

Visit Grand Junction
Advisory Board of Directors Meeting
November 12, 2019

Holiday Inn & Suites Grand Junction Airport
2751 Crossroads Blvd.
Grand Junction, CO

Presiding: Britt Mathwich

Visit Grand Junction Board Members Present: Zeb Miracle, Paul Petersen, Ken Mabery

Grand Junction City Councilmember Present: Phyllis Norris

Visit Grand Junction Board Members Absent: Tammy Anderson, Julie Schafer, Kevin Reimer, Josh Niernberg,
Mikhail Blosser

Guest Presenters: Renee Wheelock – Greater Grand Junction Sports Commission,
Nathan Souder – Colorado National Monument

Staff Present: City Manager Greg Caton, Elizabeth Fogarty, Leslie Dysart, Ciara DePinto, Kim Machado, Kerry Graves

The meeting was called to order at 3:06 pm. A quorum was not present for the meeting.

Due to the lack of a quorum at this meeting, approval of the October 8, 2019 minutes will be considered at the December 10, 2019 Board of Directors meeting.

Community Updates – Colorado National Monument

Nathan Souder, the new Superintendent for the Colorado National Monument (CNM), shared his past work experience that led him to becoming Superintendent of the Colorado National Monument. Nathan was previously the Superintendent of De Soto National Memorial in Bradenton, FL and worked in Rocky Mountain National Park. He also worked in the National Park Service regional office in Denver, CO and coordinated a program that allowed National Park employees to ride the train from Denver, CO to Grand Junction, CO in order to obtain more work experience in different parts of the state.

Nathan commended Visit GJ on the new Adventure Guide. He explained how it helped influence his decision to move to Grand Junction and is one of the best visitor guides he has seen. He further provided a brief overview of current and upcoming projects in the Colorado National Monument including the amphitheater renovation, implementing a climbing management plan, on-going trail projects, and an analysis on rock fall.

National Park Designation Discussion

The Visit GJ Board discussed a recent article in the press regarding national park status consideration for Colorado National Monument. Britt Mathwich mentioned that changing the status of the Colorado National Monument can have a positive impact on the community, but it could also increase traffic to the CNM which could strain resources. Nathan Souder added that this change should not take place until the CNM staff are fully prepared for the increase in visitation.

Community Updates – Greater Grand Junction Sports Commission

Renee Wheelock, Executive Director of the Greater Grand Junction Sports Commission (GGJSC), shared updates on their 2019 events, as well as 2020 events. Successes for the GGJSC include obtaining a portion of the new lodging tax increase, new leadership, new event partners, establishing a grant process, and seeing an increase in their social media, messaging, and marketing efforts. Future prospects include the USSA Softball Tournament, NCAA Bids, and the USA BMX Nationals.

2019 Colorado Governor's Tourism Conference Recap, including Other Staff Conference Updates

Leslie Dysart, Kim Machado, Ciara DePinto (VGJ staff), and Amanda Michaelson (Residence Inn and Courtyard by Marriott), each gave a summary of their experience and strategies learned at breakout sessions they attended at the 2019 Colorado Governor's Tourism Conference (GovCon) on September 29 – October 1. Topics discussed included changing perspectives on cannabis and hemp, keeping winters sustainable, place making, resident sentiment on tourism, myths and truths behind marketing, Google trends, and creating trip itineraries.

In addition to GovCon, Leslie also attended the eTourism Summit and shared insights on digital marketing, the power of social media, and the importance of data. Kim attended Destination International's (DI) Finance, Operations and Technology Summit and shared information about DI's Destination Next Futures Study, and using value-based messaging to defend destination promotion. Kerry Graves attended DI's Visitor Services Summit and shared insights on customer service, visitor center challenges, and marketing to the LGBTQ community. Staff shared their appreciation for the opportunity to refine their skills through the investment made in their professional development.

Director Updates

Elizabeth Fogarty presented the same 2020 Requested Budget Powerpoint presented to City Council at the October 14 City Council Workshop. She recapped the activities, data insights, and strategies that Visit GJ has accomplished this year, including support and assistance for community partners including Colorado Mesa University, Grand Junction Economic Partnership, Greater Grand Junction Sports Commission, and Grand Junction Regional Air Service Alliance, as well as city departments and community stakeholders.

Elizabeth shared that Visit GJ projected a 4.1% increase in lodging tax collections for 2019 and currently collections are up 5.2% YTD over 2018. Visit GJ is projecting a 3.6% increase in lodging tax revenue for 2020 based on industry projections and local data. Besides progressive destination marketing strategies by Visit GJ, new hotel room inventory has also been taken into consideration, and hotels yielding rates effectively is where opportunity also exists.

The requested 2020 operating budget for Visit GJ is \$3.4 million. The majority of the budget, 74%, is allocated for marketing programs, 20% is for labor, and 6% for operating expenses. When compared to other destination marketing organizations with a similar budget size, an average of 48% is allocated for marketing programs, 40% for labor, and 12% for operating expenses. Visit GJ's 2020 operating budget is well-positioned to maximize marketing spend.

Elizabeth updated the Board on the following topics:

Lodging tax collections for September's business increased 0.7% compared to September 2018's business (original 3% lodging tax). Despite Two Rivers Convention Center being closed the month of September for renovations, which significantly reduced the number of meetings and conferences, the slight increase can be attributed to Visit GJ marketing overcoming the loss in conference lodging and local hotels applying effective revenue management strategies, as has been the case for the past few months. Year-to-date lodging tax collections (original 3% lodging tax) through September are 5.2% above the same 2018 YTD period.

Final interviews have taken place for the Marketing and Data Strategy Manager position at Visit GJ and a formal offer for the position is expected to be made soon.

Nine marketing agencies submitted proposals for the Brand Positioning RFP and 3 firms were invited for in-person interviews. No local firms applied. The name of the selected firm will be shared once City Council has been notified.

Elizabeth shared the candidate names for the open Visit GJ board seats. Select City Councilmembers are expected to begin interviewing the candidates soon.

The meeting ended at 4:55 pm.