

Minutes

Destination El Paso Advisory Board Meeting

Thursday, November 12, 2020 4:00 p.m.

Destination El Paso Virtual Meeting

Board Members Present

Katherine Brennand
Gracie Viramontes
Elvira Galvan Galindo
Wolfgang Jonas
Gina Roe Davis
Katie Scott

Board Members Absent

Patrice Hills

Destination EP Staff

Bryan Crowe
Brooke Underwood
Veronica Castro
Trudy Sweeten

I. Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order at 4:10 p.m.

II. Approval of Minutes

- Motion to approve the minutes by Katherine Brennand.
- Seconded by Wolfgang Jonas.

III. General Manager's Update: Bryan Crowe

- I wanted to share some data with the board regarding hotel occupancy. We continue to see an increase in hotel occupancy week to week. This is due to out of town market medical staff who have been brought in to assist local hospitals and the ACS with the rise in COVID-19 cases. We are at 60.8% as of November 7 and have stayed consistent around 50% occupancy range.
- Brooke discussed current traveler sentiments regarding traveling during the pandemic. We subscribe to Destination Analyst which sends us a weekly report. This week's report showed that 60.9% of travelers expect the pandemic to get worse in the US and 40% feel guilty traveling right now.
- Brooke also mentioned that 80% of travelers will travel for the Thanksgiving holiday and the mean distance traveled will be 533 miles. The tourism department has expanded its advertising to a 600-mile radius.
- We are seeing people traveling more domestically and traveling with family. El Paso is benefitting from more road travelers.
- Bryan mentioned it is interesting to see how the numbers have shifted and it has influenced us on how we do our marketing. In the beginning of the pandemic we focused our messaging on the fact that we are a smaller community with great outdoor experiences, mountains, access to state and national parks, our culture and history. Due to the spike in the number of COVID cases we have suspended our leisure advertising. This will give us the opportunity to save the funds for late spring of 2021 when travelers are ready to travel again.

IV. Department Updates

- **Financials: Bryan Crowe**
- Financial Narrative for September 2020, this is the first month of our fiscal year.
- Total revenue for the month of September 2020 was \$48,644 bringing total YTD revenue to \$48,644.
- Total expenses for El Paso Live for the month of September 2020 were \$190,246 bringing YTD expenses to \$190,246.
- Total expenses for Visit El Paso for the month of September 2020 were \$151,128 bringing YTD expenses to \$151,128.
- YTD we are experiencing a positive variance of \$56,851.
- YTD after the influx of City of El Paso funding there is an Adjusted Net profit of \$95,846.

- Our budget was approved by the city and COVID-19 was taken into effect when approving the budget.
- **Tourism Development: Veronica Castro**
- We delivered over 600 gift bags to hotels and hospitals for out of town medical workers. Each worker received an Amigo Man drawstring bag with a visitor guide, lip balm, Amigo Man pin, and the Visit El Paso App card.
- We have partnered with the El Paso Chamber to launch new content on the Visit El Paso app targeted at enhancing the quality of life for El Paso's military community. Within the military section of the app, users can find information on jobs, schools, and military discounts as well as general information about our city.
- El Paso has been designated as a music friendly community. We will focus on music in the community and currently we are in the process of creating an advisory board and bylaws for the association.
- As Bryan mentioned we have paused our leisure campaigns, but we are still advertising with meetings and conventions.
- Orange 142 is a digital marketing company who we have hired to handle our social media and they advised that travelers are not searching travel at this time. We will resume in the spring.
- **Convention Development: Brooke Underwood**
- We have hired a Director of Convention Sales Development. Anthony Mancuso who comes to us from San Francisco with great experience and a lot of connections with national associations. He has had experience as a Sr, Sales Manager for Visit Oakland and most recently as a Manager for Convention Sales with San Francisco Travel Association.
- The Hotel Paso del Norte has opened and adds 351 rooms to the downtown area. It has 33,000 square feet of ballrooms and other meeting spaces. It features restaurants, a rooftop pool, and the famous Dome Bar. We look forward to showing meeting planners this hotel.
- We have had the opportunity to attend several virtual and in person conferences and meet with meeting planners.
- Ray Valles, Convention Sales Manager in our Austin Office, attended the Texas Society of Association Executives Annual Virtual New Ideas Conference from October 6-8, 2020. Ray was not only able to attend very relevant education sessions but was able to meet individually either in person or virtually with twelve notable associations and their meeting planners. Ray was able to meet with a representative from HelmsBriscoe who is a 3rd party meeting planner and with the Texas Association of Apartments.
- Ray and myself had over 124 appointments with planners and events rights holders over the course of four days in early October between the Connect Marketplace event that took place in-person in Orlando, FL and the TEAMS Sports Conference that took place virtually. Ray had 68 in-person appointments in Orlando and all of my appointments were conducted virtually. One show ran on Eastern Time beginning at 7am and the second show on Pacific Time and concluded in the late afternoon. Although it was an intense week, the connections made were great ones. Many of the appointments were with 3rd party meeting planners that represent multiple groups and associations. About 90% of those we spoke with were very much wanting to attend an in-person FAM in late 2021 and were sourcing destinations for 2022 – 2024 and averaged 300-400 in attendance. We promoted our virtual FAM in the next 4 months and received a lot of interest.
- Ray also traveled to Grapevine, TX to attend the MPI World Education Conference – November 3-5, 2020 as well as SMART Meetings from November 8-10, 2020 in Nashville, TN. Both meetings gave him access to top meeting planners in their respective markets with one-on-one appointments, both in person and virtually.

- **Venue and Event Management: Trudy Sweeten**
- The Convention Center is now an Alternate Care Site (ACS). We had one week to turn the Convention Center over into an ACS.
- We are currently setup for 55 patients and will eventually expand to 100 patients.
- There are 5 isolation rooms in the Rio Grande Room and 5 more in Hall C. The Convention Center is also now consisting of an in-house pharmacy, x-ray and lab room, and a room for social workers.
- Hall C and the Rio Grande Room are considered hot zones due to patients being in this area. The rest of the Convention Center is a cold zone, and this is where you will find a warehouse for equipment and supplies, break areas for workers and the pharmacy.
- There are 150 hospital employees working each day and we were able to call back 10 employees to help with daily operations.
- Bryan mentioned that the Convention Center is not able to receive walk-in patients. All patients are transported via an ambulance from El Paso hospitals for continued care.
- WinterFest is approaching. This year we will not be able to have an ice rink due to the pandemic. We will have plenty of virtual programming along with other City departments throughout the month of December.
- WinterFest officially kicks off on December 5 and will run until Jan. 3, 2021.
- Arts Festival Plaza will be decorated with the El Paso Electric Holiday Tree, the EP Letters will be wrapped in WinterFest graphics and we will hang the snowflake lights.
- Virtual programming will include holiday ornament decorating kits, baking workshop, painting kits from I Painted That, and live music.
- Katherine Brennand asked how we were able to secure Anthony and have him move from California to El Paso. Brooke answered that we have been looking for the right person for a while and this is a good move for Anthony. Due to COVID Anthony was available and he did great things in San Francisco and he is very excited to be moving to El Paso. He fell in love with the city and we believe he is a good match for us.
- Katie Scott asked if we are still publishing the visitor guide. Veronica responded that we are still publishing it and we have a virtual guide online at visitelpaso.com. We are currently looking at what we will do for 2021 and it is still a tool many people request.

***Adjourn 5:10 pm**

***The next meeting will be on Thursday, December 10, 2020 at 4:00 PM via Zoom.**