



City of Prescott

Tourism Advisory Committee

March 12, 2025 | 11:00 AM
201 N. Montezuma Street
Council Chambers, 3rd Floor
Prescott, AZ 86301

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Christensen called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Margo Christensen - Chair
Matt Brassard - Vice Chair
Robert Coombs - Member
Jim Dawson - Member (Excused)
Dennis Gallagher - Member
Edd Kellerman - Member
Autumn Kline - Member
Ken Leja - Member (Absent)
Nick Medina - Member
Linda Nichols - Member (Absent)

3. DISCUSSION & ACTION ITEMS

- A. Approval of the February 12, 2025 Tourism Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes.

MOTION BY MEMBER GALLAGHER TO APPROVE FEBRUARY 12, 2025 MEETING MINUTES; SECONDED BY MEMBER KELLERMAN: PASSED (7 - 0)

- B. Presentation & Discussion Regarding Prescott Event Alliance.

Tourism Manager, Cristina Binkley, introduced Prescott Event Alliance representatives, Amore Cianciola and Julie Brown Pflueger.

Ms. Cianciola opened discussion on how to create more excitement around local history through event planning. She reflected on last year's success at the Wedding Expo, noting that it served as a strong source of inspiration and helped place Prescott on the radar for event coordinators. This year, the focus will be on continuing that momentum, with the goal of raising visibility within the industry. While weddings remain a focus, the program will also be expanding to include corporate events. The date for the upcoming Industry Showcase was confirmed as Thursday, August 14, 2025.

Ms. Brown Pflueger provided additional information related to marketing efforts and regional positioning. She shared that the City of Prescott is not appearing as prominently in event-related searches as neighboring areas. Ms. Brown Pflueger noted that due to the intense summer heat, June typically marks the end of the event season in Phoenix, making Prescott an attractive location for planners looking to extend business into the summer months. This year's initiative includes a specific focus on expanding connections with destination management companies (DMCs).

Ms. Cianciola reviewed the sponsorship packages available for this year's showcase, which include venues such as the Hassayampa Inn, Grand Highland Courtyard, The Federal, and the Prescott Wedding Chapel. She outlined the planned structure for the event, which will begin with a festival-style gathering at Watson Lake. Attendees will then enjoy lunch and a tradeshow at the Prescott Resort, participate in a scavenger activity at the Fairweather Social Club, and end the day with a closing event at Sam Hill Warehouse. Each year's event is designed to be unique in structure and experience. Ms. Cianciola also mentioned ticketing plans, which will include standard admission and options for students. She noted that last year's event was very successful and fun, and there is great enthusiasm for building on that energy this year.

Ms. Brown Pflueger shared that a local caterer and an entertainment company have expressed interest in staying in Prescott throughout the summer in order to expand their businesses.

Ms. Cianciola emphasized the need for participation and feedback from the Committee to help evolve and improve the program. Monthly meetings will include updates from Tourism staff.

Ms. Binkley shared her support on behalf of the Tourism Office, stating that they are excited to see the Alliance fill a gap that Tourism currently cannot cover. Tourism has committed \$1,000 in funding to help launch this year's event and will continue supporting it to the best of their capacity.

Chair Christensen asked whether this effort was similar to the programs offered by Meeting Planners International (MPI).

Ms. Cianciola clarified that while MPI holds annual retreats, they have not hosted events comparable to what the PE Alliance is organizing. She added that there is potential to expand with a separate event in Phoenix, designed for those who may not be able to attend a one-day event in Prescott.

Member Coombs inquired about group capacity and logistics.

Ms. Brown Pflueger responded that the aim is to welcome planners of all kinds to Prescott, regardless of the types of events they typically organize.

Ms. Cianciola added that they are working to include representatives from various camps that offer retreat spaces.

Member Coombs suggested a press release from the Alliance to assist with promotion and outreach.

This item was for discussion only. No formal action took place.

C. Presentation & Discussion Regarding the Tourism Strategic Plan.

Ms. Binkley opened the discussion by providing background on the existing Tourism Strategic Plan. She explained that three years ago, the City of Prescott engaged the Corragio Group to lead the development of a strategic plan for the Tourism Office. The total cost of the project was approximately \$25,000 and included a four-day working session with members of the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC). Since its implementation, staff have accomplished an estimated 70% of the recommendations, although the most recent completion percentage has not yet been calculated. Staff are now seeking input from TAC on whether to move forward with a new strategic plan in the upcoming fiscal year, delay the effort for another year, rehire the Corragio Group, or consider a different vendor.

Chair Christensen asked what the committed plan end date was.

Ms. Binkley responded that there was no fixed end date, and that implementation was tied to feasibility and capacity over time. She explained that Members Kellerman, Coombs, Brassard, and Chair Christensen had participated in the original process. Ms. Binkley noted that the original \$25,000 cost was offset through a co-op arrangement, but future planning efforts may be more expensive. Additionally, due to bed tax requirements, the city must obtain a minimum of three vendor quotes for such a project.

Member Medina asked about the reasoning behind potentially developing a new plan.

Ms. Binkley responded that the Tourism Office is currently managing numerous projects and initiatives, some of which are being prompted by other city departments but may not align with the Tourism Office's core priorities. She emphasized the importance of strategic planning to determine what is most important to the committee, whether that be marketing or budgetary considerations. While no immediate decision is necessary, Ms. Binkley recommended planning now if the city intends to fund a new strategic plan for FY26.

Chair Christensen commented that the previous vendor was excellent to work with, to which Members Coombs and Kellerman both agreed.

Ms. Binkley added that the state recently updated its own strategic plan, which reinforces the value of staying current.

Chair Christensen asked how long the previous planning process took.

Ms. Binkley responded that the working sessions consisted of four half-day meetings, with strong attendance from TAC members as well as participation from City Council members.

Chair Christensen commented that it was well worth the effort, as it set the plan for the past three years.

Member Gallagher asked when a new plan would take effect.

Ms. Binkley responded that the process could begin once the Committee provides direction to gather quotes.

Ms. Binkley referenced a one-sheet summary included in the meeting packet, which outlined that approximately 70% of the original plan's goals had been met. Some goals, she explained, are ongoing by nature, while others depend on current priorities. She also highlighted that some elements, such as the wayfinding program, have proven costly. Other initiatives, like the Prescott Stories campaign and social media efforts, have been successful in engaging local businesses. Partnerships with the Prescott Chamber of Commerce and Prescott Downtown Partnership (PDP) were mentioned as areas that could still be enhanced. Additionally, Ms. Binkley noted that while Prescott doesn't experience a true "shoulder season," January through March tends to be slower, though not in need of significant promotion. She concluded by emphasizing that updating the strategic plan is about being both proactive and protective of what the organization can achieve.

Chair Christensen asked if there was more to be done from the staff perspective to justify pursuing another three-year plan.

Ms. Binkley confirmed that such planning should remain on the radar, with timing dependent on cost and fiscal year considerations.

This item was for discussion only. No formal action took place.

D. Presentation & Discussion Regarding Destination Management Organization Versus Destination Marketing Organization.

Ms. Binkley reviewed and explained the current and future role of Experience Prescott as a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). While Experience Prescott currently functions as a DMO focused on promoting Prescott as a travel destination, there is a global movement toward Destination Management Organizations (DMOs evolving into DMMOs). These organizations go beyond traditional marketing by also addressing tourism sustainability, infrastructure needs, and long-term community impact. She noted that with a growing portion of the tourism budget being used for destination management rather than direct marketing, the department is experiencing conflicting priorities and initiatives. Tourism staff are seeking input from the Committee on whether to remain a DMO or consider transitioning toward a more management-oriented or hybrid approach.

Ms. Binkley further explained that, according to current guidelines, approximately 75% of tourism-related funds should be directed toward marketing. However, the city is closer to allocating 80% toward destination management. If the city wishes to remain a traditional DMO, the marketing budget is currently being underutilized, especially in comparison to surrounding communities, which invest heavily in tourism promotion. Ms. Binkley asked the Committee, if the focus should remain on marketing Prescott, managing it as a destination, or a blend of both?

A brief video that outlined the distinctions between destination marketing and destination management was shared by Ms. Binkley. She mentioned a third model, Destination Marketing and Management Organizations (DMMOs), combine both approaches. Many communities have started adopting the model by slowly shifting to include destination management under the broader tourism umbrella.

Chair Christensen commented on the complexity of the issue and that this could represent a pivotal shift in direction. She expressed support for the management philosophy, suggesting it could be a springboard for long-term initiatives, such as trail enhancements or even campaigns to increase bed tax funding. Chair Christensen also noted that the original bed tax ballot language was created over 20 years ago, and that changes in tourism demands may now warrant revisiting its intent.

Vice Chair Brassard commented that this was discussed during the last strategic planning session.

Member Kline asked whether the city could revert to a traditional DMO structure in the future if needed.

Ms. Binkley responded that a shift would be possible, as the state does not formally distinguish between models. Adjustments could be made within the existing budget, with management covering both promotion and oversight, with marketing remaining more narrowly focused. She added that staff does not have a specific preference at this point, but budget discussions will become relevant toward the end of the fiscal year depending on remaining funds.

Vice Chair Brassard asked which cities currently operate as a DMMO.

Ms. Binkley responded with City of Sedona as an example. She added, however, that they are having a reactive situation due to over-tourism.

Member Coombs commented that while current marketing strategies have been effective, the management aspect is increasingly important as it helps address the impact of rising tourism, including issues like congestion and infrastructure stress.

Member Kellerman commented that he supports a more holistic approach, stating that under a DMMO model, both destination image and community needs can be balanced more effectively.

Member Medina commented on tax allocation, emphasizing that a majority of funds should still be directed towards marketing in order to drive bed tax revenues, as well as maximize return on capital and ensure long-term financial impact.

Chair Christensen agreed that marketing tends to yield a recurring return on investment and that maintenance and capital improvements should ideally fall under the General Fund, instead of being covered by bed tax revenues. However, she noted the importance of balance, related to the gray area that exists between promotion and essential infrastructure improvements.

Ms. Binkley shared an example involving public restrooms, which, while not traditionally viewed as a tourism-related expense, are important from a destination management standpoint. Intentional, well-designed tourism destinations typically include amenities like walkways, signage, and water fountains, which improve the overall visitor experience.

Ms. Binkley noted that this discussion would become a standing agenda item moving forward. Although no decisions are required by the next meeting, since the upcoming fiscal year budget has already been submitted, continued discussion is essential. Some items currently included in the tourism budget are being re-evaluated and may be shifted to other departments, particularly those related to maintenance.

Councilwoman Fruhwirth added that the issue extends beyond tourism and affects all city departments. From a Public Works perspective, both management and DMO functions have merit. She commented on the importance of understanding the original ballot language to ensure informed decisions and suggested that reviewing historical budget trends could shed light on how priorities have shifted over time.

Member Medina commented that although maintenance is necessary, it does not directly contribute to attracting new visitors.

Chair Christensen agreed and commented that this is a common debate in many other municipalities.

Ms. Binkley noted that the original bed tax ballot language could be brought forward to the next meeting to help with further decision-making.

This item was for discussion only. No formal action took place.

4. UPDATES

A. Staff Announcements & Updates.

Staff from the Tourism and Recreation Services Departments provided the following updates to the Committee:

- Tourism budget requests have been submitted and a meeting with the City Manager is scheduled soon. Tourism grants remain open to the public.
- Tourism is currently advertising an RFP for a new website and digital asset management system. This will consolidate what were previously 18 separate contracts into one.
- Projects with PIMBA and IMBA are currently in development. Exploratory meetings are also underway for sports events in 2026, with an emphasis on collaborating with local colleges. The TransRockies event is scheduled to be presented at the March 25 Council meeting, with plans for a fall 2026 event. The TransRockies event is separate from Whiskey Off-Road bike race. Tourism supports both events as part of the goals set in the initial RFP.
- The DTN website advertising program has received special permission to be piloted on the Experience Prescott platform with six local stakeholders. Prescott is the only city entity to test the program, and the early results from its first month and a half have been very positive. This will be proposed for inclusion in the July contract presentation.
- The America 250 initiative will be discussed in a meeting scheduled for May 15, bringing together multiple local organizations.
- A 20th-anniversary Vietnam group event, expected to book over 100 hotel rooms, is nearing finalization, with details to be shared with hotels soon. There is also a potential new partnership with the Arizona Department of Veterans Services to bring Mental Health First Aid support for veterans. Prescott will be a stop on June 17, and Tourism staff are aiming to be actively involved.
- The Tourism website had over 11,000 active users, with top campaigns including Google City of Prescott and Sparklight. The most visited webpage was "Things to Do." Instagram reached 11.5k followers, gaining 300 new followers in the last month. The top-performing post was about ChatGPT, and the most-viewed reel was Papa's Italian Restaurant. Instagram engagement is up 10.1%. Facebook, YouTube, and Pinterest are also performing well. The "Day in the Life" reel received strong engagement. A food photographer has been hired to enhance promotion of the Prescott culinary scene.
- Work on the General Plan is ongoing, with the goal of placing it on the ballot for public vote in August.
- The special event tournament season is kicking off, including soccer tournaments, bike races, trail runs, and Easter services.

This item was for discussion only. No formal action took place.

B. Committee Member Updates.

Councilwoman Fruhwirth and Committee Members provided the following updates:

- Work on the August ballot is expected to wrap up by the end of the month. Items potentially appearing on the August ballot include the Open Space Charter Amendment and the General Plan. If these items are not approved in time, they may be moved to the November ballot. A third item, Home Rule, will also be included, allowing the city flexibility in its spending practices without being bound by state legislative restrictions. A new Vision and Mission Statement were approved during the recent Council meeting:

Vision: Prescott is a thriving and scenic community in the heart of Arizona, rooted in western heritage and strong hometown values, where individuals, families and businesses enjoy outdoor adventures, vibrant cultural events, a prosperous economy, and the promise of a bold tomorrow.

Mission: We enhance quality of life as stewards of our natural and built environment and through outstanding city services that engage our community, preserve our past, and ensure a safe and vibrant future.

- Upcoming events at the Elks Theatre include a dinner and casino night, with a collaborative event planned in September. A recent meeting took place with the Secretary of State regarding the America 250 initiative; the state indicated it will not be overseeing or managing local efforts.
- The Edison will soon celebrate its one-year anniversary, and a permit was approved for a retaining wall. Additional events are scheduled at the Wine Bar, which is currently expanding at the resort. Parking at the Motor Lodge will also be replaced.
- An Artistic Legacy event is planned, along with continued efforts to retrofit space for a permanent art collection at the Phippen Museum. Artwork from the past 16 years is being reviewed, documented, and photographed for the first time.
- The Chamber and Visitor Center have returned to summer hours. A successful business expo was held at Pine Ridge Marketplace, featuring 50 vendors and designed to raise awareness of local businesses.
- A certification for hotel industry analytics has been completed, including a deep dive into STAR reports for hotel performance analysis.

There will be no TAC meeting in the second week of April. The next scheduled meeting will take place April 30, 2025, and will include a regular meeting, lunch, and grant scoring meeting from approximately 11:00 AM to 2:30 PM.

This item was for discussion only. No formal action took place.

5. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, Chair Christensen adjourned the meeting at 12:21 p.m.

Margo Christensen

MARGO CHRISTENSEN, Chair

ATTEST:

MariKay Whisenand

MARIKAY WHISENAND, Staff Liaison