

MINUTES

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BISBEE, COUNTY OF COCHISE, AND STATE OF ARIZONA, HELD ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026, AT 6:00 PM AT COUNCIL CHAMBERS LOCATED AT 118 ARIZONA STREET, BISBEE, ARIZONA.

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER BY MAYOR BUDGE AT 6:02 PM.

ROLL CALL

COUNCIL

Councilmember Karen Schumacher, Ward I

Councilmember Peter Skinner, Ward II

Councilmember Trish Damon, Ward III

Mayor Ken Budge

Councilmember Anna Cline, Ward III, Mayor Pro Tempore 6:04PM

Councilmember Mel Sowid, Ward II

Councilmember Lori Reynolds, Ward I

STAFF

Ashlee Coronado, Interim City Manager/City Clerk

Keri Bagley, Finance Director

VACANT, Personnel Director

Matthew Gurney, Public Works Director

Logan Dodd, Operations Manager

Tim Cox, Police Chief

Jim Richardson, Fire Chief

CITY ATTORNEY

Joseph Estes

THE FOLLOWING ITEM WAS DISCUSSED AT THIS MEETING:

1. Discussion and Possible Direction to staff regarding the DMO/Marketing RFP and Discussion on How Direction will be given to the Potential DMO/Marketing Firm from the City of Bisbee.
Ken Budge, Mayor

Mayor Ken Budge opened the discussion by noting that the council had previously voted to hold a work session to discuss the proposed RFP for a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). He invited council members to share their concerns and questions, beginning with those who had requested the work session.

Councilmember Schumacher expressed her primary concern about the lack of a clear budget outline. She wanted to understand the financial breakdown between what would be paid to a DMO, what would fund marketing activities, and what would support a visitor center. She noted that without these numbers, it was difficult to make informed decisions about moving forward. Schumacher also raised questions about the communication structure between the city and the DMO, particularly whether a tourism advisory board or a city employee would serve as the liaison.

Mayor Budge explained that most RFPs do not include specific dollar amounts upfront, as this allows proposers to submit their best offers without being constrained by preset budgets. He noted that the city would receive proposals and then negotiate during the contract phase.

He also shared that the Finance Director had provided an estimate of approximately \$112,000 to operate the visitor center (including staff, printing, internet, and coordination with Cochise County Tourism), which could be subtracted from the overall tourism budget to determine what would be available for the DMO and marketing.

Councilmember Damon agreed with the approach of not specifying a dollar amount in the RFP. She suggested that the city could work with estimated numbers based on the visitor center being operated separately, allowing the council to move forward without further delays. Damon acknowledged learning more about the RFP process and understanding that contract negotiations would be the appropriate time to address specific requirements.

Councilmember Damon emphasized her primary concern: ensuring that any DMO hired would regularly engage with local business leaders and residents for input. She suggested this requirement could be added to the RFP under the scope of work, with the DMO proposing how they would conduct community roundtable discussions and surveys.

Council agreed this was an important addition and could be incorporated without delaying the process.

Councilmember Skinner, drawing on his government contracting background, supported not including a specific dollar figure in the RFP. He explained that this approach allows the city to evaluate proposals based on requirements and compare how different firms structure their costs and services. Skinner also expressed interest in seeing a tourism advisory board established at some point and suggested that local business organizations like Bisbee Forward and Bisbee Vogue could have representation on such a board.

Councilmember Sowid agreed with the approach of issuing the RFP without predetermined budget amounts, noting that once proposals come back, the council could make decisions about what services to accept or decline based on available funding.

Mayor Budge shared his perspective on the overall structure, explaining that he initially favored a tourism advisory board but now believes a city employee serving as a tourism coordinator or director would be more effective. This person would staff the visitor center, serve as the day-to-day liaison with the DMO, coordinate with local businesses and the Cochise County Tourism Board, and handle administrative tasks such as updating the website, managing map and brochure distribution, and hosting travel writers. He emphasized this approach would follow the recommendation from Bisbee Forward to spend less on visitor center operations and more on marketing. The position would not require a marketing expert but rather someone personable who understands tourism and can facilitate communication between the DMO and the community.

Discussion turned to how to structure oversight and communication with the DMO.

Councilmember Schumacher expressed concern about repeating past difficulties in filling tourism positions with qualified candidates at the city's pay scale. She suggested that if the city were to pay a competitive salary to a highly qualified marketing professional, that person could function as an in-house DMO rather than hiring an external firm.

Mayor Budge acknowledged this option but noted the city had gone over a year and a half without successfully filling such a position, which was why the external DMO route was being considered.

Council discussed several amendments to the RFP document.

Councilmember Schumacher requested adding a scoring category for "proximity and familiarity to Bisbee" to give preference to local or Arizona-based organizations. After discussion, the council agreed to add this as a criterion worth 10 points, taken from the methodology and approach category.

Councilmember Damon suggested adding "recreation" as a key messaging pillar, which the council supported, noting the importance of outdoor activities and the upcoming Bisbee Bikeways project.

Regarding the primary objective statement describing Bisbee as a "premier destination," Councilmember Schumacher expressed concern that the language was too generic and didn't sufficiently capture what makes Bisbee unique.

After discussion, Council decided the existing language, combined with the detailed scope of work elsewhere in the document, adequately conveyed the city's character.

Councilmember Schumacher also raised the question of how the city would measure the DMO's success.

Mayor Budge noted that the RFP already requires proposers to establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and measure marketing effectiveness.

Council discussed using bed tax revenue and cell phone data (available through Cochise County Tourism) to track visitor numbers and patterns, though they acknowledged external factors would make year-to-year comparisons challenging.

Council reached consensus on moving forward with the RFP, incorporating the agreed-upon changes regarding community engagement requirements, the proximity scoring criterion, and emphasis on outdoor recreation.

Mayor Budge confirmed with the council that they were satisfied with moving forward, indicating the revised RFP would come back within a week for a special session rather than waiting two weeks. Once approved, the RFP would need to be posted for at least 15 days as required by state law, meaning responses would likely be received in about a month.

Mayor Budge stated that, as there was nothing else before this Council this meeting was adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT: 6:50PM

Ken Budge, Mayor