

SPECIAL IRON COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING
NOVEMBER 8, 2024

Minutes of the Special Iron County Commission meeting convened at 6:00 P.M. November 8, 2024 at the Festival Hall, 96 N. Main St, Cedar City, Utah.

Officers in attendance included:

Micheal P. Bleak	Commission Chair
Paul Cozzens	Commissioner
Marilyn Wood	Commissioner
Jonathan T. Whittaker	County Clerk

Also Present:

Lucas Little	County Auditor
Wade Adams	County Fleet Director
Gabe Carlson	County I.T.

Others present:

Carson Barlow	Rich Barlow	Ann Clark
Michael Clark	Robert Comstock	R. Dalton
Bill English	Miriam English	Stephanie Hill
Danette Joe	Keith Joe	Michael King
Elyse Kuehn	Stephen Kuehn	Cathy Klemic
Jodie Lecogue	Tom Lecogue	Berta MacGregor
Blaine Nay	Lisa Pellegrini	Tony Pellegrini
Ray Sadd	Sharon Sadd	Edward Sieman
Kaitlin Solomon	Tyler Solomon	Art Talbot
Ruth K. Warman	David Williams	Ree Zaphiropoulos
Russell		

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PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Those assembled were led in the pledge of allegiance by Amy Bleak.

INVOCATION

An invocation was offered by Lisa Pellegrini.

PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING IRON COUNTY GENERAL FUND INCREASE

Michael Bleak, Iron County Commission Chair, noted that anyone that would like to make a comment needed sign into the laptop that was provided. The names would be pulled from that list for comments. Mike reported that this was only a Public Hearing and there would be no action taken tonight. Once the process was complete, it would become an action item on the regular Iron County Commission meeting held on November 25th. Commissioner Bleak read, “Iron County is intending to increase the General Fund property tax rate. The dollar amount of the increase per year will be \$1.2M. The purpose of the proposed increase is due to the growing community and the need to enhance and expand essential services that support safety, well-being, and quality of life for all residents. First: with our population steadily increasing there is a greater demand for public service, including Law Enforcement and legal services. Second: inflation has significantly impacted operational costs across the board, from personnel to equipment and insurance. The last time Iron County did a tax increase in the General Fund was in 2003. In order to maintain and improve the quality of services we provide, it is necessary to adjust this funding source. The approximate percentage of increase on the Iron County General Fund tax rate is estimated to be 19.5%. This is only on the county portion of property taxes. In relation to property taxes as a whole, this is about a 2% increase. The tax on a personal residence valued at \$418,000, which is the county average that’s the median house price in Iron County, would increase by \$35.60 per year, or \$2.97 per month.”

Michael Bleak, Iron County Chair, declared the Public Hearing open regarding the property tax revenue.

Michael Clark, a citizen of Iron County, was concerned with the time the meeting was held, that Iron County was sabotaging the Iron County School District, and the tax increase.

Ann Clark a citizen of Iron County, was concerned with the time the meeting was held, did not want the jail, Iron County was at fault for the failed school bond.

Tyler Solomon, a citizen of Iron County, was concerned with the tax increase, the goal of the commission, inflation and everything going up, and not being able to pay the increase tax.

Luke Little, Iron County Auditor, reported that in government, entities were only allowed to have so much money in savings. There was a limit to how much an entity could have, and we had to stay within that limit. Iron County had a good fund balance every year. He noted that Iron County had that savings to use if something big were to happen

Jodie LeCogue, a citizen of Iron County, was concerned with being on a fixed income and having to pay for the increase,

Michael Bleak replied that there were programs through the Auditor's and Treasurer's Office for those who were unable to make their property tax payments. There were programs to help mitigate that. We do everything we can to work with those cases. The Auditor's office was well versed in helping people mitigate those problems.

Tom LeCque, a citizen of Iron County, was concerned with the tax increase, not being able to pay because of being on a fixed income, and running out of money.

David Williams, complained that he had been harassed since he spoke against the jail. He did not like the rules for public comments, because the commissioners forgot about the Constitution.

Edward Seaman, a citizen of Iron County, was concerned that his taxes had gone up 300% since he moved here, dealing with increased taxes, fuel and so forth, tax increases affected many of the seniors.

Rhonda Gardner, a citizen of Iron County, asked why Iron County needed additional increases when inflation and growth was already built into the system of getting a percentage.

Mike Bleak explained Iron County collected the taxes, but the Iron County portion of property tax was 10%. The rest goes to the School District, Cedar City Municipalities, and Water Conservancy. Iron County was allotted a certain amount of money through taxes. Mike reported on how property values and tax rates work. With the growth in Iron County that \$200,000, to just put that in perspective, would only hire one and a half police officers.

Lucas Little, Iron County Auditor, reported that he had slide presentation to show the history of the tax rate and what happens when values change and how that affects taxes.

Miriam English, a citizen of Iron County, was concerned with the growth in Iron County. Those moving in were the reason for the increasing needs of our community and they should be charged a higher portion upfront. They should have a larger responsibility in providing for the improvements that are needed. This increase would affect Senior Citizens the most.

Luke Little noted that, unfortunately, we cannot charge a higher tax rate for certain people or certain buildings. But when a new building was built, that was when we get the new growth property tax that Mike was referring to. So like you said, this year, our new growth was \$145,000 in our general fund from new properties being built. And so they'll start paying property taxes, but we can't charge them extra in the first year. They pay the same property tax rate as everyone else.

Miriam English noted that she was not talking about charging them higher tax rates, but charging them a rehabilitation fee.

Jon Whittaker, Iron County Clerk, noted that there was a version of that, called an impact fee. Jon explained impact fees. There were some pretty strict rules about how impact fees were used, and Iron County does not get impact fee monies unless it was in an unincorporated area.

Miriam said that when people applied for building permits, these builders, were determining the price of the homes they were going to sell. I just think our elected officials should figure out a way where people who are relocating here are responsible for contributing to the services that need to be added for their funding.

Commissioner Bleak reported that Iron County does have building permit fees. We cannot charge an initial moving in tax, but there were building permit fees that does help offset, and brought revenue into the county which helps us not to be reliant on just property tax. Mike explained the parameters on how property tax money could be spent and those.

Miriam stated that the point she was trying to make was the cost of living in Cedar City was much lower than it was in California, Oregon, and Washington and other large states and communities. People have a lot of money and they want to relocate here and it was increasing the cost of living for people who already live here. Was there not some way we could require them to contribute? Mike replied that legally Iron County could not do that.

Ethan Gale, a citizen of Iron County, was concerned with inflation across the board, truth in taxation, what was the "inside-the-box" thinking to make doing less do more with less, and what was going to be cut in services if this does not get done?

Mike Bleak reported that he had been a commissioner coming up on eight years. They had never discussed a property tax increase until last year. We have cut and cut and scrimped since 2003. It had been 21 years since there was an increase to this fund. The only reason we were here tonight was because they were over a barrel and there was no more to cut. With the growth of Iron County, with our responsibility as government to provide services, we are stretched. There was no where else to cut.

Paul Cozzens reported on the lack of Public Defenders. He explained how the increases had affected prices in different areas. Paul noted that his and Mike Bleak's terms would be up in two years and he would welcome anybody in this room to file and run as a county commissioner. Any one of you can do that. Because I'm telling you right now, it was not fun. This is the worst part of the job. I've been in public service for 14 years, and until we started talking about the jail, I never voted to raise taxes. There was a time when we really struggled keeping sheriff deputies that were hired to stay in Iron County because other counties were offering a higher wage. Paul noted that the commissioners were open to suggestions. This inflation had not been fun for any of us.

Marilyn Wood reported that Iron County took over the Iron County Fairgrounds from Parowan City, which had helped. The events rent the fair building which helped a bit. Parowan was going to close it up, but the commissioners knew it was important to have a fair to come together as a community. We went in and cleaned it up. Marilyn noted that she and her husband, and others, worked on improving the fences, which was all donated. We welded for a month straight and then put the new fence up.

Discussion continued, and included topics that included the jail that was under construction, tax-shifts due to centrally assessed properties, how tax rates and individual tax bills are established, and why they fluctuate, and the hardship of inflation.

Karen Nicholson, a citizen of Iron County, noted that her taxes went up on my property this year, over \$350, and she did not get any services. We've got dirt roads that are so washboardy, it's not even funny. all the new houses around us have got paved roads. Why don't we? That's not fair. We're paying for this. Paul Cozzens explained subdivision development standards, and that they were not properly enforced in Iron County until the year 2000. Today, many roads in older subdivisions would need to be brought up to proper standards before they could be maintained by Iron County.

Sherry Larson, a citizen of Iron County, recalled that the jail bond failed and the school bond failed. She asked whether Iron County got any federal help with any of them.

Jon Whittaker explained that Iron County had saved up money, some of which was COVID money, which was federal money. That money was set aside for the jail capital project. At the behest of the citizens, we actually went to the legislature and Representative Ship and Senator Vickers helped shepherd through HB 488, which allowed for the sales tax. but the short answer is no. Federal dollars don't fund correctional facilities. So jails are interesting in that regard because there is money that happens, but it's on the tail end, and it's when you house prisoners. And so with the federal inmates, Iron County receives a daily stipend.

(Speaker Unknown) "Carson Marlowe and I live in the county out on the west side of Cedar City. And fortunate for me, I have a paved road all the way into my home and so I don't like the taxes. But I for one want to stand up here and give each one of you commissioners a great big thank you for your services for us people in the county. I really do appreciate you listening to all the people and all their complaints. Because me coming and listening to their complaints and then listening to the way you respond helps me to understand the tax issues and the budget problems that the county has. I just want to say thank you."

Wade Adams, a citizen of Enoch City, noted that he was an Iron County employee. He stated, "I get sick and tired of the cut this, cut that. We need to look for better ways to save money, this and that. You guys are doing a great job. You guys are frugal, you guys are conservative, and that was a joke. you have integrity too, and I hear a lot of comments about you guys trying to do things sneakily and behind people's backs, and I don't ever see that. are doing a great job, and we appreciate it."

Michael Bleak, Iron County Commission Chair, declared the end of the Public Hearing.

ADJOURNMENT

Michael Bleak, Iron County Commission Chair, declared the meeting adjourned.



Signed: Michael Bleak, Commission Chair

Attest: Jonathan T. Whittaker, County Clerk