

Town of Yucca Valley

Town Council Meeting Minutes

December 2, 2025

Closed Session

1. The Town Council met in closed session pursuant to the provisions of Government Code Section 54957(b) regarding a public employee performance evaluation. Job Title: Town Attorney

2. The Town Council met in closed session pursuant to the provisions of Government Code Section 54956.9 (d)(1) to confer with legal counsel with regard to the following matter of pending litigation:

- Asa Huber v. Town of Yucca Valley et al; case number CIVSB2530342

Report Out of Closed Session

Town Attorney Jex stated there was no reportable action resulting from the closed session discussion.

Call to Order

Roll Call

Present: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

Absent:

Pledge of Allegiance

Led by Mayor Drozd

Council Reorganization

1. State of the Town 2025

Mayor Drozd presented the State of the Town 2025, highlighting the accomplishments of the year and a look ahead to future projects.

2. Selection of Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem for 2026

Town Clerk Copeland opened nominations for a council member to serve as Mayor 2026.

Mayor Drozd nominated Mayor Pro Tem Abel to serve as next year's mayor. Council Member Denison seconded.

Mayor Abel opened nominations for a council member to serve as Mayor Pro Tem 2026. Mayor Abel nominated Council Member Schooler to serve as the Town's Mayor

Pro Tem. Council Member Lombardo seconded.

Mayor Abel presented a plaque of recognition to outgoing Mayor Drozd, thanking him for his leadership this past year.

Mayor Abel called a 10-minute recess for refreshments and to reorganize the dais.

Recess for Refreshments

Presentations, Introductions, Recognitions

3. Joshua Tree National Park Update- Park Superintendent Jane Rodgers

Joshua Tree National Park Superintendent Jane Rodgers provided an update on park operations and a review of recent fire activity in October of this year, thanking first responders for their quick response. Rodgers also thanked Cindy Melland for her support allowing fire personnel to dip into the water ponds at Hawks Landing Golf Course for fire suppression.

Mayor Abel opened public comments. With no members of the public wishing to speak, public comments were closed.

Mayor Abel commented on the amazing suppression efforts with the air support. Abel requested information on the upcoming temporary closure of the west entrance for construction.

Council Member Lombardo asked about entrance changes being planned at the park.

Mayor Pro Tem Schooler inquired if the Golden Age Passes will be going digital, and asked about a renovation at Black Rock Canyon.

Council Member Denison complemented the first responders and Community Member Melland for their response to the fire.

Council Member Drozd thanked Rodgers for her work with the National Park and thanked Melland for the support.

4. San Bernardino County Fire Update- Assistant Chief William Villarino

Assistant Chief Villarino presented a Division 4 update including statistics and a status on the replacement facility for Station 41. The award of contract is anticipated for Spring 2026.

Mayor Abel opened public comments.

Susan Walls, Joshua Tree asked where the new Station 41 will be located.

With no other members of the public wishing to speak, Mayor Abel closed public comments.

Council Member Drozd thanked Villarino for the presentation.

Council Member Lombardo thanked Villarino for the replacement station update and inquired on the anticipated completion date.

Council Member Denison spoke of appreciation for the safety upgrades being planned for the new facility and inquired about staffing levels.

Approval of Agenda

5. Agenda Approval

Staff requested to consider Item number 18 prior to the public hearing, and to note as announcements that there will be no 2nd meeting in December.

Motion: Approve the meeting agenda as amended.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)

Mover: Council Member Rick Denison

Seconders: Council Member Jim Schooler

Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

Consent Agenda

6. Minutes

Motion:

Approve the September 16, 2025 meeting minutes as presented.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)

Mover: Council Member Rick Denison

Seconders: Council Member Robert Lombardo

Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

7. Authorization to Purchase Replacement Fleet Vehicle, 2026 GMC Sierra 2500HD Crew Cab, for the Parks Maintenance Division for an amount not to exceed \$66,097.17 from Chavez-Jessup GMC of Indio, CA

Motion:

- Waive the competitive bidding requirements because adherence to the procedures would be inefficient, impractical, and unnecessary (as stated in section 3.12.060, (G) of the Town Code) and authorize the Town Manager or designee to execute a purchase agreement with Chavez-Jessup GMC of Indio, CA, for a new 2026 GMC Sierra 2500HD Crew Cab for the Parks Maintenance Division for an amount not to exceed \$66,097.17; and
- Declare the 2005 GMC Sierra Pickup (Vehicle #4) as surplus and approves the sale of the surplus vehicle by authorizing the Town Manager or designee to auction/sell the vehicle through a public bidding/auction; consignment process; or disposition through a dismantling service.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)

Mover: Council Member Rick Denison

Second: Council Member Robert Lombardo

Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

8. AB1234 Reporting Requirements

Motion:

Receive and file the AB1234 Reporting Requirement Schedule for the month of October 2025.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)

Mover: Council Member Rick Denison

Second: Council Member Robert Lombardo

Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

9. Ratification of Warrant Registers

Motion:

Ratify the Payroll Registers totaling \$287,410.16 dated October 10, 2025, and \$301,140.83 dated October 24, 2025.

Ratify the Warrant Registers totaling \$19,845.41 dated October 2, 2025, \$945,742.22 dated October 10, 2025, and \$1,977,547.73 dated October 24, 2025.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)

Mover: Council Member Rick Denison

Second: Council Member Robert Lombardo

Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

10. DIF Annual and Five Year Report

Motion:

Adopt Resolution No. 25-32 to review and file the fiscal year 2024-25 Development Impact Fee Report and Five-Year Report and make certain findings, as required by the California Government Code Section 66000 et seq.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)

Mover: Council Member Rick Denison

Second: Council Member Robert Lombardo

Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

11. Budget Calendar

Motion:

Review and approve the proposed Budget Calendar for FY2026-28.

Result: (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)

Mover: Rick Denison

Second: Robert Lombardo

Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

12. Authorization to Purchase and Install Dugout Shade Sails at Tri-Valley Little League Fields

Motion:

Adopts Resolution 25-33, amending the FY2025-26 Special Revenue Capital Project Reserve Fund 800 to allocate \$200,000 for the total project budget as identified in Exhibit A.

- Award a Construction Contract in the amount not to exceed \$182,879.06 to Zoom Recreation, Inc. for purchasing and installing eight (8) Hanging Cantilever Shade Sails, CMAS #4-25-10-1006.
- Authorizes construction/installation, construction contingencies, and inspection costs in the total amount of \$200,000.00
- Authorizes the Mayor, Town Manager, and Town Attorney to execute the agreement, and authorizes the Town Manager to expend contingency funds, if necessary, for project completion.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)

Mover: Council Member Rick Denison

Second: Council Member Robert Lombardo
Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

13. Budget Report for the Quarter Ending September 30, 2025

Motion:

Receive and file the Budget Report for the fiscal quarter ended September 30, 2025

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)
Mover: Council Member Rick Denison
Second: Council Member Robert Lombardo
Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

**14. Yucca Valley Aquatic and Recreation Center Project – Town Project 6009
GeoCon West Inc. Consultant Services Contract Amendment**

Motion:

Approve Amendment No. 1 to the professional service agreement with GeoCon West Inc., increasing the contract amount from \$397,440.00 to \$522,440.00 and authorize the Mayor, Town Manager, and Town Attorney to sign all necessary documents.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)
Mover: Council Member Rick Denison
Second: Council Member Robert Lombardo
Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

15. Town Council Meeting Calendar 2026

Motion:

Receive and file the Town Council Meeting Calendar through January 2027.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)
Mover: Council Member Rick Denison
Second: Council Member Robert Lombardo
Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

16. Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting

Motion:

Receive and file the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)
Mover: Council Member Rick Denison

Seconders: Council Member Robert Lombardo
Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

Public Hearings

17. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Prioritization Hearing

Finance Manager Gumbish explained San Bernardino County has requested additional time to review submitted projects. Gumbish asked to open the public hearing, receive any comments and continue the hearing until the January 20, 2026 meeting.

Mayor Abel opened the public hearing. No members of the public wished to speak.

Motion:

Continue the hearing to the Town Council meeting of Tuesday, January 20, 2026.

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)
Mover: Council Member Robert Lombardo
Seconders: Council Member Schooler
Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

Department Reports

18. Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Rogers, Anderson, Malody and Scott Partner, Scott Manno presented the Town's annual comprehensive financial report for fiscal year ended June 30, 2025. The responsibilities of the auditor, the audit process and clean audit results were explained.

Mayor Abel opened public comments. With no members of the public wishing to speak, public comments were closed.

Manno received positive comments from the Council Members for the service provided to the Town and reporting a clean audit. The Town's financial team also received kudos for the consistent attention to detail and top-notch financial services.

19. Town Council Public Agency Board / Committee Liaison Assignments

Town Clerk Copeland presented the staff report for the review of the Town Council's committee assignments.

Mayor Abel opened public comments. With no members of the public wishing to speak, public comments were closed.

No changes to the assignments were requested.

20. Year End Budget Report

Finance Manager Gumbish presented the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025 financial reports.

Town Manager Yakimow announced the Town of Yucca Valley was recently awarded the GFOA Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for financial transparency. This is the 20th successive year the Town has received the award.

Mayor Abel opened public comments. With no members of the public wishing to speak, public comments were closed.

Mayor Abel expressed he is very happy to see the Town's financial stability with good reserves and a well-funded pension program.

Council Member Lombardo spoke favorably of the fiscal responsibility the Town keeps and continues to show a strong financial status.

Council Member Denison thanked Gumbish for the informative report and expressed the importance of supporting the employees in funding the pension reserves.

Mayor Abel inquired on future reserve allocations.

Mayor Pro Tem Schooler thanked the Town's management staff for the financial oversight.

Motion:

1. Receive and file the Budget Report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025.
2. Amend the 2025-26 General Fund Budget and Special Revenue Fund Budget by transferring \$3,000,000 from the General Fund unassigned fund balance in accordance with the Reserve Policy, as follows:

Result: Passed (Yes 5, No 0, Abstained 0)

Mover: Council Member Rick Denison

Second: Council Member Jim Schooler

Ayes: Merl Abel, Jeff Drozd, Rick Denison, Jim Schooler, Robert Lombardo

21. Yucca Valley Film Festival 2025 Event Recap

Recreation Supervisor Rardon introduced Yucca Valley Film Festival Director Matt Beurois to provide a recap of the recent Film Festival.

Mayor Abel opened public comments. With no members of the public wishing to speak, public comments were closed.

Director Beurois received kudos from the Town Council with expressions of a great visitor and tourism draw, effective in engaging locals to the cinema arts, and noted the increase of interest expanding over the years. The Council expressed it is very rewarding to see the enthusiasm of the filmmakers and the community.

Animal Shelter Committee Update

Mayor Pro Tem Schooler provided an update on the recent Animal Shelter Committee Meeting.

Public Comments

Mayor Abel opened public comments.

Cheryl Contopulous, Yucca Valley commented on the distribution of the "red listed" animals at the shelter.

James Porter, Yucca Valley spoke of the recent protest at the Yucca Valley Film Festival.

Janice Taitel, Yucca Valley commented on the creation of a petition and placed on [Change.org](https://www.change.org) urging the Town Council to implement inclusive invocations at public meetings. Taitel began reading the petition text.

Krista Wargo, Yucca Valley spoke of the invocation petition being circulated and continued to read the petition text.

Janna Peterson, Morongo Valley commented on a recent invocation and requested the invocations be inclusive.

Susan Walls, Joshua Tree inquired on where the animal shelter's euthanasia list is being posted and requested additional funding to support the local animals.

Linda Root, Yucca Valley spoke of concern about the operations at the animal shelter and of the invocation at a recent Town Council meeting.

Debra Savitt, Yucca Valley commented on religious discrimination.

Diana Persinger, Yucca Valley complemented the choice for shelter manager and would like to see additional spay and neuter clinics scheduled. Persinger spoke of concern about the seeming lack of web updates for the shelter animals.

Greg Gendron, Yucca Valley spoke of lack of transparency with the lack of web updates and animal announcements.

With no other members of the public wishing to speak, Mayor Abel closed public comments.

Staff Reports and Comments

Welcome to San Bernardino County Sheriff's Captain, Steve Scovel recently assigned to the Morongo Basin Station.

Community Services Manager Earnest announced the upcoming holiday events sponsored by the Town.

Public Works Director Qishta updated the Town Council of the progress of the YVARC project and the Senior Center renovations.

Mayor and Council Member Reports and Comments

Council Member Denison provided an update on recent representation with SBCTA and SCAG and reported on a recent attendance at an event hosted by Senator Ochoa Bogh and conversations regarding the Western Joshua Tree protections.

Council Member Lombardo announced an upcoming dance event being held at the Joshua Tree Retreat Center and wished everyone a wonderful holiday time. Lombardo thanked staff and the Council for financial prudence.

Council Member Drozd looks forward to seeing everyone at the holiday festivities.

Mayor Pro Tem Schooler reported on attending the Veterans' Tribute in 29 Palms and thanked outgoing Mayor Drozd for his leadership.

Mayor Abel announced the local scholarship recipient from Amy's Purpose. Announced the upcoming tree lighting at Founders Plaza. Thanked the non-profits for holding all the food drives for the holiday season.

Announcements

The Town Council meetings of December 16, 2025 and January 6, 2026 have been canceled. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, January 20, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. in the Yucca Valley Community Center Yucca Room.

With no further business, Mayor Abel adjourned the meeting at 8:01 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lesley Copeland, CMC
Town Clerk