

**M**INUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL AND UTAH COUNTY  
COMMISSION JOINT SPECIAL MEETING HELD APRIL 24, 2023 at 4:00  
p.m. in the Uintah County Conference room, 147 East Main Vernal, Utah 84078.

**PRESENT:**

**UINTAH COUNTY:** Commissioners John Laursen and Sonja Norton. Commissioner Brad Horrocks was excused.

**VERNAL CITY:** Councilmembers Robin O'Driscoll, Dave Everett, Nick Porter, Corey Foley, Ted Munford and Mayor Doug Hammond.

**GUESTS:** Quinn Bennion, Roxanne Behunin, Ken Campbell, Mike Davis, Travis Campbell, Gabby Blackburn, Cheryl Meier, Matt Cazier and Uintah High School Students.

**WELCOME:** Commissioner John Laursen welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT & APPROVAL OF SPECIAL MEETING:** *Councilmember Ted Munford moved to acknowledge and approve this special meeting. Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote.*

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 27, 2023:** *Councilmember Corey Foley moved to approve the minutes of February 27, 2023. Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote.*

**SCHEDULE OF FUTURE MEETINGS:**

Quinn Bennion explained that the recent history of the meeting times is the Commission preferred having the meetings earlier; however the time of 4:30 pm was established to accommodate working Council members who can't take time off. Councilmember Ted Munford expressed that he can make 4 pm work. Commissioner Sonya Norton requested a 3 pm start time. Commissioner John Laursen proposed a 4 pm start time as a compromise. The elected officials discussed the frequency of the meetings, which is typically on the 4th Monday on months when there are items for the agenda. Quinn Bennion emphasized the importance of scheduling meetings when needed and ensuring that it works for everyone. Commissioner Sonya Norton highlighted that there are many things going on that affect all of them and emphasized the need for communication. Councilmember John Laursen suggested that they call each other if there is something that needs to be addressed every month. They concluded that 4 pm works well for future meetings and that they would address any emerging matters as they come up.

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### **UPDATE ON DISCOVERY TRAIL:**

Quinn Bennion provided an update on the progress made towards the construction of the Discovery Trail. He expressed excitement about the project and informed the attendees that the bidding process for the three phases, including pavement, concrete, and fence, was underway and favorable bids were received for two of the phases. The Discovery Trail is planned to run behind Discovery Elementary School and extend across and down to 1500 South.

Quinn emphasized the importance of encouraging walking instead of driving to school, as it would help alleviate congestion and traffic while reducing emissions. He mentioned that an easement for the trail had been signed by Ryan and Shauna Jones. Now the contractors have until October to complete the project. Commissioner Sonja Norton confirmed that the work would be done on the south side of the street. Quinn Bennion answered yes, it will be on the south. Councilmember Nick Porter raised the concern of having a plan for snow removal on the trail and stressed its importance. Quinn Bennion explained that the City would require direction from the Council regarding snow removal on trails, as it is not currently part of the City's responsibilities. He suggested exploring the possibility of involving the school in the snow removal process. Matt Cazier inquired about the involvement of the County in the trail's infrastructure. Quinn Bennion clarified that the sidewalk and pedestrian crossing signs go across 1500 South that is in the County; however, the City has procured all the funding.

### **UPDATE ON AIRPORT:**

Ken Campbell provided an update on the airport EAS situation, stating that there have been significant changes in the plans. He contacted the Department of Transportation and received a one-week extension to gather comments and submit an application. The difficulty with the contract for commercial air service, which is set to end in July was explained. An RFQ (Request for Qualifications) was sent out, and an RFP (Request for Proposal) was submitted by SkyWest Airlines suggesting a change from using a 50-seat aircraft to a 30-seat aircraft so they applied for FAA regulation approval for this change. However, their application was denied by the FAA and the Department of Transportation. The importance of the Essential Air Service (EAS) was emphasized. The EAS program subsidizes flights to geographically located areas that have difficulty with transportation. Vernal qualifies for this service, and it has been beneficial for the community. The two airlines that qualify to provide this service once the contract with SkyWest expires were discussed. The two airlines are Boutique, which operates prop planes and would provide four flights a day with an eight passenger plane and is the only applicant qualified for Vernal under EAS, and Contour Airlines, which operates two-engine jets would provide twelve flights a week and falls under an alternate EAS program. Boutique would fly to Denver and Contour would connect to Phoenix. Cheryl Meier asked if the airport would meet the enplanements quota. Ken Campbell answered yes, even with the change the airport is on schedule. Councilmember Ted Munford voiced his concern about ridership to Phoenix. Ken Campbell stated one positive is they would still require TSA here for connecting flights. If the plane is housed here, they will fuel here although there is currently only one hanger large enough. He noted that Counter flies into 17 cities throughout the nation while Boutique is in 6 and were here 8 years ago and did not make a

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good impression. Ken Campbell explained the differences between EAS and AEAS and noted under the AEAS program, the community makes the decision who they use and controls the contract. Councilmember Ted Munford asked if he had spoken with any of the communities that use the AEAS program. Ken Campbell answered yes, he spoke with Page, Arizona airport and they love the program. Also, Moab is leaning in that direction. One problem is the airport will have to provide up front funding until reimbursement from the FAA. That cost is \$550,000. There was some discussion regarding different destinations. Ken Campbell stated his preference is to change to the AEAS and go with Contour. Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll asked what happens once you get to Phoenix. Ken Campbell explained there is an American airlines hub so Phoenix is just the first leg with connecting flights. Councilmember Nick Porter questioned if the flights will fill up. Ken Campbell stated yes because of the number of flights there will be 60 seats out a day compared to 32 a day. Matt Cazier asked what has been the average daily enplanement. Ken Campbell answered 50 seat capability twice a day and they were filling them. Councilmember Corey Foley stated it will also depend on the cost per ticket. Quinn Bennion stated there has to be a decision by Monday. Emma Workman asked if lower ticketing will go away if the EAS is changed. Ken Campbell answered no. Commissioner John Laursen asked the opinions of the students.

Eve Hyde stated she is torn although she would choose Contour as there are more seats per day and when her family flies there are a lot of them that would not all fit on the smaller plane.

Aden Sharp agreed with Contour with seating and better ticket pricing.

Emma Workman stated she likes the larger capacity and the weather aspect. Also, local decisions are better rather than the federal government making decisions for the community as they do not know what is needed.

Carson Beckstead stated the larger airline is less likely to cancel flights.

Melissa Sizemore agreed with Contour as more people will fly to Phoenix in the winter.

Candy Sandsberry stated that they travel with the oilfield and they look at the cost of the tickets and how to connect to Willeston.

The consensus of the meeting leaned toward exploring the Alternative Essential Air Service (AEAS) option and working with Contour Airlines.

**VERNAL CITY:**

*Councilmember Corey Foley moved to move forward with the AEAS program with Contour and 12 flights per week. Councilmember Nick Porter seconded the motion. The motion passed with the following roll call vote:*

*Councilmember Munford.....aye;*  
*Councilmember O’Driscoll.....aye;*  
*Councilmember Everett .....aye;*  
*Councilmember Porter .....aye;*  
*Councilmember Foley.....aye.*

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**UINTAH COUNTY:**

Commissioner Sonja Norton moved to go forward with the AEAS and Countor. Commissioner John Laursen seconded the motion. The motion passed with the following roll call vote:

*Commissioner Norton* .....aye;  
*Commissioner Laursen* .....aye.

Ken Campbell stated there is still one more item for the airport, the terminal island project. It was approved to pay for this improvement so the cobble rocks were taken out. Now that area needs to be paved. He suggested spending another \$70,000 to pave the slope at the entrance.

**UINTAH COUNTY:**

*Commissioner Sonja Norton moved to approve the \$70,000 to fix the entrance. Commissioner John Laursen seconded the motion. The motion passed with the following roll call vote:*

*Commissioner Norton* .....aye;  
*Commissioner Laursen* .....aye.  
.....

**VERNAL CITY:**

*Councilmember Ted Munford moved to move forward with the AEAS program with Contour and 12 flights per week. Councilmember Corey Foley seconded the motion. The motion passed with the following roll call vote:*

*Councilmember Munford* .....aye;  
*Councilmember O’Driscoll* .....aye;  
*Councilmember Everett* .....aye;  
*Councilmember Porter* .....aye;  
*Councilmember Foley* .....aye.

**NATIONAL 250 BIRTHDAY 2026**

Commissioner Sonja Norton explained that the area should consider celebrating the national 250 year birthday that will happen in 2026. Quinn Bennion asked if she was thinking of one event or multiple things leading up to Freedom Fest. Councilmember Nick Porter stated he thought it would be more special to extend Freedom Fest. Commissioner Sonja Norton asked them to keep it in mind. Quinn Bennion stated another event could be the Vernal Equinox which could be held in March.

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**ADJOURN:** There being no further business, *Commissioner Sonja Norton moved to adjourn. Councilmember Nick Porter seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was declared adjourned.*

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Mayor Doug Hammond

ATTEST:

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City Recorder, Roxanne Behunin

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