

Visit Grand Junction
Advisory Board of Directors Meeting
February 14, 2023, 3 pm – 5 pm

The meeting was held at the Hotel Maverick, 840 Kennedy Ave., Grand Junction, CO.

Presiding: Kelsey Coleman, Chair

Visit Grand Junction Board Members Present: Brenda Greene, Paul Petersen, Paula Skrzypczak, Elizabeth Fortushniak, Pat Nichols-Perrin, Joe Burtard, Tammy Anderson, Mikhail Blosser

Absent: None

Grand Junction City Council Member Present: Councilmember Phil Pe'a

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

Guests: Bill Edwards, District Ranger, U.S. Forest Service, Grand Valley Ranger District, and Nathan Souder, Superintendent, Colorado National Monument

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Board Chair Kelsey Coleman.

Minutes from January 10, 2022, meeting: Tammy Anderson motioned to approve the minutes as written; Joe Burtard seconded. Motion passed.

Community Updates and Q&A

Bill Edwards, District Ranger for the U.S. Forest Service – Grand Valley Ranger District, provided an update on the latest projects, which include upgrades to campgrounds, picnic, and restroom facilities, reservoirs, trail grooming, and controlled burns. Recreational activities and camping on local forest lands increased in 2022. Recreation on the Grand Mesa National Forest (GMNF) is up 30% this year above historical averages. During the pandemic in 2020, recreation use was up 70% above historical averages, showing that visitation is balancing out. Bill also shared updates on infrastructure projects on the GMNF, including upgrades to campgrounds, picnic, and restroom facilities, reservoirs, and trail grooming. Bill detailed the Grand Mesa Watershed Resiliency Partnership—a significant large landscape-scale effort to reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfire effects in critical watersheds on and adjacent to the Grand Mesa. The plan includes integrated fuel mitigation projects on the western portion of the GMNF. Funding will be provided by Congress within the next two years.

Nathan Souder, Superintendent of the Colorado National Monument (CNM), provided updates on CNM's programs, activities, trail and infrastructure upgrades and 2021 and 2022 visitor statistics. Recreational visits to the CNM were 3.9% lower in 2022 compared to 2021. Strategies and programs for 2023 include hiring key park positions, intergovernmental housing, wildlife inventory and monitoring, graffiti mitigation, interpretation and education, and facility maintenance and upgrades.

Elizabeth Fogarty shared Visit GJ's proactive destination management strategies, including Leave No Trace. Elizabeth encouraged Nathan and Bill to reach out to Visit GJ with appropriate and timely messaging that would be beneficial for residents and guests. She further explained Visit GJ's new web-based gamification app will be launching soon and that it encourages disbursement from more popular areas to lesser-known trails. The data from the app will assist Visit GJ in monitoring trail usage.

Elizabeth thanked Nathan and Greg for their ongoing partnership with Visit GJ and asked what Visit GJ could improve upon or assist the CNM or U.S. Forest Service with. Bill expressed, "I think the sheer fact that you've asked that question and have been asking that question and have been so willing to modify the messaging as uses or friction points develop, I thank you for that." He did not make any requests but indicated he would reach out when needed. Nathan explained the challenge around equitable camping and the new online campground reservation system. He asked Visit GJ for support with messaging to inform the public of available campsites to make it fair for everyone to obtain a campsite instead of months in advance. Nathan also discussed a possible partnership between Visit GJ and CNM to launch a social media campaign that will assist in receiving images with appropriate rights that both agencies could use. Nathan said he would have the new Chief Interpreter contact Visit GJ when they are ready to proceed.

Visit Grand Junction Updates

Elizabeth Fogarty provided an update on lodging tax collections for the month of December 2022 and for the entire year of 2022. From the 4.25% lodging tax collections that Visit GJ received (short-term rental lodging tax revenue is collected quarterly), December 2022's business was a factor of 6.1% below compared to December 2021 (adjusted for late and missing payments). Total lodging tax collections for 2022 was 7.5% higher than 2021's collections. Of the Grand Junction lodging properties that reported their metrics to STR, LLC., occupancy for December 2022 was 47.0%, ADR was \$82.17, and RevPAR was \$38.65.

Of the Grand Junction lodging properties that reported their metrics to STR, LLC., average occupancy for 2022 was 65.2%, ADR was \$107.12, and RevPAR was \$69.78. Grand Junction's 65.2% occupancy rate for 2022 was 4.0% higher compared to the U.S. 2022 occupancy rate of 62.7% and 1.2% higher compared to Colorado's year-to-date occupancy rate of 64.4% for 2022.

Elizabeth explained the details of Grand Junction being selected for inclusion in *The New York Times'* list of "52 Places to Go" in 2023 due to Visit GJ's public relations efforts. The list represents PR gold in the tourism industry and is recognized as a significant achievement by destinations from around the world. The Board celebrated the achievement with a small reception and cake.

Due to time, the remaining agenda items were not covered but will be included in the March 14, 2023, Visit GJ advisory board meeting agenda.

There being no further business, Paul Petersen motioned to adjourn; Joe Burtard seconded. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.