

GRAND JUNCTION VISITOR & CONVENTION BUREAU
MINUTES OF THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
December 9, 2008

PRESIDING: Paul Petersen, Vice Chair

MEMBERS PESENT: Rick Martindale, Lynne Sorlye, Brian Barry, John Williams, Steve Meyer, Brunella Gualerzi

MEMBERS ABSENT: Deborah Hoefer, Nathan Knoll

STAFF PRESENT: Barbara Bowman, Jennifer Grossheim-Harris, Erin Chapman, Irene Carlow, Debbie Kovalik, Melanie Wiseman

GUESTS: Anna Maria Ray, Linda Hill, Gaylene Ore, Tim Seeberg

The meeting was called to order at 3:08 pm.

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 12, 2008: Lynne Sorlye moved the minutes be approved as written, Brian Barry seconded, approved unanimously.

HOSTS REMARKS: Lynne Sorlye reported that, effective June 1, 2009, the Holiday Inn franchise will be dropped and the property will become a Clarion Inn, part of the Choice Hotel family. In-room renovations are underway as is a business center which will be completed after the first of the year.

BOARD DISCUSSION ITEMS: Election of Officers The Vice Chair called for nominations for Chair and Vice Chair for 2009. Lynne Sorlye nominated Paul Petersen as Chair, Brian Barry seconded, passed unanimously. Steve Meyer nominated Brian Barry as Vice Chair, Lynne Sorlye seconded, passed unanimously.

Board Vacancies Council extended the application deadline from November 14 to December 31. Lynne Sorlye and Nathan Knoll will continue to serve until Council makes new appointments.

2009 Visitor Guide Staff requested direction regarding the Holiday Inn & Suites which is under construction and expected to open Summer-Fall of 2009. The property does not have a local phone number assigned, one of the criteria in the Visitor Guide policy, and it will not be included in the Holiday Inn's toll-free reservation system until closer to opening date. It would be in the interest of our customers to include this property, and the proposed listings would be:

- Holiday Inn (changing to Clarion Inn June 1, 2009)
- Holiday Inn (opening Summer 2009)
- Holiday Inn Express (current listing remains the same)

During the discussion, it was noted that more hotel reservations are made on the Internet than by phone and that this property will be added to both the Holiday Inn and VCB websites as soon as reservations can be accepted. It is the consensus of the Board to include the new Holiday Inn in the 2009 Visitor Guide.

STAFF REPORTS: Sales Erin Chapman reported that the number of sales leads issued is at 64% of goal; staff expects to achieve 75% by year-end. This year's decline is due in part to the amount of staff time required to manage the transition and train for the new IDSS software as well as Barb Bowman's position transitioning away from full-time sales to more management responsibilities. Barb Bowman stated that many meeting planners are contacting hotels directly instead of asking the VCB to issue a lead and that a softening in the meetings market is already being reflected in lower attendance. Grand Junction lost the Rocky Mountain American Water Works conference because there are not enough break-outs at Two Rivers Convention Center.

Marketing/Public Relations: Jennifer Grossheim-Harris reported that the online photo contest is underway and the Google Earth feature has been activated. Jennifer is working with Two Rivers Convention Center on their website and new photography in addition to developing ads and a promotional plan for the Avalon Theatre. Staff is increasing its interaction with Mesa State College, regarding both prospective students and athletic events.

Gaylene Ore reported that public relations activities resulted in \$300,000 in print equivalent during 2008. Print publications continue to experience difficult times and lay-offs at magazines are increasing. As a result, freelance writers are receiving more assignments so maintaining and strengthening relationships with freelancers will become increasingly important.

(John Williams joined the meeting.)

Statistics: Lodging tax figures (representing November business) are not yet available but anecdotal evidence does not indicate any clear trend: some properties report business is very strong, some are up slightly, while others indicate business is softening.

Visitor Center Upgrade: Melanie Wiseman met with two groups of constituents (land management agencies and non-profits) to discuss the planned upgrades and seek input.

After the final design was approved, staff met with the Purchasing Division to prepare the bid package. After numerous discussions and review of the project, it was decided that a sole source request was warranted because the design represents an individual's creativity and artistic interpretation, both of which would be difficult to bid. Staff's goal is for the project to be completed by the end of February, followed by volunteer training sessions, and then hold open houses in mid-March.

Two Rivers Convention Center: Tim Seeberg reported that there has been no major decline in demand for space for holiday events, but they are seeing less spending per person. There has also been some attrition in fundraising events – those with paid admission.

OTHER BUSINESS: Debbie Kovalik reported that City Administration is looking for signs of interest in developing a plan for how the Avalon Theatre can remain a key element in downtown. The City owns the Avalon and Council is supportive of the facility being an important part of downtown, but wants opinions on a business model, e.g.:

- DDA Board take ownership
- DDA/City joint ownership
- A new 501(c)(3) organization as owner, supported by a cultural tax district
- Maintain status quo

Brian Barry asked what does the Avalon Theatre do? What goes on at the facility? Debbie responded that the Cinema at the Avalon had shown movies nearly every day. Other events at the facility include concerts, stand-up comedians, GJHS band performances, speaking events, City-related presentations. The Avalon is nearly break-even with operating costs of approximately \$140,000 per year, but that figure does not include upkeep or improvements. Movie showings will continue but will appeal to a broader audience, not just independent film buffs and we will work to diversify the type of events held at the Avalon. VCB staff has developed newspaper ads and promotional materials that are displayed and distributed throughout downtown to increase movie attendance.

The community needs for this facility to be viable. The Symphony still has some interest but their acoustic requirements are a multi-million dollar expense. The first improvements that would need to be made are replacing the seats and upgrading the stage lighting system (with associated electrical upgrades) – that would total \$350,000 - \$500,000. If those improvements were made, more promoters would use the facility and attendance would increase. Two fundraising events are planned in 2009 specifically to raise money for improvements and to develop community awareness. Staff is developing movie themes (month-long) that will be combined with an event to increase attendance, e.g., Elvis, Western, Kung Fu, Star Trek.

Brian Barry stated that movies won't attract tourists. Brunella Gualerzi responded that movies will bring people downtown. Brian asked whose responsibility is it to manage and operate/oversee movie activities? Is there another entity better suited and more knowledgeable than the VCB to do this? In planning, organizing and implementing events, if you try to be everything to everyone, you end up forgetting who you are.

Debbie will continue to make monthly reports to the Board about the Avalon. The City Manager values the breadth and depth of business acumen the Board represents and Debbie will continue to seek the Board's opinion.

Recognition: Paul Petersen thanked Lynne Sorlye for 6 years of service as a VCB Board member and presented her with a plaque of appreciation.

Erin Chapman presented Susan Weigand with the Department Employee of the Month Award in recognition of her outstanding work on the IDSS database.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:37 pm on motion of Lynne Sorlye and second of Rick Martindale.