

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL JOINT VERNAL CITY AND UTAH COUNTY
MEETING HELD MARCH 18, 2026**

MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL AND THE UTAH COUNTY
COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING HELD MARCH 18, 2026 at 4:30 p.m. in
the Uintah County Commission Large Conference Room, 2nd Floor - 152 East 100
North, Vernal, Utah 84078.

PRESENT:

VERNAL CITY: Councilmembers Edward Long, Robin O'Driscoll, and Randel Mills, and Mayor Corey Foley.

UTAH COUNTY: Commissioners John Laursen, Sonja Norton, and Willis LeFevre.

VERNAL CITY STAFF: Quinn Bennion, Sara Bell, Jessika Goodrich, Ken Campbell.

UTAH COUNTY STAFF: Lesha Colthorp, James Sharp.

GUESTS: Marty Partridge, Carol Kendall.

WELCOME: Mayor Corey Foley welcomed everyone to the meeting. Utah County Commissioner Sonja Norton clarified that Utah County had not formally noticed the meeting and would be present to receive information only and would not be taking formal action.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT & APPROVAL OF SPECIAL MEETING: Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll *moved to acknowledge and approve the special meeting. Councilmember Ed Long seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote.*

**DISCUSSION REGARDING THE COMMERCIAL AIR SERVICE AT VERNAL
REGIONAL AIRPORT - KEN CAMPBELL**

Vernal Regional Airport Director Ken Campbell presented information regarding the City's commercial air service and the upcoming Essential Air Service contract decision. He explained that in previous contract discussions, community input had been limited, and he sought to improve the process by gathering input from both local industry and tourism stakeholders. A recent meeting had been held with industry professionals to discuss air travel needs, with the goal of ensuring all voices were considered.

Mr. Campbell reviewed the history of the City's air service, noting that approximately twenty-six months prior, SkyWest Airlines had been operating under a five-year contract but encountered challenges related to federal approval requirements. Following SkyWest's exit, the contract was rebid and ultimately awarded to Contour Airlines under the Alternate Essential Air Service program. He noted that despite initial community concerns regarding service to Phoenix, the City had limited options at that time.

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Mr. Campbell explained that the current contract with Contour Airlines would expire on September 30, and that a Request for Qualifications had been issued by the federal government. The City is currently in the public comment phase, which would close on April 7. He emphasized the importance of receiving direction from Vernal City leadership on what to submit to the United States Department of Transportation and recommended entering into a forty-eight-month contract with the selected provider.

City Manager Quinn Bennion clarified that the contract represents approximately a seven million dollar annual agreement funded through federal Essential Air Service programs due to the City's geographic isolation and economic qualifications. He noted that while the City pays costs upfront, reimbursement is received from the federal government.

Mr. Campbell reviewed the proposals received from four bidders and provided analysis of several options. He expressed concerns regarding Advanced Air due to limited communication and lack of demonstrated interline connectivity, recommending that the proposal not be pursued. He also discussed Denver Air Connection, noting its flexibility in aircraft size, multiple destination options, and interline agreements with major carriers, but emphasized that operational success often depends on the strength of the working relationship with the airline.

Discussion followed among Councilmembers, staff, and members of the public regarding destinations, pricing, reliability, maintenance support, and flight frequency. Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll confirmed that a new contract would be in place beginning October 1. Councilmember Ed Long asked questions regarding flight limits and performance standards, and discussion highlighted that the Department of Transportation limits the number of weekly flights.

Travel and Tourism Director Lesha Colthorp asked questions regarding flexibility in scheduling destinations and seasonal adjustments. Mr. Campbell explained that flexibility is largely dependent upon the working relationship with the airline provider and noted that smaller carriers have demonstrated greater willingness to adapt to community needs.

Public comment was received from several individuals who spoke to the affordability of flights, the importance of maintaining Denver service, and the benefits of current service levels under Contour Airlines. Discussion also included concerns regarding aircraft maintenance availability, missed flights, and the potential for increased reliability with larger carriers.

Mr. Campbell stated that in his professional opinion, continuing service with Contour Airlines would be the best option for the community, citing strong communication with company leadership and responsiveness to local needs.

Councilmember Randel Mills made a motion to approve Contour Airlines as the City's commercial

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air service provider for a forty-eight-month contract period. Councilmember Ed Long seconded the motion. The motion passed with the following roll call vote:

Councilmember Mills..... aye;
Councilmember O'Driscoll..... aye;
Councilmember Long..... aye;

Utah County Commissioner Sonja Norton invited Vernal Regional Airport Director Ken Campbell to attend the Utah County Commission meeting scheduled for the following Tuesday and indicated that the County Commissioners would vote on the proposed air service at that time.

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.*