Five County
Association of Governments

1070 West 1600 South, Bldg. B
Saint George, UT 84770
Office (435) 673-3548

# Five County Association of Governments

# Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

# March 11, 2026

## Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at approximately 12:31 PM by Chairman Hollingshead

## 2. Roll Call and Introductions

Introductions were conducted for all attendees present in person and online. Notable attendees included representatives from counties, municipalities, school districts, state legislature, congressional offices, SUU, and AOG program leadership.

## 3. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Jerry Taylor.

## 4. Legislative Updates

**Senator Evan Vickers**
Senator Vickers provided a detailed overview of the 2026 legislative session, noting that it was a challenging budget year due to reduced income tax revenue resulting from federal tax changes. Despite initial concerns, the legislature ultimately funded key priorities, including:

- Public education funding and employee compensation increases
- Continued tax reductions, including income tax and temporary gas tax relief
- Expansion of child tax credits

He highlighted the successful restoration of $500,000 for the Local Administrator Assistance program and avoidance of proposed cuts, describing it as a significant win for local governments.

Senator Vickers also discussed major policy items that did not pass, particularly election-related legislation. He noted strong public opposition to changes that would make voting more difficult and emphasized the importance of pausing rather than rushing through policy changes.

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Additional highlights included:

- Formalization of regional higher education collaboration between SUU, Utah Tech, and technical colleges
- Updates to wildland urban interface policy allowing greater county-level influence on risk designation
- Continued efforts to align state fees with actual service costs

**Representative Rex Shipp**
Representative Shipp reported on several major appropriations and policy efforts:

- Secured $4 million for Cedar City water reuse infrastructure to reduce pressure on potable water supplies
- Advanced natural resource and water-related legislation, including funding for Colorado River litigation preparedness
- Passed AIS-related policy changes to improve invasive species prevention while reducing unnecessary regulatory burden

He emphasized concerns about rural representation in legislative prioritization, noting that some rural-focused bills struggle to advance due to competing priorities from urban areas.

Representative Shipp also highlighted the defeat of a proposed restaurant tax restructuring, noting its importance to rural counties where tourism significantly contributes to local revenue.

**Representative Logan Monson**
Representative Monson focused on rural health and public safety:

- Announced approximately $196 million in federal rural health funding, expected to continue over a five-year period
- Noted upcoming grant opportunities and encouraged local entities to engage early

He also discussed key legislation:

- Judicial transparency bill improving public access to judicial performance data
- 911 abuse bill addressing misuse of emergency services, particularly in rural areas where resources are limited

Discussion followed regarding abuse of EMS systems by care facilities, with strong concern expressed about resource strain and the need for future policy action.

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**Representative Carl Albrecht**
Representative Albrecht reported on a broad portfolio of natural resource and energy-related legislation:

- Advanced energy security initiatives across nuclear, coal, gas, and geothermal
- Passed legislation to reduce frivolous litigation against energy infrastructure projects
- Secured funding for forest health, watershed restoration, and RS2477 legal defense

Additional highlights:

- $4.5 million for rural cybersecurity training
- Funding for the Rural Business Accelerator, with intent to expand in future sessions
- Delay of HB48 implementation to allow correction of mapping and policy concerns

He emphasized continued efforts to align state policy with rural economic and resource realities.

## Approval of Previous Minutes

Motion by Commissioner Almquist for the approval of January 14, 2026, minutes
Second by Commissioner Taylor
Vote: Unanimous approval

## Approval of Mid-Year Budget Review

Motion by Commissioner Taylor for the approval of mid-year budget recommendation
Second by Burke Staheli
Vote: Unanimous approval

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## Staffing Report

HR Director Jen Wong reported:

- Total staff: 71
- Personnel changes included one resignation, two separations, and one retirement
- Three employees on FMLA, with two returning and one still out.

We have had a strong applicant response to our open positions:

- 170 applicants for a front office position
- 80 applicants for transportation roles

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Positions remain open in aging services, transportation, and CSS. Social media outreach has been expanded to increase visibility.

## 8. Executive Director Report

Director Bushman provided a candid operational update:

**CSS Merger**

- Significant workload and complexity beyond initial expectations
- Ongoing compliance and performance issues identified
- Potential risk to funding if program objectives are not corrected

**Facilities**

- Sublease of St. George building fell through
- Property now listed, with ongoing financial burden of approximately $6,500 per month

**Federal Systems and Funding**

- Delays in HUD recognition of Executive Director authority impacted grant access
- Drawdown delays tied to staffing changes and administrative barriers

**Operations and Culture**

- Staff performing well under pressure despite significant change
- Continued investment in training and leadership development

**Other Updates**

- Website redesign nearing completion
- Staff event scheduled for May 14, 2026

## CDBG Rating and Ranking

Mike Johnson presented on the CDBG applications and project rankings.

Projects ranked:

1. Beaver County Ambulance Project
    - $300,000 CDBG request with $100,000 local match
2. AOG Vehicle Acquisition
    - $361,661 request

Discussion highlighted concern over low application participation, with only one external project submitted despite outreach efforts.

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Motion by Mayor Halterman for Approval of rankings
Second by Tyler Fails
Vote: Unanimous approval

Remaining balance of approximately $247,207 noted.

## CIB Applications

Mike Johnson presented on the CIB Applications submitted.

Applications reviewed:

- Henryville Town water infrastructure project
- Hildale City water system improvements

Both requested 100% grant funding. Discussion emphasized:

- Limited CIB funding availability
- Importance of local contribution or "skin in the game"
- Challenges for small communities with limited repayment capacity

Motion by Commissioner Meyeres to support both applications
Second by Commissioner Almquist
Vote: Unanimous Approval

## Resolution Approval

Resolution No. 20260311-26
Support for Congressional Review Act action regarding Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

Discussion emphasized:

- Lack of coordination with local governments in the RMP process
- Strong regional support for congressional review and CRA action.

Motion by Commissioner Taylor to Approve the resolution
Second by Commissioner Almquist
Vote: Unanimous approval

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## SUU and Fervo Energy Update

Melynda Thorpe presented on SUU's attempt to meet educational requirements related to Geothermal and the Fervo project.

Presentation included:

- Public education initiative on geothermal energy
- Free course availability for first 100 participants
- Upcoming museum exhibit and community outreach
- Deployment of mobile STEM lab to rural communities

## MPO and RPO Presentation

Myron Lee presented on the Dixie MPO:

- Long-term transportation planning across Washington County
- Rapid growth in vehicle counts and infrastructure demand
- Coordination among cities to prevent mismatched road capacity
- Expansion of planning boundaries to include emerging communities

Nathan Wiberg presented on the RPO in Iron County:

- Nathan highlighted the difference of the RPO vs. MPO
- Also noted were the obligations of the RPO and COG

## Congressional Reports

- James Leavitt, representing Congresswoman Celeste Malloy, was introduced as having recently returned from Washington, D.C. to lead the southern Utah portion of the Congresswoman's district office. He confirmed that previously awarded airport funding should be moving forward and stated that the office remains available to assist local governments and constituents. Later in the meeting, in connection with the Grand Staircase-Escalante resolution, he explained that the office worked with Senator Lee's team to initiate the Congressional Review Act pathway after obtaining a determination that the resource management plan qualified as a rule that could be reported and challenged through that process.

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- Jeff Raisor, representing Senator John Curtis, reviewed several federal issues and committee matters relevant to southern Utah, including energy, public lands, veterans access, innovation policy, and federal land management leadership. He noted the importance of the Colorado River Compact to Utah, discussed the possibility of using upcoming federal bills as vehicles for broader policy efforts, and indicated that North Rim and related post-fire recovery issues remain on the federal radar. He also reminded the committee that Senator Curtis's office can assist with casework involving military and veterans issues, health care navigation, immigration, postal concerns, Social Security, IRS matters, and taxpayer advocacy. He advised that Senator Curtis expected to be in the five county area around April 17 and 18 and invited suggestions for communities, sites, and issues to include in that visit.

- Gary Webster, representing Senator Mike Lee, welcomed James Leavitt back to southern Utah and emphasized the value of having an appropriator in Utah's congressional delegation because of the opportunities created through congressionally directed project funding. He discussed coordination between Senator Lee's office and Congresswoman Malloy's office on the Congressional Review Act effort related to the Grand Staircase-Escalante management plan, addressed current uncertainty around the SAVE Act and potential filibuster strategy in the Senate, and encouraged local leaders to follow Senator Lee's communications for updates. He also commented on Department of the Interior issues, Colorado River Compact concerns, WOTUS and desert color permitting questions, and the need to keep North Rim and southern Utah recovery and land management issues in front of federal decision makers.

## Closed Session

- A motion was made by Tyler Fails to enter a closed session for the purposes of a potential real estate transaction as well as the character and competency of personnel. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Almquist. Executive Director Bushman asked that Jen Wong and Andrea Escobar be retained (relative to the competency and character discussion) for the closed session, as well as Kim Campbell and Kendrick Thomas (relative to the real-estate conversation)
- Motion Carried Unanimously

## Return from Closed Session

- No action taken from the closed session.

### 14. Adjournment

- **Chairman Hollingshead adjourned the meeting at 4:09pm**

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