

Emery County Economic Opportunity (CEO) Board

Meeting Minutes

September 9th, 2025 @ 3:00 p.m.

Emery County Courthouse, Commission Conference Room
75 East Main Street, Castle Dale, Utah 84513

In Attendance:

Board Members: Nicole Steele, Brock Johansen, Patsy Stoddard, Laren Huntsman, Ren Hatt (online)

Others: Commissioner Jordan Leonard, Natalie Olsen

GOEO: Debra McKee, Jen Wakeland

EDCUtah: Greg Bisbin, Jared

The meeting was called to order at 3:03 pm.

1. Welcome - Nicole Steele

Nicole Steele welcomed everyone to the Emery County Economic Opportunity Board meeting.

2. Discuss/Approve/Deny - County Economic Opportunity Board Meeting Minutes July 8th, 2025 Minutes

Brock made a motion to approve the July meeting minutes with a second from Jordan. Voting was unanimous.

3. Discussion: GOEO and EDC Utah:

There has been a lot of talk about business recruitment in Emery County and also the Energy research center. The county owns an area where they are wanting to build an Industrial park. We have been discussing the best uses for grant funding and potentially spending some of that money for business recruitment. Debra mentioned that GOEO and EDCUtah know a little bit about that so it was discussed to bring them in and let them talk about how they can help the county and what there is to offer.

Greg: Greg provided an overview of **EDC Utah**, noting:

- Emery County has been an investor since 2019.
- EDC Utah is a public-private nonprofit funded entirely through membership fees.
- Emery County contributes \$1,008 annually.
- Over the past five years, Emery County and Green River have responded to **eight RFIs**.
- Three site visits occurred within Emery County in the past year.
- EDC Utah maintains strong relationships with national site selectors.
- Services include RFI coordination, research support, site visits, community promotion, and investor networking.

Greg stated that EDC Utah would like to deepen its working relationship with Emery County and improve communication. He emphasized the importance of ensuring county officials are included in RFI notifications and project updates.

Grant opportunities were discussed, including a consolidated grant database developed by EDC Utah containing approximately **1,000 private, public, and foundation grants**, which will be shared with the County through GOEO.

Jared: Jared provided project-specific updates:

- **Project Spark** included a site visit at the San Rafael Energy Research Center; the project ultimately selected a Wyoming location, with workforce cited as a possible factor.
- **Project Everest** is an active project involving a large manufacturing facility under NDA. The project would include approximately **160 jobs, 250 acres**, and a **\$360 million investment**.
- Water availability was identified as a key factor, particularly for Green River due to available water rights.
- Utah Inland Port Authority incentives, including bonding and infrastructure support, were discussed as tools to attract industrial development.

GOEO emphasized a location-agnostic approach while highlighting how incentives such as **RED-TIF** and county wage differentials can make rural counties more competitive. State and EDC Utah representatives stressed the importance of accurately representing community strengths to ensure long-term project success.

Brock Johansen discussed the future of the State Energy Research Center and emphasized the need for the State of Utah to actively own, promote, and leverage the facility to generate spin-off energy-related businesses, similar to Wyoming's Gillette energy center. Brock also expressed concern that the center has not yet produced meaningful economic outcomes and stressed that it is now a **state-owned asset**, requiring state-led recruitment and promotion.

Discussion focused heavily on **energy development**, including nuclear, baseload power, and Operation Gigawatt. The board highlighted Emery County's competitive advantages, including **existing transmission capacity, available water rights, industrial land, and a skilled energy workforce**, noting these assets make the county well-positioned for major energy projects.

Water availability was addressed, with comments indicating that water can be made available for industrial use through leasing and repurposed water rights, including near the Energy Research Center. It was stated that water availability should not be a limiting factor for development.

Concerns were raised regarding state policy and regulation, including the role of the Public Service Commission, power generation planning, and the state's "energy agnostic" messaging. Commissioners emphasized the urgent need for **baseload power** to support renewable energy investments and economic development, noting that current policies have limited Utah's ability to recruit large power users.

GOEO representatives acknowledged the concerns and expressed support for focusing on energy as a targeted industry. GOEO committed to increased engagement, including **on-site visits, infrastructure review, coordination with state partners, and business recruitment efforts** tailored to Emery County's resources.

EDC Utah affirmed its role as a partner in business attraction and coordination and committed to continued collaboration with GOEO and Emery County.

4. Discuss/Approve/Deny - RCOG Grant:

It was clarified that the RCOG grant is separate from the Rural County Grant and is a competitive, project-based funding opportunity. Although the County was not initially planning to apply this year, staff reconsidered after internal discussions due to the recent approval of engineering for the industrial park master plan and the availability of this funding.

Because the master plan process has just begun and infrastructure priorities are not yet finalized, staff recommended focusing the RCOG grant application on improvements to the former Weed and Mosquito (Mosquito) buildings, currently used as a small business incubator site and managed by the Business Chamber under an MOU with the County.

The goal of the application is to create a true, functional business incubator, rather than temporary or informal use. Needed improvements include:

- Roof repairs
- Interior and exterior painting
- Installation of bathrooms (particularly in the shop building)
- HVAC improvements, including air conditioning

- Garage door replacement for storage buildings
- General site cleanup and property upkeep

It was noted that the lack of bathroom facilities in the shop building has caused ongoing tenant conflicts. Recent changes include the Business Chamber relocating its office to the site, increasing the need for adequate facilities.

Current building usage was outlined:

- Building 1: Chamber office and bouldering business; includes a bathroom and shower but lacks air conditioning.
- Building 2: Storage building requiring painting and a garage door.
- Building 3 (Shop): Houses two businesses (artisan products and climbing wall manufacturing); requires a bathroom, roof repairs, painting, and HVAC.
- Building 4: Storage used primarily by a church group for canoe and equipment storage.

The board discussed concerns about long-term liability, rent structure, and fairness between tenants. Questions were raised regarding in-kind rent contributions, how those contributions are tracked, and the risk of setting precedents for rent-free use of County property. Staff explained that most tenants pay a combination of cash rent and documented in-kind services, while utilities are paid directly by tenants.

Environmental concerns related to historic Weed and Mosquito use of the site were discussed. Staff reported that inspections have been completed and no contamination issues were identified. Cleanup of old equipment is ongoing and not expected to require County funding.

The board emphasized that the County must either properly maintain the property or consider divesting it, but agreed that allowing the facilities to deteriorate is not acceptable. Several commissioners expressed reservations about the incubator model but supported applying for grant funding to preserve and improve County-owned assets.

Grant details discussed:

- Requested amount: approximately \$150,000
- County match: approximately \$20,000
- Grant ratio: 80/20
- Grant consultation scheduled with GOEO Community Grants staff

Brock made a motion to apply for the RCOG grant to fund improvements to the Mosquito building incubator facilities, with the clarification that approval of the grant application does not imply support for long-term or rent-free occupancy of the site with a second from Commissioner Leonard. Voting was unanimous.

5. Other Business:

- Valar Atomics groundbreaking scheduled for Thursday at 9:30 a.m.
- Blue Castle Energy luncheon and site visit discussed; potential data center development noted.
- Commissioners discussed future targeted recruitment efforts following completion of the County master plan.
- GOEO staff offered assistance with strategic recruitment, industry targeting, and coordinated outreach.
- Upcoming Carbon–Emery Economic Development Committee meeting scheduled for September 30; GOEO participation encouraged.

6. Adjourn:

Brock made a motion to adjourn the meeting with a second from Commissioner Leonard. Voting was unanimous. The meeting was adjourned.