



Utah Governor's Office of Economic Development

OFFICE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Governor's Rural Partnership Board Meeting

August 13, 2020 from 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Held virtually by the Governor's Office of Economic Development, Office of Rural Development

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- Present:** Lt. Governor Spencer J. Cox, Steve Styler, Geri Gamber, Shannon Ellsworth, Joan Hammer, Brian Higginbotham, Curtis Wells, Gary Hallows, Brian Raymond, Zac Whitwell, Jason Yerka, Robert Miller, Kent Wilson, Michael McKee, Jeff Peterson, and James Toledo.
- Regrets:** Emily Niehaus
- Guests:** Ryan Starks, Paul Hill, James Dixon, Beckie Page, Rebecca Dilg, Chris Byrd, Douglas Meredith and approximately 40 other rural partners
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Welcome

Brad Cook, President of Snow College

Brad Cook welcomed the attendees to the meeting and expressed his gratitude for the efforts of the GRPB and other rural associates for serving rural Utah and addressing the rural-urban divide. He shared some statistics on how many crises are affecting rural communities disproportionately hard and asked that efforts be continued in serving rural Utah.

Call to Order, Introduction and Swearing-in of new GRPB Members

Lt. Governor Spencer Cox, GRPB Co-Chairperson

Lt. Governor Spencer Cox introduced Curtis Wells and Gary Hallows as the newest members of the Governor's Rural Partnership Board. Lt. Governor Cox had the two sworn-in and welcomed them on behalf of the governor. Dustin Jansen and Zac Whitwell were also sworn in, having not been sworn in previously. Lt. Governor Cox mentioned that a written oath of office would be provided to the members via email.

Minutes Approval and Executive Committee Member Nomination

Steve Styler, GRPB Co-Chairperson

Motion:	Approve the Governor's Rural Partnership Board meeting minutes from June 24, 2020.	
<i>Motion by:</i>	Jason Yerka	
<i>Seconded by:</i>	Jeff Peterson	
Vote Tally:	<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>
	16	0
Result:	Motion passes .	

After approval of the previous meeting's minutes, Steve Styler asked for nominations to the Executive Committee. There is one slot that needs to be filled. Brian Higgenbotham suggested that the duties of the office be explained before any nominations were given. Steve outlined how working on the Rural County Grant Program, agenda-setting, and communication with the Governor and GOED staff would all be included as duties. After those responsibilities were explained, the following nominations were made:

Motion:	Nominate Shannon Ellsworth for Executive Committee position	
<i>Motion by:</i>	Lt. Governor Spencer Cox	
<i>Seconded by:</i>	Jeff Peterson	
Vote Tally:	<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>
	16	0
Result:	Motion passes .	

Motion:	Nominate Kent Wilson for Executive Committee position	
<i>Motion by:</i>	Geri Gamber	
<i>Seconded by:</i>	Curtis Wells	
Vote Tally:	<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>
	16	0
Result:	Motion passes .	

Motion:	Nominate Geri Gamber for Executive Committee position	
<i>Motion by:</i>	Stephen Lisonbee	
<i>Seconded by:</i>	Jason Yerka	
Vote Tally:	<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>
	16	0
Result:	Motion passes .	

Scott Cheney noted that the GRPB Board votes on the executive committee and that the majority of the board carries, not the GOED Board, as was accidentally stated during deliberation.

Steve Styler motioned for nominations to cease and for voting to be opened virtually.

Motion:	Cessation of nominations and opening of virtual voting via email	
<i>Motion by:</i>	Steve Styler	
<i>Seconded by:</i>	Zac Whitwell	
Vote Tally:	<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>
	16	0
Result:	Motion passes .	

Rural County Grant Update

Ryan Starks, Managing Director of Business Services, GOED/James Dixon, ORD Program Manager, GOED

Ryan Starks and James Dixon presented on the Rural County grant program and opportunities for rural counties to receive government funding. Ryan began by thanking GOED staff for its commitment to serving rural Utah. Ryan thanked Beckie Page, Rebecca Dilg, James Dixon, and Nan Anderson for their work. Ryan highlighted Nan’s Main Street project in developing the downtown areas of rural cities. The two pilot cities are Price and Brigham City. Ryan thanked Chris Byrd for his service as an intern and noted his research into Western states’ rural initiatives. Ryan also touched on the rural-urban divide and how the number of minority-owned businesses that have suffered under COVID-19 has skyrocketed. That, coupled with the disproportionate effect of the coronavirus on minority populations, has led GOED to partner with the Suazo Business Center in addressing minority-owned business needs and overall inclusion for economic development going forward. Ryan noted how the Rural County Grant is replacing the BEAR Grant and how the GRPB will be involved in administering the grant. James explained how grant applications were being reviewed by a GRPB subcommittee in tandem with GOED staff. James thanked the GRPB’s efforts in assisting with the grant.

GRPB FY21 Rural Strategic Plan

Steve Styler, GRPB Co-Chairperson

Steve began by outlining the Rural Strategic Plan for the 2021 fiscal year, which consists of broadband, rural utilities, workforce, and affordable housing initiatives. These topics were selected after reviewing the white papers from previous board members’ presentations at our last meeting.

Broadband

Dustin Jansen outlined digital equity effort and broadband expansion in rural Utah. Digital literacy and internet access are crucial, especially for students and educators. Students using hotspots quickly deplete their data, and many tribal communities face geographical obstacles as well. Government entities and businesses have collaborated to try and provide better internet access for rural communities. The state library, the state COVID taskforce, the Confederated Tribes of Goshute Reservation, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and other groups have reached out to try and solve these issues.

Douglas Meredith, from GSI, spoke representing the Utah Rural Telecom Association (URTA). Douglas asserted that Utah has done great at providing the supply of broadband access. He

highlighted age, education, and income gaps for broadband access. URTA members are coordinating with school districts to try and expand broadband access to students in rural Utah. Answering a question on marketing, Douglas highlighted the separate efforts of the providers and advocacy groups but asserted that rural advocates can help educators understand the importance of expanding broadband access. Dustin added that the Navajo Nation is collaborating with the federal government and groups in Denver and Southern Utah in expanding fiber lines. Despite hesitancy from members of the White Mesa community of Ute Mountain, the Ute Tribe is close to allowing access to lay down fiber on certain allotments. Douglas agreed it is crucial. Lt. Governor Spencer Cox summarized that the board can help with gaps in access and getting the word out on rural internet access and also that collaboration between the state, federal government, and tribal groups are challenging because of the number of permits and communication that needs to occur.

Beckie Page read a question from the chat: Heidi Goedhart wondered whether satellite access was an option, with Lt. Governor Cox emphasized the expense of satellite options and the greater benefit and capability of tower and fiber infrastructure for wireless expansion. Douglas Meredith agreed and explained the advantages of 5G and the future of potentially more affordable satellite options. Natalie Randall noted in the chat that San Juan school district recently closed a request for proposal for point to point wireless, and Dustin Jansen noted that signals need to be reliable.

Rural Utilities

Jeff Peterson addressed the issue of rural utilities, which was brought up in his previous white paper. Jeff stated that Utah needs to recognize the balance between coal and alternative energy sources and how coal backs up alternative energy sources. The lower income levels of rural counties signal an exacerbated effect of utility price changes on overall economic well-being. Jeff highlighted how electric car charging facilities need to be prioritized in Utah going forward, and how businesses that use a lot of power need to know about counties like Iron or Washington that could afford them lower energy costs and might bring job opportunities to rural Utah. Steve Styler thanked Jeff for his presentation.

Five-minute break

Steve re-adjourned the meeting and suggested tasking those who have presented with developing assignments and responsibilities that the board members can be doing; whether that be letters of support, potential legislation, etc. Those assignments will be made after the meeting unless they appear obvious during this meeting. From those assignments action items will be presented at our next meeting. Ryan Starks let the board know to feel free to put the GOED staff to work; they are happy to help out.

Workforce

Zac Whitwell presented on workforce and rural workforce development. Zac noted that the ongoing pandemic has necessitated workforce transitions and development across the state and that the pandemic's economic effects have helped facilitate a shift towards different industries and have opened different opportunities for rural communities. Workforce development efforts can help raise the overall wellbeing of Utah's rural job force. Zac supports the "Rural Workforce Network" to encourage and challenge employers to host more remote work, and to pivot away from Wasatch Front-centralization for remote working opportunities. Gary Hallows emphasized that international business relations and continued economic development for rural Utah needs to be accompanied by a focus on developing local human

talent, investment, and longevity. Lt. Governor Spencer Cox agreed that affordable housing is struggling to find a foothold across the state, in urban and suburban as well as rural Utah.

Affordable Housing

Curtis Wells presented on affordable housing after the segue from the Lt. Governor. Curtis Wells shared on his screen images of news stories and articles related to the struggles of developing affordable housing. Living in Moab, Curtis was able to relate to and explain the issues that accompany housing development, including costs, external market demands, and public land ownership. Curtis shared a graph illustrating the affordability in Utah by county, with southern counties being adversely affected. Surges in demand to live and work in some counties, like Grand and Washington counties need to be proactively acted upon so as to provide for those who wish to move to rural Utah and provide work for the populations there. Curtis emphasized the outdated nature of land use codes, that regulations are restrictive and that incentives do not exist for development. Curtis suggested overhauling codes to allow for more high-density zoning in certain areas, or to at least revise some codes to fit communities' needs. Shannon Ellsworth agreed that codes are outdated, but brought up that spending funds to change the code might not be beneficial to most rural communities, considering that Moab's unique position as a tourism and residential hub allows it to experience different growth than some cities. Shannon agreed that these issues exist for many rural Utah communities and that UDOT provides some support via funding sources for communities looking to update. Curtis agreed and noted that obstacles exist on all sides, from cities to residents to counties. Lt. Governor Cox thanked Curtis and brought up how he visited every town in Utah in the past year and how the UDOT grant has been helpful but there needs to be even more support for rural communities that are experiencing unprecedented growth. Keith Heaton touched on the Commission on Affordable Housing and how the GRPB needs to collaborate with the committee in order to make progress in addressing affordable housing in Utah. He challenged the board to help spend the existing monies on housing affordability similar to the Housing Assistance Program at DWS.

COVID-19 Challenges and Success Stories

GRPB Board members

Stephen Lisonbee took over for Steve Styler who had to step out of the meeting for another.

- Kent Wilson described how Emery County has executed a contract with UAC to help with spending COVID funds provided by the government. Stephen Lisonbee agreed with the sentiment. Ryan Starks repeated Kent Wilson's point for the virtual audience that Brandy Grace at UAC is a great source for consultation on spending funds.
- Zac Whitwell talked about the challenges of resuming employment during the pandemic, and how DWS has been able to put on virtual job fairs despite the public health crisis.
- Stephen Lisonbee shared about how small business employers were impacted immediately by shutdowns and changes, and stakeholders and communities have been able to help with those issues.
- Stephen praised the In Utah campaign and its help in mitigating economic recovery.

Ryan Starks thanked everyone in attendance for their efforts.

Adjournment

Steve Styler, GRPB Co-Chairperson

Steve asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion:	Motion to Adjourn	
<i>Motion by:</i>	Zac Whitwell	
<i>Seconded by:</i>	Curtis Wells	
Vote Tally:	<u>AYE</u>	<u>NAY</u>
	16	0
Result:	Motion passes .	

Next meeting: October 7, 2020, 9 - 11 am in Cedar City