

IRON COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING

NOVEMBER 25, 2024

Minutes of the Iron County Commission meeting convened at 9:00 a.m. November 25, 2024 in Commission Chambers at the Iron County Courthouse, Parowan, Utah.

Officers in attendance included:

Michael Bleak	Commission Chair-Excused
Paul Cozzens	Commissioner
Marilyn Wood	Commissioner
Jonathan T. Whittaker	County Clerk

Also present:

Lucas Little	County Auditor
Stephanie Rainey	County COA
Shalon Shaver	County Corrections
Sam Woodall	County Deputy Attorney
Jennifer Bradbury	County HR Director
Ken Carpenter	County Sheriff

Others Present:

Bruce Washburn	Steve Miller	Jeremy Truman
Robert Comstock	Mark Nelson	David Williams
Susan		

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APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR PRO-TEMPORE

Marilyn Wood welcomed everyone and excused Commissioner Bleak, who was away. Marilyn Wood made a motion to appoint as Paul Cozzens as Commission Chair Pro-Tem. Second by Paul Cozzens. Voting: Michael Bleak, Absent; Paul Cozzens, Aye; Marilyn Wood, Aye.

INVOCATION

An invocation was offered by G'Ne Bartholomew.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Those assembled were led in the pledge of allegiance by Lucas Little.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Marilyn Wood made a motion to approve the minutes of the Iron County Commission meeting held on October 28th, 2024. Second by Paul Cozzens. Voting: Michael Bleak, Absent; Paul Cozzens, Aye; Marilyn Wood, Aye.

APPROVAL OF CLAIMS FOR PAYMENT

Marilyn Wood made a motion to approve Claims for Payment from November 12, 2024 to November 24, 2024. Paul Cozzens. Voting: Michael Bleak, Absent; Paul Cozzens, Aye; Marilyn Wood, Aye.

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Lucas Little, Iron County Auditor, reported had been working on the budget. The budget discussions went well. Carrie Christiansen, Chief Deputy Auditor, took care of the Board of Equalization. There were many appeals this year. Mickayla Meinhardt takes care of Abatements, and that is also wrapped up

Stephanie Rainey, Council on Aging (COA) Director, reported that the Cedar City and Parowan Senior Centers were doing well. Approximately 200 meals were provided as part of the Meals on Wheels program, along with 60 congregate meals. She anticipated that those numbers would increase with continued growth in Iron County. There was a need volunteers for Meals on Wheels drivers and a receptionist for the COA. At the start of July, the COA received another Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) through the Five County Association of Governments (AOG) for \$11K. The funds would be used for transportation costs.

Shalon Shaver, Jail Commander, reported that the overall budget for the 4th Quarter was at 78%. Culinary cost was \$1.03 cents per meal. Shalon reported that the average daily prisoner population was 152, with 133 male and 19 female. Currently, there were 128 county inmates, 9 state inmates, and 41 federal, with 1 inmate from another county. The work crew had provided 891 hours of service, with the majority of the efforts installing fencing. The Jail now had 6 vacancies, up from 0 at her last report. She discussed new Taser cartridges and a cage for an all-wheel transport for inmates, which was anticipated to cost \$30K.

Kenneth Carpenter, Iron County Sheriff, reported that the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) had been called out 25 times so far in 2024. The drug task force remained busy with a recent seizure that netted over 50 lbs. of Fentanyl, 231,540 pills, 123.5 lbs of methamphetamine, and over \$4M in street value. Sheriff Carpenter discussed his concerns regarding both the Mexican and Canadian border. He expressed hope that the incoming Trump administration would do a better job at the borders. Sheriff Carpenter reviewed detailed crime statistics and then discussed legislation. He then discussed growth in Iron County, noting that in Cedar City alone at more than 5,040 homes were being built. Nearly every County Commission meeting had some re-zoning of agricultural to housing or light industrial. This brought with it a significant need for additional deputies. Iron County was not keeping pace with the need for policing. He cited a situation in West Valley City, where an officer would begin their shift 45 calls behind, allowing only for triage of cases. It also creates a situation where criminals know

they will not likely be held accountable because the policing is spread too thin. It was imperative that Iron County not end up in a simply “reactive” state of police protection. Sheriff Carpenter also noted that it was a continued challenge to source new deputy vehicles, and that progress was being made on the construction of the new Jail and Sheriff’s Complex, which should be completed in January of 2026.

Marilyn Wood, Iron County Commissioner, reported that she attended Public Lands Council meetings in Bryce Canyon on the 13th, 14th, and 15th. There was discussion regarding ranching and farming issues, such as Predator Control and Intensive Grazing. They also discussed Utah’s lawsuit regarding changing certain public lands in Utah to state ownership and control from the federal government. Along Lund Highway, some sheep escaped and were struck and killed by an automobile. Commissioner Wood implored drivers to watch out for livestock and to be aware of their surroundings.

Paul Cozzens, Iron County Commissioner, reported interviewing for a new public defender. He mentioned a mental health crisis receiving center in Washington County, under the 5 County Association of Governments (Five County). They had held the Five County Behavioral Health and Steering Committee meetings. Paul then discussed the recent Canvass of the November 5th General Election. He noted that turnout was high at 88% out of 30,000 registered voters, but that Iron County had over 60,000 residents.

PUBLIC HEARING, REGARDING THE PROPOSED IRON COUNTY 2025 FINAL BUDGET

Lucas Little, Iron County Auditor, presented the Iron County 2025 Proposed Final budget. He began by giving a macroeconomic snapshot of the economy during 2024.

- **Inflation** was significantly lower than the previous two years and had somewhat stabilized. Utah’s unemployment rate remained low, with many applicants often applying, but for in-demand positions hiring has proven difficult. Iron County had not implemented a property tax increase, but there was an increase on the agenda later during this meeting. 2023 saw an increase to the fund balance in the General Fund. However, in 2023, the Municipal Services fund decreased. The Municipal Services Fund and General Fund are the two largest funds in Iron County. In 2024 the revenue from Building Permits was already higher than all of 2023. Inflation caused goods and services that Iron County had to purchase to be more expensive. Inflation also caused an increase in sales taxes, which was a positive for the budget. Increases in sales tax revenue were smaller in 2024, due to the lower inflation.
- **Sales tax revenues** would be in line with budgeted amounts. Lucas anticipated lower inflation, and therefore, lower sales tax revenues, which was reflected in the 2025 budget with a smaller increase for sales tax revenues. Because of growth and inflation, Iron County has not had to raise Property Tax rates over many years. This lower sales tax projection was, in large part, what necessitated the Truth in Taxation General Fund property tax rate increase. Also, the increased of goods and services. Driving interest rates is the Federal Reserve (Fed). To combat inflation, the Fed increased interest rates, which was successful, as evidenced by lower inflation. They have since lowered interest rates. This affects how much it costs to get a mortgage, as well home values. In Iron County, the average home is \$418K, about \$100 lower than the Utah average home price. This leveling of interest rates has not only affected building permits, but Recorder’s Office fees as well, both seeing an increase.
- In terms of **debt, and debt payments**, the largest was now the Jail. Annual Payments for that will begin in 2025. Iron County sold the bond for the Jail just after the interest rates decreased. The timing was very beneficial for the interest Iron County secured. In terms of Capital expenditures, the largest will also be the Jail project. In the Road Department, they would be replacing some large equipment in 2025. The Road Department also began receiving significant funding from the State of Utah, and additional sales tax revenue.
- **Tourism** receives funding from the Transient Room Tax (TRT), as well as Tourism, Recreation, Cultural, Convention, and Airport Facilities Tax (TRCC). The Tourism

department was proposing \$100K to improve the 3 Peaks, Wood Ranch, and 5 Mile recreation areas.

- One other significant capital expense was the **purchase of a skid steer** to assist the inmate work crew.
- Bruce Anderson requested a one-time transfer of \$450K to upgrade the 3-ton cans in the west desert to 12 ton cans by purchasing a **larger truck**, to improve efficiency. This would be from the Landfill Fund. Jeremy Truman, Landfill Supervisor, calculated the Return on Investment (ROI) to be about 3 years. They were also planning on selling existing trucks and cans to offset the purchase.
- Lucas Little gave a recent history of **salaries and wages**. In July of 2022, the commissioners decided to restore the “Step in Grade” system, and placed each employee where they should be in the system. Because of the large cost of restoring the Step in Grade, a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) was foregone until January 2024. Therefore, January of 2025 will be the 2nd year of a step increase under the Step in Grade system. Each step is a 1.5% increase. Another change for 2025 will be to increase the lowest paid office workers from Grade 2 to Grade 3. Essentially, anyone who is a full-time employee will now be at least a Grade 3. There would be 3 levels for those administrative employees, Level 1 would be the entry level at Grade 3, then Level 2, would be available after 4 years and would be a Grade 4, then Level 3 would be available after 8 years and would be Grade 5.
- Out of 30 departments at Iron County, there were 33 **new position requests**. This reflected the growth in population and demand for services. It would not be possible to fund all of those positions, so they had to prioritize which positions must be created. Among the new positions, an additional Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Specialist, a change from Part-Time to Full-Time Maintenance employee, an Administrative Sergeant in the Jail, a change from Part-Time to Full-Time Crime Scene Investigator, and lastly, 3 new employees in the Road Department.
- Of **impact to the budget this year**, was a payback of Victims of Crimes Act (VOCA) grant funds relating to the Children’s Justice Center; under Fire, the amount owing to Cedar City increased by \$100K, and the Participation Commitment for Wildland Fire increased by \$350K, although part of this funding can be “In Kind,” such as mowing, fuels mitigation and outreach; lastly, there was an increase of \$500K in employee health insurance. Paul Cozzens noted that this increase was part of each employee’s increase, because they would not have to pay for the insurance increase.
- Lucas Little concluded by relaying a rating by a private group entitled, “The Utah Taxpayers’ Association.” Iron County was listed as the 2nd Lowest in County Government Revenue per capita.

Paul Cozzens, Iron County Commission Chair Pro-Tem, declared a public hearing open regarding the Proposed 2025 budget.

Robert Comstock, a citizen of Iron County, noted that his tax bill was \$1,189, and he just got notice of a \$475 decrease in his Social Security. His property tax bill had increased 30% over the course of 3 years. Mr. Comstock noted that the Iron County School District had voted in a \$229 Property Tax increase (for the average home), and combined with the proposed \$36 increase, it felt like a large increase. He wondered about Deputy pay, and raises, tax shift, and Iron County as the Property Tax collector were discussed.

Paul Cozzens, Iron County Commission Chair Pro-Tem, declared the public hearing ended.

PUBLIC HEARING, REGARDING A COMPENSATION INCREASE FOR EXECUTIVE COUNTY OFFICERS

Lucas Little explained that under UCA § 17-6-14, a new requirement from the 2024 legislative session was that a public hearing be held whenever Executive County Officers' salary is increased. "Salary" includes salary paid under a contract, a budgeted bonus or budgeted incentive pay, a vehicle allowance, or defined deferred salary. Lucas explained that the executive salaries were increasing by 2.5%, comprised of 1.5% for a step increase, and a 1.0% increase for COLA. The salary for Iron County Commissioners was \$58,843.41 and there would be an increase of 1.0% for the commissioners.

Paul Cozzens, Iron County Commission Chair Pro-Tem, declared a public hearing open regarding a compensation increase for executive county officers.

Steve Miller, a citizen of Iron County, asked why the salary for Iron County Commissioners was shown on a public records site as \$92,788? Luke Little explained that the difference between the two numbers was due to Social Security, benefits, and Medicare taxes. Mr. Miller asked a follow-up question regarding the Children's Justice Center (CJC). He asked whether all grants must be approved by the Commission, and Iron County was paying back \$121K, but that grant was approved by the Commission. Sam Woodall, Chief Deputy Iron County Attorney, noted that what we could say was limited.

Paul Cozzens, Iron County Commission Chair Pro-Tem, declared the public hearing closed regarding a compensation increase for executive county officers.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING THE USE OF IRON COUNTY FACILITIES BY OTHER PERSONS OR ENTITIES

Paul Cozzens noted that this issue came up because of various groups using the Senior Center, and other facilities charge for their use. Paul noted that it would be beneficial to standardize a policy for the use of Iron County buildings. He noted that Mark Nelson had reached out to him regarding the use of the Senior Center in Cedar City, and that Stephanie Rainey was new and asked what the best approach would be. He noted that he had discussed the issue with the Iron County Attorney's Office who suggested that a cleaning deposit be charged, and that possibly a use fee be charged for entities that are not nonprofit. Sam Woodall noted that there was a challenge in that each building was unique. Jon Whittaker noted that he had reviewed the issue with the Utah Counties Indemnity Pool (UCIP), and that, as public spaces, the buildings should be available for use, but that policies protecting Iron County were wholly appropriate. There was discussion regarding requiring Certificates of Insurance and/or Indemnification. Jon suggested that any policy enacted be consistent county-wide. Marilyn Wood made a motion to approve the use of Iron County facilities by other people and entities, and that a cleaning deposit be required, fees and schedules be kept and posted by those department heads who have responsibility over facilities, and that Iron County develop a policy to clarify such use. Second by Paul Cozzens. Voting: Michael Bleak, Absent; Paul Cozzens, Aye; Marilyn Wood, Aye.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments were offered.

RESOLUTION 2024-10, ADOPTING ADDITIONAL PROPERTY TAX REVENUE FOR 2025 CALENDAR YEAR

Lucas Little explained the proposed increase to the Iron County General Fund. The Property Tax on a primary residence valued at \$418K would increase by \$35.60 per year. Lucas presented a Slide show to explain the value of Homes compared to the Property Tax rate. He then explained how Property Taxes had shifted from Centrally Assessed payors, such as railroads and utilities to average homeowners. Lucas also explained that the State of Utah locked in the statewide Assessing and Collecting levy, which caused a significant increase in tax burden to property owners. Paul Cozzens noted that inflation hurts everyone. There was no desire to vote for increased taxes, but it was necessary. He spoke to accusations that the meeting time of Friday at 6:00 p.m. was somehow subversive. The law requires that the meeting be no earlier than 6:00

p.m., and that it not be at the same time as another meeting, leaving Friday evening. Marilyn Wood made a motion to approve Resolution 2024-10, adopting additional property tax revenue for 2025 calendar year. Second by Paul Cozzens. Voting: Michael Bleak, Absent; Paul Cozzens, Aye; Marilyn Wood, Aye.

REVIEW AND POSSIBLE APPROVAL OF A SEWER LINE AGREEMENT AMENDMENT

Sam Woodall, Iron County Chief Deputy Attorney, explained that this item had already been approved by the Cedar City Council. It noted that the agreement pertained to the 4500 West Transmission Line. This agreement was to help BZI move forward with the assurance of sufficient sewer capacity and availability. The agreement contemplates a “Use it or Lose it,” approach to the 2,000 connections Iron County has available. When he spoke before the City Council, he asked that the original agreement be renewed with the requirement that Iron County notify Cedar City when additional sewer connections are granted. Marilyn Wood made a motion to approve a Sewer Line Agreement Amendment with Cedar City. Second by Paul Cozzens. Voting: Michael Bleak, Absent; Paul Cozzens, Aye; Marilyn Wood, Aye.

Paul Cozzens took some time for personal privilege, clarifying that Iron County was not trying to make the Truth in Taxation hearings untenable for citizens. He addressed the 2023 hearing when he was trying to address the frigid temperature in the room, but was then accused of not paying attention, because he was using his cell phone to do it. Paul also addressed accusations of the commissioners taking bribes in relation to the Jail construction. He noted that he would not even know how to do it. Paul affirmed that the commissioners were trying to be as transparent as possible. Marilyn Wood noted that that was why she did not run for another term as commissioner.

PERSONNEL

Jennifer Bradbury, Iron County Human Resource (HR) Director, presented the new hire of Taryn Schroeder as a Full-Time 4-H Coordinator for USU Extension, effective November 25th. This was a backfill of a vacant position.

Marilyn Wood made a motion to approve the personnel changes as presented by Jennifer Bradbury. Second by Paul Cozzens. Voting: Michael Bleak, Absent; Paul Cozzens, Aye; Marilyn Wood, Aye.

Jon Whittaker noted that, concerning previous agenda items authorizing the sale of the old CJC property, the sale had been finalized for full price, and that a nice young couple had purchased it. Paul Cozzens noted that the proceeds of the sale would go toward the parking lot and landscaping for the new CJC building.

Paul Cozzens asked Jon Whittaker to report regarding his recent attendance of the annual Utah Counties Indemnity Pool (UCIP) meetings. Jon explained that UCIP was Iron County’s insurance or “indemnity” for liability. The private insurance market had gotten difficult regarding premiums and reduced coverage, but, as an indemnity pool, UCIP provided greater coverage and lower rates. For example, indemnifying police officers on duty has become impossible in the open market. Many Law Enforcement (LE) agencies simply do not carry such coverage. Iron County is fortunate to have it under UCIP. Iron County has been with UCIP since its inception 30 years ago. One of the bigger expenses that UCIP incurs is “backstop” insurance or reinsurance to cover beyond the initial claim. This exposes UCIP, and by extension, counties, to insurance costs on the open market for catastrophic coverage. Another advantage of UCIP is the fact that it also includes Cyber coverage, which most insurers have dropped altogether. Jon noted that, unlike in the past, when counties construct or acquire a new building, the additional exposure would need to be accounted for as soon as it was occupied, not just on the next cycle as had been the case. Another advantage of UCIP is that each county has a certain amount of equity in the Pool. In other words, counties are not just customers, but owners of UCIP. Yet another

advantage of UCIP was that it had a superb legal team to help when lawsuits were imminent or pending. Jon concluded that, because of the reinsurance as mentioned and because of an actuarial tightening, Iron County's contribution would increase in 2025.

NON-DELEGATED ITEMS

No Non-Delegated Items were discussed.

ADJOURNMENT

Paul Cozzens, Iron County Commission Chair Pro-Tem, declared adjournment.



Signed: Paul Cozzens, Chair Pro-Tem


Attest: Jonathan T. Whittaker, County Clerk