

MINUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING HELD
APRIL 15, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the Vernal City Council Room, 374 East Main,
Vernal, Utah 84078.

PRESENT: Councilmembers Ted Munford, Robin O’Driscoll, Ed Long, Nick Porter, and Mayor Corey Foley. Councilmember Randel Mills was excused from the meeting.

WELCOME: Mayor Corey Foley welcomed everyone to the meeting.

INVOCATION OR UPLIFTING THOUGHT: The invocation was given by Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Councilmember Nick Porter.

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING HELD
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Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll moved to approve the minutes of the Regular City Council Meeting held April 1, 2026. Councilmember Ed Long seconded the motion. The motion passed with Councilmembers Munford, O’Driscoll, Long, and Porter voting in favor.

**CONSIDER THE APPROVAL OF THE REQUEST FOR SPONSORSHIP, DINOSAUR
ROUNDUP RODEO - CARSON YOUNG**

Carson Young, President of the Dinosaur Roundup Rodeo, addressed the Council and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to present. He provided a summary of the previous year’s event, noting that the rodeo hosted 626 professional contestants representing multiple states and welcomed spectators from 35 states as well as international attendees from Europe. Mr. Young reported that the event sold out on both Friday and Saturday evenings and stated that organizers are working toward achieving sellout attendance for all three nights in the upcoming year.

Mr. Young highlighted that the Dinosaur Roundup Rodeo continues to draw participation and attendance from across the western United States, with representation from every state west of the Mississippi River. He outlined planned entertainment for the upcoming event, including the presentation of colors by the Westernaires and specialty acts, and noted that Dustin Meyers, who served as barrelman the previous year, would be returning. He further stated that the rodeo will be part of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association series and is anticipated to be recognized as a premier rodeo. Mr. Young explained that Utah has become a significant location for playoff series rodeos and expressed enthusiasm that Vernal’s event will serve as the first rodeo in the Durango rodeo season.

Mr. Young informed the Council that advanced in-person ticket sales had commenced in order to discourage unauthorized resale and provide local residents with the first opportunity to purchase

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tickets. He advised that official online ticket sales would begin on May 1 and cautioned that any current online advertisements for tickets are not legitimate. He also discussed the 11th Annual “Dinah” Decorating Contest, noting that “Dinah” figures are available through the Chamber of Commerce and that the sponsorship prize has been increased. He stated that organizers are aiming to display 90 “Dinahs” this year in recognition of the founding of the PRCA. Mr. Young concluded by noting that the rodeo will be held over Father’s Day weekend.

Councilmember Ted Munford expressed appreciation for the event, stating that it has become a valued staple within the community and commended the organizers for their continued efforts. Mayor Corey Foley remarked on the consistent growth of the rodeo year over year, noting the increasing national interest and expressing support for providing local residents with early access to tickets. He further commented that continued growth may necessitate additional seating in the future.

Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll inquired whether the sponsorship request had been included as a budgeted item. City Manager Quinn Bennion confirmed that the event is included in the budget, with \$17,000 allocated for sponsorship and an additional \$1,000 designated in support of the Special Needs Rodeo.

Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll made a motion to approve the sponsorship of \$18,000 for the Dinosaur Roundup Rodeo, with \$1,000 going towards the Special Needs Rodeo. Councilmember Ted Munford seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with the following roll call vote:

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

CONSIDER THE APPROVAL OF THE REQUEST FOR SPONSORSHIP – UINTAH HIGH SCHOOL GRAD NIGHT – JANA ZUFELT

Jana Zufelt addressed the Council and stated that this is her third year assisting with the organization of Uintah High School Grad Night. She described the event as a collaborative effort designed to include all graduating seniors of the Class of 2026 within the community from Uintah High School, Terra Academy, Ashley Valley Education Center (AVEC), online programs, and homeschooled students. Ms. Zufelt explained that the event is organized and operated by parent volunteers, with a committee that has been actively meeting to coordinate planning efforts.

Ms. Zufelt outlined planned activities for the evening, noting that the event will include entertainment such as a comedian, as well as food and various activities for attendees. She reported that over 100 students have registered to participate thus far, with an anticipated attendance of approximately 300 students, and expressed hope that participation will exceed that number. Ms.

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Zufelt emphasized that the purpose of the event is to provide a safe and enjoyable environment for graduating seniors to celebrate together.

Councilmember Robin O’Driscoll inquired whether the event maintains a controlled environment throughout the evening. Ms. Zufelt confirmed that while participants are permitted to leave, they are not allowed to return once they exit the event.

Mayor Corey Foley expressed strong support for the program, noting that the event provides a safe alternative for youth in the community compared to past practices. He commended the inclusion of students from a variety of educational settings and stated that this approach strengthens the overall community.

City Manager Quinn Bennion explained that during the prior budget process, it was determined that support for this event would be more appropriately allocated through the Police Department budget rather than Transient Room Tax (TRT) funds, as the event does not directly align with tourism-related purposes. He confirmed that funding for the event has been included within the Police Department budget.

Police Chief Mike Gledhill stated that the event contributes to a safe and uneventful evening for law enforcement and expressed full support for the program.

Councilmember Nick Porter made a motion to approve the \$2,000 sponsorship for Grad Night. Councilmember Ed Long seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with the following roll call vote:

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

PRESENTATION FROM THE VERNAL AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE - MARTY PARTRIDGE

Marty Partridge, Director of the Vernal Area Chamber of Commerce, provided an update to the Council regarding Chamber activities and accomplishments. She stated that the report was originally presented at the Chamber Gala held on February 26, with additional updates provided for the Council.

Ms. Partridge reported that Chamber membership has increased from 279 members in February to 292 members within a seven-week period, noting continued growth and business engagement. She stated that the Chamber is working toward maintaining two full-time and two part-time positions and is currently seeking to fill an Event and Marketing Coordinator position.

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Ms. Partridge noted that the Chamber received two awards at the Utah Association of Chambers meeting in Park City, including recognition for Best Weekly Communication Newsletter for the “Chamber Chat” and Best Marketing Program for the “Hello Neighbor” resource bags.

Ms. Partridge reviewed Chamber programs and outreach efforts, including weekly “Chamber Chat” communications, business development workshops, and Chamber luncheons averaging approximately 50 attendees. She further reported on community events, including Santa’s Workshop and the Shop Local Season Giveaway, which generated over \$29,000 in local spending.

Ms. Partridge discussed Chamber-sponsored travel programs and noted continued participation in organized international trips. She also reported that the Fourth of July Parade included 59 entries and approximately 9,000 spectators, and stated that the upcoming theme will be “America 250.”

Ms. Partridge highlighted volunteer contributions from the Chamber’s Dynamites, noting an estimated total of nearly 7,000 volunteer hours. She also referenced ongoing committee efforts and new initiatives, including the “Chamber Connections” business referral program.

Ms. Partridge expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve the community and support local businesses.

Mayor Corey Foley commended Ms. Partridge and the Chamber for their continued efforts and contributions to the Vernal community.

PRESENTATION FROM THE UINTAH FIRE DISTRICT - JEREMY RAYMOND

Mayor Corey Foley requested an update regarding an injured firefighter prior to the presentation. Jeremy Raymond, Director of the Uintah Fire District, reported that the firefighter is doing well and recently returned home from the burn center. He stated that the firefighter underwent two skin graft procedures and is recovering ahead of schedule. Mr. Raymond noted that the firefighter has been weaned off pain medication, is able to drive, and is anticipated to return to work on a limited basis.

Mr. Raymond began his presentation on the Uintah Fire District and provided an update regarding District operations, staffing, and annual activity. He reported that the District currently has 102 paid on-call volunteers and three full-time employees, including himself, an administrative assistant, and a Wildland Engine Captain. He noted that the Wildland program is self-funded and emphasized the significant contributions of volunteer personnel.

Mr. Raymond presented year-end statistics for 2025, reporting a total of 654 fire calls, 2,360 public relations hours, and 8,107 training hours. He explained that firefighters are required to complete ongoing training to maintain certification and that initial certification requires approximately 200 hours.

Councilmember Ed Long inquired whether the reported 654 calls represented legitimate fire calls.

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Mr. Raymond clarified that the total includes all types of responses, including fire alarms, brush fires, hazardous material incidents, structure fires, and medical assist calls.

Mr. Raymond reviewed call trends, noting a steady increase in volume over the past ten years, and stated that fire alarms and carbon monoxide calls represent the largest portion of responses, followed by brush fires. He outlined service areas within the District and noted that Vernal City experiences the highest call volume.

Mr. Raymond reported that the Fire District assists Vernal City with fire inspections, plan reviews, and Wildland-Urban Interface inspections, including 153 inspections conducted for existing businesses in the past year.

Mr. Raymond discussed dry conditions contributing to increased fire risk and expressed appreciation to the Mayor and City Council for implementing open burn restrictions.

Mr. Raymond outlined goals for the upcoming year, including installation of shower facilities at fire stations to improve firefighter safety and continued focus on training and safety initiatives.

Councilmember Ed Long expressed appreciation for the data and metrics presented.

Mayor Corey Foley expressed appreciation to Mr. Raymond, the Fire District Board, and Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll for their service and dedication to the community.

DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED NEW WATER RATES, INCLUDING A NEW CONSERVATION RATE - KEITH DESPAIN

Public Works Director Keith Despain presented a proposed comprehensive revision to the City's water rate structure, noting that the current system has historically operated under a flat-rate model that includes a base charge with 8,000 gallons of usage and a single overage rate. He explained that the proposed structure transitions to a tiered rate system intended to promote conservation while also addressing financial needs associated with maintaining and replacing aging infrastructure. Mr. Despain stated that the proposal is driven by both conservation goals and the need to generate revenue to support long-term system sustainability.

Mr. Despain reviewed data from 2025 indicating a disparity in residential water usage and billing, explaining that single-family residences account for approximately 67 percent of residential water use while contributing 78 percent of the associated revenue, whereas multi-family units account for 33 percent of usage but only 22 percent of revenue. He stated that one objective of the proposed rate structure is to more equitably distribute costs across user types. He further explained that the City's water infrastructure is significantly aged, with an estimated replacement need of approximately \$80 million, and noted that historically, rates have not included a component dedicated to system replacement. He stated that the proposed structure is intended to generate approximately \$1 million annually to establish a replacement fund that could be leveraged with outside funding sources.

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Mr. Despain outlined the proposed tiered rate structure under “Stage 1” or normal operations, which includes a reduced base rate and a lower base allotment of 4,000 gallons, followed by increasing tiered rates as usage increases. He explained that similar tiered structures are proposed for residential, transient, and commercial users, with adjustments to how multi-family and transient properties are billed, including per-door base rates rather than per-meter charges. He also presented multiple usage scenarios demonstrating the anticipated impact of the proposed rates across various user types, noting that lower-use residential customers would see minimal change, while higher-use customers would experience more significant increases.

Councilmember Ted Munford inquired about average household water usage and requested additional information regarding typical residential impacts, including seasonal comparisons. He also requested further detail on projected revenue generation under the proposed structure and expressed concern regarding the magnitude of the proposed increases. He suggested that the rate of revenue generation for infrastructure replacement may be higher than necessary. Mr. Despain indicated that the goal is to generate approximately \$1 million annually, which could be leveraged with additional funding sources.

Discussion continued regarding the treatment of different user types, including businesses that rely heavily on water for operations. Councilmember Ted Munford expressed concern that the rate structure may disproportionately impact certain businesses compared to residential users and suggested exploring whether other municipalities differentiate between discretionary and essential water use. Mr. Despain stated that some jurisdictions allow limited exceptions, such as for food production, and noted that the proposal includes an appeals process for unique circumstances.

Councilmember Nick Porter stated that the proposed rates more accurately reflect the true cost of providing water service and noted that the City has historically operated with comparatively low water rates. Mayor Corey Foley acknowledged the need to address infrastructure, drought conditions, and increasing costs, but expressed concern regarding the cumulative financial impact on residents and businesses, including potential pass-through costs such as rent increases and higher service prices. He emphasized the importance of considering real-world impacts while recognizing the significant effort that staff has put into developing the proposal.

Mr. Despain presented proposed conservation stages, including Stage 2 and Stage 3 rates, which would be implemented based on defined water supply conditions. He explained that these stages are designed to encourage reduced usage rather than increase revenue, noting that base rates would decrease under conservation stages while higher usage tiers would increase significantly. He outlined specific trigger conditions, including snowpack levels, stream flows, system demand, and available supply, and stated that decisions to implement conservation stages would be made by the Public Works Committee based on these criteria.

City Manager Quinn Bennion clarified that Stage 1 represents normal operations, while Stage 2 would likely apply in drier years, and Stage 3 would be reserved for rare and severe water

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shortages. He emphasized that Stage 3 conditions would represent a critical situation requiring significant reductions in water use. Discussion also included communication strategies, with Mr. Despain noting that the City would utilize multiple channels, including mailers, the City website, social media, and the Genasys notification systems, to inform the public.

Additional discussion addressed system deficiencies and water loss. Water Superintendent Ivan Merrell stated that the City's infrastructure is significantly outdated, noting that many components, including fire hydrants and cast iron lines, exceed their useful life and contribute to water loss. He stated that the system is substantially behind on replacement efforts and emphasized the need to increase the pace of improvements. Councilmember Ted Munford acknowledged the need for system replacement but requested additional clarity regarding the extent and sources of water loss within the system.

Mr. Despain concluded by stating that the purpose of the discussion was to present the proposed rate structure and receive feedback. He requested that the Council consider scheduling a public hearing at a special meeting to be held two weeks from the date of the discussion to allow for public input, after which the Council could consider formal adoption of the proposed rates.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE PROPOSED WATER RATE STRUCTURE AND CONSERVATION RATES

Mayor Corey Foley invited public comment regarding the proposed water rate structure and recognized Mr. Zach Galloway, local business owner of Mort's Car Wash, to address the Council.

Mr. Zach Galloway expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak and provided comments regarding the proposed rate increases and their impact on his business. He stated that, based on his analysis, the proposed Stage 1 rates would result in an approximate 77 percent annual increase in water costs, equating to an estimated \$36,000 increase per year. He further noted that higher conservation stages could result in substantially greater monthly increases. Mr. Galloway explained that such increases would significantly affect his operations and the approximately 17 employees who rely on the business for income.

Mr. Galloway stated that commercial car washes provide water conservation benefits when compared to residential vehicle washing. He explained that commercial equipment uses significantly less water per minute than a standard residential hose and cited industry data indicating that commercial car washes may reduce water usage by approximately 60 percent. He expressed concern that increased costs may lead customers to wash vehicles at home, resulting in greater overall water usage rather than conservation.

Mr. Galloway further discussed consumer behavior, stating that customers are unlikely to stop washing their vehicles and may instead shift to less efficient methods if commercial services become cost prohibitive. He encouraged the Council to consider rate structures or exceptions that recognize businesses that provide net water-saving benefits.

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Mr. Galloway also addressed broader water usage in the basin, noting that the majority of water is allocated to agricultural use, with a smaller percentage attributed to municipal, commercial, and residential use. He suggested that conservation efforts should be considered in a broader regional context and expressed concern that the proposed rate increases may not result in meaningful overall water savings.

Councilmember Ted Munford expressed appreciation for the presentation and stated that he found the comments and perspective valuable.

Mayor Corey Foley thanked Mr. Galloway for his comments and acknowledged the perspective provided, noting the importance of considering both conservation goals and the impact on local businesses.

FURTHER COUNCIL DISCUSSION ON THE PROPOSED WATER RATES

Following public comment, City Manager Quinn Bennion asked the Council whether they were comfortable publishing the proposed rates for the required public hearing or whether they wanted adjustments made before publication. Councilmember Nick Porter stated that he preferred publishing the proposed rates as presented and considering any adjustments after public input. Councilmember Ted Munford stated that he would consider increasing the gallon thresholds, such as moving the residential base from 4,000 gallons to 6,000 gallons, but noted that this would not fully address his concern that different types of water use may need to be evaluated differently.

Councilmember Ed Long stated that he generally supported the direction of the proposed structure but wanted to hear additional public input before making a decision. He noted that the public comment received raised some concerns, particularly regarding commercial rates, and stated that the purpose of the next meeting should be to receive public input and take that information under advisement. Water Superintendent Ivan Merrell emphasized the urgency of adopting conservation rates, stating that the City is facing a water shortage for the upcoming summer and does not currently have conservation rates in place.

Mayor Corey Foley stated that the issue is difficult because the City is facing multiple challenges at once, including drought conditions, needed infrastructure replacement, and rising costs. He expressed concern that the public hearing may be challenging for residents to understand when comparing Stage 1 and Stage 2 rates, but stated that the matter is serious and must be carefully considered. Mayor Foley stated for the record that Community Impact Board (CIB) funding is derived from mineral lease revenues generated within the local area and expressed concern that the community does not receive a proportionate share of those funds. He noted that while the City is appreciative of the funding it has received, he believes the allocation is insufficient given the impacts experienced locally and stated that communities should have greater access to those resources.

Mr. Bennion stated that recent City water projects have often received approximately 70 percent grant funding and 30 percent loan funding, but noted that the most recent project was funded at a

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50/50 grant and loan ratio. He stated that while the City has needed to address conservation rates and infrastructure funding, the current difficult water year has created an opportunity to have the discussion while water is at the forefront of public concern.

Mr. Merrell stated that the proposed conservation rates are not being considered lightly and would only be used when the City is facing an actual physical shortage of water. He emphasized that the purpose of the conservation rates is not to generate revenue, but to reduce water usage. Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll expressed concern for both residents and businesses, noting that while residents may be able to reduce some usage, certain businesses and institutions, such as hospitals and car washes, may have limited ability to conserve without affecting operations. Councilmember Porter suggested that if the City can distinguish between landscaping use and necessary operational water use, that distinction may be worth exploring.

STAFF REPORTS

Mayor Corey Foley reported on the recent Ashley Valley Sewer Management Board meeting, stating that the lift station project is progressing well. He noted that bypass pumping has been successfully completed, requiring continuous operation for 21 days, 24 hours per day, which was completed ahead of the anticipated 30-day schedule. Mayor Foley stated that completion of this phase is a significant milestone and provides relief to those managing operations at the facility.

Councilmember Ed Long reported on the Recreation District Board meeting, providing an update on the Vernal construction project. He stated that the project is currently anticipated to be completed in December or January and is progressing smoothly. Councilmember Long noted that approximately 40 percent of subcontractors involved in the project are local, with an estimated \$2.1 million being spent with local subcontractors, reflecting an effort to keep project funds within the community.

City Manager Quinn Bennion reported that a part-time Code Enforcement Officer began employment earlier in the week. He also noted that upcoming conferences include the Utah City Managers Conference and the Utah League of Cities and Towns Conference, which some staff members will be attending.

Mr. Bennion further reported on the recent Planning Commission meeting, which included significant public participation and extended over approximately four and a half hours. He stated that two major rezoning requests were considered. The request to rezone property on 500 West from R-3 to R-4 received a recommendation of approval to the City Council by a vote of 4-1. A separate request to rezone property on 500 North from RA-1 to R-3 failed to receive a recommendation, with a vote of 2-3. He noted that both items are scheduled to be considered by the City Council at the May 6 meeting.

Mayor Corey Foley stated that he has already received public inquiries regarding the rezoning matters and noted that residents have expressed concern. Mr. Bennion advised the Council to be mindful of ex parte communications related to zoning matters, emphasizing the importance of

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transparency and encouraging residents to provide comments during public meetings or through formal written submissions to ensure all information is available to the full Council.

Assistant City Manager and Planning Director Braeden Christofferson stated that the Council will be provided with the Planning Commission packet materials, including public comments and meeting minutes, in advance of the upcoming meeting.

CLOSED SESSION

Mayor Corey Foley announced the closed session portion of the meeting would be held in the Jury Room following the exit of the present members of the public. *Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll moved to go into closed session for the following items:*

- 1. Strategy session to discuss pending or reasonably imminent litigation*

Councilmember Nick Porter seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with all in favor.

RECONVENE INTO OPEN SESSION AND ADJOURN: The meeting reconvened into an open session. There being no further business; *Councilmember Robin O'Driscoll moved to adjourn. Councilmember Ted Munford seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was declared adjourned.*