

Visit Grand Junction  
Advisory Board of Directors Meeting  
June 15, 2021, 3 pm – 5 pm

The hybrid meeting was held at Courtyard by Marriott Grand Junction and virtually.

**Presiding:** Tammy Anderson

**Visit Grand Junction Board Members Present:** Paul Petersen, Julie Shafer, Paula Skrzypczak, Joe Burtard, Angel Bautista, Ken Mabery, Josh Niernberg, Kelsey Coleman

**City Councilmembers Present:** Councilmember Phillip Pe'a

**City of Grand Junction Staff Present:** Greg Caton, City Manager; Elizabeth Fogarty, Director; Kim Machado, Administrative Specialist

The meeting was called to order at 3:04 p.m., by Chair, Tammy Anderson.

Minutes from the May 11, 2021, meeting: Ken Mabery motioned to approve the minutes as written; Angel Bautista seconded. Motion passed.

Julie Shafer requested to address the board and expressed concern regarding information she had received about members of the arts community approaching city council members requesting lodging tax funds to support arts interests. Julie asked the Board if anyone had knowledge of this. None of the board members responded that they had knowledge of this information. After asking Ken Mabery, directly, if he was aware of these conversations, he answered no; but then did mention he was aware that there is a citizen group looking for an arts and museum campus, but that funding had not been discussed. He said that he is part of this citizen group, but funding had not been discussed with a council member or the City Manager.

Julie shared that the purpose of lodging tax funds, as established in the ballot language, is for marketing and promoting tourism. She expressed concerns about other organizations pursuing lodging tax funds to support other causes. Julie stated that Visit GJ board members should understand the purpose of lodging tax funds and communicate its purpose when brought into discussions by council members, citizens, or other organizations, especially if the purpose is outside the strategy supported by the Visit GJ Board. She added that members of the arts community are welcome to speak with the Visit GJ Advisory Board regarding arts promotion, but should not circumvent the Board, and they should follow proper protocols when pursuing funding.

After Julie mentioned a potential site for the Arts Center based on a past conversation with them, Ken mentioned that the group is a citizen group with no structure, but there are conversations happening with leaders in arts and museums. Julie reiterated that if any board member is approached with information that affects Visit GJ's strategies and funding, that it should first be brought before the Visit GJ board for discussion prior to any discussion or meetings with individuals, committees, or organizations. Some board members reiterated what the lodging tax is for, including sighting ballot language that voters approved, while reinforcing that the purpose is to market the area.

Ken related that there are six to ten people who are part of this citizen group which consists of CEOs and directors from various arts and museum venues around the area. Elizabeth inquired if the citizen group conversation is about a new building or marketing. Ken replied that he is unsure but that the group is not organized and has only been having conversations with no goals, and the group is exploring the future for a campus which could include a virtual campus. Ken agreed to keep the Visit GJ board informed on the issue if he remains a member of the citizen group. He further stated that there has not been a discussion to ask voters for funding. Elizabeth asked if Visit GJ's funding has been mentioned at all. Ken answered that potential future funding sources were addressed in a conversation he had recently with the City Manager, and stated that based on that meeting, he understood that Visit GJ's funding was not a possible option.

Ken added that it's the desire of the citizen group is to coordinate options for residents to discover and understand the arts and museums better, and for visiting guests to easily locate art venues without having to look at hundreds of brochures. Elizabeth reminded the board of the web-based app that is being developed, soon to be released, that provides this service with the added benefit of gamification and consumer data. Elizabeth offered to speak to the citizen group that Ken mentioned, since the new tool is a solution to the challenge Ken expressed. Ken said he will mention it to the group. He emphasized that the conversation of the citizen group is to find ways to interface within the arts community and, to his knowledge, any organization looking to build infrastructure is obtaining private funding on their own.

The conversation continued with several board members reiterating that discussions about Visit GJ funding and strategy should first start with the board, and then based on majority input, that agreed upon direction could be shared with community members. Additionally, it was expressed that many on the board advocated for the lodging tax and represented publicly that the tax was to be used for marketing purposes outside of Mesa County; and representation of the funds outside of that purpose is problematic, compromised their own integrity, and not what residents supported nor voted for.

### **Visit Grand Junction Updates**

Elizabeth Fogarty provided an update on lodging tax collections. From the 4.25 percent lodging tax collections that Visit Grand Junction receives, April 2021's business was up a factor of 355.4 percent compared to April 2020. For a more accurate comparison, April 2021's business was 7.7 percent higher compared to April 2019. When considering the 6% lodging tax collections, April 2021's business was up 354.9% percent compared to April 2020 and 7.7 percent higher compared to April 2019. Grand Junction's hotel occupancy for April was 4.1 percent higher than March 2021's occupancy and 23.3 percent higher than the U.S. occupancy rate of 57.5%.

Other updates Fogarty shared include:

- Visit GJ hosted an influencer who posted content about her stay in Grand Junction on multiple social channels.
- Grand Junction was featured in several publications recently including, BuzzFeed and Conde Nast Traveler which highlighted Grand Junction area's natural attractions as premier hiking experiences in Colorado. The Colorado National Monument was the lead image in a recent Wall Street Journal article, in both digital and print, which also highlighted the Hotel Maverick.
- Visit GJ issued a press release featuring the Wall Street Journal article, Grand Junction's double-digit hotel occupancy performance above the U.S., and Grand Junction's April 2019 occupancy. It also highlighted how Visit GJ's data platform and science-based marketing strategies are providing valuable insights which results in successful and impactful advertising campaigns. Elizabeth played a KREX 5 video news clip, which featured Grand Junction taking the spotlight as a top summer destination. The piece included an interview from a Colorado National Monument (CNM) guest visiting from Laguna Beach, California, who discovered CNM from a digital ad on his mobile device while searching national parks to visit. The guest shared that he was not aware of CNM prior, and because of the ad, he decided to visit. This was a very clear example of how digital advertising, to correct behavioral types, results in visitation - which is what Visit GJ's advertising technology strategy is designed to do.
- Destination Think and Elizabeth shared the Destination Branding presentation to new Grand Junction City Councilmembers.
- City Council approved Visit GJ's request for an advertising technology (ad tech) spend with seven companies. The latest ad tech campaign has recently launched, and the impression activity is positive.
- Visit GJ has increased awareness, across all marketing channels, for the Avelo flight out of Burbank, CA. Testing and discovering behaviors that will convert to visitation will take time, but the team is working hard to monitor activity closely.
- Status and updates of follow-up items and requests from board members from the May 13, 2021, board meeting:
  - Based on feedback from other DMO directors in the state, DMOs are commonly requested to submit letters of support on behalf of a business, including support for a transportation permit from the Colorado Public Utilities Commission.

- A draft letter to new businesses is in progress and will be shared for review at the next board meeting.
- Colorado Springs 2020 occupancy of 54.1% was primarily in-state travelers, per Visit Colorado Springs.
- Data on camping in Colorado Springs and Pueblo will be shared at the next board meeting.
- Staff is researching available multi-segment comp set category data and will report on this at the next board meeting. Information on U.S. hotels by chain-scale and class was shared.

### **Community Updates and Q&A**

Brandon Stam, Executive Director of the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and Business Improvement District (BID), provided updates on Downtown development, programs and activities for 2021, which included events, the Creative District, housing projects, feasibility study, and parklets.

Elizabeth offered support for Downtown's events and programs and the opportunity to present to the DDA/BID team about Visit GJ's web-based gamification app. She further thanked Brandon for the partnership with Visit GJ, and encouraged him to reach out if there is anything else Visit GJ can assist with.

There being no further business, Paul Petersen motioned to adjourn, Councilmember Pe'a seconded. Motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 5:03 p.m.