

Statement from Visit Estes Park Board Chair Sean Jurgens and Shannon Davis, Interim CEO

A number of public claims have been made about the actions of Visit Estes Park and its Board. As the VEP Board Chair and Interim CEO, we take full accountability for our organization and would like to address the issues raised.

Visit Estes Park has had a vacant finance position for more than two months. Outgoing Interim CEO Suzy Blackhurst advertised for the position of Finance and Budget Coordinator (a lower level position) on June 22 (salary range \$43,000 - \$50,000) and received two applications, both of which did not meet minimum requirements. With the Board's direction, Ms. Blackhurst created and advertised for the position of Finance Manager (a mid-level position) on July 3 (salary range \$62,000 - \$70,000) and received no applications. The Chief Financial Officer position was ultimately offered with a salary of \$84,000.

Incoming Interim CEO, Shannon Davis arrived with no applications for a critical role in the organization. The decision was made to adopt an idea initiated much earlier in the year: to elevate the open financial position to a Chief Financial Officer. Mr. Davis met with Kevin Benes, at that time as acting budget committee chair, to hear his thoughts on the CFO idea and what key duties that role should fulfill. During this discussion, it became clear to Mr. Davis that Mr. Benes would make an exceptional candidate.

The VEP Board discussed the issue of creating a new CFO position at its public meeting on July 6, and Board consensus was to move forward with the creation of a CFO position. At the time of the July 6 meeting, Mr. Benes had not applied for or been offered a position with Visit Estes Park.

Following the July 6 Board meeting, Mr. Davis had a discussion with Mr. Benes and decided to deliver a written offer of employment for this newly formed position to Mr. Benes. Mr. Benes accepted and the decision was announced to the staff. Mr. Benes subsequently resigned from his job on the Town of Estes Park events staff as well as his position on the VEP Board of Directors.

Mr. Davis moved quickly because VEP is currently heading into the most important weeks of the budget cycle—VEP staff has a deadline to report a proposed 2019 budget to the Board at this month's Board meeting. It was critical for VEP to have this new hire brought on in time to assist in finalizing the 2019 proposed budget.

The Visit Estes Park Board acknowledges that the timing of the resignation and initial offer has caused concerns for some members of the community. Furthermore, we have conceded that Mr. Benes should not have been included in the discussion of the creation of the CFO position at the July 6 board meeting—This has since been acknowledged in meetings with the newspaper's staff, the mayor, and in a public comment issued by Mr. Davis in the meeting at Town Hall on July 27. Furthermore, the public has been provided all information related to this decision and Visit Estes Park will continue to operate as a transparent organization.

Visit Estes Park has the utmost respect for the critical role of accurately reporting facts and holding those in power accountable. Continuing to improve VEP processes is part of our leadership mission this year and beyond. Moving forward, the Visit Estes Park Board is committed to designing and adopting a formal VEP hiring process to prevent situations like this from occurring in the future. The creation of this policy as well as board governance training will be presented and discussed in upcoming VEP Board meetings, which will be and have always been open to the public.

The Board's decision to create a CFO position is good for Visit Estes Park. Creating a role with more responsibility and the express duty to build an efficient budget and report accurately to the Board provides the absolute transparency the community wants, needs, and deserves. A CFO who reports to the Board eliminates the potential for a CEO to gain too much power over the financial processes of the entity, a concern that has been raised in the past. The creation of a CFO position also enables anyone filling the CEO role to focus on what they need to be best at: leading a staff in creating innovative ways to brand and promote the best mountain town in America.