



ACRA DEFY ORDINARY

ASPEN CHAMBER RESORT ASSOCIATION

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT | MEMBER SERVICES | SPECIAL EVENTS | VISITOR SERVICES

Board of Directors Meeting

Date: November 25, 2025

Aspen Meadows Resort

Present: Donnie Lee, Jeff Bay, Cari Kuhlman, Cristal Logan, Debbie Braun, Matt Cook, Heather Shapard, Lisa LeMay, Dave Ressler, Rachel Richards, Steve Skadron, Julia Theisen, Maria Ticsay, Justin Todd, Bill Tomcich, Brenda Wild, and Pete Yang.

Absent: Dwayne Romero, John Rigney, Diane Jackson, Patti Clapper, Nina Eisenstat, Alan Fletcher, Michael Goldberg, Tharyn Mulberry, Justin Nyberg, Henning Rahm, and Peter Waanders.

Staff: Jennifer Albright Carney, John Davies, Savannah Grant, Casey Graves, Julie Hardman, Nichole Hellinger, Athena Pantelas, Taylor Smith, Eliza Voss, and Liz Watson.

Call to order: Donnie Lee called the meeting to order at 8:54 AM

Approval of the October 28th Minutes: Approved

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest: None

Chair's Comments: Donnie Lee opened his chair remarks by noting a slight adjustment to the agenda to accommodate board members who needed to leave early. He emphasized that the board is entering a period of notable transition, with more turnover than the organization has experienced in some time, and acknowledged that elections are currently underway for members standing for re-election. He then took time to recognize several board members who are rolling off or nearing the end of their terms. Donnie thanked Dave Ressler for his steady leadership through numerous community challenges, highlighting his professionalism, calm demeanor, and grace, and expressed that he will be missed both on the board and in the community. He also recognized Justin Nyberg, who is completing three years of service and was unable to attend, sharing Justin's appreciation for the organization and pride in its direction. Donnie thanked Lisa LeMay for being a grounding and stabilizing presence on the board and for her service representing her constituency. He acknowledged Henning Rahm for his time and service, noting that his position will be filled through a future appointment by the ski company. Finally, Donnie recognized Alan Fletcher, confirming that he will remain on the board for one additional year before rolling off, and thanked him for his continued contributions.

Year-End ACRA Updates: ACRA's Year-End Update presentation was a full-team recap of 2025 results and a preview of what's coming in 2026, framed around how much the organization delivers "quietly and consistently" for members and the community. The Membership team (Savannah Grant) reported strong engagement and retention, with membership growing to 775 (up from 738) and retention at 93% (above national benchmarks), driven largely by programs members actually use (Business After Hours, quarterly ticketed events, committee participation, in-town visits, marketing support, and the SkiCo chamber pass program). They highlighted strong communications performance (59% e-news open rate vs. ~32% industry average), solid directory traffic (96,000 visits), and program wins like Destination Uplift, workforce appreciation efforts (over 1,000 frontline worker contacts), "7,908 reasons to spend local," and expanded Colorado Green Business Network participation; they also noted the business climate pressures members keep naming—workforce, housing, transportation, rising commercial rents—and cited local workforce indicators like 3.7% unemployment and ~602 job openings. Destination Marketing (Eliza Voss) connected all marketing work to the Aspen Destination Management Plan's pillars—address visitor pressure, enhance the Aspen experience, preserve small-town character—sharing that winter and summer performance were slightly up and winter 25/26 was pacing modestly up while watching broader travel uncertainty; they leaned hard into storytelling and video, launched a new "Bauhaus roots/slow travel" campaign with major media partners, continued always-on paid search while preparing for AI-driven search changes, and emphasized that social and paid campaigns are increasingly critical for driving traffic back to Aspenchamber.org as AI summaries reduce traditional clicks. PR and partnerships were positioned around sustainable tourism leadership, with broad media coverage, continued UK/international PR work with Snowmass Tourism partners, and sustainability actions including new Green Business Network enrollments, climate programs, mountain sustainability recognition, and hands-on public lands/trail stewardship support; they also called out air service work (including a new direct Charlotte route beginning in December) and ongoing collaboration on community transportation and "Entrance to Aspen" efforts. Special Events (Julie Hardman) highlighted the Food & Wine Classic's continued global profile (42nd year) and the scale of volunteer support (561 volunteers), plus city partnerships for July 4 programming and Pride, professional development through IFEA, and a teaser that a drone show is coming to Aspen in 2026; Wintersköl planning was also front and center, with tickets promoted and a fun new "cooler with Uller" theme. Group Sales (Liz Watson) emphasized ACRA's role as the "best first point of contact" for meetings and weddings, hosting 18 planners via fam trips/site visits, running sales missions in top markets, diversifying lead-gen (LinkedIn, retargeting, partner databases), and reporting strong performance: wedding pages remain top drivers, the testimonial page is now the second-most visited, they received 270 wedding info requests YTD (84% newly engaged), and the \$2,025 master account credit helped secure 14 groups generating over \$225,000 in lodging revenue for programs through 2027. Visitor Services (Casey Graves)



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outlined the four visitor center locations staffed by a small full-time team plus ~20 seasonal staff, noted retirements and eight new hires, shared how automated phone systems freed staff to handle more guest questions, and described training, team-building, and frontline worker appreciation efforts (like airport snack giveaways). Operations (Jennifer Albright Carney and John Davies) covered the big facilities story: the May move into the Armory due to the old Powerhouse being repurposed by the city, the Armory being a temporary home ahead of redevelopment, and a facilities task force touring 10 properties—culminating in ACRA being under contract for Obermeyer Place as a permanent administrative office home; they also showcased the visitor center branding refresh and Armory welcome experience upgrades (new signage, installations, and a cohesive “Bauhaus-inspired” look), plus internal improvements like a new AI-enabled video conferencing setup and activating lobby displays for destination marketing content, alongside a fall staff retreat focused on mission/vision alignment. The presentation closed with 2026 “coming attractions”: partnering with the City to take over evening activations on July 4 and New Year’s Eve, the 75th anniversary of Wintersköl (aligned with major statewide/national anniversaries) featuring a CTO-supported drone show, an accessible travel grant with Wheel the World, major research updates (transient inventory study and visitor profile study last updated in 2023; arts & culture economic impact last done in 2019), a new strategic plan called Aspen Forward (2026–2030), and early planning for airport communications/contingency work ahead of a presumed closure in 2027; Q&A touched on why dues revenue didn’t rise as much as membership count (mix of member sizes, attrition, and early-pay discounts) and the City flagged ongoing accessibility upgrades and coordination opportunities.

Finance Committee Q3 Update & Budget Approval: Cari Kuhlman provided a concise Finance Committee update, noting that the committee met on November 20 to review third-quarter financials and approve the 2026 budgets for both Destination Marketing (DM) and the Chamber. She emphasized that the two budgets are separate—DM is primarily funded by lodging tax and related revenues, while the Chamber is funded largely by member dues—and that overall financial performance remains strong. For Q3, the Chamber is ahead of budget, with revenues at approximately \$1.35 million versus a \$1.29 million budget, driven largely by strong member dues. Expenses remain on track, and the Chamber is projected to finish the year about \$50,000 in the black. The Chamber balance sheet shows roughly \$1.5 million in cash and minimal liabilities. Destination Marketing is also performing well, with \$3.8 million in income versus \$3.3 million in expenses and approximately \$3 million in cash on hand. Combined, the organization holds about \$4.5 million in cash, some of which will be used toward the purchase of a permanent administrative office. The proposed 2026 Destination Marketing budget is balanced at \$4.5 million, with only modest projected revenue growth. Despite taking on additional responsibilities such as Fourth of July and New Year’s Eve activations and funding several major research updates, the budget reflects limited new revenue and minimal contingency. DM will also cover 70% of the cost of preparing the new administrative office space. The board approved the 2026 Destination Marketing budget on a motion by Cristal Logan, seconded by Matt Cook. Cari then reviewed the 2026 Chamber budget, which is also balanced at approximately \$1.57 million and includes a 3% dues increase, lower projected interest income, and significant savings in healthcare costs following a switch from Aetna to UnitedHealthcare. The budget supports full staffing levels and includes the Chamber’s 30% share of the new office costs, as well as funding for the airport guest services program. The board approved the 2026 Chamber budget on a motion by Jeff Bay, seconded by Cristal Logan.

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