Business Advocacy
ACRA Member Questionnaire
March 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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In January 2007, Aspen Chamber Resort Association formed a Public Affairs Committee designed to educate on and advocate for community issues that most affect the working success and viability of Aspen's local businesses.

Among the committee's early initiatives was commissioning a member survey to help ACRA better understand the opinions and positions of members on the following hot-button topics in town: the entrance to Aspen, parking, zoning and land use, and construction pacing. Ultimately, this Business Advocacy Survey sought to outline and illuminate the position members would like ACRA to take on these issues.

This report is a summary of the survey results.

An electronic invitation was initially sent to 564 ACRA businesses on March 1, 2007, requesting members link to an online survey. The approximately 240 members for whom no e-mail address was available were mailed a hard copy of the survey and asked to fax the completed questionnaire back to ecoe marketing, inc. A total of 149 completed surveys were returned(19% response rate) —124 via e-mail and 25 via facsimile—by April 2, 2007.

Bearing in mind the relatively small sample size of member survey respondents—and subsequently the small size of response sub-groups—this executive summary should serve as a directional, rather than definitive, resource for assessing member opinion.

Respondent Profile

The distribution of respondents by business category is as follows:

Business Category	%
Professional/Real Estate	20
Lodge or Property Management	17
Service Building Trades	14
Non-Profits/Government	13
Retail	12
Marketing/Advertising/Public Relations	7
Finance/Insurance	6
Restaurant	6
Entertainment/Recreation	2
Other	7

Note: the above somewhat accurately represents the distribution of businesses across categories for Chamber membership at large, with the professional/real estate and lodge or property management sectors slightly *over*represented and the service sectors somewhat *under*represented.

The majority of questionnaires returned (80%) were completed by members who identified themselves as "owners" or "general managers". More than half of survey respondents (59%) represent businesses operating in Aspen for 10 or more years; 12 percent represent fairly new businesses, operating in Aspen for fewer than two years; and 29 percent of respondents have been in business for more than two years but fewer than 10 years.

Forty-four percent of survey respondents own their business spaces and 56 percent rent their spaces. Twenty-two percent represent companies with 20 or more employees; fourteen percent come from companies with 11-20 employees; and the majority of respondents (63%) represent businesses with 10 or fewer employees.

The minority of respondents (40%) indicate an eligibility to vote in city elections. Moreover, 21 percent of respondents say none of their employees is eligible to vote in city elections, and 32 percent of total respondents report that less than 25% of their workforce is eligible to vote. The reader should extrapolate these findings keeping in mind the many variables that confound these statistics. Respondents to the survey were, at best, estimating their employees' voting eligibility and were often representing hundreds (and in a few cases, thousands) of employees; a small error in their estimation could have large consequences. Moreover, respondents may have misinterpreted eligibility for being a "registered" voter or confusing eligibility in county elections with eligibility in city elections.

KEY FINDINGS

Current Business Climate

- Aspen business says it is booming. The vast majority of respondents (82%) report their company's financial performance over the past twelve months to be *excellent* or *good*. Only three percent describe their financial performance as *poor*.

ACRA's Role: Representing the Interests of Local Business with Government

- Survey findings suggest ACRA's new political advocacy platform is a welcome addition to ACRA's mission. **Ninety-one percent feel it is important that ACRA be involved in representing the interests of local businesses with government**.

- But the fact that ACRA has little experience serving in this capacity is apparent: **only four percent of survey respondents describe ACRA as performing *extremely well* with respect to promoting the interests of local business with government**; 20 percent describe ACRA as performing *well*; 38 percent say *satisfactorily*; 23 percent say *poor*; and six percent say *very poorly*.

- **Registered voters tend to rate ACRA's performance in this arena lower than ineligible voters:** thirty-nine percent of voters access ACRA as *fair* or *poor* versus 24-percent of non-voters.

Major Issues Affecting Long-term Success of Aspen Businesses

- Chamber members clearly view transportation and transportation management as the biggest issue facing the Aspen community. **More than three-quarters (76%) of respondents identify transportation as a *major issue*.** The longer you have done business in Aspen, the bigger this issue is: there is a positive correlation between how long members have been in business and their likelihood to identify transportation and parking as *major issues*.

- A neighboring tier of issues—all similarly designated as *major issues*—include parking (60%), affordable housing (59%), and attaining/retaining a skilled workforce (59%).

- Other issues viewed as being less of a *major* impact on the long-term success of local business include tourism marketing (54 percent), construction and building impacts (50%), rising cost of health care (50 percent), zoning and land use (48 percent), and environmental impacts (42 percent).

- In the list of community issues, daycare services and immigration were generally not considered *major issues*.

Major Issues Affecting Long-term success of Aspen Businesses	**%**
Transportation	76
Parking	60
Affordable Housing	59
Attaining/Retaining Skilled work-force	59
Tourism Marketing	54
Construction/Building Impacts	50
Rising Cost of Health Care	50
Zoning and Land Use	48
Environmental Impacts	42
Immigration Regulation	22
Daycare Services	19

A Parking Garage in the Downtown Core

- **The majority (72 percent) of surveyed members favor a parking garage in Aspen's downtown core, three-quarters of whom selected Wagner Park as their preferred location.** Twenty-six percent of respondents feel another location is more desirable; most recommend the Airport Business Center or an underground garage "under any park in Aspen."

Entrance to Aspen

- Members are split on their opinions regarding proposed solutions to the entrance to Aspen problem. Some may not see it as much of a problem at all: twelve percent say leave the S-curves as is, allowing only minor improvements. **Other members are slightly more inclined to favor four lanes with no HOV/bus restrictions (41 percent) over the "preferred alternative" (34 percent)**—two general traffic lanes and two bus lanes on a curved alignment, with possible light rail, across the Marolt-Thomas property. Still, 16 percent offer other solutions, including "implementing a train system" or creating "four lanes plus a bus lane".

- As depicted in the table below, **members who are eligible voters tend to favor the preferred alternative, while ineligible voters tend to favor four lanes with no HOV/bus restrictions**. Ineligible voters are least likely to support the status quo S-curve-entry.

	Total	Eligible Voters	In-Eligible Voters
	%	%	%
Four lanes, no HOV/bus restrictions	41	30	49
Two general traffic lanes and two bus lanes on a curved alignment, with possible future light rail, across the Marolt Thomas property	34	41	29
The current S-curve entry with minor improvements	12	20	7
Other	16	14	16

Zoning and Land Use

- Approximately four out of ten survey respondents (42%) believe that with respect to zoning and land use, additional regulations are needed to ensure buildings make a positive contribution to the community. Twenty-two percent do not feel changes to the existing zoning and land use regulations are needed, but 16 percent argue development should be tightly restricted.

Construction Management: A Pacing or Lottery System

- While 42 percent of Chamber members do not believe a pacing or lottery construction management system is necessary in Aspen, 51 percent do believe one *should* be employed—a third of whom (33 percent) say this system should be required only of commercial projects, and two-thirds of whom (67%) say this system should be for all types of projects including residential and affordable housing projects.