

# AGENDA ITEM #V.

## Five County Association of Governments

1070 West 1600 South, Building B  
St. George, Utah 84770

Fax (435) 673-3540



Post Office Box 1550  
St. George, Utah 84771

Office (435) 673-3548

**[DRAFT MINUTES – TO BE APPROVED ON FEBRUARY 8, 2023]**

### MINUTES FIVE COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2023 at 1:30 P.M.

**MEETING HELD AT: FESTIVAL HALL; COMBINED ROOMS 5&6; 105 N. 100 E., CEDAR CITY, UTAH.**

**MEETING WAS ALSO BROADCAST TO THE PUBLIC VIA A ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE.**

#### MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE IN-PERSON

Commissioner Jerry Taylor, Chair  
Commissioner Gil Almqvist  
Commissioner Wade Hollingshead  
Commissioner Celeste Meyeres  
Hurricane City Mayor Nanette Billings  
Milford City Mayor Nolan Davis  
Tyler Fails  
Commissioner Paul Cozzens  
Escalante City Mayor Melani Torgersen  
Henrie Walton (ex-officio, non-voting member)

#### REPRESENTING

Garfield County Commission  
Washington County Commission  
Beaver County Commission  
Kane County Commission  
Washington Co. Mayor's Representative  
Beaver County Mayor's Representative  
Beaver County School Board  
Iron County Commission  
Garfield County Mayor's Representative  
Dixie State University

#### OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Bryan Thiriot  
Gary Zabriskie  
Nate Wiberg  
Cindy Bulloch  
Heath Hansen  
Kyle Wilson

#### REPRESENTING

Five County AOG Executive Director  
Five County AOG Deputy Dir./Chief Technology Officer  
Five County Senior Planner  
Congressman Chris Stewart  
Senator Mike Lee  
Senator Mitt Romney

---

BEAVER

GARFIELD

IRON

KANE

WASHINGTON

**AGENDA ITEM I. WELCOME BY CHAIR.**

At 1:30 p.m. sharp, Garfield County Commissioner Jerry Taylor, as Steering Committee Chair, after recognizing that there were nine members in attendance, welcomed everyone to the Five County Association of Governments Steering Committee meeting. It was noted that the Association Bylaws require a quorum present, which is at least eight voting members, in order to conduct a meeting.

Prior to moving into the meeting the Chair asked the Steering Committee's newest member, Kane County Commissioner Celeste Meyeres, to introduce herself. Commissioner Meyeres explained that prior to being elected and sworn in as a Kane County commissioner she had previously been on the city planning commission for Kanab, which is the county seat and then moved onto city council about five years ago. She said that she started on the commission just last week and thanked everyone for letting her be there, and said she was super thrilled to have this assignment. The Chair said that the Board appreciates that she has already been very active from the day that she was elected. He said that he and Commissioner Meyeres had been in several recent discussions, and that Commissioner Meyeres had followed outgoing Kane County Commissioner Andy Gant around and has been involved with Garfield County, so she has already hit the ground running, which is good for us. Commissioner Meyeres said that Commissioner Gant had been very gracious about onboarding her.

Mr. Bryan Thiriot, Executive Director, mentioned that Mr. Henrie Walton was in attendance in the audience, and stated that as a formal member of the Steering Committee, Mr. Walton may participate at the table. Mr. Gary Zabriskie, Deputy Director, explained that Mr. Walton is an ex-officio non-voting member. Mr. Walton took a seat at the table with the other board members.

**AGENDA ITEM II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.**

The Chair then asked its newest member, Commissioner Celeste Meyeres to lead the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**AGENDA ITEM III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE NOVEMBER 9, 2022 MEETING AND DECEMBER 29, 2022 MEETING.**

The Chair asked if everyone had a chance to read those minutes, and if they had any questions, comments, or concerns? He then called for a motion for approval of the minutes for the previous two meetings, the November 9, 2022 and December 29, 2022 Steering Committee meetings.

**Commissioner Gil Almquist moved to approve the minutes as presented. The motion was seconded by Mayor Nanette Billings.**

The Chair, after asking for any needed discussion, and seeing there was none, called for a vote.

**The vote of the members was unanimous in the affirmative to approve the minutes as presented.**

**AGENDA ITEM IV. UTAH LEGISLATURE PREVIEW / BOARD DISCUSSION.**

The Chair explained that this agenda item is an open item amongst the members of the Board about what bills anyone knows about that are coming. He said that they had a Utah Association of

Counties (UAC) meeting that morning where they talked about everything. He indicated that there is a place that one can go online and can track the bills. He said that for county commissioners, they have a place on UAC's website tracking bills, and the Legislature's own website.

Commissioner Wade Hollingshead said that one bill he is aware of is one that will affect every county, if it becomes law. He said it is the Recorder Bill where there is a potential for a recorder to be appointed by the state. He said that there is a real frustration from the recorder in their county saying it is not a good idea, in her opinion. The Commissioner said he did not know how all the rest of the counties feel about this prospect, but he said that he agrees with their county's recorder that they need to keep that as local control. The Chair said that his county will push back on that bill. Commissioner Paul Cozzens asked if that would change it from being an elected position to someone hired by the state? Mr. Bryan Thiriot, Executive Director of the Association, said that it would be a state office.

The Chair commented that he had heard that there are a couple of counties up north that each do things a little bit different, and it upsets the realtors. Commissioner Almquist said he heard that it all stems from a couple of cases where something was recorded, when someone comes in and they record what they asked to have recorded, but somebody did not like the fact that there was some information that they did not want anybody in the public to see. No one was aware of who was running this bill, but Commissioner Hollingshead said he would look into it. Mr. Bryan Thiriot also mentioned that this was also brought up with the economic development meeting at UAC last week. The Chair stated that his county will push back on it because they do not want that to happen in Garfield County.

Mayor Nanette Billings said that there are three bills, for issues that they are looking into, that would probably affect some in Washington County. One bill involves EMS services, where any town that is in a third class through fifth class county, can participate in EMS to help fund the emergency services and fire districts. She said that in the Hurricane Valley they have a challenge with their fire district with having enough funding. She explained that with a national park and two state parks they see a lot of service calls for EMS. She said what is proposed is to expand the EMS funding to cities in a second-class county to have that. She said that there are a couple of legislators that are helping with that to draft a bill. She explained that a second bill is for new interoperable radios for the police and they have to pay \$275,000 for them, and that is mandatory that they have that by this coming year. She said that is a lot of money for smaller communities to have to pay. She said the final one that they are working on is the corridor fund, which would probably just affect the road to Sand Hollow State Park, a city road, which she explained is probably the only road in southern Utah, or in Utah, that goes to a state park that is fully within a city. She said that the City needs to widen that road, because they get millions of visitors, and there is not enough room, and it is dependent on the city to make it wider, and also needs turning lanes in both directions. Commissioner Almquist mentioned that the 2021 visitation count for Sand Hollow State Park was 2.5 million visitors.

Commissioner Meyeres mentioned that she would very much like to see uses of Transient Room Taxes (TRT) to include fire protection, but also said that is a short-term low-hanging-fruit fix. She said that the larger fix in fixing this mess, where 47% of TRT funding has to go back into promotions and the tourism establishment, which just gets the counties into the cycle of they have to do tourism, because that is the only thing they are allowed to do in their little county anymore. She said then all the money that we get from tourism (47% of the money) has to go back into getting

more tourism, So they cannot get under that boot of tourism that is on our neck and we cannot get out from under it. She said that what needs to happen is there needs to be an adjustment in the ratios to be slanted less towards marketing. She said she would love to see 25%/75% split, but maybe 60%/40% is more realistic.

The Chair said that Garfield County struggles with the amount of visitors that they have coming into Garfield County, things like the garbage collection that they have to deal with. He said that with all of the visitors coming in, a lot of times, they buy their goods somewhere else and then they come in, they play around, and then as they leave, they leave all their garbage with us. He did say that they do love having them there, because that is what we have now, but the County does not get the benefit of them buying their groceries and everything here. He said that they may get a tank of gas going out, but we do get all the garbage to properly dispose of, but with all of the other stuff that the County has to do like search and rescue, law enforcement, etc., it is tough. He said that there needs to be some equity there. He said that the county has all these people coming in, camping, parking, recreating, so there is a large amount of stuff that goes on that the County is in charge of, and they have to take care of, so there needs to be some type of compensation back to the counties, and back to rural Utah and gateway communities. He mentioned that within Garfield County, or nearby, they have three national parks, three state parks, the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument, and the Glen Canyon National Recreational Area. He said that in Garfield County, with 3% of the land left in private ownership, it is a challenge. He said that they could probably talk about public lands forever but asked if there was anything left that was not covered. Seeing none, the Chair moved the meeting onto the next agenda item.

**AGENDA ITEM V. FIVE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) UPDATE.**

The Chair turned the time over to Mr. Nate Wiberg, Senior Planner at the Association, to discuss the status of the Five County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) update. Mr. Wiberg explained that this is a regional plan and the AOG staff has been on this plan for a while trying to get input from the economic development directors, or those who are tasked with economic development, from all of the five counties, and from whoever else will give comments. He said that staff is reaching out to them, and they are on our advisory committee. He said the Association staff has been working very closely with the state of Utah, which is working on a statewide economic development strategy. He said that the state wants to pull information that is a little more locally generated, so the Association staff has been polling our advisory committees and inviting people from the steering committee to come to our CEDS plan meetings. He said there is going to be the third and last meeting the following week on January 19<sup>th</sup> at the Dixie Tech campus up on the bluff in St. George and the Association is hoping to get the last bit of the feedback for the state plan. He said that Camoin Associates, the economic development consulting firm who was selected by the state, and has been working on the CEDS for the state, will pull it all together, and we will have a statewide plan. He said that some of the data they have already pulled they have given to us for local use as well.

Mr. Wiberg explained to the Board that the Five County Association of Governments is an EDA Economic Development District, also known as an EDD, and one of the main goals of EDDs is to coordinate locally with all of the commissioners, the mayors, the economic development staff, and really anybody who is involved with economic development in the region, and put together the CEDS. He said that is the main goal, because putting together the CEDS allows our region to use

EDA grants. He said without that document, and without being an EDD, we cannot access those EDA funds. He said they just had a phone call with the Denver region EDA staff, who work with Utah, to talk a little bit about those grants. Mr. Wiberg told those in attendance that if anyone has a project idea, to get in contact so we can find out if that project is eligible. He said that the Denver staff is great to work with right now. He said they do not want a jurisdiction to go through a whole application process just to find out that a particular project is ineligible, so they will be very upfront with entities about that. Mr. Wiberg said that the Association will probably be going to the public comment phase of the CEDS document development in August and have it wrapped up before the end of the year, and of course the staff will bring it to this body again, because the Steering Committee is the Executive Committee for the EDD, so it has to come to it for its review. Mr. Wiberg said that the CEDS document does not have to be approved, or anything like that, but we want to let the EDD Executive Committee be aware of what is in it and just give us their okay.

Mr. Wiberg then mentioned that the Association does have an economic development website: <https://fivecountyecon.org> that has some information. He said that mainly right now it hosts the plans that we do. He said that the CEDS is a document that creates space for the region to identify its strengths and weaknesses, and brings together a diverse set of partners to generate good jobs. He said that is the whole goal, to create jobs. He said that through the CEDS we are trying to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and hopefully it will develop into projects that we can apply to EDA for.

Mr. Thiriot said a number of projects that took place in this region are because of the role of the Five County Association of Governments, being the EDD, that allows cities, counties, and universities to make an application with the EDA. He said that one of those applications was Atwood Innovation Plaza, which is probably the most recent one. He said because of that EDA grant, it was able to really lift off and get going. He said that in addition to that Innovation Plaza grant for equipment, there was an additional University Center grant that Utah Tech partnered with SUU. He said that the University Center grant is still ongoing and provides funding for economic development activity across the Five County region. He said those are just a few examples.

Mr. Wiberg said that there is an airport connecting road, that was done way before his time here at the Association, that took place at the Cedar City airport. Mr. Zabriskie said that he knows quite a bit about that project, which assisted the expansion of the CyberJet plant in Cedar City. He said the EDA funding provided for a paved connection that went across from their private jet manufacturing facility east of the airport runway to the airport and included a bridge over a canal and some other things, like a gate to roll the aircraft through so they could get the newly built aircraft to the airport runway. He said that the project was an EDA funded project, and it was a big deal for this area. Mr. Zabriskie also mentioned that there was EDA funding in the industrial area of Hurricane which became home to the large Walmart Distribution Center and other large warehouses and businesses. He said that project was one that the late John Williams, former executive director of the Association, worked with the City of Hurricane to do that business park. Mr. Zabriskie said that park was called Gateway at the time, but he is not sure if it is still called that, but that is what it was originally called. He said that the EDA funding for that was to help put infrastructure in for that, to get water and sewer lines extended, and all that kind of stuff, to that area. He said that area is massive now and houses many jobs and there is new development going in now, and eventually there is going to be a new freeway interchange on I-15 at the north end of the industrial park.

Mr. Wiberg finished by saying that our goal is to start getting more EDA investment into our region, so we are really trying to be a little more proactive. He said that this is why the Association held the meeting last week with the Denver EDA staff, so our region's people can better understand the grants. He said that it is not typical, like with the CIB and CDBG, where you come to the Association staff to apply for those grants. With EDA, you go directly to EDA, but the Association's community and economic development staff can really help facilitate necessary meetings with and the application process. He said that if a region is not an EDA Economic Development District, you cannot go to EDA, so that is why it is so important that we are a district here.

#### **AGENDA ITEM VI. FOREST SERVICE WOODY BIOMASS / FOREST PRODUCTS UPDATE.**

The Chair turned the time for this agenda item over to Mr. Wiberg and Mr. Thiriot to discuss biomass. Mr. Wiberg said that there are four grants available through biomass products: Community Wood Grant; Wood Innovation Grant; Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance; and Firewood Banks.

Mr. Thiriot said that the U.S. Forest Service held a meeting in Richfield the previous day on the topic of biomass and using wood products. He said that he and Mr. Wiberg Zoomed into the meeting. He said that they wanted to learn more about what was happening in that realm of forest products. He said that they want to be able to help the Steering Committee keep tabs on what is going on. He said that this is an important industry for our region and there are those grants that are available through the Forest Service. He said that there have only been only a few investments in Utah, but we would like to see some in our region.

Mr. Wiberg said that he is happy to, since he does not know a ton about this, to get the PowerPoint slides to the Steering Committee members, or even get the individual who presented this information to come and talk to you a little bit more about it. The Chair mentioned that part of the problem with anything to do with forest products is that until you get a 20-year guarantee of material, nobody is going to want to invest. He said that the Forest Service says that we put out all this green timber now for people to bid on, and they do not bid on it. He said that is because we do not have mills anymore that will cut green timber. Mr. Thiriot said that one industry that was looking at biomass is one that is actually happening, and said he wants to learn more about it. He said they are creating jet fuel out of this product, and this was his first time to hear of it and see that it is actually happening. He said that the individual who was speaking about that was from Montana and said that he and Mr. Wiberg will follow-up on that and find out how they did it. Mr. Wiberg said that there is also going to be a grant opportunity for doing a revolving loan fund for smaller companies to be able to get smaller equipment for this industry. He said he does not know if it is going to be the state, or the region, or what, but they are going to be doing a revolving loan fund.

The Chair said that in a lot of the forest right now they go in and burn it, trying to control things by burning it. He said that there are companies around like the Daltons from Piute County that are willing to go and take all of that and chop it up and shred it up into shavings to send to the turkey farms. He asked a rhetorical question that "instead of taxpayers paying the Forest Service to go in and burn that, why don't they just give somebody that material to a private firm, if they will go in and clean that out?" He said that they will make money off of that material and will also create jobs in the communities with that material. He said that it just does not make sense to him that the government is putting this on the expense side of the financial statement, when that material could

be creating jobs and opportunities within local rural communities. He said this affects each one of us. Mr. Wiberg said that the person who is going to be running this program is Bergen Eskildsen, with the Utah Department of Natural Resources – Forestry, Fire, and State Lands. He told the Chair that he could set up a meeting with Mr. Eskildsen with the Chair and Mr. Thiriot. Mr. Thiriot said it would be good for the Steering Committee if we could have him come to a future meeting.

Mr. Wiberg said that he thinks the goal with this program is that they are trying to get companies who could use some of this biomass to be able to just come and get it, so we need to somehow connect the dots. The Chair said that we have so much of it in the forest right now, that is so overgrown, and that it is hurting the watershed, it is hurting everything. He said to look at what the Brian Head fire did to Panguitch alone. Mr. Wiberg said that the Association staff is willing to put together meetings.

Mayor Billings asked about the loan fund that was talked about and whether that will be for private businesses, or will that be for the municipalities? Mr. Wiberg said was not sure. He said it is either going to be like the state, or the AOGs, that are going to be running that new revolving loan fund, but thinks it is going to be more for industry like small businesses. Mr. Thiriot said he just took a screenshot of it, and as we get the slide deck, we will forward it onto the Committee members. He said that it is called the “Rural Opportunity Program - Rural Communities Opportunity Loan” and it is a \$21 million revolving loan fund. He said that the slides say that the rural community will need demonstrate it has exhausted all other means of securing funding from the state of Utah and that the loan, not more than 0.5% above bond market interest rates, is available to counties and communities, including communities of less than 10,000 in second class counties. He said that the fund is not currently open right now, but more information will be coming as it opens up. Mr. Thiriot said that we are just kind of letting you know. Mr. Wiberg said that we will keep an eye on it for you. The Chair asked Commissioner Cozzens what kind of a turnout did the meeting the night before. Commissioner Cozzens said there was about 75 in attendance. Ms. Cindy Bulloch, with Congressman Chris Stewart’s office, said that there were a lot more governmental people than industry people in attendance. Commissioner Meyeres said that maybe those people can help disseminate that information so that the word gets out.

Mr. Zabriskie brought up the defederalization of our revolving loan fund that we have had at the Association, which was EDA funded way back in 1987. He said that it has been defederalized and he rebranded it last year to be the “*Southwest Utah Microloan Program - established by the Five County Association of Governments*”, and it can provide loans of up \$50,000 for either startup businesses, or expanding small businesses. He said it is not bound by any of those old federal rules, or anything like that, and he is the one that approves the loans, now that we do not have to have a formal loan board, which was a requirement of the federal government back then. He said that he has done, in the last year or so, six new microloans, most of them were at the \$50,000 maximum, with a few much smaller than that. He said that one was for \$15,000 for equipment for a food trailer that was in St. George that they shipped it over from China where the fire suppression system that was inside did not meet the fire code here. He said they had to have a company over here retrofit it and they came in for a loan for \$10,000. When they came for the microloan, I asked what funds are they going to use to buy their initial food with? He said that they responded saying that they had not thought about that just yet. Mr. Zabriskie said that he loaned them some additional funds as working capital to buy their initial food inventory. He said that they then went to all kinds of different local public events. He said that he did not know if any of the Committee had seen the trailer, but it was a Chinese Food trailer and is bright yellow. The owners, unfortunately, had to

move up north, so they sold the business down here and I got repaid, but it is still here. Mr. Zabriskie said that if anyone knows of anybody that has a small business that wants to get started, to not send them to him first. He said to send them up to DixieTech, to the Small Business Development Center, and have them see Mr. Jeff Mather. Mr. Zabriskie said that Mr. Mather is a filter because the Microloan Program here is only a small portion of his work at Five County, not the only thing. He said that he could spend all day just dealing with microloans. He said that Mr. Mather filters the ones that have a good business plan, one that makes sense, and the business isn't a dog. Mr. Zabriskie said that if you have ever taken a finance professional education course, you learn to determine if a prospective borrower's business proposal is a dog. He said that if you determine it is a dog, you don't touch it because you don't know if it's going to bite your hand off. He said Mr. Mather will filter the "dogs" out, and just send to me the "good ones", and I then review them. We then can both concur that, yes, this one, or that one, makes sense. Then our program funds it. Mr. Zabriskie mentioned again that the maximum microloan amount is \$50,000. He said that rather than doing one \$200,000 loan like we used to do as an RLF, he would rather do four \$50,000 microloans.

Mr. Thiriot said that we will bring back more information on that new loan program once they have it. The Chair said for everyone to be proactive in all of this. He said everyone needs to push this forest products biomass matter and thinks there are jobs for southern Utah in that. He finished by saying that it will also improve the environment, the watershed, and almost everything. He finished by saying: "Let's push it".

#### **AGENDA ITEM VII. CONGRESSIONAL STAFF UPDATES.**

The Chair turned the time over for Congressional Updates.

**Ms. Cindy Bulloch** with Congressman Chris Stewart's office said that the House is in session and said they are working after an interesting vote for Speaker of the House. She said that they were supposed to, and are hoping to, know by the end of business that day what committees everyone will be on. She said that they were not expecting changes with Congressman Stewart, but they will wait to see. She said that they did pass a bill to get rid of the 87,000 IRS agents, but now it is up to the Senate. She said that it probably will not pass, but it was at least a statement. She said that other than that, we are reintroducing bills that they were working on last year, one of which is this ambulance EMS bill that is going to help some of these smaller communities for equipment. She said if there is a community with a small population and a large visitor count they will get more points to be able to buy ambulances. She said that right now it is not fire trucks, but they are hoping for that, and it might get to that. She said that this bill has not been introduced yet in this but said she will keep the Steering Committee informed. She said that they are working and it is early in the new session and they will soon see where it is going. She told the Steering Committee members to reach out to the Congressman's staff if they have any questions. She said they are watching things from the state level and said if there are things that you need something similar, or parallel, for the feds, to let them know because they can introduce that as well. She said they are closely watching a lot of the water related matters. She said that new Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rules were passed out at the last minute on December 30<sup>th</sup> and there is a pending lawsuit. She said they were really hoping that they would not pass that out until they had the decision from the Supreme Court. But it has been, and said that they will watch that and see what happens.

Commissioner Meyeres brought up a matter that she said is just horrible, in her opinion, which is a federal overreach from the current administration, that is impacting our small businesses. She said



that small businesses across America are being harassed about census, and surveys, and things like that where the feds will send communication after communication trying to get the businesses to report every single thing about the business. She said it is essentially an audit. She said that the other thing that is happening is there is a new requirement to make sure that your bank is lined up with your EIN, supposedly just for the security and safety of everyone, but it is just so they can know every single thing about you. She said that any pushback on that by the Congressman would be so appreciated.

Ms. Bulloch asked where these communications came from, so that they can look into it on their side. Commissioner Meyeres said they are from the Census Bureau, and they just send them out every now and again and ask how many employees you have, or whatever, but now basically since Biden went into office, have been incredibly persistent, and just spending a ton of money trying to get this information from people.

**Mr. Kyle Wilson** with Senator Mitt Romney's office said that the Senate is out of session until January 23<sup>rd</sup>. He said that Senator Romney is part of a bipartisan group of eight senators to send a letter to Interior Secretary Deb Haaland urging her to withdraw some guidance impeding energy projects in the Intermountain West. He said that is something that they currently are knee deep in. He said that like Congressman Stewart's staff, they are also watching the WOTUS rule that was issued on the 30<sup>th</sup>. He said that they were also hoping that there would be a decision in the Sackett v. Environmental Protection Agency case before that came about, but that did not happen, so there is a lot in flux there. He said that the WOTUS rules are terrifying for farmers and ranchers and he said he is personally concerned about it. He said it was something that Senator Romney was pushing back on at the end of the last session. He did say that the Senate did get some pretty cool stuff across the finish line. He said that PILT was funded in its entirety. He said that \$1 billion in funding was provided for wildfire fuels reduction, watershed projects, and landscape-size projects which are 100,000 to 200,000 acre projects that are really going to move the needle in terms of forest and watershed ecology in southern Utah. He said that they are happy about that. He brought up the matter of all of the international climate agreements. He said that China is treated as a developing nation, so they are not held to the same standards that the United States is. He said that they got a bill across the finish line that would help change China's designation as a developing nation because they are the biggest polluter on the planet, yet the U.S. are being held to the fire, where theirs are not. He said that along those lines, is a bill to decrease dependence on critical minerals from China and Russia and develop that industry domestically. He said, lastly, as it pertains to rural hospitals in southern Utah, two Medicare programs were expanded that we hope will also move the deal for health care in this area.

Commissioner Cozzens said he recently saw a news article where military members who refused vaccines were removed and there was a vote to require the military to reinstate them, and wanted Mr. Wilson to explain the Senator's vote on that. Mr. Wilson said that he would have to ask, and would get back to Commissioner Cozzens personally. Mayor Billings said she would also like to know about that as well.

Mayor Billings asked Mr. Wilson about the six different energy bills that they are putting forth. She said that she wants to see Congress loosen up energy right now as it is because of supply and demand that prices are so high. She said that there are some real issues here in Utah, like their municipality which is part of the IPA in Delta, Utah and they are using all they are entitled to. She said that even though it is transitioning between coal and natural gas, which is going to give the

users way less energy, it is still something. She said that they are worried because they are part of this nuclear power plant that is going to be built in Idaho, but they do not have enough generation. Mr. Wilson said he agreed and said that it is important to Senator Romney, and the Senator spent a lot of time on energy, specifically in August 2022, but there was not a piece of legislation, in particular, that he can refer to. He said that there has been some pushback from a bipartisan group of senators saying this is not sustainable energy-wise. Mr. Wilson said he was up at 4:00 a.m. that morning reading that the environmentalists want to ban gas cooktops in kitchens, so he said that the attack on fossil fuels continues. Commissioner Cozzens said that the environmentalists want them to go to electricity, but they are tearing down our coal-fired power plants.

Mayor Billings said that we really need to push back against the EV (electric vehicle) tide. She said it is just not sustainable. Mr. Wilson said he agreed that in no way, shape, or form is it sustainable. He said it does not pencil out and is pie in the sky and they are aware of that, and the Senator is aware of that.

Commissioner Almquist said it is not necessarily a Congressional appropriation, but thinks it was more from the executive side for a \$25 million study of the Great Salt Lake. He said that they have already studied the water clear out of it. He opined that the \$25 million could build something that would really do something. He said he does not want a bunch of “think tanks” employed to waste that money by saying stuff everyone already knows.

Mr. Wilson said this is more relevant to north of the Great Salt Lake, but there are some proposals for fallowing agricultural land and paying those producers a per-acre fee for sending that or for keeping that water in the stream, which he said he thinks is a terrible idea for a couple of reasons: one, because he said he is a farmer and loves agriculture; two, because we all need to eat; and three, because we do not know if that is going to make a difference. He said that we have reduced the use of water in the agriculture community to such a degree, and it has not helped, obviously, because the Great Salt Lake is still having level and salinity problems. He said that hopefully that study funds real solutions, because the pie in the sky ones, like fallowing agriculture ground in Box Elder County, where there is no data to support that it will make any difference, whatsoever. He said it will destroy communities.

The Chair gave an example of his experience with water in the state of Utah. He said that he owns a business that sits on about eight acres in West Jordan, Utah, in an industrial park. He said that the City makes him, out of that eight acres, to plant so much lawn and so many trees in an industrial park. He said that they made him tear out four parking spots and plant trees in those parking spots in an industrial park. He said we are wasting water trying to green up an industrial park, and it is crazy what we are doing, and yet they tell you to conserve water, but your communities have in their planning and zoning that it has to have so much lawn, so many trees. He said that it is ridiculous.

Mr. Wilson said that he hopes that study finds some real data driven solutions, because the solutions that we are coming up with now are harmful, and we have no idea if they will work.

Commissioner Almquist said that we do know that certain nozzles on overhead agricultural spray irrigation do effectively work, and so they should buy \$25 million of those, for the farmers who are being told what to do, so they can grow the same amount of alfalfa, or whatever they are growing, and use about 25% to 30% less water.

Mayor Billings suggested secondary water systems and explained that most communities do not have them. She said they use culinary water inside and secondary for outside water, so that would be something that would really benefit.

The Chair said that he is pushing right now the reservoir restoration plan in the state of Utah for us to go in and improve our reservoirs, fix them up, clean them out, take care of it where we can store more water, to help our communities. He said that water is the key to the west. He said that we need to all get on board with that, and take care of that, and start using water and looking to the future, and, if not, our reservoirs are going to be full of silt, our forests are going to be overgrown, and we are going to be out of business in Utah, especially the farmers and ranchers. He said even in little communities like Escalante, we fight for every ounce of water we can get, and every time you turn around, there is a state agency that says, oh, no, you can't do this, and no, you can't do that. He said that is just baloney. He said that we have all got to look to the future and be a little bit forward thinking about what we are doing, and we need to take care of that, especially our water.

Commissioner Meyeres said that is especially the case with some of the smaller aquifers. She said that with Lake Powell, her understanding is they have the opposite problem, where there are things that have floated down to the bottom, minerals and things like that, that they don't want to disturb, because if they disturb it, then it becomes a cleanup site for that particular reservoir. She said that there is a fight to maybe not dredge up all that stuff and then have it become a cleanup site.

Commissioner Almquist said that from this study we just do not want a stack of papers 3 feet high, we want actual boots on your ground sort of stuff, not just words. The Chair added that we want to see bricks and mortar.

**Mr. Heath Hansen**, with Senator Mike Lee's office said that the Senate has not started its work yet. He said it will be back in session on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, so that means the Senators have not officially received committee assignments, but said that Senator Lee anticipates that he will remain on the same committees which are the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, where he will continue to be the ranking member of the Public Land Subcommittee. Mr. Hansen said that Senator Lee will be on the Judiciary Committee, as well as on the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. Mayor Billings asked if the Senator was off of the Antitrust Committee? Mr. Hansen said that Senator Lee is still the ranking member of Antitrust, and he thinks that that is the Senator's favorite committee because he likes doing employer stuff. He said that Senator Lee will continue with many of the things he has been pushing like NEPA reforms, the "Houses Act" and the online protections for minors, things like that, but he is always looking for new ideas. Mr. Hansen said if you have got any ideas, if you see problems that you think could be fixed with legislation, please get in touch. He said that is because the Senator is always looking for new ideas, new things to cause trouble with up on the Hill with the Energy Natural Resources Committee. He said that there is a Democrat Senator from Nevada who has a big Nevada public lands bill and a Republican Senator from Wyoming who has a big Wyoming public lands bill that may want to get passed. He said that this may create an opportunity for a larger public lands package which is what they are starting to talk about doing more in this Congress. He said that typically these do not happen until the end of the Congress, so it may not happen for a couple of years when this Congress is about to wind down. Mr. Hansen said that he just wanted to put this out on your radar screens that there may be an opportunity for a public lands package, centered around these two bigger Nevada and Wyoming pieces. Mr. Hansen said that they would love to make sure that Utah gets some priorities in a bill

like that as well. He said that there was no rush or anything, but just to keep that in the back of your mind. He said that if there are public lands related issues, land transfers, land disposals that you think might be a good idea, be making a note, and get in touch with him. He said that there is no guarantee this will happen, and if it does, it probably will not happen for a little while, but just know now that there soon may be an opportunity that comes up during this Congress. Mr. Hansen brought up the fact that the current administration is also gearing up to redo the Sage Grouse regulations. He said they were going to address that last year, but they did not get to it, so they are aiming for summer of this year to release their initial Draft Environmental Impact Statement. He said that it will most likely look a lot like the 2015 Sage Grouse rules that the Obama administration promulgated that were not good for rural Utah. He said these new proposed rules may actually contain even stricter regulations, if we are reading the tea leaves correctly in this administration. He said they will be watching that one very closely when that draft EIS hits. He said if what is suspected to appear in the draft EIS occurs, it will require a redo of a lot of the local BLM Resource Management Plans here in Utah. Mr. Hansen said in one sense that kind of gives us an advantage, because the local BLM offices will have to go through public notice and comment, so we will all have opportunities to weigh in, and the process can be a long one. He said to just be on the lookout for that. He said that if you couple that with WOTUS, and all the other stuff this administration is doing, rural Utah could be in a world of hurt. He said that on that same vein, the ozone transport rule that the EPA is promulgating, that in Washington County, Dixie Power is extremely concerned about that bill. He said Colorado is blaming Utah for a lot of the pollution that is showing up in Denver and so they are trying to find a justification to shut down even more of our coal fired power plants. Mr. Tyler Fails asked how do they decide where the pollution they have comes from? Mr. Hansen said that they say it is science. Commissioner Cozzens asked if it is really just California pollution passing through Utah? The Chair said that that brings up a good point, and we ought to monitor the air along the Utah-Nevada border and see how much of that pollution is coming from Nevada and California, before we do anything with Colorado.

Mr. Kyle Wilson commented that it does not account for any discharges from wildfires, for example, so it is a really stupid idea. Mr. Hansen said he knows that there is already talk at the state legislature about providing some funding to the Attorney General's office to fight this legally. He said that the EPA has until March 23<sup>rd</sup> of this year to either decide whether they are going to accept, or reject, Utah's plan, which they previously said wasn't strong enough, and if they confirm that ruling, they will impose a much stricter federal implementation plan. Mayor Billings said that Craig Miles has been working on this and wondered if there could be some collaboration there. Mr. Hansen said that we need to get collaboration, not just within Utah, but also other states like Wyoming that are going to suffer from this as well, and he knows that is being worked on. Mr. Hansen said that Senator Lee is having conversations with Wyoming Senator Barrasso back in DC to try to form an alliance to stand up to this. Mr. Hansen said that the last thing he will mention is the matter of Navy Lieutenant Ridge Alkonis who was serving in Japan. He said that over the fall Lt. Alkonis was with his family and they were driving up a mountain and he blacked out from an acute illness caused when one gets too high up in altitude. He said that when Lt. Alkonis blacked out, his family car hit another family, a Japanese family, and killed members of that family. He said Lt. Alkonis was prosecuted in Japanese court and they sentenced him to three years in a Japanese prison. Mr. Hansen said that Senator Lee has been working very closely with the Japanese government and with the Biden administration, and also Rahm Emanuel, former Governor of Illinois, who is the current U.S. Ambassador to Japan, trying to arrange some way to get Lt. Alkonis home before his three year sentence. He said they are engaging in talks about prisoner swaps, things like that. Mr. Hansen said that up to this point, Lt. Alkonis has been relying on leave time

because he is no longer considered on active duty, as he is in prison, and his active duty status expired on December 28<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Hansen said that Lt. Alkonis and his family were going to be left without pay and benefits. He said that Senator Lee was able to, as part of the government funding measure that just passed, get an amendment passed that will continue the pay and the benefits to Lt. Alkonis and his family. He said that Senator Lee did not vote for the overall bill, but the silver lining for him was that he was able to secure some funding for this Lieutenant that is currently in prison over in Japan.

Commissioner Cozzens brought up that he had talked to Mr. Hansen the previous night at the Forest Service meeting in Richfield about “LEED Certified” buildings, which he said are supposedly “environmentally-friendly” buildings. He said that, in his opinion, they are a scam, and cost the taxpayers about 10% more money. He said, as an example, a \$100 million hospital that is LEED Certified is probably going to cost \$10 million more. He said that in his industry, the cabinet industry, there is something called FSC or Forest Stewardship Council. He said what it is is a chain of custody so when the timber guy cuts down the tree, he creates a paper, and they have a chain of custody, a paper trail, all the way to where they mill the product and install it, and it costs us about twice as much money for that raw material. He said that it is a scam, and we need to get away from it. Commissioner Cozzens said that Mr. Hansen had told him that a lot of this stuff gets crammed through in these 50,000 page congressional bills that nobody reads, and the Commissioner said that we have got to start pushing back against the environmentalists because they are fleecing the taxpayer, and the environmentalists are getting rich off of this crap. He said that there might be a few things with windows, such as UV filtering and things like that, so there might be some good aspects, but in his industry, he said it is a scam, and we have got to figure out a way to get away from that stuff.

Mayor Billings asked about what Senator Lee was doing in regard to judicial reform? Mr. Hansen said that would be a state issue. He said that Senator Lee has always been focused on criminal justice reform. He said he has been very involved in the antitrust subcommittee, so he has been heavily involved in looking into the meat packing issue and all of the consolidation in that industry. He said that Senator Lee was the key Republican supporter of the “First Step Act”, which passed under President Trump, and that gave judges a little bit more leeway, and especially when they are looking at things like nonviolent drug crimes, specifically for first offenses. He said we were putting people away for 20 to 40 years, and it was breaking up homes, and it was very destructive.

The Chair thanked Mr. Hansen for his update report.

#### **AGENDA ITEM VIII. STATE AGENCY UPDATES.**

Mr. Thiriote stated that Mr. David Busk with Workforce Services had contacted him prior to the meeting and apologized that he was not able to attend, and asked to be excused. There were no other state agencies to report, so the chair moved the meeting on to Agenda Item # IX, University and Technical College Updates.

#### **AGENDA ITEM IX. UNIVERSITIES AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES UPDATES.**

Mr. Gary Zabriskie informed the Committee that he had sent out an individual e-mail to Mr. Brennan Wood, President of Southwest Tech, and Mr. Jordan Ruston, President of DixieTech and informed them that at our most recent meeting of the Steering Committee, which is our governing board, it

was a consensus of the Steering Committee members, to invite the president of each of the two technical colleges in this region, or their designated representative, to have an opportunity to update the Steering Committee, on a regular basis, of what is happening, exciting new things, reporting, etc. Mr. Zabriskie said that the Association's Bylaws, which have been in place for 50 years this year, our 50th anniversary, forms the makeup of our 17 member Steering Committee. He explained that it is comprised of a mayor's representative from each county, a county commissioner, and a school board representative, plus the two presidents of the two universities, which at the time those bylaws were written were both colleges, or their designated representative as members of the Committee but as ex-officio non-voting members. Mr. Zabriskie said he has never heard discussed by the Steering Committee whether to add the presidents of the two technical colleges to the governing board as ex-officio non-voting members, but if that were to be the case in the future, that would require amending the Bylaws. Mr. Zabriskie said that in his e-mail to those technical college presidents that the Steering Committee would love to have them, or their designated representative, attend either in person or by a Zoom, to give an update from time-to-time, as needed, regarding what is happening at their respective colleges. Mr. Zabriskie said that he sent the whole packet out to them so they could see what takes place, but had not received a response back from either of those by that date, but they were invited to participate in that meeting. He said that he will follow up with them again for next month, but thinks it is a great idea to have them, because they are a big part of our region, just like the universities are. It was noted that there was no one representing Southern Utah University in attendance to report, so the Chair turned the time over to Henrie Walton, with Utah Tech University, to provide an update.

**Mr. Henrie Walton**, representing Utah Tech University, said he would just share a few updates relative to the University of things that have been accomplished during 2022. He said that they added three new bachelors degrees, two associates degrees, several certificates, and maybe most importantly, eight online baccalaureate degrees. He said that there is a growing need for online baccalaureate degree programs for returning students and non-traditional students. He said that they are very excited about expanding into that space. He said they welcomed in their largest student body ever last fall of 12,500 students. He said that their library was recognized recently by the federal government as a "Patent and Trademark Resource Center" He said that they are one of two patent and trademark resource centers in the state of Utah, the other being in Salt Lake City. He said that the closest one to here is in Las Vegas, Nevada. He said that this important recognition is an outgrowth of the exciting activity that is happening at the Atwood Innovation Plaza with patents and trademarks, and the federal government was happy to recognize the library on our campus as a "Patent and Trademark Center". He said that this allows citizens in the community to have access to resources if they are interested in applying for patents and trademarks. Mr. Walton said that the University also hosted over 100 community events over the past year. He said they are anxious to engage with the community. He said that they recently opened the Water Canyon Center in Hildale. Mr. Walton said that they now have educational centers in Panguitch, Hildale, Hurricane, and Kanab that all provide concurrent enrollment in college courses to high school students in those areas. He said that last, but not least, they recently concluded their partnership, the City Alliance partnership, with St. George City, and have begun a City Alliance partnership with Santa Clara. He said that City Alliance is something he has talked about previously to the Committee, where the University partners with different municipalities to work on projects that are important to them and provide them with needed resources. He said that there are a lot of exciting things going on at the University, a lot of momentum, and a lot of growth, and he said he just appreciates the opportunity to spend time here on the Steering Committee. He then said that he would be happy to answer any questions, if anyone had any. Commissioner Almquist brought up the new housing

on campus taking place. Mr. Walton said that they were just about to break ground on another 550-bed apartment. He said housing is a real challenge, not only in Washington County, but everywhere, and it is something that Utah Tech University continues to struggle with on campus. He said it creates a soft cap on our enrollment, so they recently built two new 500+ bed apartments on the campus, and they were planning to wait at least another year, or 18 months, before breaking ground on the third one, but they have decided to move forward with, and the Legislature has given us approval to move forward on, that third unit immediately. Mr. Nate Wiberg asked Mr. Walton how many patents and businesses have come out of the Atwood Innovation Plaza? Mr. Walton said that he did not have those exact numbers with him, but said it is well over 150 patents applied for and businesses it is around 50, but he was not entirely certain on that number, but it is a significant number. He said that it is not just a plaza that is open for students, faculty, and staff, but community members are also able to come into Atwood Innovation Plaza and use the resources available there. Mr. Zabriskie asked Mr. Walton if there were any updates on the Desert Color Southern Campus since he last reported on it in the November meeting? Mr. Walton thanked Mr. Zabriskie for reminding him on that, and said that several months ago, he shared an update on the Innovation Campus and Desert Color property that is going to be built out near exit two off of I-15, near the border with Arizona. He said that they have put together several committees that are working to determine a master planning document for that property. He said that they have 183 acres, and a portion of that property will become an innovation district, which is like Atwood Innovation Plaza on steroids. He said that the idea is to take businesses that have been incubated and are beginning to grow, and are no longer able to fit in the confines of Atwood Innovation Plaza, ample space to grow in what is called an innovation district, where they can bump into and collaborate and partner with other businesses and researchers and things along those lines. He said they plan this summer to begin master planning on that property. He said that they have 110 acres on Utah Tech's main campus in downtown St. George, but they only have one or two building pads left. He said that the University will continue to grow as the community grows, so that new 183 acres will be really important to the University for the coming decades. Because of his urban planning background, Mr. Zabriskie asked if the University was planning on any kind of a shuttle bus system, separate from the city's bus system, that the University itself could cut down on the amount of traffic between the two campuses, and the required parking for cars. Mr. Walton said they are having conversations about that, but they are very preliminary at this point, because it is going to take us several years to buildout that campus. He did confirm that there have been conversations about ensuring that there is some sort of shuttle system between the two campuses as it is about a 10 to 15 minutes car drive between those two campuses.

The Chair thanked Mr. Walton for his update.

#### **AGENDA ITEM X. LOCAL AFFAIRS DISCUSSION.**

The Committee had a brief follow-up discussion on the matter of County Recorders. The consensus is that this proposal to make Recorders in each county a state function is overreach by the state that is very similar to the overreach that our state leaders and politicians complains that the federal government is doing to the state.

Mayor Nolan Davis said that he was in a Zoom meeting that morning with the Utah Rail Passenger Association and after preliminary talks and studies what they want to do is implement a passenger service again. He said that Amtrak used to run from Salt Lake directly, and Denver to Las Vegas and Denver down to Sacramento, and then it was discontinued about 20 years ago. He said it was called the Desert Wind. He explained that the talk now is to go ahead and implement passenger rail service

from Ogden down to Moab, and Ogden down to Cedar City with a bus bridge from St. George to Cedar City, to allow the larger population in this area, St. George, to be able to utilize that service. He said that former Governor Herbert was on the call that morning about this and brought up a lot of interesting points. He said that they are going to go back to the table, and they have got to do a lot of studies because trying to put Amtrak back on that rail where it was normally at 79 miles an hour, they want to up it to 125 miles an hour. Mayor Davis said that what he can tell the Committee from his experience of working on the rail for 32 years, is that it is not going to happen on the rail they have got right now. He said that they have got a lot of work to do, and it is going to cost a lot of money. He said that the project itself, he thinks, is a great idea, because once it gets into southern Utah, they can expand it to a lot of the rural communities using bus bridges to bring everybody in to it. This is so they can get to the train and can get up to Salt Lake City and Ogden, He said that there is the talk about expanding it clear to Las Vegas, maybe going west toward Reno and/or north towards Boise later on down the road. He said that this is just in the preliminary phase now, so they are going to have some more meetings later on in the year. He said that when more information comes out, he will bring that back to the Steering Committee. Commissioner Cozzens asked Mayor Davis if the current infrastructure will not handle those increased speeds? Mayor Davis said that the biggest sections, from Salt Lake to Cedar City is when you go on the Lund siding coming up the branch to Cedar City, which is only up to Iron Springs, is 40 miles an hour. He said Iron Springs into Cedar City is only 20 miles an hour track and there is no safety systems, no signal systems in place. He said that basically they are going to have to gut that whole system and build the whole new rail system all the way from Lund to Cedar City. He said the trains cannot go past the airport here in Cedar City anymore because they have taken all the tracks out going up into town, traffic crossings and everything. He said what they are talking about is setting up turnaround service at the airport right for buses so passengers can just take the train right into the airport, doing everything from there, and try to adjust the proposed bus bridge schedules accordingly, where they can have flights out of Cedar City, or the train, and stuff like that. He said that there is a lot of work that has got to be done. Mayor Davis said he had heard about it about eight months ago and did not think too much of it, then they called just a couple of days ago and said to get on this Zoom call. He did, but like former Governor Gary Herbert said, one of the biggest factors is they were worried about the return rate on their money, but Mr. Herbert said you cannot worry about a return rate. He said that we spend millions and millions of dollars every year on our highways to improve our infrastructure and you cannot worry about a return rate, because there is no return rate. He said when you get down to rural counties with B and C funding, that is how we are all able to operate and keep some of these roads passable. He said that they have got to take that out of the equation right now. He said they are just going to have to spend money to make this work, provide the service, relieve the traffic on I-15 off the Wasatch Front. Mayor Davis said that there is a lot to be done so it can be quite a few years, but the conversation is started, so we will just see where it goes.

Mr. Bryan Thiriot asked the Chair to give the General Plan updates progress report that was compiled by Mr. Kevin Smedley, Associate Planner in the Community and Economic Development Division at the Association. The Chair read the report which said that “the Community and Economic Development Division staff had met with most of the communities in the five-county area to complete community surveys, and based on their input, and the dates of their most recent general plans, some of which are from the 1990s and early 2000s, the staff will focus on assisting five rural communities this year”. The Chair said that the report says that “those five will be Escalante, Panguitch, Minersville, Kanarraville and Paragonah, and the assistance is pending their respective town council's approvals to move forward.”



Mr. Gary Zabriskie mentioned to the Committee that the Utah Broadband Council staff would like to work with each individual rural county and the jurisdictions within those counties to determine how jobs can be brought out to those counties. The Utah Broadband Council staff wanted to know whether the counties preferred that interaction to be on a county-by-county basis or on a regional basis. The consensus of the Steering Committee members was to do it on a county-by-county basis, but the hope is that this is to actually implement things, and just not be another plan.

**AGENDA ITEM XI. ADJOURNMENT**

The Chair asked if anybody else had anything to bring up. Mr. Thiriot reminded everyone that at the February 8, 2023, there will be a rotation of the Chair and Vice-Chair. The Chair said at the next meeting he will turn the Chair of the Committee over to Kane County Commissioner Meyeres, and he will then be sitting in the background. He then thanked all for attending the meeting. The Chair called the meeting adjourned at 2:49 p.m.

These minutes were transcribed and typed by Mr. Gary Zabriskie, Deputy Director at the Five County Association of Governments.

The minutes will be presented for approval by the Steering Committee at their February 8, 2023 meeting in Cedar City, Utah.

DRAFT