

Board of Directors Meeting

Date: July 29, 2025

Zoom

Present: Donnie Lee, Jeff Bay, Cari Kuhlman, Dwayne Romero, John Rigney, Cristal Logan, Diane Jackson, Debbie Braun, Patti Clapper, Nina Eisenstat, Alan Fletcher, Tharyn Mulberry, Justin Nyberg, Henning Rahm, Dave Ressler, Rachael Richards, Steve Skadron, Justin Todd, Bill Tomcich, and Brenda Wild

Absent: Matt Cook, Michael Goldberg, Heather Kemp, Lisa LeMay, Julia Theisen, Maria Ticsay, Peter Waanders, and Pete Yang

Staff: Jennifer Albright Carney, John Davies, Savannah Grant, Casey Graves, Julie Hardman, Nichole Hellinger, Jessica Hite, Karina Keller, Athena Pantelas, Sarah Reynolds Lasser, Eliza Voss, and Liz Watson

Guest(s): Jake Anderson, Rick Balentine, Hannah Brennan, Ali Hammond, Kris Mattera, and River Stingray

Call to order: Donnie Lee called the meeting to order at 8:35 AM

Approval of the June 24th Minutes: Approved

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest: None

Aspen Fire Protection District Ballot Measures: The Aspen Fire Protection District ballot measure presentation, led by Fire Chief Rick Balentine, incoming Chief Jake Anderson, and Director of Community Wildfire Resilience Ali Hammond, outlined two proposals for the November ballot:

- Mill Levy Extension (0.24 mills) – originally used to build the downtown and North 40 stations, this extension would fund replacing outdated apparatus, station upgrades (HVAC, diesel exhaust management, sustainability), and other infrastructure needs.
- New Sales Tax (0.5%) – exempting groceries, prescriptions, and school supplies, this would fund wildfire mitigation programs, technology upgrades, additional staffing, firefighter health/wellness initiatives, and retention/recruitment efforts.

The district covers 87 square miles—including Aspen, Aspen Village, and Woody Creek—operates five stations and has over 80 members (career and volunteer). Calls have risen 52% over the last decade, with notable growth in major incidents and EMS responses. Leadership cited challenges such as wildfire risk, unpredictable revenue, difficulty securing grants, rising equipment costs, and the need to maintain volunteer ranks. Ali Hammond emphasized proactive wildfire mitigation, homeowner education, vegetation management, and advanced technology like AI-powered detection cameras (Pano AI) and upcoming firefighting drones. Success stories showed how quick response and mitigation efforts have prevented larger disasters. During discussion, participants raised concerns about cumulative tax impacts, competition with other ballot measures, and ensuring cost-efficiency before seeking new funding. Leadership confirmed they have pursued efficiencies, but that meaningful wildfire mitigation requires substantial, sustained investment. Officials also stressed strong partnerships with agencies like Aspen Ambulance, the importance of community participation for insurance considerations, and the blend of career and volunteer staffing to maintain service quality. Overall, the presentation framed the measures as a balanced, fiscally responsible approach to diversifying revenue, addressing immediate needs, and preparing the community for increasing wildfire threats.

Chair's Comments: Donnie Lee noted that while tourism across the state has dipped this year, Aspen is performing better than most destinations—holding steady rather than seeing a decline. He mentioned that winter bookings are currently pacing slightly behind, though it's still too early to gauge final numbers. Overall, summer has been strong, with the town busy, activities running smoothly, and visitors in good spirits. He had no additional major updates to share.

President's Comments: Debbie Braun announced that, after three years of working to fully staff the chamber, they have now achieved it and welcomed Athena Pantelas to the membership team alongside Sarah and Savannah. She noted that, following recent presentations from the school district and fire district, the next step is to gather member input on potential business impacts of November's proposed tax ballot initiatives. A short "member awareness survey" will be sent out this week, with results expected in about 10 days, in time to inform Rachel's upcoming council meeting. Reporting from Park City, where she is attending a leadership summit with other destination CEOs, Debbie shared discussions about occupancy declines, destination management, and marketing strategies. She encouraged the board to review the Destination Management section of their packet, as Eliza is working on multiple projects that could benefit from board input. She also highlighted memos included in the packet covering: upcoming strategic planning for the next five years, updates from the 21st Century transportation coalition meeting, and progress on finding new chamber office space, with the facilities task force reviewing affordability and potential opportunities.



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Finance Committee Update: Cari Kuhlman reported that the finance committee met on July 9 and had an exceptionally brief meeting, but still reviewed financials closely. For the chamber budget, first-quarter income was slightly over budget and expenses slightly under, primarily due to timing and payroll distribution between the chamber and destination marketing. The budget had included a membership coordinator role starting in January, but the position—now filled by Athena Pantelas—was not hired until June, reducing expenses early in the year. The chamber's balance sheet remains strong, with over \$1.5 million in liquid assets and minimal liabilities. For destination marketing, income was slightly over and expenses slightly under budget, again due to timing. Although the November 2024 tax revenue (received in Q1) was initially lower than budgeted, it has since exceeded projections. The balance sheet is also strong, with \$3.2 million in current assets and minimal liabilities. Cari concluded by noting the ongoing search for a new building, with the facilities committee meeting the following day, and confirmed that the chamber's overall financial position is strong.

Directors' Remarks:

Rachael Richards reported that it has been a busy and productive month at City Hall, with significant progress on multiple initiatives. The city has initiated its first contract with the Gorman Company for the Luminary Project, which includes a six-month process to explore partnerships with local entities—such as the fire district, hospital district, or Snowmass Village—that could contribute funding in exchange for rental priorities. While there is debate over whether to prioritize “essential workers,” she stressed that all workers are essential in their own way. The city will also move forward with a \$70 million bond question on the November ballot to help finance the project, supplemented by housing fund contributions, without using low-income tax credits due to eligibility challenges. She encouraged employers to monitor the APCHA website for available for-sale units. Rachael also noted progress on the Armory Project, with most issues resolved with the Historic Preservation Commission and construction planned for 2026. Regarding the chamber's facilities search, she recommended a rent-to-own agreement if leasing to avoid another relocation in a few years. She addressed a growing traffic problem in the West End, where 34% of Aspen's daytime traffic now exits via Power Plant Road, creating safety and livability issues. The city is working with police, engineering, and management to explore interim solutions until larger entrance improvements can be implemented. This ties into the council's decision to contract Jacobs Engineering for a \$2.5 million reevaluation of the preferred entrance alternative, which could lead to a supplemental EIS and integrate ideas from the 21st Century Transportation Coalition. Finally, she mentioned upcoming transportation efforts, including a two-month fare-free bus pilot with RFTA in the fall. Consultants have praised Aspen as a national model for congestion management, but future strategies may require weighing incentives against possible disincentives like congestion pricing. She invited follow-up calls for anyone wanting to discuss the issues in greater detail.

Justin Nyberg kept his remarks brief, expressing surprise that planning for winter is already starting. He took the opportunity to compliment Debbie Braun and the ACRA team, noting that the staff and president's reports consistently reflect a professionally managed organization that handles its finances responsibly. He emphasized that this high level of performance deserves more recognition and offered his thanks to the team.

Bill Tomcich reported from Dallas, where he was leading a delegation to JSX headquarters. He said Aspen airport operations have improved compared to last month due to calmer winds, resulting in fewer cancellations and diversions—though delays still occur when winds pick up. With summer temperatures easing, he expects conditions to further improve. Capacity for the rest of summer is strong and matches last year's levels. Chicago will resume a second daily United flight in late August, and several routes will run longer into the fall: San Francisco through September 24 (a first), and both Houston and Chicago through October. United will keep Los Angeles service year-round, Delta will continue from Atlanta and Los Angeles, and American will operate twice daily through fall. For winter, capacity will be nearly identical to last year, except for a new nonstop American Airlines route from Charlotte starting December 19, operating three times per week and becoming Aspen's longest nonstop flight. Bill also noted two newly delivered Embraer E175 aircraft now serving Aspen, bringing the total to 12, and marking the retirement of the last CRJ-700 on Saturday. All aircraft at Aspen will now be E175s. United Express will also be adding Starlink in-flight Wi-Fi to these planes, providing high-speed connectivity.

Cristal Logan began by thanking Bill Tomcich for his detailed updates and support during a challenging summer for Aspen airport operations. She addressed a false rumor circulating among some United flight attendants and airport staff that private aircraft receive priority over commercial flights, clarifying—confirmed by Bill—that the airport operates on a first-come, first-served basis. She also thanked the ACRA team for managing airport-related frustrations and noted that summer has been going very well, with strong attendance at community programs. The organization recently celebrated its 75th anniversary with a community day that honored both Aspen's history and its present. Cristal highlighted upcoming events, including historian Max Boot speaking on Reagan and Meredith Levien, CEO of The New York Times Company, later in the week.

Patti Clapper announced that Pitkin County hired Ryan Mahoney, formerly with Basalt, as the new deputy county manager effective July 1, replacing Rich Englehart, who will continue providing airport consulting. She also congratulated County Manager John Peacock on his recent marriage. She reported that the county received a state grant (via federal funds) for safety improvements on Highway 82, specifically



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at the Smith Hill Road intersection and for an eastbound acceleration lane out of Lazy Glen—an area with past accidents, including a fatality. The county is also finalizing a purchase agreement with CDOT for the Brush Creek Park and Ride property, which could help address airport parking needs, including potential overnight options for self-contained campers and vans. Public input will be sought as planning develops. Patti highlighted the Board of County Commissioners' ongoing role as the board of the Ambulance District since 1982 and expressed support for the strong mutual aid relationship between Aspen Ambulance District and Aspen Volunteer Fire Department. She also noted the commissioners' recent tour of valley water infrastructure, observing unusually dry high-alpine vegetation all the way to the top of Independence Pass. She urged conservation—especially among well users outside municipal systems—given evaporation concerns and the need to preserve water for wildfire response.

Diane Jackson thanked Patti Clapper for her ongoing support in addressing airport parking issues and Cristal Logan for dispelling misinformation about private aircraft priority. She emphasized the value of a team approach in promoting accurate, positive messaging about the airport. She reported that the airport is still in the scoping and fee negotiation stage for both the terminal designer and runway consultants, with updates expected in early fall. She suggested scheduling a fall presentation for ACRA with the project management team to share timelines and answer questions. The Airport Advisory Board currently has applications open (due Friday) for two task forces: the Terminal Task Force and the Multi-Modal Connectivity Task Force, encouraging community participation. Regarding the 2025 spring airport closure, Diane said no dates are set but hopes to keep it under 30 days and, if possible, restore Memorial Day to the schedule. In response to Patti's question about the BUILD grant, Diane said the grant list has been released but no official award letter has been received yet, noting it's encouraging news and crediting Patti and the commissioners' D.C. advocacy. Patti clarified the grant would fund planning for a multi-modal transportation center to be built alongside the new terminal, addressing broader transportation and congestion issues, extending beyond just the airport to areas like Brush Creek.

Dave Ressler shared that the process to find his successor as CEO is now underway following his recent retirement announcement. The board has appointed John Sarpa to chair the selection committee, which will include internal, external, and community stakeholders. Dave has not set a firm departure date, anticipating it will be sometime after the first of the year, depending on the timing of the hire and any needed overlap. He will remain in his role in the meantime and continue participating in ACRA discussions, noting how much he's enjoyed his involvement over the years. He echoed Justin Nyberg's praise for ACRA's strong leadership team and gave special recognition to John Davies for consistently producing accurate, well-written meeting minutes that make him sound more articulate than he feels he is.

Jeff Bay centered his remarks on gratitude, congratulating Dave Ressler on his service and leadership at the hospital and echoing praise for ACRA's strong, well-run, and financially sound operations. He noted Aspen is outperforming many other resort communities and should be proud of its success. Reflecting on recent events, he highlighted the vibrant Fourth of July celebration, ongoing arts and cultural programming, and personal enjoyment attending Mamma Mia at Theatre Aspen. He emphasized that such experiences are what make Aspen so attractive, offering moments of joy and escape. Jeff also praised the national recognition of local events like the Aspen Security Forum and Aspen Ideas Festival, which have been featured on NPR and other national outlets. He stressed the importance of supporting free speech and a free press, including local papers, to ensure communities receive accurate, transparent information for sound decision-making.

Dwayne Romero praised the ACRA staff for their strong work and representation of the community, even during challenging times. He shared that among the HOAs and condo associations his team manages, there's increased discussion about building reserves in anticipation of potentially tougher economic conditions, particularly in Snowmass. He clarified recent rumors, stating that the Snowmass Mall is not under contract and remains active with a strong tenant base and solid marketing support. Downvalley, at the Willits Town Center, sales reports show similar trends to the broader lodging slowdown. He gave a shout-out to Chris Mater for her excellent work with the chamber in Basalt. Looking ahead, he noted the Facilities Committee will meet tomorrow with Jennifer, and the Transportation Coalition will reconvene next Thursday. He's hopeful that by fall the coalition will have tangible, short-term recommendations ready for implementation to test new transportation ideas and make progress.

Alan Fletcher reported that the season is going very well, with attendance significantly higher than last year and ticket sales up about 10%. The "Under 35 Free on Fridays" program has been drawing around 100 attendees each week, with roughly 80% being first-time visitors to the tent. A recent Appreciation Day for the school district, fire district, first responders, and the hospital drew about 250 participants. Overall, the AMFS is feeling positive and energized as they move through the summer.

Tharyn Mulberry thanked Debbie and Dwayne for their help in refining messaging around the school district's proposed sales tax initiative, noting the value of the board as a sounding board for community insight and feedback. He shared that the school board will make its final decision on the ballot measure's details on August 20, after which the campaign will be run by a private citizens group, as the district cannot promote its own initiative during the election process. He introduced two new staff members: Tom Dodd, the new Aspen Middle



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School principal, and Brett Beville, the new athletic director. Tharyn also noted the district's early start this year—staff returns August 7, with high school beginning August 12 and middle school August 13—and cautioned the community to be prepared for the associated traffic.

Steve Skadron shared that the new Colorado Mountain College (CMC) fall bulletin has been mailed out, featuring many offerings, including new culinary classes taught by adjunct faculty as part of an ongoing experiment after the departure of former full-time instructor Ari Lewis. He highlighted the strong connection between CMC and the Aspen Fire Protection District, noting that many local firefighters train at CMC. The firefighting program, along with nursing, is among the school's most popular, and entry into the Emergency Medical Services program is highly competitive—on par with elite colleges—reflecting the community's commitment to gaining skills that protect the environment. Steve closed with a lighthearted remark to Debbie Braun, wishing her well on her wilderness vacation and assuring her that if she needed help, responders trained at CMC in wilderness first responder skills would be ready to assist.

Nina Eisenstat reported that the service industry remains busy, with most businesses feeling positive about summer despite ongoing staffing challenges and some uncertainty about the post-Labor Day outlook. While one luxury pop-up retailer noted this summer feels slightly less robust than last year, with some spending hesitation, they still described it as a good season overall. She closed by giving a special shout-out to Cristal Logan for the Aspen Institute's 75th anniversary celebration, praising her eloquent panel appearance with David Brooks, which captured the essence of Aspen and its global cultural impact. Nina encouraged everyone to watch the discussion, saying it would renew pride in the community and its arts offerings.

Brenda Wild expressed excitement about Athena Pantelas joining ACRA, praising her talent and positivity, and wished Debbie Braun a wonderful wilderness vacation. She provided a detailed real estate market update, noting that while transaction numbers are higher year-over-year, total dollar volume is also up, indicating a buyer's market across most areas. In Aspen, the median single-family home price is \$16.925M (191 days on market, 19% price decrease, 122 homes in inventory), while condos have a median of \$3.85M (134 days on market, 15% price decrease, 86 units in inventory). Basalt's single-family median is \$3.72M with 38 homes in inventory, while condos have a new median of \$4M due to higher-priced listings. Snowmass Village single-family median is \$7.52M with tight inventory (16 homes), while condos average \$3.075M but have slowed in sales. Carbondale's single-family median is \$2.5M, and condos average \$1.7M, with most markets showing increased days on market and slower absorption rates. She compared current conditions to 2008 as one of the more difficult markets, attributing buyer hesitation partly to Federal Reserve policy and broader economic uncertainty. Brenda also flagged that Colorado's new HB 1152, aimed at expanding accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in high-density areas, does not apply to rural or mountain towns like those in the Roaring Fork Valley. She plans to provide a one-page summary from the Colorado Association of Realtors to clarify the law, as misconceptions have already arisen locally.

Henning Rahm reported that business levels have been generally strong, though private events are slightly down—possibly due to fewer weddings post-COVID and a return to pre-pandemic event patterns rather than the pent-up demand seen in recent years. Hotel occupancy is solid, but last-minute bookings dominate, making forecasting difficult and creating uncertainty about the rest of summer. He noted that while the Fourth of July initially looked underwhelming, strong last-minute reservations for the remainder of July exceeded expectations. Guest spending remains healthy, and overall sentiment is positive. The hotel is focused on driving direct bookings, maintaining high service standards, and ensuring visitors have an excellent experience so Aspen continues to present itself at its best.

Adjournment: Donnie Lee adjourned the meeting at 10:14 AM