

Minutes

Destination El Paso Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday, February 25, 4:00 p.m.

Destination El Paso

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

I. Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order at 4:03 by Daniel J. Veale

II. Approval of Minutes

- Motion by Daniel J. Veale to approve January minutes, seconded by Bernie Olivas. Motion passes.

III. Department Updates for January 2026

- **Updates: Jose Garcia, President/CEO, Destination El Paso**
- **Occupancy/Financials: Jose Garcia, President/CEO, Destination El Paso**
 - Local hotel occupancy is trending slightly behind the previous year; however, the average daily rate has increased.
 - Hotel occupancy increased by 7.7% week-over-week, with performance expected to level out year-over-year by mid-to-late March.
 - Revenue is currently \$1.3 million ahead of budget, driven primarily by strong event activity.
 - Financial performance by division includes:
 - Visit El Paso approximately \$25,000 under budget.
 - El Paso Live approximately \$1.2 million over budget.
 - Water Parks approximately \$4,000 under budget.
 - After accounting for the hotel occupancy tax city subsidy, the organization remains approximately \$150,000 ahead of budget overall.
- **Tourism Development: Veronica Castro, Visit El Paso**
 - The Amigo Man mascot participated in a lot of community events during this month. The 50th Anniversary Celebration held at the Downtown Visitor Information Center was well attended and positively received.
 - Partnership efforts with Fort Bliss continue to strengthen through weekly presentations, welcoming newly arriving soldiers and organized tours for military personnel and their spouses, with participation increasing monthly.
 - The upcoming Black History Tour, scheduled for February 26, expanded capacity from 18 to 30 attendees due to strong demand.
 - Earned media efforts generated \$5.1 million in media value with less than \$50,000 invested in travel writers and influencers.

- A German travel writer who visited in December 2023 published a feature article about El Paso in August 2024, demonstrating long-term media impact.
- Two influencers are currently visiting El Paso; they will be sharing their experience during a 15-minute segment in a Phoenix event.
- A free public horseback riding tour held in Waco, Texas received positive feedback from participants, and monthly public tours are planned moving forward.
- Industry engagement included participation in:
 - American Bus Association (ABA) appointments alongside Team Texas.
 - International Media Marketplace (IMM) with over 50 media appointments, historically generating 3-4 annual media visits.
 - Travel & Adventure Show, engaging approximately 1,000 attendees on the first day despite reduced attendance on day two due to weather conditions.
- Upcoming initiatives include participation in Expo Chihuahua and an event in Monterrey in March, a Canada media sales mission and North American Travel Journalist Association event in April, and the Women in Travel Summit (WITS) in May.
- **Advertising: Rene Wong, Destination El Paso**
 - The primary search campaign generated nearly 10,000 ad views and more than 12,000 website visits.
 - An ongoing leisure campaign delivered 234,000 views and approximately 2,400 site visits, with TikTok and Meta serving as the strongest traffic drivers.
 - Top-performing organic social media content featured the “Nueve Uno Cinco” cocktail lounge and the film *One Battle After Another*, both generating strong engagement.
 - Print advertising placements highlighted El Paso’s boot making heritage, cultural experiences, and community identity.
 - The meetings planner campaign generated over 450,000 ad views and nearly 8,000 website visits.
 - Top LinkedIn content included industry participation updates, sales travel announcements, and promotion of *One Battle After Another*.
 - A print advertisement was placed in Convention South Magazine promoting the convention center, hotel inventory, and local visitor experiences.
 - The Mexico Leisure campaign delivered over 855,000 ad views, more than 40,000 website visits, and nearly 400,000 video views, with TikTok identified as the top-performing platform. Traditional placements included tourism publications and airport advertising.
 - Increased interest from Mexico was noted, particularly surrounding concerts and major events such as Post Malone.
- **Convention & Sports Development: Brooke Underwood, Visit El Paso**
 - Participation in the Sports Express Conference generated 11 RFPs from 33 appointments.
 - A site visit for the LULAC 2027 Convention resulted in confirmation of the event, projected to bring 2,000 attendees, more than 2,300 room nights, and an estimated \$1.5 million economic impact.

- The New Breed Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Tournament was booked for April 2026, expected to attract approximately 400 athletes and spectators with a projected \$100,000 economic impact.
- A Pickleball Tournament scheduled for March 20-22 aims to increase participation to 250 players.
- Discussion addressed the likelihood that a large-scale bowling tournament will not return due to long-term venue commitments and declining regional popularity. However, strong relationships with Conference USA (CUSA) present opportunities to host future NCAA events. UTEP volleyball was identified as a viable hosting opportunity.
- Board member Daniel Veale shared that El Paso Children's Hospital will launch a sports medicine program in April. A potential partnership was discussed to provide medical services for visiting tournaments, positioning El Paso as a competitive destination for sporting events.
- **Special Events/Venue and Event Management: Chris Puga, Destination El Paso**
 - A total of 12 events across 19 event days were hosted, generating 20,700 attendees.
 - Notable sell-out performances included Jesse & Joy, with attendance of 1,950 guests.
 - The board discussed venue selection considerations between the Plaza Theatre and Abraham Chavez Theatre. Selection depends on availability, promoter preference, and venue capacity. The Plaza Theatre offers financial advantages due to historic tax exemptions, while the Abraham Chavez Theatre's built-in production system remains a strong attracting for touring acts.
- **El Paso Water Parks: Daniel Arizpe, Destination El Paso**
 - Water Parks leadership completed advanced risk management training.
 - Recruitment efforts began in January to hire approximately 350 seasonal staff members.
 - Community outreach included water safety education programs for middle school students and hosting the Polar Plunge, which raised more than \$4,500.
 - Group sales bookings have been confirmed, and discussions are underway with El Paso Children's Hospital regarding collaborative water safety programming.
- **Floor open for questions/comments**
 - Board members discussed challenges associated with tracking tourism visitation from Mexico due to legal and technical limitations in accessing customs data.
 - Event ticket sales data indicates a significant number of visitors traveling from Mexico. A new flight service launching in May is expected to increase hotel demand, and continued hotel usage by executives from Juárez maquila operations was noted.

*Adjourn: 4:52pm

*The next meeting will be March 24, 2026, at 4:00 pm

Chairperson: _____



Date: _____

3-24-26