

Bluff Town Council
Public Hearing on Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Tentative Budget **Approved** Minutes
Tuesday, June 2, 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#

4:06pm 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

1. **Statements from Budget Officer Mayor Ewing:** Ewing shared a request received from former Mayor Leppanen requesting that all written public comments be spoken into the record. Ewing indicated he was not inclined to do so, as the written comments total approximately 25 pages and the town is not legally required to share the written comments in the public hearing. The council discussed the options. There were concerns raised about the difficulty of navigating the website; the importance of this topic; fairness of reading comments out loud which would exceed the 3-minute time limit those making verbal public comments; request for public comment link to be more readily available on town website and providing a physical copy in the town office; if public comments are read aloud it has the potential to become less of a hearing and more of a back and forth due to one resident making multiple comments. Mayor Ewing made the final decision not to read all written comments aloud and emphasized that written comments are encouraged by all, as three minutes does not always feel like enough time to say what needs to be said. The Council committed to reading all public comments and will continue listening to the public regarding this topic.
At next week's work session, Council will discuss what was heard and changes to the budget. FY26/27 Budget Approval will be in 2 weeks during the June 16 Regular Meeting. The last day for written public comments is Friday, June 12, 2026 @ 5:00pm.

Ewing reviewed the process of budget approval and truth in taxation. Each year, budgets must be approved for the following Fiscal Year (FY) by the end of June, regardless of whether the truth in taxation process is occurring. Entities are required to follow specific procedures for proposed property tax increases including hosting a Truth in Taxation public hearing which is scheduled for Wednesday, August 5, 2026 at 6:00pm. If the FY26/27 proposed budget is approved, the funds to be received from a property tax increase may not be spent until the truth in taxation process is complete. If the proposed property tax increase goes into effect, it will reflect on this year's property tax bill mailed to property owners in late Fall 2026. The public hearing date is later than the traditional June budget timeframe because the County Assessor's office has tasks through early June, delaying final calculations for the Certified Tax Rate which reports to the County and State.

2. **Presentation of Town of Bluff Property Tax Statement**

Mayor Ewing shared the following information:

- 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 0.00113663.
- b. 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.

- c. The approximate percentage increase of ad valorem tax revenue generated by the proposed property tax increase is 151%
 - d. The additional tax revenue generated by the proposed property tax increase will fund a Part-Time Emergency Services Coordinator Position, as well as support routine maintenance and expenses for emergency services.
 - e. The Town of Bluff will provide notice of, and conduct, a **Truth-in-Taxation Public Hearing** at which members of the public will have an opportunity to provide comments specifically regarding the proposed property tax rate increase on **Wednesday, August 5, 2026 at 6:00 pm MDT at the Bluff Community Center located at 190 N 3rd E Street, Bluff, UT 84512**. The public may also attend virtually via Zoom.
3. Brief Presentation of Tentative FY2027 Budget for fiscal year July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027, including proposed property tax increase: Ewing reviewed the presentation shared during the May 19 Open House Event, and encouraged listeners to review the full presentation which was recorded. Review of Emergency Service investment including administrative support, HB48 responsibilities, grant writing and others. Other FY27 changes noted: Roads, Bluff Rural Innovation and Civic Center (BRICC) renovation project, Minute Taker Role, Community Promotion and more.
4. Public Comment to be taken on Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Tentative Budget which includes a proposed property tax increase:
- Linda Sosa:** property owner – against the increase of property tax and requests council to vote against the proposed budget and prevent the public hearing in August. Mayor Ewing and Chief DiLego need to work together and with Council to create a job description and create a plan. Transparency is the most important thing we do as a town. This plan has certainly not been run by the town lawyer. Sosa is not opposed to the position but recommends that they start hourly and work their way up to salary, as Erin and Malia both have. Job is the main reason given to raise property tax while Fire/EMS are free services from the County. The town has plenty of funds to pay hourly for this position, no reason to put property and business owners through this financial upheaval. The current letter from DiLego can be summed up as, ‘give us money, we have no plan’.

Ann Leppanen: resident & voter – impressed that Council has tackled the truth in taxation process and commended them on how well budgeting has gone, it is not an easy task. Reminders: Two years ago commercial businesses were hammered with tax appraisals. She does not know how council can expect all to pay additional funds in a few months with what has happened to commercial businesses. Request to slow it up and spend time looking at the net impact of a tax increase. Recommendation to talk to Bob Springmeyer who follows trends. Noted that creating a position for a named person does not have a good optic. Everyone in town agrees that Fire/EMS services are important, but a longer-range plan may be best. Would like to see further digging into the allowances to fund a specific position with property taxes. Request for public comments to be available for computer-challenged individuals to view. Many thanks to Council.

Luanne Hook: Former council member, business owner, resident & Member of Fire Dept – Request to table the property tax increase, this has probably turned out to be more divisive than the Council had anticipated. Hitting businesses in a low, not a good time to ask them to pay again, town gets a lot from the businesses already. Many thanks to all Bluff Volunteers: Council, Water Board, Food Bank, Festival

Coordinators, Planning and Zoning, etc. This is a slippery slope, by picking one volunteer and paying them, which others will you not pay? If the goal is to give all volunteers in town a paid job, point that out. The goal in last 10 years has not been to pay all volunteer positions. Suggestion to put tax increase on the ballot to remove stress from Council. Maximum a municipality can collect is .007, and it makes her nervous that the taxes will continue to increase.

Marx Powell: Resident – Misconception that if we don't agree to this tax, we will lose EMS services, completely untrue. Even with a tax increase, Bluff can't afford to support this program. Implied that volunteerism is becoming unsustainable and people need to be paid. Tax provides salary for 1 part-time person while leaving all others on a volunteer basis. Most small towns, including Bluff, are built on volunteers as most small towns cannot create revenue to sustain themselves without creating an economic hardship on the majority of its residents. County portion of property tax is 300% higher than Bluff's and most of which is funding for Fire/EMS. Our valuation went from 24.7M to 60.9M resulting in more taxes being paid, why doesn't Bluff petition for more tax revenue from SJ County? Bluff chose incorporation to 'Keep Bluff Bluff' and it has resulted in a larger economic burden on businesses, more expensive and more rules for residents. Not sure how much longer we can sustain this. To go from volunteerism and paying people, we will no longer be able to sustain ourselves. Agree with Hook that this should be tabled and not addressed until we can fund it.

Susan Liza Duran: Business Owner & Resident – 40th anniversary as business owner in Bluff this year. Opposed to raising property taxes, believes there are other places to look for the money, including budget surplus. If this is a valuable position, seek other methods to pay for it. One thing she has learned by owning a business is that things must start slow. Commend all volunteers in Bluff and agrees that the business owners were slammed with an increase in property taxes 2 years ago. This is not a good year to come after businesses, referencing gas prices and recommends finding other sources of funding.

Kelly Martin: Business Owner – fortifying what is being said. No anger to individuals but emphasized that businesses have been hammered with property taxes and this is the wrong time. Employees are making more than business owners in an effort to treat people right. This is the wrong time.

Kate Aitchison: Business Owner, Member of Fire Dept & Resident – As a member of community and BVFD and a young person in Bluff it is important to invest meaningful financial support for the Bluff Fire Dept for the volunteering and risk-taking they've done for many years. As a young person and one of 2 firefighters under 50 until last night. As a business owner that rents space, all rent goes toward the landlord's property tax, she is looking to the future. Crucial to contribute to opportunities for more young people to come to town and have meaningful, well-paying work. Believes it is essential to create a community that values its public infrastructure and supports this. This position would be a way to continue to grow extremely necessary and fundamental services. Both Town Manager & Administrative Director have streamlined services, increased town budget, secured funding and more. This position will also be able to work in a similar capacity and can only imagine how positive it will be. Based on the presentation, because of the way taxes work in Utah, Bluff's tax revenue is decreasing over time due to inflation, hurting the town's ability to provide infrastructure and services. Volunteerism looks different than it did when BVFD first formed, Fire Volunteers have served the town in ways no other volunteer can, as the June 1 Bluff Fire Department event demonstrated. We now understand the toxic nature of smoke coming from buildings, no more pregnant responders and equipment is expensive and requires maintenance. Insurance, State and Federal requirements all make

the job of a volunteer much harder and more complex. This position will allow the fire chief and other volunteers the time to focus on responding to calls and training for said calls. The original reason for creation of the BVFD was to help lower fire insurance cost for property owners and since has worked to lower fire risk ever since. This position would help the department meet the complex demands and transform them to exist in a way that will help respond to emergencies and help community and land thrive. If BVFD cannot keep up, it will be tragic but put unknown financial burdens on property owners. She suggests choosing a way in which we can invest financially and a way we choose to achieve the best results for both town and the fire department.

Jim Hook: Resident, Volunteer & Business Owner – many thanks for Council for their work on this controversial project. Echoed Marx that we are a town of volunteers, thanks to all. Fire Department will not disappear. His worry is that we are looking for money before having a plan, Strategic Plan is a good idea, no need to fund something without a plan in place. BVFD will not go away, retired fire fighters will step back in before they let it fail. Request to table the tax, create a strategic plan with residential and fire fighter input. Many thanks to all for what you do and what you do for me.

5. [Adjourn back to Regular Bluff Town Council Meeting](#): All Town Council Members voted in favor to move back to regular meeting. Public Hearing Ended at 4:55pm.

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

Minute Taker: Malia Collins

Draft Minutes Published: June 4, 2026

Approved Minutes Published: June 16, 2026