



To: Town of Ridgway  
From: Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce  
Subject: Q2 Interim Lodging Tax Report  
Date: August 5, 2019

Dear Ridgway Town Council,

The RACC Board of Directors is happy to share our second quarter report with the Town of Ridgway. We are excited by the progress that continues to be made at the organization.

Due to extenuating circumstances we will be submitting Chamber's Lodging Tax P&L statement late. As a reminder, RACC's QuickBooks structures are organized around the Town-approved marketing plan and managed by Middleton Accounting. These actuals are a direct pull from QuickBooks and reflect a continued diversification of investments designed to advance our local business community.

It has been a busy and exciting three months since our last report to the Town. Currently, we are overseeing two Colorado Tourism Office grants: \$10,000 marketing grant (partnership with OTO) and \$15,000 Visitor Center and Heritage Park redesign grant that is now complete. We are prepping for the September 14th Chamber Golf Open along with the 2020 Visitor Guide. In addition, we are in the process of applying for another year of funding from the Colorado Tourism Office marketing grant to continue to support off-peak season economic development.

We continue to see progress being made as a result of the organizational infrastructure investments made over the last two years, especially through RidgwayColorado.com and the exceptional group of contractors now engaged with the organization. We continue to strive towards a sustainable model of staff-led, board-advised organization.

We look forward to hearing any questions or comments you have regarding this interim report and continuing to partner with the Town of Ridgway to advance the interests of local businesses and the community as a whole.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hilary Lewkowitz".

Hilary Lewkowitz  
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## **Staffing**

As shared in the 2019 Marketing Budget Request, we are transitioning the Chamber to an organization that is staff-led and board-advised. Increased staff capacity will enable the organization to successfully achieve its marketing plan and bring increased value to the local business community.

Marketing Director, Hilary Lewkowitz, has taken on an increase of roles in order to ensure that the Chamber can move towards a staff-led and board-advised model. Hilary is managing all staff, which includes: leading monthly staff meetings, working with the board to identify marketing goals, guiding the direction for all marketing-related projects, partnerships, approving invoices and liaising with town staff. In addition to these management roles, Hilary is overseeing all marketing-related projects plus managing our two current Colorado Tourism Office grants.

Program Coordinator, Pamela Cannalte continues to maintain a lead staffing role for the organization focused in particular on the operational/program management of our different tracks of work. In particular, management support to the Visitor Center, membership relations, and the implementation of select special projects throughout the year, including this year's golf tournament. Pamela has been a terrific leader and contributor to the organization's mission and the community more broadly.

As of April 30th, we are now internally managing the weekly e-blast and social media. Hilary Lewkowitz is managing the weekly e-blast plus Instagram account and Tanya Ishikawa, who works closely with us on many other communications projects including the Visitors Guide, is managing the Chamber's Facebook account. Part of the transition process included a number of changes to the e-blast, which are listed in the "Website" section of this report.

Jeannie Robertson has taken over the Visitor Center Coordinator volunteer position. Pamela Cannalte is working directly with Jeannie to ensure the Visitor Center volunteer staff and general operations are being managed appropriately. The Visitor Center opened on Saturday, May 3rd.

Our exceptional group of local consulting partners and staff, all based in Ridgway, includes:

- *Marketing Director* – Hilary Lewkowitz
- *Program Coordinator* -- Pamela Cannalte
- *Online Content and Storytelling Consultant* – Tanya Ishikawa
- *Visitors Center and Volunteer Coordinator* – Jeannie Robertson
- *Accounting* – Middleton Accounting (Jane Pulliam)
- *Website and Technology Partner* -- Peak Media (Josh Gowans)
- *Media and Design Partner* – Sprout Design Studio (Nicole Green)
- *Youth Ambassador* – Emma Wallin

## **Board of Directors**

As noted in the Q1 report, Colin Lacy was re-elected as President for another year-long term with the caveat that this will be his final year in that leadership role. During the April monthly board meeting, Barb Latham informed the board that she will be stepping down from her role as Treasurer due to a career change that moves her away from Ridgway. The Board is actively working to find a replacement for Barb.

- *President* – Colin Lacy (US2020)
- *Vice President* – Tim Patterson (RIGS)
- *Secretary* – Erin Stadelman (Ouray County Fairgrounds and Rodeo Association)
- *Treasurer* – Vacant
- *At Large*
  - Jason Bojar (Balance Natural Medicine)
  - Daniel Richards (Colorado Boy)
  - Amanda Swain (Ridgway Adventure Sports)

### **Colorado Tourism Office Grant: \$10,000 Off Peak Season Marketing (partnership with OTO)**

In the fall of 2018 the RACC received a Small Marketing Match Grant for \$10,000 from the CTO, which is based on a 25% match (\$2,500). Grant implementation began in January and is being led by Marketing Director, Hilary Lewkowitz. RACC and OTO are collaborating on the grant in an effort to increase countywide off-peak season visitation and visitor-driven economic opportunities. Both organizations recognize that summer tourism visitation is close to maximum capacity. In contrast, businesses struggle to keep a consistent cash flow during the off-peak seasons of October through April.

Grant implementation since January includes:

- Sponsored article on Colorado.com, CTO's website for marketing Colorado out-of-state and internationally. The article, "5 Reasons to Escape to These Quiet Mountain Towns", focuses on off-peak season tourism assets in Ridgway and Ouray.
  - <https://www.colorado.com/articles/5-reasons-escape-these-quiet-mountain-towns>
- Advertisements on Colorado.com that showcase Ridgway as a year-round destination and are based on the five marketing themes. Advertisements will run until they receive 100K impressions. Clicking on the advertisement (and links in the article mentioned above) takes readers to [RidgwayColorado.com/plan-your-trip](http://RidgwayColorado.com/plan-your-trip) to enter their contact information to receive a digital copy of the Visitor's Guide.
- Instagram Takeover on Visit Colorado's (144K followers) account from April 19-25. Over a 7-day period, 22 images were shared on their account that covered the five marketing themes and focused on late spring tourism assets.
- Colorado Tourism Office September out-of-state newsletter featured advertisement to 296K inboxes. Featured advertisement focuses on off-peak season tourism opportunities in Ridgway and Ouray.

Below is a press release that details the grant and opportunity. We are in the process of applying for the same grant for 2020, which will continue our partnership with OTO to drive off-peak season economic opportunities.

### **Ridgway and Ouray Receive State Grant to Promote Off-Peak Season Tourism**

The Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce (RACC) and the Ouray Tourism Office (OTO) are pleased to announce their recent award of a \$10,000 marketing grant from the Colorado Tourism Office to promote countywide, off-peak season visitation and tourism-driven economic opportunities. Ridgway and Ouray recognize that summer tourism visitation is at or near maximum capacity. In contrast, local

businesses struggle to keep a consistent cash flow during the shoulder seasons of October through April. The marketing grant will be used to target off-peak season months in an effort to increase tourism-driven economic opportunities for local businesses. This is the first tourism-related, countywide collaboration that will lay the foundation for future marketing strategies around off-peak season travel periods, and Ridgway Chamber's first state Tourism Office grant award as the lead applicant.

The two biggest challenges for Ridgway and surrounding area business owners are seasonal swings (off-peak season income) and hiring/retaining employees, according to a 2017 study conducted by Durango-based RPI Consulting. Over the years, Ridgway and Ouray have seen businesses close because of decreased cash flow during the slower months. It has also been challenging to hire and retain employees without being able to promise year-round employment. The purpose of this new initiative is to increase visitors during the off-peak seasons, which will directly impact the success of our local economy by bringing more financial (and workforce) stability to local businesses.

This grant will greatly enhance both Ridgway and Ouray's current marketing programs. To date, Ouray and Ridgway have not worked together towards a collaborative countywide marketing strategy. In addition, neither Ridgway nor Ouray has specifically targeted off-peak season tourism in marketing campaigns. This grant will be the start of a long-term marketing strategy to unite Ouray County stakeholders towards a common goal of tourism development beyond the busy summer season. The marketing initiatives will be based on a series of itineraries highlighting countywide tourism assets that are accessible during the months of October through March. Target markets will be high-value outdoor enthusiasts and creatives that are looking to experience uncrowded and authentic Colorado mountain towns.

"We see this grant as only the beginning of a new and ongoing strategy to focus marketing efforts specifically on the off-peak season, and to do so in collaboration with Ouray. Our board believes this is where we can move the needle for our business community and their employees", commented Colin Lacy, RACC Board President.

"This grant represents an opportunity for Ouray and Ridgway to showcase our shared assets and unique experiences in the seasons where we would like to see more economic stability. Both the Ouray Tourism Office and Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce share a vision of a sustainable, community-first and experience-based destination marketing program, and this forms the basis of a new collaborative strategy between the organizations. This grant, and the shoulder seasons, are our best opportunity to start moving forward on a sustainable path into the future. We applaud RACC for taking the lead on this grant and look forward to working with their excellent team in the upcoming year.", said Kat Papenbrock, Executive Director, Ouray Tourism Office.

Outside of just this CTO grant, RACC intends to guide its broader marketing strategy to focus in particular on this shoulder/low season period. This is a period that is critical for our businesses success and an area where we believe we can begin to move the needle in terms of impact. This grant would support the development of a marketing plan, which will include a series of itineraries based on existing initiatives: Creative Corridor, Hot Springs Loop, Colorado Spirits Trail, and San Juan Skyway. Itineraries will detail off-peak season tourism assets related to existing initiatives, and incorporate activities, restaurants and lodging throughout the county. This is just the beginning of a broader strategy to target the shoulder and low seasons.

## **Colorado Tourism Office Grant: \$15,000 Visitor Center & Heritage Park Strategic Plan for Redesign**

In partnership with the Town of Ridgway, the Chamber received a \$15,000 grant (with a \$3,650 match by RACC) to create a strategic plan to redesign the Visitor Center and surrounding Heritage Park. We are pleased to announce that the new strategic plan was approved by Town Council on July 10. The plan can be reviewed here:

[https://ridgwaycolorado.com/images/news/Ridgway-Gateway-Strategic-Plan\\_June2019.pdf](https://ridgwaycolorado.com/images/news/Ridgway-Gateway-Strategic-Plan_June2019.pdf).

This area is considered the gateway to the region, and is the first point of contact for visitors entering Ridgway from the directions of Montrose or Ouray. As the Railroad Museum started its transition to the new location, we have seen the numbers of visitors at the center dropped from approximately 6,000 in 2017 to 4,500 in 2018. Grant funding was used to hire a consulting firm to help redesign the space to meet off-peak season needs, drive visitors to explore tourism assets, adapt to the digital world of travel and better represent Ridgway's community character. This project is an exciting and significant opportunity for both the business community and community at large.

Grant activities February - July:

- DHM Design was chosen through a public RFP process as the lead consulting firm for the redesign process.
- March 28th - The first community input meeting was held in order to gather ideas on vision for the redesigned space.
- April 1-28 - DHM Design created a 1st draft of the strategic plan with input from Town, Chamber and community meeting.
- April 29 - The second community input meeting was held to assess the 1st draft of the strategic plan. Feedback from this meeting was used to create a second draft of the strategic plan.
- May 24 - 30 - Draft plan public comment period.
- June 14 - Final plan released.
- July 10 - "Strategic Master Plan for Ridgway Visitor Center and Heritage Park" adopted by Ridgway Town Council.
- July 22 - Final report, including long-term implementation plan, submitted and accepted by CTO.



This project is a great example of Town-Chamber collaboration and we look forward to working together on the implementation process. Below is a Press Release that details the final plan:

### **Ridgway Visitor Center and Heritage Park to be Revamped**

The Town of Ridgway and the Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce (RACC) released a [Strategic Master Plan for Ridgway Visitor Center and Heritage Park](#) on Friday, June 14. The plan includes two options for the southwest corner of the intersection of Highways 550 and 62, a site at the entrance to

the town currently occupied by the Ridgway Visitor Center and Ridgway Railroad Museum. The property is known as Heritage Park.

Both plan options for Heritage Park and Visitor Center maintain features that are reminiscent of Ridgway's railroad history. Besides a series of attractive pathways and a xeric garden, amenities include a new, larger Ridgway gateway sign near the highway intersection, and a photo opportunity area and marker where family and friends can stand on a railroad trestle and take a scenic photo capturing a view up the valley with the San Juan Mountains as a backdrop.

The options also feature a large climbing boulder and nature-play themed tot lot including a series of smaller boulders, logs and stumps. A large Visitors Center sign will direct travelers to the center, which will have renovated, accessible restrooms, a picnic area, and improved parking. Plus, activity-themed informational signage will offer information on historic and local attractions.

While the first option consists of less-expensive retrofitted storage containers to serve as information kiosks available year-round, even when the Visitor Center is unstaffed, the second option envisions a new Visitor Center building that would provide additional services and amenities but require year-round staff.

“The property is a key gateway piece for our town and community. It is how the world first sees Ridgway coming from the north and south on Highway 550, and it can set the tone and theme for the local and visitor experience here, providing another great public space for locals to congregate, sharing our culture and heritage, and introducing visitors to our town and local businesses,” said Ridgway Town Manager Jen Coates. “We first needed to establish a vision and plan for the space and then we will explore opportunities for realizing the improvements in the short and longer terms, based on the priorities of the town.”

Since the Railroad Museum decided to move to a new location at 200 North Railroad Street, the Town and Chamber have been considering how the former museum site could remain a valuable visitor attraction. A majority of the train cars have been relocated to the museum's new location, and the plan is to move the indoor displays there by summer 2020. The Visitor Center remaining on the site is in a 73-year-old building, and the park has minimal amenities and landscaping. Center visitor numbers dropped from 6,000 in 2017 to 4,500 in 2018, with future projections of a continued decrease in numbers.

DHM Design was hired by the Town and Chamber this spring to facilitate the creation of a strategic plan for a redesign of the Visitor Center and Heritage Park. Working with staff from DHM's Durango office, the town hosted two public meetings to gather community input about what amenities should be included on the site.

DHM has worked on streetscape, park and gateway monument projects in key locations for attracting the attention of passers-by in several southwest Colorado communities such as Naturita, Nucla, Norwood, and Cortez. The Ridgway Streetscape completed in 2017 was one of their designs, which not only included paved roads and sidewalks but also created gathering spaces, traffic and pedestrian flow, and featured site furnishings designed by various artists.

“Getting people to stop at Ridgway Heritage Park and Visitors Center would increase the foot traffic not only of the park itself, but can also let people know of the attractions offered in downtown. Increasing

visibility and awareness serves to increase visitation and can boost the local economy as the tourism sector of the Town grows,” DHM Principal Walker Christensen said. “Having a key gateway area into a community can have long-range effects on the town—it can beautify the space, which can increase land values; it can boost the local economy by attracting more stops at local businesses; and it can offer local residents some additional amenities not currently being provided in the community—such as the climbing boulder feature. It is your first impression of the Town.”

The total estimated cost of the first option with retrofitted storage containers is approximately \$746,055, while the second option with a new Visitor Center is estimated at \$1,219,430. A list of potential funding sources is provided in the Strategic Plan.

“Due to the cost of the redesign, a phasing plan was created that identifies top priorities. Phase 1 includes: site clean-up, landscape design and irrigation, visitor information signs, accessible bathrooms, and more,” RACC Manager Hilary Lewkowitz said. “The timing of construction phases of different park elements may vary as funding is acquired. The Town will utilize funding from the Department of Local Affairs’ Colorado Main Street Program to create construction drawings for landscape design, visitor information signs and the photo opportunity area. The RACC will be applying for a CTO grant to create content and layout design for the visitor information signs.”

### **Colorado Creative Corridor**

In 2018, Ridgway joined four other Colorado communities in the establishment of the “Colorado Creative Corridor.” This project is continuing in 2019, with another \$25,000 grant from the Colorado Tourism Office. RACC will provide \$2,500 in match funding for this effort, and the Town of Ridgway will also provide \$2,500. The partners are: Tourism Council of Carbondale; Carbondale Creative District; Salida Creative District; Chaffee County Visitors Bureau; Crested Butte Creative District; Gunnison-Crested Butte Tourism Association; Delta County Tourism Council; North Fork Creative Coalition; Ridgway Creative District; and the Ridgway Chamber.

2019 grant funding will continue on the success of this past year, which saw the following results: print brochure (with Ridgway itinerary) distributed throughout the state, earned media with estimated 142.9 million reach, plus Creative Corridor Colorado.com brand channel and social media platforms.

Hilary is serving in a lead strategy role from the Chamber’s end on how we can begin to capitalize on this significant investment and opportunity. This includes working with Town Staff to ensure marketing content best reflects Ridgway assets.

We are excited for this project to continue to bring value to the business and creative economy for years to come, and look forward to this continuing to be an important example of the positive impact of Chamber/Town collaboration.

### **Online Media Assets: Website, Digital Newsletters & Social Media**

RidgwayColorado.com remains the #1 Google search result for keyword “Ridgway Colorado” as well as other high value keywords. Site optimization is an ongoing effort, we are working with Peak Media to

continue to improve site features, functions and ease of use. We will continue to invest in additional content and our staff/contractors to monitor the site and keep membership content fresh and up to date. We are actively leveraging the “Five Themes” branding (detailed below) within the website, online itineraries and quarterly visitor newsletter (launching in May).

In an effort to better capture email leads, we updated <https://ridgwaycolorado.com/plan-your-trip> so the Visitor Guide is gated content. This webpage is the landing page for any digital advertisements outside of RidgwayColorado.com (e.g., Colorado.com advertisements land on this page). All email leads will automatically be added to our CRM system and sent the weekly e-blast and/or quarterly visitor news (based on user preferences).

Last fall we completed the development of a CRM (customer relationship management) for the website. With leadership from Peak Media, we are now using this system and continually working on improvements.

The weekly community e-blast was relaunched on May 13th with a new design and platform. Before that, email contacts were stored under an email platform that was not connected with our CRM system. Because of this, we were losing valuable data and list growth. Peak Media and Hilary Lewkowitz worked together to transition all contacts into our CRM system and redesign the e-blast in a manner that will better serve businesses and the greater community. In addition, we plan to launch our first-ever quarterly visitor newsletter. This newsletter will go out to our Go-Colorado leads plus website sign-ups. The purpose of this newsletter is to send promotional emails to targeted email leads. This new newsletter will focus on the five marketing themes and promoting Ridgway as a year-round destination.

The RACC Instagram account is now being presented as a visitor-facing platform. So, we will use this social platform to promote Ridgway tourism assets and local businesses to potential visitors. This strategy is in-line with communities throughout Colorado. Since February we started partnering with local photographers and using only high quality images. As of July, our Instagram account has more than doubled to 1,066 followers. Facebook will continue to be a platform that we promote and communicate to our local community with 1,841 followers.

## **Visitors Guide**

Discussion is now underway for the 2020 Visitor Guide. We will continue our partnership with the Ouray Tourism Office, and design elements of a single cover with “Ridgway and Ouray” and combined content. Since the release of the 2019 guide, we have received positive feedback on usability with this new version. Over the past three months, the RACC and OTO explored the option of producing the 2020 Visitor Guide in-house with the hopes of streamlining the creation and distribution process. After a thorough investigation, both organizations decided it is currently not financially feasible along with lacking staff capacity. Therefore, we will continue our partnership with Ballantine Communications, which has produced and distributed the Visitor Guide for the past two years. We will continue to use our staff and contractors on content design, which will be led by contractor, Tanya Ishikawa.



## **Golf Tournament**

Planning for the September 14th Chamber Open began in June, and is being led by Pamela Cannalte with support by the Board, Marketing Director and contractors. This year's fundraiser and community event will build on the success of 2018. We are using 2018 tournament proceeds to fund the Youth Apprenticeship Program (see below section).

## **Five Themes**

The Chamber is actively using the five themes as the foundation of all marketing initiatives. As we have shared in previous reports, these themes are designed to capture the unique attractions of the Ridgway area and our goal has been to develop these themes and inline with marketing best practices, use them consistently across our media, including website, visitors guide, print ads, social media and visitor center. These are now being adopted across all of our platform in conjunction with the themes:



## **Print Media**

The Chamber coordinated co-op ads with local businesses in the 2019 San Juan Skyways publication. The San Juan Skyway is distributed throughout Colorado and is considered to be a marketing asset for local businesses as well as the Chamber.

## **Visitor Center**

In the staffing section of this report we highlight Jeannie Robertson, our new Visitor Center Coordinator. With the support of Pamela Cannalte, we are thrilled to have Jeannie coordinating the volunteers and Visitor Center operations.

As mentioned above, we are excited to have the newly adopted "Strategic Master Plan for Ridgway Visitor Center and Heritage Park". In partnership with Town, we look forward to partnering on the implementation process.

## **Itineraries**

Itinerary development is a project that we continue to work on and the itineraries are now included on the RidgwayColorado.com website as well as the Colorado Tourism Office's Colorado.com website in their Field Guide/Creative Corridor section of the website. These itineraries are important assets for the Visitors Center as well. The Chamber is committed to giving exposure to all five categories of business mentioned above and ultimately develop itineraries to include a wide range of activities, themes and times of the year. We will continue to send fresh itinerary content to Colorado.com, which will incite interest in Ridgway as a whole and provide inclusion of a cross-section of local businesses.

## **Youth Apprenticeship Program & Career Experience Fair**

This year, we launched the Youth Apprenticeship Program. This new program builds on a series of initiatives to better connect local youth to our business community and provides high quality work experience opportunities. The Youth Apprenticeship program offers paid summer apprenticeships with completion bonuses for Ridgway students in their junior or senior year. Students will have a specific job with a local member business and will receive ongoing training and professional development above and beyond a traditional summer job. Funding for this initiative is entirely made possible by the generous support of our annual golf tournament sponsors and players. This year, the program paired three local students with three businesses: RIGS Fly Shop & Guide Service, Cowgirl Creations Flowers & Gifts, and Lucky Find Consignments for summer 2019. Though the 2018 Golf Open proceeds were only enough for those three apprenticeships, Mountain Girl Gallery and Beautifully Served by Jill applied for the program and promoted apprenticeships (funded independently) as well.

In partnership with Ridgway Secondary School, we co-hosted a Career Experience Fair on May 13th. This one-hour event enabled local businesses and nonprofits to connect with middle and high school students, and introduce students to part-time work and volunteer opportunities in our community.

*The Chamber is very pleased with the progress that continues to be made in 2019 and we sincerely thank the Council and all of the Town staff for their support and partnership.*

