

Minutes

Destination El Paso Advisory Board Meeting

Thursday, August 12, 2021 4:00 p.m.

Destination El Paso Virtual Meeting

Board Members Present

Gracie Viramontes
Katherine Brennand
Patrice Hills
Katie Scott
Monica Lombrana
Gina Roe Davis

Board Members Absent

Johnny Escalante
Elvira Galvan Galindo

Destination EP Staff

Bryan Crowe
Brooke Underwood
Veronica Castro
Amanda Fernandez

I. Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order at 4:06 p.m.

II. Approval of Minutes

- Motion to approve the minutes by Monica Lombrana.
- Seconded by Katherine Brennand.

III. General Manager's Update: Bryan Crowe

- Bryan shared data with the board regarding hotel occupancy. We have dipped a little due to school being back in session. We are at 75.2% for the week of August 1-8, 2021, with revenue at \$4.764M. We still have a strong occupancy with El Paso leading in the state of Texas and ahead of the state average.
- We subscribe to Destination Analysts and would like to share some data from July 23 on when Americans plan to take overnight leisure trips. American travelers have an average of 2.8 trips planned. Travelers are less likely to book for November and December, they would rather commit to traveling within 30 days.
- Data regarding optimism about the pandemic situation improving in the United States dropped from 68% to 32%. This data is a little concerning and we will be watching it to see if there is a reduction in travel, events, conventions which will impact hotel occupancy.
- The next question presented to travelers was regarding the increase of Delta Variant cases and if it will make travelers less interest in traveling right now. 53.6% of travelers agreed, 26.5% were neutral and 19.9% disagreed that it affects them traveling.
- We will keep an eye on all this data and see how it affects El Paso.

IV. Department Updates

- **Financials: Bryan Crowe**
- Financial Narrative for June 2021.
- Total revenue for the month of June was \$1,072,059 bringing total YTD revenue to \$3,539,703.
- Total expenses for El Paso Live for the month of June 2021 were \$697,558 bringing YTD expenses to \$3,595,987.
- Total expenses for Visit El Paso for the month of June 2021 were \$206,976 bringing YTD expenses to \$2,045,137.
- YTD we are experiencing a positive variance of \$1,765,500.
- YTD after the influx of City of El Paso funding there is an Adjusted Net profit of \$1,784,342.
- We are still pacing ahead of budget. We are starting to see the impact from the water parks. The water park expenses and excess revenue is 100% funded by the City. For next month's meeting I will add a slide and take out water park revenue and expenses.
- Note that Destination Marketing is down by \$700,000 and we have talked to the City and they have looked at their hotel occupancy tax collections for this fiscal year and they are recommending about a \$770,000 reduction to our operating budget in this year which will

hit us in this fiscal year. The city will adjust and amend our budget because they are not collecting as much HOT revenue and it is not an issue from this fiscal year but the previous fiscal year. Due to COVID they did not adjust the budget and the City is now catching up. We are now in alignment with the City.

- Katherine Brennand asked why the City cut our budget when hotel occupancy has been phenomenal. Bryan answered that while occupancy is high, revenue is still below of where we normally are because the average daily rate the hotels are charging is lower than what they were charging pre-pandemic. The city is doing very well when it comes to hotel occupancy but the City paid us \$700,000-\$800,000 of money from last year that was not collected. They continued to pay us each month per the contract, and we will now be all caught up.
- **Tourism Development: Veronica Castro**
- Veronica hosted a media FAM June 20-23 in the hopes that the border was going to reopen. The FAM was extremely successful, and we had 7 stories that ran in El Diario de Chihuahua. Other agencies that were represented were Look Magazine, Imagen Radio and Televisa de Juarez and Chihuahua.
- El Diario ran a commercial with interviews from Zin Valle, Paso del Norte Hotel and Veronica.
- We partnered once again with Viva Big Bend this year, last year the event was cancelled but is back and will be in Alpine, Marfa, Fort Davis and Marathon June 28-August 1. We sponsored 3 El Paso bands with signage at the bars the bands perform in. We have done this event for 6 years and the event continues to grow each year.
- We were featured in the July issue of TX Highways magazine with a 13-page editorial and an event calendar with a spotlight on Viva El Paso. The editorial value was \$82, 615.
- July ads on social and digital with a focus on downtown hotels and outdoor leisure.
- **Convention Development: Brooke Underwood on behalf of Anthony Mancuso**
- Anthony is currently attending Southwest Showcase and it is a traditional tradeshow. Melissa Correa from the Doubletree is also attending and will be in the booth with Anthony and Ray Valles.
- We have been awarded the 2023 Texas State Association of Firefighters Convention. This will convention is a 6-day convention with 400 in attendance, over 2,000 in room nights and an economic impact of \$500,000. This convention has not been in El Paso in 20 years.
- Another big win for us is the Showcase Sports will host their Dusk til Dawn Event September 3-5, 2021. There will be 300 participants and spectators with 275 room nights and an estimated economic impact of \$120,000. The event will take place at various high schools. This organizer held an event back in February and had a great experience so decided to bring the Dusk til Dawn event to El Paso.
- Ray attended Destination International's 2021 Annual Convention from July 13-15. It is three days of education sessions focused on the move towards a brighter future post-pandemic. Ray networked with a wide variety of clients and made promising connections for potential business to El Paso.
- The team will be traveling the next few months to various conferences, and we always encourage hotels to participate. Connect Marketplace is the next convention for the team to attend and is one of the largest appointment-based convention. Ray and Anthony will be attending and we usually have 35-45 dedicated appointments.
- Katherine asked if there are any creative ideas on how to move forward after COVID. Brooke responded that she has not heard of any crazy or off the wall ideas but there are a lot of safety protocols being introduced and enforced to make attendees feel more comfortable. Brooke also mentioned that a hybrid meeting doesn't have the same impact as in person meetings for destinations. Attendance is typically lower for virtual conferences than in person conference. We are taking a lot of safety precautions with Venue Shield and Bio Ionization in our facilities. Bryan also mentioned there is also an

impact to the conference and the meeting planner. Attendees will probably be a little more selective on which conventions they will attend and possibly look at destinations that they have not been to. Katherine asked if we have advertised all of our safety protocols we have in place. Brooke responded that we have advertised our safety with a commercial and it is on the website.

- **Venue and Event Management: Bryan Crowe**
- The Convention Center continues to serve as a mass vaccination site. We are accepting walk ins for ages 18 and over for Dose 1 and 2, both Moderna and Pfizer. We are also now accepting walk ins for ages 12-17 for Dose 1 (Pfizer). Hours of operation are Mon.-Fri. 8 a.m.-6 p.m. and Sat. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. We will be locating the vaccination center by the end of August to a smaller site. We are also providing testing with the same operating hours.
- Cool Canyon Nights kicked off June 17 with a great showing of 1,339 in attendance. We continue to see high attendance for this event and it will continue until September 2.
- Plaza Classic Film Festival has just ended and had a great movie line up. The client asked for a mask mandate and a limited capacity.
- We had our second round of unannounced audits at all four El Paso Water Parks conducted by Ellis and Associates. The audit focused on three sections: Recorded Visual Observations of Lifeguard staff maintaining the 10/20 Protection Standard, Team Management Scenarios, and Administrative Items. Sections 1 & 2 can be graded on a scale of Needs Remediation, Meets and Exceeds. Section 3 is a Pass or Fail. All four water parks received an overall score of Exceeds. Camp Cohen is in the top 10% for their overall score for water parks in the world.
- On Aug. 2 we have transitioned to a Back-to-School schedule and one park will be open one day a week and all four will be open on Fridays from 4-8 p.m. and regular hours on Saturday and Sundays. We are having conversations with the City on if the parks will stay open after Labor Day.
- Gina Roe Davis commented on all the great things she has heard about the water parks and how great they look. Bryan commented that we are very pleased with the water parks and have great staff who have helped maintain the water parks. There are a lot of more things we can do with the water parks for season 2 and we have some fun stuff planned. Gina asked if the parks close for the winter. Bryan answered that they will close and we will focus on maintenance and continue to hire and plan for season 2.

***Adjourn 4:47 pm**

***The next meeting will be on Thursday, September 9, 2021 at 4:00 PM via Zoom.**