

Utah Board of Tourism Development
Meeting Minutes
virtual meeting
Friday, Jan. 9, 2026

Board Members Present	Lesha Coltharp, Kaitlin Eskelson, Joanie Hammer, Jessica Merrill, Jason Murray, Graydon Pearson, Jordan Smith, Kevin Smith, Shayne Wittwer
Board Members Excused	Victor Iverson, Nathan Rafferty, Harold Simpson, Melva Sine, CJ Wade, Jennifer Wesselhoff
Tourism & Film Staff	Tera Atwood, Rachel Bremer, Ben Cook, Rachel Creer, Lorraine Daly, Michelle Evans, Kim Heys, Melissa Jackson, Todd K. Jenson, Denise Jordan, Becky Keeney, Emma Kwanin, Anna Loughridge, Carli Mahas, Ben Mangelsdorf, Christina Martin, Derek Mellus, Liz Peck, Natalie Randall, Laici Shumway, Jasmine Simpson, Dave Williams, Heather Zang, Stacey Zoller
Public	Jason Curry, Machel Devin, Nycole Durfey, Terra Girvin, Tina Grange, Ryan Lundstrom, Brittney McMichael, Amy Myers, Betsy Sabala, Bridget Siebert, Celina Sinclair, Mick Solenta, Matthew Watson, Rachel West, Cortney Yazzie

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Board Vice Chair Lesha Coltharp called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone and asked for board member introductions and updates.

- Lesha Coltharp (representing Carbon, Daggett, Duchesne, Emery, Grand and Uintah counties) shared that it has been a weird winter and glad they have hockey and wrestling events coming to Uintah county. Unfortunately Daggett county had to cancel their Burbot Bash, which is an annual ice fishing derby, due to no ice on Flaming Gorge for it to be safe enough.
- Joanie Hammer (representing Utah Tourism Industry Association) shared that Box Elder County had a really good December with the Fantasy at the Bay, which is held at Willard Bay State Park. Looking forward to a good year ahead and starting discussions on a state park at Mantua. From the UTIA perspective, the legislative session begins Jan. 20th, and Tourism Day on the Hill is Friday, Feb. 6th. This is a great day to connect with our legislators and celebrate what tourism means to the state and how important it is. Recommend registering tourism and hospitality partners so legislators can hear directly from the people and businesses.
- Jordan Smith (representing outdoor recreation industry) shared that they wrapped up the first quarterly pulse survey that IORT and UOT are partnering on and look forward to sharing some of those results in the weeks ahead.
- Shayne Wittwer (represents Washington, Beaver, Iron, Millard, Sanpete and Sevier counties) shared that it has been relatively flat but in the southern counties the late winter in the north part of the state has given them beautiful hiking and outdoor activities.
- Kaitlin Eskelson (represents Salt Lake, Morgan and Tooele counties) shared they are anticipating very cool plans for an entirely new downtown Salt Lake City, a collaboration with different agencies and partners. Major enhancements to the Salt Palace Convention Center but still waiting to get architectural renderings. Been exciting to work with Smith Entertainment Group. Also looking ahead to the opening of Temple Square in March of 2027 as anticipating three to five million visitors. VSL partnering with Silicon Slopes to co-host Summit, Feb. 4-7. February 7th is the skijoring event that brought almost 20,000 people to downtown Salt Lake.

- Graydon Pearson (representing the lodging industry) shared that the hotel and lodging industry has taken a beating at the end of 2025. The government shutdown affected everyone but the hotel industry in particular and then the slow snow this winter was a second hard hit. Looking forward to seeing how the industry recovers.
- Kevin Smith (representing arts and cultural organizations). On a personal note, was recently sworn in as mayor of Ivins. Arts organizations are expecting a better year this coming year than last year. Seemed to be a downturn on ticket sales in 2025 but looking forward to it picking up.
- Jason Murray (representing business, finance, economic policy, and academic media marketing community). For guides and outfitters, reports have been different from different sides of the state as they close out 2025. Many are down 20-30% year-over-year with international bookings. Booking trends for 2026 are down approximately 20% for guides in the St. George, Kanab, Southern Utah and Moab areas. The northern Utah multi-day outfitters are also seeing that trend. Luxury travel is up and that is the highest demand area.
- Jessica Merrill (representing Davis, Weber, Box Elder, Cache and Rich counties). Like many had an ups and downs with the government shutdown and Hill Air Force Base having a large presence in the area. Looking forward to a strong 2026. Discover Davis just completed an updated strategic plan and excited to have a full year of events at Western Sports Parks.

MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: Graydon Pearson motioned to approve the Dec. 12, 2025, board meeting minutes. Kevin Smith seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Natalie Randall, Managing Director, Utah Office of Tourism

- In the new year, critical changes that are impacting our industry include the change of surcharges and fees at national parks for international visitors. The America the Beautiful non-resident annual pass is \$250 and this option is what we are messaging to all international visitors. The \$100 non-resident surcharge only applies to Bryce and Zion and is added to the non-resident entrance fee but there are a lot of nuances that play into it.
- Working very closely with the Global Markets team on messaging to our travel trade and with Bryce and Garfield county, as well as the Washington county team.
- Share with the board and all the partners listening in on all of the resources we have available to help understand these changes. Currently a banner on our website: www.visitutah.com/plan-your-trip/national-park-fee-changes.
- In regular communications with the Department of Interior to get the most recent updates and things are changing fast with the implementation. Will continue to message out and work with UTIA and our DMO partners to make sure information gets shared and filtered down to businesses and our visitors.
- Another key change that is the result of legislation passed last year and connected with 100% ID. Any businesses that serve alcohol on site, regardless of appearance of a customer age, will ask for ID. Critical for our international visitors to know that they will need to bring passports with them. Information here abs.utah.gov/new-id-law-2026/
- February is a busy month ahead for the industry:
 - Board meeting is Feb. 5th at 2:30pm at the Western Sports Park with Jessica Merrill and Davis county as our host.
 - That same evening, Feb. 5th at 5pm hosting a special event—*Passport to Prosperity* to celebrate a unique way to look at our annual report.
 - Tourism Day on the Hill is the next morning on Friday, Feb. 6th. This is an opportunity to engage with legislators. Please invite your business partners as well and it is a great time for us to come together as an industry.
 - Kaitlyn, Jennifer, Nathan and myself will be attending the Utah 2034 observers program attending the 2026 Winter Olympics. Looking at hospitality experiences around the games and live celebration sites in communities throughout the state for our industry.
- Partnering with IORT, as Jordan mentioned, to do a stakeholder survey, quarterly. Very helpful to have information about what is happening on the ground and real-time data. Thank you to the industry for participating and encouraging sharing with businesses, partners, etc., in your area.

- The legislative session kicks-off on Jan. 21 and UOT has launched a legislative resource page. It includes a [legislative dashboard](#). Great resource when working with communities and legislators as it shows how visitors make life better in Utah in specific districts. Also an element that provides information on film's economic contribution to the state

UTAH FILM COMMISSION

Derek Mellus, Production Manager, Utah Film Commission

- All of these recent projects received a film incentive, and they include *Humble House Christmas*, which is our first AI project to receive a film incentive and it is available on YouTube.
- In theaters beginning Jan. 23 is *Standout the Ben Kjar Story*, a true story told by TC Christensen and his son Tanner, who are local Utah filmmakers.
- Season two *Yo Gabba Gabbaland* premieres on AppleTV, Jan. 30. The creators of this show are also Utah residents and live in Washington county. It was filmed at the Utah film studio. The incentive was for the first two seasons and hoping they are greenlighted for a season three and beyond.
- *Grizzly Night* was filmed in the summer of 2023 and was done by local filmmakers. It is a true story about the 1960s grizzly bear attacks at Glacier National Park. It is available in theatres Jan. 30.
- The film incentive program was allocated \$20M for FY26. We are out of the rural film incentive funds but started the fiscal year with \$12M. The motion picture program is \$6.79M in tax credit and \$1.5M in cash rebate and we still have funds available.
- We have approved 19 projects this fiscal year and these have filmed in Davis, Grand, Morgan, Salt Lake, Summit, Utah, Uintah, Wasatch, Washington, Wayne and Weber counties.
- Have awarded more than \$20.6M which has resulted in almost \$86M in economic impact.

MOTION: Graydon Pearson motioned to approve \$581,250 for incentives for the following productions which have met the criteria defined by statute. Joanie Hammer seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Production	Estimated Utah Spend	Incentive Amount Per Production	Locations (Counties)
<i>Taken From Me</i>	\$525,000	\$105,000 - 20%	Salt Lake & Utah
<i>Tokens</i>	\$600,000	\$120,000 - 20%	Juab, Salt Lake, Utah & Washington
<i>Sol Hershowitz's Guide to Extraterrestrial Life</i>	\$1,425,000	\$356,250 - 25%	Kane, Salt Lake, Tooele & Wayne
	\$2,550,000 TOTAL Spend	\$581,250 TOTAL Incentive	

MEETING ADJOURNED