

**MINUTES** of the work session of the Uintah County Commission held **December 10, 2025** in the large Commission conference room of the Uintah County Building at 152 East 100 North, Vernal, Utah. The meeting commenced at 10:04 a.m.

**PARTICIPANTS:** Commissioners John Laursen, Sonja Norton, and Willis LeFevre.

**ATTENDANCE:** Mike Wilkins, JC Brewer, Jon C Kerr, Britny Westergard, Anna Billings, Steve Labrum, Lacey Grammer, Tonya Craven, Georgene Cook, Matt Cazier, Gennie Bird, Trinna Gardner, Ryan Goodrich, Ivan Merrell, Chris Kearl, Bert Young, Derrick Jaramillo, Spencer Caldwell, Eddie Borregs, Michael Cook, Karen England, Daren Kelly, Brad Grammer, Travis Campbell, David Shallenberger, Lesha Coltharp, Jo Gardner, Crystal Clark, Ryan Mattson, Wayne Simper, Scott Hardman, Quinn Bennion, Amber Toler, Amanda Jenkins, Deanna Nyberg, Mark Grammer, Jessica Farmer, Justin Harris, Angela Averett, Angela Hawkins, Aaron Averett.  
Minutes by Sheri Allen.

**WELCOME:** Commissioner Laursen, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1. SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT POLICY - Crystal Clark, IT**

Crystal Clark, IT, has been meeting with Loren Anderson and Karina Valenzia, County Attorney's office, to revise and update this policy. The fundamental reason for creating this policy was to comply with GRAMA (Government Records Access and Management Act) requests. The policy has evolved from this core purpose. Any social media accounts used for government business must be managed and archived in compliance with public records laws. The policy defines retention requirements, appropriate use, and the process for county offices and departments to achieve compliance. The scope covers employees, contractors, volunteers, consultants, and service providers performing business for the County. The draft suggests a 30-day compliance window for existing County departments using social media, which may not be enough time to fully implement the policy. If the County starts deleting or changing social media posts, we must be able to capture and save the original content to comply with records laws. Products like "Archive Social" (by CivicPlus) can archive many social media accounts. The estimated cost for these tools is roughly \$10,000 per year. We have not used these tools because most active county accounts only post and do not delete or change content. Once we begin removing content, tracking becomes mandatory and requires these tools. The policy applies to all content (posts, comments, messages) created, generated, or maintained by official county social media sites.

For a social media account to be official, the department head or elected official must present it to the IT Steering Committee for recognition and placement on the Uintah County social media list. This process, which currently doesn't exist, is intended to help track and maintain a current list of all County social media sites. The Steering Committee provides a forum to ensure new accounts are either covered by existing archiving tools or to assess if another tool purchase is necessary (a system of checks and balances). All County social media sites must be administered by the requesting department/office management or their designee. This makes the department/manager accountable (e.g., Lesha Coltharp or Melanie Silcox would be accountable for theirs). Each department is responsible for its own data retention. It makes sense to purchase a social media archive program county-wide and split the cost among users. Users need to verify that their content is being archived (e.g., testing by deleting a post and checking the archive). Using personal information (personal email, personal social media accounts, user IDs) for official County social media sites is not allowed. Many existing accounts were started with individual personal accounts. When the person leaves, the County loses access to official data. The proposed 30-day migration window is likely insufficient. Departments should use a dedicated department email account for social media setup. Posts must be set to either no public comments or allow public comments subject to the Comment Policy. A separate, major topic for discussion is whether the comment policy will be managed county-wide or department-wide. Only designated individuals can monitor County social media sites and remove comments, stressing the need for training. Sites that allow comments must link to the Comment Policy, or reference the County website if the platform doesn't allow it. All sites must link back to the official County department page

and provide contact information. When comments are permitted, the site is a limited public forum and must be moderated. Who will moderate, and how quickly can blatantly ugly content be removed? Anonymous posting will not be allowed. Authorized/designated personnel may immediately hide or delete content that violates the Comment Policy. There's a need for consistent time frames for blocking users (e.g., 2 days vs. 2 weeks) across departments. The draft currently leaves "violations" and "blocking" undefined. We need definitions, possibly in an addendum outside the main policy document to allow for easier updates.

An elected official's use of a personal social media platform for official County business may convert that account into a public forum with First Amendment protections and restrictions, such as removing their ability to block individuals. Government communications do not originate from personal accounts, personal communications are never made via government accounts, and elected officials do not use government accounts to post content reflecting political campaigns or parties. Any social media account owned or controlled by the County government, including any social media used by an elected official to conduct Uintah County Business, constitutes a public record subject to GRAMA. The current disciplinary action listed (e.g., temporary loss of network connectivity) is not enforceable and makes no sense, as it prevents the employee from doing their job. A feasible consequence for policy violation is needed. The current single sentence about each department educating its staff is insufficient. A more consistent, flushed-out, and required training policy for all users is needed. The County must take necessary steps to secure accounts, such as complex passwords, secure storage, and multi-factor authentication. All accounts should have MFA (multi-factor authentication) linked to a secure shared source (e.g., a group email or a desk phone) to prevent reliance on an individual's personal phone.

Commissioner Laursen asked if this policy meets the requirements of the State Law Privacy Act. Crystal stated this is mainly an issue if the County is collecting personal information on these sites, which we intend to avoid by using them as a "bulletin board" rather than a reciprocal information-gathering tool. Commissioner Laursen recommended having 180 days instead of 30. Daren Kelly from the Library noted that the Library, the Regional History Center, and the Museum all make extensive use of social media. He mentioned that they have a set policy governing social media use, including who can post and when. Commissioner Norton, he recalled, was present when this policy was discussed at the Museum; it closely aligns with much of the county's own social media policy. He suggested that some differences are necessary between the Library's approach and the county government's approach. While not advocating for a complete divergence from the county policy, he stated that the Library would engage in certain social media activities that the County government likely would not. Crystal would like to meet with a dedicated group of individuals who use social media to discuss and clarify the required formatting. When Loren, Karina, Ryan Mattson, and Crystal worked on this, they took our existing policy and did the best they could. However, they left with numerous questions about how people are currently using it, how they should be using it, how to ensure effective use, and simultaneously how to protect the county. Crystal's concern is that it is certainly not fully developed. She recommends presenting this to the steering committee in January and announcing that they will be discussing the social media policy there, inviting anyone who wishes to attend.

## **2. VIA FERRATA ROUTE IMPROVEMENTS - Dave Shallenberger, Access Utah**

Travis Campbell, Economic Development, would like to introduce the next presenter, Dave Shallenberger from the Utah Education and Outdoor Access Foundation (Access Utah), a non-profit dedicated to promoting Via Ferrata in Utah. Mr. Shallenberger and his team have been essential partners in the development of Uintah County's existing Via Ferrata route in Ashley Gorge. The investment and partnership have already generated significant, visible economic benefits for the community. Travis extended a sincere thank you to Mr. Shallenberger and Access Utah, as well as the Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation for their annual grant and Recreational Trails Program grant. Their combined funding allowed for the creation of this wonderful resource at no cost to the county, aided by the speed with which the grants were provided. The positive impacts are already evident from the soft opening this year. As mandated by county ordinance, all users must complete an online waiver, which

provides valuable data to estimate the project's impact. We have had 628 individuals sign the waiver, from 105 different zip codes and 15 different states. The data includes a number of repeat visits (people signing the waiver multiple times). The age demographics show broad usage across various age groups, with the 40 to 50 year-old group currently representing the largest segment of Via Ferrata users. To provide a visual understanding for those unfamiliar with Via Ferrata, a brief video was shown. The video offered a quick overview of what the Via Ferrata is, what it looks like up Ashley Gorge, and why it is a great resource for both residents and visitors.

Dave Shallenberger, representing Access Utah, provided background on their organization's focus on outdoor recreation in Utah. Outdoor recreation is a primary driver for people moving to and staying in Utah. Access Utah secured state grant money to promote outdoor recreation in underutilized areas, leading them to partner with Travis and his team on the Ashley Gorge Via Ferrata project. Dave praised the installation crew—top engineers and certified mountain guides—for creating a world-class Via Ferrata. Word is spreading quickly. Dave has enjoyed many experiences in the Uintah Basin's outdoor activities (biking at McCoy Flats, McConkie Ranch petroglyphs) and recognized the Via Ferrata as a future "gem" for the Basin. Access Utah, with state funding that will not impact the county budget, is proposing improvements based on recommendations from the expert installer crew, who consider Ashley Gorge the most amazing spot for Via Ferrata they have ever seen. The improvements are all within the existing county-owned footprint and are intended to enhance the user experience and encourage multi-day visits. The improvements are focused on the existing route, not expanding the overall territory. Proposed is new route sections/improvements and additional footpaths. The key changes are: adding a segment that wraps around "the finger" and crosses some fins, offering an alternate path to the current route down to the footpath, and additional exits. The current route is largely a single, continuous experience. The goal is to break it into segments (A, B, or C), to provide multiple exit points back to the entrance. This addresses past concerns by drawing foot traffic away from the bottom of the gorge and the river. One proposed exit point and footpath will run along the top of the ridge back to the entrance. Instead of following the footpath back after crossing the sky bridge, a new route will ascend the ridge. This provides a high-level exit back to the entrance. The installers estimate this addition will transform the Via Ferrata from a one-day activity into a two-to-three-day experience, encouraging multi-day stays in Vernal and the Uintah Basin. Access Utah is eager to continue its partnership with the county and move forward with the state-funded improvements.

Commissioner Laursen asked if there were any comments or questions for Mr. Shallenberger.

Amber Toler noted the new routes weren't on ONX; Travis clarified they are on county land, not SITLA. The expansion will add an 800-foot ascent to the ridge, taking several hours with rest stops. Jo Gardner asked about the seasonal closure due to deer migration. Matt Cazier, Community Development, confirmed it's currently closed and a seasonal trail due to weather. Jo worried about potential issues like graffiti (citing American Fork Canyon) with longer stay times (2-3 days). Dave, who lives near American Fork Canyon, assured that rock climbers generally follow "leave no trace" principles and respect the environment. Travis noted county ordinances already cover vandalism (misdemeanor). Jo proposed year-round use and suggested developing a second, year-round Via Ferrata on Blue Mountain (SITLA property) to disperse visitor volume from Ashley Gorge. Amber reported busy days (up to 80 people) but noted people spread out on the course. She also mentioned that the main user group are responsible adults (30-50 year olds), not the problematic teenagers some anticipated. Matt stated that any trash has been minimal, mostly in the parking lot, and often old debris being cleaned up. Eddie Borregs and Mike Cook agreed, noting a general positive shift in recreation attitudes and self-policing. Jessica Farmer (BLM) asked if new route construction would delay the grand opening. Travis said the bulk of the new work is next to the existing route and a full closure is not necessary, though coordination is required.

Jessica Farmer and Georgene Cook raised concerns about parking capacity for longer stays. Matt said the current plan is to develop half the lot and with major improvements next year. Jessica confirmed the BLM delay on the parking lot construction is resolved and work is starting soon. Quinn Bennion (Vernal

City) and Jo asked about restrooms on the 3-7+ hour course. Matt confirmed there are plans for vault toilets up-canyon, dependent on a grant and bridge location, but temporary restrooms could be placed sooner. Lesha Colthorp, Tourism and Events, highlighted the \$247/day average tourist spend, arguing that a multi-day course significantly boosts local revenue (hotels, food, gas, etc.) and makes Vernal a more attractive destination. Travis added that the resource also improves the quality of life, which helps retain local residents and families. Amanda Jenkins shared her positive experience as a resident using the Via Ferrata. John Kerr (physician) gave an emotional appeal, arguing that outdoor recreation is "essential for life" for mental and physical health, especially for youth, and praised the Via Ferrata as a fantastic resource. Ivan Merrill (Vernal City Water) expressed concern about camping around the spring area with multi-day use, though he noted zero issues with the current Via Ferrata usage. Matt said camping is not allowed on the property and would be an enforcement and education issue, but dispersed camping is allowed on nearby BLM land. Ivan cited a site visit to Ouray, Colorado, where a Via Ferrata operates adjacent to their water system with no issues. Travis stressed that the new routes take climbers further away from the creek and water infrastructure. Jo asked who is "policing" the seasonal closure. Matt confirmed there is no full-time guard; the closure relies on signage, as a high-risk activity encourages self-regulation and use of proper equipment. He also explained that developing a Via Ferrata on the desired Blue Mountain SITLA property is risky because the county would have to purchase it at public auction, and could be outbid by private developers. Derrick Jaramillo, a concerned resident on 2500 West, expressed concern about increased traffic on his road due to the development, urging planners to consider the daily impact on long-term residents.

### **3. REAUTHORIZATION OF ZAP TAX - Mike Wilkins, Clerk - Auditor**

Mike Wilkins, Clerk-Auditor, stated the ZAP tax, which has funded Western Park and the Western Heritage Museum for 30 years, is set to expire on October 1, 2026. New state legislation for fourth-class counties, like Uintah County, allows the County Commissioners to reauthorize the tax for another ten years by a majority vote, bypassing a public election, because it has already been authorized for two or three consecutive ten-year periods. Reauthorization is recommended for 10 more years to ensure the continued funding of the Western Park and Museum. The Zap Tax generates \$1.3 million to \$1.5 million annually and significantly offsets the tax burden on local residents. Commissioners were urged to act quickly, as the revenue is factored into the upcoming budget. Place on December 16, 2025 Commission agenda.

### **4. 2026 HOLIDAY SCHEDULE - Tonya Craven, Human Resources**

Tonya Craven, Human Resources, noted there are no changes to the existing Holiday Schedule policy. We just need to clarify whether the County should continue following Utah State law regarding the observance of Juneteenth or change the policy to observe Juneteenth on the actual day. The Commissioners decided to maintain the current policy, adhering to Utah State law.

### **5. ROAD MAINTENANCE AGREEMENTS WITH KW TRUCKING - Scott Hardman, Road Department**

Scott Hardman, Road Department, has two Road Maintenance Agreements with KW Trucking. Agreement 1: 2887 South 2500 West, Vernal, KW Trucking, the property owner, proposes to upgrade the road with a road base. They requested 30 feet for ditching. The agreement has been submitted to the Road Department and forwarded to Loren for his review. Commissioner Norton recommended notifying surrounding property owners about the road upgrade. Agreement 2: 500 South 4500 West, Lapoint, KW Trucking, the property owner, previously rerouted this road, resulting in improvements. They are currently upgrading the road with a road base. Commissioner Norton recommended notifying SITLA about the road upgrade. Place on December 16, 2025 Commission agenda.

### **6. CULVERT INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE AGREEMENT - Scott Hardman, Road Department**

Scott and Loren have developed a Culvert Installation and Maintenance Agreement for property owners now that the County is responsible for the maintenance of flood channels. This agreement aims to improve documentation of culvert locations and ensure the correct size is used. Under this agreement,

property owners are responsible for purchasing and installing the culverts, which will then be inspected by the Flood Channel Specialist and the Road Department. Place on December 16, 2025 Commission agenda.

**7. REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL OPENING:UC29-19, UINTAH COUNTY LIBRARY OFFICE**

**REMODEL** - Trinna Gardner, Purchasing & Grants

The County received bids from three contractors for the Uintah County Library Office Remodel:

- Woods Construction (Vernal, Utah)
- Sinju Construction (West Valley City, Utah)
- Green River Construction (Vernal, Utah)

Place on December 16, 2025 Commission agenda.

**8. REQUEST BY VERNAL CITY FOR A WAIVER OF BUILDING PERMIT FEES FOR ELECTRICAL SERVICE IN ASHLEY GORGE-** Matt Cazier, Community Development

Matt Cazier, Community Development, presented a request from Vernal City to waive the standard \$200.00 electrical permit application fee. This fee is associated with their application and plans for installing electrical power in Ashley Gorge to operate security cameras. Place on December 16, 2025 Commission agenda.

**ADJOURN:** The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:48 am.

  
JOHN LAURSEN, CHAIR

  
MICHAEL W. WILKINS, CLERK – AUDITOR

