

Bluff Town Council Meeting **DRAFT Minutes**

Tuesday, September 1, 2026, at 4:00 pm MDT

4:08 pm: Meeting called to order

Roll Call

Town Council: Mayor Josh Ewing (virtual), Brit Hornsby, Jennifer Davila, Spencer Wade, Gary Haws
Staff: Erin Nelson, Malia Collins (virtual), Charmayne Sandoval (virtual)

Public Comment Period:

Jim Sayers spoke during public comment expressing concerns regarding water governance and management across the state (noting recent issues in Boxelder regarding state water deals with corporations). He suggested that the Town of Bluff should unify all water entities under the town council to secure long-term water safety and resilience against external pressures.

Mayor Josh Ewing responded by thanking him for the comments, noting that he would never sign a data center NDA, and highlighted that positive collaboration is ongoing between the town and the water board.

Revisit and Clarify of Meeting Minutes from August 4, 2026, Regular Town Meeting:

Mayor Ewing requested clarification regarding the wording of his vote on the maintenance services contract. He clarified that he did not declare a "conflict of interest" (as he has no monetary or personal interest) but rather stated he was "conflicted" because he previously worked with Mr. Helgersen in the fire department. The minutes were amended to reflect that he abstained because he was "conflicted on the issue".

Approval of Meeting Minutes from August 18, 2026, Regular Town Meeting

The August 18th Regular Meeting minutes were reviewed and approved by consensus as distributed, with no corrections or edits.

Ewing called to approve the amended August 4, 2026, minutes and the August 18, 2026, regular meeting minutes.

Voted in Favor: Haws, Davila, Hornsby, Wade & Ewing. Motion passes unanimously.

Unfinished Business

1. Update on Emergency Services Coordinator Hiring Process

Town Manager Nelson updated the council on the hiring process, noting they received numerous applications and conducted three interviews. A job offer was extended to Nizhoni Begay, who has extensive EMS and wildland fire background experience. She starts on Tuesday, September 8th, in a part-time capacity. Mayor Ewing noted that the Moab Fire Chief (T.J. Brewer) also applied and expressed interest in helping. The Town is exploring utilizing a small portion of the contracting budget to engage him for advisory services to jumpstart emergency planning. Jennifer Davila suggested incorporating work-session discussions to brainstorm program ideas for the new coordinator, which will be added to the next work session agenda.

2. Discussion and Vote to Approve Resolution #109 (Utah Retirement Systems)

Discussion regarding initiating employee retirement benefits for full-time staff through Utah Retirement Services (URS). Although the full formal employee benefits policy vote is pending further discussion at the upcoming work session and regular meeting, the town council agreed on providing retirement benefits to full-time staff. To initiate the URS retirement services process ahead of the formal policy implementation, URS requires a resolution from the board. Mayor Ewing introduced the resolution in the meeting packet, noting it was straightforward and opening it up for questions or discussion before taking a vote.

Ewing calls for a vote to approve Resolution #109

Voted in Favor: Ewing, Davilla, Hornsby, Haws. Abstain: Wade (due to stated conflict of interest).

Motion passes four to one.

New Business

3. West Bluff Cottonwood Addition Chip Sealing Project

Roads Manager Michael Haviken presented a preliminary \$100,000 proposal to chip seal gravel roads in West Bluff using Vialytics data. The proposed scope includes Sagebrush from 4th Street to the end, 5th Street to the end, and 6th Street to Sagebrush. The Roads Department plans to obtain formal contractor bids and request a 50% matching grant from the county transportation board on the 21st. Chip sealing would improve the town's UDOT road rating, which may increase future annual state funding. Mayor Ewing emphasized the need for a formal top five or top ten project priority list to guide the strategic use of town funds rather than evaluating projects individually. Michael agreed to draft the list. Jennifer Davila raised concerns about possible boundary and right-of-way disputes on Sixth West and advised against paving legally unsettled areas. The council agreed to either obtain written approval from affected landowners or exclude Sixth West from the immediate project scope until survey issues are resolved with legal counsel.

Towards the end of the discussion, a brief procedural clarification was made confirming that the previously discussed West Bluff chip-sealing project will move forward on all scheduled streets except Sixth West, pending further landowner conversations or boundary resolution.

4. Discussion Regarding Weed Spraying in Rights-of-Way (Goat Heads)

The council discussed whether town maintenance staff should use chemical spray to target emerging goat heads in rights-of-way following recent moisture. While some council members favored spraying to knock them back (especially for cyclists), others, including Mayor Ewing, argued that blanket spraying is expensive, ineffective unless done weekly all summer, and opens a problematic precedent for spraying near private residences, gardens, and pets. The town decided against blanket spraying public right-of-way strips in front of private properties. Instead, the town will coordinate with San Juan County to make herbicide available for private residents who wish to voluntarily pick it up and treat their own properties. The council agreed that maintenance staff should focus their efforts and chemical treatments exclusively on town-owned properties, such as the old elementary school grounds and West Park, to set a good community example. Recognizing that goat head seeds can survive in the soil for up to 10 years and require years of diligent pulling to eliminate.

5. Town of Bluff Position on San Juan County EMS Sales Tax Increase (Proposition 7)

Mayor Ewing introduced a discussion regarding San Juan County's proposed 1% sales tax increase on the fall ballot (designated as Proposition 7), dedicated to funding underfunded county emergency medical services (EMS). He noted that as a tax-strapped county where raising property taxes is difficult, this tax shifts a major portion of the EMS financial burden onto visitors. Jennifer Davilla (speaking as a business owner who collects sales tax) expressed strong support, noting Jeremy Hogard's previous presentation data showing that 44% of tracked calls are tourist related, particularly true for Bluff and Southern EMS calls involving highway accidents. She added that visitors will willingly pay the extra 1% when they understand it directly supports critical ambulance services. Gary Haws raised the procedural point that if the town takes a formal position, they must ensure proper public notice and provide equal space or time for anyone opposing the initiative to voice their opinions. Mayor Ewing agreed, noting that while governments cannot spend money to support or oppose ballot measures, they are legally permitted to take a formal stance. The council reached a consensus in favor of taking a supportive position. Before putting it to a formal vote, Mayor Ewing planned to check with Jeremy Hogard to see if any organized opposition groups exist, and the item will be added to the agenda for a vote at the next regular meeting in two weeks.

Looking Ahead / Reminders / Other

6. Upcoming Agendas & Items:

- Employee benefits full written policy (discussion in work session and potential vote).
- Legal counsel for RFP responses review and selection.
- Housing consultant for RFP development.
- Joint meeting with Planning & Zoning regarding zoning code changes scheduled for **September 15th**.

7. Community Reminders:

- Saturday, September 19th: Emergency Services Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser at the Bluff Fire Station (8:00 AM – 10:00 AM).
- Wednesday, September 30th: Meet-the-Candidates Night at 6:30 PM at the Bluff Community Center.

8. Adjourn (5:11 pm)

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

Minute Taker: Charmayne Sandoval

Draft Minutes Published: September 6, 2026

Approved Minutes Published: