



GRAND COUNTY COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING

Grand County Commission Chambers
Hybrid virtual participation on Zoom
Moab, Utah

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MINUTES 20 March 2025

The Grand County Commission met in a special meeting on March 20th, 2025. The meeting was held in-person in the Grand County Commission Chambers, with hybrid virtual participation also available via Zoom. It was also broadcast and saved on YouTube. Attending the meeting in-person were, Commission Vice-Chair Melodie McCandless and Commissioners Jacques Hadler, Brian Martinez, Mary McGann, Trisha Hedin, Mike McCurdy. Also attending in-person were Commission Administrator Mark Tyner, Associate Commission Administrator Quinn Hall and County Attorney Stephen Stocks. Commission Chair Bill Winfield was in attendance virtually.

This special meeting was scheduled in response to a Countywide power outage during the regular scheduled meeting held on March 18th, 2025. This Special meeting resumed at Action Item 11 of that agenda, which had been moved up after Item 6 during the General Business section by Vice-Chair McCandless, without objection

4:00 p.m. Vice-Chair McCandless called to order the special meeting

Pledge of Allegiance

Commission Disclosures

Attorney Stocks clarified that Action Item 11 presents no restricted conflicts for any Commissioners. Commissioner Martinez disclosed that he manages a concession contract with Arches National Park and Commissioner Hadler disclosed that he is co-owner of a company that does business in Arches National Park.

Elected Official Reports

Attorney Stocks offered an update on his review of the Mud Springs Trail Independent Contractor Agreement, which has required some adjustments but is sufficient at this time to move forward without further delay and be presented for approval at the next Commission meeting.

Citizens to be Heard

Brittney Melton expressed her desire for the Commission to forward the citizen prepared report regarding economic impacts of the Arches Timed Entry system that was in the previous agenda packet to the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. Melton added that she disagreed with Park Superintendent Pace's assertion that she has collaborated with the local Chamber of Commerce.

11. Request for a study on Arches N.P. Reservation System impacts on Grand County (Commissioner Martinez)

Presentation

Commissioner Martinez repeated the following statement, presented for the record verbatim:

I, and many in our community, are concerned with the continued downturn in our economy. When elected last year, I promised to do everything I could to restore Grand County to economic strength. I, and this community, need to understand what's causing this local, economic downturn. Many people, including me, are concerned that the Arches Reservation System is having an unacceptable economic impact.

The comprehensive analysis in the packet raises concerns for me. It tells a coherent story that meshes with the economic reality we've all been experiencing since the reservation system was first introduced 3 years ago. It draws on the latest data from multiple sources, over multiple time frames, and it shows:

- 1. There has been a significant drop in visitation at Arches national park since the reservation system was introduced, especially during the months when reservations are required.*
- 2. The visitation decline is much greater than that seen in parks across the state, the region, and the nation. In fact, over the last 3-years, Arches NP has been the third largest decline of any national park in the country.*
- 3. And this is coming at considerable cost to our community - to our tax base, to local workers, and our local businesses.*

Adjusted for inflation, Grand County's tax revenues have now declined for 3 straight years. This should concern all of us because it's unsustainable. The County and the City cannot continue to raise taxes to make up the shortfall. There has been considerable discussion and disagreement about the cause of the local tourism decline in Grand County, from gas prices, to inflation, to COVID, to the political climate.

But based on the data and analysis presented here, I can no longer accept that the decline in visitation at Arches is being caused by all things EXCEPT the one thing that was specifically put in place to limit visitation at the park. None of this should come as a surprise, because this was predicted in the Economic Impact analysis commissioned and published by the National Park Service back in 2018, which forecast back then that the reservation system would cost approximately \$22 million a year in lost spending; which adjusted for inflation, is approximately \$30 million today. We're now seeing impacts greater than that, with Kem C Gardner publishing data that says we have seen a decline in visitor spending since 2021 of almost \$100 million a year. That is unsustainable. The University of Utah's Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute is Utah's premier economic and public policy research body, which the State of Utah and the National Park Service rely on for quality research to inform good policy. In an email in November last year, the NPS wrote:

"For looking at county-level trends in visitor spending, the University of Utah Tourism dashboard is a better source than our annual Visitor Spending Effects estimates."

Given the size and scale of these economic impacts, I think it's essential we ask the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute to review and expand upon this work, so we are all fully aware of the economic impact the reservation system is having on our community. The timed-entry reservation system has long-term implications for our tourism-dependent economy, so it is essential that we have independent, up-to-date, high quality, reputable research to provide evidence-based guidance.

Motion by Commissioner Winfield to explore the engagement of Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute to further expand on the Arches Reservation System's impact on Grand County.

Motion seconded by Commissioner Martinez

Discussion

Chair Winfield stated that in his informal discussions with the Kem C. Gardner Institute, they expressed enthusiasm for looking deeper into the matter after being supplied with the analysis prepared by citizen Matt Hancock.

Commissioner McGann stated that the reason for decreased visitation figures was due to a change in how the calculation of cars to people entering the park is made, and stated that visitation actually increased when following the metric previously used by Arches and still used by other parks that showed visitation increases. McGann referenced the scientific study regarding economic impacts of the Arches Timed entry system already completed within the last year, and that Mr. Hancock's study does not appropriately factor anomalous spikes in growth in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic, which would show a predictable pattern of growth. McGann stressed that public land agencies need all the support they can get from local leaders during a very difficult time of widespread federal budget cuts, that reservation systems are considered common best practice for high volume visitor destinations and are easily navigated and expected by travelers, and that the National Park Service has made several significant adjustments during the Timed Entry pilot as a way of finding the right balance and benefit.

Commissioner Hedin agreed that area parks are seeing increases in visitation, rather than decreases, and reference flaws in data analysis by Mr. Hancock's report, which she does not consider remotely credible and should not be presented before the public as though it is. Hedin spoke to the importance of appropriate procurement process in working with the proposed contractor.

Commissioner Hadler stated that he felt that report prepared by Mr. Hancock was a biased review backed by a political agenda. Hadler stated that as the Chamber of Commerce liaison he observed firsthand that the National Park Service was well engaged with the Chamber during implementation of the Timed Entry Pilot. Hadler referenced a letter signed on by at least twenty local tourism business showing support for the Timed Entry system.

Chair Winfield stated that the passion exhibited on the topics warrants deeper analysis for the reservation system's effects, and that the currently contemplated action is merely an exploration into this idea and not entrance into any agreement. Winfield took issue with what he sees are political statements being targeted at Mr. Hancock, and stated that the highly reputable Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute will take into account all studies and analysis completed to date. Winfield stated that the local economy was in a downturn and the Commission owed it to the community to understand the root causes.

Commissioner McGann reiterated that she feels the economy is not down but rather growth has flattened when adjusting for the spike that occurred after the pandemic. McGann added that there is not current valid replacement for the reservation system and that no one wants to go back to the long lines and closures that were experienced prior to its implementation, and that many businesses would be hurt in that scenario.

Commissioner Martinez showed support for Mr. Hancock's analysis and stated that the Commission needs this reputable independent analysis in order to move forward with the appropriate management decision.

Commissioner McCurdy stated that overflowing parking lots inside Arches National Park is a preferable scenario to the current situation where he claims that parking lots are left empty. McCurdy added that he's received lots of negative feedback from business owners regarding the timed-entry system.

Park Superintendent Lena Pace gave some background regarding current challenges as the spring visitation season kicks off, and referenced the adjustments that the Park has made in improving the Time Entry system, including public outreach.

Motion passes 4-3, Hadler, McGann, Hedin opposed

4. Approval of 2025 CIB County list (Commission Administration)

Item postponed without objection, topic to be addressed at upcoming Commission Workshop

5. Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (CPACE) (Attorney Stocks)

Presentation

Attorney Stocks explained that this CPACE project had been brought to the County years ago, with the previous County Attorney deeming it cumbersome and difficult. The program places a levy and assessment on private property owners in order to cover the cost of energy efficiency upgrades. Attorney Stocks confirmed that this would not place an undue burden on County resources, as the process has become more streamlined over time. Further discussion ensued regarding the benefit to local contractors in achieving high building energy efficiency in new constructions and the absence of a burden or liability to the County.

Motion by Commissioner Winfield to approve the County moving forward in facilitating the CPACE program

Motion seconded by Commissioner McCurdy

Discussion (none at this time)

Motion passes 7-0

6. Resolution Authorizing Release of Performance Bond Associated with Country Inn & Suites Hotel (Clerk/Auditor Woytek)

Presentation

This action authorizes the County Clerk/Auditor to release the performance bond held by the County for the purpose of guaranteeing the satisfactory completion of site improvements associated with the Moab County Inn & Suites Hotel development. It is unclear why a Development Improvements Agreement and a performance bond were required for this commercial site development as there were no new lots created for sale and no public improvements that will be taken over for maintenance by Grand County. A final inspection of the site improvements, including required landscaping, was completed back in October. Everything was completed and signed off and the Certificate of Occupancy was issued soon thereafter.

Motion by Commissioner McCurdy to approve the Resolution authorizing the release of collateral in the amount of \$868,894.15, held by Grand County and associated with the site improvements for the Moab Country Inn & Suites.

Seconded by Commissioner Hadler

Discussion (none at this time)

Motion passes 7-0

7. Third Amendment to Independent Contractor Agreement (Love Communications) (Attorney Stocks, Travel Council Advisory Board Chair Lori MacFarland)

Presentation

This is the third amendment to the Love Communication contract agreement. Later this year, in 2025, the Moab Office of Tourism plans to issue an RFP for an Agency of Record for fiscal year 2026. This contract was approved unanimously by the Moab Tourism Advisory Board (formerly the Travel Council Advisory Board) during its regular meeting on March 11, 2025. Attorney Stocks stated that this would be better characterized as a renewal rather than an amendment.

Lori MacFarland began by noting that this contract was unanimously approved by the Travel Council Advisory Board at its March 11th meeting, despite discomfort with renewing a contract that had expired on January 1st. Clarification given that this action served to approve a contract but not a specific marketing strategy, which would go through further approval.

Chair Winfield stated that there needs to be a representative from the County following up on whether the contracted firm is meeting the contractual requirements.

Commissioner Martinez stated that he was not comfortable jumping into another contract with this agency given their demonstrated performance, and that existing staff in the Office of Tourism is well equipped to handle marketing duties proposed in the contract. Martinez suggested putting the contract back out to bid as soon as possible.

Commissioner Hadler stressed that it would be prudent to remain with the currently contemplated contract so as to maintain marketing activity uninterrupted through the end of 2025. Commissioner Hedin expressed a similar sentiment, especially given the unanimous recommendation by the Travel Council Advisory Board.

Commissioner McCurdy spoke to the urgency needed in maintaining robust marketing efforts uninterrupted, and sought clarification regarding realistic timelines for putting the contract out to bid.

Chair McCandless stated that she would like to see the action postponed so that the contractor can be brought in for more information on how it would proceed this year.

Further discussion ensued about the logistics and timelines of going out to bid and contracting with a new firm and the effects that this could have on the high short-term demand for advertising.

Motion by Commissioner Hedin to approve the 2025 Third Amendment to Independent Contractor Agreement with Love Communications

Seconded by Commissioner Hadler

Substitute motion by Chair Winfield to deny the 2025 Third Amendment to Independent Contractor Agreement with Love Communications and put a new marketing contract out to bid.

Substitute motion seconded by Commissioner Martinez

Substitute motion fails 3-2, Hedin and Hadler opposed, McGann and McCandless abstaining

Original motion fails 2-3, Martinez, Winfield, McCurdy, McCandless opposed, McGann abstaining

Motion by Commissioner McGann to postpone the item for future consideration

Seconded by Commissioner Hedin

Substitute motion by Commissioner Martinez to postpone consideration of the 2025 Third Amendment to Independent Contractor Agreement with Love Communications and direct staff to put a new marketing contract out to bid for 2025

Substitute motion seconded by Commissioner McCurdy

Substitute motion passes 4-2, Hadler and Hedin opposed, McGann abstaining

Further discussion ensued about the need to direct staff to maintain marketing activities with funds budgeted for that purpose in order to avoid interruptions.

8. Consent Agenda

- A. Ratification of Payment of Bills**
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes for March 4, 2025**
- C. Purchase of High Index Reflective Glass Beads for Canyonlands Regional Airport**
- D. Purchase of Artificial Turf for Canyonlands Regional Airport - State Funded**
- E. Renaming the Travel Council Advisory Board to the Moab Tourism Advisory Board**
- F. 2025 "Non-Motorized Recreational Trails Program Grant Program" Application**
- G. Letter of support - Rim to Rim Restoration**
- H. Supporting the BLM application for a motorized RTP grant**
- I. ALJ approval/appointment for V.S. hearing**
- J. Tim Vetere lease - Reissue previously approved easement agreement**
- K. Contract - Rocky Mountain Power – Removal of Streetlights at Millcreek and 191 (for stoplight installation)**
- L. Grant Awards & Integration of State-Mandated Programs - Grand County Sheriff's Office**

Motion by Commissioner McCandless to approve the Consent Agenda, as read by the chair, excepting Item I

Motion seconded by Commissioner McCurdy

Motion passes 6-0, McCurdy absent

I. ALJ approval/appointment for V.S. hearing

Presentation

Attorney Stocks explained that in lieu of a hearing that would typically go to the Commission, an ALJ would be contracted to review the hearing, subject anonymous.

Motion by Commissioner McGann to approve

Motion seconded by Commissioner McCurdy

Discussion (none at this time)

Motion passes 7-0

Discussion Items (none scheduled)

Closed Session

At 6:01 p.m., Motion by Commissioner McCurdy to enter closed session for the purposes of discussing pending or reasonably imminent litigation and the character and professional competence of an individual

Motion seconded by Commissioner Hadler

Motion passes 7-0

At 6:39 p.m., Motion by Commissioner Hedin to exit closed session

Motion seconded by Commissioner McCurdy

Motion passes 7-0

Vice Chair McCandless adjourned the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

Bill Winfield
Chair, Grand County Commission

Gabriel Woytek
Grand County Clerk/Auditor