

**M**INUTES OF THE VERNAL CITY COUNCIL AND UINTAH COUNTY  
COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING HELD FEBRUARY 25, 2019 at 4:30 p.m.  
in the Vernal City Council room, 374 East Main, Vernal, Utah 84078.

**PRESENT:**

**VERNAL CITY:** Councilmembers Dave Everett, Ted Munford, Travis Allan, Bert Clark and Samantha Scott and Mayor Doug Hammond.

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

**STAFF:** Quinn Bennion, Roxanne Behunin, Cheryl Meier and GJ Searle.

**GUESTS:** Kevin Yack, UBAG, Laurie Brummond, UBAG, Bob Abercrombie, Ballard Mayor, Mike Allred, Board Member UTSSD, Sonja Norton, Dan Dilsaver, Board member UTSSD, Kurt Mower UBAG, Dean Baker, Naples City Mayor.

**WELCOME:** Mayor Hammond welcomed everyone to this meeting. He asked the audience to use the microphone if they want to make comments regarding the BTA.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT & APPROVAL OF SPECIAL MEETING:** *Councilmember Samantha Scott moved to acknowledge and approve this special meeting. Councilmember Bert Clark seconded the motion. The motion passed with Commissioners Horrocks, Haslem and Stringer voting in favor and Councilmembers Everett, Munford, Allan, Clark and Scott voting in favor.*

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 28, 2019:** *Commissioner Bill Stringer moved to approve the minutes of January 28, 2019. Commissioner Brad Horrocks seconded the motion. The motion passed with Commissioners Horrocks, Haslem and Stringer voting in favor and Councilmembers Everett, Munford, Allan, Clark and Scott voting in favor.*

**BTA SERVICES AND FUNDING IN UINTAH COUNTY:**

Mayor Doug Hammond explained that this meeting was to discuss the future of the bus service (BTA) in Uintah County and Vernal City and the elected officials want to hear from the local community on this topic. Laurie Brummond, UBAG Director, stated that UBAG is the service provider for the BTA. She noted that UBAG serves the Tri-County area representing all local governments. The BTA was initially funded by the Federal DOT and after two years the funding dropped to an 80% grant from UDOT and 20% local match. The Uintah Basin was one of four areas receiving this funding and there is a waiting list. The vehicles were purchased using revitalization funds for the 20% local match. Routes were established with the help of other transit systems. The red route has a \$1 fare; the other routes do not require a fee. The para transit system is a one-on-one service which requires residents to apply for services and is the most expensive to operate. The equipment must be purchased through the State and the largest service is to the dialysis center. Commissioner Bill Stringer reminded everyone that this issue has been on the ballot twice to add a ¼ cent sales tax to collect funds for transportation for the Cities, County and BTA in Uintah County and it was defeated twice. However, unless something changes in the Legislature, it has been said that the ¼ cent tax will be imposed in Uintah County in the future and the vote will not stop it. The County Commission has the

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option to pass an ordinance before May of 2020 to collect the tax which will ensure that the funds stay here and be distributed to the Cities, BTA and Uintah County. He stated he did not know the percentage that would go to the bus system yet, however, it would be a fairly good amount. If the County does not do this, then the Cities would be offered the same opportunity and the funds would be split between the Cities and BTA. The bottom line is the ¼ cent tax will be imposed. If that is the case, the County will consider passing an ordinance and distribute the funds to BTA, Cities and County. Commissioner Brad Horrocks stated that this tax passed in Duchesne County and they collected \$780,000 for the first eight months so the tax in Uintah County could be upwards of \$1 million dollars. Commissioner Stringer stated that the distribution to BTA will be a greater amount than they are receiving from the Transportation District. Councilmember Bert Clark asked for a clarification of the difference between collected tax and funds used by the Special Districts. Commissioner Bill Stringer explained that the Special Service Districts receive mineral lease money coming to the County which has been as high as \$36 million dollars a year. The amount collected the last few years has been between \$12 million dollars and \$13 million dollars. Those funds support fire suppression, higher education, animal control, health services, recreation services and impact to the community. Sales tax is collected in the county throughout the year and helps run other government programs and operations so this extra ¼ cent sales tax will be added increasing the sales tax to 6.45% with those extra funds going toward transportation. Dean Baker, Naples Mayor, stated that the question is how to keep BTA up and running during the transitional period when the County or Cities impose the tax. Cheryl Meier, Uintah Transportation Director, stated that the Transportation District held a meeting and made the decision to fund the BTA for 90 days and then revisit that funding once new board members were in place. Mayor Hammond opened the meeting for public comment.

Mr. Bobby Oosteven stated that his commitment to the bus system started during the summer passport program where one of the requirements was to ride the bus. His family noticed that people had to sit on the curb or in the dirt and wait so his daughter did not want to ride the stupid bus. He stated that a goal as a dad is to teach his children the value of giving and create a better place. He noticed an older gentleman holding a prescription bag waiting for the bus or someone with an armful of groceries. He decided there was better way to treat patrons of BTA and as a community there needs to be a clear path to give hope to those that need this service. Quinn Bennion stated that he has been working with Bobby to install 12 benches at more prominent stops and donors have come forward to purchase the benches and concrete.

Mr. Tim Beavers sated he moved to Vernal last summer and loves the community and bus system and hopes it is funded through the rest of the year. He asked if there would be any scaling back of scheduled routes and suggested an annual pass be offered.

Mr. Terry Kiever stated that he looked at the information in the hand out and asked for clarification of the routes. The pamphlet shows 12 loops per day 365 days per year or 5 days per week. He also asked how the ridership is determined and what criteria is used to determine when a bus needs to be replaced.

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Mr. Bruno Wilson stated that he works at the airport and knows the bus system is needed. He asked UBAG to consider a stop at the airport. Travelers have to walk to find food between flights and he suggested the red loop be reorganized to help the green loop.

Alicia Gowen stated that many students ride the bus to and from school and may not go to school if they have to walk. From the perspective of an advocate for victim of crime, the location of the crisis center was chosen to utilize the bus services to help victims and it vital for them to have this transportation.

Cory Hatch Jr. stated that the paratransit bus system has been amazing and is vital to get to appointments. He stated it is a wonderful service for dialysis, and there is a greater need beyond that and asked UBAG to consider adding another van because at times it is completely booked making it hard to get to appointments. The cost for the bus is \$2 where a taxi is a minimum of \$7 each way making it too expensive.

Francis Lewis asked if the services can be expanded to help patrons at the Golden Age Center.

Karrie Hoops, manager of the Dialysis Center, stated that approximately 1/3 of their patients need the paratransit service as they cannot drive. She stated that this service keeps them alive along with keeping the road safe.

Roy McKee stated he is a taxpayer and business owner. The people who were able to drive to this meeting are lucky to have a car as there are a lot at this meeting who do not have vehicles and are trying to get back and forth to work. The bus system helps keep vehicles off the road to improve the air quality which is close to being dangerous. He stated that he wants his kids and grandkids to grow up here so the bus is important to keep the community together.

Mr. Lloyd Dean, taxpayer, asked how everyone got along before 2010 when there was no bus system. He also wondered what the purpose was of the proposition if there was no value to that vote. Mr. Dean voiced his frustration that the State Legislature would add a tax when the voters decided not to. He stated he empathizes with the residents that need the bus, but the calculations come out to only five people riding per loop so there must be a cheaper way to provide mass transit. If the sales tax continues to increase it will placed the local market out of line with other areas.

Brenda Jenkins stated that she needs the bus as she cannot drive and asked the elected officials for their number so she could call them when she needs a ride if the bus goes away.

Debra Momley, originally from Roosevelt, stated that she recently lost her home and uses the bus to get from Vernal to her job. If she cannot ride the bus she will have to give up her job in Roosevelt. She stated she appreciates everything that has been done for her and how the bus helps the community.

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Aleita Leigh stated that she has a child that is a college student that attends UB Tech and rides the bus to and from classes. She stated the bus makes her student late for class and asked UBAG to look at the schedules times to be more rider friendly for the college classes.

Valerie Huber stated that she live in Roosevelt and can only ride the bus in the winter because of the hours of operation. She noted that without the bus, certain things in her life that would not be going right. If the hours of operation were extended later in the evening it would help those that do not work a 9 to 5 job.

Clarissa Benning, Vernal resident, stated that she works at Northeastern Counseling and many of their clients desperately need the bus otherwise they have to walk during the winter when it's cold and dangerous.

Sonja Norton stated that the first time this proposition was on the ballot the issue was not clear and people thought the money would go to other transit systems. She stated that the tax can be used for not only the transit, but other transportation needs in the County such as trails and sidewalks. She noted that students ride the bus a lot.

Michelle Wheeler, employee of Uintah County library, stated that she does not live too far from work and used to walk. She had the experience where someone came up behind her which was scary so now she rides BTA. She stated that she has met a lot of amazing people on the bus and the drivers are kind and courteous. The paratransit system is also a god-send giving people a touch of freedom to those that need the service badly.

Jordan Mathis, Director of Tri-County Health, stated that it is important to understand all aspects of the community. In the Uintah Basin as a whole, many residents suffer from poor health outcomes, some due to social detriments, and often times linked to not having access to things that help promote health. To increase access those residents need transportation to reach the food pantry, doctors, Tri-County health, etc. He noted that not everyone rides the bus, but it is an important aspect of the community.

Mayor Doug Hammond thanked everyone for their comments. Laurie Brummond stated that with the current budget constraints, the schedule has been set for five days a week starting at 5:45 am to 7 pm. She noted that it is enlightening to hear what could determine additional ridership such as a special route between campuses for students. Initially the transit system was going to have a hospitality stop for the airport and a Naples City stop. When there was a budget shortfall those stops did not happen. Two years ago funding was received for more paratransit vehicles and hope to have one on order soon. Also, Duchesne County and Uintah County helped purchased a larger bus because of the demand in the morning and after school. The ridership is counted when someone gets on the bus that counts as one rider. Councilmember Ted Munford agreed that the tax was voted down twice and he also takes issue with the State changing the rules. He recommended citizens contact the State Legislature to let them know how they feel about them implementing this tax. He stated that the State also took funds from all the Cities and Counties to pay for the homeless shelters on the Wasatch Front. He suggested

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citizens become involved. Mayor Hammond thanked everyone for voicing their opinions and attending the meeting.

**ADJOURN:** There being no further business; Councilmember Samantha Scott moved to adjourn. Commissioner Bill Stringer seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was declared adjourned.

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Mayor Doug Hammond

ATTEST:

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Roxanne Behunin, Deputy Recorder

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