

Bluff Town Council Work Session Approved Minutes

Tuesday, October 13, 2026, at 4:00 pm MDT

Bluff Community Center - 190 N 3rd E Street, Bluff, UT 84512

Meeting called to order: 4:01pm

Roll Call

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

Public Comment

No public comments.

1. Road Improvements Prioritization Discussion (Haviken/All)

The council reviewed annual road maintenance routine expenses, which include road patching, pothole repairs, culvert and cattle guard cleanouts as needed, managing overgrown vegetation, and winter crack sealing. The town currently receives approximately \$80,000 per year in revenue for Class C Roads. The Town also has a roads fund balance of \$72,000 representing unspent roads revenues rolled over from the previous fiscal year. Additionally, San Juan County awarded a matching maintenance fund of \$71,000. Specific budgetary and project allocations discussed include:

Operational costs total \$47,000, including the Road Manager's salary, \$15,000 for engineering services from consulting engineer Jones and DeMille, and \$10,000 for equipment allowances. Maintenance budget items include \$32,000 allocated for Bluff Bench Road to repair damage caused by gravel trucks during the U.S. 162 project, \$8,000 for road patching (which the town must handle independently this year because the county is unavailable, utilizing the town handyman for potholes while edge repairs cannot be done), \$7,000 for winter crack sealing, \$20,000 for road grading within the town proper, and \$5,000 for culvert cleanouts tentatively scheduled to start on Monday the 19th.

The roads manager secured a \$104,000 grant last month for road work south of Larkspur in southwest Bluff, though a proposal from Jones and DeMille came in high at \$209,000. Chip sealing in southwest Bluff is currently on hold. The project alternatives may include Mulberry Avenue, Third Street East, and Black Locust (between Third and Fourth, and Fifth Street), addressing traffic diversion problems caused by the bumpy current condition of Black Locust.

A 2025 long-range study by Vialytics outlined a total magnitude of \$3,882,000 to fix all roads in town, though such massive totals require multi-year savings, external funding, or borrowing. The old highway improvement project has two main approaches: revitalizing the base with a two-inch hot asphalt 30-foot-wide road featuring a painted pedestrian/bicycle pathway for an estimated 20-year lifespan, or a chip seal alternative estimated at \$600,000 for a 24-foot-wide road requiring crack sealing maintenance every four to five years. However, this project is tied up with ownership issues on Navajo Twins Drive. Other major corridors discussed include Sand Island Road (requiring a two-inch hot asphalt overlay estimated at \$110,000) and Bluff Bench Road (requiring an overlay estimated at \$743,000, which council members noted might be a strong candidate for Community

Impact Board (CIB) funding derived from oil and gas revenues, or potential state assistance due to heavy commercial traffic from the UDOT project).

The council discussed exploring third-party collaboration with the BLM regarding Sand Island Road during an upcoming meeting with Jake Palma, as well as coordinating with UDOT concerning trail projects and potential adjustments to active transportation routes moving away from Cow Canyon toward Bluff Bench Road and Montezuma Creek. The active transportation committee has an initial meeting scheduled, with a public open house tentatively set for November 19th. The transportation board meets next on November 21st, serving as a key deadline if the town chooses to modify its grant allocations. Finally, the council agreed on the long-term value of purchasing a mobile speed limit trailer (ranging between \$2,000 and \$5,000) to address interior street speeding and motorist behavior and instructed staff to prepare a concrete decision-making plan for the upcoming council sessions.

2. Discussion of Airport Capital Improvements List Through FY2032, as required by UDOT Division of Aeronautics (Hook/All)

The council discussed the required capital improvements project list submission for Bluff Airport, noting that submitting the list does not financially commit the town to these projects. Jim Hook, who has served as the volunteer airport manager since about 1990, joined the meeting to provide historical context and updates. The Bluff Airport originated as a dirt strip constructed along with many others across San Juan County during uranium and oil exploration periods, featuring a north-south strip and an east-west strip in the Cottonwood edition. When Jim moved to town in 1988, the county operated the airport, and Gene Foushee worked with the county to pave and fence the facility in exchange for building a hangar. Ownership of the hangar was later transferred to Jim and his wife Luanne, and they eventually donated it to the Town at an appraised value of \$170,000. The town, through Jim and Town Manager Nelson, leases out the four hangar spaces to fund operations. Jim personally handles the airport's maintenance, including mowing with his own machinery and time twice a year, and keeping track of the windsock. The airport has experienced regular usage this fall, hosting paragliders and an RC club that flew remote-control jet planes, during which one jet accidentally crashed into and destroyed the windsock, which was replaced.

Regarding capital improvements, the state and federal aviation departments operate on five-year planning cycles through the Aeronautical Division of UDOT. A previous pavement preservation project in 2024 involved sealing cracks and adding an overlay to extend the asphalt's lifespan by about five years. The next major projected need is slated around 2029, where the aging asphalt will require complete milling, a thicker new surface, and the addition of a turnaround area at the end of the runway, as planes currently have to be shut down and physically turned around by hand to face the prevailing southwest winds. The state typically funds 90% of such projects if the airport is kept up to standard, leaving a 10% town share amounting to approximately \$225,000.. The airport property itself is situated on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and leased from the BLM, a transition that was originally arranged when the town incorporated to prevent private or commercial entities from taking over the space.

Mayor Ewing and Town Manager Nelson also discussed long-term possibilities for the airport, such as adding water and restroom facilities, exploring remote delivery trials using unmanned vehicles or helicopters for distributing packages and food, and potentially addressing lease terms with the BLM to allow broader usage. The airport sits at an elevation of 4,000 feet, making it lower than facilities in

Monticello or Blanding. The capital improvement plan draft is managed via the state's "Black Cat" program with engineering support from aviation, and it must be submitted by the first week of November without requiring a formal council vote since it serves as a non-binding planning document.

3. Discussion Regarding USDA Grant for Generator and Solar Project at Bluff Community Center (Ewing/Wade)

The town council discussed a grant that would pay for most or all of an emergency generator for the community center. However, installing the generator poses a problem because the building has four different electrical supplies, meaning the generator could only be plugged into one of them. Installing solar panels on the community center would only power a single circuit unless this electrical configuration is resolved.

The budget for the current year includes a capital improvements allocation of approximately \$75,000 intended for solar work at the community center. Councilmember Wade has been working on researching the issue and provided an update, indicating that he is still waiting to hear back from Rocky Mountain Power after submitting a load sheet. Combining the panels into a single circuit would likely be costly, would require bringing the rest of the electrical system up to current code due to existing non-compliant elements, and might require installing a commercial transformer outside the building. For comparison, a new residential power connection costs about \$12,000.

The council weighed whether to invest in upgrading the community center to create a resilient emergency facility with a generator and solar power, or alternatively, to repurpose the budgeted funds toward the brick project at the old elementary school project and leave the 1970s community center building as it is without future electrical upgrades. Councilmember Wade plans to follow up with Rocky Mountain Power again to obtain more concrete cost estimates, and the council agreed to table the item to continue gathering information and revisit it during the work session next month.

4. BLM BENM Cooperating Agency Status and Back-Up Representatives

The town council discussed an invitation from the Bureau of Land Management for the Town of Bluff to participate as a cooperating agency in a major planning process. This legal status requires agencies to involve local municipal governments in major decisions affecting their boundaries. The process is triggered by a large planning undertaking involving one environmental impact statement (EIS) and two resource management plans to establish new resource management plans for the Bears Ears National Monument and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument following the administration's reduction of the monuments' sizes. Although the town previously expressed a lack of support for reducing the size of the monuments, it was agreed that having a seat at the table is in the town's best interest, especially since parts of the reduced monument lie within the town boundaries of Bluff.

Participating requires signing a memorandum of understanding, included in the council's packet, which outlines cooperation and the agreement to keep confidential information confidential. The memorandum will be signed and submitted to the agency. The agreement asks for up to two backup representatives to attend meetings and speak for the town if the primary representative cannot attend. Mayor Ewing, who previously served as a cooperating agency representative for Bears Ears during the last management plan, volunteered to serve along with Councilmembers Hornsby and Wade as backup representatives.

5. Update from BRICC Design Review Committee & Discussion of Off-Street Parking Ordinance (Collins)

The town council was updated on the Design Review Committee (DRC) and its relation to the off-street parking ordinance. Planning and Zoning, Chair Collins, provided an administrative update stating that the 2024 Rural Community Opportunities Grant and the USDA fire suppression grant have both been successfully closed out. Currently, the town has two open grants remaining, the Cultural Capital Grant (supporting fire suppression) and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG), which funds an upcoming lighting and insulation project at the BRICC building that must be completed before the program closes in May. Chair Collins plans to apply for a \$500,000 Rural Communities Opportunity grant for fiscal year 2027 by the end of the month, following recommendations from James Dixon at the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED), which will help bridge funding gaps for the BRICC project. Regarding congressionally appropriated funds, final budget approvals from Congress are expected to be delayed until mid-December following the elections.

The council reviewed the town's off-street parking ordinance, which was originally passed in 2021 and requires revisions and better organization. The architects working on the old elementary school (the BRICC building) noted that the structure sits across two parallel lots, one on the west side and one on the east side which separate the building from the parking lot. While the existing ordinance does not explicitly mandate that parking must be located on the same lot as the business, the architects raised questions about how the layout is addressed, leading to a proposal to draft a letter confirming that parking is permitted on an adjacent lot under the same ownership.

The discussion expanded into complexities surrounding right-of-way parking and solar panel placement. The design team originally considered running solar panels along the north and west sides of the BRICC property where historic parking has occurred for decades but ran into concerns because that area falls within the road right-of-way. The council discussed distinctions between public and private rights-of-way, noting that since the town both owns the property and the right-of-way in this specific case, it could establish exemptions allowing public infrastructure like solar shade structures or parking areas. Rather than dragging out a lengthy review process through the Planning and Zoning Commission, the council agreed that it would be a more efficient use of resources to have legal counsel review and update the ordinance directly. Final decisions regarding solar panel locations at the BRICC building will ultimately depend on recommendations from electrical engineers and the architecture team, considering sun exposure and potential placement in the parking lot south of the modular building.

6. September Financials Update (Nelson)

A brief financial update was presented by Town Manger Nelson, regarding the September financials provided in the packet. Town Manger Nelson, noted that if anyone had questions about what they saw, they could let her know, while also reporting that she is currently working with the audit team to conduct test transactions for the 2026 fiscal year. More updates on the audit are expected in the coming weeks. Following this update, councilmembers acknowledged the stressful nature of audits and expressed thanks to Town Manager Nelson.

7. Looking Ahead/Other/Reminders

Monticello MOU still pending

Other

A brief update noting that work on the Monticello MOU is still ongoing and will be presented to the council as soon as possible.

It was announced that all cemetery documentation has finally been signed and recorded at the county, meaning the town now formally owns the property where the town cemetery is located. This milestone was credited to the hard work of everyone involved, including Town Manager Nelson, former Mayor Leppanen, and the board of the Southwest Heritage Foundation.

Reminder, the Planning and Zoning Commission schedule, the upcoming meeting is not this Thursday, but next Wednesday, the 21st, from 10:00 AM to noon.

Councilmember Davila requested a future agenda update regarding secondary water, suggesting that Patrick (McDermontt) or another appropriate individual provide a briefing. It was noted that an update would be scheduled in November or December timeframe.

8. Motion and Vote to Move into Executive Session Pursuant to Utah Code 52-4-205 to Discuss Strategy for Pending or Reasonably Imminent Litigation; discussion of the purchase, exchange, or lease of real property, and Adjourn Thereafter

Mayor Ewing noted that the meeting would be adjourned directly following the executive session without returning to open session, and no votes would be held during the closed session.

Mayor Ewing called a vote to enter closed executive session pursuant to Utah Code § 52-4-205. The purpose of the closed session was to discuss strategy for pending or reasonably imminent litigation, as well as the discussion of purchase, exchange, or lease of real property. Vote: Hornsby – Aye, Davila – Aye, Haws – Aye, Wade – Aye, Ewing – Aye.

Time Entered: The council entered executive session at 5:26pm.
Meeting adjourned at 5:51pm.

For request to receive emails/meeting invitations, email: office@townofbluffutah.gov
Minute Taker: Charmayne Sandoval
Draft Minutes Published: October 18, 2026
Approved Minutes Published: October 22, 2026