



ACRA DEFY ORDINARY

ASPEN CHAMBER RESORT ASSOCIATION

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT | MEMBER SERVICES | SPECIAL EVENTS | VISITOR SERVICES

Board of Directors Meeting

Date: February 27, 2024

Zoom

Present: Cristal Logan, Jeff Bay, Cari Kuhlman, John Rigney, Donnie Lee, Rose Abello, Dan Bartholomew, Debbie Braun, Patti Clapper, Nina Eisenstat, Alan Fletcher, Michael Goldberg, Heather Kemp, Henning Rahm, Dave Ressler, Dwayne Romero, Steve Skadron, Maria Ticsay, Justin Todd, Bill Tomcich, Torre, Brenda Wild, and Pete Yang.

Absent: David Baugh, Matt Cook, Lisa LeMay, Justin Nyberg, and Heather Steenge-Hart.

Staff: Alycin Bektesh, Jennifer Albright Carney, John Davies, Savannah Grant, Casey Graves, Nichole Hellinger, Sarah Reynolds Lasser, and Eliza Voss.

Guests: April Long (WMR Regional Housing Coalition) and Ray Erku (The Aspen Times).

Call to order: Cristal Logan called the meeting to order at 8:32 AM

Approval of the January 30th Minutes: Approved

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest: None

West Mountain Regional Housing Coalition: April Long presents to the ACRA Board of Directors, highlighting the inception and mission of the WMR Housing, a newly formed nonprofit focused on regional affordable housing solutions. Long details the organization's genesis, tracing back to discussions in 2017-2018 between founders Bill Lamont and David Myler, who sought a regional approach to affordable housing beyond individual jurisdiction efforts. This initiative was shaped into a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2022, propelled by the significant impact of a global pandemic on housing affordability and supported by comprehensive housing analyses revealing a stark affordable housing gap. Long emphasizes the coalition's foundation on government agency membership, including municipal jurisdictions within the Roaring Fork Valley, Eagle and Pitkin Counties, Colorado Mountain College, and the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority, all contributing seed funding for 2024. The coalition's strategy pivots on data-driven solutions, aiming to complement existing affordable housing programs without direct involvement in land banking or construction. Presenting income analysis and housing affordability data, Long underscores the mismatch between median incomes and housing prices, particularly in Garfield and Pitkin Counties. This disparity has rendered homeownership increasingly unattainable, with significant portions of the population becoming housing burdened, spending over 30% of their income on housing. The presentation reveals a dire need for intervention to correct market distortions driven by external wealth, ensuring local income earners can afford housing within their region. This foundational overview sets the stage for discussing the coalition's proposed programs to address these challenges.

ACRA Member Services Profile: Sarah Reynolds Lasser and Savannah Grant provide an insightful overview of member services, underscoring ACRA's dedication to evolving with the needs of the business community. They focus on building connections, supporting business growth, and advocating for the interests of the Aspen business community. Sarah and Savannah highlight ACRA's role in creating opportunities and serving as a catalyst for business development. This commitment manifests through various initiatives aimed at education, providing exclusive benefits, and supporting the workforce. The presentation showcases Alycin Bektesh's efforts in covering essential business topics, with Savannah Grant's role in connecting with members to understand and address their needs, and Sarah Reynolds Lasser's focus on enhancing non-dues revenue and sponsorships. ACRA's member services are highlighted, including the introduction of the Aspen Atlas and a partnership with LOCL to improve Google business profiles. The membership analysis shows 770 members across different sectors, with an increase in dues collected, credited to improved networking opportunities, resources, awards, and public affairs initiatives. The staff outlines strategies for engaging new members, such as a quarterly outreach report to the board, emphasizing the significance of community connections and retention. ACRA's success in referring business leads, boosting online presence, and engaging members through social media is also detailed. Member feedback leads to tailored programming, including guest service training, professional development sessions, and the Aspen Learning Lab for enhanced local knowledge. The 2023 member survey results are shared, indicating overall satisfaction with ACRA's value, a positive net promoter score, and identifying staffing, transportation, and housing as top business challenges. A new member onboarding process is introduced to strengthen the bond within Aspen's business and nonprofit sectors, featuring personalized emails, newsletter recognition, social media acknowledgment, and board engagement strategies.

Chair's Comments: Cristal Logan expresses gratitude towards Savannah and Sarah for their insightful presentation, particularly appreciating the innovative approach of adding new members to the newsletter. She then transitions to highlight the vibrant activities and achievements within Aspen, expressing excitement for the upcoming World Cup event hosted by the Aspen Skiing Company, acknowledging its significance to Aspen's heritage and allure. Cristal extends congratulations to the Aspen Meadows team for the launch of West End Social, a new restaurant praised for its exceptional food and ambiance, encouraging everyone to experience it firsthand. She also celebrates the opening of the new Colorado Mountain College (CMC) location in Basalt, recognizing it as a valuable addition to the community. Cristal notes her recent engagements with arts and culture nonprofits, applauding their successful events and contributions to Aspen's vibrant scene, from the Dance Aspen performance to Jazz Cafe and other notable gatherings. Highlighting the importance of civic engagement, Cristal commends Alycin for including a civic engagement curriculum in the report, acknowledging it as an important resource developed by CMC. She concludes her remarks by congratulating everyone involved in these diverse initiatives for their roles in fostering Aspen's thriving community.

President's Comments: Debbie Braun discusses ACRA's active role in supporting the community and enhancing the small-town character of Aspen through various initiatives. She mentions ACRA's gesture of appreciation for the organizations and employees at the Pitkin County Airport by providing breakroom snacks, recognizing their efforts amidst operational challenges. This act is part of ACRA's destination management plan aimed at supporting frontline workers who assist with local travel. Additionally, Debbie highlights ACRA's Wintersköl sponsorship of the First Friday Uphill Breakfast on January 12, which served as a significant community gathering. ACRA took the initiative to sponsor the event for the remainder of the season by offering a 50% discount on breakfasts, reinforcing the importance of preserving small-town character and fostering community spirit. The positive feedback received at info@aspenchamber.org underscores the community's appreciation for these efforts. Debbie also introduces the launch of a Community Dashboard as a result of the destination management plan's 360-degree feedback mechanism. This dashboard, featured in The Daily News and distributed to members, provides a preview of the week ahead with information on occupancy rates and other metrics to help residents and visitors navigate the community more effectively. This initiative, which has been in discussion for 8 to 10 years, aims to offer tips and tricks for community mobility, such as using public transportation during high occupancy periods. Debbie invites feedback on the dashboard to refine and tailor it to the community's needs, emphasizing ACRA's commitment to enhancing the living and visiting experience in Aspen.

Directors' Remarks:

Patti Clapper expresses gratitude for the minimal noise disruption and successful management of traffic during the Palm Tree Festival near her home in Aspen. She highlights the positive impact of the event on local businesses, noting an increase in sales, and thanks the organizers, Belly Up and Michael Goldberg, for contributing to another successful local event. Switching to legislative matters, Clapper updates on Senate Bill 33 concerning short-term rentals, which may turn into a study for the next year. She emphasizes the importance of monitoring the bill due to potential heavy amendments and its implications for property tax assessments on short-term rentals, which could significantly affect Snowmass Village, Aspen, and parts of Basalt. Clapper mentions Pitkin County's legislative liaison, Levi, who is tasked with keeping the Board of Commissioners informed on this and other legislative issues. She also discusses House Bill 1299, which addresses the property tax treatment of short-term rental units, particularly those not used as the owner's primary or secondary residence. Clapper stresses the need to stay informed about this bill's progress and its potential impact on the community. Lastly, she acknowledges the various bills currently in circulation and assures that Levi will keep an eye on matters relevant to ACRA, inviting members to stay engaged and informed about these legislative developments.

Torre begins by echoing Cristal's comprehensive remarks, appreciating her ability to touch on nearly every aspect of Aspen's vibrant life filled with fun, activity, excitement, and recent great snowfall. He decides not to add further comments, instead thanking Patti for her legislative updates and encouraging everyone to safely enjoy the snow. He concludes with a note of positivity about the joys of living in Aspen, Colorado.

Alan Fletcher announces the Aspen Music Festival & School's 75th anniversary season for the upcoming summer, highlighting it as the most remarkable season in his two decades. He appreciates the recent presentation on housing and shares plans for major housing projects on land owned by the AMFS, underscoring the commitment to addressing the crucial housing challenges in the community.

Bill Tomcich discusses the Aspen airport's record passenger numbers in 2023, which slightly surpassed the 2019 record by three-tenths of a percent, attributing this achievement to the reliability of flights during the holiday season and additional flights in spring, summer, and fall rather than winter. He highlights the increased local usage of the airport, with more locals from the Roaring Fork Valley and beyond using it due to the expanded year-round service, as evidenced by parking data and other indicators. Tomcich updates on the peak winter schedules extending into April, with United, Delta, and American extending their full winter schedules beyond previous years and maintaining certain flights year-round. United will focus on Chicago as a year-round destination, supported by eight daily flights from Denver, marking an increase in spring season flights. He notes the airport's closure from May 6 through May 23 for annual maintenance, with future spring closures planned. Additionally, Tomcich mentions Aero's operation of up to nine segments per week to Van Nuys and Dallas, offering a high-end public charter service. He reassures that despite the temporary airport closure, airline capacities are robust for the spring, with United resuming full summer schedules immediately after the airport reopens on May 24, American on June 5, and Delta offering year-round service for the first time.

Brenda Wild provides an update on the real estate market, sharing insights from a recent overview presented at the St. Regis with Elliot Eisenberg and Randy Gold. The discussion included the national economy's impact on real estate and the mixed messages regarding a potential recession. Despite uncertainties, the housing market appears strong, with sales throughout competitive resort areas increasing. Randy Gold's data suggests a positive outlook for the year, predicting sales could surpass the \$100 million mark. The current year has already seen remarkable sales, totaling \$409,310,333 from 127 transactions, with a noteworthy sale in Woody Creek at \$14,350,000 and the highest year-to-date sale in Snowmass Creek at \$34 million. Wild also reports on specific areas: Carbondale's inventory is down with an average sale of 2.3 properties, Basalt experienced a 33% decrease with no significant sales in January, and Snowmass shows a 3% increase with a median house price of \$6.2 million. The overall message is optimistic, indicating a robust real estate market for 2024.

Cari Kuhlman shares that she doesn't have much to report for this month's meeting, noting that ACRA's finances are in good shape, as recently reviewed at the Wintersköl luncheon. She expresses her satisfaction with being part of the meeting and excitement about the various activities happening in town, as highlighted by others, including Cristal, and the active involvement of nonprofits. Kuhlman concludes by expressing her happiness about the additional snowfall.

Dan Bartholomew announces his upcoming trip to Washington D.C. with Commissioners Clapper and Jacoby, County Manager John Peacock, to discuss airport issues with the federal delegation, FAA, and EPA, hoping for productive conversations. He mentions a joint BOCC and Airport Advisory Board meeting on March 12 to discuss alternatives for the airport layout plan, addressing changes in direction based on feedback from a January 29 meeting with the FAA. Bartholomew highlights an FAA communication stating no further funding for airfield pavement maintenance after this year, due to the pavement's condition and subsurface issues, indicating a need for full reconstruction. He notes the financial impact this will have on the airport's budget. Bartholomew concludes by encouraging sign-up for the airport newsletter for insights on airport operations and future developments, directing to the website's News tab for subscription.

Dave Ressler expresses gratitude for April's presentation and acknowledges the compelling data and ongoing efforts to find solutions to shared challenges. He updates on healthcare and the hospital, mentioning that parking at AVH is currently strained due to blocked off areas, which is part of efforts to manage space effectively. However, the positive aspect is this disruption signals the start of the fourth and final phase of the hospital's reconstruction and rehabilitation project, part of a master facilities plan initiated in 2005, made possible by community support. This final phase, expected to complete in a year, will feature a new front lobby designed to enhance accessibility, convenience, and aesthetics, eliminating the need for navigation through the current complex layout. Ressler thanks the community, including philanthropic supporters and taxpayers, for their role in realizing this long-term project and looks forward to its completion.

Jeff Bay expresses satisfaction with the lodging sector's performance, highlighting a successful February that exceeded expectations, despite the lack of year-over-year data due to being closed the previous year. Both January and February performed better than anticipated, with March also forecasted to surpass projections. This success is attributed to favorable snow conditions and a vibrant calendar of events and activities in town. In contrast, he notes that one of their properties in Ketchum is not experiencing as strong a season, due to less snowfall and a less active event calendar, as well as transitions within their local marketing organization. This comparison heightens his appreciation for the effective work and the valuable benefits provided by his current organization,

emphasizing the importance of community cooperation and participation. Jeff mentions upcoming World Cup events in March, with Sun Valley Resort principals planning to visit Aspen to observe and potentially learn from their success, highlighting the community's role as a model of success. He concludes by expressing excitement about being part of such a vibrant community and anticipates a strong end to the season.

Dwayne Romero updates on his involvement with the Public Affairs Committee, highlighting his anticipation for the upcoming meeting on March 14. He mentions communication with Alycin about a group of construction community members eager to engage in discussions on policy and land use code, indicating a forward movement in these talks. Additionally, Romero shares his pride in the Romero Group's contributions to regional housing efforts, notably their donation of six development lots to Habitat for Humanity in New Castle. This gesture is part of their involvement with the West Mountain Regional Housing Coalition and reflects their commitment to community support through housing initiatives, emphasizing the significance of their participation in a larger, mixed-use community project approved last year.

Heather Kemp reports a successful January and February at Sashae, attributing the success to the stock market and increased consumer confidence, which she believes benefits the entire town. She notes the challenges of dealing with inflation in pricing retail products, reflecting on the effect of inflation on 2023 profits compared to 2022. Kemp, along with Alycin and Lisa LeMay, has been reaching out to retailers to support the airport terminal project, focusing on educating about the benefits of larger jets and addressing concerns regarding the private aviation sector. She highlights the luxury retail sector's support, emphasizing the positive economic impact on the local economy. Kemp commits to rallying more support for the new terminal by reaching out to retailers directly, aiming to gather more backing before the March 12 meeting.

Henning Rahm echoes Jeff's positive sentiments about the season's success. Rahm highlights the high visitation levels and successful business, especially at the airport, with March also looking promising for guest bookings. He mentions the beneficial impact of a recent snowstorm on the remainder of the season, despite possible delays in arrivals. Rahm notes the busy and steady business environment, particularly over the President's weekend, and anticipates continued success during the upcoming World Cup events. He specifically mentions the Limelight Snowmass, which has experienced a record month with close to 90% occupancy, underscoring the town's enduring appeal and the overall positive performance of the local tourism and hospitality sector.

Justin Todd reflects positively on the current hotel performance, noting a recovery in February from a downward trend that began in January. He highlights the diversity of guests visiting Aspen, attributing this to various festivals and events, and commends everyone's support for these activities as crucial for shared success. Todd observes that Snowmass is pacing ahead of Aspen in terms of bookings up until March 23, after which Aspen's bookings rebound through the end of the month. He anticipates this trend might extend into early to mid-April but expects a significant downturn in May due to seasonal closures, impacting hotels that remain open. Additionally, Todd shares the successful opening of the new restaurant and lounge, West End Social, at the Aspen Meadows, inviting everyone to visit and expressing gratitude to those who attended the launch event.

Maria Ticsay expresses gratitude towards the city for providing a platform that allows business members to engage in the parking and transportation study. She highlights the importance of collaboration between the city and businesses to enhance conditions conducive to business growth. Maria anticipates the report to the City of Aspen in April, noting significant member participation in this crucial issue. She thanks the city for its cooperation and specifically appreciates Alycin Bektesh for her overwhelming effort in managing the process, emphasizing the hope for a future with fewer operational challenges.

Nina Eisenstat reports that the services category is thriving, particularly highlighting the success of President's week and the anticipation for the World Cup. She notes the season has been very successful for her category and mentions the early promotion of summer events like Jazz Aspen, the music festival, Food & Wine, and Ideas Fest, which is expected to boost visitation. Eisenstat commends Sarah and Savannah's presentation, suggesting its promotion to the membership to showcase the organization's resources. She praises Eliza and her team for sponsoring the Buttermilk breakfast, emphasizing its significance to the community. Lastly, Eisenstat acknowledges Rose's contributions and expresses appreciation for her work in Snowmass, marking Rose's retirement as a loss to the board but celebrating her achievements and wishing her well for the future.

Pete Yang shares that there's not much to report on the local banking industry, noting its close ties to the real estate market and thanking Brenda for her real estate market overview. He emphasizes the significant impact of housing on employee retention, stating that stable and affordable housing has been crucial for maintaining consistent staff, while unstable housing situations have led to staff losses. Yang highlights the importance of affordable employee housing in the region as critical. He also mentions the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), explaining that banks are incentivized to engage with low to moderate income projects, like those mentioned by Dwayne, such as Habitat for Humanity. This incentive encourages banks to seek CRA credit and projects, underlining the banking sector's efforts in this area.

Rose Abello shares her mixed emotions about transitioning from her role, noting it's bittersweet but also exciting. She reassures everyone that she's staying in the valley and anticipates seeing familiar faces around. She provides an update on January's performance, mentioning a slight decrease in room nights sold by about 1%, but an increase in Average Daily Rate (ADR) by 8%, leading to a 7% increase in Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR). The tax revenues for 2023, which fund tourism initiatives, are up by about 10%, contributing an extra \$1.2 to \$1.3 million. Additionally, \$5 million has been allocated from the tourism fund to a housing initiative, maintaining a healthy budget of around \$10 million. Abello highlights that Snowmass's softer bookings for the last week of March allowed the Disabled American Veterans event to be rescheduled to March 31, benefiting from higher-rated business during Semana Santa. This scheduling contributes to an 82% year-over-year increase in April bookings, promising a strong season finish with the NASCAR nationals following the DAV event. She also mentions the World Cup opening ceremonies in Snowmass, encouraging attendance for the celebrations. Abello introduces her successor, Julia Theisen, who starts on Thursday, coinciding with a tourism talk that will serve as a welcome event, available both in person and online. Abello looks forward to spending time with Theisen during the transition and expresses gratitude for her experience on the board. She anticipates engaging more in volunteer activities and community events now that she'll have more free time, thanking everyone for their support.

Steve Skadron expresses gratitude towards Rose Abello for her contributions and looks forward to working with Julia Theisen, highlighting the smooth transition. He praises the member survey conducted by Sarah, Savannah, and Alycin, particularly noting the positive response to the value question. Skadron commends Eliza for her work on the Friday uphill event, emphasizing its importance in preserving community spirit, especially after a pricing issue early in the year. He shares his involvement in developing a program at Colorado Mountain College (CMC) focused on soft goods manufacturing, which is an extension of public policy efforts and will sponsor the "Green is the New Black" fashion show in Carbondale. This initiative is part of Skadron's broader philosophy of integrating community and programming, as demonstrated by CMC's activities in the Aspen and Carbondale areas. Skadron mentions the opening of Morgridge Commons Basalt, a new community space in Basalt, reflecting CMC's commitment to the Mid Valley region. He also announces the opening of the Aspen Kitchen, which aims to be a communal gathering spot offering cooking classes. Furthermore, he notes that the CMC culinary program will support the Food and Wine Classic, with students and faculty preparing food behind the scenes and interacting with prominent chefs. Finally, Skadron addresses a protocol matter regarding media presence at meetings, suggesting that it might not be appropriate for media to ask questions during scheduled times and recommending that they follow up afterwards.

John Rigney expresses his excitement for the upcoming World Cup event, noting that scheduling the race seems to have brought snow, which they are now clearing for a fantastic racecourse. He details the race schedule starts at 10 AM on Friday and Saturday, and 9 AM on Sunday, with second races at 1 PM on Friday and Saturday, and noon on Sunday. He mentions that programming will be in place wherever attendees park, promising great acts each night, tons of activities, a drone show, and awards. Rigney highlights the community-wide effort behind organizing the event, thanking the chamber, lodges, and various businesses for their support. He anticipates a great show with good weather and is excited to have the world's best athletes competing in their backyard. He keeps his message brief but emphasizes the importance of community participation, noting that the grandstands and Wagner Park are free and open to everyone, encouraging everyone to attend and enjoy the event.

Adjournment: Cristal Logan adjourned the meeting at 10:17 AM