FIVE COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

Steering Committee Meeting

MINUTES

Date:	August 19, 2026
Time:	12:30 PM
Location:	Festival Hall Conference Center, Rooms 5 & 6, 96 North Main St., Cedar City, Utah (Hybrid)
Presiding:	Commissioner Wade Hollingshead, Beaver County (Chair)
Called to Order by:	Commissioner Hollingshead

Approved

1. Call to Order and Attendance

The Steering Committee meeting was called to order at 12:30 PM on August 19, 2026, at Festival Hall Conference Center in Cedar City, Utah. The meeting was conducted in hybrid format.

Steering Committee Members Present — In Person

- Wade Hollingshead, Beaver County Commissioner (Chair)
- Paul Cozzens, Iron County Commissioner
- Jerry Taylor, Garfield County Commissioner
- Gil Almquist, Washington County Commissioner
- Celeste Meyeres, Kane County Commissioner
- Jean Krause, Mayor, Town of Virgin
- Mollie Halterman, Mayor, City of Parowan
- Curtis Barney, Garfield County School District
- Tyler Fails, Beaver County School District
- Burke Staheli, Washington County School District
- Donna Law, Southern Utah University

Steering Committee Members Present — Online

- Stephanie Hill, Iron County School District (online)
- Brad Last, Utah Tech University (online)
- Taylor Glover, Kane County School District (online)

Steering Committee Members Absent

- Nolan Davis, Mayor, City of Milford
- Melani Torgersen, Mayor, City of Escalante
- Ray Spencer, Mayor, Town of Orderville

Staff Present

- Darin Bushman, Executive Director
- Allison McCoy, CFO
- Michael Johnson, Program Manager
- Sheri Reber, Program Director (Aging Services)
- Kelly Reeder, Assistant Program Director
- Myron Lee, Transportation Director (online)
- Carrie Sigler, Child Care Resource Agency / Five County AOG (online)

Guests

- James Leavitt, District Director, Congresswoman Celeste Maloy's Office
- Carson Brown, Field Representative, Senator John Curtis's Office
- Gary Webster, Field Representative, Senator Mike Lee's Office
- Colette Cox, Utah Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED) (online)

2. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Tyler Fails at the invitation of the Chair.

3. Review and Approval of Draft Minutes — June 10, 2026

The draft minutes from the June 10, 2026 Steering Committee meeting were presented for review and approval. One correction was noted: a reference to "Senator Clint Lee" should be corrected to Senator Mike Lee.

Motion:	Approve the June 10, 2026 Steering Committee minutes as corrected.
Moved by:	Burke Staheli, Washington County School District
Seconded by:	Commissioner Gil Almquist
Vote:	Approved unanimously

4. State, Federal, and Education Partners Reports

Brad Last — Utah Tech University

- August 19, 2026 is the first day of school at Utah Tech University.
- Ribbon cutting for the new America First Performing Arts Center is scheduled for August 28th. Washington County and St. George City participated in funding alongside America First and legislative contributions. A public concert featuring William Joseph and other performers will follow in the evening.
- Utah Tech University and Southern Utah University are both now members of the Big Sky Conference. Competition will be strong, particularly against well-developed Montana programs.

James Leavitt — Congresswoman Celeste Maloy's Office

- Wildfire and flood disaster assistance: The office is leveraging Congresswoman Maloy's oversight to apply political pressure on FEMA, NRCS, and Army Corps on behalf of affected counties. Correspondence and direct agency contacts are being used to prioritize waiver applications.
- FEMA reform: There is significant disparity in how Western disasters (wildfire/flood as separate incidents) are treated compared to East Coast hurricanes. This makes it difficult to meet

Approved

thresholds for individual assistance. Residents will likely need to rely on SBA loans. DEM was working with counties on standing up programs.

- Insurance access: Commissioner Taylor raised concern about inconsistent timelines insurance companies use before allowing homeowners to access flood/fire-damaged properties. Some residents were allowed in after three days; others were denied for weeks, causing further damage. The office will look into whether the industry can standardize access timelines.
- Section 201 trade investigation: Working with Congressman Burgess Owens on an investigation into dumping practices by Australia and New Zealand impacting the Utah lamb and sheep industry. A public hearing is scheduled for October 16th.
- Clear Cut Act (U.S. Forest Service criminal prohibitions rule): A hearing has been held; working toward bipartisan support. Bill has not yet been marked up out of committee.
- Secure Rural Schools (SRS): Doug LaMalfa's passing transferred sponsorship to Maloy's office. Senate sponsors are Crapo and Wyden. Expiration deadline is September 30th. Timeline uncertain.
- Fix Our Forests Act (FOFA): Passed the House. Thanked Senator Lee's office for identifying and correcting provisions that would have opened the door to serial litigation. Pending Senate action.
- FERC licensing: The DC team is engaging with FERC on Beaver County's flood-damaged infrastructure to avoid triggering new re-licensing requirements.

Carson Brown — Senator John Curtis's Office

- Carson Brown recently assumed Jeff Raizor's position covering Southern Utah for Senator Curtis.
- Supporting Beaver County flood/fire recovery
- State Visa Pilot Program: Senator Curtis is sponsoring federal legislation that would allow states to administer a small number of visas to address specific workforce shortages. Utah's unemployment rate is approximately 3.5%, with roughly 97 job seekers per 100 openings.

Gary Webster — Senator Mike Lee's Office

- Congressional Briefing Tour: Participated in the full tour. Staff from the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee attended, including Rob McGregor from that committee.
- FEMA: New director Cameron Hamilton was confirmed August 7, 2026 — just 9 days on the job as of this meeting. Commissioners are encouraged to engage as the agency transitions.
- Circuit Court of Appeals Reorganization Act: Legislation to address the Ninth Circuit, which frequently impacts Utah and Western states.
- Wildfire Prevention Act: Co-sponsored with Senator Barrasso (WY). Some elements may be incorporated into the Fix Our Forests Act.
- Great American Outdoors Act: Significant funding implications for national parks in the region. Will require substantial work through Natural Resources committees in both chambers.
- Save America Act: Legislation requiring photo ID for federal elections.
- Monument reduction: Pleased with recent reductions; monitoring ongoing federal land oversight issues.
- BLM fuel reduction: Commissioners raised that BLM does not reduce fuels on federal land adjacent to private property, even where the fire risk is clear (e.g., Cameron Valley). Asked the office to consider adding language to Fix Our Forests requiring BLM and Forest Service to coordinate fuel reduction on their respective lands.
- Mobile offices scheduled in the five/six county region the following week.

Approved

Colette Cox — Utah Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED)

- Rural County Grants: FY2026 reports have been submitted. New applications will open within the next few weeks. Economic development directors at the county level should be engaged now on project identification.
- Rural Communities Opportunity Grants: $2 million competitive pool; applicants may request up to $600,000. Eligible categories include economic development infrastructure, workforce development, and business recruitment, retention, and expansion. Intent to apply due September 1st; final applications due October 30th.
- Rural Economic Development Incentive (REDI): Provides up to $6,000 per job created at or above the average county wage (Washington County: $38,000; Iron County slightly lower). Cap of $250,000 per business. Referrals are welcome for any businesses adding even a single qualifying position.

Donna Law — Southern Utah University, Associate Vice President of Regional Services

- Rejoining the Steering Committee in a new capacity after serving in Governor Cox's cabinet (Department of Cultural and Community Engagement) for the past 2.5 years.
- Utah Summit two weeks prior was a success. Distributed economic impact information highlighting SUU as the third largest employer in the region. Note: the Utah Shakespeare Festival alone recently reported a $52 million direct and indirect economic impact; the figures in the distributed materials may be understated.
- Small Business Workshops: The SUU Business Development Center will offer workshops in Beaver, Garfield, and Iron counties the week of September 22–24.
- SUU Homecoming week is September 22nd. School begins September 3rd.
- Both SUU and Utah Tech University are now in the Big Sky Conference.

5. HR Report

HR Director Jen Wong was absent due to a family emergency. Executive Director Darin Bushman presented in her place.

- CFO replacement (Allison McCoy's position): All resumes have been collected and reviewed. A hiring committee is being assembled. First-round interviews will be conducted virtually; finalists will be interviewed in person.
- Aging department: Staffing is relatively stable.
- Child care programs: Staffing is relatively stable.
- Community Support Services (CSS): Experiencing some turnover. One open position in Cedar City; one part-time position open in St. George (former Circles grant employee transitioned to CSS and then departed).

6. Aging Services Presentation — Alternative Program and Aging Waiver Program

Sheri Reber, Program Director for Aging Services (Home and Community Based Programs), presented on two of the department's in-home nursing home diversion programs.

Alternative Program (In-Home Services)

- Provides in-home services primarily to individuals age 60 and older. Up to 25% of clients may be under age 60 if they meet medical criteria.

Approved

- Goal: nursing home diversion — keeping individuals in their homes safely rather than placing them in residential care.
- Each client is assigned a $750/month budget managed by a Five County AOG case manager. A waiver process exists to exceed this cap when necessary.
- Services available: homemaking (light housekeeping, vacuuming, meal preparation), companionship and non-medical transportation, meal supplements (up to 31 fresh-frozen meals per month, contracted through a vendor), respite care for caregivers, emergency alert buttons, medication management (phone reminders or automated locking dispensers), bathing assistance, and budget assistance.
- Medicaid is the payer of first resort; the program serves as payer of last resort. A sliding scale fee applies for clients who exceed income limits but do not qualify for Medicaid.
- FY2026 outcomes: 87 clients served; average monthly program cost per client: $950 (including administration, case management, and service delivery); average yearly cost: $11,000.
- Comparative costs: nursing home placement averages $57,000–$103,000/year; assisted living averages $48,000–$67,000/year.
- Referrals: Contact Bethany Hill at Five County AOG — email: bhill@fivecounty.utah.gov, phone extension 108.

Aging Waiver Program (Medicaid 1915(c) Waiver, Age 65+)

- A federal Medicaid waiver program that uses nursing home funding to pay for in-home services. Clients must qualify both financially (Medicaid) and medically (meet nursing home level of care).
- Services include all Alternative Program services plus: adult day health services, chore services (pest control, lawn care), home modifications (e.g., walk-in shower installation), and more comprehensive case management with monthly home visits and annual nursing assessments.
- Spousal impoverishment provisions apply; spend-down options available for clients slightly over the Medicaid income threshold.
- FY2026 outcomes: 59 clients served; started year with approximately 30 clients, ended with 47 (some transitioned off due to death or relocation). Average monthly program cost: $1,300; average yearly cost: $16,000.
- No current waiting list — state allocated additional funding at the last legislative session, expanding the statewide cap from approximately 600 to 800 clients. The five-county area waiting list is currently closed due to budget limits but referrals are still encouraged as openings occur.
- Referrals: Contact Bethany Hill — bhill@fivecounty.utah.gov, extension 108.

Board members discussed the potential for greater utilization in rural counties, family member compensation provisions, and the application process. Director Reber encouraged all board members to share program information with constituents and to refer interested individuals directly to Five County AOG.

7. Approval of CDBG PY2027 Rating and Ranking Policies Public Hearing Minutes

Michael Johnson presented the minutes from the CDBG public hearing held at the Five County AOG Administration Building on July 9, 2026. No public comments were received during the hearing or during the subsequent 30-day comment period.

Motion:	Approve the minutes of the CDBG PY2027 Rating and Ranking Policies Public Hearing held July 9, 2026.

Approved

Moved by:	Commissioner Gil Almquist
Seconded by:	Tyler Fails, Beaver County School District
Vote:	Approved unanimously

8. Review and Approval of CDBG Rating and Ranking Policies — Program Year 2027

Michael Johnson presented the CDBG Rating and Ranking Policies for Program Year 2027 for board approval. The Finance Committee previously approved the regional prioritization section (page 8 of the policies). The full policies and procedures are unchanged from the prior year. Staff noted a renewed emphasis on proactive outreach to ensure applicants meet deadlines, which has historically been a challenge.

Motion:	Approve the FCAOG Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Rating and Ranking Policies for Program Year 2027 as presented.
Moved by:	Commissioner Jerry Taylor
Seconded by:	Commissioner Paul Cozzens
Vote:	Approved unanimously

9. Regional CIB FY27 First Trimester Application — Parowan City Library

Michael Johnson presented the Community Impact Board (CIB) application from Parowan City for the June trimester. Mayor Mollie Halterman provided additional context.

- Project: Parowan City Library renovation and systems replacement.
- Amount requested: $475,000 (100% of project cost).
- Scope: Replacement or repair of roof system, windows, HVAC, electrical, and plumbing. The library has served the community for approximately 60 years; improvements are projected to extend useful life by an additional 20–30 years.
- The library serves as the primary community gathering space in addition to its library function.
- Parowan City explored the USDA Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program but determined the administrative burden was not proportionate to the project size.
- Mayor Halterman noted the city has been addressing failing systems reactively for years. The building is structurally sound and worthy of investment.
- The board discussed county library fund contributions as a potential supplemental resource for unexpected costs.

Motion:	Support the Parowan City CIB application for $475,000 for the Parowan City Library renovation as presented.
Moved by:	Commissioner Celeste Meyeres
Seconded by:	Commissioner Paul Cozzens
Vote:	Approved unanimously

10. Congressional Briefing Tour Recap

Commissioner Jerry Taylor and Executive Director Darin Bushman provided a recap of the annual Congressional Briefing Tour.

Approved

- Approximately 19–20 congressional and national staff participated — a hand-picked group selected in coordination with all delegation offices (a change from prior years' open invitations).
- Itinerary: Began Sunday evening with dinner at Black Desert Resort in St. George; Monday visited Beaver County (geothermal, solar, and wind energy projects at Purple), Redmond Salt Mine, Johnson Ranch; Tuesday visited the Forest Service in Richfield, Dalton Sawmill in Circleville, Powell Point overlook, Bryce Canyon; and concluded at Zion National Park.
- National Association of Counties (NACO) representatives participated for the first time, including President George Dunlap and Dr. Gregory Nelson, Director of the National Public Lands Center. Their engagement and relationship-building with congressional staff was seen as a major asset.
- Key discussions included forest management and logging (sawmill viability, long-term contract needs), public lands policy, and the Northern Corridor — Zone 6 was overlaid on maps of Washington DC and New York City to illustrate the scale of land being offered.
- The tour is considered a success. Board members and staff expressed gratitude for the exceptional logistical support provided by Jen Wong and the AOG team. Jen alone logged approximately 106 hours during the tour week.
- Board discussion emphasized the value of building long-term relationships with staffers who will move through various offices and committees over their careers.

11. Annual Report, Local Participation Rates, and AOG Branding

Annual Report and Local Participation Strategy

- Executive Director Bushman reported that the initial rollout of proposed local participation rate increases received significant pushback. The approach has been reconsidered.
- The revised strategy prioritizes demonstrating the value Five County AOG delivers to each community before revisiting rate discussions. An Iron County packet was prepared showing value delivered by city (e.g., Cedar City: $585,000; Iron County total: approximately $946,000 — and likely higher upon further research).
- A draft Annual Report has been developed — the first since 2007. Each department completed program and expenditure packets. The report covers AOG programs comprehensively by department.
- The draft was shared with board members for review (please do not distribute — pending staff verification and photo releases).
- County-level economic impact estimates: Washington County — approximately $3.5 million in direct AOG spending into the local economy; Iron County — approximately $1.8 million. These figures do not include staff salary expenditures or multiplier effects.
- Director Bushman presented to the Iron County School Board the prior evening — the first time members were aware of their legal entwinement obligation through the AOG interlocal agreement.
- Next steps: Finalize the report within the coming week, then schedule visits to cities, counties, and school districts.
- Board members expressed strong support and offered to advocate on behalf of the AOG within their respective cities and school districts. The case was made that eliminating AOG services would cost individual counties far more to replicate independently.

AOG Branding Discussion

- Executive Director Bushman raised the question of whether the Board wished to undertake a rebranding effort for the AOG, noting that the current name and acronym (FCAOG) are not well recognized externally.

Approved

- Examples of successful rebrands cited: the Six County AOG (now R6) and the Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC).
- Board members expressed broad support for exploring a rebrand. Ideas included a student competition (modeled on a successful Iron County project) and AI-assisted concept development.
- No formal vote taken; Board consensus was to proceed with exploring branding options.

12. Director's Report

Operational Updates

- Cybersecurity: Multiple cybersecurity incidents have occurred. All staff are completing an AI cybersecurity training module through KnowBe4. The organization is the only AOG in the state still running on Microsoft products; a switch to Google Workspace is under evaluation to improve security and cloud data retention (Microsoft cloud deletes data after 90 days). Utah Cyber Security Center's Sentinel One software is deployed on all devices at no cost.
- St George Heat Building (leased space): A car fire behind the building approximately two weeks prior caused fire damage to the rear of the structure, followed by a water leak that flooded the interior. The state continues to reimburse the $6,500/month lease only through December 31, 2026. AOG remains locked into the lease for approximately 8 more years. The organization is actively seeking a subtenant.
- Copier leases: Xerox has merged with Fuji and is transitioning to Lexmark. Two copiers are coming up for lease renewal and staff are evaluating alternatives, including local vendors.
- Annual audit: Auditors will be on-site the last week of August. Allison McCoy is currently managing audit correspondence.
- AOG Conference: September 10, 2026 at Bryce Canyon — an evening event coordinated with cities and towns through the Local Administrative Advisor program and the ULCT. Three concurrent training sessions will be offered, with a focus on planning and board function. RSVP forthcoming.
- CDBG: Iron County disaster declaration CDBG funding still available; Mayor Halterman has completed the Parowan Application and it's in review, the Cedar City application has yet to be fully submitted.
- Building roof: A third significant water intrusion event has occurred. The 30-year-old roof requires full replacement, including tile removal. Ceiling tile damage throughout the building, Admin will be getting bids.
- AI Policy: Being developed; will be brought to the Board.
- Website and Social Media: New website is live with a distributed department team maintaining content. Social media presence spans Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and X. Follower counts are growing slowly (~370 on AOG account); board members and partners are encouraged to share AOG content to expand reach. Engagement for search purposes is performing well.
- Circles program: No organizations in Utah received continued Circles funding. The program is effectively ended in Utah. Staff member Kathryn Moster transitioned to an outreach position in the aging department.
- Remote leadership training: Completed through Utah State University at no cost.

Board member Paul Cozzens offered public recognition of Executive Director Bushman's leadership during his tenure, which was echoed by the Board.

It was noted that Southwest Behavioral Health and Public Health have recently completed AI policy reviews and suggested the AOG review those as models.

Approved

13. Committee Members Roundtable

Washington County

- Commissioner Almquist and Mayor Krause noted growing political and social division within Washington County and the broader region. Board members emphasized the importance of elected officials setting a tone of unity and cooperation, particularly citing the success of America 250 celebrations in bringing communities together.
- Mayor Krause: A city staff member who had engaged in politically divisive communications was addressed directly by the city council. Board members collectively agreed that intergovernmental relationships should remain cooperative and above partisan division.
- Cybersecurity: Board members encouraged all counties and cities to connect with the Utah Cyber Security Center (referenced by Commissioner Almquist as a resource championed by Representative Carl Albrecht). Sentinel One software and ongoing phishing/education modules are available at no cost.

Beaver County

- Commissioner Hollingshead reflected that the wildfire and flood disasters, while devastating, brought an outpouring of help from surrounding counties and communities. He expressed gratitude for regional solidarity.
- Data centers: Commissioner Hollingshead raised the growing conversation around data centers locating in rural Utah. He suggested educating the Board and public on how data centers actually operate; it was cited that Washington County has an example of a low-impact, long-standing facility adjacent to the AOG Headquarters. The idea of a local educational site tour was discussed.

Garfield County

- Commissioner Taylor reported the county is running an active marketing campaign promoting Garfield County as a place to live and raise a family.
- A new sawmill seeking to locate in Panguitch cannot secure adequate power from Rocky Mountain Power without first paying $20,000 for a feasibility study. The county has an 8% unemployment rate, and the sawmill represents significant job creation potential.
- A new food store sought to locate on a property outside city limits requiring a turn lane. UDOT initially quoted $1 million; later revised the estimate to $13 million. The business relocated to a site with existing turn lanes, but UDOT is still raising objections. Two job-creating businesses are being stymied by infrastructure and regulatory barriers.
- The board discussed whether MPO transportation resources or Region 4 contacts (Commissioner Bruce Adams on the Transportation Commission) could assist. Executive Director Bushman suggested looping in Nate from the AOG transportation team.

Kane County

- Commissioner Meyeres reported two significant wins: the right-sizing of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and the conclusion that the Swaner Fall Road project was reasonable and necessary after six to seven years of process.
- Zion National Park's ban on large vehicles (tour buses) on the east side of the park is significantly impacting Kane County tourism, as tour buses represent a high percentage of visitor traffic entering from the east.

Approved

- A shuttle solution from the east entrance to the main park shuttle system is being developed but faces an ongoing operational funding gap of approximately $1.5–2.5 million per year. Capital funding is more accessible than O&M funding.
- Chief Bridge: Delayed by a BLM study requirement but progressing.
- Coral Pink Sand Dunes Road: Mostly complete; Arizona side still pending.

14. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Approved