

Visit Grand Junction
Advisory Board of Directors Meeting
July 14, 2026, 3 p.m. – 5 p.m.

The meeting was held at Residence Inn, 767 Horizon Drive, Grand Junction, CO.

Presiding: Brenda Greene

Visit Grand Junction Advisory Board Members Present: Dora Fang, Tevfik Demirciftci, Elizabeth Fortushniak, Theresa Horvat, Pat Nichols-Perrin, Manon Desrosiers

Visit Grand Junction Advisory Board Members Absent: Christina Schultz, Julie Shafer

Grand Junction City Council Present: Mayor Laurel Lutz

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

Guest Speaker: Chandler Smith, Executive Director, Grand Valley Outdoor Recreation Coalition

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

Minutes from the June 9, 2026, advisory board meeting: Elizabeth Fortushniak motioned to approve the minutes as written; Dora Fang seconded. Motion passed.

Community Updates and Q&A – Grand Valley Outdoor Recreation Coalition

Chandler Smith, Executive Director of the Grand Valley Outdoor Recreation Coalition (GVORC), provided a brief overview of GVORC, followed by a presentation on True West, an initiative to create a shared vision for outdoor recreation in Mesa County. True West is being developed with Community Builders, a Colorado nonprofit. A steering committee representing local outdoor recreation businesses, land management agencies, municipalities, and other community partners is guiding the work. Visit Grand Junction Director Elizabeth Fogarty and Advisory Board member Elizabeth Fortushniak both serve on the committee. The project scope covers an assessment of existing recreation assets; development of guiding principles and strategies; industry and workforce recommendations; and identification of priority projects that could be advanced over the next five to 10 years. Community engagement will involve stakeholder interviews, industry roundtables, public workshops, and a community survey. Anticipated discussion topics are long-term funding options, recreation etiquette, Leave No Trace education, and the importance of stakeholder participation. Visit Grand Junction offered to assist with digital distribution of the survey. The initial survey deadline is August 14, 2026.

Elizabeth thanked Chandler and commended his leadership in bringing together a balanced range of outdoor recreation interests. She invited him to return to share the survey results and initial feasibility study findings with the Advisory Board. Chandler shared that stakeholder interviews generated positive feedback about Visit Grand Junction's destination marketing, responsible recreation messaging, and education efforts. He also noted that the Outdoor Recreation Industry Summit is scheduled for November 10, 2026, followed by the Celebration & Awards on November 13, 2026.

Visit Grand Junction Updates

Elizabeth shared an update on Grand Junction's lodging tax collections and key hotel performance metrics for May 2026's business activity.

For May 2026 business, Grand Junction's lodging tax collections were 0.4% above May 2025. Year-to-date (YTD) collections through May 2026 were 5.9% above the same five-month period in 2025, using the same adjusted comparison. Hotel occupancy was 74.5%, average daily rate (ADR) was \$142.90, and revenue per available room (RevPAR) was \$106.41.

Notable hotel metrics include:

- May 2026 occupancy of 74.5% was 2.5% below May 2025.
- May 2026 ADR of \$142.90 was 5.4% above May 2025. It was the highest recorded ADR for any month of May in Grand Junction's history. This marked the tenth consecutive month that Grand Junction paced ahead of Colorado (including and excluding ski resorts) and the U.S. in ADR.
- May 2026 RevPAR of \$106.41 was 2.7% above May 2025. It was the highest recorded RevPAR for any month of May in Grand Junction's history.

To reinforce the need for additional hotel rooms, Elizabeth shared a booking example based on Grand Junction's current room inventory to demonstrate how high occupancy can limit choices for travelers with specific lodging requests. With Friday occupancy averaging 81.5% in May 2026, the example illustrated that the consumer's requested property, room type, rate, and length of stay reduced the available rooms to a small number of lodging choices that likely would not match the consumer's expectations. She explained that this results in loss of visitation and hinders hospitality industry momentum, as consumers move on to searching other destinations for their vacation and recreation plans.

Other Updates

- Elizabeth shared portions of a pre-budget deck that was presented to City directors regarding Visit Grand Junction's performance, opportunities, and challenges. Highlights included record hotel metrics, an 11.5% increase in YTD nonresident deplanements through April 2026, and the department's successful data-driven marketing and destination management strategies. Challenges included a shortage of at least 2,000 hotel rooms compared with peer destinations, lodging cannibalization, and wage competitiveness. She emphasized that focusing staff efforts on core tourism responsibilities is essential to Visit Grand Junction's effectiveness. This ensures that tourism continues to perform as a significant economic driver. Grand Junction generates 27% to 30% of the City's total sales tax revenue.
- The memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the City of Grand Junction and the Grand Junction Regional Air Service Alliance and the MOU between the City of Grand Junction and the Grand Junction Sports Commission have both been signed and adopted by City Council. Visit Grand Junction will continue coordinating with partners to receive the data identified in the agreements.
- Planning continues for a marketing strategy related to the Aspen/Pitkin County Airport closure, which is scheduled to begin in April 2027.
- Community and industry meetings, conferences, and events that Elizabeth attended recently include the City of Grand Junction Department Director Retreat; media interviews with The Daily Sentinel and KREX; City of Grand Junction Utilities Director Candidate Meet and Greet; Grand Valley Outdoor Recreation Coalition True West Steering Committee meeting; One Riverfront meeting; Dark Skies meeting; Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) Dark Skies webinar; Visit Grand Junction department meeting with the City Manager, Deputy City Manager, and Chief Financial Officer; The Art Center of Western Colorado Board meeting; Grand Junction Sports Commission meeting; Colorado Mesa University (CMU) Asteria Theatre marketing meeting; and the Main Street Play Area ribbon cutting.
- Recent media coverage of Grand Junction included TODAY Show ("Travel 'Outside the Box' With These Underrated Destinations"); The Daily Sentinel ("Grand Junction Tourism Growing Despite Industry Challenges, Loss of Hotel Rooms"); WesternSlopeNow.com/KREX ("Grand Junction's Tourism Is Growing, Lodging Tax Up 8.1%"); Livability ("6 Best Places to Travel in 2026: The Ultimate Guide for Every Type of Getaway"); Taking the Kids ("6 Secret U.S. Destinations You Shouldn't Miss in 2026"); Traveller ("The Underrated US City With a 'Mini Grand Canyon' and Few Tourists"); Globe Rider Magazine ("Howdy Folks! Welcome to Colorado!"); Forbes ("6 Venues Putting Colorado's Cocktail Scene on the Map" and "Rocky Mountain Electrify: 7 Super-Charged Colorado EV Byways"); Westword ("Ten Things to Do in Grand Junction"); Thirst Colorado ("Grand Junction Travel Guide: Outdoor Recreation, Scenic Trails and Local Beer"); National Geographic ("Ride the Rails, Then the Trails—These 8 Stunning Bike Routes Are Reachable by Train"); DiningOut Denver ("Destination Spotlight: Bin 707 Foodbar Is Worth All of the Hype"); Backpacker ("7 Otherworldly Hikes That Will Make You Feel Like You're on Another Planet"); Mountain Town Magazine ("Spoil Your Kids and Your Pup"); AFAR ("The Company Helping Turn Colorado Into a Tortilla Destination"); Houston Chronicle ("Head to This Colorado Site for Horseback Riding and Amazing Views"); Travel + Leisure ("11 Best Desert Towns in the U.S. for Striking Scenery and Unique Escapes" and "20 Best Places to Visit in Colorado, From National Parks to Hot Springs and Quaint Towns"); 5280 ("Bougie on a Budget: Where to Find the Best Mud Season Deals in Colorado"); CNN Travel ("25 of the USA's Most Underrated Destinations"); Parade ("America's Favorite Small Towns"); Travel Boulder ("Ready, Set, Road Trip"); and The Denver Post ("Can Hikers and Mountain Bikers Get Along? Some Colorado Counties Believe They Can").

Mayor Laurel Lutz shared a City Council update.

There being no further business, Theresa Horvat motioned to adjourn; Dora Fang seconded. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 5:04 p.m.