

Commission Meeting Minutes

The following are the minutes of the Utah Independent Redistricting Commission meeting. The meeting was held on Saturday, September 24, 2021, in Roosevelt City Hall located on 255 S State St, Roosevelt, UT 84066

Note: A copy of meeting materials, and an audio recording of the meeting can be found on the Public Notice Website. The minutes may refer to the recording found on the Public Notice Website with the approximate number on the recording where an issue is being discussed.

Attendance - Commission Members

Chair, Utah Independent Redistricting Commission - Rex Facer

Commissioner Karen Hale

Commissioner Christine Durham

Commissioner Jeff Baker

Commissioner Robert Bishop

Commissioner Lyle Hillyard

Commissioner William A. Thorne Jr.

Attendance - Staff and Others in Attendance at Anchor Location:

Gordon Haight, Executive Director

Aly Escobar, Administrative Coordinator

Cassidy Hansen, Intern

Sariah Benion, Intern

Joey Fica, Intern

Mayor JR Bird - Roosevelt City

Ronald M. Winterton, State Senator

Lori Jo Winterton

Irene Hansen, Duchesne County Commissioner

Gordon Snow, Former State House Representative

Jay Blain, Utah Education Association

Bryan Gorum, Chairman of the Republican Party Uintah County

Katie Wright - Better Boundaries

Doug Hammond, Vernal Mayor

Greg Miles, County Commissioner

John Hale

Keith Gootspeed

Kyle Snow

Matt Cannon – Ray Quiney (Virtually)

Kyle Friant (virtually)

Amanda Wind Smith, Alliance for a Better Utah (Virtually)

I. Open House

At the start of the meeting, an open house was held to allow the public to view drafted maps.

II. Welcome – Chair Rex Facer

Chair Facer thanked the public for their attendance and began the meeting at 6:00 PM. He also noted some changes to the posted agenda and invited the local government representatives to share some comments.

III. Presentation: City and County Delegations

Mayor Bird from Roosevelt addressed the commissioners. His comments mentioned the current work in the energy industry in Roosevelt and their desire to diversify their economic interests. He also expressed an interest in seeing Duchesne County remaining free of any splits for voting boundaries.

Duchesne County Commissioner Irene Hansen then addressed the commissioners. Her comments mentioned that she would like to see Duchesne County remain whole when it comes to voting boundaries. She also mentioned that she appreciated having their congressional district contain both urban and rural areas.

Chair Facer turned the time to Commissioner Hillyard to introduce several members of the audience. Commissioner Hillyard introduced Gordon Snow, a former state representative, and Ron Winterton, a current State Senator.

Chair Facer then introduced the members of the commission, mentioning which political party appointed each member and noting which commissioners are associated with a party.

IV. Presentation: Redistricting Process – Rex Facer

Chair Facer moved to the next item and stated that he would explain some of the process of redistricting and how the commission functions.

He began by explaining that Proposition 4 in 2018 began the creation of the Utah Independent Redistricting Commission and after some compromise legislation in 2020 the commission was created. Chair Facer explained that the Utah Independent Redistricting Commission is an advisory commission to the Legislature and would be giving the Legislature three drafted Congressional, State House, State Senate, and State School board maps. He mentioned that areas such Washington County had grown at a faster rate than other areas, and so essentially to account for population numbers to remain equal some representation would shift into the areas that had the higher growth over the previous ten years.

Chair Facer then went on to explain the criteria to be used by the commission. More information about these criteria can be found here: <https://uirc.utah.gov/uirc-meeting/synopsis-criteria-and-standards/>

In this explanation, Chair Facer mentioned the requirements for equal populations as being the fundamental criteria as the commissioner works to create maps for the Utah Congressional seats, Utah House, Utah Senate, and State School Board. He presented the various population numbers for each map type. He presented the question of what counties and areas Duchesne and Uintah Counties would like to have included in their districts.

Chair Facer also explained that the commissioners had decided to match the criteria adopted by the Legislative Redistricting Committee as well as their own criteria.

Chair Facer then moved to explain the additional criteria adopted by the Utah Independent Redistricting Commission which can be found in the link above. In this explanation he touched on the importance of

communities of interest, both as a way to ensure representation and to help the commissioners understand where communities can be split if necessary. He also mentioned that the commissioners have decided not to consider political data as they map.

Chair Facer explained the Commissioners' efforts towards acting transparently, and explained that mapping sessions are all streamed on YouTube. He also explained that the public can comment through various avenues, including mapping the state or submitting a community of interest.

Commissioner Hansen from Duchesne County noted to the commissioners that Commissioner Miles from Duchesne County was now in attendance as well as Mayor Hammond from Vernal.

V. Presentation: Public Comment – Cassidy Hansen

Chair Facer then turned the time to Cassidy Hansen to present on the commission website uirc.utah.gov and how the public can use the website to submit comments. Cassidy explained how the public can submit communities of interest, full maps, and written comments. Tutorials and links to these resources can be found at uirc.utah.gov.

During Cassidy's presentation commissioners mentioned how helpful explanations are for submitted communities of interest and encouraged attendees to reach out to staff with any questions regarding the online software.

VI. Presentation: Public Hearing Format – Gordon Haight

Chair Facer turned the time to Gordon Haight to explain the format for public comment. Gordon explained that there would be a five-minute timer for each comment and asked the public to stay within that limit to accommodate hearing from everyone that would like to comment.

VII. Open Public Comment

Chair Facer then turned the time to public comment and asked Mayor Hammond if he would like to make the first comment. Mayor Hammond from Vernal then addressed the commissioners. He thanked the commissioners for making their way to the area. He then explained that Vernal is growing and holds a strong rural identity. He expressed a desire for their district to not contain areas from Park City to the west if possible.

Gordon Snow then addressed the commissioners regarding a map he had drafted. He expressed his feelings that keeping cities and towns whole is an important criteria and helps accommodate fair representation and noted things like annexation may complicate that.

Commissioner Baker asked about some mentioned annexations. Mayor Bird from Roosevelt explained some recent annexations and explained that those new boundaries had largely been updated in the state system already.

Commissioner Bishop then turned the conversation back to the comments from the member of the public and asked more specifically what areas Uintah and Duchesne Counties would like to be included with for state house and senate seats, as neither county has the population for a full house seat and the two

counties together do not have enough for a full senate seat. He then asked some questions about how Duchesne County and Uintah Counties had been split in previous years.

Senator Ron Winterton addressed the commissioners. His comments discussed the size of his Senate district, and the overlap it has with two congressional districts and five state house districts. He also mentioned the connections between Daggett County and Uintah County as well as the connections between Summit County and the Uintah Basin. He expressed a desire for his district to largely stay the same if possible.

Commissioner Miles from Duchesne County addressed the commissioners. He discussed some differences between rural Utah and other areas and the concerns the constituents may have.

Commissioner Durham explained that the commissioners had heard a lot about the different concerns regarding urban and rural areas in Utah, and that some had expressed a desire for all four congressional districts to contain both urban and rural parts of the state and others had expressed a desire for urban and rural areas to remain distinct for congressional seats. She asked to hear more regarding that idea.

Commissioner Miles explained that while each congressional district certainly does have some shared values and concerns, he saw areas such as land management concerns as areas not shared across the state in the same way.

Beth Suave, a teacher from Roosevelt, then addressed the commissioners. Her comments focused on state school board districts and expressed a concern with Roosevelt being in the same district as a large portion of Alpine School District. She explained that the smaller school districts have unique concerns and would better served in a district with other rural districts. She noted understanding the necessity of certain boundaries for population deviation but asked the commissioners to work to keep school districts intact and suggested a school board district consisting of Duchesne, Uintah, Daggett, Wasatch, and Summit Counties, perhaps even moving south towards Grand County.

Commissioner Durham explained that the population criteria adopted by the commissioners are largely based on federal law. Commissioner Hale thanked Beth for her comments, especially as the commissioners had received fewer comments regarding the school board maps than other map types.

Commissioner Bishop explained that Uintah and Duchesne Counties do not have the population required for a house district and asked the attendees for their thoughts on putting Uintah and Grand County into a district.

Bryan Gorum from Uintah County addressed the commissioner regarding this question. He explained that while he was from Uintah County, seeing other parts of the basin split into so many parts were concerning. He then explained that he was more concerned with rural Utahn voices being preserved than specifics of putting Uintah County with Duchesne or Grand County. He discussed the population numbers present in the rural counties in Utah, and explained that he was concerned about rural Utahns being left behind in representation and asked commissioners to consider the voices of rural Utahns while mapping.

Commissioner Durham asked Bryan for his thoughts on balancing one person one vote and the concerns for rural Utahns. She asked if it seemed better to include some rural representation in multiple districts, or create rural districts.

Bryan explained that he had seen maps in which each district had a portion of the more populated counties and expressed concern about that split. He explained that the right representative can balance both areas and thanked Commissioner Bishop for his work while he was in congress. He explained that a given representative themselves are a key part of maintaining rural voices and hoped that representatives and the commissioners would consider rural Utahns during their work.

Commissioner Hillyard again explained that the required numbers are an objective standard, and explained that any change to one district requires a change to another district. He then complimented Commissioner Bishop for his time in congress for taking time to consider the rural parts of his district. He then discussed the potential of large rural districts and some of the logistical challenges and travel issues with such a district. He then suggested that for these reasons' districts may necessitate having a combination of rural and urban areas, especially with the connection between rural and urban areas. He then discussed some possibilities for house districts, but noted that if Uintah county was to be put with Grand County, San Juan county would be isolated. He further discussed some ideas about which counties could be put together and the consequences of each option. He also mentioned that every option would likely have proponents and opponents.

Mayor Bird suggested that the issue with rural representation brought up by Bryan is a political question as well as a redistricting question, and that individual representatives needed to understand their job in considering their rural constituents.

Commissioner Bishop then explained that there are different schools of thought for state seats and congressional seats. He explained that as much as he would have liked to be the representative for all of rural Utah, having each district contain both urban and rural areas help create a unified Utah delegation to Congress. He explained that there is an expectation that Utah Senators represent both rural and urban interests, and expressed his belief that Utah Representatives can do the same and the unified efforts of all representatives is helpful. Commissioner Bishop then explained that the thought process for state senate and house seats is different and allows for more specialized districts.

Commissioner Baker then asked staff to show a public submission for a congressional map that placed three congressional districts along the Wasatch Front and one final district consisting of the rural portions of the state. He asked attendees for their thoughts on this map.

Commissioner Hansen from Duchesne County responded to this question. She explained that it can seem contradictory to suggest splitting certain areas for congressional districts but not for state districts but referred to Commissioner Bishop's comment that the school of thought is different. She explained that she felt that for congressional districts all Utahns have more in common than for state districts. She expressed her belief that having both urban and rural areas in congressional districts was preferable and made the districts better.

Commissioner Durham thanked Commissioner Hansen for her comments and explained that this discussion highlights the need for different considerations for congressional districts.

Gordon Snow explained that if Uintah moves into Duchesne county along the border then Duchesne likely loses a chance to have a major portion of any district.

Amy Farmsworth then addressed the commissioners. Amy explained that she was an educator that had lived in the area for many years and explained the different needs for urban and rural students and expressed that being included in a district with Utah County had led to their voices being outweighed. She then asked a question about the proposed Purple team school board map and staff answered her question.

Chair Facer noted that all maps were currently drafts.

Amy then noted that with that calcification the Purple school board map seemed to be a very rural district.

Commissioner Hale explained that the effort for the school board map in question was to keep school districts together and keep rural districts together. She then explained that the purpose of the drafted maps was to allow people to explain what worked and what did not work in a given map.

Jay Blain addressed the commissioners. He explained that the discussion of the need for urban and rural areas in congressional districts struck a chord with him especially as related to school trust lands. He thanked Commissioner Bishop for his work with trust lands during his tenure in Congress and noted the importance of members of Congress considering school trust lands.

Commissioner Hillyard explained that given the various school district and county sizes, he had run into issues when it came to splitting Utah County, which created an effect in other areas. He also noted that his mapping team had considered trying to create school board districts based on state house seats. He explained his understanding of some suggestions to move rural districts together and emphasized the importance again of one person one vote given how objective population counts are as far as the various criteria. He also reminded attendees that the Utah Independent Redistricting Commission is advisory.

Chair Facer thanked everyone for their comments, especially the reminder that there are many things that unite all Utahns.

Keith Goodspeed from Roosevelt then addressed the commissioners. Keith thanked Commissioner Bishop for his time in congress and noted his influence on the area. He expressed his agreement with other commenters that the current map did not create the best outcome for the Uintah Basin overall and hoped to see fewer splits in the area.

Commissioner Bishop then asked Ron Winterton about his senate district and what parts of Summit or Wasatch Counties were included in that district. He also asked what connection problems there were between Duchesne and Wasatch and Ron explained that there were not pressing issues.

Chair Facer thanked the public for their attendance and asked for any final public comments.

VIII. Close Public Comment

With no further comments, Chair Facer noted that the commissioners would work to apply the information given tonight, and invited the public to give any future comments to the commission after the meeting.

Staff reminded attendees that staff members would be present after the meeting to answer questions.

Commissioner Hale thanked attendees for their attendance and their comments.

Commissioner Baker also thanked attendees for the comments given and explained how influential comments are.

IX. Adjourn

Chair Facer then asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Hale motioned to adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:46