



Memo

To: Honorable Mayor Hall & Board of Trustees
Through: Town Administrator Machalek
From: Suzanna Simpson, Management Analyst
Department: Town Administrator's Office
Date: December 9, 2025
Subject: Guiding Philosophy for Events
Type: Public Hearing

Objective:

Consideration of a Guiding Philosophy for Events.

Present Situation:

To help develop a guiding philosophy, staff conducted research on how other municipalities across the state handle events; stakeholder interviews were conducted with the Events & Visitor Services Department, the Estes Chamber of Commerce, Visit Estes Park, and the Estes Park Police Department; and a survey was conducted with the intent to gauge the resident and business sentiment on events in Estes Park.

Staff presented a draft guiding philosophy document based on resident and business feedback and discussions with key stakeholders at a Study Session on November 25, 2025. The proposed document includes feedback received from the Board.

Proposal:

Staff is proposing that the guiding philosophy be adopted in a master plan format, to help guide any policies that address events, as well as overall event operations.

Advantages:

- Adoption of a guiding philosophy will demonstrate that the work of the Events & Visitor Services Department takes into consideration the overall impact of events on the community.

- The proposed guiding philosophy for events is responsive to community feedback.

Disadvantages:

- Sentiments may change based on events or extenuating circumstances, so if the guiding philosophy is too narrow, it may need to be revisited often.
- Aspects of the guiding philosophy may have negative impacts on some existing events.

Action Recommended:

Staff recommends approval of the guiding philosophy.

Finance/Resource Impact:

None

Level of Public Interest:

Medium

Sample Motion:

I move for the approval/denial of the guiding philosophy for events.

Attachments:

1. Guiding Philosophy for Events
2. Guiding Philosophy for Events Report



Guiding Philosophy for Events

The Town of Estes Park produces and supports events that showcase the unique community of Estes Park and support our local economy and nonprofits. Events are designed to celebrate local culture, arts, and recreation, while providing a safe and positive experience for residents and visitors alike. Events & Visitor Services staff will prioritize collaboration at all stages of the event process - planning, execution, and evaluation, environmental sustainability and work to mitigate any adverse impact of events on neighborhoods, businesses, and public services. Event success for the Town means high quality events that are in keeping with the spirit of the community and contribute to a vibrant economy.

Guiding Principles

Prioritize Collaboration: The Events & Visitor Services team works with both internal and external partners on event planning, execution, and evaluation. This collaboration helps ensure that adverse impacts are mitigated and that all stakeholders have an opportunity to engage in each stage of the process.

Focus on Events that Showcase our Unique Community and Celebrate Local Culture, Arts, and Recreation: The Town's signature events are popular and appreciated by locals and visitors alike. These events should showcase the unique and diverse aspects of our community, from Bigfoot Days, to the Rooftop Rodeo, to Catch the Glow, each signature event highlights a fun and unique aspect of Estes Park. Events are intended to celebrate our local culture, arts, and recreation. The Town will prioritize local vendors when possible and will encourage all attendees at the Town's signature events to visit and patronize local businesses.

Reduce the Prominence of Alcohol at Events: The Town will not add any new events that would be considered “alcohol-centric” through title or substance, will re-evaluate current events for ways that the prominence of alcohol may be reduced, and will discourage the use of Town-owned event facilities for private events that are solely focused on alcohol consumption.

Reserve Bond Park for Civic Uses/Support: Bond Park should only be used for civic uses, publicly-owned events, or events that support local nonprofits. Efforts should be made to ensure that Bond Park events are not repetitive or generic.

Exercise Good Stewardship for the Community: Our events should invite visitors to engage responsibly with our mountain community and balance celebration with stewardship. Events & Visitor Services staff will prioritize efforts to reduce waste, and work with internal and external partners to manage traffic, parking, and transportation, as well as mitigate adverse impacts on neighborhoods, businesses, and overall public services. While Town financial resources should be focused on Town signature events, partnership opportunities will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The Town will manage and be attentive to road closures and will work to mitigate impacts of large events on private property.

Assist Outside Event Organizers in Producing Successful Events: Events & Visitor Services staff will help outside event organizers produce successful events by serving as a resource for planning, permitting, and execution, keeping all elements of the guiding philosophy in mind throughout the process.

Prioritize Public Safety: Events & Visitor Services will work closely with the Estes Park Police Department to ensure that all attendees have a safe and positive event experience. The police department will always respond to public safety incidents, but they do not have the resources to provide continuous security at events. Event organizers that request this level of security for their events will be required to fund these resources. The overall safety and security of the town will not be compromised based on the individual needs of a specific event.

Political, Religious, and First Amendment Gatherings: The Town will work to manage events while respecting the constitutional rights of our residents and guests.

Implementation

The guiding philosophy is to be approached like a Town Master Plan. Implementation will rely on policy and operational decisions.

Board Review

The guiding philosophy will be reviewed with each new Town Board and will be shared with new members during the Events & Visitor Services Department onboarding process.

Town of Estes Park Guiding Philosophy for Events

Purpose

The 2025 Town Board Strategic Plan includes an objective to “Develop a guiding philosophy for events that includes consideration of impact on businesses and the community.” This document is intended to facilitate the discussion around developing the guiding philosophy.

Stakeholders and Resources

Stakeholder interviews were conducted with Town of Estes Park Events & Visitor Services Director Rob Hinkle, Estes Chamber of Commerce Director Colleen DePasquale, and Visit Estes Park Operations Director Rebecca Domenico-Gelsinger. Research was conducted on several municipalities across the state to get a better understanding of their approach to events in the community. Those municipalities were Aspen, Avon, Boulder, Breckenridge, Brighton, Broomfield, Fort Collins, Frisco, Glenwood Springs, Longmont, Loveland, Lyons, Pagosa Springs, Snowmass Village, Vail, and Windsor. Public feedback was sought through a survey conducted by Polco.

Public Feedback - Survey Results

The survey was open for 18 days and had 198 responses, which were categorized by resident, business owner or manager, and both resident and business owner or manager. Of those, 79% (156) were residents, 1% (2) were business owners or managers, 16% (32) were both residents and business owners or managers and 4% (8) were categorized as “other,” self-identifying as former residents, second-home owners, and employees.

The purpose of the survey was to get a sense of resident/business sentiment, current barriers to participation, what types of events people would like to see more/fewer of, and gain an understanding of the impact that events have on the business community. We did not include every event that takes place in town, but focused on Town signature events, larger private events held at Town event spaces, and events that take place in the downtown corridor.

The overall sentiment on events was positive, with a few fair and poor ratings for each event, but primarily the responses were “excellent” or “good.” The business respondents were more likely to give “fair” ratings.

The majority of respondents are satisfied with the current number of events at 50% (81), with 40% (65) stating they would like to see fewer events, and 10% (16) stating they would like to see more events.

Residents are motivated to attend events in large part for entertainment purposes or to enjoy a unique experience.

Of the choices offered, cost was the largest prohibitive factor for attending events, but many, 25% (71) wrote in other reasons.

- Crowds
- Traffic
- Parking
- Alcohol

Of these, crowds was noted as the largest deterrent for residents attending events, followed by traffic, parking, and alcohol. For the business respondents, crowds was noted as the largest deterrent, followed by scheduling, parking, and cost.

The types of events that residents feel should be considered for the future include winter events, nature/wildlife-themed events, musical performances, family-friendly events, and food-focused events.

The types of events that the business respondents feel should be considered for the future include winter events, educational events, cultural events, and family-friendly events.

The types of events that residents would like to see fewer of are alcohol-centric events, those that take place downtown, and repetitive events that are similar in nature (such as arts & crafts shows).

The types of events that business respondents would like to see fewer of are arts & crafts shows, alcohol-centric events, those that require both entry fees and additional charges by vendors at the event.

The overall impact of downtown events on business was rated as neutral by 38% (12) of respondents, followed by positive at 22% (7), and negative at 19% (6).

The majority of respondents at 58% (19) feel that the overall impact of events on the local business community is positive, followed by 15% (5) who feel it's extremely positive, 12% (4) who feel it's neutral, and 6% (2) who feel it's negative.

The top concerns identified across all of the text responses are as follows:

- Traffic (50 mentions) - the most common logistical complaint, especially regarding downtown congestion during busy weekends.
- Parking (48 mentions) - lack of parking, suggestions of improved signage and more coordination being needed during large events.
- Alcohol (47 mentions) - most often raised as a request for fewer alcohol-centric events.

- Crowds (19 mentions) - the large crowds at many downtown events are a barrier to resident attendance.

Opportunities

Collaboration

A high level of collaboration is a key component to success in all facets of the event process. Both internal and external partners play a significant role in mitigating issues around business impact and participation, traffic, parking challenges, and resident sentiment. Currently, staff from the Events & Visitor Services Department meet with both Visit Estes Park and the Estes Chamber of Commerce. Internally, the Events & Visitor Services Department meets with the Police Department and Public Works Department. This could expand to include Parking & Transit Division staff, which generally participates in discussions through the permitting process.

Programs that encourage business participation in events, such as the Beyond Program, should be highlighted and promoted. Through this program, business owners can create specials or products based on events, and a poster is created with a QR code. The Chamber and Visit Estes Park primarily manage the program, which was created during the 2022 Elk Fest. The main vision was to help drive traffic into town for local businesses before or after large events, especially those at the Events Complex. From January 2025 through August 2025 the program generated 139 coupons and 16,428 clicks.

Bond Park Events

Events that take place in Bond Park have the biggest impact on traffic and downtown businesses. These events are initially approved by the Town Board, but then follow the permitting process in subsequent years. There are currently 11 events that take place in Bond Park:

- Big Foot Days (Town event)
- Estes Park Art Market (nonprofit event)
- Cowboy Brad Concerts (Town event)
- Estes Park Wine Festival (private event)
- Handmade in Colorado (private event)
- Labor Day Arts & Crafts Show (nonprofit)
- Fine Arts & Crafts Show (nonprofit)
- Autumn Gold (nonprofit)
- Elk Fest (Town event)
- Pumpkins & Pilsners (nonprofit)
- Tree Lighting Ceremony (Town event)

Out of these 11 events, 2 are private, for-profit events with no nonprofit connection or component. From the business perspective, sentiment is mixed on these events. While they were not noted to have a negative impact on business, respondents noted frustration that many

of these events felt repetitive, sold products that were perceived to compete with downtown businesses, and created the most congestion in town.

Alcohol-Centric Events

There are currently 8 events that advertise alcohol:

- Wine & Chocolate Festival
- Whiskey Warmup
- Frozen Dead Guy Days
- Estes Park Wine Festival
- Autumn Gold
- Pumpkins & Pilsners
- Rocky Mountain Craft Spirits Festival
- Holiday Wine & Craft Show

These events are popular among attendees, though overall resident sentiment from the survey was not favorable for these types of events. While eliminating current, successful events is not recommended, the Events & Visitor Services Department could carefully weigh the benefits of adding any new events that advertise alcohol. The Police Department has noted that there is not an increase in public safety issues or incidents during these events.

The Town should ensure that public transportation options are available, contracted, and promoted for each of these events.

Family-Friendly Events

In general, an event would be considered family-friendly if it is affordable and appropriate for all ages. Many of the Town's current events can be considered family-friendly in that regard and could be advertised as such.

Lessons/Ideas from Other Communities

Estes Park is fairly unique in its approach to events, in large part because of the variety of venues and well-established signature events. Of the communities researched, only a few produce a large number of municipal events, and most serve as a resource for outside events to guide them through the permitting process. The Events & Visitor Services Department's website for the Events Complex stands out as a resource for event information, planning, and promotion.

The Town of Frisco emphasizes a neighborhood-feel approach to the events they produce, holding several seasonal events that are designed for participants to engage with local businesses. All third party events are reviewed through a committee, led by the Town.

Telluride is one community that shares many of the same challenges as Estes Park in terms of managing large events in a small town. Over a 22 week period, while their gondola is operating,

they have 45 events on Town property alone. They have a series of [policies](#) intended to mitigate some of the impacts. The criteria they have established includes:

- Length of time in existence on the requested date or weekend.
- Longevity of event in Town.
- Longevity of organization in Town.
- Value to community (cultural, economic, environmental, and social).
- Impact on community (infrastructure, environment, and economy).
- Change to existing events or new events (proximity to other events; impact on other events with regards to economics, infrastructure, and available venues; similar events; and crowd size).
- Fulfills requirements of Town contracts and Special Event Policies.

These policies are updated every year and they try to incorporate lessons learned. Overall, despite the policies and established criteria, they do not feel they have found a clear solution to managing the impact on infrastructure or resident and business sentiment on the large number of people visiting their town during the high season. The Town is not currently adding a large number of events, rather, the focus has been on maintaining a slate of largely historical events. A set of criteria like that of Telluride could be valuable if the Town was in a position to review new events on a more frequent basis.

The City of Aspen has evolved their event philosophy over the years, narrowing their focus to signature events that create a community connection. As part of this transition, athletic events that were once produced by the City are now privately managed. Today, the City of Aspen Events Department is guided by a new mandate: to produce events that are free or low-cost, community-driven, environmentally responsible, and designed with locals in mind — the people who live, work, and play here every day. Inevitably, visitors are folded into the mix, especially during free community gatherings like the Community Picnic and July 4th celebrations.

Successes & Current Philosophy

The Events & Visitor Services Department's mission is to: "provide residents and guests with resources, extraordinary events and venues to enhance the quality of life in Estes Park and to ensure that Estes Park remains a vibrant mountain community and premier destination." The amount of positive feedback from those who attend events, as well as the results of Economic Impact Surveys, demonstrates that the department is thoughtful in their approach to events and prioritizes measuring their impact.

Timing of Events

The Events & Visitor Services Department takes a thoughtful approach to balancing events across the year and throughout the week, utilizing performance measurements to help establish targets and track metrics. This is an attempt to boost the shoulder season and help bring people to businesses during times that normally have lower visitation, as well as spread events out

throughout the week instead of concentrating them on the weekends, adding to congestion. The economic impact survey for the Whiskey Warmup shows that direct spending in 2024 was \$204,781 and Bigfoot Days shows \$472,779.

Sustainability Efforts

The Events & Visitor Services Department has partnered with the League of Women Voters to volunteer at events to assist with recycling and overall sustainability efforts. The League is putting together a report to highlight this work over the last year.

Additionally, the department received a grant for two water fill stations and trash/recycling bins for events.

Elements of a Guiding Philosophy

A guiding philosophy that deals with events should contain a set of principles or values that helps maintain consistency in operations, is rooted in purpose (the department's mission), and provides a framework for making decisions. Based on the research conducted, as well as the current status of events, a guiding philosophy for the Town of Estes Park's Events & Visitor Services Department could contain the following elements:

- Prioritizing collaboration (internal and external partners)
- A focus on events that showcase our unique community
- Celebrating local culture, arts, and recreation
- Being good stewards of the environment and sustainability initiatives
- Considering local priority for vendors, as well as encouraging attendees of Signature events to visit local businesses
- Providing a safe and positive experience for residents and visitors alike
- Reserving Bond Park for civic uses/support
- Assisting outside event organizers in producing successful events
- Minimizing adverse impacts on neighborhoods, businesses, and public services
- The mission of the department
- Police support for security at public and private events (cost, etc)
- Non-PD support for private/public events (event subsidies)

Additional elements that could potentially be included:

- Reducing the number of arts & crafts festivals in Bond Park
- Not producing new alcohol-centered events or reducing the number of current such events

