

MINUTES of the special public meeting of the Uintah County Commission held **August 13, 2026** at the Tridell Fire Station, Tridell UT. The meeting commenced at 7:00 pm.

PARTICIPANTS: Commissioners John Laursen, Willis LeFevre and Sonja Norton.

ATTENDANCE: Keith Campbell, Joe McKea, Margie Shewell, Sheri Allen, Mike Wilkins, Tyler McKee, Anna Billings, Shaun Angus, Jackie Swett, Brenda McDonald, Donette Brooks, Nolan Jackson, Danny Mortensen, Loren Anderson, Jo Gardner, Dan Dilsaver, Matt Cazier, Kelly Laursen, Cindy Dilsaver, Alina Tate, Brian Gorum, Katrina Harris, Kirk Harris, Aundrey Merkley, Ed Johnstun, Eleasha McKee, Karen McKee, Michael McKee, Earl Merkley, Janet Merkley, Billie Perry, Sue Perry, Rick Perry, and Aaron Averett
Minutes by Leasha Williams

WELCOME: Commissioner Laursen, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

PRAYER by Joe McKea

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE by John Laursen

PUBLIC HEARING: Proposed Optional Plan to change County form of government

Commissioner Laursen opened the public hearing regarding the proposed change to the county form of government. He clarified that this is a legally required public hearing for information sharing rather than a commission work meeting or a vote. Participants were instructed to remain respectful, with the warning that interruptions would result in removal from the chambers. Speakers were asked to state their full names, focus on factual information, and limit comments to five minutes, with an additional three minutes allowed if time permitted. Groups were encouraged to designate a single representative to speak on their behalf. We are not here to answer questions or tell you our thoughts. We are bound by State Law to hold this meeting.

Anna Billings noted that the proposed plan is an approved form of government, one of four recognized options. The proposal calls for a five-member council elected geographically, similar to school districts, and an appointed county manager responsible for day-to-day operations, while the council handles legislative duties. She noted that Summit, Tooele, and Wasatch counties currently utilize this form of government. Addressing financial concerns, she clarified that her group does not determine potential salaries, as those decisions are made by future representatives upon implementation. She distanced her group from recent misinformation regarding finances, stating their intent is simply to offer a new approach for the county. She requested that discussion focus on the plan itself rather than personal attacks or her group's composition, and offered to address questions after the hearing.

Joe McKea expressed opposition to the proposed plan. He provided handouts comparing Utah's 29 counties, noting that 22 maintain full-time commissions. He questioned the necessity of the change, specifically addressing issues of representation and cost. Referencing data from transparent.utah.gov (hand out available and attached to the roll online), he noted that legislative and executive costs in counties with full-time commissions average approximately \$250,000 annually. He voiced concerns regarding the shift from three full-time commissioners to five part-time council members, citing past consensus that the workload exceeds 40 hours per week. Additionally, he cautioned that an appointed, unelected county manager would possess significant influence over elected officials due to their specialized knowledge of county intricacies. He urged residents to review all data carefully and provided his email, joe.mckea@gmail.com, for further information.

Mike Wilkins addressed the financial implications of the proposed government structure. He noted that the alternative forms of government discussed each require both a manager and an assistant manager. He cited the annual costs for these structures in other counties, specifically Summit County (\$783,000),

Tooele County (\$509,000), and Wasatch County (\$720,000). Mike argued that the current county commission form has historically proven to be the most cost-effective option, noting that part-time positions often entail additional benefit costs. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of providing accurate financial information for public consideration.

Brenda McDonald, a county employee, expressed strong opposition to the proposed change in government structure. She argued that the county's diverse responsibilities—ranging from natural resources and agriculture to public safety and mental health—require full-time, year-round dedication. She emphasized that maintaining consistent, long-term relationships with state legislators is essential for securing the county's needs, citing past successful efforts to protect elderly benefits as evidence that part-time representation would be insufficient. She also addressed misinformation regarding commission salaries and urged residents to research the experiences of other counties, such as Morgan, Tooele, and Summit, which have faced challenges with council-manager forms of government.

Danny Mortensen raised concerns regarding the procedural changes in commission voting, noting that the prior requirement for a second on motions encouraged compromise among commissioners. He expressed frustration that this requirement was removed, enabling two commissioners to pass motions unilaterally, and stated he has been unable to locate the meeting minutes documenting when this change occurred. In support of the proposed plan, he advocated for a five-member council elected by district and the appointment of a professional manager, emphasizing the importance of qualified oversight for the county budget.

Jo Gardner raised concerns regarding the proposed district-based representation, questioning if it would genuinely ensure that representatives advocate for their specific areas. He expressed skepticism about the potential influence of outside groups on candidates and suggested that the proposed structure might not guarantee local accountability. He indicated he is consulting with individuals experienced in other counties to better understand the potential impacts of such governance changes.

Commissioner Laursen clarified the Commission's adherence to Robert's Rules of Order, explaining that the requirement for a second on motions was removed for small commissions, allowing motions to proceed without one. He addressed concerns regarding the voting process, noting that disagreements are a natural part of the commission's work and that the chairman's decisions aim to reflect the best interests of the community. In his closing remarks, Commissioner Laursen urged citizens to engage in direct, factual conversations rather than relying on internet rumors. He emphasized the importance of the community members communicating directly with one another to ensure accurate information sharing.

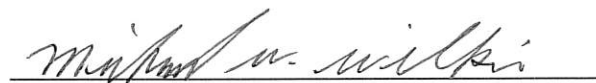
Mike McKee expressed his appreciation for the attendees and the commissioners, acknowledging the dedication required for public service. While stating he respects the proponents of the proposed plan, he advocated for retaining the current commission form of government. Drawing on his 14 years of experience as a county commissioner and various leadership roles in local governance, he argued that the current structure is unique because it combines executive and legislative powers, whereas the proposed council-manager form would limit commissioners to legislative duties only. He expressed concerns that an appointed, unelected county manager would hold too much operational authority and questioned the effectiveness of part-time representation, noting that the duties of a commissioner require full-time, dedicated attention.

Commissioner Laursen concluded the meeting by encouraging attendees to conduct thorough research and verify information rather than relying on internet sources. He thanked the participants for their attendance and reminded them of the final scheduled meeting in Vernal on Monday at 7:00 p.m. Additionally, he announced that, in response to community feedback, the upcoming Uintah County Commission meetings on September 1st and September 22nd will be held at 7:00 p.m.

ADJOURN: Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:34 pm.



JOHN LAURSEN, CHAIR



MICHAEL W. WILKINS, CLERK – AUDITOR