered at Town Park on Fridays with yarn bombing, along with Comedy Nights at The Collective which are also selling out. This and coming weekends host a variety of special events such as Heritage Fire, the Plein Air Arts Festival, and the Deja Vu drinking event in August. From a business perspective, Abello notes that they entered June with a 16% decrease year over year in room nights sold, but finished flat, with revenues also remaining flat. July started with an 18% decrease and revenues down by 11%, but she is hopeful for improvement, as seen in June, thanks to last-minute bookings. Looking over the summer season, she mentions that they are down by almost 13% in room nights booked from June through September, with revenues down by about 10%. Despite these numbers, Abello shares that she has received positive feedback from properties and there doesn't seem to be significant concern. She concludes by expressing hope that the last-minute booking trend seen in June continues through the summer.



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Henning Rahm begins by echoing sentiments expressed earlier about the current state of business. He notes that their private event site is performing strongly, benefiting significantly from Aspen Institute events. The Little Nell and Limelight hotels are also experiencing stronger occupancy during periods of major forum activities and activations. Rahm observes an increase in short-term bookings, a trend that seems to be strengthening, although he notes that this goes against their usual business practice of planning ahead. On the bright side, he points out that winter bookings are ahead of schedule and pacing well compared to last year. While acknowledging a slight decrease in occupancy compared to last year, he expresses hope that the rising temperatures across the nation and in Europe may encourage people to make last-minute trips to the mountains over the next two to three months.

Lisa LeMay begins by praising Debbie for her well-crafted response to a member's comments about the airport expansion, expressing how much it informed her. She proposes that the organization should create a formal letter or document summarizing this kind of valuable information. This resource could be forwarded to constituents who express concerns, helping to alleviate confusion and misinformation. She believes such a document would allow her to discuss the issue more confidently, without fear of misquoting details. Bill Tomcich acknowledges that Pitkin County has issued several factual press releases regarding recent happenings and decisions. He thanks Lisa LeMay for her suggestion about creating an informative document to address concerns related to the airport expansion. On the topic of retail, LeMay shares that there has been a noticeable rebound. While luxury retail experienced a tough June, they've bounced back in July, even if they're a little bit down overall. For lower-end retail, such as t-shirt shops, they're breaking even with their 2019 numbers, actually showing an increase. She sees this as a balance between what's happening in luxury versus lower-end retail, and believes a similar trend might be occurring in the restaurant scene.

Dan Bartholomew thanks everyone for their assistance and encourages anyone with questions or seeking clarification about potential misinformation to reach out. While his role at the county airport prevents him from taking a side on certain issues, he is more than willing to provide factual information or explanations to help with understanding. He emphasizes that he is approachable and open to inquiries.

Justin Todd reports that Aspen Meadows is experiencing its best summer yet, crediting this success to the collective efforts of the community in creating an exceptional experience for visitors. He underlines the importance of staying factually informed about the airport expansion. He expresses slight concern about a potential slowdown in the upcoming winter season. Todd then asks about anticipated runway maintenance in the future. In response, Dan Bartholomew indicates there will probably be a two-week closure for maintenance in the spring. He explains that tests revealed the runway's sub-base needs significant repairs, which could potentially lead to extended closure periods in the future for maintenance.

Nina Eisenstat begins by congratulating Sarah on her promotion and commending her excellent work in promoting Aspen. She also expresses her sadness over Charlie leaving the board, but is glad he'll stay involved with the Public Affairs Committee. Eisenstat praises the Fourth of July celebration and the art fair in Paepke Park. On a less positive note, she brings up a study from the Colorado Health Foundation indicating the top concerns in Colorado, namely: cost of living, housing affordability, government and politics, public safety and crime, and homelessness. She highlights that Denver is experiencing a homelessness state of emergency. However, she also notes that concern over COVID-19, political division, and jobs in the economy has decreased. Eisenstat suggests these statewide concerns may have implications for local planning discussions.

Dave Ressler congratulates Sarah and addresses Nina's points on COVID. He asserts that while we're in a post-COVID period, the virus is not completely gone and there are still cases appearing, including among hospital staff due to their exposure. He advises continued vigilance and protection as the virus is still present in the community, evidenced by an increase in wastewater indicators. Ressler shares that the vaccine and booster uptake in Pitkin County has been around 25%, but it's closer to 50% for those over 65. He emphasizes that new boosters targeting current strains will likely be available in September and encourages everyone to get their shots, comparing it to seasonal flu shots. Despite the enjoyment of the post-COVID period, he advises everyone to remain cautious, mentioning that hospital staff have resumed wearing masks during patient encounters. He urges everyone to think about getting the COVID booster to protect themselves, their families, and the community. Ressler concludes his remarks with an offer to answer any questions.

Steve Skadron congratulates Sarah Lasser and expresses his disappointment over Charlie's departure. He praises Sarah Roy's presentation and appreciates the direction the city is taking. He shares his excitement about the momentum at Colorado Mountain College (CMC), including the construction of a community kitchen, which he hopes will replace some local gathering places that have



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been lost. Skadron discusses the launch of a soft goods manufacturing program at CMC, which caught the attention of Patagonia's CEO, Ryan Gellert, at the Ideas Festival. He sees this as a compliment to the Aspen community. He urges everyone to look through the bulletin that CMC mailed out, as it cost a significant amount to produce, print, and mail, and it lists fun classes on offer. Finally, Skadron mentions CMC's growing investment in the Basalt area, where they now own a space that is expected to be ready for community scheduling in November. He feels responsible for the CMC region from Aspen to Carbondale and is excited about the developments at CMC.

Justin Nyberg praises the public art program in Aspen and compliments ACRA's event calendar system, highlighting its usefulness when looking for events in town. He wonders if more community organizations, especially those hosting events, are aware of this resource and encourages wider participation. Nyberg comments on the vibrancy of downtown Aspen, especially areas like Paradise Plaza and Wagner Park. He notes, however, that East Cooper's side of the pedestrian mall seems to struggle with attracting pedestrian traffic and wonders how its use could be increased. On parking, Nyberg remarks on the difficulty of finding spots downtown and suggests greater effort should be made to promote the Rio Grande parking garage to visitors. He suggests using electronic bulletin boards at town entrances for a targeted advertising campaign. In response, Debbie informs him that the parking garage is usually full by early afternoon, implying that it is indeed being utilized effectively.

Matt Cook observes an interesting trend that seems to be taking place within Aspen's nightlife. He notes from his drivers' experiences that local night activity appears to have significantly decreased, and many drivers are now requesting to shift from night to day schedules. In response to this observation, Cristal comments that during a recent arts and culture meeting, it was shared that late-night shows, such as those at Jazz Aspen, were not selling as strongly as before. She notes a theory that COVID may have altered people's body clocks, leading to a decrease in attraction to late-night events. Matt further comments that the reduction in the number of bars and changes in the demographics of people frequenting bars could also contribute to the changes in nightlife. He states that it would be interesting to see how this trend unfolds in the years to come.

Maria Ticsay praises today's arts presentation. She also advocates for the creation of a fact sheet about the airport from Dan Bartholomew. She argues that presenting clear, concise facts about the airport is primarily the airport's responsibility, as these facts would provide a foundation for discussion within the community. Maria believes this approach would ensure that discussions are not simply advocacy for more tourism and more people, but rather, are based on real, factual information about the airport's plans and reasons. In response to Maria, Dan agrees that they could do more in terms of providing easily accessible information and mentions that they have been cautious about getting into debates with groups opposing expansion. However, he believes that a more aggressive approach is needed, and he promises to discuss the possibility of creating a fact sheet with his communications team. Maria reiterates her point that the airport's responsibility is not necessarily to engage in public debates, but rather to provide information. Bill Tomcich agrees with Maria's idea for a fact sheet, acknowledging that even though the airport has been releasing press statements, they may not be easily digestible for the public. He expresses his eagerness to assist in amplifying these facts once they are made available.

Adjournment: Cristal Logan adjourned the meeting at 10:01 AM