

MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD ,2025

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NOVEMBER 5, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. in the Vernal City Council room, 374 East Main,
Vernal, Utah 84078.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Ed Long, Robin O'Driscoll, Randel Mills, Ted Munford and Corey Foley and Mayor Doug Hammond.

WELCOME: Mayor Doug Hammond welcomed everyone to the meeting.

INVOCATION OR UPLIFTING THOUGHT: The invocation was given by Councilmember Randel Mills.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD October 15, 2025 *Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll moved to approve the minutes of the Regular City Council Meeting held October 15, 2025. Councilmember Corey Foley seconded the motion. The motion passed with Councilmembers Munford, Mills, O'Driscoll, Foley and Long voting in favor.*

DISCUSSION AND CONSIDERATION OF A NAME FOR THE PTERANODON SHADE STRUCTURE - QUINN BENNION

City Manager Quinn Bennion introduced the item regarding the naming of the newly installed Pteranodon shade structure, explaining that while naming such a feature was not a routine matter, it felt fitting given that other large dinosaur displays in the community, such as Dinah and the T-Rex, already have names. He noted that the structure was completed through a T-Mobile Hometown Grant, designed by Public Works Director Keith Despain, and fabricated by Vernal City staff. Mr. Bennion stated that the City conducted a public naming process to engage residents in selecting an appropriate name for the new feature.

City Recorder Sara Bell detailed the naming process, reporting that more than one hundred fifty suggestions were received through online forms and social media. After eliminating duplicate entries, ninety-eight unique names were reviewed by City employees, who narrowed the list to twenty finalists. Those names were then shared in a community poll through Facebook and Instagram, which garnered 454 votes. The five most popular names were Petrie, Terry, Pterrence, Psteve, and Tara Dawn. Ms. Bell noted that "Petrie," inspired by the Land Before Time character, received the highest number of votes, with 121.

The Council discussed the public input, with several members commenting on the creativity of the suggestions and the nostalgic appeal of the top choices. Councilmember Edward Long and Councilmember Corey Foley both expressed support for the name Petrie, while humor was shared regarding some of the more unusual submissions. Vernal resident Carol Kendall asked if the local school children had been invited to participate in the naming of the structure and City Manager Bennion acknowledged that schoolchildren and families had participated actively in the poll. He noted that community engagement was an important outcome of the process.

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Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll made a motion to name the shade structure Petire, with Councilmember Randel Mills seconding the motion. The motion passed with the following roll call vote:

<i>Councilmember Munford.....</i>	<i>aye;</i>
<i>Councilmember Mills.....</i>	<i>aye;</i>
<i>Councilmember O'Driscoll.....</i>	<i>aye;</i>
<i>Councilmember Long.....</i>	<i>aye;</i>
<i>Councilmember Foley.....</i>	<i>aye</i>

UPDATE ON VERNAL CITY PUBLIC COMMUNICATION EFFORTS - QUINN BENNION & SARA BELL

City Manager Quinn Bennion introduced the update on Vernal City's public communication efforts, emphasizing the ongoing goal of improving how information is shared with residents. He stated that the City frequently hears concerns from the public about not receiving timely information and acknowledged that local governments often struggle with effective communication. Mr. Bennion explained that the City has implemented three initiatives focused on outreach while remaining cost conscious. These initiatives include the continued use of the Podium messaging system, the launch of the Genesis geo-based notification platform, and the introduction of a quarterly newsletter now available on the City's website.

City Recorder Sara Bell provided an overview of Podium, explaining that residents may communicate with the City through text message, Facebook Messenger, or the "Text Us" feature on the website. She reported that the Finance Department, primarily employees Brenda Allen and Obern Mayes, responds to these messages with an average response time of one minute and forty-six seconds. In the past thirty days, seventy-four full conversations were completed, and over the past year, more than five hundred thirty-nine. Ms. Bell highlighted that Podium is also used internally for efficient communication between Utility Billing and Water Department staff, including water shutoff notices, meter replacements, and high-usage alerts. Mr. Bennion added that Podium has also proven useful for distributing utility applications and notifying residents of unusual water usage.

Ms. Bell then reported on the implementation of Genasys, the geo-based notification system recently adopted through partnership with Uintah County Emergency Management. She explained that this system allows the City to text or email only those residents located within an affected area. She cited a recent water outage in which the City successfully notified impacted residents by selecting the specific area on the map, resulting in forty-four successful text messages and fifty-three emails. Ms. Bell noted that the public may now opt in to receive alerts related to water and sewer issues, police notifications, street closures and parades, noise ordinances, and emergency alerts, with one hundred thirty-three residents enrolling during the first week. Mr. Bennion stated that the system is provided at no cost to the City and commended County staff for supporting Vernal City's use of the platform.

The Council discussed after-hours communication through Podium, and Ms. Bell clarified that an automated message informs the public when messages are received outside business hours. Although employees may voluntarily respond if able, they are not required to do so. Mr. Bennion added that the current balance between automated and manual responses allows for urgent issues to receive prompt attention without placing undue burden on staff.

Ms. Bell concluded by announcing the launch of the City's quarterly newsletter, which is now

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available online on the Vernal City website under Community Services. She stated that the City will work toward distributing the newsletter by email and creating a subscription option through the website.

CONSIDER THE REQUEST TO TRANSITION A SEASONAL EMPLOYEE TO A FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE IN THE UTILITY DEPARTMENT - IVAN MERRELL

Utility Department Supervisor Ivan Merrell addressed the City Council regarding staffing needs within the department. Mr. Merrell explained that the department has undergone significant positive change in recent years and credited much of the progress to the quality of the employees who have joined the team. He stated that a seasonal employee hired earlier in the summer had proven to be an exceptional addition, demonstrating strong work ethic, initiative, and compatibility with the department's mission. Mr. Merrell requested authorization to transition this seasonal employee to full-time status with the understanding that when the next full-time employee leaves through attrition, the vacated position would not be refilled, allowing the department to return to its current staffing level.

Mr. Merrell explained that the department has worked for many years in a reactive mode, responding to failures rather than addressing long-term maintenance needs. He stated that with additional staffing they have been able to undertake significant proactive projects, including the 3500 West slip-lining project, which has installed nearly eight thousand feet of pipe and is estimated to save the City approximately three and a half million dollars upon completion. Councilmembers inquired about the availability of funding to support the position through the current budget year. Mr. Merrell reported that higher than anticipated water sales, including water delivered to Ashley Valley and the sand mine, would allow the position to be funded through the enterprise fund. Finance staff indicated that budget adjustments could be made if needed.

City Manager Quinn Bennion stated that he had reviewed the request with Mr. Merrell and Public Works Director Keith Despain and supported the proposal. He emphasized the importance of full-time equivalent positions, noting that adding staff must be considered carefully. Mr. Bennion stated that the department continues to face substantial backlogs in valve exercising, grease trap inspections, sewer line evaluations, private hydrant oversight, and infiltration reduction, and that additional staffing would meaningfully advance proactive maintenance.

Councilmembers discussed the value of retaining skilled employees and expressed support for maintaining staff who demonstrate strong performance and commitment. They acknowledged the importance of cross-training and year-round productivity but agreed that the seasonal employee's performance warranted the opportunity. The Council also noted the difficulty of recruiting qualified personnel and the benefit of retaining an employee already trained and proven.

Councilmember Corey Foley made a motion to approve the transition of the seasonal employee to full time employment in the Utility Department. Councilmember Ed Long seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with the following roll call vote:

Councilmember Munford..... aye;
Councilmember Mills..... aye;

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Councilmember O'Driscoll..... aye;
Councilmember Long..... aye;
Councilmember Foley..... aye

CONSIDER THE DECLARATION OF SURPLUS OF THE OLD AIR SWEEPER - KEITH DESPAIN

Public Works Director Keith Despain presented the request to declare the City's 2002 La France air sweeper as surplus equipment. Mr. Despain explained that although the typical useful lifespan of an air sweeper is five to seven years, this machine has remained in service for significantly longer and has provided excellent value to the City. In recent years, however, the sweeper has become increasingly costly to maintain, and its condition has declined. He reported that the City received its new street sweeper the previous Thursday, making it an appropriate time to dispose of the older unit.

Mr. Despain stated that there may be limited market interest due to the condition of the auxiliary engine, which is no longer functioning reliably. The primary engine remains in good working order, and the chassis could be repurposed as a water truck or similar utility vehicle. He noted that the last sweeper the City sold was purchased by Naples City, though Naples has since acquired newer equipment. He suggested that smaller municipalities, such as Manila or others in the region, might benefit from the opportunity if they are willing to invest in necessary repairs.

Councilmembers expressed support for declaring the equipment surplus and discussed possible avenues for disposal. They agreed that outreach to smaller communities would be worthwhile while still following proper procedures for surplus disposition. Mr. Despain confirmed that a surplus declaration is required before the City can pursue options such as offering the sweeper through state surplus channels or contacting potential municipal buyers.

Councilmember Ed Long moved to declare the old street sweeper surplus. Councilmember Randel Mills seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with the following roll call vote:

Councilmember Munford..... aye;
Councilmember Mills..... aye;
Councilmember O'Driscoll..... aye;
Councilmember Long..... aye;
Councilmember Foley..... aye

CONSIDER THE APPROVAL OF THE 100 N WATER AND SEWER CONTRACT WITH JONES & DEMILLE - KEITH DESPAIN

Public Works Director Keith Despain presented the proposed engineering contract for the 100 North water and sewer replacement project. He explained that the project is funded in part through the Community Impact Board award received this year and is similar in scope and funding category to the ongoing 3500 West replacement project being completed in house. Mr. Despain stated that the project will replace water and sewer lines between 900 West and 500 East, noting that not all sections require replacement due to prior upgrades and work completed this year through the Silver Spur project. He acknowledged that residents along 100 North have experienced multiple construction impacts but emphasized that the improvements are essential to City infrastructure,

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particularly as the existing sewer line is undersized and experiencing significant flow.

Mr. Despain reported that the City conducted a formal request for qualifications and received three submissions from local engineering firms. After internal review of qualifications, Jones and DeMille Engineering was selected as the design engineer for the project. He noted that price is not included in the qualifications-based selection process, although feedback was received from other firms who felt Jones and DeMille appeared well positioned for the project. Mr. Despain stated that the review was conducted without predisposition and that Jones and DeMille was selected solely on the strength of its qualifications.

Jones and DeMille submitted a proposal in the amount of four hundred seventeen thousand dollars for design services and part-time construction engineering, consistent with the structure used in prior projects. Mr. Despain reported that the amount is slightly below what was budgeted when the City sought funding for the project. He explained the importance of meeting the design schedule to achieve favorable contractor pricing, stating that the City intends to advertise the project just before Christmas, allow adequate time for bid preparation, receive bids in mid to late January, and award the project in early February. This schedule aligns with the period when contractors begin planning their summer workload and typically yields more competitive bids.

Councilmembers discussed the selection process and expressed support for the project, noting that the infrastructure in this area has been long overdue for replacement due to past funding limitations. Councilmember Corey Foley and Councilmember Edward Long both spoke to the necessity of proceeding, emphasizing that the improvements will benefit the community and address longstanding deficiencies. Councilmembers concurred that the proposal was consistent with City practice and that Jones and DeMille Engineering has provided reliable service on prior projects.

Councilmember Corey Foley approve the 100 North water and sewer contract with Jones and DeMille as presented by Keith Despain for the amount of \$417,000. Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with the following roll call vote:

Councilmember Munford..... aye;
Councilmember Mills..... aye;
Councilmember O'Driscoll..... aye;
Councilmember Long..... aye;
Councilmember Foley..... aye

STAFF REPORTS

Assistant City Manager Braeden Christofferson reported that the City opened the annual business licensing process on November first. He stated that within the first four days, one hundred nineteen businesses had already completed their license renewals. Mr. Christofferson noted that Vernal City has approximately six hundred licensed businesses in total and that the early response reflects strong participation and timely compliance with the renewal process. He provided the update for informational purposes and will continue monitoring the progress as the renewal period continues.

Quinn Bennion informed the Council that the City County meeting had been scheduled for Wednesday, November 12th at four o'clock in the afternoon. He noted that the City has not held a

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joint meeting for some time. Councilmembers discussed scheduling challenges, and several members, including Councilmember Ted Munford and Councilmember Corey Foley, stated that they would be out of town or unable to attend at that time, resulting in the lack of a quorum.

Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll asked whether advance agendas were typically exchanged between the City and the County. Mr. Bennion confirmed that this particular meeting will include an update from Airport Manager Ken Campbell concerning recent airport construction, commercial building activity, and the completion of utility infrastructure associated with grant-funded work. Councilmembers agreed that without a quorum it could still function as a County Commission meeting, with two City Councilmembers and the Mayor present for informational purposes only and without taking action.

Mr. Bennion informed the Council that he and Assistant City Manager Braeden Christofferson would be attending the Utah City Managers Conference for the following two days in Brigham City. They will remain available to staff and the Council as needed.

City Recorder Sara Bell reminded the Council that the canvass of the municipal election will be held on Monday, November 17th at noon. Ms. Bell explained that the canvass date was chosen at the request of County election officials and will be conducted as a brief special City Council meeting with lunch provided. She further noted that the audit of ballots will be handled by Uintah County on November twelfth and that the canvass meeting will consist solely of certifying the election results.

Assistant City Manager Braeden Christofferson reminded the Council that the Planning Commission would be meeting November 18th at 6:00pm.

CLOSED SESSION

Mayor Doug Hammond announced that the Closed Session portion of the meeting would be held in the Jury Room. Councilmember Corey Foley moved to go into closed for the following items:

- 1. Strategy sessions to discuss the purchase, exchange, or lease of real property, including any form of a water right or water shares, or to discuss a proposed development agreement, project proposal, or financing proposal related to the development of land owned by the state or a political subdivision.*
- 2. Strategy sessions to discuss the sale of real property, including any form of a water right or water shares.*
- 3. Discussion of the character, professional competence, or physical or mental health of an individual;*

Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll seconded the motion. The motion passed with the following roll vote:

Councilmember Munford..... aye;
Councilmember Mills..... aye;
Councilmember O'Driscoll..... aye;

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Councilmember Long..... aye;

Councilmember Foley..... aye

RECONVENE AND ADJOURN: There being no further business; *Councilmember Randel Mills moved to adjourn. Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was declared adjourned.*