

**Board of Directors Meeting**

**Date: October 29, 2024**

**Zoom**

**Present:** Cristal Logan, Jeff Bay, Cari Kuhlman, John Rigney, Donnie Lee, Julia Theisen, Dan Bartholomew, Tharyn Mulberry, Debbie Braun, Patti Clapper, Matt Cook, Nina Eisenstat, Alan Fletcher, Michael Goldberg, Heather Kemp, Lisa LeMay, Justin Nyberg, Henning Rahm, Dave Ressler, Dwayne Romero, Steve Skadron, Maria Ticsay, Justin Todd, Bill Tomcich, Torre, Brend Wild, and Pete Yang

**Absent:** Heather Steenge-Hart

**Staff:** Jennifer Albright Carney, Bridget Crosby, John Davies, Savannah Grant, Casey Graves, Julie Hardman, Nichole Hellinger, and Liz Watson

**Guests:** Hannah Berman, Valerie Carlin, Tessa Schreiner, Maggie Tiscornia, and Halle Zander

**Call to order:** Cristal Logan called the meeting to order at 8:33 AM

**Approval of the September 24th Minutes:** Approved

**Disclosure of Conflict of Interest:** None

**Regional Early Childhood Landscape:** The presentation on the Regional Early Childhood Landscape highlighted critical challenges and potential solutions for improving early childhood care and education across the region, from Parachute to Aspen. Maggie Tiscornia, Director of the Confluence Early Childhood Education Coalition, provided an overview of the coalition's work, which began in 2017 to address the need for accessible and affordable childcare. Hannah Berman, representing Aspen One and a Basalt Town Council member, shared insights into how childcare shortages and high costs have impacted local employees, particularly women, noting that some have left the workforce due to the financial burden. Key challenges identified include a lack of capacity, with only 43% of children under five able to access licensed care programs. The shortage is most severe for infants and toddlers, with capacity varying across regions, from 53% in the Up Valley to 25% in the Colorado River Valley. The high cost of care further compounds the issue, as the median monthly income for families is \$7,500, while childcare for two children averages \$2,800—37% of household income. In Pitkin County, the cost is even higher at \$1,800 per month per child. This financial strain forces many families to have one parent leave the workforce, affecting business productivity and the regional economy. The lack of adequate childcare options results in an estimated annual economic loss of \$50 million for the region, including \$20 million in Pitkin County. Additionally, childcare educators face low wages, with a median of \$20 per hour, making it difficult to retain qualified staff. Many workers leave for higher-paying jobs or cannot afford to enroll their own children in the programs they teach. The coalition proposed a regional approach to address these challenges, focusing on creating flexibility for families and aligning efforts with the economic and community needs of the area. Funding priorities include providing tuition assistance, grants for providers to increase capacity and quality, better wages for educators, licensing assistance, and family support services. To achieve this, the coalition plans to establish an Early Childhood Special Tax District, enabled by state legislation passed in 2018 and 2019. While both property and sales tax options are being considered, preliminary modeling has shown higher public support for a 0.25% sales tax. Public feedback and financial modeling will continue through a planned December survey, with a potential ballot measure targeted for 2025. Concerns were mentioned about tax fatigue, suggesting caps, term limits, or exemptions for lower-valued homes if a property tax is chosen. Participants also stressed the importance of leveraging local funding to secure state and federal matches for capital projects. Existing efforts, such as Aspen Skiing Company's Tree House childcare facility and Basalt's exploration of the 2E parcel for childcare and housing, were discussed as examples of steps being taken. The coalition emphasized the need for sustainable funding to expand access, improve affordability, and retain qualified educators. Community engagement will remain a priority as the coalition works with stakeholders and local governments to secure support for this initiative. The presentation concluded by underscoring the importance of addressing these challenges for the well-being of children, families, and the regional economy.

**Colorado Green Business Network of Aspen:** The presentation highlighted the program's efforts to support and recognize sustainable business practices in Aspen and beyond. Tessa Schreiner, Climate Action Manager for the City of Aspen, detailed the program's objectives and impact. The network, a state-level initiative, partners with regional entities like Aspen to provide free technical assistance and sustainability consulting to businesses. The program focuses on a variety of sustainability metrics, including energy efficiency, waste reduction, employee well-being, equity, and leadership. It also offers businesses local and state recognition, access to resources, and eligibility for grants and priority permitting. In its first year, the program worked with three Aspen businesses—Bosq, St. Regis, and Mountain Flowers of Aspen—all of which achieved bronze-level certification. The process involved assessing their sustainability goals and providing tailored guidance to implement improvements. Participants noted benefits such as technical support, community recognition, and connections to sustainability networks. Schreiner emphasized that the program is inclusive, accessible to businesses of all sizes and sectors, and designed to meet businesses where they are in their sustainability journey. Community benefits include a healthier local environment, reduced waste and energy use, and alignment with consumer demand for sustainable practices, particularly from younger generations. The initiative also supports Aspen's broader climate goals, addressing the significant role buildings and businesses play in the city's greenhouse gas emissions. Feedback included suggestions to simplify access to rebates and assistance for small businesses and expand awareness of the program. Some participants highlighted the need for education to clarify the program's scope and encourage more participation. The program will continue expanding to involve more businesses in Aspen and across the region, with a focus on fostering sustainable practices that align with community values and climate action goals.

**Chair's Comments:** Cristal Logan welcomed attendees to the meeting and introduced Tharyn Mulberry, the new board member and Superintendent of the Aspen School District. She shared that she and Debbie had a lunch meeting with Tharyn to orient him to the board and expressed enthusiasm about his involvement. Cristal also mentioned that she recently convened a meeting with arts and culture organizations, including nonprofits and Belly Up, as part of ACRA's regular engagements to discuss innovations, challenges, and ways ACRA can support these groups. These meetings occur three times a year, and the most recent session took place last week.

**President's Comments:** Debbie Braun shared several updates, beginning with her appreciation for the rain in the Mid Valley and the hope for snow in Aspen. She informed the group that the Aspen City Council recently allocated approximately \$4.4 million for the destination management budget, with next steps involving budget drafts informed by input from the Marketing Advisory Committee. The Finance Committee will review the budgets on November 7, and final approval for the destination management and ACRA budgets will be sought during the November 26 board meeting. This meeting, which will also incorporate the Tourism Outlook Forum, will provide an overview of 2024 achievements and priorities for 2025. Debbie highlighted her ongoing collaboration with John Rigney on the Aspen Skiing Company agreement, addressing details around funding for the X Games and other winter events. She also mentioned her involvement in Pitkin County's Visioning 2050 initiative, noting its long-term focus and hoping it will be more straightforward than the airport advisory process. Emphasizing the importance of voter turnout, Debbie encouraged everyone to remind friends and family to vote, especially with the upcoming election. Additionally, Debbie discussed the chamber's partnership with the Valley Health Alliance to explore providing an ICHRA (Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangement) benefit for members. ICARA offers an employer-funded health benefit, allowing employees to purchase individual health plans using allocated funds, making it a viable alternative for small businesses that may struggle with traditional health insurance plans. Debbie concluded by welcoming Tharyn Mulberry to the board and expressing her enjoyment in meeting him recently.

**Marketing Advisory Committee Update:** Justin Todd provided an update from the meeting held in mid-October, focusing on two primary topics. The first was a presentation by Matt Woods from Queenstown, Aspen's sister city, on their ambitious destination management plan aimed at achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. Woods shared examples of community collaboration, such as eliminating single-use coffee cups, showcasing how businesses and residents aligned to meet sustainability goals. This tied directly to local efforts like Tessa Schreiner's sustainability initiatives, and there were discussions about how property managers and other stakeholders in Aspen could adopt similar practices. The second topic reviewed key performance metrics from the summer season, highlighting a 4% increase in occupancy and a nearly 2% growth in rates.

October was particularly strong for Aspen and Snowmass, with notable long-term growth in the shoulder season. Since 2007, occupancy in September has risen by almost 70%, and October by 50%, reflecting the success of targeted initiatives to bolster off-peak tourism. Other items discussed included the Petal It Forward campaign, which launched at this year's FOOD & WINE but didn't gain as much traction as hoped. Plans are underway to revitalize the campaign with a stronger focus on social media. The committee also reviewed the community utility of data shared by ACRA, such as occupancy rates and local event updates published on their website and in the local news. While this information is valued, it requires significant effort from the ACRA team to compile. Overall, the meeting covered successes, areas for improvement, and opportunities for greater alignment with sustainability and tourism growth goals.

#### **Directors Comments:**

**Torre** provided a brief update, highlighting key priorities from the city side. He emphasized the importance of voter turnout, echoing Debbie Braun's call to encourage people to get to the polls. Torre reiterated his opposition to larger planes and certain expansion aspects of the airport, advocating instead for a safer and more environmentally sustainable solution that works with the FAA to secure funding without increasing plane size. He also expressed support for Ballot Question 1A to address the housing crisis in the valley, noting its potential benefits for the entire community. Torre concluded by wishing everyone a great week and acknowledging that many will be relieved once the election is over.

**Patti Clapper** provided an update on Pitkin County's ongoing budget process, emphasizing that the county does not have the funds or bonding capacity to independently finance airport improvements, underscoring the need for external support. She stressed the importance of voter turnout, urging everyone to encourage staff, friends, and family to vote early to facilitate a smoother election process for staff and timely results. Patti noted the high volume of early voters at the county office and expressed appreciation for their participation. She concluded with a hopeful note about the incoming snow, mentioning that she had prepared her garden for winter and was ready for the weather.

**Alan Fletcher** provided an update on the Aspen Music Festival and School's planning and initiatives. He highlighted the completion of their budget and preparations for the 2025 summer season, which is shaping up to be very promising. The organization recently completed the first year of a three-year partnership with two renowned firms: TRG, an international ticketing and audience specialist, and 21C, a leading PR firm for classical music. TRG praised the festival's exceptional market penetration and is advising on programming and partnerships, including collaborations with ACRA, to increase awareness of the role arts and culture play in attracting visitors to Aspen. Meanwhile, 21C is providing guidance on audience development and building donor support. Alan also introduced a new initiative, Smart Start, an early childhood music education program designed by the Royal Conservatory in Canada. This program, a first for a rural district, provides interactive musical experiences for children as young as 18 months, accompanied by a parent or caregiver. For pre-K-aged children, the program offers supervised childcare integrated with music learning, which has proven social and educational benefits. The program will be tuition-based for families who can afford it, with full scholarships available for those in need. Initially, Smart Start will roll out from Glenwood to Aspen, with plans for broader expansion in the future.

**Bill Tomcich** presented recent research challenging claims about the potential influx of large private jets, such as Boeing Business Jets (BBJs) and Airbus Corporate Jets (ACJs), at the Aspen airport if expansion were to allow them. He provided detailed data to refute assertions that "hundreds" of such jets would fly into Aspen. Globally, only 317 BBJs and ACJs exist, with 140 BBJs and 95 ACJs still in service. Most of these are overseas, leaving just 32 BBJs and three ACJs in North America that could potentially operate in Aspen. Among those, many are corporate jets or charter planes, with only a handful privately owned. Tomcich highlighted a comparison with Bozeman, Montana, a larger airport with three times Aspen's private jet traffic, which sees fewer than 15 BBJ or ACJ operations annually. He concluded that the narrative suggesting a significant increase in these jets is "patently false." He also mentioned submitting an op-ed to local newspapers to address misconceptions and emphasized the importance of shifting the conversation as the election approaches. This information aims to clarify misunderstandings and reinforce the airport's current and potential capacity realities.

**Cari Kuhlman** provided a brief update, noting that ACRA's finances are in excellent shape. She mentioned an upcoming ACRA Finance Committee meeting scheduled for Thursday, November 7th, at 2:00 PM, inviting anyone interested to join for more detailed discussions.

**Dan Bartholomew** provided updates on Aspen airport developments. He noted that the E175 aircraft, which underwent ground testing and practice approaches recently, is expected to begin commercial operations in Aspen on December 3. The Airport Layout Plan has received tentative FAA approval and will proceed to the board for a first reading on November 6 and a second reading and public hearing on November 20. This plan is a critical first step toward modernizing the airport with a new terminal and upgraded airfield. He also cautioned about anticipated long lines at the airport this winter due to airline schedule compressions between 10 AM and 2 PM. To address crowding in the undersized terminal, temporary outdoor tents with heaters will be set up to accommodate passengers. Additionally, Dan acknowledged a worsening parking shortage at the airport, with efforts underway to collaborate with the parking management company and the board to address the issue. He apologized in advance for the challenges passengers may face with parking and lines during the winter season.

**Dave Ressler** highlighted the importance of voter participation, proudly displaying his "I Voted" sticker and sharing his personal support for the Coalition for a 21st Century Airport. He noted that this is the first time in his 20 years in Aspen that he has publicly supported an issue unrelated to health care, emphasizing his strong feelings about the future of air traffic in the community. Dave also expanded on Debbie Braun's explanation of the Valley Health Alliance (VHA) and the ICHRA (Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangement) benefit for employers. He explained how ICHRA can help address the health coverage gap for employees who lost Medicaid eligibility during the redetermination process following the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency. In Colorado, over 700,000 individuals were disenrolled from Medicaid, many of whom are employed but remain uninsured. He encouraged businesses and individuals to explore ICHRA to provide or access health coverage. He also highlighted the subsidies available through Connect for Health Colorado, which many may not realize they qualify for based on income levels. Dave invited anyone seeking more information to reach out to himself or Debbie to connect with the VHA for assistance navigating these options, emphasizing the critical need to ensure health care access for workers and the broader community.

**Dwayne Romero** provided an update on his work supporting Ballot Question 1A, which proposes dedicating property tax funding for 25 years to address the local housing crisis. He noted progress in the campaign, including door-knocking efforts in Aspen, Snowmass, Redstone, Woody Creek, and other high-density areas. However, he emphasized that the measure faces challenges despite its aim to support workforce housing and critical service workers. Dwayne outlined three main sources of pushback from voters: tax fatigue, concerns about the vague or non-specific language of the proposal, and frustration with other issues, such as the airport, leading some to reject all ballot measures except the landfill question. He acknowledged these challenges but expressed optimism, citing widespread support from jurisdictions and organizations, including ACRA's unanimous resolution of approval. Dwayne urged continued advocacy for 1A, emphasizing its role in providing sustained housing for critical employees and underscoring its development-neutral approach. While the measure won't fully solve the housing crisis, he stressed its importance in making meaningful progress for the community's workforce, friends, and family.

**Nina Eisenstat** expressed enthusiasm about Tharyn Mulberry joining the board, praising his strong community connections and reputation. She also echoed Justin Todd's comments on the Marketing Advisory Committee meeting, highlighting Eliza's excellent presentation on strategy and the robust data available to members on the website, which she encouraged promoting as a valuable resource. Nina found Matt Woods' presentation on Queenstown and Wanaka particularly compelling, noting the parallels with Aspen and Snowmass. She appreciated Queenstown's focus on regeneration, which emphasizes improving destinations beyond sustainability, and expressed hope for stronger partnerships given the similarities between the regions. She was especially intrigued by the concept of Whoosh, a cutting-edge gondola-like ride-hailing system that could offer innovative solutions to traffic and congestion issues in Aspen. Nina concluded by thanking Debbie Braun for facilitating this collaboration and expressing optimism for future developments.

**Brenda Wild** shared her enthusiasm for the wealth of information presented during the meeting and highlighted its relevance for the local business community. She mentioned the confusion surrounding the airport ballot initiatives, recounting her efforts to explain the issues during a morning workout, which successfully influenced one positive vote. Brenda then provided a comprehensive update on the real estate market across several areas. In Snowmass, the market is thriving, with the closings of Aura and Viceroy expected to impact future statistics. The average single-family home price is \$7.7 million (up 8.1%), with 22 sales so far in 2024 compared to 24 in 2023. Days on market decreased from 168 in 2023 to 135 in 2024. In Aspen, the average home price is \$12.5 million (up 2.7%), with 55 sales this year versus 66 in 2023, though days on market increased from 156 to 226. In Basalt, the average sales price is \$2.19 million (down 3.6%), with 24 sales so far in 2024 compared to 42 last year, and days on market increased from 121 to 147. In Carbondale, the average sales price is \$1.975 million (up 3.9%), with 99 sales this year compared to 103 in 2023, while days on market rose slightly from 130 to 140. Brenda observed that market activity has slowed significantly due to election-related uncertainty, with a more than 15% decrease in activity compared to the usual seasonal decline of 9%. She noted this "mental stop" among buyers as the primary cause of the slowdown. Brenda concluded by wishing everyone a fabulous rest of the week.

**John Rigney** shared updates on the excitement building around the upcoming winter season, noting favorable weather conditions for snowmaking, with crews mobilizing and anticipating a good run. He mentioned the arrival of new team members, likening it to a "freshman class" arriving in town, which adds a sense of renewal and energy each year. John emphasized the importance of voter turnout, noting efforts to encourage team members to participate in this critical election. He also discussed his recent presentation to Upper Valley elected officials at an EOTC meeting, where he highlighted the value of supporting mass transit for significant events like the X Games. He explained the multifaceted benefits of the event, including filling the town, generating global promotion for the resort, celebrating athletic achievement, and building a connection with younger audiences—an essential goal for the ski industry and other businesses. Additionally, John expressed gratitude for the community-wide support of the X Games over its 24-year history. He also shared that he had a productive meeting with Debbie Braun last week to discuss ways to make the afternoon blend program more effective and impactful, aiming to enhance participation and awareness. He concluded on an optimistic note about the season ahead.

**Lisa LeMay** revisited the earlier discussion on childcare, emphasizing the significant impact of staffing shortages. She shared an example from an employee, noting that one childcare worker typically cares for five children, meaning the loss of two workers eliminates spaces for ten children—a substantial effect. Lisa highlighted the reality of "wage wars" in the valley, where workers often choose jobs down valley offering \$19 an hour over slightly higher wages in town, due to the added burden of lengthy commutes. This wage competition affects all industries, from retail to hospitality, and underscores the broader challenges of attracting and retaining employees. She also reflected on October's activity in town, noting how events like soccer and hockey tournaments, as well as a gymnastics meet, brought energy and life to the area. While these events may not attract high-dollar spenders, they contribute to the town's vibrancy and sustain businesses and employees during the shoulder season. Lisa encouraged efforts to make October engaging and enjoyable for visitors, as every purchase, whether it's a slice of pizza or a t-shirt, supports the local economy. She concluded by expressing excitement for the upcoming winter season and wishing everyone a great week.

**Maria Ticsay** expressed gratitude for everyone's passion and dedication to the community. She emphasized that many voters are not deeply informed about the nuances of the issues and often rely on sound bites, which can be misleading. As an example, she mentioned hearing the misconception that voting on the airport would take away a long-held right, illustrating how such sound bites can influence decision-making at the polls. Maria encouraged attendees to engage in conversations with friends and others to clarify the real issues and counteract misinformation. She acknowledged the current barrage of election-related challenges but expressed hope that things would normalize after the election cycle concludes early next year.

**Justin Nyberg** shared an idea inspired by Hannah and Maggie's presentation on a special tax district for childcare. He suggested considering the creation of a special tax district dedicated to affordable housing that would span the Tri-County area, encompassing the broader commute region. While acknowledging the challenge of tax fatigue and potential resistance to additional special districts, he proposed that such a coordinated approach to financing affordable housing might address a

critical need before these issues escalate further. Justin expressed support for Ballot Question 1A in Pitkin County as a valuable local funding source for housing but noted the potential benefits of a broader, regional funding mechanism. He admitted uncertainty about whether this idea is feasible or has been explored before but encouraged further discussion and consideration of a unified strategy to tackle the affordable housing crisis. He concluded by leaving the idea open for others to pursue if it resonates.

**Jeff Bay** introduced himself in his new role as Western U.S. Estate Manager for Fernwood LLC, overseeing three homes in Aspen and Snowmass. He expressed enthusiasm about rejoining the Aspen community and remaining engaged with the organization and local initiatives. Jeff shared his voting intentions for the upcoming election, supporting Ballot Question 1C and opposing Ballot Measure 200, citing personal reasons aligned with community priorities. Reflecting on the day's discussions about environmental initiatives supported by the City of Aspen, Jeff raised a concern about the potential inability to advance similar efforts at the airport if adequate funding isn't secured through partnerships with the FAA. He emphasized the importance of considering this issue, given the community's focus on environmental sustainability. Jeff concluded by sharing his thoughts and appreciation for being part of the group again.

**Justin Todd** shared an article from Forbes highlighting the dramatic rise in home values in the region, emphasizing its implications for housing affordability. The article identified Carbondale, Colorado, as the top city for home value growth from 2004 to 2024, with a staggering increase of 460%. Other local areas like Rifle and Glenwood Springs were also included on the list. While this growth benefits real estate, Justin noted it poses significant challenges for providing affordable housing, especially for employees and prospective homeowners. He expressed gratitude to Patti Clapper, Dwayne Romero, and others for their efforts to address the housing crisis, emphasizing the importance of continuing these initiatives. Justin concluded by underscoring the need to keep housing affordability a priority in community discussions and policymaking.

**Pete Yang** shared that much of the recent conversation has revolved around the airport and the upcoming election, emphasizing the importance of voter turnout. Regarding the Colorado Green Business Network, he mentioned his dual roles at the bank as a loan officer and head of sustainability for the entire bank group. Pete offered to assist anyone with questions about sustainability initiatives, reflecting his expertise and openness to collaboration.

**Steve Skadron** provided an update on Colorado Mountain College (CMC) and its contributions to the community. He noted CMC's active role in early childhood education through its participation in the CECE group and its long-standing support of childcare programs, such as providing space for Kids First in Aspen. He acknowledged the high demand for childcare and the challenges faced by small businesses in the sector, reaffirming CMC's commitment to addressing the issue. Steve highlighted the Concurrent Enrollment Program (CEPA), which enables high school students to take college courses. This program accounts for nearly 40% of CMC's enrollment, making college more affordable and accessible for students in rural areas. He emphasized that while higher education faces national challenges, such programs demonstrate how the model is evolving to serve the next generation effectively. He also mentioned the success of the CMC Community Kitchen, where classes are consistently sold out. The upcoming CMC bulletin will include new course offerings, including the first food-and-wine pairing class, and he encouraged early registration due to high demand. On housing, Steve discussed a collaboration with the City of Aspen and the U.S. Forest Service to develop housing on a parcel made available through the Farm Bill. Despite progress, the project was paused due to the Farm Bill's expiration on September 30. Encouraged by stakeholders, including Senator Michael Bennet, to continue planning, Steve expressed optimism that the project will advance once the bill is reauthorized in the next one to two years. Steve concluded by reaffirming CMC's commitment to supporting the community through education, childcare, and housing initiatives, all aimed at improving the well-being of the region.

**Adjournment:** Cristal Logan adjourned the meeting at 10:14 AM