

MINUTES OF THE JOINT VERNAL CITY COUNCIL AND UTAH COUNTY
COMMISSION MEETING HELD AUGUST 23, 2023 at 4:00 pm in the Uintah
County conference room 147 East Main, Vernal UT 84078

PRESENT:

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

UINTAH COUNTY: Commissioners Brad Horrocks, John Laursen and Sonja Norton.

STAFF: Quinn Bennion, Roxanne Behunin, Keith Despain, Wendy Long, James Sharp, Lesha Coltharp, Gabby Blackburn, Deanna, County planner, Jon Stermer, Ken Campbell, Carl Morton,

GUESTS: Dean Baker, Laurie Brummond, Ryan Goodrich, Nate Zilles, Kevin Yack, Steve Evans, Carl Conrad, John Ramsey, Randy and, Jared Ellsman.

WELCOME: Brad Horrocks welcomed everyone to the meeting.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND APPROVAL OF SPECIAL MEETING: *Councilmember Corey Foley moved to approve this special meeting. Commissioner John Laursen seconded the motion. The motion passed with Councilmembers Foley, Porter, Everett, O'Driscoll and Munford and Commissioners Laursen, Horrocks and Norton voting in favor.*

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF JUNE 14, 2023: *Councilmember Nick Porter moved to approve the minutes of June 11, 2023. Commissioner Sonja Norton seconded the motion. The motion passed with Councilmembers Porter, O'Driscoll, Foley, Munford and Everett and Commissioners Horrocks, Norton and Laursen voting in favor.*

DISCUSSION REGARDING WATER & DEVELOPMENT IN THE VALLEY: Quinn Bennion, Vernal City Manager, highlighted that the Ashley Water District has placed a moratorium on building within their jurisdiction due to water scarcity concerns. Vernal City is also facing water issues. Ryan Goodrich explained that Ashley Springs is the primary source of culinary water for the valley, with additional water coming from reservoirs. The conservation message in 2021 emphasized the urgent need to be water-wise and clear reports indicated that the District is running out of water. Fiduciary responsibility led to meetings and a moratorium on new water usage. He explained the Water Board discussed the need for a policy to secure water and the challenge of shifting water from agricultural to drinking water. There are clear state laws how that can happen and they would need a dedication and extraction policy. He noted that there are complexities in deciding whether to require water shares in order to add additional building. Quinn Bennion suggested that the next steps involve securing water and signing it over to Ashley Valley or Vernal City, but there are concerns about how irrigators will handle this issue. There was some discussion regarding the challenges in water rights, voting shares and the importance of representation and fighting against vague definitions of "M Stock" was emphasized. Commissioner Brad Horrocks asked if they could lease the water. Ryan Goodrich stated they cannot allow more building with leased shares.

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There was a conversation about the cost of water, especially for agriculture and the need of preserving agricultural land for food production. Commissioner Brad Horrocks emphasized that the recent repairs to Steinaker is costing the farmers. Ryan Goodrich reported that the District has 640 shares and Vernal City has 760 shares and is paying more than the irrigators for that water. Commissioner Brad Horrocks asked what the cost for culinary water is. Quinn Bennion stated the City is paying 50% of the Steinaker repair costs. Dean Baker stated the irrigators do not have to pay until the cost of the first rebuild is paid off. Councilmember Ted Munford noted that if the issue is the need for residential and commercial water use and agricultural use is decreasing, yet the irrigators are not in favor of changing the use, there needs to be a conversation with the irrigators. Commissioner Brad Horrocks agree that they need to meet and see what will work. Ryan Goodrich suggested a committee be formed to work on this issues including zoning, land incentives, landscaping, land swaps, and water usage. The high value of water in the area was stressed, affecting both construction and agriculture. There was some discussion regarding reusing water from the water treatment plant, making it almost potable, and potential legislation to sell water back downstream. Ryan Goodrich emphasized that the water coming out of the plant belongs to the sewer entities. After further discussion, the elected officials agreed to form a committee to work together for a solution.

VERNAL CEMETERY WATERLINE REPAIR UPDATE: James Sharp explained he received a call that the subdivision behind the cemetery had water in it and it was traced to see where it was coming from. There was a three foot crack in the irrigation line in the middle of the street that was seven feet deep. The line has been abandoned and there is no more water in people's backyards.

UBAG REPORTS –

- **BTA SPECIAL EVENTS REPORT:** Laurie Brummond stated the BTA has been participating with special events to accommodate tourism. The Commission needs to designate what special events should be handled to continue on with that process. Also the Mayors need to approve events in the cities. Commissioner Brad Horrocks stated the current process works great and the BTA should continue to work with Lesha with travel and tourism to handle special events.

CEDS REVIEW – GUIDING OUR GROWTH: Kevin Yack explained that they seek federal grants that have a lot of requirements. One of those is a five year strategy plan for the three counties and cities. Laurie Brummond stated the strategy plan has a thirty-day review period which is coming to an end. She noted that the water section will need more emphasis.

LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR PROGRAM: Nate Zilles introduced the new Local Administrator program instigated by the Utah League of Cities and Towns. The cities or towns must be members of the League to receive services. The AOG's will help rural communities with fewer than 5000 residents and who do not have full-time administrator. That excludes Vernal City, Naples City and Roosevelt. Some of the help will be for land use, employment policies, and economic development plans. Laurie Brummond stated the cities have invited Nate to go through and assist with the approval of the Councils.

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DISCUSSION REGARDING ADDITIONAL COMMERCIAL SERVICE AT THE AIRPORT: Ken Campbell introduced John Ramsey, owner of Redtail Air from Moab. There is interest to have an airline connection to Salt Lake City and Redtail Air is interested in providing that flight. John Ramsey reported that he has entered into a contract for one year with Grand County to see if this concept will work and offered the same program to the Vernal airport. If it is successful, they will offer flights to other cities within a 300 mile radius. The negotiation started at \$95,000 and \$150 ticket one-way. In order to drop the ticket price to \$100 the cost to the airport was \$136,000. The final negotiation was determined to be \$130,000 subsidy for a \$100 one-way ticket to Salt Lake City on Tuesday and return on Thursday. If weathered out, the flights can be changed to another day during the week. Commissioner John Laursen asked where the flight will land in Salt Lake. Campbell answered on the east side of the airport. He suggested the airport enter into a year trial contract. *After further discussion, Councilmember Corey Foley moved to authorize the airport staff to continue to negotiate and work toward a contract with Retail Airlines with a \$130,000 cost and a \$100 ticket cost. Councilmember Ted Munford seconded the motion. The motion passed with Councilmembers Foley, Porter, Everett, and Munford and Commissioners Laursen and Horrocks voting in favor. Commissioner Norton and Councilmember O'Driscoll were not present for the vote.*

DISCUSSION REGARDING AIRPORT ANNUAL FUNDING: Ken Campbell explained that several years ago the funding for the airport was changed. Carl Morton stated the County budget is \$600,000 and the City is \$200,000. It is cumbersome to send invoices to the County before they will pay their portion. Quinn Bennion asked the Commission to consider changing one paragraph in the Interlocal agreement so the cost remains a flat amount. Ken Campbell noted with the federal funding over the past few years will keep the airport functioning for a long time.

ADJOURN: There being no further discussion, *Commissioner John Laursen moved to adjourn. Councilmember Dave Everett seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned.*

Mayor Doug Hammond

ATTEST:

City Recorder, Roxanne Behunin