

**Five County Association of Governments
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
January 14, 2026**

Location: Festival Hall Conference Center, Cedar City, Utah (96 W. Center St, Cedar City Utah.

Time: 12:30 pm

Chair: Paul Cozzens(Iron County) (until chair appointment), then Chair
Commissioner Hollingshead(Beaver County)

Staff Support: Darin J. Bushman (Executive Director)

1. Call to Order

Commissioner **Paul Cozzens** called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees. The meeting was held at Festival Hall Conference Center in Cedar City, Utah.

2. Roll Call and Introductions

Those present introduced themselves

In-person (as stated):

- Paul Cozzens, Commissioner (Chair pro tem for opening items)
- Darin Bushman, Executive Director, Five County Association of Governments
- Jen Wong (HR Director, Five County AOG)
- Gil Almquist, Washington County Commissioner
- Wade Hollingshead, Beaver County Commissioner
- Mike Johnson, Program Manager, Five County AOG (started on the 15th)
- Curtis Barney, Garfield School Board
- Nolan Davis, Milford Mayor
- Melani Torgersen, Escalante Mayor
- Burke Staheli, Washington County School Board
- Celeste Meyeres, Kane County Commissioner
- Stephanie Hill, Iron County School Board
- Jean Krause, representing Washington County mayors
- Jerry Taylor, Garfield County Commissioner
- Melynda Thorpe, Southern Utah University
- Kathryn Moster, Five County AOG
- Oscar Alba, DWS
- Bruce Summers, Congresswoman Celeste Maloy's office
- Gary Webster, Senator Mike Lee's office

Online (as stated):

- Brad Last, representing Utah Tech University
- Myron Lee, representing The Five County AOG / Dixie MPO
- Tyler Fails, Beaver County School District
- Nate Wiberg, Five County, Iron County RPO / Dixie MPO
- JC Finicum, Five County AOG
- Carrie Schonlaw, Five County AOG
- Allison McCoy, Five County AOG

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The committee recited the Pledge of Allegiance (led by Commissioner Cozzens).

4. Appointment of Steering Committee Chair (Rotation)

Motion: Appoint **Commissioner Hollingshead (Beaver County)** as Steering Committee Chair.

- **Moved by:** Mayor Davis
 - **Seconded by:** Commissioner Almquist
- Vote:** Approved unanimously.

Chair **Commissioner Hollister** assumed the chair.

5. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes (November)

Motion: Approve the **November** meeting minutes.

- **Moved by:** Commissioner Meyeres
 - **Seconded by:** Commissioner Taylor
- Vote:** Approved unanimously.

6. Approval of Minutes: CDBG First Public Hearing (December)

Mike Johnson summarized the first public hearing on CDBG funds (hybrid/virtual format; one participant noted they were from Beaver County).

Motion: Approve the **December CDBG First Public Hearing** minutes.

- **Moved by:** Mayor Davis
 - **Seconded by:** Mayor Torgersen
- Vote:** Approved unanimously.

7. HR/Staffing Report

Jen Wong reported staffing changes since the last meeting:

- Two resignations
- One part-time hire (Circles)
- One full-time new hire - Mike Johnson
- Two retirements

- Two employees on FMLA returned to work
- One full-time employee transferred to a part-time role (accommodated)
- Staffing count changed from **77 (October report)** to **75** currently

Open position: Weatherization role combined with HEAT/Weatherization case management, housed in Cedar City; posting closes Monday at 6:00 p.m.; two resumes received at time of meeting. Posting shared via DWS and internal channels, and the Steering Committee

URS Retirement Plan Update

Jen provided an informational update: URS will offer additional retirement plan options beginning late March/early April:

- Roth 401(k)
- Roth 457(b)

A formal agreement will likely be brought to the Steering Committee at a future meeting for employer opt-in.

8. Travel Reimbursement Policy Update (Jen Wong)

Jen presented proposed changes to the travel reimbursement policy (last updated 2022), including:

- Proposed per diem increase:
 - Breakfast: \$12 → \$15
 - Lunch: \$18 → \$18
 - Dinner: \$24 → \$27
 - Total daily: \$54 → \$60
- Out-of-state meals: shift to **GSA Meals and Incidental Expenses (M&IE)** rates
- Mileage reimbursement:
 - If AOG vehicle is available: reimburse up to **\$0.40/mile**
 - If AOG vehicle not available: reimburse personal vehicle use at **IRS rate** (referenced as 72.5 cents)
 - Added requirement for justifiable business reason if personal vehicle used when AOG vehicle available (reviewed/approved internally)

Discussion included handling accidents (WCF, UCIP, accident kits in vehicles), complications with out-of-state rental/credit card payments, and insurance hierarchy for personal vehicles used on official business.

Motion: Approve travel reimbursement policy changes, with an **effective date to be determined** (potentially July 1 to align with new budgets).

- **Moved by:** Commissioner Almquist
- **Seconded by:** Mayor Davis

Vote: Approved unanimously.

9. Informational: Employee Gifts

Jen noted employee gifts (AOG coffee mugs) were available to steering committee attendees.

10. Executive Director Report (Darin Bushman)

Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Darin noted the regional hazard mitigation plan is approaching expiration (noted as 2027). A prior funding source (BRICS) no longer exists. Nathan Wiberg reported DEM funding is available through 2027 but requires use of a contractor. A decision was needed “this week” to proceed with DEM application. This was presented as informational.

Outdoor Recreation Grant

Darin reported receipt of a **\$200,000 grant** to study outdoor recreation opportunities in the AOG area and recreation hub concepts. Work will be managed by the Office of Outdoor Recreation, with Five County AOG providing coordination support. Nathan Wiberg noted that coordination efforts are underway with Washington County to avoid duplication with the county's ongoing planning.

CSS Consolidation and Facilities Moves

Darin provided a detailed update on the consolidation of Community Support Services (CSS) and facility changes:

- Vacated an Iron County building and consolidated staff into the Social Security building (former HEAT office area)
- Childcare Resource Agency relocated into space at weatherization facilities (minor renovations: carpet, paint, internet)
- Vacated leased space in St. George and moved HEAT staff into the main St. George building.

- Ongoing operational challenges during consolidation (including transition issues and loss of institutional knowledge from a departing/disgruntled employee)
- Exploring sublease of a facility with significant remaining lease term (approximately 8 years remaining; approx. \$65k–\$70k/year cost; +escalations), and attempting to avoid realtor fees by direct tenant arrangement

Darin emphasized overhead reductions from consolidation: reduced copier leases, postage machines, phone/internet costs, and other facility overhead.

Grants and Program Updates

- Received an IHC grant for aging/nutrition support (check received)
- The RCOG grant application was not funded due to limited resources
- Accounts Payable reorganization finalized; JC Finicum now in her new role and performing well
- Local Administrative Advisor program realigned: assigned communities among Kevin Smedley, Roger Carter, and Michael Johnson to provide a single point of contact for communities
- CDBG land acquisition process underway (Iron County/Cedar City area); realtor meetings scheduled; Have talked with Archiplex to see if they could assist with design/drawings to support CIB application (targeting June CIB)

Strategic Discussion: Cedar City Building and Headquarters Concept

Darin discussed long-range facility planning:

- Proposed new Cedar City facility capable of supporting administrative headquarters functions, plus future growth and meeting space
- Potentially shifting “headquarters” functions to Cedar City due to capacity constraints in St. George
- Discussion referenced the Six County model and the potential to offset O&M through leasing unused space to tenants until we grow into the building

Process Modernization

Darin reported progress on internal modernization:

- Online credit card processing operational; receipts routed electronically through approvals
- Work underway for online timekeeping (in coordination with Pelorus)
- Allison is currently testing the electronic invoice and check request workflow for departments to reduce paper-based routing

Congressional Briefing Tour

Darin reported:

- Planning meetings ongoing; he and Travis Kyhl traveled to Washington, DC
- Met with chiefs and congressional delegation offices; asked each office to designate a “champion.”
- Positive planning meeting held with all offices in attendance

Leadership Training

- Ongoing leadership/staff training during meetings (every other week)
- Working with USU on remote/virtual employee management training for directors

Economic Development Model Discussion

Darin noted that his salary is partially paid for by EDA planning money and other state and federal sources. Darin flagged a gap: many communities lack economic development support. He planned a meeting with Jefferson Moss to discuss how AOG fits within the state model and funding options for an AOG economic development function. Ideally the AOG would have an Economic Development Coordinator similar to R6.

Committee members acknowledged and praised AOG’s consolidation efforts and proactive cost-reduction approach amid broader statewide budget tightening.

11. Circles Program Update (Presenter: Kathryn Moster)

Kathryn provided an overview of the **Circles** program:

- Goal: help families move to **200% of the federal poverty guideline**
- Cohort operating in St. George; working to launch a Cedar City cohort
- Model includes weekly dinner, education sessions, childcare programming, and volunteer “Allies” (mentors)
- Outcomes tracked (grant-driven): training completion, credit score improvements, savings contributions, employment increases, earnings growth
- Discussed the “benefits cliff” and mitigation concepts
- Presented national results (multi-state program, 25+ years): increased income, education, homeownership, transportation, support networks
- Recruitment through flyers and partner agencies (DWS, health/human services providers, food pantries, radio outreach)
- Need: location with kitchen, meeting space, and childcare capacity, plus volunteers

Discussion included:

- Potential partnership pathways with faith communities (LDS and others)
- County investments in job training support (example: tuition/books/fees assistance through Southwest Tech)
- Program impact on intergenerational poverty and family stability

12. Approval: Resolution Requesting Revisions/Delay to Utah HB 48 Implementation

The committee discussed a resolution concerning concerns raised by communities about HB 48 implementation and mapping. Darin noted potential political sensitivity but affirmed the importance of communicating impacts.

Motion: Approve the resolution regarding HB 48 for submission/advocacy to state leadership.

- **Moved by:** Commissioner Almquist
 - **Seconded by:** Commissioner Cozzens
- Vote:** Approved unanimously (no opposition noted).

13. Guest Presentation: Utah Tech University Update (President Shane Smeed, virtual)

President **Shane Smeed** provided an institutional update, including:

- Personal introduction and family background
- Institutional heritage and commitment to honoring Dixie history (heritage cove, merchandise, orientation content, participation in Dixie Days)
- Academic and enrollment growth, clubs growth, and new/expanded programs
- College of Health Sciences highlights (largest college; accredited programs; advisory boards)
- Facilities growth: student housing, general classroom building, campus market, performing arts center expansion
- Athletics: D1 growth and conference move to the Big Sky (2026); Mountain West for certain sports
- Atwood Innovation Plaza and entrepreneurship support
- Partnerships: Dixie Tech pathways, University of Utah rural health MD program partnership, City Alliance program

Question/Request: Darin asked if Utah Tech could help source volunteer mentors for the Circles program.

President Smeed responded positively and requested follow-up coordination (Darin to work with Brad Last).

14. CDBG Application Discussion: Vehicles

Darin provided an update on a proposed CDBG application to support vehicle purchases:

- CDBG favors growth-related needs more than replacement
- St. George is an entitlement community, limiting use of CDBG-funded vehicles for service within St. George (and possibly Santa Clara/Ivins) and creating compliance complexity
- AOG will proceed but with tempered expectations

Alternative option discussed:

- Potential borrowing from the Revolving Loan Fund to purchase vehicles, repaid with interest; concept appears feasible pending existing obligations rolling off
- Leasing is considered but problematic due to high mileage across the region

Committee members suggested exploring procurement and fleet replacement practices used by counties/school districts and contacting the Washington County School District for potential surplus vehicles.

15. Federal Delegation Report (Senator Mike Lee's Office) (Gary Webster)

Gary provided a policy and schedule update, including:

- Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee work and priorities
- Colorado River negotiations (deadline noted as February 14 for state proposals; EIS referenced as forthcoming "in two days")
- Farm bill timeline (expires September 30)
- 2026 appropriations and desire to avoid shutdown; "regular order" goal
- County/energy issues and upcoming hearing opportunities around NACo timeframe

Celeste Meyeres thanked the office for support related to SRS and noted reduced shutdown concern.

16. Utah Department of Workforce Services Update

Oscar Alba reported unemployment rates (November data):

- Beaver: 3.0% (no change year-over-year)
- Garfield: 8.3% (up from 7.1%)
- Iron: 3.5% (up from 2.9%)
- Kane: 4.2% (up from 3.5%)
- Washington: 3.9% (up from 3.4%)
- Statewide: 3.6%

Announcement:

- “Mission Ready Southern Utah Military Veteran and Family Wellness Fair”
 - **Date:** February 21
 - **Time:** 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
 - **Location:** Utah Tech University, St. George
Materials to be shared electronically for distribution.

17. Southern Utah University Update

SUU representative reported:

- Collaboration with Fervo Energy and geothermal initiatives in Beaver County
- Three geothermal apprenticeship tracks and micro-credentials; scholarships for first 100 participants
- Completion of a community assessment for the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah (first since 1958; published in November)
- Workforce responsiveness focus, including short-term training aligned with employer needs

Discussion:

- Kane County childcare shortage (no licensed providers) and interest in concurrent enrollment pathways in childcare and first responder training
- SUU noted development of early childhood education programs (associate’s and bachelor’s) and coordination with the AOG childcare representative

18. Additional Informational Item: Pattern Energy and Transmission Line

Darin reported the AOG met with Pattern Energy, which is beginning NEPA efforts to parallel the Trans West Express corridor with a proposed higher-capacity transmission line. Pattern will coordinate outreach to counties. The AOG will assist with coordination.

19. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting adjourned.

Adjourned at: 2:35