

MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL AND UTAH COUNTY COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING HELD, MAY 2, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. in the Uintah County Conference room, 147 East Main, Vernal, Utah 84078.

PRESENT:

VERNAL CITY: Randel Mills, Corey Foley, Ted Munford, Mayor Doug Hammond

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

STAFF: Quinn Bennion, Roxanne Behunin, Ivan Merell, Ken Campbell, Gabby Blackburn, Keith Despain.

GUESTS: Willis LeFevre, Mayor Dean Baker, Steve Evans, James Sharp, Danny Mortensen, Mike Davis.

WELCOME: Mayor Doug Hammond welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF MARCH 13, 2024: Councilmember Corey Foley *moved to approve the minutes of December 20, 2023. Commissioner John Laursen seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote.*

UPDATE ON BESS REPORT: Travis Campbell, joining the meeting electronically, provided an update on the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) project. Mr. Rigoberto briefly updated the officials on his company's focus, mainly in the US and Canada, with US locations utilizing hydropower, wind, and solar energy. The project in the Basin will connect the Ashley substation and is estimated to cost \$50 million for the placement of battery storage units. It is currently in the design phase, with design completion expected in 2024, construction in 2025, and full operation by 2026. A conditional use permit will be required, and negotiations with Rocky Mountain Power are ongoing for substation administration. Travis Campbell displayed an image of the proposed site, which will feature a fenced area with large battery boxes located directly north of the Rod & Gun Club. Quinn Bennion inquired about permanent job creation, to which Mr. Rigoberto responded that 1-2 people would be employed to check the system.

CEMETERY UPDATE:

James Sharp, Cemetery Manager, requested consideration for a new building at the Vernal Cemetery to house equipment due to vandalism and theft. The proposed steel building would house existing and future equipment, including a backhoe, trucks, and trailers. The estimated cost is around \$1 million, with concrete costing \$160,000 and the rest between \$400,000-\$500,000. The building would require bay doors for backhoes and security cameras, although existing cameras are ineffective at night. Commissioner John Laursen suggested a match from Vernal City for funding, and Quinn Bennion asked if they are looking for a 50/50 funding split. James Sharp mentioned potential funding from the Community Impact Board (CIB) and Commissioner Sonja

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Norton noted it is on the one-year CIB list for the County. Discussion ensued about building specifications and costs, with various options being considered to secure and house equipment adequately. James Sharp stated he will get more firm numbers on the cost of a building.

JAKE BRAKE REGULATIONS:

Quinn Bennion provided information on engine brake restrictions for the County, Naples, and Ballard. Vernal City had previously enacted an ordinance prohibiting engine brakes due to complaints. However, before signs can be put up, UDOT has to perform studies to validate the restrictions. Locations for signage include North Hwy 191, Hwy 121, Highway 40 by Naples, and Highway 40 off the hill, all of which qualify and have been validated. Councilmember Corey Foley mentioned that drivers are positive about the regulation, and Quinn Bennion agreed that most understand and comply with the restrictions. A media campaign will be conducted before enforcement. Mayor Dean Baker stated that Naples City already has signs up with this restriction.

ANNEXATION;

Quinn Bennion opened a lengthy discussion on annexation, emphasizing its timeliness and necessity. He explained that the Ashley Valley Water and Sewer Improvement District (AVWSID) has restricted water availability, impacting development and growth. One solution discussed was annexation, with some businesses approaching the City for water connections. Quinn Bennion outlined the financial implications and benefits of annexation for Vernal City. Commissioner John Laursen and others discussed potential collaboration with AVWSID to secure water for future development. Various points were raised about the benefits and challenges of annexation, including, infrastructure responsibilities, and long-term water availability. The property tax revenue for the County would not be affected by the annexation and the City would provide services. The discussion highlighted the interconnectedness of the City and County and the need for collaborative solutions to address water and development challenges. Another suggestion was to annex a subdivision into the City to free up those lots for AVWSID or have irrigation water available to develop. Commissioner John Laursen indicated that the irrigators are working with AVSID to work things out in the short and long term by allowing the purchase of canal stock. Another suggestion is for the City to consider leasing water to AVWSID for a 25-year period. Quintin Daniel asked what is the benefit of annexation from the City perspective. Quinn Bennion answered the direct benefit is the City receives the property tax, and the more indirect for the entire community is new businesses. He noted that stagnant development and economy hurts all of Vernal. Quintin Daniel stated he understands the community is interconnected; however, it may cost the Vernal City citizens to annex. Councilmember Ted Munford stated there are very complex issues here and annexation is how a City grows. Councilmember Corey Foley and others stressed the broader community impact of water availability. Without sufficient water, development stalls, affecting local businesses, housing availability, and overall economic growth.

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The potential ripple effect of not addressing the water issue was discussed, highlighting how a lack of development could lead to decreased property values, loss of business opportunities, and a decline in community services. Wayne Simper stated they are working with AVWSID for a permanent solution as there is not enough water out there for the farm ground. He stated there is 12,0000 acre feet set aside for growth and no one is pursuing that water. He noted if commitment letters for that water are not issued, that water will be lost to California. Councilmember Ted Munford acknowledged that it is not that simple to buy the water and build infrastructure. Several potential solutions were discussed, including long-term plans to secure additional water sources, such as purchasing Red Fleet Reservoir water. The possibility of consolidating multiple water districts to streamline water management and improve efficiency was also considered. Officials acknowledged the complexity of the issue, including legal and environmental challenges, but agreed on the necessity of proactive planning and action.

ADJOURN: There being no further business; *Commissioner John Laursen moved to adjourn. Councilmember Randel Mills seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was declared adjourned.*

Mayor Doug Hammond

ATTEST:

City Recorder, Roxanne Behunin