

MINUTES of the work session of the Uintah County Commission held **September 25, 2023** in the large Commission Conference Room of the Uintah County Building at 152 East 100 North, Vernal, Utah. Meeting commenced at 9:09 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS: Commissioners Brad Horrocks, John Laursen and Sonja Norton.

ATTENDANCE: Mike Wilkins, Carly Lansche, Amber Toler, Travis Campbell, Mike Cook, Gennie Bird, Zeke Atwood, James Sharp, Jess Hermann, Melanie Silcox, Wendi Long, Willis LeFevre, Matt Cazier, Brenda McDonald, Barbara Simper, Rick May, Ryan Mattson, Deanna Nyberg, and Jon Stearmer. Minutes recorded by Tai Duncan.

WELCOME: Commissioner Horrocks welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. ROCK CLIMBING PROPOSAL for designated areas – Dinoland Adventure Project (DAP)

Amber Toler, Vernal Trails Representative on the DinoTrails Committee and Member of DAP, along with Carly Lansche, Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation, offered a presentation for the Commissioner's consideration. Carly began by stating they are not looking for a formal approval but they want to get discussion started regarding potential rock-climbing sites in Uintah County. She invited everyone to attend the grant review meeting they will be doing in Roosevelt on November 6th at 10 am. This is an opportunity for people to learn more about the grants offered and administered by the Division of Outdoor Recreation. The Division is also updating the Outdoor Recreation Plan and needs public input. The Mountain West Trails Conference will be held in Vernal May 13-15, 2024. This is an opportunity for groups and individuals through the entire intermountain west to get together and share resources, ideas, and plans. She offered a promocode for those that wanted to attend and indicated they may be able to work something out to assist with some registrations. Amber added there are opportunities to expand the outdoor recreational offerings in the Basin. Via Ferrata, which will be discussed next, could put Uintah County on the map. The addition of rock climbing will reinforce our reputation as an outdoor destination. But we want it to be sustainable. This is where DAP comes in. Earlier this year, DAP applied for and was awarded the Outdoor Recreation Planning Assistance (ORPA) grant. Over the last few months they have discovered potential crags. There are several different types of rock climbing but they suggested focusing on two. Sport climbing has fixed protection for safety. Climbers use a harness and rope much like the small wall at the Recreation Center. Bolts are a key part and are fixed into the wall for the rope to be clipped to. When installed correctly, they should last through decades of use. Bouldering is the second type and is close to the ground; they do not need a rope or harness just shoes and a crash pad. These will require access trails and landing areas. Rock climbing will be a benefit to the entire community. This is a social sport that improves physical and mental health. This is an opportunity for search and rescue training, youth groups, tenacity, teamwork, problem solving, and environmental stewardship. Manti-LaSal recently did a study on their climbing visitors. They estimated expenditures at \$3.44 million and \$1.61 million in wages with an increase of 49 jobs. This is a huge economic boost. There is also an opportunity to host regional events, competitions, and festivals.

With this unique opportunity in Uintah County, power will come from planning. There are individuals who put in routes and ask for forgiveness later, which poses problems. There isn't enough documentation and history on the infrastructure and that becomes a liability. Safety protocol and standards are not formalized and locations may not be well vetted. Infrastructure is needed to make a great experience safe. We also want to minimize the impact on natural resources, such as parking and waste. We must plan ahead for restroom facilities, campsites, parking, etc. Uintah County is a great place to do this and an example for others in the state. The ultimate goal is a long-term vision and a plan for stewardship. They intend to work closely with all stakeholders to meet environmental standards, develop a safe and responsible opportunity, educate the public regarding sustainability and follow best practices. The priority list they have come up with will evolve over time. Each location will need to be inspected and reviewed closely. Some will be taken off the list while others are added depending on many factors. The top priority locations they have determined at this point are the Battleships above Red Fleet, the Red Mountain Boulders on the west of Red Mountain via 2500 West and the Flag Wall at Remember the Maine. The Flag Wall is an exceptional opportunity as it already has several boxes checked. They have

bathrooms and parking and the trail development would be straightforward. They understand there is an existing Memorandum of Understanding with Uintah Special Service District 1 so they will ensure all parties are included in discussion. They propose single pitch routes on the lower shelf. These would not interfere with the flag memorial or the falcon nests higher up. The lower shelf would be beginner friendly. It is also close to town making it easy access. In discussion with the rock wall director at the Rec Center, many people are excited to learn how to rock climb but then get bored because we don't have an area for beginners. This is our chance to keep people engaged. Carly and Amber continued by noting this is a unique wall in particular. It is not on federally owned property, it is close to town, already has some infrastructure, and is a beautiful location. It would take minimal investment. They will need protocol for bolts and anchors with extreme standards to reduce the risk of liability. Liability will be a huge part of the conversation. The Salt Lake Climbers Alliance has worked with the LDS Church on their property in Little Cottonwood Canyon to do route inspections. This is an example that an agreement can be done; it is possible. Cars seem to travel quickly on this road so they would suggest a barrier of some kind between the wall and the road. There are many that can contribute ideas so the group, as a whole, can come up with the best options. Interpretive signage could be included. There is also a donation kiosk already there for the flag memorial maintenance, perhaps one can be added for rock wall maintenance.

Mike Cook, Trails, has been working with these individuals and agrees this would be great for the County. When they first mentioned this area, he knew the flag would be a concern. There is a shelf about 50 feet up and that would be the area used. Wildlife concerns are higher on the face. Mitigating the traffic with a barrier to keep users safe would be necessary. It could be a good addition to the park itself. There is existing infrastructure that would support the use. He doesn't see many ways the activity could detract from the area. Carly added this area also has cellphone reception and that will help foster the beginner family friendly feel. If this is a possible project, we need to determine the next steps and begin moving forward. Commissioner Horrocks is supportive of the idea though he doesn't plan to do any rock climbing. The road and traffic are a concern but he feels they could find a way to overcome it. It would be a good addition to what the County has to offer. There are a lot of logistics to work through. Commissioner Norton agreed. The road is a concern and likes the idea of a barrier for safety. She is concerned about the County's liability. Carly agreed liability is a huge concern for everyone involved. There is a recreation use liability statute that says if you are not charging a fee for access, then you are absolved of the liability. The statute includes a specific list of activities but does not include rock climbing. They are working with legislators to get this changed to specifically include rock climbing. We are not the only ones who would like to see this change. A license agreement is also an option to balance liability. Amber noted DAP is working with the Charitable Friends of Ashley Valley to become their own entity to cover maintenance and oversee everything. This way no one person takes on any liability. There are grants, as this is an outdoor recreational activity, that would cover most of the costs of the infrastructure. Carly added, as the DAP has received the ORPA grant, they have a "fast pass" through the grant advisory committee. It shows they have done their due diligence. Safety is also a huge concept for the committee. Stainless steel bolts are best practices and will last 25 to 50 years depending on the use and funding to do the replacement when the time comes.

Commissioner Horrocks asked Matt Cazier his opinion as Community Development Director. Matt stated he is also a member of Dino Trails Committee. Regarding Planning, this would be a great addition to our area, not just for locals but for visitors too. Willis LeFevre asked if the rock climbing in Logan and Maple Canyons were part of the system and Carly responded they are not. Users put up those routes. The Salt Lake Alliance is trying to work with existing crags and local land managers and others involved, to help with the stewardship of such areas. They have been mentoring and guiding as well. They are happy to do trainings for local climbers and share information about best practices. They are a great resource. They have it down to a science; they even know the batch number on the adhesive for each bolt so they know exactly what has been put where and when. Commissioner Norton asked if they needed formal approval. Carly did not plan to ask for that but would not object to it. Commissioner Norton noted there is a general consensus of approval. Jon Stearmer, Deputy County Attorney, is not scared of the liability issues so long as we go into the project with open eyes. A year or so ago, there was talk about the statute and that it needed changed. He would recommend, as the County's formal support, that we support and do what we can to help make the change in statute. We can encourage others to support

the change too. That would be his preferred route over an agreement. It just makes sense to add rock climbing to the list of activities. It was suggested we get Senator Winterton involved, they anticipate him to be supportive as well. Amber added in their discussion from last week, they now understand SSD1 will have to provide the final approval as this is part of the Remember the Maine Park. They will begin working with that in mind as well. There are several entities that will need to be cooperative and work together with the same goal in mind.

2. VIA FERRATA DISCUSSION – Travis Campbell, Economic Development

Travis noted this is similar to rock climbing. If Uintah County develops a Via Ferrata trail, it will be the first public trail in Utah; there are others but they are all on private property. Via Ferrata trails are often referred to as vertical trails. It would be a big draw for locals and visitors from all over. It also opens the door for new businesses such as outfitters and guides. They believe Ashley Gorge is the best place for such a trail. This is a very scenic area with very little use. The recent conveyance includes the water but also recreation activities. Last fall, Travis met Dave Shallenberger. After their discussion, they determined there is funding available for this. Funding was approved to develop the first Via Ferrata in Utah last year but they didn't want it on the Wasatch Front; a rural area would be best. Travis, Dave, and Mike inspected Ashley Gorge, as much on foot as possible and with a drone. The half a million in funding is available we just need to start the process of planning and development, with approval from the necessary entities. Clint Cook, from Ouray, Colorado Via Ferrata, has been involved. The trail in Ouray is the first public site in the US, again most are on private land. There are thousands of public trails in Europe, this is new to the US. Clint was instrumental in developing the trail in Ouray and was excited to see our potential location. He said it could be a world-class trail. Ashley Gorge has a lot of potential. Travis showed a short video clip of Ouray's trail. We would not look like the system in Ouray because we have a different landscape but we have similar features. They have a draft document on what the install and design would be for such a trail in Ashley Gorge; getting down to the details of the anchor points, drill bit sizes, epoxy, etc. There are many details to be considered to ensure the safety of users. Travis would like feedback from the Commissioners. There is a lot to do and if this is something we want to pursue, we should get started. It is not likely to be used in the winter but would be popular in the summer. We want to ensure we don't do any damage to the natural element while providing a meaningful experience for all. A feasibility study has not been done for Uintah County. However, one was done in Colorado and they found they had 12,000 visitors each year with roughly \$5 million going back into the economy. He also suggested they turn the maintenance and liability over to a local group like DAP or similar to what would be done with Remember the Maine. The liability component doesn't seem to be an insurmountable challenge. He would assume the state legislature would be in favor of the change in statute to include rock climbing as they approved the funding for the Via Ferrata. Clint has done an initial, rough, plan for trails. They could be done based on difficulty. There is a possibility anyone on the ground would not see the infrastructure and cabling above them and maybe not even people climbing, they are steep and very high rock faces. Ashley Gorge is an ideal place and there are no other recreational uses. This could open up the area for other recreational opportunities as well. Jon reiterated what he said regarding the rock-climbing liability, it fits this situation as well. There is a Forest Service road on top to access the County property and may be a consideration for an access point as well as potential parking. There is access from the bottom. Travis noted this was discussed in the trails meeting last week. Access will also depend on the design; all options will need to be considered. He wanted to make sure he had Commissioner support before forging ahead and getting too deep. Mike added there may be a way to access from BLM property as well, from the east of the canyon. A hiking trail through the cedars is a possibility. It is a unique area and is beautiful. There aren't any hiking trails and it is difficult to walk up the bottom of the draw, which adds to the beauty of the area. Jon added Congress put some restrictions on their conveyance of the property to the County. If we don't use it for those purposes, the federal government will get it back. This kind of development is great legally as we are increasing the outdoor recreational opportunities. It had been discussed long before that we don't want to do a lot of development because we want to preserve the beauty. A small amount of hiking, some fishing, and perhaps some dispersed camping would be good options. We want to ensure we preserve our drinking water first and foremost. Mike agreed. This land is mostly vertical and coincides with minimal use in the area. Jon feels it would be a national monument if it were in any other state. You can't really appreciate it until you are in the heart of it. Commissioner Horrocks stated there is a general consensus

in support of moving forward. They would be willing to formalize support in a Commission meeting if necessary.

3. RFP OPENING: Irrigation line replacement at Vernal Memorial Park – Mike Wilkins, Clerk-Auditor. Four bids have been received, however, three are from Chivcon Construction dba Backhoe Supremo. These three are multiple copies of the same bid. The other bid received is from Stubbs and Stubbs Oilfield Construction. Both companies are from Vernal and were received on time.

4. RFP AWARD: Western Park Roto mill and Parking Lot Asphalt – Zeke Atwood, Purchasing & Grants. These bids were opened previously and the committee has asked for one additional week. The bidder was responsive but they are still working out the budgeting. This would be a spring project.

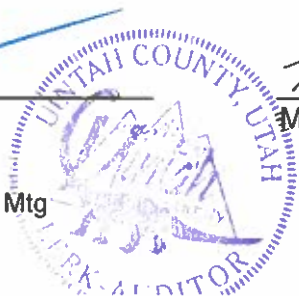
5. INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION GRANT MODIFICATION – Gennie Bird, Grants. This item is on the agenda tomorrow for formal approval. On August 1st, the Commission approved the contract modifications for the Public Defender office funded by the IDC Grant. This formalizes, for the State, so we can get the quarterly reimbursements for the contracts that were modified and the addition of the Justice Court Contract. The Justice Court contract is for \$54,000 to end in July to meet the fiscal calendar. This is in addition to and the grant award has not changed. Commissioner Norton asked if the County took care of indigent defense for the cities as well or just the County. The County takes care of the County only. There had been talk about regional services but that did not come to fruition.

6. ORDINANCE #09-25-2023 O1: amending Section 17.29.010-030; allow licensed insurance agents to install temporary signs during the months of October thru January each year – Matt Cazier, Community Development, noted this is a request from a couple of insurance agents. They would like to modify the existing County Zoning Code regarding signage, specifically temporary signage; Code Section 17.29.010 through 030. They would like to have the ability to put up temporary signs anywhere they would like from October through January of each year. Planning Commission did hold a public hearing. They heard comments from insurance agents and clients. Planning Commission had additional questions after the public hearing regarding legalities. They spoke with Tegan Troutner, who recently left the County Attorney's office. The Attorney's office recommended if the Planning Commission were to make changes for temporary signs they must allow anyone; they cannot allow preference for a specific group of people or businesses, etc. Planning Commission unanimously recommends denying the application. Matt spoke with Jon and they determined it best to fully complete the process and take the matter before Commission to make the final decision. Jon noted the County wants people to get the information they need, especially those that may have a hard time obtaining the information they need regarding sign-up periods, coverage, etc. We cannot give preference to any one group over another. If they find our signage ordinance is too restrictive overall, we can make the necessary changes to affect all. There are other ways for them to get the information out. Commissioner Norton noted that in reading the section, we do allow temporary signs with permits. Matt agreed. The temporary signs are allowed with a permit but they have to be on commercial property, they wanted to be able to put them anywhere. They do still have the ability to put up temporary signs without changing the code.

The Commissioners noted they will be gone next week and meetings will need to be canceled. The following week is the Holiday and we normally cancel both work session and regular meeting on Tuesday. However, they are also going to be gone October 16th and 17th. That would be three weeks in a row without a meeting. This is not advised so we will step away from usual procedure and hold the regular meeting on Tuesday October 10th.

ADJOURN: The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:08 am.


BRAD HORROCKS, CHAIR




MICHAEL W. WILKINS, CLERK – AUDITOR