

UTAH COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

**Minutes
July 21, 2026**

Present:

Shayne Pierce
Seth Cox
Sullivan Love
Robert McMullin
Lorraine Davis
Glen Roberts
Stanford Sainsbury

Excused:

Also Present:

Bryce Armstrong
Greg Robinson
Marie Patten
Dale Eyre

A. CALL TO ORDER

Shayne Pierce called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM at 100 E Center St, Room 1400, of the Utah County Administration Building, located in Provo, Utah.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Sullivan Love led the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: Seth Cox Second: Glen Roberts

Motion to **approve** the minutes of the June 16, 2026, meeting of the Utah County Planning Commission. The motion passed with the following vote: "Aye" Shayne Pierce, Seth Cox, Sullivan Love, Lorraine Davis, Glen Roberts, Stanford Sainsbury. "Nay" none. "Abstain" Robert McMullin.

D. ITEMS SUBJECT TO PUBLIC HEARING

1. **Chris Cowden - Proposed Utah County Land Use Ordinance text amendment to Sections 12.08.D, 12.08.E, and any other applicable section, to reduce the minimum area required for a one-family dwelling, manufactured home, or lots in a planned subdivision from 5 acres to 2.5 acres and reduce the minimum lot/parcel width required for a one-family dwelling, manufactured home, or lots**

in planned subdivision from 250 feet to 210 feet in the Residential Agricultural (RA-5) Zone

Greg Robinson explained that the applicant had requested amendments to the RA-5 zone by reducing the minimum lot size from 5 acres to 2.5 acres and the minimum frontage from 250 feet to 210 feet. He stated that the applicant believed the change would make rural housing more affordable because many families could not afford five-acre lots. He noted that a similar proposal had been considered in January 2025 and had been rejected by both the Planning Commission and County Commission. He reviewed the history and purpose of the RA-5 zone, explaining that the five-acre minimum had existed since 1990 and that the zone was intended primarily to preserve irrigated agricultural land, crop production, livestock operations, open space, and the farming industry. He cited the general plan's preference for directing residential growth first into municipalities, then into unincorporated communities with existing water systems, and only afterward into other unincorporated areas. He also reviewed concerns previously raised by the state engineer about groundwater depletion, interference among wells, declining groundwater levels, and contamination from large numbers of individual septic systems. He stated that the Utah Department of Environmental Quality had more recently reiterated similar concerns. He explained that staff strongly recommended denial because increased rural density would conflict with the land use ordinance and general plan, while smaller lots were already permitted in selected county zones where central water and sewer systems were required. He added that the applicant had not supplied exact ordinance language, so staff had prepared proposed revisions based on its interpretation of the request.

Stanford Sainsbury asked how many additional five-acre lots could potentially be developed in Utah County under the existing ordinance.

Greg Robinson estimated that approximately 78,000 acres were zoned RA-5, which could theoretically accommodate about 15,685 five-acre lots.

Stanford Sainsbury asked whether that meant approximately 15,000 new homes could be built.

Greg Robinson clarified that the estimate represented the total theoretical number of five-acre lots within all RA-5 land, not the number of additional undeveloped lots. He added that the actual total could differ because some parcels had already been approved at smaller sizes.

Stanford Sainsbury asked what percentage of the potential RA-5 lots had already been developed.

Bryce Armstrong stated that the unincorporated county population was approximately 6,000 to 7,000 people, representing roughly 2,000 residential units. He noted that not all of those units were in the RA-5 zone and that the developed percentage was much smaller than the suggested one-half or one-fourth.

Seth Cox asked to see a map showing the locations of RA-5 zoning throughout the county.

Bryce Armstrong stated that the proposed amendment represented a significant change because

it would effectively double the permitted density. He emphasized that staff had substantial concerns.

Seth Cox recalled the previous discussion of a similar proposal. He stated that the concerns had included water, policing, emergency response, and other public services that the county was not positioned to provide.

Bryce Armstrong agreed and explained that the county was not designed to provide municipal-level services. He stated that property tax rates in unincorporated areas were based partly on zoning and density, so doubling potential density could eventually require higher property taxes to support additional emergency calls and other services. He displayed the RA-5 map and identified extensive areas between West Mountain and the freeway, in Goshen Valley, east of Elberta, in northern pockets, and between the mountains and freeway near Salem, Payson, and Spanish Fork. He noted that these areas received much of the county's residential development interest.

Seth Cox observed that much of the former RA-5 land in the northern part of the county had disappeared.

Bryce Armstrong stated that the reduction had occurred partly by design.

Seth Cox recalled that considerably more RA-5 land had existed there approximately 20 years earlier.

Bryce Armstrong began explaining that some RA-5 land remained as cities expanded.

Seth Cox stated that cities had absorbed much of the land.

Bryce Armstrong agreed and explained that much of the land had been annexed. He stated that preserving larger parcels and open space before annexation allowed cities to master-plan those areas more effectively without having to work around fragmented small lots, narrow roads, and existing higher-density development.

Lorraine Davis asked staff to identify the three most important values or objectives of the RA-5 zone.

Bryce Armstrong stated that the primary objectives were preserving agriculture, maintaining greenfields and open space, and protecting environmentally sensitive groundwater and sewage-discharge areas. He acknowledged that five-acre lots were not ideal for serious agriculture and noted that the county had once required 40 acres, but he explained that five acres had represented a compromise allowing landowners some development rights.

Lorraine Davis stated that future demand for land would continue increasing. She agreed that five acres was already a generous and arguably inadequate minimum for agricultural preservation, suggesting that 20 or 40 acres would better support agriculture. She also doubted that 2.5-acre lots would meaningfully provide affordable housing because they would remain

expensive. She supported staff's concerns about reducing the minimum lot size.

Bryce Armstrong explained that other county zones, including the TR-5 and RR-5 zones, permitted lots as small as one-half acre in targeted areas. He stated that those zones required central water systems, which helped address potential environmental concerns associated with septic discharge and groundwater contamination.

Lorraine Davis emphasized that water availability was a major concern because future drought patterns, hot summers, and changing mountain snow levels were unpredictable. She stated that the state engineer's warning deserved serious consideration.

Shayne Pierce asked whether the Commission had additional questions for staff and then invited applicant Chris Cowden to explain his request.

Chris Cowden identified himself and explained that he had worked with many people who wanted to live in the countryside, raise families, keep horses and farm animals, and enjoy open space. He stated that five-acre lots commonly cost approximately \$500,000 to \$550,000 or more, making them unaffordable once construction expenses and high interest rates were included. He argued that reducing the minimum to 2.5 acres could lower land prices to approximately \$300,000 and allow more families to build rural homes and participate in small-scale or urban farming. He stated that he had worked in building and development for 46 years and had observed many families being priced out of rural living. He compared 2.5-acre lots with increasingly dense municipal development. He cited a 55-acre Spanish Fork annexation that included commercial property and 204 residential units, arguing that a comparable county development with 2.5-acre lots would have only about 18 homes, water connections, and vehicle-generating households. He stated that annexation throughout Utah County was replacing agricultural land with low-, medium-, and high-density development. He argued that 2.5-acre county lots could conserve more water, reduce traffic and pollution, and preserve a rural lifestyle compared with dense city development. He stated that 2.5-acre lots were large enough to accommodate wells with required protection zones and septic systems meeting state standards. He argued that extensive annexation into Spanish Fork, Saratoga Springs, Provo, Lehi, and other municipalities was rapidly removing land from county jurisdiction. He cited the annexation of approximately 1,200 acres into Saratoga Springs and proposed developments near Benjamin with densities as high as 30 units per acre. He predicted that Benjamin would become a city and that more county land would eventually be incorporated. He stated that his purpose was to allow families to own rural property before such land disappeared.

Lorraine Davis asked staff how it responded to the applicant's argument that much of the land would eventually be annexed and developed more densely.

Greg Robinson stated that higher-density municipal development generally used water more efficiently than dispersed rural residential development because rural lots required irrigation across larger areas. He acknowledged that preserving agricultural user provided benefits but stated that cities were better equipped to manage traffic, roads, utilities, and public services associated with residential growth. He explained that the county lacked the same resources and service structure, particularly if rural density increased.

Chris Cowden argued that annexation reduced the county's responsibilities because cities assumed weed control, fire protection, roads, snow removal, and other services. He stated that Spanish Fork intended to place high-density development near the freeway and that large annexations into Saratoga Springs and the future incorporation of Benjamin could remove thousands of acres from county jurisdiction. He argued that the resulting reduction in county service obligations would outweigh the additional burden created by a limited number of 2.5-acre lots.

Greg Robinson responded that cities assumed snow removal and other services precisely because they had plans and resources to support urban development. He noted that many of the same affordability and rural-living arguments had been made when the county adopted the five-acre minimum in 1990. He stated that five-acre parcels frequently developed weed-control problems because they were not maintained as effectively as larger agricultural operations. He also explained that smaller residential parcels often created conflicts when new residents complained about nearby farming activities, eventually contributing to the disappearance of agriculture. He acknowledged that agricultural land was being lost but stated that landowners had the right to sell their properties for development.

Bryce Armstrong recommended opening the public hearing after the applicant's presentation so the Commission could gather all testimony before continuing its questions.

Glen Roberts clarified that Utah's Greenbelt tax classification generally required at least 5 acres, so reducing the zoning minimum to 2.5 acres would not qualify those lots for Greenbelt treatment.

Chris Cowden clarified that he had used "green belt" more generally to describe open land being annexed and developed. He stated that 2.5-acre owners could still participate in urban farming. He then asked to discuss water information provided by engineer Shane Sorensen.

Greg Robinson identified Shane Sorensen as Alpine City's city manager.

Chris Cowden agreed and stated that Mr. Sorensen had successfully worked on county developments. He cited a 2017 statement concerning a subdivision near Utah Lake in which Mr. Sorensen concluded that wells on the lots within the specified development would likely draw from the same aquifer and provide sufficient flow, pressure, and water quality. He stated that every well drilled in that development had exceeded expectations. He argued that Utah County contained abundant groundwater and that engineering studies supported the feasibility of wells and septic systems on these lots. He also stated that land speculators were purchasing large tracts not for agriculture but for eventual high-density development. He argued that permitting 2.5-acre lots could preserve land in rural residential use before cities annexed it.

Glen Roberts stated that reducing the RA-5 minimum would not prevent cities from later annexing the property, so it would not eliminate future density concerns.

Chris Cowden agreed but stated that the change would allow families to live on 2.5 acres before

the land was gone.

Glen Roberts noted that a family who owned a 5-acre lot might later subdivide its 2.5-acre property or create a flag lot once they were within a municipality.

Chris Cowden acknowledged that future subdivision was always possible in any city or jurisdiction.

Glen Roberts stated that the proposal therefore did not appear to solve the underlying problem. He also argued that smaller lots would create more traffic, water demand, and county maintenance obligations.

Chris Cowden stated that the purpose of smaller lots was to allow individual families to live in rural areas.

Glen Roberts referred back to the applicant's claim that annexation reduced county maintenance obligations and argued that doubling rural density would instead increase the county's burden. He agreed that rural land and pastoral settings were becoming difficult to acquire but stated that high land prices reflected what property owners demanded. He observed that developers often needed high density to recover their purchase costs and suggested that the proposal did not resolve the fundamental conflict between affordability, private property value, and preservation.

Chris Cowden stated that he had not intended to solve every development problem. He argued that the amount of land being annexed from the county would exceed the effect of adding a limited number of 2.5-acre lots. He explained that development occurred gradually through lengthy approval processes and predicted that Benjamin and other areas would eventually incorporate as Utah's population continued growing.

Glen Roberts remarked that growth was not necessarily bad and that communities without growth declined.

Chris Cowden agreed and stated that county facilities and economic progress existed because developers had taken risks and invested. He reiterated that his main purpose was to help families obtain something they otherwise could not afford. He described service to others as a central purpose of life and stated that helping a family find joy in rural living would make the effort worthwhile.

Lorraine Davis stated that she appreciated his advocacy for families seeking a rural lifestyle but returned to the water issue. She stated that merely citing a certified engineer did not resolve the broader concerns and asked staff to explain the apparent disagreement over water availability.

Bryce Armstrong stated that the discussion involved two different issues. He explained that the applicant's engineer had evaluated whether wells in a specific five-acre subdivision could produce the required quantity and flow. By contrast, the Department of Environmental Quality had raised regional concerns about the cumulative effect of proliferating wells and individual sewage-disposal systems at densities greater than one lot per five acres, particularly south of

Utah Lake. He noted that the Division of Water Quality had reiterated those concerns to him as recently as 2019.

Shayne Pierce asked whether there were further questions for the applicant.

Chris Cowden requested permission to make one additional comment and stated that modern farms and orchards increasingly used efficient drip-irrigation systems. He asked Robert McMullin whether his operation included orchards.

Robert McMullin asked whether Chris Cowden was addressing him.

Chris Cowden confirmed that he was and asked whether Mr. McMullin operated orchards.

Robert McMullin stated that his family was in the fruit business and respectfully disagreed with the applicant's water claims. He stated that he had opposed the five-acre standard because he believed it had already damaged county agriculture, and he opposed reducing the minimum further. He explained that water rights were being readjudicated and could be taken from owners who could not prove beneficial use.

Chris Cowden stated that the readjudication process had existed for years.

Robert McMullin stated that county water supplies were tight, wells were declining, and drought conditions were creating serious difficulties. He stated that he could not imagine adding several thousand additional lots under those circumstances and reiterated his opposition.

Chris Cowden acknowledged the concern but argued that dense annexed developments in Spanish Fork would draw from the same regional water sources. He questioned why thousands of municipal units were acceptable while lower-density county development was treated differently and concluded his remarks.

Motion: Seth Cox Second: Sullivan Love

Motion to open public hearing. The motion passed with the following vote: "Aye" Shayne Pierce, Seth Cox, Sullivan Love, Lorraine Davis, Glen Roberts, Stanford Sainsbury, Robert McMullin. "Nay" none.

Motion: Robert McMullin Second: Seth Cox

Motion to close public hearing. The motion passed with the following vote: "Aye" Shayne Pierce, Seth Cox, Sullivan Love, Lorraine Davis, Glen Roberts, Stanford Sainsbury, Robert McMullin. "Nay" none.

Seth Cox stated that he did not believe the proposal would meaningfully address housing affordability. He doubted that reducing lot sizes from 5 acres to 2.5 acres would significantly lower property values or prices. He also cited the county's concerns about providing services,

managing additional development, and protecting water resources. He sympathized with the desire for rural living because he had grown up on a five-acre county lot, although his parents' property had later been removed for Pioneer Crossing. He acknowledged that population growth and development had both benefits and drawbacks but concluded that reducing the minimum lot size would not solve the underlying problems.

Stanford Sainsbury stated that the proposal represented a major change to both the county's land use ordinance and general plan. He explained that the RA-5 zone was intended to support agriculture and believed that permitting 2.5-acre lots would conflict with that purpose. He suggested that such a change should begin with a broader reconsideration of the general plan involving community participation and a discussion about whether Utah County still wanted to preserve agriculture. He also questioned whether 2.5-acre lots would actually be more affordable. He believed demand would be extremely high and that the smaller lots could sell for nearly the same price as five-acre lots because many buyers wanted enough land for horses but did not necessarily want a full five acres. He described his experience living on a 38-acre farm surrounded by five-acre developments. He stated that wells in the area had progressively needed to be drilled deeper, increasing from approximately 100 to 150 feet in earlier years to more than 360 feet for two recently constructed neighboring wells. He explained that his artesian culinary well had gone dry for the first time after 35 years on the property, preventing water from naturally reaching his livestock. He anticipated that he might eventually need to spend approximately \$40,000 to deepen the well. He stated that groundwater was declining and that water availability had become a major concern, even if water could still be found at much greater and more expensive depths. He also noted that agricultural water users were now being required to demonstrate beneficial use because water had become increasingly scarce. He concluded that people seeking 2.5-acre lots should approach municipalities and encourage them to annex and zone land for that purpose. He explained that cities were better equipped to provide such development because they obtained water from multiple sources, including reservoirs, rivers, and wells, rather than relying exclusively on individual wells. He stated that some cities already permitted one- or two-acre lots and could potentially accommodate 2.5-acre development. He appreciated and sympathized with Chris Cowden's objective but remained opposed to the proposed countywide amendment.

Motion: Glen Roberts

Second: Robert McMullin

Motion to recommend **denial** to the Utah County Commission of the proposed Utah County Land Use Ordinance Text amendment to Section 12.08. The motion **passed** with the following vote: "Aye" Shayne Pierce, Seth Cox, Sullivan Love, Lorraine Davis, Glen Roberts, Stanford Sainsbury, Robert McMullin. "Nay" none.

E. OTHER BUSINESS

1. Take action on proposed Utah County Planning Commission Resolution No. 2026-01 for Procedures for the Submittal and Acceptance of Applications to Appear Before the Planning Commission

Bryce Armstrong explained that staff had prepared a resolution establishing formal procedures for submitting and accepting Planning Commission applications. He stated that recent state legislation had clarified the Commission's duties, including its responsibility to establish how applications were accepted. Although the county had followed an informal policy for years, he could not locate a resolution formally documenting it. He explained that the proposed resolution reflected current practices by specifying submission requirements, deadlines, and the amount of time needed before an application could be placed on an agenda.

Shayne Pierce observed that the resolution appeared intended to give staff and commissioners sufficient time to review applications before meetings. He asked whether applicants had previously requested placement on agendas with very little notice.

Bryce Armstrong confirmed that applicants sometimes requested placement on the next available agenda. He explained that staff needed enough time to satisfy state public-notice requirements, request additional information, review materials, and prepare staff reports. He stated that the 28-day deadline balanced applicants' desire to proceed quickly with the county's need for adequate preparation.

Shayne Pierce noted that applicants could request a meeting later than the first available date but could not request one occurring fewer than 28 days after submission.

Bryce Armstrong confirmed that applicants could choose a later meeting if they were unavailable for the next eligible meeting. He stated that the resolution was written to preserve that flexibility rather than requiring applicants to appear at the earliest available meeting.

Shayne Pierce noted that when the 28-day deadline fell on a weekend or holiday, the resolution allowed applications to be submitted on the next business day.

Bryce Armstrong explained that this occurred fairly often because the deadline generally fell on a Monday and county offices were occasionally closed near the deadline. He stated that staff preferred allowing submission on the next business day rather than requiring applicants to submit by the previous Friday.

Shayne Pierce asked whether commissioners had any questions or wished to discuss the proposed resolution.

Motion: Glen Roberts

Second: Robert McMullin

Motion to **accept** resolution number 2026-01 for procedures for the submittal and acceptance of applications. The motion **passed** with the following vote: "Aye" Shayne Pierce, Seth Cox, Sullivan Love, Lorraine Davis, Glen Roberts, Stanford Sainsbury, Robert McMullin. "Nay" none.

Shayne Pierce opened the floor for public comment, but no comments were offered.

Bryce Armstrong informed the Commission that the application deadline corresponding with the newly adopted resolution had passed the previous day and that no applications had been submitted. He announced that there would therefore be no meeting in August.

Shayne Pierce confirmed that there would be no August meeting and stated that commissioners could clear their calendars.

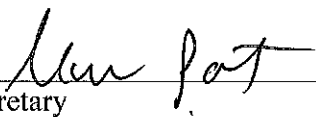
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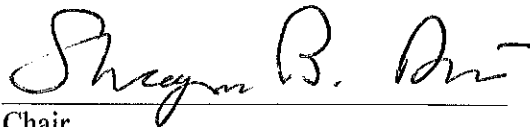
The meeting was adjourned at 06:37 PM.

Utah County Planning Commission
July 21, 2026

Minutes respectfully submitted by:

APPROVED BY:


Secretary


Chair