



ACRA DEFY ORDINARY

ASPEN CHAMBER RESORT ASSOCIATION

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT | MEMBER SERVICES | SPECIAL EVENTS | VISITOR SERVICES

Board of Directors Meeting

Date: October 28, 2025

Zoom

Present: Donnie Lee, Jeff Bay, Dwayne Romero, Cristal Logan, Diane Jackson, Debbie Braun, Patti Clapper, Matt Cook, Nina Eisenstat, Alan Fletcher, Michael Goldberg, Lisa LeMay, Tharyn Mulberry, Justin Nyberg, Dave Ressler, Rachael Richards, Steve Skadron, Julia Theisen, Maria Ticsay, Justin Todd, Bill Tomcich, Brenda Wild, and Pete Yang

Absent: Cari Kuhlman, John Rigney, Heather Shapard, Henning Rahm, and Peter Waanders

Staff: Jennifer Albright Carney, John Davies, Savannah Grant, Casey Graves, Julie Hardman, Nichole Hellinger, Karina Keller, Sarah Reynolds Lasser, Eliza Voss, and Liz Watson

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

Approval of the September 30th Minutes: Approved

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest: None

Latinos on the Western Slope Update: Alex Sanchez, President & CEO of Voces Unidas, provided the board with an overview of the organization's work serving Latino and immigrant communities across the Western Slope. He explained that Voces Unidas operates four nonprofit entities focused on advocacy, organizing, policy work, research, leadership development, and civic engagement, reaching 15 counties and more than 300,000 voters since its founding in 2020. With deep roots in the Roaring Fork Valley, the organization has played key roles in community crises—from running large-scale COVID-19 vaccination clinics to operating temporary shelters for asylum seekers and now managing a 24/7 emergency hotline alongside free legal consultations for Western Slope residents caught up in increasingly aggressive and often unlawful federal immigration enforcement. Sanchez shared data from the Colorado Latino Agenda research initiative, noting persistent economic and housing concerns within the community and widespread distrust of government and law enforcement, with half of Latino residents unsure where to turn during immigration emergencies. He emphasized the urgent need for competent legal representation for detained residents, the high cost barriers involved, and the opportunity for chambers and employers to help fund legal defense efforts. Sanchez also discussed the importance of outreach tools like bilingual “know your rights” door hangers, which he offered to provide to ACRA and its members for distribution. In response to board questions, he highlighted gaps in federal engagement—specifically Congressman Hurd's absence—while stressing the role business and civic leaders can play in advocating for practical, bipartisan solutions. He closed by encouraging stronger collaboration across sectors and reaffirmed Voces Unidas' commitment to community protection, accurate public information, civil rights enforcement, and long-term policy change.

Chair's Comments: Donnie Lee opened with updates from the nominating committee, noting that nominations are due November 10 and that several candidates—including Matt, Dwayne, Brenda, Justin, and Cari—are currently running unopposed, with one additional petition expected from the finance sector. He announced that long-serving board member Lisa LeMay will not seek reelection to the retail seat and offered sincere thanks for her many years of meaningful service. Donnie also highlighted the successful completion of Guest Service Appreciation Month, during which staff distributed more than 200 gift cards to frontline workers, and he thanked Debbie and Eliza for their strong work on the city council and destination management budget presentation. He noted that the strategic plan continues progressing, with next month's meeting—held in person at Aspen Meadows—extended to 11 a.m. to accommodate a joint discussion with MAC members and budget approval. He reminded the board that November will be the final meeting of the year. Donnie closed with comments on the business climate, acknowledging that macroeconomic conditions are creating some softness and variability in winter pacing across the lodging sector, though overall expectations for the season remain positive.

President's Comments: Debbie Braun began by acknowledging long-serving board members Alan Fletcher and Dave Ressler as they transition off the board, and she thanked them for their years of partnership. She noted that multiple petitions have now been pulled for the service, finance, and retail seats—an encouraging sign of strong engagement and interest in ACRA's work. Debbie reminded the board that the community is one week out from several major local ballot initiatives—including measures related to fire, schools, CMC, childcare, the airport, and the Lumberyard project—and encouraged employers to give staff flexibility to vote. She also highlighted the voter resources available on aspenchamber.org and referenced her recent grassroots TV interviews with ballot stakeholders. Debbie then walked the board through a preview of ACRA's next five-year strategic plan, Aspen Forward 2026–2030. Designed as a living, adaptable roadmap, the plan is structured around four guiding “compass” directions—stewardship and sustainability, community and culture, organizational excellence, and economic vitality. These directions are anchored by five draft strategic pillars: trusted information and storytelling; community and workforce support; destination management and sustainable growth; access and connectivity; and operational excellence and culture. She emphasized that the coming years will bring significant transitions for Aspen—from relocating ACRA headquarters and



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designing a new Armory Visitor Center, to navigating an eight-month airport closure and renewing major contracts—and the plan is built to help the organization stay resilient, steady, and community-focused. Debbie outlined a phased approach beginning with relocation and stabilization, moving into innovation and inclusion, and culminating in legacy and leadership by 2030. She noted that the board will engage in a vision and mission exercise in November, with the full framework launching in January alongside the newly seated board. Debbie closed by previewing the Wintersköl 2025 theme and button—Its Cooler with Ullr—and reaffirmed that Aspen Forward is meant to balance business success with community wellbeing and strong visitor stewardship, encouraging continued board input as the plan evolves.

Finance Committee Update: Donnie Lee reported that the Finance Committee met on October 14 to establish key assumptions for the 2026 budget. Staff, along with Debbie, are now drafting the full budget, which the committee will review later next month before bringing it to the full board for approval at the November 25 meeting. He also noted that ACRA issued RFPs to the banking community for financing related to the organization’s permanent home; six proposals were received, and the committee is in the process of narrowing them down, with final selections expected in the coming weeks.

Directors’ Remarks:

Justin Nyberg noted he needed to leave the meeting early but reiterated his interest in ACRA’s communication strategy for the 2027 airport closure, particularly how the organization will gather member feedback and understand concerns. He also voiced strong support for Mayor Richards’ emphasis on expanding affordable rental housing within the APCHA inventory, stressing that rental units are essential for both workforce stability and overall community vitality. He commended the focus on rentals at the Lumberyard project and thanked the group before signing off.

Lisa LeMay reported a quiet month for the downtown retail sector as shoulder season settles in. Many shops are taking advantage of the lull to complete remodels and prep for winter

Rachael Richards shared that the City of Aspen has wrapped up its budget process and is in a strong position heading into the next year. She announced that Pete Strecker has been officially appointed as city manager, removing the “interim” title he had previously carried. Rachel highlighted ongoing collaboration with Debbie on issues like Food & Wine parking, noting the city’s commitment to waiving fees where possible while avoiding spillover parking into residential neighborhoods. She strongly urged board members to help clarify for employees and neighbors that the Lumberyard housing project requires no new taxes and is designed to deliver much-needed affordable rental units—an essential resource for young workers, families, and long-term community stability. She emphasized the importance of rentals alongside ownership units, while also acknowledging structural challenges within Aspen’s older deed-restricted ownership inventory. Rachael closed by encouraging everyone to vote in next week’s election, especially on the airport bonding question—also a no-new-tax measure—and warned of misleading opposition ads circulating without proper campaign registration.

Patti Clapper opened by thanking Lisa LeMay for her service and energy on the board, noting she’ll be missed but never far. She mentioned that snowmaking has begun on Little Nell, signaling the fast-approaching winter season. Patti echoed Rachel Richards’ concerns about the misleading, unregistered opposition campaign against Pitkin County Ballot Question 1A and emphasized the importance of accurate information. She shared that Michael Goldberg suggested bringing ACRA and the broader business community into ongoing discussions about airport impacts related to the upcoming closure. Patti plans to coordinate with airport staff, city leadership, and Rachael to explore options—including potentially reduced parking rates during the closure—to support visitors who will need to drive. She closed with reminders about the election: ballots should now be dropped off rather than mailed, replacements can still be issued, and early in-person voting is underway at the county building. Patti signed off to head into budget meetings, inviting anyone who wanted to join.

Dave Ressler provided two key updates. First, he shared progress on Aspen Valley Hospital’s five-year housing plan, which leverages internal reserves and new debt to significantly expand employee housing. The flagship project is the Beaumont redevelopment, which will grow from 20 to 60 units. Following initial community feedback and revisions, the hospital is preparing for another public meeting before moving the project through Planning & Zoning and City Council. Dave noted they are requesting no variances and hope for an efficient approval process. He also previewed a second housing project focused on larger two-, three-, and four-bedroom units designed for physicians and staff with families. Second, Dave updated the board on the hospital’s CEO search. The process is being led by a broad selection committee chaired by John Sarpa and supported by community members—including Cristal Logan—alongside board, physician, and foundation representatives. Industry expert Ron Schiller is facilitating the search, drawing from national candidates with strong local ties. From an applicant pool of more than 65, finalists will be announced at the November 10 board meeting, with a final selection expected in December. Dave emphasized his confidence in the rigor and quality of the process.

Justin Todd echoed concerns about softening winter lodging pace, noting that while the festive holiday period looks solid for both Aspen and Snowmass, major pillars of the season are trending behind. Bookings for Aspen Gay Ski Week, MLK Weekend, and X Games are



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currently 7–15% down year over year, with another dip in early February. Pace recovers somewhat heading into Presidents Day, but spring break—particularly mid- to late March—is also significantly behind. He emphasized the need for everyone to keep a close eye on these trends as economic conditions continue to shift. On a positive note, Justin reported that the fall season is ending on a strong upswing for properties currently open, with activity well above pace. He closed by sharing that his new hotel, The White Elephant Aspen, officially opens February 3, marking an exciting milestone even though it will miss the holiday period.

Jeff Bay congratulated Justin on the White Elephant Aspen opening and thanked Lisa, Dave, and Alan for their service. He praised Debbie’s strategic plan presentation, especially the addition of the “access and connectivity” pillar, which he sees as essential to ensuring the plan is relevant, community-facing, and accessible to all who rely on ACRA. Jeff also encouraged the group to think not only about preparation for the 2027 airport closure but also about the communication strategy after the airport reopens—highlighting the importance of proactively educating the public on improvements, schedule changes, aircraft updates, and the broader benefits of the modernization project.

Bill Tomcich provided a comprehensive air service update, beginning with major fleet transitions already underway. United has fully retired its CRJ-700 fleet and completed its move to the Embraer E175, with seven brand-new aircraft delivered since December—one of which entered service this week and will soon serve Aspen. Delta will eliminate its CRJ-700s next Sunday, shifting both Atlanta and L.A. flights to the E175 as well. Looking ahead to the 2027 airport closure, Bill acknowledged the strong interest from the community and industry partners in developing clearer plans. To advance those conversations, he is attending the upcoming Takeoff Conference in Tallahassee to meet with American, Delta, Landline, and SkyWest, with 2027 planning as his top agenda item. He referenced Eliza’s city council presentation and noted the need to reconnect with Diane after new discussions with Landline. Bill reported improved operational reliability after a difficult summer marked by persistent high winds. September and October have seen excellent performance, with just one canceled flight. Airlines are prioritizing “completion” over cancellation even when diversions occur, and United recently announced its highest third-quarter completion factor in company history. Current air service is at its seasonal minimum—11 daily flights—but ramp-up begins December 2, followed by full winter schedules rolling out December 18–20. He also warned that parking at the Aspen airport is extremely constrained, urging travelers to build in extra time and have backup transportation options such as RFTA, taxis, or rideshare. In response to Rachael Richards’ question about the federal shutdown and air-traffic-controller staffing, Bill relayed that operations in Aspen and Denver remain unaffected so far, though both local tower leadership and United’s CEO have emphasized that prolonged shutdown conditions are unsustainable and could eventually impact system reliability.

Michael Goldberg noted that the business community is increasingly shifting from asking what will happen during the airport renovation to what if—specifically, what if the 2027 runway work is not completed by early December as planned. Because many local businesses rely heavily on early-winter revenue to recover from the off-season, he stressed that this uncertainty is top-of-mind. Michael urged the creation of a trusted, unified communication channel—ideally involving ACRA, the county, and the city—so the business community can understand the real risks, contingency plans, and operational scenarios if construction is delayed. He emphasized that industries like music and events must make booking decisions a year in advance, and having clarity about fallback options is essential. Michael also suggested that businesses need to know which hotels or venues may be closed during the 2027 period to accurately plan for demand and programming. Overall, he underscored the need for timely, ongoing, transparent dialogue between airport officials and the business sector, as 2027 is already weighing heavily on people’s planning.

Pete Yang noted that as a resident of the AABC/North 40 area, he’s increasingly aware of how concentrated the construction impacts will be in 2027, with the airport runway project and the Lumberyard development occurring simultaneously in the same corridor. He flagged this as a significant neighborhood concern after seeing visual renderings at the Afternoon Blend event. Pete also provided a brief banking and economic update: recent CPI data shows inflation ticking up again, which may prompt downward adjustments to interest rates in the near future. Lastly, he shared that during the federal government shutdown, several local banks—including Alpine Bank and Timberline Bank—are offering interest-free furlough loans for affected workers.

Alan Fletcher thanked the board for their kind words and noted that although he’ll eventually transition out of his role, he will remain in place for more than another year to ensure a smooth handoff. He shared that this is a key planning moment for his organization, with the upcoming year’s budget now completed and in strong shape. Alan previewed next summer’s theme, tied to the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and inspired by Walter Isaacson’s forthcoming book on what Isaacson calls the most important sentence in U.S. history—the closing words of the Pledge of Allegiance. The season’s theme will be “For All,” reflecting the enduring aspiration of liberty and justice for every American.

Steve Skadron reflected on a memorable early moment from his time as mayor, when Alan Fletcher invited him to speak at the Aspen Music Festival’s convocation—a daunting but meaningful experience that he still treasures. He offered warm congratulations to Alan and shared a lighthearted memory about gifting him oversized novelty glasses during one of those events. Steve then followed up on his prior



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comments regarding CMC's ballot issue 7C, praising Debbie Braun for her excellent moderation during their Aspen Public Affairs segment. He shared that a community member approached him afterward to say the discussion persuaded him to support the ballot measure—a testament to the impact of the program. Steve joked that Debbie even changed outfits for each ballot topic, keeping the presentation fresh. Finally, he announced an important development at CMC: the launch of a new civics initiative aimed at strengthening civic knowledge and discourse across its communities. CMC received an unexpected and highly competitive \$750,000 federal grant—spread over three years—from the U.S. Department of Education's Elementary and Secondary Education Division. The funding will support teacher training, public events, and potentially student trips to Washington, D.C. Steve emphasized that civics, at its core, is about understanding one's role and responsibilities as a citizen, and he looks forward to the Aspen campus being a hub for this work.

Julia Theisen praised Debbie and the ACRA team for the clarity and strength of their strategic framework, noting that its pillars align closely with the themes in Snowmass's destination management plan—particularly the balance between supporting businesses and supporting the broader community. She shared that Snowmass will bring its destination management plan to council for final approval next week, and much of the work is already underway. Several tactics focus on inclusivity and becoming a more welcoming destination, which she felt tied in meaningfully with Alex Sanchez's presentation earlier in the meeting. Julia also highlighted a major joint initiative between Snowmass Tourism and ACRA: participation in the Colorado Tourism Office's accessible travel program with Wheel the World. Starting in November, the six-month certification process will help ensure that both destinations better serve visitors and residents with mobility disabilities and receive placement on Wheel the World's booking platform. On the tourism outlook, Julia echoed Aspen's soft pace concerns. Snowmass is currently pacing 13% down in occupancy over the next six months, though higher rates are offsetting some of the decline, with RevPAR down about 6%. She noted a continued trend of unpredictability in bookings and shared that recent lodging meetings show similar apprehension heading into winter. While not alarmist, she acknowledged clear signs of softness and hopes for late-season pickup in the coming months.

Cristal Logan shared that the Aspen Institute is beginning its own CEO search following President Dan Porterfield's announcement that he will step down next summer. The search will be led by board chair Margot Pritzker, giving the organization ample time for a smooth transition. Cristal reported strong momentum across the Institute's year-round public programs, which span roughly 60 days of community events covering domestic policy, foreign policy, Shakespeare, great books, and leadership and values. She highlighted the continued success of youth programming, including the leadership seminar for students from Aspen to Parachute, as well as the Hearst Leaders Forum, which recently hosted a well-attended alumni gathering. Cristal also shared that she recently traveled to Washington, D.C. for an event with Justice Anthony Kennedy tied to the release of his new memoir. She then echoed concerns raised about the 2027 airport closure, noting that the Institute has already begun internal planning but emphasizing that the broader community needs coordinated, early action. She urged collective discussions around visitor messaging, hotel strategies, transportation options, and rumor control to ensure Aspen remains accessible and attractive during the disruption. Cristal welcomed hosting or participating in those conversations and thanked Bill Tomcich for connecting her with United Airlines to support that work.

Matt Cook said that taxi traffic and bookings—often a reliable bellwether for overall visitor volume—are showing the same softness that hotels and SkiCo are reporting. As a member of the ASE Multimodal Task Force, he offered to be a resource for anyone with questions about airport-closure planning and transportation impacts. Matt noted that there is a huge amount of information the community will need, and suggested that a dedicated, centralized committee—likely coordinated by ACRA—may be the most effective way to organize details such as which hotels will be closed, expected visitor patterns, and transportation contingencies. He highlighted how unpredictable the planning process is, particularly because airlines don't finalize schedules until about 13 months out, making it difficult for Diane and airport officials to provide definitive guidance. Matt emphasized the opportunity for a major win if a seamless bus-connection system could be built to move passengers from Eagle to Aspen during the closure, especially given Eagle's greater off-season capacity. He ended by expressing hope that Bill's upcoming airline meetings will produce more clarity and reiterated his willingness to answer airport-related questions from a transportation operator's perspective.

Maria Ticsay thanked the board for bringing in Alex Sanchez, praising him as a vital community leader and stressing the importance of making his information widely accessible. She suggested posting the recording of his presentation on ACRA's Public Affairs webpage and featuring it in the newsletter, along with contact information for Voces Unidas, so members know where to turn when urgent situations arise. Maria congratulated Alan Fletcher and expressed appreciation for the departing board leaders—including Lisa and Dave Ressler—whose service has been meaningful and inspiring. She also acknowledged the community's grief over the recent passing of Gideon Kaufman, calling it a reminder to enjoy the mountains while staying safe. Finally, Maria complimented Debbie and the team on the strategic plan, noting its thoughtfulness and the substantial work ahead—especially around airport communication and community change—before wishing everyone well.



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Nina Eisenstat reported that the services sector had a strong summer and fall, though there is cautious uncertainty about the months ahead. She praised the strategic plan update, especially the access and connectivity component, which she sees as essential given the major transitions facing the community. Nina emphasized how valuable the “what to do” messaging approach will be as Aspen navigates upcoming disruptions. She also reflected on the departures of several major community leaders—Dave Ressler, Alan Fletcher, and Dan Porterfield—along with board member Lisa LeMay. Nina noted that all three institutional leaders leave behind thoughtful, well-developed succession plans, a testament to their professionalism and high standards. She closed by expressing gratitude for their contributions and urging continued communication as the community works through numerous complex issues.

Diane Jackson offered several key reminders and updates related to the ASE airport projects. She thanked Bill Tomcich and Matt Cook for their support and acknowledged the complexity of the runway and terminal modernization effort, noting that Matt’s work on the multimodal task force has been especially valuable. Diane highlighted the next airport open house—held Thursday at the Hoffman—where updated concept designs and comparisons between the current airport and future possibilities will be shared. She urged board members and the community to attend, emphasizing the need for input on ground transportation, connectivity, and terminal design. She confirmed the spring 2026 closure schedule of April 23 at 9 a.m. through May 21, and said airlines have stopped booking flights during that period. Most travelers affected have already been contacted, but anyone who still holds tickets for that window should reach out to their airline to rebook. Diane also addressed concerns about the North 40/ABC neighborhood, assuring Pete that both the county and Atlantic Aviation are actively evaluating impacts and working to be responsible neighbors throughout the construction process. Finally, she warned about severe parking shortages at the airport. With no special events driving demand, the lots have been overflowing, and vehicles parked illegally—blocking walkways, fencing, or safe circulation—are being towed to maintain safety. She asked the community to spread the word and encourage travelers not to park in prohibited areas, despite the understandable pressure to catch flights.

Brenda Wild joined from the Colorado Association of Realtors Fall Conference and noted she’ll bring legislative updates next month. She provided a detailed snapshot of the regional real estate market, emphasizing an overall slowdown paired with persistent inventory shortages. Year-to-date, 2025 has seen 124 sales totaling about \$2.97 billion, compared to 785 sales and \$3.22 billion in 2024, with Brenda expecting a relatively quiet finish to the year unless a few major transactions shift the numbers. She reported that Aspen’s average sale price is now around \$20 million, with seven recent sales, sharply reduced days on market, and an average monthly rent of \$50,000. Snowmass is averaging \$5.8 million with five sales, lower days on market, and rents near \$40,000. Basalt sits at roughly \$1.6 million with eleven sales and rising time on market, while Carbondale averages \$2.5 million with seven sales, 95 days on market, and higher rental rates around \$12,000. Despite varied performance, the trend across all areas points to softening activity and extremely limited inventory, with future movement likely tied to anticipated Fed rate changes. Brenda closed by praising the morning’s presentation, stressing the importance of staying informed at the local level, and offering the full support of the Aspen Board of Realtors to help distribute Voces Unidas’ door hangers throughout the community.

Adjournment: Donnie Lee adjourned the meeting at 10:23 AM