

MINUTES of the work session of the Uintah County Commission held **January 14, 2026** in the large Commission conference room of the Uintah County Building at 152 East 100 North, Vernal, Utah. The meeting commenced at 10:03 a.m.

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

ATTENDANCE: Brenda McDonald, Matt Cazier, Wendi Long, Scott Hardman, Michelle Zilles, Joe Judd, Leslie Pearson-Rich, Rodney Black, Braeden Christofferson, JC Brewer, Trinna Gardner, Tonya Craven, Caleb Hall, Danette Brooks, Derrick Jaramillo, Kevin Hurd, Loren Anderson, Mike Wilkins, Jess Hermann, Jordan Merrell, Wendi Long, Angela Hawkins, Crystal Clark.

Minutes by Sheri Allen.

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

1. OPENING REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL UC25-20: Professional Engineering for Cemetery Storage Building - Trinna Gardner, Purchasing & Grants

Mike Wilkins, Clerk Auditor, received two bids for the Cemetery Storage Building from Jones & DeMille Engineering and d'velept Design with Sunrise Engineering.

2. CLASS D ROAD EASEMENT - Scott Hardman, Road Department

Scott Hardman, Road Department, presented a straightforward Class D road easement for a reroute. Finley Resources, who are leasing the private property, owned by Don Hicken Farms LLC, where the existing Class D road currently terminates, requested the reroute. The reroute is entirely on the Don Hicken Farms private property. Since the road ends on their property, they are expected to submit a road vacation request in the future. The proposal has been reviewed and surveyed by Brock Slaugh, Uintah County Surveyor, and has also been reviewed by Loren Anderson, Civil Attorney.

3. URS SERVICE AGREEMENT - Mike Wilkins, Clerk-Auditor

Mike Wilkins, Clerk-Auditor, provided an update on the Utah Retirement System (URS) and its new system, Aureus. Around March 31st/April, URS will introduce two new retirement vehicles: a 401(k) Roth and a 457 Roth, both considered highly beneficial for employees. The county currently auto-enrolls new employees into the 401(k) plan. With the new options, the recommendation is to shift auto-enrollment to the standard 457 plan (not the 457 Roth). Kevin Hurd from URS can provide more details, but URS will now offer "auto escalation." Annually, on a new employee's anniversary date, their contribution will automatically increase. Current employees can also set this up for themselves. The county's matching contribution will continue to go into the 401(k) plan. This is necessary to avoid paying Social Security tax on the county's contribution, which would defeat the plan's purpose. The current match will remain at two and a half percent. There is an aspiration to encourage an increase in this rate when the new rates are released in June or July. Kevin Hurd with URS gave a presentation on the new URS developments.

4. 3 YEAR AGREEMENT WITH ESRI FOR GIS SOFTWARE - Matt Cazier, Community Development

Matt Cazier, Community Development, noted the GIS program utilizes several ESRI products for the county's mapping system. The existing agreement for this software has just concluded, necessitating a new three-year agreement to ensure continued service. This new agreement will cover the period from 2026 through 2028. The base cost for the general software is \$42,200. Additionally, there is an add-on called "drone to map" costing \$1,750. This brings the total cost for the three-year term to just under \$44,000. This contract is designed to keep the pricing steady for the next three years. A significant benefit of this new structure is the inclusion of the enterprise system, which was adopted several years ago. This provides unlimited licenses, ensuring that as the county grows and more users require access, licenses can be added without incurring additional costs, a change from the previous system where licenses were limited and paid for individually. This agreement is expected to cover all county departments currently utilizing ESRI.

5. POLICY 210 RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION, DISCUSSION - Tonya Craven, Human Resources

Tonya Craven, Human Resources, Policy 210 Updates and Discussion. The policy was revised to state that "department head/elected officials screens applications for minimum qualifications," changing it from the original "HR personnel screens applications." Based on commission feedback, the requirement for three-member and five-member interview panels will be retained, instead of the proposed change to two-member panels. Language was added to provide more detail on grounds for disqualification, including: inability to perform essential functions, falsification or omission (false statements), late submission, and unsatisfactory background or performance. The purpose was to make the policy more conclusive and easy to follow. Commissioner Laursen clarified that HR's review of interview questions is solely to ensure compliance with laws (e.g., against asking about sex, birthday, marital status) and prevent legal violations, not to judge the quality of the question itself. The word "shall" was added regarding the secure retention of all recruitment records by HR after the hiring process is complete, based on Commissioner Laursen's recommendation. This is to ensure documents are safeguarded, as HR is typically the first contact for attorneys. Commissioner Norton suggested training for department heads and elected officials on the hiring process and legal questioning, potentially during department head meetings, given the ever-evolving nature of HR law. A concern was raised that the current wording suggested the department head needed HR's approval to hire a chosen candidate. Tonya clarified the intent is only to ensure the proposed salary range and other details are aligned before an offer is made, not to override the hiring decision. Crystal Clark, IT, raised a question about whether departmental blackout vacation days should be explicitly spelled out to a potential candidate during the pre-hire engagement. Tonya confirmed this should be part of the discussion with the candidate. Scott questioned the extent of the changes. Tonya explained that the revisions primarily aim to standardize and bring consistency to hiring processes across the county by documenting steps already being informally followed (e.g., panel interviews, contacting HR about the chosen candidate/salary). Commissioner Laursen added that some changes were prompted by past issues with illegal questions being asked. Commissioner LeFevre questioned if the use of "spousal" was too narrow and suggested looking at broader relationship terms. Loren noted that the term is likely aligned with state law, but will look into better recognizing/narrowing the relationship language. Department heads/elected officials are encouraged to continue reviewing the working draft and send additional feedback to Tonya. Training on the policy may be incorporated into future department head meetings.

6. POLICY 460 LISTING OF EMPLOYEE BENEFITS, DISCUSSION - Tonya Craven, Human Resources

Tonya led the discussion on policy 460 Employee Benefits. To clarify the front-loading \$500 of the annual Health Savings Account (HSA) contribution, specifically for new hires. The proposed clarification is to restrict the \$500 front-load to employees covered by insurance on January 1st (open enrollment/hire date). New hires starting mid-year would instead receive a prorated share of the annual contribution, which the Clerk Auditor's Office strongly supports to avoid complex mid-year accounting adjustments and the "ever moving target" of contribution rate changes.

Commissioner Norton raised a concern that the initial purpose of the front-load was to help new hires cover high, early medical costs, and the \$500 amount was chosen to "work its way out" (equalize with contributions) within a few months. Tonya suggested the front-load could still be used as a recruitment incentive by promoting the High Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) for the following year's enrollment, thereby avoiding immediate accounting issues. The discussion also touched on the difficulty of maintaining policy language that includes specific dollar amounts that frequently change.

7. POLICY 310 COMPENSATION, DISCUSSION - Tonya Craven, Human Resources

Tonya also led the discussion on Policy 310 Compensation which has been reviewed by the commission for several months. The policy previously referred only to "elected officials." Due to changes in the code, the title needs to be updated to "elected and executive officers." Loren referenced Title 17,

but hesitated to include specific codes due to their frequent changes, as Title 10 deals with municipalities. Instead of listing specific, frequently changing codes, the policy should simply reference the relevant laws. To use the phrase "as per Utah code" to avoid constant policy revisions when the state code changes. Commissioner Norton argued that simply stating "as per Utah code" is not helpful for guidance, as the code is vast. A more specific reference (e.g., just the Title or Chapter) or a resource for guidance is needed. Remove the detailed information regarding the process for elected/executive salary changes and replace it with a simple statement, followed by a point of contact for details. "Elected officials, executive per state code. For detailed information and processes, contact HR or legal." Tonya confirmed agreement with this and an additional point. The policy must recognize the need for a public hearing and notice regarding salary changes for elected and executive officers, as this was previously missing but is required by state code (referencing the recent process of approving salaries via ordinance). Crystal noted that the policy's scope section ("The policy sets forth guidelines for the establishment of a pay and plan provides salary adjustment procedures") is grammatically unclear and needs clarification. Language referring to specific performance levels (outstanding, proficient, exceeding, accepting) was removed because it no longer aligns with the current evaluation process. All salary terms and negotiations (including increases) for new hires or internal transfers must be finalized before the employee's effective date in the new office/position. This is to prevent continued negotiation after the transfer and aligns with standard HR practice. Executive officers are generally exempt from the standard Career Service system, including probationary periods. Elected personnel are ineligible for probationary increases. Evaluation cycle to be completed by the end of the first quarter of each year. Evaluations were completed on the employee's anniversary date. Feedback has been mixed; some department heads prefer the bulk timeline for efficiency. Crystal noted she conducts quarterly reviews anyway, providing the data needed for an annual review regardless of the date. The proposal for the quarterly timeline will stand. Professional Development Incentive Pay is lacking a clear definition and standardization has led to inconsistent percentage awards between departments (e.g., 2-3% vs. 4-5%). Certification Awards: 2% increase. License and Degree Awards: 3% increase (must be beneficial to the county scope of work). Eligibility and the plan must be approved prior to implementation by the department head, HR, and the commission to ensure commitments can be met. Step Plan (Sheriff's Department): The existing step plan language remains in the policy, despite the County Commission voting against funding the step plan overall. Guidelines are needed to clarify when the increase takes effect, especially if testing is delayed (e.g., due to vacation). The goal is to ensure consistency and minimize payroll complications. Proposed Effective Date: Anniversary date or the date they finish the testing, whichever is LATER. (This allows early testing while penalizing delays beyond the anniversary date.) Crystal noted the standardized 2% and 3% incentives based on certifications/licenses do not fit the department's need to reward the growth of highly specific, technical skill sets (e.g., Spillman Administrator, Motorola Flex Admin) which are not covered by standard tests. She prefers a skill set assessment or a multi-level structure (e.g., "Desktop 1, 2, and 3") tied to a defined growth plan and job description. Danette Brooks, County Assessor, stated 3% for a license is a "slap in the face" for licenses that take two and a half to three years to obtain (like the Appraiser license), arguing that the compensation should reflect the complexity and time commitment. She asked to determine her own rate, not be bound by 3%. The Commissioners recommended eliminating the "surprise" requests and random subjective awards; all professional development increases must be planned for and budgeted by department heads for the coming year. Department heads must include "placeholders" (budgeted funds) for expected promotions, certifications, and licenses in their yearly budget, broken out by position or function, to ensure the money is available if the employee achieves the goal. The group agreed this is a budgeting issue, not a placeholder, as the money is allocated for a specific purpose (the expected advancement). Commissioner Norton suggested adding a stipulation that employees who receive county-funded training or certification must remain with the county for a certain period (Danette confirmed this is already in place for her department). The group agreed to continue looking over the policy and hold further discussions.

8. POLICY 500 CODE OF PERSONAL CONDUCT, DISCUSSION - Tonya Craven, Human Resources Tabled - place on the next work session meeting agenda for January 28, 2026.

ADJOURN: The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:38 am.

John Laursen
JOHN LAURSEN, CHAIR

Michael W. Wilkins
MICHAEL W. WILKINS, CLERK – AUDITOR

