

11-10-25

Work Session

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Meeting notes:

- **Snowmass Airport Modernization and Closure Planning:** Diane Jackson, Ryan Mahoney, and Bill Tomsch provided the Snowmass Village Town Council with a comprehensive update on the airport modernization project, including runway and terminal improvements, funding, public engagement, and detailed plans for the 2027 airport closure, with extensive discussion on alternative transportation and coordination with nearby airports and airlines.
 - **Project Scope and Funding:** Diane Jackson outlined the airport modernization project, which includes shifting and reconstructing the runway, building a new terminal, and improving the fixed base operator (FBO) facilities. The project is funded by successful ballot measures, allowing up to \$341 million in borrowing capacity, with repayment through airport revenues and no tax increases. Additional federal grants are being pursued, especially for runway improvements.
 - **Timeline and Design Phase:** Ryan Mahoney explained the project timeline, noting that the design phase will continue through 2026, with a major airport closure scheduled from April to November 2027 for runway and terminal construction. During this period, the old terminal will remain in use until the new terminal is completed, projected for 2029.
 - **Public Engagement and Task Forces:** The team described robust public engagement efforts, including open houses and meetings at local venues, and encouraged ongoing community participation. Two task forces—one for the terminal and one for ground transportation—are actively involved in ensuring the design aligns with community values and common ground recommendations.
 - **Alternative Transportation During Closure:** Bill Tomsch and Diane Jackson addressed concerns about transportation during the 2027 closure, detailing coordination with Eagle and Grand Junction airports, airlines' plans to increase service at alternative airports, and exploration of creative ground transportation solutions such as motor coaches and shuttle services. Private aviation will focus on Rifle, and boutique operators like Arrow will expand service to nearby airports.
 - **Aircraft Modernization and Operational Improvements:** Bill Tomsch reported on the transition from CRJ 700 to Embraer E175 aircraft, which offer improved reliability, higher tailwind tolerance, and advanced navigation systems. United and Delta have upgraded their fleets, with United Express aircraft now equipped with Starlink Wi-Fi. American Airlines remains the sole CRJ 700 operator, maximizing gate usage and expanding nonstop routes. The team also discussed technical changes in FAA wind reporting and approach procedures, resulting in smoother and more reliable operations.
 - **Parking and Ground Transportation Center:** The council raised questions about worsening parking conditions, which Diane Jackson attributed to increased flight activity, competitive pricing, and non-airport use. Plans for the new terminal include a dedicated ground transportation center, improved multimodal

options, and reserved space for future transit solutions such as light rail or gondola, with ongoing collaboration with local transit providers.

- **Snowmass Ski Area Upgrades and Community Initiatives:** Jeff Buckhister updated the council on Snowmass ski area improvements, including new chairlifts, restaurant renovations, snowmaking automation, housing and childcare initiatives, and plans for future transportation and community engagement, with council members and Thomas providing feedback and requests for enhanced local accessibility and affordability.
 - **Lift and Facility Upgrades:** Jeff Buckhister reported the completion of two new chairlifts (Elk Camp six-pack and Circle T Bar), ongoing acceptance testing, and readiness for operation pending snow conditions. The new roof on the Lara facility allows continued construction through winter, with anticipated public opening next year. Temporary food and restroom solutions are in place for the current season, and expanded deck seating at Elk Camp adds 120 seats.
 - **Snowmaking and Trail Improvements:** A snowmaking automation project on House Hollow was completed, increasing efficiency and uptime. Snowmass is on track with its historical snowmaking average, and new uphill trail maps and signage are being introduced to improve safety and navigation for uphill skiers.
 - **Housing and Childcare Initiatives:** The ski company is advancing a shop housing project and exploring cost-sharing partnerships with the town to make childcare more affordable for local families, especially for children under three. Council members and Thomas emphasized the need for accessible childcare and affordable ski programs for locals, with Jeff committing to take feedback to the team and explore collaborative solutions.
 - **Community Engagement and Local Programs:** Discussions included the importance of affordable mountain amenities such as Up 4 Pizza, the community sticker program, and expanded camp offerings for children. Council members advocated for increased local access to facilities like the Treehouse and requested continued attention to local needs in future planning.
 - **Future Transportation and E-Bike Pilot:** Jeff confirmed the ski company's commitment to participate in transit planning during the airport closure and expressed interest in partnering on new transportation modes, including aerial transit and an e-bike pilot program on ski company property for next summer.
- **Tourism Department Budget, Events, and Destination Management Plan:** Julie and the tourism board presented the tourism budget, event strategy, and the new Destination Management Plan (DMP), highlighting the balance between community-focused and ticketed events, inclusivity efforts, sustainability goals, and the evolving role of tourism in supporting local businesses and residents, with council members providing feedback and discussing adoption timing and future priorities.
 - **Tourism Budget and Housing Allocation:** Julie explained the tourism budget, which remains relatively flat with a slight increase in personnel services. The transfer to housing has grown from \$4.2 million to \$4.8 million, with capital reserves allocated for projects like the new Skittles lift and concert venue improvements. The council discussed the intent and history of the tax split between tourism and housing.
 - **Event Strategy and Community Engagement:** The department invests heavily in free community events such as Thursday night concerts, Oktoberfest, and

family-friendly activities, with data showing strong local and regional participation. Ticketed events are fewer but drive business and support local hospitality. Council members emphasized the need for continued accessibility and local engagement, suggesting initiatives like discounted tickets for residents and maintaining the community focus of events.

- **Destination Management Plan Overview:** Julie provided an overview of the DMP, developed through extensive stakeholder engagement, and structured around four pillars: people, place, prosperity, and process. The plan aims to shift from tourism promotion to management, prioritizing community benefit, sustainability, inclusivity, and data-driven decision-making. Key initiatives for the coming year include history and heritage programming, responsible travel education, accessible travel mapping, and inclusivity efforts.
- **Sustainability and Affordability Concerns:** Council members raised concerns about the affordability gap for locals and the need for more robust sustainability actions, such as composting and carbon reduction. Julie and Clint acknowledged the limitations of current resources and discussed the potential for a dedicated sustainability position, with future funding possibly coming from tourism or general funds. The council agreed to coordinate efforts and consider recommendations from the Environmental Advisory Board.
- **Plan Adoption and Council Feedback:** The council debated whether to adopt the DMP before finalizing the 'Thrive Not Just Survive' initiative, ultimately agreeing that the plan provides a flexible framework for ongoing work. Members highlighted the importance of maintaining local identity, marketing to residents, and ensuring the plan remains a living document adaptable to future needs.
- **Boards and Commissions Application Process:** The council discussed the upcoming boards and commissions application process, agreeing to use the Spark Hire video interview platform for new and contested applicants, while incumbents in uncontested seats will not be required to re-interview, and clarified the information-gathering steps for Megan and future improvements to the application.
 - **Interview and Selection Procedures:** Council members agreed that Spark Hire interviews will be required for new applicants and those applying for contested seats, while incumbents in uncontested positions will be reappointed without interviews. Megan will gather attendance records and feedback from committee chairs regarding reapplicants, and the council will consider adding clarifying questions about applicants' willingness to serve on other boards.
 - **Future Application Improvements:** Thomas suggested updating the written application to include more detailed questions, and the council agreed to place this on a future agenda for discussion and potential revision.

Follow-up tasks:

- **Airport Closure Planning:** Coordinate with other airport directors (Eagle, Grand Junction, Rifle) and airlines to finalize contingency transportation and flight plans for the 2027 Aspen airport closure, including ground transportation options and schedule adjustments. (Town, Bill)

- **Ground Transportation Center Design:** Continue discussions with task forces and service providers (e.g., RAFTA, rideshare, shuttle operators) to develop enhanced public transit and multimodal options for the new airport terminal, reserving space for future projects like light rail or gondola. (Town, Ryan)
- **Airport Parking Management:** Evaluate and implement solutions to address airport parking congestion, including reviewing fee structures and policies to prevent long-term non-airport use, while maintaining affordability for locals. (Diane Jackson)
- **Childcare Accessibility and Affordability:** Collaborate between Town Council and Aspen Skiing Company to explore cost-sharing and expanded access to affordable childcare for children under 3 at Treehouse, including coordination with local facilities and consideration of pricing models. (Town, Heather Henry, Aspen Skiing Company)
- **Boards and Commissions Appointment Process:** Gather attendance records and confidential feedback from committee chairs regarding reapplying board members, and clarify SparkHire interview requirements for new and contested applicants. (Megan)
- **Destination Management Plan Adoption:** Make minor edits to the DMP as discussed (e.g., wording changes, clarifications), and prepare the plan for adoption on the consent agenda, ensuring alignment with council's Thrive Not Just Survive initiatives. (Julie, Town Council)