

## Minutes

### Destination El Paso Advisory Board Meeting

Tuesday, August 26, 4:00 p.m.

### Destination El Paso

CITY CLERK DEPT  
2025 SEP 25 AM 8:19

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

#### I. Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order at 4:02 p.m. - Daniel Veale, Vice Chairperson

#### II. Approval of Minutes

- Motion to approve July minutes by Daniel Veale, Vice Chairperson
- Approved unanimously

#### III. Introductions

- New member Pifas Silva was introduced to the board.

#### IV. Department Updates for July 2025

- **President/CEO Update: Jose Garcia, President / CEO Destination El Paso**
- **Occupancy/Financials: Jose Garcia, President / CEO Destination El Paso**
  - Jose Garcia reported on hotel performance, noting the average occupancy was 65.3%, down 2.4 percentage points from the prior week's 66.9%.
  - The average daily rate was \$124.5 a 1.3% decrease from the previous week, and total revenue was \$2.7 million, down 3.6%
  - Year-to-date total revenue is 1.8 million, exceeding the budget by \$1.3 million.
  - Expenses are \$700,000 under budget, primarily due to timing.
  - El Paso Water Parks are \$387,000 below budget for expenses.
  - Including the city subsidy, the organization is \$1.6 million ahead of budget.
- **Tourism Development: Veronica Castro, Director of Tourism, Visit El Paso**
  - Veronica Castro detailed Amigo Man attending over 15 events, including El Fresco and the Helen of Troy Welcome. A key initiative was a welcome reception for Helen of Troy employees, who are relocating their headquarters to the Flower building in downtown El Paso. Helen of Troy had been homebound for about four to five years after their old building was sold. The move is expected by October and is seen as a significant boost for the downtown area.
  - Engagement with Fort Bliss remains strong, with 1,100 engagements throughout the month. Visit El Paso attended the change of guard for the garrison commander, noting that the retired commander chose to stay in El Paso. They are also working with the BOSS program, which has conducted downtown cleanups. For this first time, Visit El Paso will join a recruiting group traveling to Kansas to promote the city to new majors, highlighting Fort Bliss's unique offerings, such as its top

technologies and status as the largest inland military training facility. The base's location in the middle of the city enhances its attractiveness, aiding Army retention and encouraging retirees to stay in El Paso. A dedicated military liaison, Dania Pendas, an ex-military individual, has been highly effective in building these relationships, constantly present on the base and well-represented at events. Visit El Paso also sets up tables at major Fort Bliss events and twice a month at Freedom Crossing.

- In partnership with the local nonprofit "We Hike", Visit El Paso is hosting hiking safety classes to promote ecotourism responsibly, emphasizing the importance of caution due to El Paso's terrain and weather. The second of a three-part series has been held, with about 25 people attending each event, and the final class for the summer is scheduled for August 23<sup>rd</sup>. A new "Outdoor Adventure Guide" has been produced, a collaboration with the marketing team and the first of its kind in probably in ten years and is being distributed to encourage exploration of local trails.
  - Visit El Paso participated in the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Viva Big Bend Music Festival, connecting with over 300 attendees from Midland, Odessa, and the Southern New Mexico area, positioning the city as a "gateway to the region". A new partnership was formed with a regional hospital that serves the Big Bend area; Visit El Paso hosted their entire hospital team and will utilize their transport teams to distribute promotional materials to doctor's offices and other community points throughout the Big Bend region.
  - The familiarization (FAM) trip during Coldplay was very successful, yielding \$2.4 million in earned media from four individuals. This included a feature in Vogue Mexico, with the article digitally, in the October print issue, and a potential El Paso cover for the November issue, following a photoshoot in El Paso. Additionally, Visit El Paso hosted two walks (one in El Paso and one in Juarez) for "America's Walking Club", whose conference was in Las Cruces. One of the walkers, a travel writer, generated a story worth nearly \$2.9 million in earned media. The tourism manager, Lucy, has already exceeded her fiscal year's goal of \$5 million, with current earned media totaling \$5.4 million and more expected in August.
  - The team is preparing for several consumer shows to close the fiscal year, including the Balloon Fiesta (part of the Texas booth for four days) and the Circuit of the Americas Formula One in Austin. These events are targeted to attract domestic and international visitors, including many from Europe, Mexico, and Germany.
  - In collaboration with Sabores, a new PR firm in Mexico City that Visit El Paso teamed up with a year ago, a new Spanish-language visitor guide has been created to be distributed to travel agencies in Mexico. Artwork by graphic designer Mariana is featured on the cover. A total of \$50,000 copies were printed and will be distributed annually in key Mexican markets with nonstop flights to Juarez (Mexico City, Guadalajara, León, Monterrey), and at the mobile visitor center in Chihuahua. Future editions will look for sponsors or paid advertisements.
- **Advertising: Rene Wong, Destination El Paso**

- July's digital advertising campaigns for the Leisure Vertical saw significant engagement from key markets like L.A. and Denver. The top-performing ad achieved a remarkable 4.74% click-through rate (CTR), exceeding the industry average of 0.24%. Video ads reached a 94% completion rate, and the search campaign delivered a standout 17.5% CTR, driven by high-intent keywords such as "El Paso Entertainment Calendar".
- The most successful organic social media post was an "open letter to Vermont", generating 20,000 engagements on Facebook. The "Free things to Do" series also continued to perform well.
- The print strategy is building on one of Visit El Paso's most significant recent brand achievements, including an ad in the Dallas Cowboys yearbook, highlighting El Paso as the "boot capital of Texas". The "Welcome to the new El Paso" ad for the meetings and conventions achieved a 1.59% CTR, more than six times the industry average. LinkedIn strategies focus B2B engagement showcasing El Paso as a hub for major events and professional opportunities.
- A new marketing plan, contributed by all department directors, will be launched on September 1<sup>st</sup>, outlining department focus and new pillars, including AI. The plan will also be available online.
- Print campaigns continue in top-tier industry publications, including *Meetings Magazine*, *Meetings Today*, and *Sports Destination*. The digital ad campaign targeting At Comark in July achieved click-through rates of 8.13% and 7.08%, far above industry average. The "Piensalo de Nuevo" (Think Again) campaign is successfully challenging perceptions.
- AI's impact was discussed, noting travelers increasingly use AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity for planning, reducing reliance on websites and traditional metrics. Focus is shifting to engaged visits and storytelling. Traditional metrics such as website visits and CRTs are less reliable; QR codes are now ubiquitous.
- **Convention & Sports Development: Jose Garcia, Destination El Paso**
  - The convention sales team attended the Lamont Company annual partner meeting in Arlington, Texas (July 8– 10), engaging planners and educating them on El Paso and hotel partners offerings.
  - The team hosted a site visit with the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). El Paso successfully won the RFP for 2027, an incredible win against Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, reinforcing that site tours are a contributing factor to their high conversation rate once groups visit El Paso.
  - The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has selected El Paso for their commission meeting, which will bring 100 attendees, generate 200 total room nights, and have a direct economic impact of \$104,000. Additional verbal confirmations were received for the 2026 College Football Equipment Managers Society Conference, the 2027 Southeastern Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians, and the 2026 Gulf States Camera Club Council Annual Convention, collectively bringing 650 attendees, 940 total room nights, and an economic impact of \$721,000.
  - The sales team remains very busy and, on the road, with a list of sales initiatives they will be attending.
- **Special Events/Venue and Event Management: Chris Puga, Destination El Paso**
  - Summer series at El Paso Live venues saw strong attendance:

- Alfresco Music Series (Latin and Country Nights) offered dancing and F&B options.
- Cool Canyon Series drew 5,571 attendees at the McKelligon Canyon Amphitheater, featuring local talent, attendance recovered after a rainout.
- Viva El Paso attracted 2,700 attendees, benefiting from new marketing efforts.
- Grupo Folklorico performances drew 2,275 attendees, offering multicultural interactions.
- Plaza Classic Film Festival attracted 12,000 attendees, featuring films and special guests, including the director of La Bamba. F&B included themed drinks.

- **El Paso Water Parks: Jose Garcia, Destination El Paso**

- The El Paso Water Parks had a strong June, but numbers dipped in July due to monsoon rains. Despite this, they are still pacing ahead year over year in revenue.
- Special events included Stars and Stripes and Neon Night.
- Swim lessons are offered across all parks and will be extended outside the season due to El Paso's moderate weather.
- The parks also offer a sensory splash hour and are one of the only certified autism centers.
- The parks reported good park buyouts and group sales.
- For the first time in four seasons, all four parks received "exceeds" ratings on every one of the three random audits conducted by Ellison Associates.
- The season will officially end around Labor Day, with staggered closings throughout September.

- **Floor open for questions/comments**

- Veronica Castro discussed the "Vivamos Mexico" event, a celebration of Mexican Independence Day in partnership with the Mexican Consulate. Expected to draw about 10,000 people, consistent last year. The event will feature fireworks, the official grito, lucha libre, and many performers.
- Pifas Silva asked about the Visitor Center in Chihuahua. Veronica Castro explained that it shifted from a fixed kiosk in a mall (which operated for nine months in 2019 before shutting down by COVID) to a mobile center. Six paid interns from UPRN University staff it. This approach has proven successful. The downtown El Paso visitor center, reopened in March, is located upstairs from the former Chamber of Commerce location and now includes a retail portion.

**\*Adjourn: 4:50 pm**

**\*The next meeting will be September 23, 2025, at 4:00 pm**

CITY CLERK DEPT  
2025 SEP 25 AM 8:20