

Bluff Town Council Regular Meeting **DRAFT** Minutes

Tuesday, May 5, 2026, at 4:00 pm MDT

In Person

Bluff Community Center Building
190 N 3rd E Street, Bluff, UT 84512

Virtual Meeting

via Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/92499673928>
via Phone: 7193594580, 92499673928#

4:00pm Meeting Called to Order and Roll Call

Town Council: Mayor Josh Ewing, Jennifer Davila, Gary Haws, Britt Hornsby, Spencer Wade
Staff: Erin Nelson, Malia Collins

Approval of Bluff Town Council Meeting Minutes from April 21, 2026 Regular Meeting

Ewing calls for a vote for April 21 meeting minutes, all in favor, none opposed, motion passes unanimously.

Public Comment: Gary Lichtenstein (4:02pm) Gratitude expressed to Town Council and list of experience, specifically Fire Chief and owner of Quality Evaluation Designs. While in role as Bluff Fire Dept Assistant Chief, he explored the challenge of a sustainable fire dept by contacting other small-town Fire Chiefs and board chairs. The following questions he hopes will help frame upcoming discussions: What does Town promise residents and specifically businesses with a \$50,000 tax increase? With ~\$25,000 for salary, can the other ~\$25,000 could be used for a brush truck or mechanical repairs? How will Fire/EMS be staffed? Currently both operate on skeleton crews, struggling to recruit and engage the current crews. What is the administrative structure? Will this make Fire/EMS fall under the Town? Is Bluff prepared to pay for the liability? What is the cost to run a sustainable fire department? His figures show ~\$230,000 is the estimate he has configured, price does not change much for population of 5,000 or a town of 200. Is \$50,000 enough or too much? Only way to determine value is to ask what first what the outcomes are we plan to achieve.

Ewing responded that the conversation is just beginning and mentioned the open house May 19.

Presentation

Jeremy Hoggard speaking about San Juan County's proposal to implement a 1% sales tax Increase for San Juan County Emergency Medical Services (4:06pm): Hoggard, San Juan County EMS Director provided an update and details regarding the sales tax campaign to be on ballot Fall 2026.

Facts: Combined on call time in 2025 was ~54,000 hours; 5 full-time staff & 35 part-time staff ranging in many certification levels, up to paramedic; 2 transporting ambulances 24 hours/day, 7 days/week; Bluff's ambulance has been upgraded to transport when the two Bluff EMTs are responding. Legislative Session 2024 - SB215 grants authority and requires municipalities & counties to ensure minimal amount of EMS services. **Current Funding:** SJC has borne the brunt of this cost and is currently exploring ways to make it sustainable; few funding options are offered in this bill. SJC 2026 EMS Budget: ~\$1,060,000.00 with projected income ~\$707,309 and staff ~\$734,636, operating budget at ~\$360,000, previous years the additional has come from general fund and is not sustainable nor allow for growth or improvements. Land mass is 5,000 square mile service area. Response time at ~5.7 minutes. In 2025, SJC EMS responded to 591 calls and transported 449 patients, can only bill for patients transported and 142 of those were unbillable. 3 years of data shows that ~37% of call volume consists of visitors/outside service area (La Sal, Blanding, Monticello, Bluff, Mexican Hat) with interlocal agreement with UNHS to service Navajo Nation. Low Call Volume increases the fixed cost/call ~\$1,670 with average collection of ~\$700/call.

Challenges: inadequate reimbursement system (not unique to our area), money comes from call volume; 64% of calls are Medicare/Medicaid, 30-40% of these bills received; staffing - competing jobs, training requirements, traveling into town for shift, and burnout; long transport times; ambulance costs have increased from \$200,000 up to \$350,000. For one, Full-time Advanced Life Support ambulance fully staffed costs ~\$1.2M per year.

Options: Cut services (currently on skeleton crew, so tough to do), Property Tax Increase (only effects residents), or (Recommendation) Rural Health Care Sales Tax (County Commission Support, most fair way to support as visitors will also help fund). Current campaign is a Rural Health Care Sales Tax at 1%, this is not a tax on non-prepared food, fuel or prescription medications. Estimated revenue would generate ~\$1.2M. **Things to spend it on:** additional full-time staff (should be looked at as a career, not volunteer-based venture) which will reduce response time; establish replacement fund for ambulances, station improvements and equipment (range from 2002-2019). Looking for champions of the initiative and to help support and share details with the general public. 54,000 volunteer hours are worth ~\$38/hour, totaling millions of dollars that have been donated, time for the public to give back and support.

Council Discussion: Ewing inquired if Commission has formally decided to do this: Yes, at a work session, verbal confirmation was received. Will be on the ballot this Fall 2026. Bluff resort tax is 1% of the sales tax in Bluff, by looking at what the resort tax brings in, we can estimate the amount Bluff will contribute to this sales tax, ~\$125,000-\$150,000 annually. Ewing emphasizes that this is a great way for Bluff to contribute to supporting EMS and the County. This tax increase may decrease the amount the County needs to contribute from General Fund, last 2 years at \$300,000 annually. Nelson mentioned previous conversations that the municipalities would need to pay into EMS at ~\$40,000 annually, this sales tax would eliminate the need. Added benefit that there is also an impact of visitors who are nearly 40% of the EMS calls. Ewing inquired who the 'We' is supporting the campaign. SJC cannot spend money on the campaign, looking for grassroots partnerships. Currently working for proposition number from County to create a support structure to purchase signage, etc. Wade inquired about other communities successfully doing this: Wayne Co, Wasatch Co, Moab/Grand Co (helped stabilize their system- nearly had to cut service), Summit Co, Garfield Co, Beaver City.

Unfinished Business

1. [Report on Disconnection Finalization \(Nelson\) \(4:32pm\)](#): Nelson reported the disconnection of 5,310.07 acres certified by the Lieutenant Governor, officially certified on April 24, 2026. On an earlier version of agenda, 'roads manifest to include the addition of Copper Cliffs II' has been rescheduled for later approval to allow Mr Simpson to attend meeting in person. The UDOT update will be in the next week to ten days. Legal Counsel has all disconnect papers in their record, as does Town of Bluff.
2. [Open BRICC Fire Suppression Sealed Bids \(Collins\)](#): Collins issued RFP for Fire Suppression and received one bid from System Service Specialist Inc which broke their bid into multiple sections: Design (\$89,250), Fire Alarm (\$58,500), Underground work (\$54,750), Kitchen Hood (\$1,550), Fire Cabinets (\$145/cabinet + \$500 install) totaling \$204,050. Collins will confirm that the bid is complete and meet with Design Review Committee prior to the meeting on Thursday at 5:00pm.
3. [Review and Discuss Bluff Rural Innovation Civic Center \(BRICC\) Window Replacement Quotes](#): Collins read three quotes: TWS Construction (\$37,700); Utah Window Experts (\$12,984.03); Clarity Glass LLC (\$36,500). Collins will review quotes and meet with DRC prior to Thursday's meeting.
4. [Review and Discuss Bluff Rural Innovation Civic Center \(BRICC\) Selective Demolition Quotes](#): Pueblo Tierra Construction (\$119,800); DRL Enterprises (\$79,250); TWS Construction Inc (\$145,800). Collins will review quotes and meet with DRC prior to Thursday's meeting.

5. [Update on Building Department staffing \(Nelson\) \(4:42pm\)](#): Nelson reported that Blanding City has been assisting Bluff Building with inspections through interlocal agreement on a temporary basis. Building Department Inspector job posting with one applicant received, Ben Tomko, who has all certifications except the 40-hour class for building officials. A Job offer extended and accepted, start date: Friday, May 8, 2026. Blanding will help with transition over the next week. Kristen Bushnell will continue serving as Permit Technician. Both building dept individuals' salaries have been accounted for in the budgets. Shoutout to Bushnell for all her hard work keeping the building dept moving forward during the transition. building@townofbluff.gov if anyone has building-related questions. Reminder to keep in mind that Tomko has another job and will schedule inspections in advance, residents should not expect same-day inspections. Penalty fees will begin to be imposed if permit is not received prior to building.

New Business

6. [Intention by Budget Officer Mayor Ewing to make a statement that the Town of Bluff is proposing a Tentative Budget that includes a Property Tax Increase for the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 \(4:47pm\)](#): Multiple bills passed in last UT legislature requiring multiple things to be said, early and often. Ewing stated it is his intention to make the statement that a property tax increase is being pursued. Budget Officer Mayor Ewing then read agenda item #7.
7. [Budget Officer Mayor Ewing presentation of Impact Statement that the Town of Bluff is proposing a Tentative Budget for Fiscal Year 2026-2027 which includes a Property Tax Increase of \\$50,000 to fund Emergency Services including an Emergency Services Administrative Manager, and if this tax rate increase is pursued, the Town of Bluff will hold a duly noticed public hearing on the increase. \(4:49pm\)](#) Ewing stated all of the following:
 - a. The Town of Bluff is considering levying a property tax rate that exceeds the certified tax rate. This would increase the certified tax rate from 0.000545104 to approximately 0.00113663. The additional ad valorem tax revenue generated by the proposed increase is \$50,000, resulting in a total proposed collection of \$83,186 for the Town of Bluff. (4:49pm)
 - b. The approximate percentage increase of ad valorem tax revenue generated by the proposed property tax increase is 151% (4:50pm)
 - c. The additional tax revenue generated by the proposed property tax increase will fund a Part-Time Emergency Services Administrative Manager Position, as well as support routine maintenance, equipment, and expenses for emergency services. (4:50pm) When emergency services is stated: Fire and EMS are both included.
 - d. The Town of Bluff will provide notice of, and conduct, a public hearing at which members of the public will have an opportunity to provide comments specifically regarding the proposed property tax rate increase. This public hearing will take place in early August 2026 at the Bluff Community Center located at 190 N 3rd E Street, Bluff, UT 84512, as well as virtually via Zoom. We are coordinating with San Juan County to identify a date and time for this public hearing. (4:50pm)

PROPOSED PROPERTY TAX IMPACT SCHEDULE

TOWN OF BLUFF

Town of Bluff will consider an increase to its property tax rate from 0.000543 to 0.001366 (estimated) to generate an additional \$50,000 in revenue. The following information is intended to provide decisions makers and the public with an explanation of how the Town's operations would be affected if the proposed property tax increase is adopted.

Town of Bluff's Current Property Tax Rate	0.000543
Town of Bluff's Current Property Tax Revenue	\$33,186
Proposed Revenue with Tax Change	\$83,186
New Property Tax Revenue to Town of Bluff	\$50,000

Estimated Increase to Town of Bluff's Property Tax Revenue 151%

Estimated increase to a primary residence with a market value of \$233,800 is \$105.61 annually.

Estimated Increase to a primary residence with a market value of \$500,000 is \$225.85 annually.

Estimated increase to a business property with a market value of \$443,600 is \$364.32 annually.

Estimated increase to a business property with a market value of \$1,000,000 is \$1,366.39 annually.

Impact of Tax Increase: The Town of Bluff will hire a part-time Emergency Services Administrative Manager to oversee required administrative and maintenance functions, serve as the designated Emergency Manager representing Bluff for local and regional emergency coordination planning efforts, and manage obligations set forth in Bluff's contractual Cooperative Agreement with the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands. The increase will also support additional emergency services equipment.

Total General Fund Change: \$50,000

The above 'estimated increase' numbers are estimated because the state has not provided this information but will provide it later in the year and will be shared. This is why the public hearings are to be held in August. Businesses will take a large portion of this hit, as they do not receive the 55% primary residence rate. Council may decide not to do this, but to have the option to pursue, this meeting must have all information presented.

Discussion: During the process, do we have to stick with what has been stated today in regard to usage of the funds? The funds would have to stay within the same budget line item (Emergency Services). However, if in a few years, the additional revenue becomes earmarked for something separate, that is allowed. (If this happens, State Legislature may pass law forbidding this.) Can the total amount be decreased during this process? Yes, formal adoption of budget may allow a decrease. Reality is that the value of tax dollars decrease annually due to inflation and since taxes have never gone up.

Open House May 19 at 5:30pm to discuss this further. Working with Chief DiLego to help define why the position is needed, previous Fire Chiefs have taken on thousands of hours of paperwork. Bandwidth is decreasing in Fire Dept and with the increased number of unfunded mandates coming from Legislature, something must be done. Davila clarified this is not Bluff taking over either of these departments, but showing our support for the services and our willingness to 'put some skin in the game'.

8. [Presentation of Drafted Tentative FY2027 Budget \(5:02pm\)](#): UT law requires a tentative budget to be adopted first meeting of May, which shows the public this is what is being considered, may not be what

the final budget looks like later in 2026. Nelson will update language on this budget to say 'tentative budget'. Changes: General Fund decrease due to Capital Projects moved to the Capital Projects Fund. Previously funds were moved back and forth from General Fund and Capital Projects, update ensures it rolls over annually and makes accounting clearer. BRICC/CCC/Old Elementary School is a Special Revenue Fund and will stay as a required transfer to the General Fund. Total annual tentative budget FY27: \$711,031. Increased funds to: BOB, Emergency Services (Property Tax Increase Proposal to fund), Retirement & Health Care for Full-time Employees, Dark Sky, Wayfinding Project (hopeful to find Grant funds), Part-time Maintenance Position, Part-time Notetaker Position.

9. [Discussion and Vote to approve Resolution #103 Adopting Tentative FY2027 Budget and Date of FY2027 Budget Public Hearing June 2, 2026, at 6:00 PM \(5:10pm\)](#): Per the law, the budget must be adopted at this meeting. Haws unable to find some codes listed: 10-6-110 corrected to 10-6-111, 59-2-4ai corrected to 59-2-3, 10-6-1105, & UAC 105-108. Due to UT Code changing, may be best to remove all code numbers and just state 'UT Code'. Nelson adjusting and will share edited later this meeting, as it must be approved.
(5:40): Nelson reviewed code and removed specific references to the code, Title only referencing 10-6 because it covers all of the budget. Budget Public Hearing must be scheduled, Nelson recommends Tuesday, June 2 prior to the Regular Meeting. Roll Call Vote for Resolution #103 Hornsby- aye, Wade – aye, Ewing – aye, Davila – aye, Haws – aye.
10. [Confirm date and time of Your Town at Budget at Work Open House Event on Tuesday, May 19th from 6:00 – 7:30PM at the Bluff Community Center \(5:21pm\)](#): Discussion of the Open House event: Start with 15-20 minute presentation then break-out groups (Fire/EMS Station, BRICC Project, Business-related expenses – BOB & Wayfinding Project) in which Council members tabling to share information with members of the public. Proposed to host this after normal meeting on Tuesday, May 19 from 6-7:30pm.
11. [Discussion and planning for Budget Open House for assignments, breakouts, council member responsibilities \(5:23pm\)](#): Business Owners of Bluff/Wayfinding/Dark Sky: Davila & Burak or Davidson; Fire/EMS: DiLego & Ewing; BRICC: Collins & Hornsby; Secondary Water: McDermott & Haws; General Budget Questions: Nelson; Roads: Haviken & Wade.
Haws to contact McDermott, Davila to contact Davidson and Burak, Wade to contact Haviken.
Recommendation to invite Building Department, may be worth doing a separate Building Open House. Davila supports this format to review and discuss the budget.
12. [Councilmember Gary Haws representing Bluff non-profit Hozho Horse Haven's request for reimbursement for feral horse capture and removal within town boundaries \(Haws/All\) \(5:30pm\)](#): Haws has started a non-profit Hozho Horse Haven that captures, houses, feeds and transports feral horses. Proposal for Bluff to cover the cost of round-up, which the County was previously completing and Hozho Horse billing Bluff for. The non-profit will pay for the housing, feeding and additional responsibilities cost. Suggestion to pay this from the 'Enforcement' budget line item. Davila recommends billing this from 'public nuisance' since an animal ordinance has not been passed. Council voiced no concerns and comfortable moving forward.

Reminders & Other

13. [Reminder of Bluff Rural Innovation Civic Center \(BRICC\) Special Meeting on May 7th at 5:00 PM \(5:34pm\)](#): Attendance may be in-person or virtual. Nelson requests an additional Special Meeting on Tuesday, May 12 after the Work Session to approve Roads Manifest and meet in-person with landowners.
14. [Other \(5:35pm\)](#):

Wildlands Conservancy is applying for grant funds through the State for planning a trail, requesting a letter of support. Ewing comfortable completing this letter with council approval. Council comfortable with the letter.

USU is hosting a meeting on May 19 on how they can help with workforce housing and training at 10:00am at USU Blanding, Ewing and Nelson plan to attend.

Mosquito Abatement – contact Malia Collins if someone has standing water for pellets, otherwise Collins will do species identification and contact Town with additional information.

Adjourned at 5:45pm

For requests to receive emails/meeting invitations, email office@townofbluffutah.gov

Minute Taker: Malia Collins

Draft Minutes Published: 5/11/2026

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