



Town Hall - 551 Hot Springs Blvd.
Pagosa Springs, CO 81147

MINUTES

Pagosa Springs Area Tourism Board Meeting
April 2, 2025 @ 4:00 PM

A regular meeting of the Pagosa Springs Area Tourism Board was called to order on April 2, 2025, at 4:00 PM in the Town Hall - 551 Hot Springs Blvd. .

BOARD PRESENT: Board Member Johnson, Board Member Lucero, Board Member Dufour, Council Member Williams, Board Member Thornton, Shane Prince, Sarah Mashue, Board Member Marchand, and Board Member Ranson

BOARD ABSENT:

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER – Meeting was called to order at 4:03pm.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT – *There was no public comment*

III. **CONSENT AGENDA**

1. **Approval of March 24th Meeting Minutes**

Council Member Williams moved to approve March 24th Meeting Minutes, Shane Prince seconded.

Carried.

IV. **REPORTS TO BOARD**

1. **Destination Blueprint Update - Dave Santucci**

Dave Santucci attended the meeting via Zoom to give the Board an update on the Destination Blueprint Program. Dave reminded the group that the Destination Blueprint was a grant from the CTO that included a destination assessment, a workshop, and 100 hours of consulting. At the workshop the group chose goals to focus on for the program. The goals that were chosen were Championing the Value of Tourism and tourism management in Pagosa Springs area and develop and implement messaging that highlights the importance of tourism and the efforts of VPS to both residents and visitors. We have created tools to help with this including an editorial calendar, website content, blog posts, social media content, newsletter content, Championing the Value of Tourism slide deck and ambassador communications. The editorial calendar includes fire safety information as well as construction. The website has a new Welcome page, About Us page and a Blog page. Resident facing messaging channels have been created or are in the works such as weekly contributions from tourism in the Town of Pagosa Springs newsletter, public presentations using the CVT slides, ambassador communications, and social media. The next steps for Destination Blueprint are completion of the content, launching of the content, and a program summary report. The program will wrap up in about 6 weeks. Director gave an update on the status of the tools at this time. We don't currently have a blog on the website but it is in progress and she had a meeting with the website vendor yesterday and should have something in a week or two to start adding content into and it should go live in 2-4 weeks. We are thinking about calling the "About Us" the "Business Resources" section in the footer. Staff is starting to work on building out that content on the website. We have a new video about how to properly douse a fire. We are working on some new paid social with some of this content. Board Member Prince asked if there is any way to prioritize construction and fire information to go out sooner than 6-8 weeks. Director answered we will be getting the fire content pushed out in about a week. In regards to construction information we have the parking flyer/maps, the QR code magnets and card for lodging properties. The QR codes go to our Welcome

page on the website which has construction information and will be updated with fire information, safe driving (designated drivers), the free wifi in the parks is now linked to the Welcome page. Director and Dave have a meeting tomorrow to continue working on this. Dave showed the Board the Championing the Value of Tourism slide deck. This tool is for anyone on the board or staff who is acting as a spokesperson for tourism to use slides for presentations. Dave mentioned that Pagosa Springs has had a great start to the year compared to the state. Pagosa Springs continues to be a bright spot in the state as far as visitation. A lot of the state slowed down in 2024 and Pagosa still saw good numbers and continues to see good numbers in 2025.

2. Chair Report

3. Director Report

Director explained that she doesn't always receive all of the lodging tax data by the first Wednesday of the month. At the time of this packet being sent out February lodging tax was not yet available but Director has since received February numbers which show we are 25% up over February 2024. When director looked at November through February we were up 19.7% or \$45,552.

Director is involved in updating the IGA with a small group Madeline Bergon, Veronica Medina, Shane Lucero. There was a lot of consensus at the joint town and county meeting that the 2 year terms for Tourism Board members should be changed to 3 year terms. This should be adopted by the end of the year. The updated IGA will come before the town and county in a future joint work session.

Director explained to the Board that it has been a very busy start to the year. She is usually in meetings for 3 solid days every week.

Director asked if anyone had any questions from the Director Report. County Commissioner Rep John Ranson asked how our lodging tax numbers compare to the rest of the state. Director answered since we don't have a STAR report and we don't get a state wide STAR report director doesn't see those numbers. She will see if Dave Santucci has any information he can share with us. The state usually releases their numbers in July for the prior year. Board Chair Lucero stated it was surprising to hear we were up with such a dry winter. Director stated we sometimes see better numbers in dryer years because the visitors aren't afraid to drive to Pagosa. They will still come as long as they can still ski.

Director mentioned we have not had any complaints about construction at the Visitor Center yet but we do have the stress balls for that purpose. Board Member Prince stated he had not had any complaints yet. Board Chair Lucero stated he had a couple from St Paul and they did not think the traffic was a big deal at all. If people are traveling from bigger cities then construction is not unusual for them. Board Member DuFour stated when people come into her store and mention the construction she tries to put a positive spin on it and talk about how great it is going look when it is completed. Director mentioned Kat with Main Street is working on a video that will show what the project will look like when it is completed. We plan to have that looping on a TV at the Visitor Center.

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. Multipurpose Pavilion / Event Venue - Brian Collabolletta

Director provided an agenda brief in the meeting packet for Board Members to review before the meeting today. The brief explained the history of how the funds were moved into a restricted fund. We

are not going into the nuances of how the Multipurpose Pavilion will operate at this time. Brian stated the Tourism Board has been good to the Multipurpose Pavilion over the years with infrastructure support, funding for tournaments, and ice skates. The project was started in 2012. The first rink was in 2015 and they have operated it every year except during covid until this winter. The rink was not opened this winter because it is not sustainable for 28 days of operation. It has been a labor of love but they have had a plan to move forward for years now to a permanent facility. Two years ago they were about to add a roof at the South Pagosa Park location and at the last minute, the plug was pulled on that location. It has always been labeled a Multipurpose Pavilion with ice skating events in the winter and in summer could be used by local sports groups or any event in the town. So it makes sense to label it as a multi-use event center. In the winter it will be refrigerated. It will be a 35,000 ft covered space. In the past they tried to have hockey, broom ball, and curling tournaments but it was a difficult to try to have events there. Town Council Rep Williams mentioned the Town set aside 3 acres next to the Pickleball courts. The space is contingent on them raising the funds within 3 years. They should know in the next year whether this is going to happen or not. If not the Town will consider using the land for other purposes and funds will go back to the people who provided funding.

Brian is here to ask the Tourism Board to use the \$500,000 they have set aside in a restricted fund for an event center. The facility will have a concrete surface, room for the stage to back in, bleachers, a spot for 3 food trucks at the east end. Board Chair Lucero asked when the clock started on the 3 years. Brian answered a year ago in December. They have possible donors who are waiting to see if the town kicks anything in. Brian stated GoCo was on board for a grant but they rarely fund the same town in the same year or back to back years. The town applied for the grant for Bob's LP property and they snuck in the cycle before them. They are applying for some other grants like Palmer Foundation who helped with the Alamosa rink but that foundation is more focused on youth sports rather than event centers. They have reached out to the Gates Foundation. Board Member Johnson asked how much the whole project will cost. Brian answered a little over \$3.5 million. The roof is \$2 million and the rink is \$1.5 million including refrigeration. It could be less in another location because the footers have to go so deep with the fill in this location but they like the location for the community, parking, etc. Board Member Mashue asked about walls. Brian answered the reason they went with open concept is because GoCo is for outdoors. They won't fund anything indoors. They are considering having walls on 3 sides, perhaps even roll-down canvas sides. Board Member Dufour asked when was the last time the budget was updated. Brian answered about 6 months ago and they put in an extra 20% for increased costs over time. Board Member Johnson asked if the ice rink will be year round. Brian answered no, the ice rink will be 5-6 months of the year and the concrete floor for the other months for roller skating or roller hockey, volleyball, wrestling, events.

Director stated the ask today is if the Board wants to make a recommendation to move the funds from the restricted fund but it is ultimately up to Town Council and BOCC. Director would take it before the Town and County. Brian added their nonprofit will run the center and it will be operated year round. Events and everything will go through them. It will be similar to Seeds where they rent the spot from the town and will be operated by the nonprofit. He has spoken with Mary Jo and she is interested in moving her events to the pavilion. So this will help the community have better event experiences especially with inclement weather. Board Member Marchand asked if there are other event venues being proposed. Director explained that no, when the board put the funds aside they didn't have any specific location or design in mind. Board Chair Lucero stated they put the money aside because if they went for a grant and it was a matching grant they would be ahead of the game. Director stated if the project doesn't happen and the grants aren't awarded, the money will not be spent. Board Member Marchand asked if it will be open to the general public. Brian answered they aren't sure yet. It will be fenced in and they need to

consider liability insurance. Board Chair Lucero asked if there will be bathrooms. Brian answered they aren't sure yet but likely port-o-potties like they have always had and it will be a work in progress. County Commissioner Rep John Ranson asked what the next step would be if approved by the town and county. Director answered she will provide a letter stating that we have committed this money for this project. Then they can use the letter for grant applications showing they have the funds.

Board Member Johnson moved to recommend approving allocation of the \$500,000 from the event venue restricted fund as cash match for the Multipurpose Pavilion to pursue grants, Council Member Williams seconded.

Carried.

2. 2025 Event Funding Update

Director stated there is \$18,280 remaining in Event Funding. Director heard from one other event organizer and they were given the deadline of last Friday to submit their application and they have not submitted anything. The funding is first come first serve. That is spelled out in the event funding application that is sent out to event organizers in December. The \$140,000 total for event funding in 2025 includes the \$40,000 in funds that Town Council allowed us to reallocate for more event funding.

3. 2025 Event Funding -Thingamajig Theatre

Laura Moore with Thingamajig Theater Company was in attendance. They are requesting \$25,000 in event funding. Town Council Rep Williams explained to Laura that the board really focuses on events that bring people to town to stay in hotels and vacation rentals and eat at our restaurants. He would like to know how many out of town visitors the theater brings in. Laura answered they sell tickets and collect zip codes so they know exact numbers. In 2023 they did a survey and asked non-locals how many days they were staying in Pagosa and if they came specifically to see shows. In 2024 they sold 8,260 tickets, 46% were out of town zip codes so 3,800 tourists saw a show. In 2023, 1,216 tourists came specifically to see a show at PSCA and averaged 5.5 nights per stay, 96% stayed in local lodgers, so 6,688 nights of heads in beds were created by Thingamajig Theater, 3,344 beds were occupied, Al says that lodging averages \$166 per night in low season and \$304 in high season so the theater provided between \$535K-1 million to lodgers. So in lodging tax the theater returned between \$26-50K to this board. Board Member Prince pointed out that the lodging letter that was provided was from 2024. Laura stated he must have sent in the same letter as last year. She stated they also work with Mountain Landing and the Springs Resort. Board Member Prince also stated he goes to shows and has never been asked if he was a local. He also pointed out that tickets are \$27 (based on Laura's numbers in budget of # of tickets sold and income) and increasing the price of the ticket by \$2 to around \$30 it would add up to \$25,000 which is what they are asking for. Laura clarified tickets are actually \$44 for adults and \$25 for kids. They are a non-profit and they are trying to bring quality arts to the community at a price that is affordable. They do scholarships for kids camp and there are ways to see shows for free by running the door. It would be like asking why doesn't the library charge for their books? Board Member DuFour stated \$30 might not seem like a lot but for a family of 4 it adds up and may keep children from having those cultural experiences. Laura pointed out that each ticket costs them \$90 to produce but they charge \$40 and the rest of the money is made up by donors and grants. They are thrifty, have only one employee. Laura added every penny you give us we will give it right back to you and more. She also pointed out they also do a lot of shows in the shoulder seasons.

Sarah Mashue moved to approve an allocation \$18,280 in 20235 event funding to the Thingamajig Theatre, Board Member Dufour seconded.

Carried.

4. Tourism Ambassador Program

Director explained this was Council Member Martinez idea which came up in a joint work session 2 months ago. Director has had several meetings and discussions about this program with Council Member Martinez, Council Member Williams, County Commissioners Brown and Medina, Kat with Main Street, and Mary Jo with the Chamber of Commerce. We had a program like this ready to roll out in 2020 and then the pandemic hit so it was put on hold. At that time the team was trying to get the businesses engaged with the free tools and resources available through Visit Pagosa. This time the impetus for this program is the construction project. In the past we went to The Springs and Wyndham and trained their front line employees. The language is not quite finalized yet but we are looking at a certification process with businesses who want to participate. The businesses will get something out of it, like a free reel on social media and other incentives to get the businesses to take advantage of this to encourage their employees to attend. If businesses do get 50% of their staff to attend they will be certified. We will have window decals that designates them as a partner, perhaps a logo on their listing on our website, and special social media promotions. It will be free of charge, just a time requirement. It gives us opportunity to get our weekly newsletter out to more businesses with all of the other educational information we need them to be aware of like construction and fire info. Everyone working in the community get visitor questions about various things such as road conditions, fire restrictions, etc. That helps the community on a broader level know how to answer these common questions and knows where to find the answers. Director and Mary Jo have both done these types of trainings in the past and have materials that can be updated. The trainings could be done in an hour time frame and would likely be done by Director to talk about resources through Visit Pagosa, the Sherriff to speak to emergency management and fire, Mary Jo and Kat will talk about opportunities through the Chamber and Main Street. The employees will be required to attend in person and then complete the Colorado Concierge program through the CTO online that takes about an hour and goes through Leave No Trace, our general region, and other hospitality information. If the community is helpful and knowledgeable to visitors that will help with repeat visitation. The employers will have knowledgeable employees and for the employees it could be a resume builder. This program will be co-branded with the chamber and Main Street. We will need them to help reach out to and encourage the businesses they have contacts with to participate. Director explained we are moving forward with this. Her staff is tapped and she has had conversations with David Harris about a possible reorganization of staff, maybe adding another part time employee to help coordinate and help fill in at the visitor center when needed. The county currently has \$100K for business grants. This was originally an idea to help use some of that money. Director is proposing having lodging tax cover the expenses of the program and the county can free up all of their \$100K for business grants. There will be a monthly drawing for participants of the program to win gift cards. Director is planning to go before Town Council to discuss moving \$15K from the \$400K in Infrastructure they have asked us to not use. Director sees this as an ongoing program even after construction is completed. Board Chair Lucero commented he and his staff went through the program in 2020 at The Springs and it was awesome. The Springs staff was much more knowledgeable and received more positive reviews from guests after training. Board Member Prince stated they have a hospitality training at Wyndham they put their staff through and they see a 5% increase in satisfaction scores after the training. He thinks this is fantastic to have trained staff who are all speaking the same language. Director will be meeting with some businesses to talk through the logistics and incentives. We will likely launch this program around memorial day before the busy summer season. There will be multiple classes, we will bring in lunch, give hand outs and cheat sheets with resources, get everyone to sign up for our weekly newsletter, and hopefully this will expand use of the app. Director asked Board Members to let her know if they have any ideas.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. AI Tool for Website

Staff has been exploring different uses for AI to enhance our offerings for months. While staff has an upgraded account through ChatGPT to assist in various tasks, such as copywriting, we have also explored

adding an AI tool to the website for more interactive trip planning for visitors. We were early adopters with a chatbot tool in 2018 and 2019, but did not renew the subscription as it had a lot of weaknesses and we weren't able to determine usage to justify. Technology has advanced significantly since and there are now many tools designed specifically for tourism. Staff recently met with Guide Geek for a demo of their tool. Guide Geek is powering an AI tool for Visit Estes Park, Colorado.com, Visit Colorado Springs and many others. Staff has also investigated Intentful and Mindtrip. Adding an AI tool to the website for visitors to plan vacations should enhance user experience, increase engagement, and drive conversions. The tool can provide personalized travel recommendations and time-saving convenience. For example, instead of manually searching through multiple websites, users can receive instant, customized itineraries in minutes. Ideally, we would have the tool integrate with our booking engine, in order to provide up-to-date information on flights, hotel availability, weather conditions, and travel restrictions. Additionally, once "trained" the AI-powered chatbot can answer user queries 24/7. An interactive AI tool can keep users engaged longer on the website, increasing the chances of them completing a booking. Another advantage is multilingual & accessibility features, without the cost of page by page translations.

Another aspect is access to analytics to track user behavior, preferences, and trends, helping us and potentially

businesses refine their offerings. There is a lot of future opportunity and ways to leverage this tool once it is integrated into the website. If the Board wants to pursue this, the cost of the tool would be absorbed into the 2025 marketing line item. Staff is still evaluating options, but is leaning towards Intentful for cost and shorter implementation time.

Board Chair Lucero stated he felt like it was up to the Director and Staff to make the decision. He appreciates the update and hopes it makes staff lives easier. Director stated training the tool will take time and be challenging. Board Member Marchand stated they use an AI tool for his business. They are about 8 months in and it is still not trained after about 5 hours per week of working with it but it has made his life easier and it has been worth the money for his business. Director asked the Board for a general consensus if they agree with moving in this direction. There was general consensus from the Board to move forward with this.

VII. Other Discussion

1. County Commissioner Rep Ranson stated he and the Commissioners have been talking about ideas to help with getting visitors and locals to continue to come downtown during the construction project. He would like the Board members to let him know if they have any ideas. Director mentioned she is working with Andy with the MET on an idea for a bus schedule to get people downtown for events with uptown collection points. This would help with traffic and parking and getting people to attend the events. If this works it could be something we do beyond construction since parking is always a problem for events. Board Member Lucero asked if there would be a way to put a moratorium on the limited number of taxi licenses during the construction. Director answered taxis are a state program and the county can't compete with shuttle services. Director also mentioned we have had some tragic accidents in the community recently so we have added safe driving resources to the Welcome page. We are also working on a coaster that we will distribute to bars and restaurants with a QR code that links to that Welcome page. We will give them to the businesses for free. We can get them printed for 2-3 cents each. Mary Jo had the idea to have a big poster with the same information at events. Board Member Marchand suggested the bus routes have a live view. When he traveled to Canada they had that on an app and you could see exactly where the bus was on the route. It might encourage more people to use the bus. Director agreed that would be a great resource and she will pass that idea along. Director also

stated the construction signage is coming soon. Tourism is not in charge of this signage but Town staff is working on getting signage with enforceable language and the signs will be ordered and installed soon.

VIII. NEXT TOURISM BOARD MEETING MAY 7TH AT 4:00 PM

IX. ADJOURNMENT