

**WORKFORCE ARIZONA COUNCIL**  
**Q1 2026 Full Council Meeting Minutes**

Thursday, March 12th, 2026 | 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Virtual Meeting ONLY

**Zoom:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85113856459?pwd=5hP7LHnMEjl7IR6L8GbdQGqbToqXnm.1>

**Meeting ID:** 851 1385 6459 **Passcode:** 266692

<p><b><u>Council Members Present:</u></b> Alexander Horvath, Tucson Medical Center Beverly Wilson, AZ Dept of Education, Title II (joined at 1:11pm) Chet Samuelson, BOK Financial Debra Margraf, NECA Dennis Anthony, State Apprenticeship Council Jackie Elliott, Central Arizona College Jenna Rowell, Local First Arizona Jeffrey McClure, Supervisor, Pinal County Jim Corning, Novakinetics Aerosystems John Walters, Vice Chair, Trucordia Karla Moran, SRP Kristen Mackey, Dept of Economic Services, Title IV Mark Gaspers, Chairman, Boeing Michael Cruz, Lucid Motors Michael Wisehart, Director, Dept of Economic Security, Titles I &amp; III Michelle Bolton, Second Vice-Chair, Banner Health Regina Romero, Mayor of Tucson Scott Holman, Amkor Technology Shawn Hutchinson, Phoenix Electrical Skylie Estep, South32</p>	<p><b><u>Council Members Absent:</u></b> Alisa Wren Freeport-McMoRan Bill Ruiz, Western States Regional Council of Carpenters Danny Seiden, AZ Chamber of Commerce &amp; Industry Ian O’Grady, Policy Advisor, Governor Hobbs Josh DeSpain, IBEW Local 570 Justin Wilmeth, Arizona House of Representatives Rose Castanares, TSMC Sandra Watson, Arizona Commerce Authority Thomas Winkel, Arizona Coalition for Military Families Zenji Reynolds, Southwest Shoulder Elbow and Hand Center</p>
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**1. Call to Order**

Chairman Gaspers welcomes all members of the Workforce Arizona Council and the public to the Q1 2026 Full Council meeting. The meeting is called to order at 1:02pm.

**2. Roll Call**

Giselle Retana, Workforce Arizona Council Administrative Coordinator conducted roll call, a quorum was present.

**3. Call to the Public**

Chairman Gaspers opens the call to the public. No one spoke.

**4. Success Story**

This Q1 success story highlights Southeastern Arizona Local Workforce Development Board and Adalberto Acuna. Deputy Director of SEAZ Local Workforce Development Board, Vickie Simmons shared the story. ([Full Success Story](#)).

**5. Chairman Updates**

Chairman Gaspers expressed his appreciation and thanked members for their participation in the recent Council retreat, noting the strong turnout and the significant time commitment from participants. The retreat provided an opportunity for members to align on statewide workforce priorities, support the Governor’s goals, and clarify the Council’s role within the workforce system. It was particularly valuable for newer members and reinforcing the Council’s responsibilities while identifying ways to strengthen its

impact and service across Arizona. The discussion emphasized appreciation for members' engagement and invited additional reflections from those who attended.

## 6. Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of minutes from November 20th, 2025 Full Council meeting

**MOTION:** Chair Gaspers called for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Alex Horvath made a motion; Mayor Regina Romero seconded the motion.

**ALL IN FAVOR:** Alex Horvath, Beverly Wilson, Chet Samuelson, Debra Margraf, Dennis Anthony, Jackie Elliott, Jenna Rowell, Jeffrey McClure, Jim Corning, John Walters, Karla Moran, Kristen Mackey, Mark Gaspers, Michael Cruz, Director Michael Wisehart, Michelle Bolton, Mayor Regina Romero, Scott Holman, Shawn Hutchinson, Skylie Estep

**OPPOSED:** None

**ABSTAINED:** None

**MOTION PASSES**

## 7. Elections

Chair Gaspers noted nominations and elections for the officer positions of First Vice Chair and Second Vice Chair would take place this meeting. He highlighted the position requirements as follows:

### Election Process

- Officers are elected for a **three-year term**
- Seats to be filled during the election:
  - First Vice Chair
  - Second Vice Chair
- Positions must be filled by business members to comply with WIOA requirements.
- Elections occur at the first regularly scheduled meeting of each calendar year (as needed or if a vacancy occurs).
- **First Vice Chair:** Vice Chair will perform the Chair's duties in the event of the Chair's absence at meetings or in such circumstances where the Chair will relinquish duties to the Vice-Chair
- **Second Vice Chair:** In the absence of the Council Chair and Vice Chair, the Second Vice Chair will perform all duties of the Chair.

Chair Gaspers opened up the floor for nominations, the following actions were taken:

First Vice Chair Election:

- Nominee: Michelle Bolton was nominated by Karla Moran; and Michelle Bolton accepted the nomination.
- No additional nominations were made. The nomination was seconded by Chet Samuelson.
- Result: A vote by acclamation was conducted given one nomination received and accepted, and Michelle Bolton was elected First Vice Chair unanimously.

Second Vice Chair Election:

- Nominee: Skylie Estep was nominated by Scott Holman, and Skylie Estep accepted the nomination.
- No additional nominations were made. The nomination was seconded by Michelle Bolton.
- Result: A vote by acclamation was conducted, and Skylie Estep was elected Second Vice Chair unanimously.

## 8. Workgroup Updates

- a. Continuous Improvement

- i. Eligible Training Provider List Policy Update, **Vote**

Vice Chair Walters provided the updates on the work the Continuous Improvement has done towards the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) policy, which were developed following a

detailed review focused on strengthening program quality. Key considerations to note included:

## Continuous Improvement, Vice Chair John Walters

### WAC ETPL Policy Revision

#### Purpose

- Align training provider standards with Workforce Pell requirements
  1. Quality Safeguards
    - a. Minimum Operational History Requirement for Training Providers
    - b. Recognized Credential Within Six Months of Completion
    - c. Stackable Credential Requirement
  2. Continued Eligibility
    - a. Demonstrated Compliance with the interim provisions
- Stakeholder Public Comments
  - ETPL Draft Policy was released for a public comment period between 1/28-2/10



**Action Item:** Motion to approve the recommended Eligible Training Provider List Policy update.

**MOTION:** Chair Gaspers called for a motion to approve the recommended Eligible Training Provider (ETPL) update. Alex Horvath made a motion; Scott Holman seconded the motion.

**ALL IN FAVOR:** Alex Horvath, Beverly Wilson, Chet Samuelson, Debra Margraf, Dennis Anthony, Jackie Elliott, Jenna Rowell, Jeffrey McClure, Jim Corning, John Walters, Karla Moran, Kristen Mackey, Mark Gaspers, Michael Cruz, Director Michael Wisehart, Michelle Bolton, Mayor Regina Romero, Scott Holman, Shawn Hutchinson, Skylie Estep

**OPPOSED:** None

**ABSTAINED:** None

**MOTION PASSES**

More on the Continuous Improvement Workgroup, Janice Garza, Workforce Policy Manager provided an update workgroup, highlighting its recent focus on two key policy initiatives: developing a recaptured funds policy for WIOA funding and revising the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) policy to align with short-term workforce Pell program requirements noting it just received Council approval. Next steps include finalizing the recaptured funds policy after incorporating revisions and public comments, followed by review and action by the Executive Committee before it is brought to the full Council. Looking ahead, the workgroup will continue its efforts to strengthen system performance by developing key performance indicators (KPIs), reviewing fund allocation formulas to ensure they function as intended, and updating the Continuous Improvement Workgroup charter.

#### b. Training Effectiveness

Kristen Mackey, the Training Effectiveness Workgroup Executive Sponsor highlighted the statewide rollout and application of High Impact Training (HIT) data and shared that the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) data team has completed a statewide analysis, released dashboards, and presented the findings to nearly all local workforce areas. These efforts aim to help local partners better understand and apply the data in workforce planning, noting that local workforce areas are beginning to use the HIT data to inform training investment strategies, Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) reviews, and decisions about sector-based training programs. The workgroup is also encouraging system coordination, with local areas sharing best practices, referral tools, and templates to strengthen collaboration across the workforce system.



a. **2025 LWDB Recertification**

Patrick Brown, the Workforce Council Administrator provided an overview of the 2025 LWDB Recertification.

i. Coconino County Workforce Development Board Update

The Coconino County Workforce Development Board remains on track for Q2 recertification, with a presentation to the Workforce Arizona Council Executive Committee scheduled for April 9 and a potential recommendation to the full council on May 14. Key items in progress include finalizing governance documents (SGA and bylaws) under county legal review and addressing remaining board membership vacancies, including labor representation. Final materials are expected by March 27–30, and staff are providing technical assistance and expedited review. Recertification remains contingent on completing governance updates and resolving membership requirements or pursuing a waiver if needed.

ii. Arizona Tribal Workforce Development Board Update

It was noted that the Arizona Tribal Workforce Area has made notably progress as it works toward recertification. Workforce Council staff met with ATW leadership on February 19 to review outstanding requirements and establish a timeline for completing remaining materials. ATW has made significant progress by submitting signed consortium and shared governance agreements from all 13 tribal governments, resolving a major compliance barrier. Work continues on the local plan, expected to be completed by April 2026, and ATW is addressing its one-stop operator requirement after a recent RFP was unsuccessful. One option under consideration is serving as its own operator, which is allowable under WIOA with proper safeguards.

iii. Northeastern Arizona Local Workforce Development Board, Vote

Following a March 4 meeting with NEAZ leadership, Workforce Council staff confirmed that all outstanding recertification items have been addressed and are prepared to recommend the board for recertification. NEAZ resolved prior governance concerns by confirming that board member appointments are vetted through the Board of Supervisors and by providing supporting documentation. With no remaining compliance barriers, staff indicated that NEAZ is in a strong position for recertification and will continue working with the board on improvements after approval.

**MOTION:** Chair Gaspers called for a motion to approve the recommended 2025 LWDB Recertification for Northeastern Arizona Local Workforce Development Board. Michelle Bolton made a motion; Jenna Rowell seconded the motion.

**ALL IN FAVOR:** Alex Horvath, Beverly Wilson, Chet Samuelson, Debra Margraf, Dennis Anthony, Jackie Elliott, Jenna Rowell, Jeffrey McClure, Jim Corning, Karla Moran, Kristen Mackey, Mark Gaspers, Michael Cruz, Director Michael Wisehart, Michelle Bolton, Mayor Regina Romero, Scott Holman, Shawn Hutchinson, Skylie Estep

**OPPOSED:** None

**ABSTAINED:** None

**MOTION PASSES**

b. **LWDB Membership Vacancy Waiver Request, Vote**

The Arizona Tribal Workforce Development Board (ATW) requested a membership vacancy waiver for an open board seat representing the White Mountain Apache Tribe. The request was submitted on February 26, 2026, as the tribe is currently conducting general elections expected to conclude in April 2026. Due to potential leadership transitions, the board anticipates filling the vacancy by April 30, 2026. Workforce Council staff recommended that the Council approve the temporary waiver.

**MOTION:** Chair Gaspers called for a motion to approve the Arizona Tribal Workforce Development Board Membership Waiver Request. Mayor Regina Romero made a motion; Michelle Bolton seconded the motion.

**ALL IN FAVOR:** Alex Horvath, Beverly Wilson, Chet Samuelson, Debra Margraf, Dennis Anthony, Jackie Elliott, Jenna Rowell, Jeffrey McClure, Jim Corning, Karla Moran, Kristen Mackey, Mark Gaspers, Michael Cruz, Director Michael Wisheart, Michelle Bolton, Mayor Regina Romero, Scott Holman, Shawn Hutchinson, Skylie Estep

**OPPOSED:** None

**ABSTAINED:** None

**MOTION PASSES**

## 10. State Plan Modification Updates

Patrick Brown presented an update on the WIOA State Plan two-year modification for Arizona, which serves as the state’s blueprint for coordinating federally funded workforce programs. The modification updates priorities, strategies, performance targets, and program details to reflect current labor market conditions, funding changes, and policy guidance for the remaining two years of the plan cycle. The original submission deadline of March 3, 2026 was extended to April 30, 2026, and the state is currently on track to meet that deadline. A public comment period will run from March 23 to April 3, after which feedback will be incorporated into the final draft. Key updates include refreshed labor market analysis, revised in-demand industries and priority sectors (including emphasis on information technology), operational updates across partner programs, updated performance levels for Program Years 2026–2027, and alignment with the America’s Talent Strategy framework. The modification continues the plan’s focus on a customer-driven workforce system, stronger business engagement, expanded economic opportunity, and improved youth workforce outcomes. The following timeline showcases the next steps:

### WIOA Unified Plan Modification

The workstreams below maps to the ICR structure and address identified gaps in the current Arizona plan (e.g., an unfinished Executive Summary, updated LMI Data) and narratives framing Arizona WIOA State Plan PY 2024-2027.

#### Key Milestones

MILESTONE	TARGET DATE	CITATION
Governor’s designee letter/email submitted	2/2/2026 - submitted	TEGL 07-25, p. 8
Full draft compiled	3/6/2026	
WAC Full Council Update	3/12/2026	
Public comment complete + responses finalized	3/23 - 4/3/2026	TEGL 07-25, p. 6-7
WAC Executive Committee Update	4/9/2026	
WAC Special Meeting: Final approval complete	4/16/2026	
<b>Submission to State Plan Portal</b>	<b>4/30/2026</b>	<b>TEGL 07-25, p. 1-2</b>

## 11. Coconino County Local Workforce Development Board Report Update

Patrick Brown updated the Council that the inquiry was initiated after WAC staff received information in October regarding potential governance concerns, including possible interference by the Coconino County Board of Supervisors, delays in board recertification, and proposed changes to board size and composition that could affect compliance with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements and state policy. Council staff has completed a draft report with findings; however, the Arizona Attorney General’s Office requested additional time for legal review. As a result, the findings are expected to be presented at the next Executive Council meeting. In the meantime, staff will continue providing technical assistance to support the board’s compliance and recertification efforts. The report may be revised to remove findings that have already been resolved as the board has made progress toward recertification. Overall, the approach focuses on addressing any remaining compliance issues while also supporting the board’s path toward successful recertification.

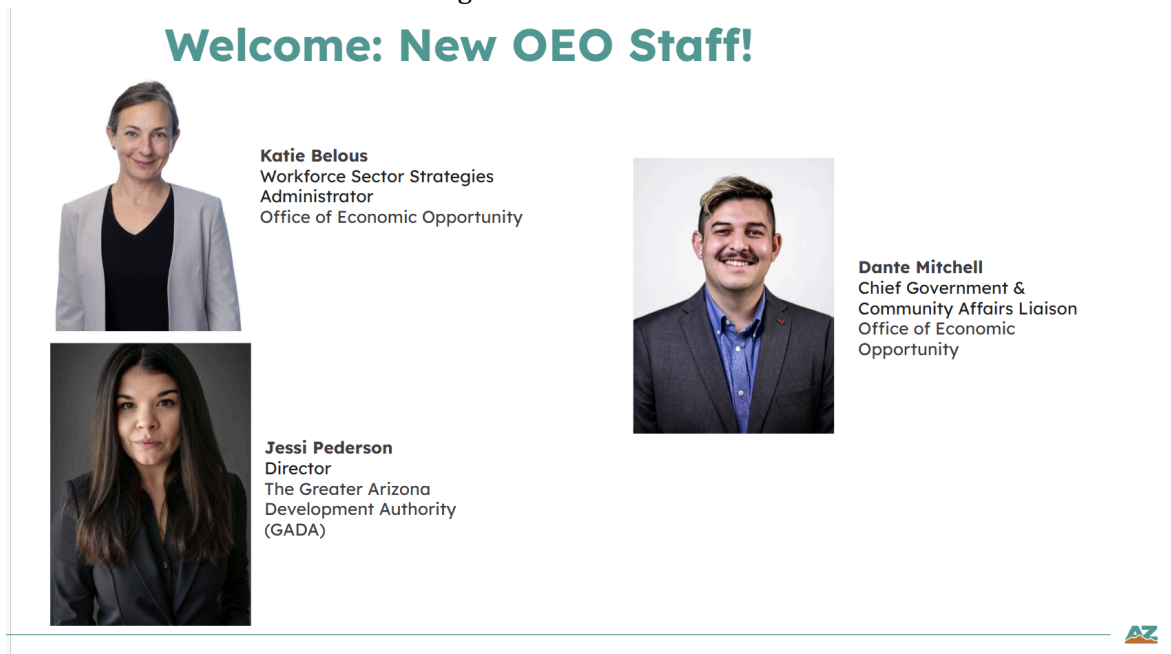
## 12. Agency Updates

### a. **OEO: Director Mary Foote** (15 minutes)

Mary Foote, OEO Director provided an update on the following:

#### i. New OEO Staff

OEO Director welcomed the following staff members:




**Welcome: New OEO Staff!**

**Katie Belous**  
Workforce Sector Strategies  
Administrator  
Office of Economic Opportunity

**Dante Mitchell**  
Chief Government &  
Community Affairs Liaison  
Office of Economic  
Opportunity

**Jessi Pederson**  
Director  
The Greater Arizona  
Development Authority  
(GADA)



#### ii. 2026 Arizona Workforce Summit Update

An update on the upcoming 2026 Arizona Workforce Summit, themed “Connecting Today’s Skills to Tomorrow’s Opportunities.” The summit will take place June 9–10, 2026 at the Mesa Convention Center. New elements this year include increased partner collaboration and a call for session proposals, with submission guidance available on the summit website. The event will also feature a Champion of the Workforce Awards luncheon on Day 2 to recognize impactful workforce programs, partnerships, and leaders across Arizona. Sponsorship efforts are underway, with four companies already providing verbal commitments totaling \$19,000, leaving \$10,000 remaining to meet the sponsorship goal. The first confirmed keynote speaker is Frederick “Freddy” Shegog, presenting “What is Your Legacy?” His keynote will focus on resilience and workforce purpose, drawing from his personal journey overcoming substance abuse and mental health challenges. Registration is expected to open at the end of April, with free but limited attendance.

#### iii. Rural Healthcare Transformation Program (RHTP)

The presentation outlined the states’ Rural Health Transformation Program, a five-year initiative supporting rural healthcare improvements across Arizona. The state received \$167 million in the first year, with a minimum of \$100 million annually expected over five years (potentially up to about \$175 million per year depending on performance). A key component is the Rural Health Workforce Development and Training Program, overseen by the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity, which will receive \$47 million of the first-year funding. It was noted that the Governor’s application focused on four priority investment areas:

## Arizona's RHTP Initiatives

**Arizona is focusing on 4 initiatives** to address the key challenges related to access to healthcare in rural communities



Workforce investments will expand healthcare education and training programs, provide incentives for practitioners to work in rural areas, support upskilling and career pathways in healthcare, and establish a healthcare workforce project office and best-practices network. Efforts will also focus on increasing early career awareness, strengthening partnerships with K-12, community colleges, and universities, and addressing challenges such as access to clinical training opportunities. Program success will be measured through three primary metrics: increased healthcare learners, successful transition into healthcare employment, and workforce retention. Initial work will focus on benchmarking and resource allocation in the first year, with performance outcomes measured in subsequent years.

Following the presentation, the Council discussed whether there would be program specifics such as recruitment and retention requirements, incentives for educational institutions (e.g., funding for new faculty), and whether healthcare providers receiving incentives must remain in one location for the full five-year commitment or can move within rural communities. In response, it was explained that further program details will emerge as Letters of Interest (LOIs) are released to potential funding recipients in the coming months. The program also plans to establish an advisory board that will coordinate with the Workforce Arizona Council. Regular updates will be provided to the Council to ensure the program aligns with the state's workforce strategy and ongoing initiatives in Arizona.

#### iv. Latest AZ Employment Report

Doug Walls, the Labor Information Director, provided an overview of the latest Arizona Employment Report, highlighting year-end labor market trends in Arizona and comparisons with the United States. Arizona's labor market showed modest growth despite a national slowdown. Nonfarm employment increased 0.7% year-over-year, outperforming the national rate, while the state's labor force grew 2.5%, reflecting continued population and workforce growth. Unemployment remained slightly below the national average, and hourly earnings grew 3.5%, indicating real wage gains above inflation.

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## 2025 YEAR-END LABOR MARKET HIGHLIGHTS

### Arizona reported faster growth in four key indicators to end 2025:

- Arizona nonfarm employment increased by 0.7% year-over-year (YoY); US jobs increased by 0.3%
- The Arizona labor force increased by 2.5% YoY, compared to 1.8% U.S. labor force growth.
- The Arizona unemployment rate held at 4.3% compared to the U.S. rate of 4.4%
- Arizona average hourly earnings increased by 3.5% YoY, while U.S earnings increased by 3.1% YoY

Source: Produced by the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity in Cooperation with the U.S. Dept. of Labor, BLS.



Nationally, signs of economic softening have appeared, including job losses in February and a rising unemployment rate. Arizona has also experienced slower hiring and a gradual increase in unemployment since its historic low in early 2024, though it remains below pre-pandemic levels. Between December 2024 and December 2025, Arizona added 24,600 jobs, with the largest gains in healthcare and social assistance, as well as growth in professional services, construction, and financial activities. Job losses occurred primarily in the government sector, particularly in education and federal positions. Two-year projections through 2027 indicate slower but continued growth (0.7% annually) across most industries and counties. Healthcare is expected to remain the fastest-growing sector, while educational services and parts of the information sector are projected to decline.

**b. DES: DERS Deputy Assistant Director, Tom Colombo (15 minutes)**

**i. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Waiver Information**

DES Deputy Assistant Director for the Division of Employment and Rehabilitation Services, Tom Colombo highlighted opportunities for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program waivers recently encouraged by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL). States can request waivers to increase flexibility in implementing workforce programs, typically submitted alongside the state plan modification or afterward. Currently, Arizona has two approved waivers: allowing Individual Training Accounts for in-school youth and reducing the out-of-school youth spending requirement from 75% to 50%, which helps local areas manage participation challenges. New federal guidance encourages states to consider additional waivers to address operational barriers. Potential options include flexibility in youth program service requirements, extending supportive services after participants exit programs to support job retention, and allowing training services to be delivered through contracts when training providers are unavailable. Another option is a WorkFlex plan, which could allow the state to approve certain local waivers directly and provide more flexibility in infrastructure funding processes. Feedback was collected from local workforce areas through a survey conducted between December 2025 and January 2026. Early responses showed support for maintaining current waivers, expanding supportive services for participants after program exit, increasing flexibility for training contracts, and

potentially raising reimbursement levels for on-the-job training. State agencies are now reviewing the feedback and will coordinate with the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to determine which waiver requests to pursue.

Following the presentation, the Council discussed the potential use of WIOA waiver flexibilities encouraged by the USDOL emphasizing that the federal government is encouraging states to pursue innovation and flexibility where appropriate. Members were encouraged to share feedback with the DES and the OEO as the state considers possible waiver requests. During the discussion, a question was raised about whether a waiver for the requirement to maintain a comprehensive one-stop center in each local workforce area could be applied selectively. It was clarified that if Arizona requests such a waiver, it does not have to be applied statewide and could instead be used for specific local areas that face unique challenges.

### 13. Adjournment

Chair Gaspers provided the following reminders:

**REMINDERS:**

- **Special Full Council Meeting on 04/16/2026**  
Virtual via Zoom
- **Full Council Meeting on 05/14/2026**  
Hybrid Meeting (Zoom) & In-Person: 1700 W Washington Street,  
2nd Floor Conference Room
- **Arizona Workforce Summit on 6/9/2026-6/10/2026**  
Mesa Convention Center, Building C, 263 N Center St, Mesa, AZ  
85201

**AZ OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**

**MOTION:** Chair Gaspers called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Michelle Bolton made a motion; Alex Horvath seconded the motion.

**ALL IN FAVOR:** Alex Horvath, Beverly Wilson, Chet Samuelson, Debra Margraf, Dennis Anthony, Jackie Elliott, Jenna Rowell, Jeffrey McClure, Jim Corning, Karla Moran, Kristen Mackey, Mark Gaspers, Michael Cruz, Director Michael Wisheart, Michelle Bolton, Mayor Regina Romero, Scott Holman, Shawn Hutchinson, Skylic Estep

**OPPOSED:** None

**ABSTAINED:** None

**MOTION PASSES**