

MINUTES OF THE JOINT VERNAL CITY COUNCIL AND UINTAH COUNTY
COMMISSION MEETING HELD AUGUST 24, 2020 at 4:30 pm in the Uintah
Conference Center, 313 East 200 South, Vernal, UT 84078.

PRESENT:

UINTAH COUNTY: Commissioners Bart Haslem, Brad Horrocks and Bill Stringer.

VERNAL CITY: Councilmembers Dave Everett, Ted Munford, Nick Porter, Travis Allan and Bert Clark and Mayor Doug Hammond.

NAPLES CITY: Councilmembers Dan Olsen, Robert Hall, Dennis Long, Gordon Kitchen and Mayor Dean Baker.

BALLARD CITY: Mayor Bob Abercrombie.

STAFF: Roxanne Behunin, Mark Caldwell, Quinn Bennion, Jon Stermer and Mike Davis.

GUESTS: Cheryl Meier, Kent Bunderson, Christina Williams, Alicen Hatch, Jeremy Raymond and Robin O'Driscoll.

WELCOME: Vernal City Mayor Doug Hammond welcomed everyone to the meeting.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT & APPROVAL OF SPECIAL MEETING: *Councilmember Bert Clark moved to acknowledge and approve this special meeting. Councilmember Dan Olsen seconded the motion. The motion passed a unanimous vote.*

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF JULY 27, 2020: *Councilmember Dave Everett moved to approve the minutes of July 27, 2020 as presented. Councilmember Ted Munford seconded the motion. The motion passed with Commissioners Stringer, Haslem and Horrocks and Councilmembers Everett, Allan, Munford, Clark and Porter voting in favor for a unanimous vote.*

DISCUSSION AND DECISION REGARDING MINERAL LEASE FUNDS AND SPECIAL SERVICE DISTRICTS DISTRIBUTION OF MONEY: Commissioner Bart Haslem explained that the Commission received letters and emails from all of the Special Service Districts giving suggestions on how to keep the services provided by the Districts and still keep the City's and County services intact. Lots of cuts have been made and debt has been trimmed so the Districts could survive with \$7.7 million dollars annually, but that leaves no funds for the operations of the Transportation District. The Commission must make a decision for these funds although there is not a service that is provided that is not needed by the community. Commissioner Bill Stringer advised that at the last meeting the mineral lease allocations had only been received through May so they were projecting the revenue through the end of the year with those figures. The allocation for June was higher so everyone was wondering why these meetings were necessary. Then the July allocation came in lower than expected. In order to operate on \$7.7 million dollars annually, the Transportation District does

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not receive any funds for projects. What that means given these numbers, is the Districts will only limp along, no improvements can be made, no road treatments can be done, and no investing in new things. On the bright side, the cost for natural gas is up. However, it is not reasonable to say it will get better with only one month of good funding. *Commissioner Haslem stated that they want to keep all the services for the community without raising taxes, so the best scenario is as follows, and would be in the form of a motion:*

- 1. The Uintah Health District will remain, and the allocation will drop to \$1 million dollars a year;*
- 2. The Uintah Animal SSD will stay the same with a budget of \$854,000 a year;*
- 3. The Uintah Transportation SSD, Uintah Recreation SSD and Uintah Impact Mitigation SSD will be moved into one District;*
- 4. The Uintah Fire Suppression District will be closed down and those services moved back to the cities and the County.*

He noted that this scenario seems to have the least impact to the taxpayers. This change to services will not happen right away; however, the plan is to work on moving this direction by the end of the year. Councilmember Clark asked if the Transportation District will remain only doing projects for the County or will that include the Cities. Commissioner Haslem stated the attorneys will have to look at that. Councilmember Ted Munford stated that at the last meeting, the District Directors were instructed to meet and come up with a plan for a \$6.5 million dollar budget. Also, the fire fighters came forward with an incredible offer, so maybe this drastic measure is not necessary. Commissioner Brad Horrocks stated that they are not willing to make the Fire District a taxing entity nor put more taxes on the citizens. Councilmember Ted Munford disagreed stating that if the Fire District is dissolved, the only way the cities can fund fire services is with a tax increase. There was some discussion regarding the needs of the Transportation District and the work that has been done for the Cities. Councilmember Gordon Kitchen stated that it is hard to formulate where the Commission is coming from without seeing the data. Mayor Dean Baker stated it has been discussed. Councilmember Kitchen stated he would like to see this plan in writing so he can understand how they came to this decision. Councilmember Travis Allan agreed that if the plan is to dissolve the Fire District he would like to see the plan as that District is a great functioning operation. He noted that the Fire District has been an immense blessing to the community. Also, the Transportation District has done a few small projects for the Cities, but the majority of those funds only benefits the County, where the rest of the Districts provide services for all residents of the the County. Commissioner Haslem reminded everyone that the oil and gas industry impact the roads the most and impacts all the citizens in the County. Councilmember Bert Clark stated he would like to hear the suggestions from the Districts.

Tina Williams, director of the Animal SSD, stated they have had the same budget for over 3 years serving all three municipalities and the County. She stated that they cannot provide the same level of service with additional funding cuts.

Jeremy Raymond, director of the Fire District, explained that a document was forwarded to the Commission from all the directors asking them to wait a few more months and allow the Districts to create a budget that will be 40% less for 2021.

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Mike Davis stated that the districts provide vastly different services from one another, have increase workloads with less funds and now services have to be reduced. One option is to go to the taxpayers for a vote to see what they want to pay for. If one of the Districts became a taxing entity, it would cost \$28 in property tax on a \$200,000 home to collect \$1 million dollars. If the idea is to dissolve the Fire District, then the funds to pay for that service have to come from a different tax source. If the budget is cut by 40% then the response time would decrease. He stated that he has reviewed this budget and if it is cut more than 15% there will be a loss of services. Mayor Dean Baker asked Jeremy Raymond to explain what would happen if the Fire District is dissolved. Mr. Raymond explained before the Fire District was created, Uintah County had three fire departments - Avalon, Jensen and Tridell. Vernal City and Uintah County shared the Vernal station that was managed by the City. Naples City had their station and only responded inside Naples City. It would be up to the Cities to decide if they want to offer fire services in the County. He noted that with the District the outlying areas receive better ISO insurance ratings; there is better training, communication, standardized policies and better equipment. He stated if the District is dissolved, the County stations would go backwards. Mayor Dean Baker stated currently the Naples Department helps cover through the Book cliffs, and would stay within the Naples boundaries if they are not part of the District.

Cheryl Meier stated that the director's proposal is a wait and see approach with the finances. She stated the Transpiration District functions differently with cuts being the miles of roads that can be completed based on funding. When the District was formed it was for the County unincorporated areas only and it has never been brought back to extend the boundaries. She stated she would still propose to wait and see where the funding is at in the next few months. It would be nice to see on paper what the District would look like if it is combined with the other Districts. Cheryl agreed that transportation is the number one impacted service from the oil and gas industry. Councilmember Ted Munford agreed that is an odd combination to combine transportation, recreation and impact mitigation. He asked why that idea came up. Commissioner Haslem stated it is based on the budgets.

Commissioner Bill Stringer stated this is the proposal being presented by the Commission. He noted that the Districts keep making cuts to make ends meet and they cannot continue to do that and benefit the community. The funds have been looked over and a decision has to be made although this cannot happen right away. The rules seem clear on how to merge or dissolve, but it will need to be worked out with a new charter and the District will be assigned a function. Then a Board will be selected to move forward. The County has until December before setting the allocations. Councilmember Travis Allan asked what the Cities role in this process is.

Kent Bunderson, director of the Impact Mitigation District, stated the role of this District is fairly simple with the funds primarily going to bond debt. Scholarships are awarded to students attending USU and UBTECH, and they fund the air quality team and work with local educational institutions.

Robin ODriscoll, director of the Recreation District, stated that if they cut services, they also cut revenue. Major changes were made at the golf course to reduce the cost, and they have been looking at internal cuts, so it does not affect the public. The cuts for 2021 are \$500,000.

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Commissioner Bart Haslem stated that transportation is very important as without the roads there is no industry that supplies the mineral lease funds. He noted that the Fire District is the smallest hit to the tax payer. The cost to the County will be \$1 million dollars and \$250,000 to Vernal City and \$180,000 to Naples City. Councilmember Gordon Kitchen agreed the biggest impact is to transportation, and it is designed so the cities cannot give any input. The scholarships have not always been available, and is that a service that the community expect the Districts to provide. Commissioner Haslem stated that whatever is spent in the County benefits all residents.

Dan Dilsaver, Chairman for the Transportation District, stated that the Commission asked all six Districts to look at the problem and come up with proposals, which has put the Boards in awkward positions. He stated it is a hard decision and hopes the Commission acts in the best interest of the community. Commissioner Haslem invited the City leaders to come to his office and see what has been looked at to meet budget and provide services.

UINTAH COUNTY:

Commissioner Bill Stringer moved to arrange a time to meet with each City and go through the numbers so the Cities can formulate a plan to present to the Commission and meet again on September 14th. Commissioner Brad Horrocks seconded the motion. The motion passed with Commissioners Stringer, Horrocks and Haslem voting in favor.

ADJOURN:

Councilmember Dave Everett moved to adjourn. Councilmember Nick Porter seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned.