

PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

*Recommend the adoption of the
Water Use & Preservation Element of the Grand County General Plan*

TO: Grand County Planning Commission
FROM: Andrew K. Jackson, AICP, CTP — County Planner
DATE: June 1, 2026
HEARING: June 22, 2026
RE: Water Use & Preservation Element of the Grand County General Plan (06-01-26 Edition)

Request

Staff requests that the Planning Commission hold a public hearing and forward a recommendation to the Grand County Commission to adopt the Water Use & Preservation Element (the “Element”) as a component of the Grand County General Plan. The Element was prepared in cooperation with the Grand Water and Sewer Service Agency (GWSSA), the Thompson Special Service Water District (TSSWD), and the Arches Special Service District (ASSD).

Statutory Authority & Compliance

Utah Code §17-79-403(2)(v), as amended by Senate Bill 110 (2022) and Senate Bill 76 (2023), directs the County to incorporate a water use and preservation element into its general plan. The statute requires the element to address four subjects. The Element responds to each, as summarized below:

Statutory requirement	Where addressed
(A) Effect of permitted development and land use patterns on water demand and infrastructure	Section 5
(B) Methods of reducing water demand for future development	Section 6
(C) Methods of reducing water demand for existing development	Section 7
(D) Opportunities for the County to modify operations to eliminate water waste	Section 8

Because the Element amends the General Plan, adoption follows the General Plan amendment process under Utah Code Title 17, Chapter 79, including Planning Commission review and a public hearing, a recommendation to the County Commission, and adoption by the County Commission after its own public hearing.

Nature of the Document

The Element is a policy and coordination tool, not a regulatory ordinance or capital commitment. As stated in its disclaimer, it does not guarantee water availability, allocate or administer water rights (a function of the Utah Division of Water Rights), or obligate any provider to serve. The County does not own or operate public water systems; its role is to align land-use decisions with provider capabilities and to require will-serve confirmation before approval.

Key Findings

- **Setting:** Grand County is an arid, groundwater-dependent county; recharge relies on La Sal Mountain snowpack and cannot be assumed to expand with growth.
- **Growth:** Population is projected to rise from roughly 10,000 (2025) to about 14,300 (2065), with substantial seasonal tourism demand on top of the resident baseline.
- **Current demand:** Total system demand is approximately 2,400–2,500 acre-feet/year — about 988 AF culinary and about 1,490 AF irrigation/secondary.
- **Per capita use:** System-wide use is about 184 GPCD, currently within the State’s regional conservation target.
- **Primary lever:** Outdoor culinary irrigation is the largest and most controllable component of demand and the chief driver of peak system stress.
- **System loss:** Distribution losses run about 7–8% of culinary production (roughly 80–90 AF/year).
- **Savings potential:** Combined conservation and infrastructure measures can reduce demand by an estimated 800–1,500+ AF/year — enough to offset projected growth and hold total demand near current levels.
- **Constrained areas:** Crescent Junction and Thompson Springs remain water-constrained following the UMTRA cleanup and require demonstrated water rights and new infrastructure before significant development.

Principal Policy Direction

- Align growth with water availability and verified infrastructure capacity (water-rights documentation, provider will-serve, and peak-demand capacity at development review).
- Reserve treated drinking water for indoor use and shift outdoor irrigation to non-potable sources or secondary water, requiring connection where GWSSA secondary infrastructure exists and evaluating feasibility elsewhere.
- Reduce outdoor demand through landscape and irrigation standards (limit non-functional turf, drought-tolerant planting, drip and smart controllers).
- Reduce demand in existing development through turf-conversion incentives, retrofits, provider pricing/demand management, and leak reduction.
- Lead by example through County facility and landscape efficiency improvements.
- Strengthen regional coordination and pursue funding, primarily through the Permanent Community Impact Board (PCIB).

General Plan Consistency

The Element is consistent with and advances the goals of the Grand County General Plan. It provides a framework for evaluating the relationship among development, water demand, and infrastructure, and it outlines the development-review criteria, goals, policies, and a 2026–2040+ phasing strategy needed to implement it. It does not conflict with other adopted plans; in the event of conflict, state law and water-rights administration control, and provider service determinations prevail.

Public Process

- Notice of public hearing published and posted per Utah Code requirements.
- Coordination with GWSSA, TSSWD, and ASSD during preparation.
- Public comment received at the hearing and incorporated as appropriate.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission forward a **positive recommendation** to the Grand County Commission to adopt the Water Use & Preservation Element (06-01-26 Edition) as a component of the Grand County General Plan.

Suggested Motion

"I move that the Planning Commission recommend that the Grand County Commission adopt the Water Use & Preservation Element of the Grand County General Plan (06-01-26 Edition), based on the findings and analysis in the staff report and the public record."

Attachments

- Water Use & Preservation Element of the Grand County General Plan (06-01-26 Edition)
- Public hearing notice