

City of La Verkin

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La Verkin City Council Work Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 20, 2024, 5:00 pm.

Gym, 111 S. Main, La Verkin, Utah

Present: Mayor Kelly Wilson; Council Members: Patricia Wise, Blair Gubler, Richard Hirschi, Micah Gubler, and Darren Prince; Staff: Kyle Gubler, Fay Reber, and Christy Ballard, Public; Representative Joseph Ellison and Senator Evan Vickers.

A. Called to Order—Mayor Wilson called the work meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

1. State Representatives

Mayor Wilson thanked the representatives for attending and asked them to report on how the legislative session went.

Representative Joe Ellison reported on the DEI Bill that passed. It will affect state institutions by removing race, ethnicity, and gender as factors when applying to schools or jobs.

They indemnified and defined what a male and a female are. It also required government buildings moving forward (new construction) to provide three bathrooms, male, female, and unisex.

This does not deal with sports, that was addressed two years ago.

There is a commission that an athlete can petition to determine if their athletic ability falls within the realm of an average female. If so determined, they would be allowed to participate. A few individuals had gone before the commission, but he didn't think any exceptions had been given.

Last year, a bill was passed that precluded any foreign government or entity from owning property in Utah. This year, a bill was passed that gave those governments or entities one year to sell the property.

Councilwoman Wise asked about the purpose behind both bills.

Representative Ellison explained that much of the reasoning was our military facilities. We need to prevent foreign entities from purchasing property around our military installations, which has happened in other states and is a national security issue.

Councilwoman Wise pointed out China owns several mainstream US companies. Are they able to lease property in Utah?

Representative Ellison responded that they could lease.

On the agricultural side, there has been a huge concern about foreign entities purchasing and controlling our resources, which could leave us no longer a sovereign nation. We need to maintain control of our energy resources and food resources.

Senator Evan Vickers reported that both bodies put together a list of priorities before the session began, and it was interesting how similar they were. Energy was at the top of the list.

He reported on HB374, which made some energy policy amendments that passed.

Utah has the lowest energy rate in the United States since Washington State pulled out many hydroelectric facilities.

Utah would like to continue with coal if they can. Some money was put into water, but not as much because it still has money from last year.

There are a couple of pieces of legislation regarding water to watch. One is HB211, which President Adams and Speaker Schultz ran. It is similar to the Colorado River Contract, which requires a commission to negotiate. Many surrounding states have similar water issues to Utah, so they have talked about joining together to discuss the issue, and HB211 would facilitate that. There is even the potential of bringing water from other states into Utah.

The other bill is HB280, which concerns water-related changes. Our water system has a lot of aging infrastructure with a big maintenance price tag. This bill looks at finding a way to upgrade that infrastructure and continue to develop water for our growth. One component that he would urge the city to monitor is how that money would be collected, which is going to be some type of user fee. That makes a lot of people nervous, especially the agriculture people.

A significant amount of money was put into education.

There was a lot of discussion about affordable housing, homelessness, criminal justice, and infrastructure. Taxes were cut again for the fourth year in a row. HB69 dropped the income tax from 4.65 to 4.55. An additional bill, HB153, raised the childcare tax credit eligibility from 3-year-old children to four-year-old children.

The impact social media has on youth is significant enough that Utah is happy to take the lead on it. It requires social media companies to identify the age of users and restrict certain types of social media accordingly.

Councilwoman Wise asked how they do that without invading privacy.

Senator Vickers replied that was included in the bill; they must collect the data but cannot use it any other way.

Representative Ellison explained that the requirement was passed last year; this bill is just some fine-tuning. He reported Pornhub had left Utah because of it, which is a good side effect.

He sits on the energy board, and one of the bills mentioned by Senator Vickers states that if the federal government tells Utah they must pull an energy source offline, they do not have to do that unless there is an adequate replacement.

There was a discussion of how fragile the country's infrastructure is and the impact the freezing weather had on Texas in 2021 and the Navajo power plant shutdown in 2019.

Councilwoman Wise asked what clean energy the legislation is going after for the future.

Representative Ellison answered anything affordable and viable. They have put money into hydrogen and geothermal. Nuclear is always an option.

The IPP is trying to shut down coal facilities. We are trying to keep coal going; it is by far the best cost for Utah. Our coal energy production aligns with some of the more "green energy" sources.

Senator Vickers commented that the dialog regarding coal needs to change from coal not being used, to emissions. If we can control emissions and still use fossil fuels, why shouldn't we be allowed to do that?

The other challenge is clean air, especially along the Wasatch Front. The air is much cleaner than ten years ago, but we don't get credit for that. The emissions are going down even with the population increasing, but the federal agencies' restrictions are becoming more stringent than we can keep up with. There are ways to utilize natural gas and coal, but it's impossible to get a natural gas plant permitted.

The IPP plans to use natural gas and introduce up to 30% hydrogen, eventually 100% hydrogen. Dominion Energy is working with 1800 homes in the Delta area using 5% hydrogen to natural gas. It uses 300 gallons per day of water. This technology is moving forward and seems to be viable.

The geothermal plant uses fracking technology. It produces clean energy but costs a little more than we are used to. He explained how solar power operates and stated the challenge of solar is storage. Because of that, it could never be an independent source.

Mayor Wilson mentioned that water is a big issue in the state. La Verkin is working with the Washington County Water Conservancy District on our secondary water system. We have applied for a secondary water study to identify ways to improve it.

It is a forty-year-old system installed using the cheapest PVC pipe available and placed directly into existing ditches. Much of the pipe is behind people's homes. The city wants to move the lines into the streets and replace the pipe with higher-quality material.

As best as we can tell, we lose about 450 gallons of water per minute during slow times. That is a lot of water. The District is aware of this concern.

La Verkin has one of the best water rights on the river.

The study would determine the cost of a system upgrade. It would also conduct an impact fee study and analysis for new growth and determine how best to maximize water use, including the possibility of a storage pond.

The focus of Washington County is to save as much water as possible for future generations.

Zach Renstrom, with the WCWCD, says he is trying to get money for La Verkin to upgrade the system. Growth has slowed down in the county, but La Verkin still has the potential for a lot of growth once the topside is sold.

He explained the work the city, the District, and the Credit Union are doing to get infrastructure to the topside. That infrastructure will benefit Virgin, Toquerville, Hurricane, and La Verkin.

La Verkin was approved for a technical planning assistance study with UDOT. This is a follow-up study from a previous UDOT study on moving traffic more efficiently through La Verkin on SR9 and SR17. The technical planning study will determine if the proposals from the initial study are feasible. He went over a couple of those proposals.

Councilman Prince arrived at 5:32 p.m.

There was a discussion on the amount of traffic, particularly coming from Zion National Park and the intersection of 300 South.

Councilman Micah Gubler asked if any housing bills had passed.

Representative Ellison reported a "package deal" of housing bills had been presented. One of the bills that raised some concern was the Ombudsman Bill. This bill is an avenue for contractors who feel stonewalled by a city. They can request the ombudsman review the case. If a city follows the law, there shouldn't be any worry. It is just a mechanism to help mitigate potential lawsuits.

Senator Vickers reported on his bill regarding building inspections. It gives the city three days to complete an inspection. If it is not done in that time, the builder then goes to a list provided by the city of at least three approved inspectors to complete it. He wasn't trying to take anything away from the cities or get around inspections, but to give the developer an option to keep their project moving forward.

The three-day inspection requirement is not new; the inspector list is the change. The contractor does not pay for that inspection. It comes from the building permit fees.

Councilman Prince stated he feels private inspectors are a good idea.

Councilwoman Wise talked about the ballpark. She discovered that much of the money would come from TRT tax. Those funds go toward recreation and are important to Washington County. That needs to be considered when discussing programs that would impact those funds.

Senator Vickers stated that the Miller family has been working hard on the ballpark. They will put 3.5 billion dollars of their own money into the ballpark. A designated area by the state fairgrounds will house the stadium. There was a lot of discussion on how to do this. Where it landed was that they were going to create a district where the taxes would be generated to pay the stadium off. The player's income tax paid to the state of Utah will be part of the district. They also discussed a statewide 1.5% transient room tax to be paid for by visitors. There was a lot of opposition to that, and it was not included in the package.

Something similar was done for hockey, with an additional sales tax to revitalize that stadium. Salt Lake City should be getting major league hockey in 2025.

Councilman Prince asked if there has been talk about getting easements for pioneer canals. The canal has a huge historic significance to La Verkin City.

Representative Ellison responded that there had been some talk, but it didn't go anywhere. The ballpark caused rumors of a statewide tax to fund it, but that is not the case. It will be a localized tax.

I. Adjourn:

The meeting adjourned at 5:53 p.m.

April 3, 2024
Date Approved

ATTEST: Christy Ballard
Christy Ballard
City Recorder

Kelly B. Wilson
Mayor Kelly B. Wilson

