

Visit Grand Junction
Advisory Board of Directors Meeting
December 10, 2024, 3 pm - 5 pm

The meeting was held at Hotel Maverick, 840 Horizon Drive, Grand Junction, CO.

Presiding: Brenda Greene, Chair

Visit Grand Junction Board Members Present: Joe Burtard, Theresa Horvat, Julie Shafer, Pat Nichols-Perrin, Tammy Anderson

Absent: Manon Desrosiers, Elizabeth Fortushniak, Mikhail Blosser

City Council Members Present: Mayor Pro Tem Randall Reitz

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

Guests: Kamie Long, Western Slope Urban & Community Forest Specialist, Colorado State Forest Service; Bill Edwards, District Ranger, U.S. Forest Service – Grand Valley Ranger District

The meeting was called to order at 3:02 p.m. by Board Chair Brenda Greene.

Minutes from the November 12, 2024, advisory board meeting: Theresa Horvat motioned to approve the minutes as written; Pat Nichols-Perrin seconded. Motion passed.

Community Updates and Q&A – Colorado State Forest Service

Kamie Long, Western Slope Urban and Community Forestry Specialist from the Colorado State Forest Service, shared updates on projects, programs, and events relating to Mesa County's traditional and urban forestry. Traditional forestry efforts include forest thinning on 223 acres in Mesa County to reduce wildfire fuel and a \$100,000 grant for private property vegetation management. Urban forestry initiatives include a \$200,000 grant for Grand Junction to plant eighty-eight (88) street trees and expand irrigation systems. Upcoming events include the Southwest Arbor Fest on April 26, 2025, where free tree seedlings will be available. Residents can pick up a tree at the event or go online to request a tree be delivered to their house.

Kamie added that QR-coded plaques identifying tree species in downtown Grand Junction have been installed. Elizabeth Fogarty inquired if a webpage exists that lists all trees in downtown, and if not, Visit Grand Junction can work with her to create a page and/or write a blog about it. Kamie replied that she will check if one exists and follow up with Elizabeth.

Elizabeth thanked Kamie for the update and asked how Visit Grand Junction could assist the Colorado State Forest Service. Kamie did not mention anything specific, but thanked the Board for inviting her to share the updates and to contact her for further questions.

Community Updates and Q&A – U.S. Forest Service

Bill Edwards, District Ranger for the U.S. Forest Service – Grand Valley Ranger District, provided information and updates on recent activities surrounding the area's national forests, which includes the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG). The GMUG Revised Forest Plan has been finalized, which provides a framework for the long-term management of the forests. The plan aims to balance public access for local communities and annual visitors with the preservation of vital wildlife migration corridors, habitats, and watersheds. He mentioned that the Grand Mesa Visitor Center was open this summer and that it welcomed approximately 45,000 visitors in 2023. The Rocky Mountain Conservancy, a nonprofit organization supporting the Rocky Mountain National Park, assisted in the operations of the Grand Mesa Visitor Center and is expected to continue its support in 2025. Bill noted that the U.S. Forest Service is facing significant budget challenges, with staffing issues affected by reduced funding following a congressional budget rollback to pre-2022 levels. This budget reduction has impacted trail and facility maintenance, delayed hiring for key positions, and has hindered operations.

Elizabeth thanked Bill for the U.S. Forest Service partnership and asked if Visit Grand Junction can improve upon anything. Bill shared that he has been especially encouraged about how Visit Grand Junction has represented the Palisade Plunge and attributes the lack of recent rescue efforts to the improved strategy. Bill thanked Visit Grand Junction for the successful safety communication efforts around the Palisade Plunge and asked that the messaging continue. He also requested help with messaging about ongoing staffing challenges to set realistic public expectations regarding the upkeep of restrooms and facilities in the forests. Elizabeth also offered to help with printing materials and encouraged the agency to reach out if

needed. Bill also appreciated the invitation to the Grand Junction Visitor Center allowing him to present to the Volunteer Ambassadors and welcomes a similar arrangement again in the future.

2024 Colorado Governor's Tourism Conference Recap and Attendee Comments

The 2024 Colorado Governor's Tourism Conference (Gov Con) was held in Mt. Crested Butte, CO, on September 26 – 29, 2024. Representing Grand Junction were sixteen attendees, consisting of four Visit Grand Junction advisory board members, 6 community stakeholders, and 6 Visit Grand Junction staff members. Visit Grand Junction covered the expenses related to conference registration and lodging for the sponsored attendees. Gov Con sessions included artificial intelligence, emerging marketing and data trends, sustainability, responsible destination management and stewardship, and visitor services.

The following community stakeholder attendees provided their insights, learnings, and applications from the sessions they attended: Lisa Steigerwald, Rooms Division Manager, Hotel Maverick; and Sera Nahrstadt, Group Sales Manager, Doubletree Hotel. Visit Grand Junction staff members Mason Barrows, Content Specialist; Kyle Schmiek, Intern; and Joel Esparza, Intern, also shared their insights.

Lisa and Sera thanked Visit Grand Junction for sponsoring their attendance at this year's conference and shared the tremendous value it provided them.

Visit Grand Junction Advisory Board Business

Due to the absence of three advisory board members, the election for 2025 officers will be held during the January 14, 2025, advisory board meeting.

Visit Grand Junction Updates

Elizabeth shared an update on Grand Junction's lodging tax collections and hotel metrics for October 2024's business activity. For October 2024's business, lodging tax collections were estimated to be 6.3% below October 2023. Year-to-date lodging tax collections are 2.1% higher through October 2024's business compared to the same ten-month period in 2023.

Highlights of hotel metrics were shared for the months of September and October. Notable metrics included:

- September 2024 occupancy of 74.7% was 15.6% above the U.S. occupancy of 64.6%, 4.5% above Colorado, including ski towns, occupancy of 71.5%, and 2.3% above Colorado, excluding ski towns, occupancy of 73.0%.
- September 2024 ADR of \$132.29 was the highest ADR ever recorded for the month of September and 8.9% above September 2023 ADR of \$121.44.
- October 2024 occupancy of 67.6% was 0.4% above the U.S. occupancy of 67.3%, 5.2% above Colorado, including ski towns, occupancy of 64.2%, and 1.2% above Colorado, excluding ski towns, occupancy of 66.8%.
- October 2024 ADR of \$121.53 was the highest ADR ever recorded for the month of October.

Other updates include:

- Elizabeth thanked the advisory board members who attended the City of Grand Junction Board and Commission Appreciation Dinner on Monday, December 9, 2024.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Grand Junction Regional Air Service Alliance remains under development.
- Elizabeth provided an update to a recent meeting of the Colorado Association of Destination Marketing Organizations (CADMO). Many Colorado destinations shared their numbers were down compared to last year.
- Julie Shafer shared that the Grand Junction Air Show will return in October 2026.

There being no further business, Tammy Anderson motioned to adjourn; Julie Shafer seconded. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 5:04 p.m.