



ACRA DEFY ORDINARY

ASPEN CHAMBER RESORT ASSOCIATION

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT | MEMBER SERVICES | SPECIAL EVENTS | VISITOR SERVICES

Board of Directors Meeting

Date: March 25, 2025

Aspen Meadows Resort

Present: Patti Clapper, Nina Eisenstat, Alan Fletcher, Diane Jackson, Heather Kemp, Donnie Lee, Cristal Logan, Justin Nyberg, Henning Rahm, Dave Ressler, Steve Skadron, Maria Ticsay, Julia Theisen, Bill Tomcich, Torre, Peter Waanders, and Brenda Wild

Absent: Jeff Bay, Matt Cook, Michael Goldberg, Cari Kuhlman, Lisa LeMay, Tharyn Mulberry, John Rigney, Dwayne Romero, Justin Todd, and Pete Yang

Staff: John Davies, Savannah Grant, Casey Graves, Julie Hardman, Nichole Hellinger, Jessica Hite, Sarah Reynolds Lasser, and Liz Watson

Guest(s): Valerie Carlin

Call to order: Donnie Lee called the meeting to order at 8:33 AM

Approval of the February 25th Minutes: Approved

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest: None

West Mountain Regional COAD: The West Mountain Regional Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD), co-chaired by Valerie Carlin, operates across Pitkin, Eagle, and Garfield counties in partnership with local emergency management offices. Under the umbrella of county disaster response structures, COAD specifically addresses the mass care and shelter function (ESF 6), focusing on assisting individuals during emergencies through evacuations, establishing shelters, and supporting community needs. COAD manages several committees, including a Volunteer Committee led by High Country Volunteers to recruit, train, and deploy volunteers; a Communications Committee coordinated by Aspen Public Radio to amplify official emergency alerts, reaching community members who might not otherwise receive critical messages; a Donation Management Committee spearheaded by Food Bank of the Rockies, responsible for organizing donated goods and ensuring they effectively reach impacted individuals; and a Financial Management Committee led by Aspen Community Foundation, which manages monetary donations and coordinates their distribution to people and organizations in need. Additionally, COAD has established, though not yet activated, a Long-Term Recovery Committee dedicated to sustained community support and rebuilding efforts following immediate disaster response. The COAD has successfully trained around 100 volunteers in Red Cross shelter management and continues to actively recruit volunteers with diverse skill sets, from providing emotional support to post-disaster cleanup efforts. Valerie emphasized the importance of community participation, inviting individuals and organizations to join COAD committees, help amplify emergency messaging through phone trees, and participate in ongoing training. This comprehensive approach ensures the COAD can effectively mobilize community resources to complement and enhance governmental disaster management efforts across the region.

Chair's Comments: Donnie Lee opened by acknowledging two outgoing board members. First, he recognized Dan Bartholomew, who couldn't attend the meeting, for his valuable contributions, especially his efforts in managing training and ensuring progress with airport matters. Secondly, he expressed gratitude to Torre as he concludes his tenure as mayor, emphasizing that anyone taking on such a demanding role deserves immense respect and appreciation for their dedication. Lee briefly touched upon the current state of the community, noting it's spring break with a generally good winter season overall, despite some ups and downs. He encouraged everyone to maintain their focus, support one another, and finish the season strong, highlighting the importance of resilience and preparation for the upcoming summer season and beyond.

President's Comments: Debbie Braun started by thanking Torre warmly for his service and friendship during his tenure as mayor, expressing hope to stay connected and perhaps even seeing him return as mayor again someday. She noted that many staff members are currently away on spring break, wishing them well-deserved rest. Debbie also mentioned that there's a lease extension up for approval at the city council meeting, hoping for a smooth process, and shared that the team is excitedly preparing to move into the armory by the end of April. She looks forward to showcasing the revamped visitor center at a future networking event. Debbie mentioned that while there's still uncertainty about the ultimate location of the offices, the facility task force will reconvene to explore potential options over the coming year. Additionally, she highlighted an upcoming Valley Health Alliance board meeting, emphasizing the ongoing challenge of ensuring employees utilize primary care rather than specialists to help control healthcare



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costs. Finally, she noted that due to spring break absences, updates from the marketing and finance committees will be provided next month.

Directors' Remarks:

Cristal Logan shared that the Aspen Institute recently launched an "Advancing Women's Health" speaker series, with plans to host three lectures annually, likely during winter. The inaugural event is set for June 12, featuring Dr. Mary Claire Haver, who enjoys a significant national following, which has already resulted in record registrations since the announcement. She noted a fortunate alignment with Aspen Public Radio's newly established women's desk—dedicated broadly to women's issues, not just health—which is notably the first initiative of its kind among public radio stations nationwide. Aspen Public Radio celebrated the launch of this women's desk just last week.

Bill Tomcich reported a busy winter season at the Aspen airport, though growth rates have slowed compared to last year, with February passenger numbers just 1.6% above the previous year on similar capacity. While January saw slightly stronger growth due to holiday shifts, he expects only modest, low-single-digit increases moving forward, as overall capacity has stabilized, particularly with Delta marking a full year of continuous service this April (excluding the upcoming airport closure). For summer, airline capacity and schedules closely mirror last year's, with United switching fully to the Embraer E175, while Delta and American will continue operating CRJ-700 aircraft. American resumes flights on June 4th, with United and Delta resuming June 2nd, alongside a few flights arriving the evening of June 1st when the airport reopens. Bill also highlighted improved pricing at Aspen Airport, noting fewer complaints and increased local use due to competitive fares compared to nearby airports. However, ground transportation remains problematic; Roaring Fork Express has discontinued service for this winter, leaving significant service gaps. Discussions are underway with potential new ground transportation providers to address both immediate needs during flight disruptions and long-term solutions ahead of planned airport closures next spring and potentially summer 2027. Bill concluded by noting the Embraer E175's performance remains strong, typically carrying around six more passengers than the CRJ-700, though its capabilities will be further tested during hotter summer conditions, especially with afternoon departures like the 2:15 PM flight to Houston.

Steve Skadron noted that the Colorado Mountain College (CMC) summer bulletin is currently being prepared and will arrive in mailboxes within three weeks. He encouraged everyone interested in popular courses such as cooking, sewing, guitar, or Spanish to register quickly, as spots fill rapidly. He also mentioned that CMC will host George Newman's transportation group, which is evaluating past and present transportation initiatives. Steve gave a friendly plug to support George's project, particularly addressing Torre and Patti. Additionally, Steve congratulated Torre on his tenure as mayor, acknowledging that the role is challenging and jokingly recalling Debbie Braun telling him to pack up and leave at the end of his own service. Humorously, he offered his assistance with moving boxes when the ACRA team relocates to the armory in April. Lastly, Steve emphasized his support for returning the local election to its traditional May date.

Justin Nyberg brought attention to the ongoing discussions about the North Star Preserve, emphasizing their relevance to ACRA members, particularly commercial guides and outfitters. He highlighted that every five years, the management plan for the Preserve is reviewed and updated, prompting recurring debates around its use and management. Current issues include concerns over paddle boarding and river access, potential wildlife habitat degradation, complaints from neighbors about visitor behavior and large crowds during peak times, as well as traffic and safety issues. Justin stressed that the best time for stakeholders to provide input and influence the plan is early in the drafting process rather than after decisions have been finalized, suggesting that ACRA may have a valuable role in this discussion.

Torre emphasized the importance of community participation in the upcoming election, underscoring that engagement itself matters more than choosing a particular candidate. Reflecting on his six years of service, he praised ACRA as one of the most effective and impactful organizations in Aspen, highlighting its admirable role in supporting the community during challenging times. He referenced a recent Aspen Times article about Snowmass's management plan, noting their shift from a tourism-first approach toward prioritizing community needs. Torre encouraged ACRA to continue fostering sustainability, affordability, and a cooperative downtown retail and commercial environment, emphasizing the need for balanced economic growth that doesn't sacrifice future opportunities. Finally, he expressed gratitude for his time serving alongside ACRA, affirming he will remain active and engaged in the community.



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Henning Rahm provided a quick update as the ski season winds down, mentioning closing dates: Buttermilk on April 6, Aspen Highlands and The Little Nell on April 13, and Aspen Mountain and Snowmass on April 20. He encouraged everyone to enjoy the remaining ski days, highlighting current conditions as good. Looking toward summer, Henning noted that booking pace seems solid, but he stressed continued efforts in marketing and sales to ensure strong and sustainable business. He pointed out a noticeable decline in private and social events, particularly weddings, compared to the post-COVID surge when couples frequently held events even on weekdays. Henning humorously reflected on how weddings are now moving back to traditional weekend schedules, indicating a broader trend or dip in demand nationally. Overall, he's cautiously optimistic but emphasized the importance of staying proactive and finding new ways to attract visitors throughout the summer.

Brenda Wild provided a detailed real estate update, referencing a recent annual event with experts like Lawrence Yun and Randy Gold. She noted uncertainty in the market nationally, emphasizing mortgage rates likely won't dip significantly lower—around 6% would be considered favorable. Locally, Aspen's average single-family home price is around \$16.9 million, with inventory lasting about 21.7 months. Snowmass Village experienced skewed high averages due to a couple of unusually expensive sales, averaging \$119 million, with about six months of inventory. Basalt saw a major drop to around \$695,000 due to limited sales, and Carbondale's average home sale price is about \$1.5 million with a 7.2-month supply. Brenda highlighted a general slowdown in sales and some price corrections but stressed that it's still not a buyer's market due to limited inventory. She explained the inventory shortage as partially driven by owners retaining properties as generational family assets rather than selling, common in resort markets. The transfer of wealth hasn't notably boosted inventory either, as younger generations prefer to hold onto these assets. Brenda also emphasized demographic shifts, noting the peak of baby boomers reaching age 65 in 2025, which will then begin declining, coupled with reduced birth rates, affecting long-term housing demand. She closed by mentioning her role with the Colorado Association of Realtors Foundation Board, encouraging the group to reach out if they knew nonprofits needing grants related to housing or housing education.

Heather Kemp provided an update highlighting several notable retail developments. Aspen and Carbondale's Ace Hardware stores now have new owners—the same individuals who own the Telluride Ace Hardware. She mentioned the closure of Aspen's AT&T store, noting this would leave the town without a dedicated cell phone store, which could become problematic given the high demand from visitors needing phone replacements while on vacation. Heather also pointed out Aspen Reprographics is relocating to the AT&T store's former area. Despite these changes, luxury retail remains strong, with premium brands like Dior opening pop-up stores at premium lease rates and Veronica Beard moving into the newly renovated former Hugo Boss location. Heather expressed interest in seeing more timely sales tax data to better understand local retail performance. Additionally, she shared concerns about ongoing tariff uncertainties, particularly affecting the floral industry due to fluctuating import costs from countries like Colombia, which could impact pricing for hotels, retail businesses, and ultimately consumers.

Patti Clapper shared several updates from her roles with the Board of County Commissioners and the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments Economic Development District. She mentioned an upcoming symposium in Silverthorne on May 1, highlighting it as an important event worth attending. Patti recounted her recent trip to Washington, DC, noting challenges related to securing frozen federal grants for transportation projects at the airport. She emphasized ongoing efforts and active support from local congressional representatives. Patti discussed significant concerns raised at a recent Northwest Colorado Council meeting, specifically restrictions on using certain words—such as "women," "climate," "diversity," and "equity"—in federal grant applications, a situation complicating funding efforts. She addressed complexities surrounding management at North Star Preserve, noting federal Forest Service involvement and potential staffing issues due to funding freezes, possibly affecting seasonal ranger presence. Patti also addressed concerns about potential closures at Independence Pass restrooms, pledging to follow up with the appropriate jurisdictions. On airport funding, Patti explained various grant applications in play, emphasizing their importance for planned improvements like intermodal transportation projects and runway enhancements. She noted strategic decisions by the county to keep grant applications active despite uncertainty at the federal level. Regarding the popular Maroon Bells area, Patti confirmed that contingency plans are in place, including maintaining the reservation system and securing alternate management support to ensure the site remains operational and safe for visitors. Lastly, she mentioned ongoing collaboration with the City of Aspen regarding appointments to the Airport Advisory Board, highlighting the importance of coordinating efforts between city and county appointments.

Diane Jackson provided updates from the airport, beginning by noting Dan Bartholomew's absence and expressing appreciation for his significant contributions. She mentioned Dan is stepping into the role of interim county airport manager, emphasizing he's still



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very involved in ongoing projects and will continue supporting the airport's initiatives. Diane reminded everyone of the airport's scheduled closure for the month of May, and highlighted preparations for the arrival of disabled veterans for ski week, acknowledging the significant collaborative efforts required from TSA and airport administration teams to manage this important event smoothly. She expressed gratitude in advance to all involved staff for their hard work and support during this busy period.

Julia Theisen shared that Snowmass is expecting a strong finish to the ski season with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) group coming in March 30- April 6th, followed by Mountain Travel Symposium (MTS) April 7-13th which will bring in over 800 representatives from the mountain travel industry. Snowmass is also hosting Burton Culture Shifters the following week. Looking forward to summer, we have a strong events line up with our signature events including the Thursday Night Concerts, the Rodeo, Heritage Fire and Labor Day JAS festival. This fall we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Snowmass Balloon Festival with special events as well as adding a new Oktoberfest event September 27-28th. The Destination Management Transition Plan has been presented in draft form, and we will be incorporating feedback from our stakeholders into a revised plan which will be presented later this Spring.

Nina Eisenstat reported that by and large, local service-based businesses are experiencing a strong season. Most are busy meeting customer demand and juggling staffing needs, while working hard to keep the current momentum going through the peak of summer. She also expressed concern about the potential sale of two downvalley mobile home parks, a development that highlights the ongoing challenge of preserving affordable housing in the valley. This issue continues to impact both the workforce and the broader community. Nina closed her remarks by offering heartfelt thanks to Torre for his dedicated service on the ACRA Board and his many accomplishments as Mayor. She acknowledged his deep passion and commitment to the community and noted that his presence and leadership will be missed.

Adjournment: Donnie Lee adjourned the meeting at 10:35 AM