City of Valdez

212 Chenega Ave.
Valdez, AK 99686

Meeting Agenda

Valdez Tourism Task Force

Wednesday, March 4, 2026 | **5:00 PM** | **City Council Chambers**

Regular Meeting

I. ROLL CALL

II. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Discussion Item: Review and Discussion of Task Force Feedback Survey Results

III. ACTION ITEMS

1. Action Item: Recommendation to City Council for Management Structure of Future Tourism Marketing Organization

2. Action Item: Recommendation to City Council for Initial Interim Marketing Funding in the amount of $100,000

IV. TASK FORCE MEMBER COMMENTS/ NEXT STEPS

V. ADJOURNMENT

File #: 26-0091, **Version:** 1

ITEM TITLE:
Discussion Item: Review and Discussion of Task Force Feedback Survey Results

SUBMITTED BY: Elise Sorum-Birk, Deputy City Clerk

FISCAL NOTES:

Expenditure Required: n/a
Unencumbered Balance: n/a
Funding Source: n/a

RECOMMENDATION:

Discussion only.

SUMMARY STATEMENT:

A survey to gather opinions on topics discussed at the initial task force meeting was sent to members on Thursday, February 26th. Most questions centered around pros and cons of various organizational management structures and the final question was an open-ended inquiry on immediate tourism marketing needs for 2026.

Members were asked to respond by Monday, March 2nd. Once all responses are received the agenda packet will be updated with response data to ensure information is available to the public ahead of the meeting and responses will be distributed to the task force members.

The goal of this discussion will be to allow members to discuss their opinions in open session and to determine if there is consensus for a path forward among members.

Members may choose to gather additional feedback from the business community as well.

Valdez Tourism Task Force Feedback Survey

7 responses

Publish analytics

Name (optional)

7 responses

Colleen Stephens

Samantha

Joseph List

Kathy Nielsen

Kate Spadafora

Amber

Nate

Organizational Structure

Board of Directors

3

In your opinion, should Valdez's next DMO be governed by a board of directors containing board members representing a diversity of businesses in the local visitor industry?

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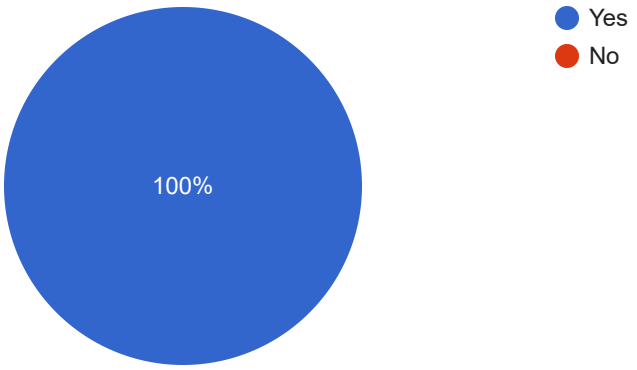
7 responses



From your own experience, list any pros of an organizational structure including a board of directors.

7 responses

Ideally a diversity of backgrounds that can each contribute. Also deliver a diversity of skills to help direct the organization.

Accountability and oversight, ability to preform checks and balances to ensure alignment with strategic goals and hold leadership accountable.

Buy in and on the ground info from people who live it day to day.

Diversity of knowledge and opinions. Board members can develop a strong sense of the organization and become a proactive voice on its behalf, both to stakeholders and higher governing bodies. They can provide support and direction to those hired to lead and coordinate the program.

I lean toward yes with some significant changes HOWEVER I also am interested in discussing option 3: RFP because it may be impossible to make enough changes to the board system to allow it to succeed. I know RFP is a lot more expensive but I feel it would be an entity that could be held accountable.

community representation, buy in and participation in organization or coalition

diverse opinions for decisions makers. the bard better represents the entire body without needing every member to participate all the time.

From your own experience, list any cons of an organizational structure including a board of directors.

7 responses

non participation, not giving staff oversight and direction, and not understanding a role of a board (not managing enough or managing too much.

A board requires members to dedicate their time and take initiative which has potential to create a grey area of responsibility. Having a board of directors can blur lines of accountability, leading individuals to defer or assume others will act, potentially causing inaction, oversight lapses, or reduced personal ownership.

Gettting people to commit

It relies heavily on having really good staffing. This model relies on staff to report accurately both in programs and in accounts. Oversight is not impossible but it is difficult. An all volunteer board doesn't have the time to hold the hand of management, nor should they have to. This could be overcome with a carefully crafted program of work (where the board can be very helpful) and a rigorous set of bylaws. That are adhered to, of course.

In this case history has repeated itself several times. How can we ensure it won't happen again?
Cons= lack of oversite of the exec director and financial, lack of accountability for actions taken by both the board (unsure here) and the exec director
I appreciate the model of the Valdez museum but I do feel that there are some differences in that the museum has a lot more legacy knowledge and deep roots in the community that VCVB hasn't ever really had.

expecting professional oversight and/or decision making from unqualified volunteers

too many cooks in the kitchen. Apathy or lack of participation leads to misguided direction or ineffective leadership

Oversight

Do you believe additional oversight is needed?

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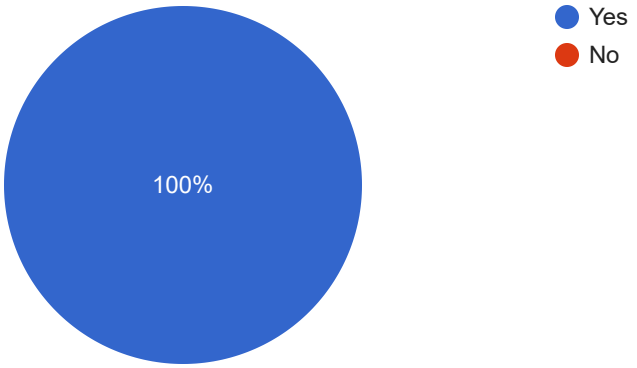
7 responses



If yes, what should be included as increased oversight? (Select all you agree with)

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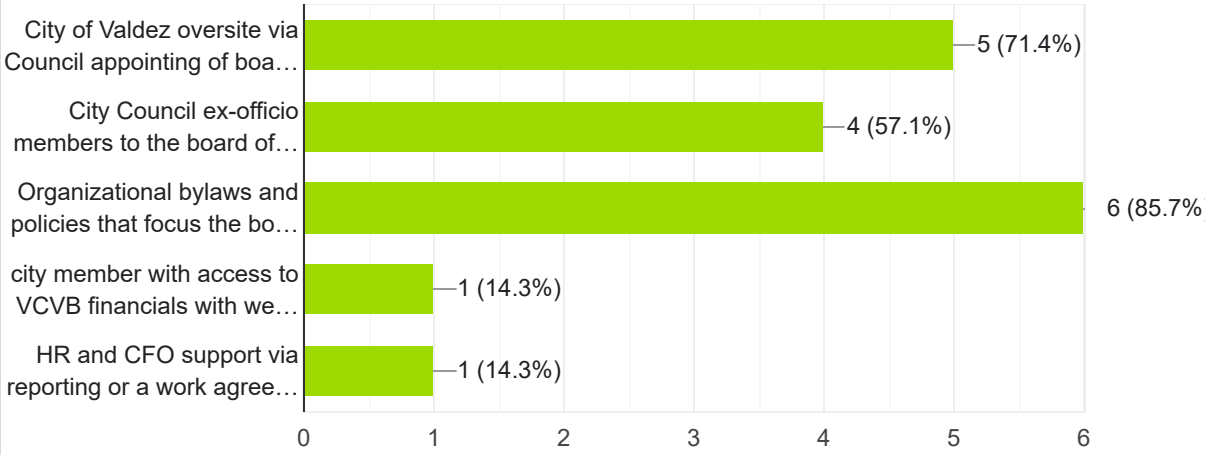
7 responses



Please share any additional feedback or ideas on options for organizational oversight.

4 responses

Would love to have board training mandatory each year so that we keep a group that understands what to look for and is focused on proper board management.

To clarify the last selection, a council ex-officio member is nice for having a conduit at meetings for immediate council reference. Same with an ex-officio city employee. But I don't see it as critical for oversight.

All members of the board should have access to regular financials. If this cannot be provided, to the satisfaction of the board, an auditor or additional oversight kicks in.

Monthly reporting on efforts, outcomes, financial status

Membership

Do you believe that there should be enrolled members in the next Valdez DMO?

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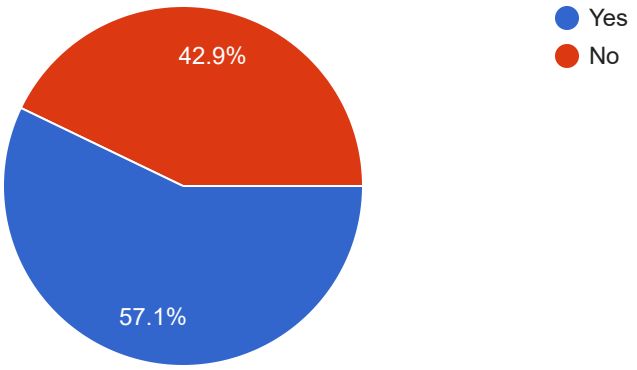
7 responses



Should any business in Valdez be eligible for a basic no cost membership?

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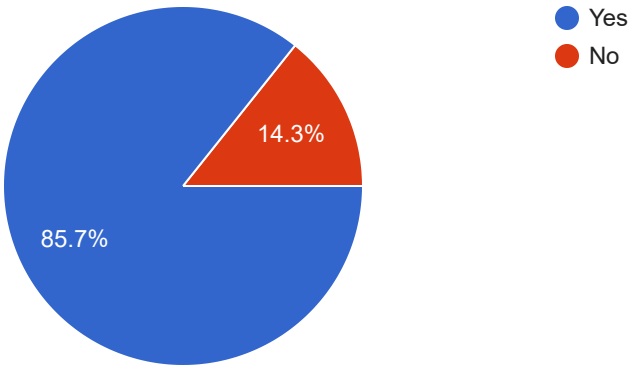
7 responses



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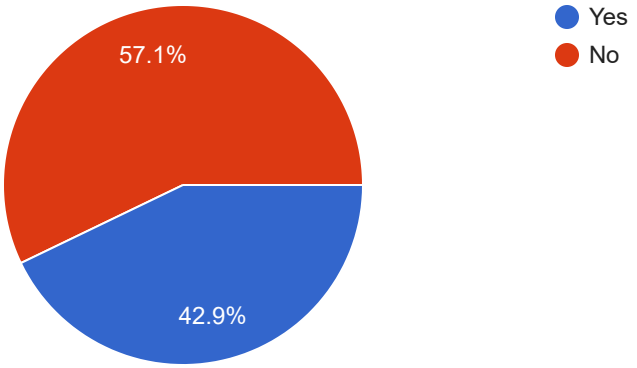
Should there be multiple member levels with an expense for elevated marketing or promotion benefits?

7 responses



Any other comments relative to membership?

6 responses

We should also include trade for other DMO's in AK, and a basic membership for out of town businesses.

I am on the fence on this one. I think having the option to pay for additional marketing would be great however I don't believe it should be tied to a membership in any way.

If all are members, the task of the DMO management and board is to develop ways for members to buy in. We have products to sell and that is where we can focus on monetary support from members. It would be more a la carte selections rather than membership levels.

This is difficult to answer. I want the visitors bureau to welcome guests, during the summer, create and distribute the Valdez Guidebook and meet regularly with a board. I have NO CONCEPT of how much this costs? Can it be done in the $400k that's there?
For this upcoming year, I believe businesses should pay for their ads in the visitors guide. Non-profits should have a almost free option (in my option) to allow them visibility.
Memberships are a lot to manage and I have seen it done to so many different levels the past 5 years. If we can afford to keep it simple, that is my preference.
Eventually, if things run smoothly memberships could be added in? I loved when my membership offered additional social media support from the visitors bureau. If things work for the first year or two maybe it can be added back in with memberships? Maybe this is just asking too much.

Members should consent to providing data or insights anonymously to support the broader effort of promoting Valdez as a destination.

If funded by tax dollars and if a membership model, should allow for a basic inclusion for any tax paying business.

Organizational Structure Options

Of the organizational structure options presented at the first meeting please rank them in your order of preference (Select 1 choice for each row- 1 is highest and 5 is lowest)

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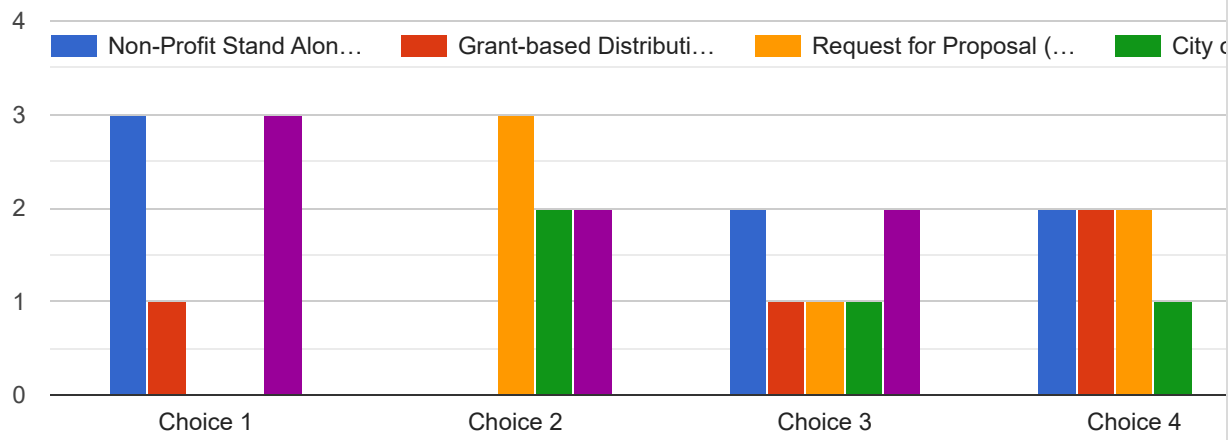

Any additional comments or thoughts on organizational structure options?

2 responses

I would have left choice 5 empty if it would have allowed. It would be an extremely hard sell for me to ask for a department within the city.

Non-profit stand alone isn't working. Can we make it our own by modifying it to allow for city or outside financial oversight? Also clear community level transparency on funding etc? Some sort of checks and balances.

Interim Marketing and Traveler Outreach

Please identify any other topics that need to be addressed immediately.

2 responses

I agree completely with the four items already listed. Fingers crossed that's all, because that is a lot!

business community needs a robust communication from DMO to align business operations and promotions to meet and exceed brand promise and expectation

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File #: 26-0092, **Version:** 1

ITEM TITLE:
Action Item: Recommendation to City Council for Management Structure of Future Tourism Marketing Organization

SUBMITTED BY: Elise Sorum-Birk, Deputy City Clerk

FISCAL NOTES:

Expenditure Required: n/a
Unencumbered Balance: n/a
Funding Source: n/a

RECOMMENDATION:

Make a motion to recommend the organizational management style supported by the majority of the group. This motion will be informed by the prior discussion of survey results.

Sample motion text: I move to recommend to city council that a future tourism marketing organization be structured as a _____.

SUMMARY STATEMENT:

Based on survey feedback and subsequent discussion the task force will be asked to make a recommendation to City Council on management structure.

Note on process:

- Discussion occurs after the motion is made and seconded.
- All members should have equal opportunity to weigh in.
- Since this is a decisional matter, the public should have an opportunity to be heard.
- Motions to amend, refer or postpone time specific may be offered by members.

File #: 26-0093, **Version:** 1

ITEM TITLE:
Action Item: Recommendation to City Council for Initial Interim Marketing Funding in the amount of $100,000

SUBMITTED BY: Chair Colleen Stephens and Economic Development Director Martha Barberio (ex officio member)

FISCAL NOTES:

Expenditure Required: $100,000
Unencumbered Balance: Click here to enter text.
Funding Source: Public Accommodation Tax Reserve Fund

RECOMMENDATION:

Sample motion: I move the task force provide city council with an outline of identified immediate needs and recommend funding for these needs in the amount of $100,000.

SUMMARY STATEMENT:

Chair Colleen Stephens and Economic Development Director Martha Barberio (ex officio member) have compiled a list of outstanding items that need immediate attention and ongoing expenses. A summary of immediate funding needs is attached.

Past due items come to a total of $86,940 and monthly ongoing expenses total $2,736.50 each month. Recommending an initial appropriation of $100,000 from the city Council would allow past due bills to be paid and monthly expenses to be paid for a period of 4 months.

Travel Guide and Guide Ad Placement

Actions will include communicating with the company under contract to produce the guide about the current situation, clarifying if specific ads are needed and identifying bills that are past due. All advertisers contacted thus far are keeping in ads with the knowledge that payment will come as the old organization works through processes.

- **Vacation Guide Distribution**

  Actions will include contacting in state guide distribution companies and other DMO's to ensure the 2026 guide is circulated and drafting a plan with dates and needs for additional distribution.

- **In State Trade Shows**

The goal will be to maintain participation by Valdez businesses to market Valdez for the upcoming seasons as space is available.

- **Website Transition**

  Actions will include developing a detailed plan on how to address the website focusing first on short term needed (such as updates to dates, home page and contact info) and then on a long -range plan to improve search engine optimization and ensure members are represented correctly based on packages previously purchased. Coordination will need to take place with the prior organization to transfer intellectual property and the domain.

If other immediate interim needs are identified in the survey, they may be incorporated by amendment.

Valdez Destination Marketing Immediate Expenses to Approve

Original Date of Invoice	2025 or 2026	Vendor	Amount Owed	Reason for Expense	*Other notes*
9/2/2025	2026	Bells Alaska	3,400.00	2026 Guides & Map Ads	
3-Aug	2025	Edibel Alaksa	1,745.85	2025 Advertising	*On VCVB list for a different amount*
2/5/2024	2025	Kennicott/McCarthy Guide	870.35	20205 Advertising	
5-Feb	2026	Kennicott/McCarthy Guide	875.00	2026 guide ad	
9/2/2025	2026	Bearfoot Guides	10,358.00	2026 Guides	
2/4/2026	2025	Anchorage Brochure	164.80	Brochure Storage for 2025	
1/2/2026	2026	Anchorage Brochure	5,540.00	Brochuee Dist for 2026 ANC area	
Oct 25 - Jan 26 Multiple	2025/Jan 2026	Simpleview	10,786.00	Web and CRM	*a portion of this in on the VCVB list, Feb Simpleview has been paid by COV for $2696.50*
		Journal Graphics	40,000.00	Guide Printing	
		Gold City Brochure Distribution	1,200.00	Fairbanks Guide Distribution	*estimate, needing official quote*
		Website SEO/Writing/Mapping	12,000.00	Updates severly needed	*Suggested plan is attached, this is a not to exceed number.*
		Total Initial Past Expenses to Approve	**$ 86,940.00**		

Valdez Destination Marketing Routine Expenses

Simpelview	1,697.50	Montly Hosting/CRM	
Simpleview	999.00	Visit Widget Plus Plan	
Anchorage Brochure	40.00	Montly storage fees for brochures	
Total Monthly	**$ 2,736.50**		*Need to have the total for this planned in for a few months*

= On the VCVB Payable list from 1/24
= a portion of the amount due is on the VCVB Payable list from 1/24
= need amount and vendor

Discover Valdez Guide Distribution Plan - DRAFT

Distribution Services
Anchorage Brochure (has brochures)
Gold City Brochure/Fairbanks (need to contract and provide guides)
PR Services in Yukon (need to contract and provide guides)

Member Distribution
Members
Members participating in shows

State based Info Centers
Explore Fairbanks (to be delivered in April**)
Tok Information Center (to be delivered in May*)
Copper Valley Information Center/Glennallen (to be delivered in April/May**)
Delta Info Center (to be delivered in April**)
Neanna Info Center (to be delivered in May*)
Mat Su Info Center (to be delivered in May*)
Wasilla Info Center (to be delivered in May*)
Palmer Info Center (to be delivered in May*)
Visit Anchorage Info Center (by Anch Brochure)
Whittier Chamber Info Center (to be delivered in May*)
Anchorage Airport (need to research)
Fairbanks Airport (need to research)
Kenai Info Center (Need to mail)
Seward Info Center (need to mail)

Other Locations
RV Rental Companies (to be delivered in May*)

* May deliveries by Karen Feero as she drives to Whitehorse, Tok, Fairbanks, Anchorage and everything inbetween.
** April deliveries in route to/from Fairbanks outdoor show by Stan Stephens Crusies.

A very basic review of the current Discover Valdez website has been done, and it is in need of some help. They type of help that needs some investment and focus. Sadly enough, there has been a great deal of neglect to this site and right now it does not fully support travelers' needs or member business needs.

We cannot wait until we have a new organization in place. Each day that the site is in its current state is a day that the travelers and the community are underserved. Interim fixes will only get us so far. The following is a suggestion plan to consider doing longer term strengthening to the site:

IMMEDIATE: To be facilitated by Colleen and Martha with support from Simpleview the web framework provider

- Identify immediate update, nonstructural, that would include:
    - New guide flip book,
    - Event updates,
    - Deletions of address and info center hours,
    - Deletion of the temporary closed statement,
    - Home page update to show summer and winter features.
- Finalization and contracting the below plan for longer term structure and writing.

2026 Updates/Needs:

- Member Business Listings and Advertisements
    - Obtain a listing from Quickbooks of current members, their membership levels. (This work in in progress/started.)
    - Obtain a member benefits listing from VCVB.
    - Cross reference the members with web benefits and ensure that the site is correct.
    - This may take more support that Colleen and Martha can give. Does the City have someone else that could support this?
- Outline a new web structure/flow with Simpleview
    - We will not be able to do a compete restructure, but we can clarify and outline what should be on each page. This will mean in most situation, removal of what is there and new writing for what should be there.
    - We will need to focus on essential and then make it more robust for 2027.
- Contract writers that are local to draft text for pages and introductions.
    - We have two persons in mind would just need to make an offer, decide on rates and set deadlines and topics for each to work on.
- Contract a person/firm to review writing for brand SEO strength and AI bot search suggestions. There is no reason to do any work if SEO is not focused on.
- Upload new copy to pages.

Ideally the member listing and advertisement portion can be done at the same time as the outline and writing.