

**M**INUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD,  
February 4, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the Vernal City Council room, 374 East Main,  
Vernal, Utah 84078.

**PRESENT:** Councilmembers Robin O’Driscoll, Randel Mills, Ted Munford, Ed Long, and Nick Porter and Mayor Corey Foley.

**WELCOME:** Mayor Corey Foley welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**INVOCATION OR UPLIFTING THOUGHT:** The invocation was given by Councilmember Ted Munford.

**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 JANUARY 21, 2026.**

*Councilmember Nick Porter moved to approve the minutes of the Regular City Council Meeting held January 21, 2026. Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll seconded the motion. The motion passed with Councilmembers Munford, Mills, O’Driscoll, Long, and Porter voting in favor.*

**REQUEST FOR SPONSORSHIP, BLOW WISHES FOR EMILY - MARK STRATTON**

Kevin Stratton and Pearl Cook, representing Blow Wishes for Emily, addressed the Vernal City Council regarding a request for funding support for their annual Cornhole Tournament. Mr. Stratton explained that the event is Blow Wishes for Emily’s primary annual fundraiser and has been held for six years. Proceeds from the event support the organization’s nonprofit mission, which has included assisting with burial costs for approximately 50 families in the Uintah Basin and providing more than 5,200 meals to the local school district through a school lunch fund. Blow Wishes requested \$750 in funding assistance from Vernal City to help offset event-related costs, specifically the facility rental.

Mayor Corey Foley thanked the presenters and provided general context regarding the use of Transient Room Tax (TRT) funds, noting that such funds are generated through hotel stays and are subject to state-imposed guidelines. City Manager Quinn Bennion reviewed the City’s sponsorship guidelines, explaining that events are evaluated based on priority criteria. While community-building events that attract visitors rank as a higher priority, charity fundraisers are categorized as a lower priority due to the volume of such requests. Mr. Bennion noted that the City has supported this event for several consecutive years.

Councilmember Ed Long inquired about the organization’s financial information and requested clarification regarding the profit and loss statement included in the application, noting that revenues appeared to exceed expenses. Mr. Stratton explained that the document reflected only the event budget and that remaining funds are placed into the organization’s general fund to support burial assistance and related services. He offered to provide updated documentation for

**MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 4, 2026**

clarification. Additional discussion included the increased cost of the Uintah County facility and the organization’s decision to seek funding through Vernal City rather than the County.

Councilmembers expressed appreciation for the services Blow Wishes provides to the community and acknowledged the positive impact of the organization’s charitable efforts.

*Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll made a motion to approve the sponsorship funding of \$750 for Blow Wishes for Emily. 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 Porter..... aye;*

**REQUEST FOR SPONSORSHIP, MARVELOUS XTREME BULL MADNESS - TONJA LOFTHOUSE**

Ben and Tonja Lofthouse addressed the Vernal City Council regarding sponsorship support for the annual Marvelous Extreme Bull Madness event, a Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) sanctioned bull riding event held in Vernal, Utah. Mr. Lofthouse stated that the event has been held for seven years and continues to grow in scale and regional impact. He explained that the 2025 event featured approximately 80 professional bull riders, including nationally and internationally recognized competitors, many of whom travel to Vernal midweek and remain through the weekend, contributing to hotel stays and local economic activity. Mr. Lofthouse noted that participants fly in from multiple states and internationally, utilizing the Vernal Regional Airport.

Mr. Lofthouse further outlined increased operational costs, including higher PRCA-required rider payouts, increased facility fees at Western Park, and rising insurance costs. He emphasized that the event incorporates family-friendly and community-focused elements such as sheep riding and a donkey race to encourage broad community participation. He also noted that, independent of the riders, event operations result in the booking of approximately 30 hotel rooms to accommodate staff and animal handlers, with livestock transported from several western states.

Mrs. Lofthouse presented a special concept planned for the upcoming event in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the United States, noting that the opening ceremony will feature a patriotic theme centered on a large Liberty Bell display. She explained that local businesses are assisting with materials and construction, and expressed hope that the Liberty Bell could be reused for future community events and parades. It was also noted that the event has received national exposure, including rebroadcasts on the Cowboy Channel.

During discussion, Council noted that the sponsorship amount requested had been left blank on the application. Mr. Lofthouse stated that he has traditionally left the amount open and has been

**MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 4, 2026**

appreciative of prior City support, which was clarified to be \$1,000 in previous years. Mayor Corey Foley and City Manager Quinn Bennion commented on the event’s strong alignment with community identity and its demonstrated success, while also noting the long-term goal of encouraging self-sustaining operations for for-profit events.

*Councilmember Ed Long motioned to approve a \$1,000 sponsorship for the Marvelous Xtreme Bull Madness event. 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 Porter..... aye;*

**CONSIDER ACCEPTANCE OF ANNEXATION PETITION FROM MICHAEL ESKELSON FOR BRIAR CREEK SUBDIVISION AND N&E PROPERTIES - QUINN BENNION**

City Manager Quinn Bennion presented an annexation petition for property located near 500 West and 1500 South, adjacent to existing Vernal City boundaries. He explained that the request is primarily driven by water availability limitations through Ashley Valley Water and Sewer, which create challenges for future subdivision development. The petition is supported by the vast majority of property owners and exceeds the statutory requirement that at least one-third of the total appraised property value consent to annexation.

City Attorney Michael confirmed that the petition meets state requirements and outlined the annexation process, with City Recorder Sara Bell noting that Council consideration at this stage is limited to accepting the petition for further review. Acceptance initiates agency notifications and a 30-day protest period but does not finalize annexation. If protests are received, the matter would be reviewed by the Boundary Commission. Following the protest period, the matter would return to the Vernal City Council for a public hearing and potential adoption of an annexation ordinance.

Councilmembers requested that any formal protests received during the protest period be shared with the Council for review. City Attorney Michael confirmed that protests are submitted to his office and could be provided to the Council.

Applicant Michael Eskelson stated that nearly all property owners have agreed to the annexation, with additional properties under contract or negotiation. He reported no significant opposition and noted general support from Ashley Valley Water and Sewer and Uintah County officials.

Councilmembers expressed support for the annexation concept, noting the need for housing opportunities and long-term infrastructure planning, and acknowledged the existing and anticipated water constraints within Ashley Valley Water and Sewer.

**MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 4, 2026**

Mr. Bennion provided additional commentary regarding future coordination with Ashley Valley Water and Sewer, outlining four potential service scenarios related to water infrastructure, water rights, and billing arrangements following annexation. He emphasized that while these matters do not prevent acceptance of the annexation petition, they will require resolution prior to final annexation approval. He noted that discussions with Ashley Valley Water and Sewer are ongoing and that similar annexations are anticipated in the future due to regional water limitations.

Mr. Eskelson clarified that the internal water and sewer infrastructure within the subdivision remains under his control during the bonding period and has not yet been accepted by Ashley Valley Water and Sewer, which may affect future service agreements if annexation proceeds.

City Manager Quinn Bennion advised that accepting the petition would initiate the statutory timeline and formalize coordination efforts with affected agencies. He stated that Ashley Valley Water and Sewer and Uintah County have been notified and are aware of the request.

*Councilmember Ted Munford made a motion to accept the annexation petition from Michael Eskelson for Briar Creek Subdivision and surrounding properties ad presented. Councilmember Nick Porter seconded the motion. Councilmember Ed Long excused himself from the vote due to a familial tie within the proposed annexation area. The motion passed with the following roll call vote:*

*Councilmember Munford..... aye;*  
*Councilmember Mills..... aye;*  
*Councilmember O'Driscoll..... aye;*  
*Councilmember Long..... abstain;*  
*Councilmember Porter..... aye;*

**PRESENTATION REGARDING GEO-GRID DISTRICT AND CONSIDER APPROVAL OF A PHASE 1 STUDY - KEITH DESPAIN**

Public Works Director Keith Despain provided a follow-up discussion regarding the proposed geothermal thermal energy network, explaining that the concept involves using the Earth's natural heat to provide heating and cooling to buildings through a shared water-based utility loop. He stated that the feasibility study under consideration would help answer questions previously raised by the Council. As a preliminary estimate, he projected that approximately one mile of geothermal loop with eleven building connections could cost roughly \$2 million, including boreholes and distribution piping. He emphasized that this figure is conceptual and based on assumptions, as no formal design has been completed.

Mr. Despain noted that return on investment is difficult to quantify due to variables such as existing building efficiency and potential energy savings, but suggested the system could provide long-term cost benefits and serve as an economic development incentive. He also indicated the City's interest in coordinating with Uintah County, which has secured grant funding for a related geothermal study, and combining resources to evaluate both approaches through a single feasibility

**MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 4, 2026**  
effort.

Matt Garlick, CEO of the Gray Edge Group, joined the meeting remotely and presented an overview of thermal energy networks and geothermal systems. He reviewed system components, including heat pumps, ambient temperature loops, and thermal storage, and explained how energy can be shared between buildings to improve overall efficiency. Mr. Garlick presented case studies from Colorado Mesa University and Weber State University, highlighting significant long-term utility cost savings, reduced water use, and high system efficiency achieved through similar systems. He also discussed scalability, long system lifespans, and potential ownership and operating models involving public entities, utilities, and third-party partners.

Mr. Garlick outlined a proposed phased study approach. Phase One would be a \$20,000 fixed-fee feasibility study to identify potential building clusters, estimate thermal loads, and evaluate possible energy sources and sinks. Subsequent phases could include test bore drilling, further engineering analysis, and system design, with significantly higher costs.

Councilmember Ed Long raised questions regarding upfront costs, long-term financial commitments, depreciation, maintenance requirements, and realistic return on investment timelines. Councilmember Randel Mills expressed about committing City funds without a clearer understanding of total project costs, funding sources, and the likelihood of implementation. Councilmember Ted Munford requested additional information from other municipalities that have completed similar studies, including phased costs, timelines, maintenance histories, and documented savings.

Mr. Garlick discussed the potential funding mechanisms, including federal tax credits, utility incentives, grants, and utility-style financing repaid through user fees. Councilmembers emphasized the importance of identifying grant funding opportunities before committing City budget funds. Councilmember Ted Munford stated that, while he is not opposed to the geothermal concept, he would like to review detailed information from public entities that have already implemented similar systems before making a decision. He indicated that such information should be publicly available and requested documentation outlining the full process those entities followed, including phase-by-phase costs, project timelines, and overall implementation structure. Quinn Bennion noted that Uintah County has secured grant funding for a related geothermal study and expressed interest in coordinating efforts.

*Councilmember Nick Porter motioned to table Phase 1 of the Geothermal Study, allowing more time for information to be collected. Councilmember Ted Munford seconded the motion. The motion passed with all in favor.*

**CONSIDER APPROVAL OF A DEMOLITION CONTRACT WITH ALTA CONSTRUCTION FOR THE DEMOLITION OF THE MOTEL PORTION ON LAMPLIGHTER BLOCK - KEITH DESPAIN**

Public Works Director Keith Despain stated that the item was a follow-up to the prior Council meeting at which the project was awarded to Alta Excavation for demolition of the motel portion of the Lamplighter. He explained that the contract has since been signed by the contractor and is

**MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 4, 2026**

now before the Council for review and approval. Director Despain requested approval of the contract so the City may execute the agreement and proceed with demolition. Councilmember Ed Long inquired about the total contract amount, noted as approximately \$134,000.

*Councilmember Ed Long made a motion to approve the demolition contract with Alta Construction for the demolition of the motel portion of Lamplighter Block. 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 Porter..... aye;*

Mr. Despain noted that demolition work was scheduled to commence the following Monday.

**CONSIDER THE APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE NO 2026-02, ADOPTING THE 2006 UTAH WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE CODE, AS ADOPTED UNDER UTAH CODE § 15A-2-103 - BRAEDEN CHRISTOFFERSON**

Assistant City Manager Braeden Christofferson presented the revised Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) map as a follow-up to Council discussion held approximately one month prior. He explained that the Council had previously reviewed a draft map and expressed concern that the highlighted areas were overly expansive. In response, Braeden worked with Jeremy Raymond and Corey Auger, along with partners from the Department of Natural Resources, to recalibrate and significantly reduce the designated areas. A public meeting was held the previous week to gather input, with limited attendance from Vernal residents as well as representatives from surrounding communities. The updated map was provided to the Council in ledger format for parcel-level review and displayed publicly during the meeting. Braeden emphasized that the map reflects what staff believe is an appropriate and necessary representation of WUI areas within the City, while remaining subject to Council discretion for further adjustment.

Mr. Christofferson clarified that no areas within Vernal City are designated as “high risk” under the State’s separate high-risk WUI map released the prior month. The areas identified within City limits are classified as “moderate risk” and are intended to address defensible space requirements under the 2006 WUI Code. Properties located within the designated areas would generally be required to maintain approximately 30 feet of defensible space from structures to adjacent wildland vegetation. Existing homes would not be required to replace roofs or retrofit building materials, however, new construction within designated areas would be required to comply with applicable WUI building code standards.

Councilmembers asked questions regarding the number of homes affected, potential insurance implications, and whether assistance would be available to property owners. Mr. Christofferson estimated that approximately a dozen homes may be directly impacted, along with several undeveloped parcels. Jeremy Raymond stated that the revised Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

**MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 4, 2026**

map reflects a significant reduction from the previous version presented to the Council. He explained that staff removed agricultural fields and vegetation areas deemed not directly pertinent to wildfire risk and carefully reevaluated residential areas based on on-site review and Council feedback. Corey Auger confirmed that the Fire District can provide home assessments, education, and mitigation assistance at no cost to homeowners through existing cooperative agreements and available funding. Councilmembers expressed appreciation for having resources available to help residents comply, noting that the goal is education and hazard mitigation rather than punitive enforcement.

Mr. Auger explained that the WUI map is not permanent and must be reviewed at least every three years under state code. As development expands, vegetation is cleared, or annexations occur, designated areas may be adjusted accordingly. Discussion also included consideration of how future annexations or adjacent county-designated areas may impact the City’s map. Councilmembers acknowledged the importance of addressing fire risk while minimizing unnecessary burden on residents and ensuring ongoing review and coordination with county and state agencies.

*Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll moved to approve Ordinance 2026-02, adopting the 2006 Utah Wildland-Urban Interface Code. Councilmember Ted Munford 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 Porter..... aye;*

**CONSIDER THE APPROVAL AND APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR POSITIONS OF THE VERNAL CITY PLANNING COMMISSION - BRAEDEN CHRISTOFFERSON**

Assistant City Manager Braeden Christofferson reported that during the January Planning Commission meeting, the Commission welcomed two newly appointed members and reorganized its leadership. Following discussion, the Commission voted to appoint Steven Lyle as Chair and Samantha Chapoose as Vice Chair. Mr. Christofferson stated that the Planning Commission appreciates the City Council’s support and requested formal acknowledgment of the leadership appointments.

*Councilmember Randel Mills motioned to approve the Chair and Vice Chair positions of the Vernal City Planning Commission as presented. Councilmember Nick Porter seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with the following roll call vote:*

**MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 4, 2026**

*Councilmember Munford..... aye;*  
*Councilmember Mills..... aye;*  
*Councilmember O’Driscoll..... aye;*  
*Councilmember Long..... aye;*  
*Councilmember Porter..... aye;*

**CONSIDER THE APPROVAL OF THE VERNAL CITY PLANNING COMMISSION SCHEDULE - BRAEDEN CHRISTOFFERSON**

Assistant City Manager Braeden Christofferson presented the Planning Commission meeting schedule as the second Tuesday of every month beginning at 5:30 pm in the Council Chambers.

*Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll motioned to approve the schedule of the Vernal City Planning Commission meetings as presented. Councilmember Ed Long 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 Porter..... aye;*

**STAFF REPORTS**

Police Chief Mike Gledhill provided an update to Mayor Corey Foley and the City Council regarding a planned student protest scheduled for the following day involving Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). He stated that students intend to walk from the high school into City limits, concluding at the library. The Police Department has coordinated with the school district and developed safety plans to ensure the event remains peaceful and orderly. Chief Gledhill reported that the Vernal Police Department will monitor the activity and remain present to ensure public safety. The school district is aware of the protest and has indicated it will not prevent students from participating.

City Manager Quinn Bennion reported that, upon review of the Haunt lease agreement, staff discovered an automatic one-year extension is already in place, eliminating the immediate need for Council action. He further updated the Council on ongoing legislative developments, noting that city manager groups are participating in daily briefings due to the volume of proposed bills. He highlighted significant discussion surrounding property tax legislation, including proposals ranging from eliminating certain tax authorities to requiring voter approval for increases or limiting increases to 5% above the certified tax rate. Mr. Bennion stated that while the City is not immediately concerned, such changes could create challenges in responding to unforeseen financial needs. He also addressed proposals to reduce required reserve funds from 35% to 25%, expressing his recommendation to maintain the current 35% reserve, which provides approximately four months of operational coverage compared to three months at 25%.

Finance Director Nick Rousseau addressed a recent notice indicating the City is currently out of compliance with certain state reporting requirements. He explained that the issue stems from

**MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 4, 2026**

staffing vacancies and transition-related cleanup from the prior year. Mr. Rousseau assured the Council that the City is actively working to bring all filings current and remains on track to submit required documentation moving forward.

**ADJOURN:** *There being no further business; Councilmember Randel Mills moved to adjourn. Councilmember Ed Long seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was declared adjourned.*