

minutes

Destination El Paso Advisory Board Meeting

Tuesday, September 23, 4:00 p.m.

Destination El Paso

CITY CLERK DEPT
2025 OCT 30 AM 8:59

Board Members Present	Board Members Absent	Destination EP Staff	City of El Paso	Public
Daniel J. Veale *	Gabriel Ayub	Jose Garcia		Dany Padilla
Jennifer Gonzalez *		Rene Wong		
Rene Hurtado*		Jose Gil		
Veronica Hernandez*		Chris Puga		
Genevieve Torrez*		Brooke Underwood		
Pifas Silva *				
Ken Gorski *				
Bernie Olivas *				

I. Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order at 4:07 p.m. - Rene Hurtado, Chairperson

II. Approval of Minutes

- Motion to approve August minutes by Rene Hurtado.
- Motion seconded by Jennifer Gonzalez and Genevieve Torrez.

III. Department Updates for August 2025

- **President/CEO Update: Jose Garcia, President / CEO Destination El Paso**
- **Occupancy/Financials: Jose Garcia, President / CEO Destination El Paso**
 - Jose Garcia reported that hotel occupancy was 67.9%, showing year-over-year growth despite a cyclical dip.
 - The Average Daily Rate (ADR) was approximately \$115, an increase of about \$3 from last year.
 - Weekly revenue totaled around \$3 million, with El Paso continuing to outpace state and national occupancy levels.
 - For July 2025 financials, revenue is pacing ahead of budget.
 - Visit El Paso expenses are \$700,000 under budget due to timing.
 - El Paso Live expenses are \$25,000 over budget.
 - El Paso Water Parks expenses are \$200,000 under budget.
 - After subsidy, the organization remains just over \$100,000 ahead of budget.
- **Tourism Development: Brooke Underwood, Executive Director Visit El Paso**
 - Brooke Underwood reported that Amigo Man made more than 19 appearances across the city, engaging with over 1,000 residents and visitors.
 - Engagement with the military community remains strong. Military liaison Dania Bandas participated in the 1st Armored Division leadership onboarding, supported the BOSS program – where volunteers earned service medals through clean-up activities – and continued newcomer briefings. Jose Garcia also received a community award from AUSA in recognition of Visit El Paso's support for soldiers and their families.

- A familiarization (FAM) tour was hosted for our tour operators from Guadalajara, and Monterrey, Mexico. The goal was to develop at least two sellable itineraries. Stops included Salt + Honey, the Outlets and Fountains at Farrah, Dave & Buster's, a Chihuahua baseball game, La Nube, the Museum of Art, and the Mexican American Cultural Center.
- The Mission Trail Monthly tour was also held, with 12 attendees exploring the historic churches and cultural sites. These are free Saturday tours and are planned year-round.
- Lucila Guerra attended the Outdoor Writers Association of America (OWAA) conference, connecting with national creators and writers focused on storytelling, conservation, and culture. This event was noted as a key opportunity for relationship building.
- Influencer and media activity included:
 - Ed Marquez, an El Paso native, who drove strong engagement through local book signings.
 - John Sorsby, a Houston-based influencer, who highlighted El Paso's culinary scene and is planning a return visit focused on the outdoors.
- Brooke also previewed an upcoming activation at Formula 1 in Austin, which will highlight El Paso to international travelers and connect itineraries to Big Bend.
- **Advertising: Rene Wong, Destination El Paso**
 - Rene Wong reported that August digital campaigns exceeded benchmarks in Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Dallas, with the top three ads delivering strong performance.
 - Leisure digital campaigns remained strong, while event-driven organic social content achieved the highest engagement. Top posts included season announcements, the August 3rd anniversary, and Mammoth content.
 - In meetings, conventions, and sports marketing, PPC search was the strongest driver of traffic. The "Welcome to the new El Paso" ad performed six times above the industry average, and the promotional video is performing well, with plans for new versions incorporating music.
 - On LinkedIn, top-performing posts included the announcement of major upgrades, coverage of the CBA luncheon with the city manager, and a press conference. Convention South magazine also highlighted El Paso's southwestern value.
 - Mexico market activity continued to deliver high engagement. Campaigns used Meta, targeted industry outlets, and integrated print and radio strategies.
 - Rene also reported on generative AI, noting platforms such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, DALL-E, Jasper, and Perplexity and reshaping how travelers receive information. AI-generated overviews now often replace traditional search results.
 - A Generative Engine Optimization strategy is being developed. This includes restructuring website content into a question-and-answer format, anticipating traveler queries, and producing high-engagement itineraries and videos. Newsletter growth will support retention, and AI will be used as a creative tool for event and content ideation.

- Board member Ken Gorski emphasized the importance of visual storytelling, noting that people-centric imagery is essential for resonance. Rene shared that AI visuals are advancing rapidly, with Gemini now able to combine and enhance images.
- He also stressed that stakeholder expectations must evolve, as traditional ROI metrics will need to include AI-sourced engagement and off-site content distribution. A cross-industry session is being planned to align messaging across city entities.
- **Convention & Sports Development: Brooke Underwood, Executive Director Visit El Paso**
 - Brooke Underwood reported that the team attended the LULAC conference and successfully secured the 2027 event, winning against major cities like Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia.
 - The team also participated in the ASAE trade show in Los Angeles, with a booth activation featuring live painting by local artist Patrick Avalgon. Creative ideas such as painted badges were highlighted for visibility.
 - At Connect Marketplace in Miami, the team conducted over 70 planner meetings in a speed-dating style format, supported by lodging coordination with Hotel Paso del Norte.
 - The team also attended HPN Global in Las Vegas, connecting with third-party planners through one-on-one meetings, and participated in the Pickleball Conference. The inaugural tournament drew 200 participants, doubling the target. Plans are underway to host larger tournaments, with facilities able to accommodate up to 17 volleyball courts.
 - Site visits included Educate Texas, with projected utilization of \$600,000; the Association of Bilingual Education, considering El Paso for 2028 with an estimated 1,210 room nights; and Sullivan Center Gratitude Events, exploring basketball tournaments with local coach Bob Jones.
 - The Country/Regional Volleyball Association, a long-term client, is expanding from one to two weekends, with additional tournaments under discussion.
 - Upcoming initiatives include hosting Small Markey Meetings, outreach to athletic governing bodies, continued pursuit of a Division I men's event, and an international presence at IMEX in March through a co-op with the State of Tennessee.
- **Special Events/Venue and Event Management: Chris Puga, Destination El Paso**
 - Chris Puga reported that Al Fesco "Country Nights" had strong attendance and community engagement.
 - Cool Canyon Nights also saw good turnout.
 - Kevin Kaarl's concert drew nearly 3,800 attendees.
- **El Paso Water Parks: Jose Garcia, Destination El Paso**
 - Jose Garcia reported that all four water parks received "EXCEEDS" ratings from Ellis & Associates, the industry safety auditor.
 - Special events included SummerWeen, a Solar Splash activation, and the Oasis Surf Club. Attendance for the summer surpassed 10,000 visitors, exceeding the annual goal.
- **Floor open for questions/comments**

*Adjourn: 5:02 pm

*The next meeting will be October 28, 2025, at 4:00 pm

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Chairperson: Bruce

Date: 10/28/25