

Visit Grand Junction
Advisory Board of Directors Meeting
June 9, 2020

The meeting was held virtually

Presiding: Paul Petersen

Visit Grand Junction Board Members Present: Julie Shafer, Joe Burtard, Tammy Anderson, Zeb Miracle, Mikhail Blosser,

Visit Grand Junction Board Members Absent: Ken Mabery, Josh Niernberg, Kelsey Coleman

Grand Junction City Councilmembers Present: Mayor Duke Wortman, Councilmember Phillip Pe'a

Staff Present: Greg Caton, Elizabeth Fogarty, Kim Machado

The meeting was called to order at 3:06 PM.

Minutes from the March 10, 2020 meeting: Zeb Miracle motioned to approve the minutes as written: Mikhail Blosser seconded. Motion passed.

Advisory Board Member Comments and Updates

Paul mentioned that Mesa Mall is open and safety guidelines are being followed. Site work for Dillard's property and exterior work for new Home Goods store are nearing completion. An announcement will be made soon regarding a tenant for the former Herberger's property.

Mikhail Blosser shared a brief update regarding his marketing business.

Joe Burtard reported that leisure passenger traffic is up at the airport. The three Allegiant flights are experiencing large load capacities. The Mesa, AZ flight is outperforming the Las Vegas flight, possibly due to Las Vegas not fully opening yet and the Los Angeles flight started on June 5. The United Airlines Denver flight is now direct, with no layover in Montrose. The flooring project in the airport is now complete and he invited everyone to come and see it.

Zeb Miracle mentioned he is now working for a local river foundation that supports healthy rivers and funding for rivers across the U.S. He has been participating in a series of podcasts relating to outdoor recreation with fly-fishing and map-making manufacturers, to promote responsible outdoor recreation post COVID-19.

Julie Shafer reported that residential and commercial real estate for May 2020 was down. Since then, there has been an increase in buyers which is outpacing current inventory. She expects the market will rebound quickly and will reach similar numbers in the third quarter 2020 compared to the same time period in 2019. Julie thanked and commended Mayor Wortmann, Councilmember Pe'a, and City Manager Greg Caton, for the River Park at Las Colonias.

Tammy Anderson reported that the Hotel Maverick will have a soft opening on June 11 with the full opening on June 18. She has noticed an increase in cars outside of the hotels in the Grand Junction area, which demonstrates an increase in hotel traffic.

Mayor Wortmann commented that he's been hearing good news around the community and is happy that the number of cases in Mesa County is low with no deaths.

Councilmember Pe'a manages the Budweiser distributorship in Clifton and he mentioned that the liquor business has been strong during the crisis. Liquor sales for events will be down this year due to cancellations such as, Country Jam.

City Manager Caton provided an update on the summer camps and mentioned that the Lincoln Park Pool will be open around July 4, provided enough staff can be in place. Many of the recreation staff have been redeployed to assist with park maintenance. City Hall is open on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and closed to the public on Tuesday and Thursday to allow for Municipal Court proceedings.

Visit Grand Junction Updates

Elizabeth provided a thorough update, including but not limited to the following items:

- From the 4.25% lodging tax collections that Visit Grand Junction receives, March 2020's business was down 34.4% and April's business is approximately down 75.8%. Total collections received year-to-date through April's business decreased 32.2% compared to the same time period last year. When considering the 6% lodging tax collections, March's business decreased 34.4% and April's business saw a decline of 76.0% over the same month last year. Year-to-date collections for the total 6% lodging tax through April's business has decreased 32.6% compared to the same time period last year. The 3.25% city sales tax collections through March's business has decreased 4.5%.
- Grand Junction's occupancy for April 2020's business was 23.4%, the average daily rate was \$60.06, and revenue per available room was \$14.03. As expected, April's business declined significantly over April 2020. Although metrics for May 2020 have not officially been released, weekly reports show that occupancy was approximately 38.7%, average daily rate was \$66.96, and revenue per available room was \$25.93. Grand Junction combined loss of room revenue for March through May 2020 is estimated to be \$9.3 million over the same period last year.
- The U.S. hotel industry had its worst month ever in April 2020 with a decrease of 63.9% in occupancy, a 44.4% decrease in average daily rate, and a 79.9% decline in revenue per available room. When compared globally, North America had the third largest occupancy in world at 24%, falling behind China at 36% and the Middle East at 31%. Tourism Economics latest report projects that occupancy for 2020 will end at 35.8% and 52.1% for 2021. They also project that average daily rate will end at \$102.83 for 2020, and \$105.58 for 2021.
- Elizabeth shared information on visitor segment markets to demonstrate how Visit GJ will position campaigns in alignment with recovery stages. She highlighted that larger destinations who previously focused on group business will transition to new leisure markets to accelerate their recovery. Grand Junction is well-positioned as a leisure destination; however, new competition will surface from these larger destinations with far greater budgets.
- U.S. traveler sentiment from Longwoods International, Miles Partnership, and Destination Analysts was shared. Visit Grand Junction also deployed traveler sentiment nationally. The data demonstrated that travelers are ready to travel to domestic drive markets with scenic open spaces and outdoor activities being the most desirable of destinations. Colorado is one of the most desirable U.S. states for post-COVID-19 travelers, with Grand Junction listed as one of the most interested city-level destinations ahead of Breckenridge and Fort Collins. Although the data indicated that consumers are ready to hear messaging, Visit GJ will continue to survey residents to ensure the community is comfortable welcoming visitors. The staff continues to strategically arrange campaigns around data to ensure appropriate messaging is deployed at the right time.

- Elizabeth reviewed the “Ready, Set, Go” strategy from the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO). Currently, the campaign is in between the “Set” and “Go” phase with the messaging primarily aimed for in-state travel. Visit GJ will support CTO’s strategy with regard to in-state travel.
- The Colorado Hotel and Lodging Association (CHLA) hosted a call with Governor Polis and over 150 CHLA members. Topics included the possibility of lifting conference restrictions statewide, as many conferences are cancelling and shifting to other destinations with minimal to no restrictions. A letter from CHLA’s director and board chair was sent to the Governor requesting an immediate executive order to establish meeting-rooms and hotel-based restaurants to operate at 50% capacity with phased increases of 75% in August and 100% in September, with social distancing, if disease rates remain in acceptable ranges. The letter also requested an announcement of a plan and timeline to remove hospital beds from the Colorado Convention Center to underutilized spaces in the Denver metro area.
- Visit GJ has created a COVID-19 guidelines and suggestions page for stakeholders on VisitGrandJunction.com. It provides recommendations and practices for businesses to implement based on the category of business – retail, lodging, restaurants/bars, activities, personal services, and events. In addition, a grid-like page is being developed for consumers to reference on what COVID19 measures each tourism-related business is implementing. Both pages provide a one-stop-shop to obtain information instead of spending time calling or researching the information.
- Organic sessions on VisitGrandJunction.com have increased 43% above the historical average since May 1, 2020. This trend is a good indication of an intent to travel to Grand Junction, and it demonstrates that the COVID-19 campaign has worked to inspire travel to GJ.
- Visit GJ has contracted for additional data and insights for the Place DNA Branding project, in collaboration with existing data and research. The process, called “Place DNA 2.0”, will uncover what Grand Junction is projecting or telling the world about the destination, and conversely, what the world is saying about Grand Junction. The findings will be combined with the insights from the Place DNA resident process to uncover any gaps and make recommendations for Grand Junction’s brand.
- Visit GJ’s staff has been attending many webinars to learn information on how the travel industry and destination marketing organizations can navigate through the COVID-19 crisis. Visit GJ’s intern, Ciara DePinto, has accepted a position with the Parks and Recreation Department. Research is being done to consider reclassifying the Visitor Center and Administrative Coordinator from a non-exempt status to an exempt status. Because the industry evolves at a rapid pace, a new job title will be posted for a Data Scientist to assist with the abundance of data analysis required. This will be followed by the posting of a Marketing Manager. Dates for posting both positions is TBD.
- Because Farmers Market is primarily a food-related market this year, Visit GJ will not be participating as done the past two years. Visit GJ will likely return in 2021.
- Grand Junction was featured as one of four U.S. destinations with low COVID-19 cases in the New York Times article, “*A Striking Disconnect on the Virus: Economic Pain with Little Illness*”. Elizabeth spent time with the writer, Michael Keller, and provided information for the article, including arranging interviews with local stakeholders. The article equals a print value of \$93,000 and a large amount of media reach, which is a big win for Grand Junction. Mayor Wortmann commented on the positive aspects of the article.
- The Colorado National Monument was featured on the cover of the June 2020 edition of 5280 Magazine. The 10-page spread, “*5280’s Essential Guide to Colorado National Monument*”, highlighted the Monument’s hiking trails that included a solitude meter for each trail. Several Grand Junction restaurants were also mentioned. Media value for this 10-page spread is \$100,000, a significant value for the community during a critical time.
- For the second year in a row, Grand Junction holds exclusive rights to the Colorado Insert that is included with the Colorado 2020 Official State Vacation Guide and mailed worldwide to those who

request the guide. This promotional piece is wrapped on top of the guide, providing Grand Junction a significant amount of additional exposure.

- The Official Grand Junction Visitor Guide is being refreshed and edited based on the current environment. For example, the events page is now arranged by season, instead of dates, and it includes new photography for the front and back cover. The guide will go to print soon.

There being no further business, Tammy Anderson motioned to adjourn, Julie Shafer seconded. Motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 4:39 pm.