

ACRA DEFY ORDINARY
ASPEN CHAMBER RESORT ASSOCIATION
DESTINATION MANAGEMENT | MEMBER SERVICES | SPECIAL EVENTS | VISITOR SERVICES

Board of Directors Meeting

Date: June 30, 2026

Zoom

Present: Donnie Lee, Cari Kuhlman, John Rigney, Cristal Logan, Jeff Bay, Debbie Braun, Matt Cook, Nina Eisenstat, Alan Fletcher, Michael Goldberg, Lauren Heath, Diane Jackson, Noemi Kiss-Baldwin, Tharyn Mulberry, Rachel Richards, Mindi Safchik, Heather Shapard, Steve Skadron, Maria Ticsay, Bill Tomcich, Justin Todd, Brenda Wild, and Pete Yang.

Absent: Patti Clapper, Dwayne Romero, Julia Theisen, and Peter Waanders.

Staff: Jennifer Albright Carney, John Clay Davies, Savannah Grant, Casey Graves, Julie Hardman, Nichole Hellinger, Jessica Hite, Karina Keller, Athena Pantelas, Sarah Reynolds Lasser, Eliza Voss, Liz Watson, and Taylor Wilcher.

Guests: Evan Cree, Deric Gunshor, Katie Kissane Viola, Kris Mattera, Virginia McNellis, Pete Strecker, and Jamie Tokuno.

Call to order: Donnie Lee called the meeting to order at 8:32 AM

Approval of the May 26th Minutes:

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest: None

Visitor Profile Results: Jamie Tokuno, Research Director with Future Partners, presented findings from the 2025 Visitor Profile Study conducted in partnership with ACRA. The study surveyed 929 visitors to Aspen between March 6 and 23, 2026, using a third party online panel as well as ACRA's owned and partner audiences. Respondents needed to be over 18, have visited Aspen in 2025, and not be Aspen area residents. Tokuno opened with a comparison to the 2022-2023 study, noting several key shifts. The share of overnight visitors increased from 38.5% to 50%, and average length of stay grew from five to six days. Average daily spend per party increased nominally from \$1,735 to \$1,757. The share arriving by air declined from 29.9% to 24.5%. Overall trip satisfaction declined from 83.7% to 77.4%, likelihood to return dropped from 86.6% to 78.2%, and likelihood to recommend fell from 80.7% to 69.3%, all still strong but trending downward. On destination attributes, dining ranked as the most important factor in destination selection at 86.6%, followed by historical sites, museums, hiking, festivals, and concerts. Aspen performs strongest on winter outdoor sports, with skiing and snowboarding delivering well above its importance score, representing a significant positive gap. Areas where Aspen has room to close gaps include dining, historical sites, and museums, where importance ratings outpace perceived delivery. Among activities, shopping was the most common at 48.6% of visitors, but downhill skiing and snowboarding was the top primary trip motivator at 18.2%, followed by concerts and orchestra performances at 13.3%. Visitors are predominantly loyal repeat guests, with over four in ten having visited Aspen nine or more times as adults. Average overall trip spend per party was over \$10,000, with nearly half going to accommodations and just under \$1,500 to dining. On the 2027 airport closure, just over a third of respondents were aware the airport would be closed from April through December 2027. Among those likely to return to Aspen, 18.6% said the closure makes them more likely to visit, while only 15.1% said less likely, with the remainder saying it would have no impact. Hotel guests were significantly more likely to say the closure would increase their likelihood to visit, at 43.2%. Those less likely to visit cited inconvenience of alternate airports and long drives as primary concerns. Those more likely to visit cited expectations of fewer crowds and a quieter, more relaxed atmosphere as the main draw. Board discussion was robust. Members noted that the downward trends in satisfaction, value perception, and likelihood to recommend warrant attention, and suggested that future surveys include more granular follow-up questions to identify the specific drivers behind declining scores. The importance of understanding workforce sustainability was raised, with concern that competing employers in mid and down valley communities are increasingly retaining workers who previously commuted to Aspen, which may be contributing to declines in hospitality and service satisfaction scores. A request was made for comparable spend and satisfaction benchmarking data from peer destinations such as Jackson Hole or Vail to provide relative context, and Future Partners indicated they would look into making those comparisons available. The high share of drive market visitors during summer was noted as important context for understanding the airport closure impact, reinforcing that many visitors will continue to come regardless of air access. Eliza Voss noted that ACRA will release cross tabs to the board, and highlighted guest service training, workforce appreciation, and destination education around Aspen's history and cultural richness as key areas where the findings point to opportunity. The full report and a public press release will be posted to the ACRA website.

Chair's Comments: Donnie Lee opened by noting that summer is off to a strong start following Food and Wine, with a busy season ahead leading into the Fourth of July. He took a moment to congratulate Debbie and the entire ACRA team on the closing of the Obermeyer building, which is scheduled to occur that day, marking the first time in ACRA's history that the organization will have a permanent home. He described it as a milestone moment that has been years in the making and expressed enthusiasm for what it represents for the organization going forward.



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President's Comments: Debbie Braun opened by thanking Jamie Tokuno for presenting the visitor profile results, noting that she was joining from Japan at 11:30pm local time. She shared that Eliza Voss and the marketing team will bring the findings to the Marketing Advisory Committee to inform strategy, and that the team is already reviewing the results to identify opportunities to continue elevating the Aspen brand. Debbie expressed gratitude to the ACRA team for another successful Food and Wine Classic and noted that the summer is not slowing down. The upcoming Fourth of July celebration runs July 3 through 5, featuring a free carnival at Rio Grande Park with a 65-foot Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, and other attractions provided by the City of Aspen. ACRA will produce a drone show over Aspen Mountain at 9:30pm on July 4. She shared heartfelt remarks about the Obermeyer building closing, scheduled for that afternoon, describing it as a milestone moment after 27 years with the organization. She expressed deep gratitude to the City of Aspen, City Manager Pete Strecker, Mayor Richards, and City Council for their partnership in making it happen. She gave special recognition to Maria Ticsay for guiding ACRA through the real estate transaction, and to COO Jennifer Albright Carney for her exceptional diligence in reviewing every document throughout the process. On fire safety, Debbie noted that both Pitkin County and the White River National Forest have entered Stage Two fire restrictions, but that many arriving visitors are unfamiliar with what Stage Two means in practice. She encouraged the county and city to consider posting clear explanations of the restrictions in high visibility locations such as the airport and mall areas, similar to signage used during COVID. She noted that ACRA's website at aspenchamber.org currently features wildfire safety information, current fire restriction details, live fire maps, and a link to sign up for Pitkin County Alert texts, and encouraged board members and their staff to share those resources with guests. Debbie closed by asking board members to save the date for a Ready Together Community Town Hall on the 2027 runway closure, scheduled for Tuesday July 14 from 5:30 to 6:30pm, featuring airport leadership, transportation partners, ACRA, and DMO partners. Registration is required and the event may be moved to a larger venue at Buttermilk due to high interest. Updates are available at aspenairport.com/communityevents. She also thanked Vista Bank for a significant sponsorship supporting the Chamber and the Fourth of July drone show.

Directors' Comments:

Cristal Logan reported that Ideas Fest is going well, with a block of passes provided to community leaders as a thank you for their service. She congratulated the ACRA team on Food and Wine and on the Obermeyer closing. She noted that misinformation about 2027 events is already circulating, including a rumor that Food and Wine has been canceled, and emphasized the importance of board members staying informed and actively correcting misinformation. She also noted that ground transportation costs next summer may be offset by savings on airfare, which is a useful reframe for visitors concerned about access.

Bill Tomcich reported that recent abnormal wind events have caused significant flight disruptions and diversions. Looking ahead, summer schedules are strong, running slightly beyond the airport's design capacity, with a parking position shortage emerging as both a near term operational challenge and a longer term concern related to gate allocation plans for the new terminal. On a positive note, American Airlines has confirmed it will expand Charlotte service to daily flights beginning mid-December, up from three times per week last winter, reflecting strong demand on that route. On 2027 planning, the official closure dates have been announced as April 5 through November 19. United has already published backfill schedules into Eagle County Airport, tripling capacity there with nine daily flights including service from Denver, Chicago, Houston, and Los Angeles. American and Delta schedules are still pending. Four responses to the ground transportation RFQ were received and are being reviewed.

Nina Eisenstat congratulated the ACRA team on Food and Wine, noting strong feedback from both consumers and trade attendees. She highlighted the visibility of ACRA's tent presence at the event and the popularity of the bag giveaway. She noted that all Aspen Ideas seminars are available on YouTube, providing broad visibility for Aspen, and called out Jazz Aspen June, the upcoming Fourth of July, the Music Festival, Art Week, Theater Aspen, Anderson Ranch, and Ballet as highlights of a packed summer calendar.

John Rigney noted that the resort is looking great heading into summer, with positive energy throughout town, mountain biking on Snowmass, and Sunday brunches at the Cabin. Aspen Skiing Company launched its chamber pass offering for the early season, with a new Flex 15 product replacing the one day per week option. He closed by wishing Dwayne Romero well on primary election day.

Steve Skadron congratulated the ACRA team on Food and Wine and on the Obermeyer closing. He noted that an Ideas Fest panel on the future of higher education featured CMC's president and highlighted the innovation community colleges are doing to stay relevant. He shared that CMC has committed to building 350 new housing units across the college system over the next decade, with nine deed restricted units already secured in Old Town Basalt and nine more coming in Glenwood Springs later this summer. He echoed concerns about Initiative 175, noting that CMC's Board of Trustees has formally adopted a resolution opposing the measure, which would redirect general fund dollars away from education and transit toward roads and bridges despite being framed as a no new taxes initiative.

Alan Fletcher reported that Aspen Music Festival and School ticket sales are up 5 percent year over year, with 82 additional season passes sold and locals passes also up, reflecting strong community commitment. The Festival is launching fully online ticketing for the first time this



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summer. He noted that the Festival will send a full symphony orchestra to perform Stravinsky's Rite of Spring at the Up in the Sky Festival at Buttermilk, and expressed enthusiasm about introducing a live symphony to an electronic dance music audience. He also noted a free July 4 concert at 4pm and encouraged board members to attend.

Lauren Heath reported that Food and Wine was extremely well received, with widespread feedback that the luncheon was the best ever. She noted that she is hearing significant concern from clients and contacts about 2027 events, with many under the impression that major events including Food and Wine will not happen. She shared that Rocky Mountain Connections has created a one pager highlighting travel times from alternate airports and emphasizing continued service coordination, and encouraged any positive messaging the broader community can offer about 2027.

Brenda Wild reported on recent NAR travel including the state meeting, Resort Alliance conference, and Region 11 meetings covering multiple western states. Key themes across all meetings included housing affordability, insurance costs, and property rights. She noted that NAR successfully passed House Bill 6644, the 21st Century Road to Housing Act, through both chambers of Congress, though it is unlikely to be signed by the president. She also addressed a rumor circulating that Food and Wine is ending permanently, encouraging board members to dispel it. On the local real estate market, she provided a brief update noting that Aspen's median price is up 14 percent to \$28 million, with an off market sale recently closing at \$91.3 million. Snowmass sales are down 35 percent from 2025 while Basalt sales are up 16.7 percent and Carbondale continues to show activity.

Matt Cook reported a strong June from a bookings standpoint and expressed optimism heading into July. He thanked the ACRA staff for Food and Wine and wished Dwayne Romero well on election day.

Cari Kuhlman congratulated the team on the Obermeyer closing and thanked Alpine Bank for their financing support and Jennifer Albright Carney for her leadership throughout the process. She noted the Finance Committee has not met since the last reported meeting and that everything continues to look strong. She shared that interest rates may increase one more time before year end due to inflation pressures, which could have some impact on travel and market activity.

Michael Goldberg thanked Alan Fletcher for bringing the Aspen Music Festival and School to Up in the Sky and noted excitement about the genre mixing concept. He highlighted that the visitor profile data on the car versus air travel split is critical information for businesses making decisions about 2027, including Belly Up's commitment to produce Up in the Sky again next year. He noted that while business is coming in and spending money, restaurants are facing significant hiring challenges, with down valley competition increasingly attractive to the workforce. He also shared that Belly Up is hosting a free July 3 concert at Wagner Park featuring The Record Company.

Diane Jackson thanked the board and ACRA staff for their ongoing support of the airport project. She reported that the Planning and Zoning denial was overturned at the second reading the day after the May meeting, clearing the way for the project to move forward. The construction manager at risk for the runway is now on board. She noted that the July 14 community town hall is at capacity but encouraged board members to join the wait list as the event may be moved to a larger venue at Buttermilk. A small groundbreaking ceremony is planned for July 15. She also offered to print and post Stage Two fire restriction signage in the airport terminal in response to Debbie's earlier comments, and noted she will work with ACRA on placement in baggage claim. She affirmed support for Maria Ticsay's suggestion to target departing summer visitors with information about 2027 access and ground transportation options.

Pete Yang thanked the ACRA staff for Food and Wine, expressed excitement about the Obermeyer closing, and noted that town appears to be in full summer swing heading into the Fourth of July.

Tharyn Mulberry reported that the school district is focused on deferred maintenance this summer, funded in part by bond proceeds. Housing inventory has grown from 100 to 119 units since the bond passed. He offered the district's facilities and parking to the community for events and airport closure related needs, and encouraged ACRA and partners to reach out if there is anything the district can do to support visitorship during the 2027 closure.

Mindi Safchik thanked the team for Food and Wine and congratulated ACRA on the new home. She acknowledged that retail has been slow but is picking up. She shared ideas for encouraging later business hours, noting that shoppers tend to be out later in the day after morning activities, and suggested a possible shift to an 11am to 7pm retail window as a topic for community discussion.

Rachel Richards urged all community members and businesses to continue reducing water use given the severity of the drought and Aspen's surface water dependency. She noted that the Fourth of July Main Street diversion begins at 7am and encouraged people to arrive in town early. She reminded board members that it is primary election day and encouraged voting. She flagged that the wait list link for the July 14 airport town hall does not display the event date and asked that it be corrected. She also provided an update on RFTA's Hogback

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Route funding challenges following Garfield County's withdrawal, noting that the burden is increasingly falling on RFTA district taxpayers and raising questions about long term workforce transportation sustainability. She closed by mentioning Mountain Towns 2030, a group of 500 to 600 from mountain communities that meets annually, noting there is interest in bringing the October 2027 gathering to Aspen and flagging a funding ask of approximately \$150,000 from the host community. She encouraged the board to consider whether ACRA and partners would be interested in supporting the effort.

Maria Ticsay expressed appreciation for the visitor profile findings and noted pleasant surprise at the relatively measured visitor reactions to cost concerns around dining and lodging. She raised a concern that the survey's March timing may not fully capture the perspective of the most vulnerable visitor segment for 2027, the summer flying visitor, and suggested developing a mechanism to reach departing summer visitors at the airport with information about 2027 access options and events, including links to ground transportation resources as they become available. She expressed deep gratitude for the teamwork that made the Obermeyer closing possible, specifically recognizing Debbie Braun, Jennifer Albright Carney, and the finance team for long range planning and fiscal discipline.

Noemi Kiss-Baldwin congratulated the team on a successful Food and Wine Classic and wished everyone a wonderful rest of the summer.

Justin Todd congratulated the ACRA team on Food and Wine and on the Obermeyer closing. He shared that both White Elephant Aspen and Lola 41 are now open following a successful first few weeks, and expressed appreciation for the community's support.

Adjournment: Donnie Lee adjourned the meeting at 10:11 AM