

Town of Yucca Valley
Town Council Meeting Minutes
April 7, 2026

Call to Order

Mayor Merl Abel called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

Roll Call

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

Absent:

Pledge of Allegiance

Led by Mayor Pro Tem Schooler.

Presentations, Introductions, Recognitions

1. Administration of Oath of Office – Town Clerk

Mayor Abel offered remarks recognizing Brooke Dudra’s service and contributions to the Town. The Mayor then administered the Oath of Office to Brooke Dudra as Town Clerk.

Approval of Agenda

2. Agenda Approval

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

Motion:

Approve the agenda as prepared.

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

Mover: Mayor Pro Tem Jim Schooler

Second: Council Member Rick Denison

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

Consent Agenda

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

Mayor Abel requested that Item No. 5 be removed from the Consent Calendar for further discussion.

3. Minutes

Motion:

Approve the meeting minutes of Tuesday, March 17, 2026 as presented.

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

Mover: Council Member Robert Lombardo

Second: Council Member Jeff Drozd

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

4. Rejection of Claim

Motion:

Reject one Claim filed against the Town of Yucca Valley submitted on January 16, 2026, by Mercury Insurance Company as subrogee of Amrik Malhi.

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

Mover: Council Member Robert Lombardo

Second: Council Member Jeff Drozd

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

5. Agreement with San Bernardino County, Preliminary Design Services for the Yucca Trail and La Contenta Road Intersection Roundabout Project

Town Manager Yakimow provided a report regarding the proposed agreement for preliminary design services associated with the Yucca Trail and La Contenta intersection project.

Mayor Abel clarified that moving forward would involve evaluating all feasible design options, including a potential roundabout, along with associated scope and cost considerations. The Town Manager confirmed.

The Mayor opened public comment. Cheryl Contopolis addressed the Council regarding familiarity with the intersection and nearby schools, expressed support for simpler traffic control options such as a four-way stop, and noted considerations related to bus circulation and community use.

With no additional speakers, public comment was closed.

Council Member Lombardo expressed support for proceeding with the investigation and emphasized the importance of identifying alternatives.

Council Member Drozd noted there has been significant community discussion and

clarified that no decision has been made, and that the item is for study purposes.

Mayor Abel emphasized that traffic safety is a high priority, referenced alignment concerns with the existing roadway, and expressed support for conducting the study and exploring potential funding opportunities.

Motion:

That the Town Council

1. Amend the FY2025-26 Special Revenue Fund Budget Measure I Fund 524, allocating \$200,000 of undesignated reserve funds to accommodate the preliminary design cost for the Yucca Trail and La Contenta Road Intersection Roundabout Project;
2. Adopt Resolution 26-06 to amend the Measure I Five-Year Capital Improvement Program and Expenditure Strategy for Fiscal Years 2025/2026 to 2029/2030 by adding the Yucca Trail and La Contenta Road Intersection Roundabout Project with a preliminary design amount of \$200,000;
3. Approve the Agreement with San Bernardino County for Project Design Services for the Yucca Trail and La Contenta Road Intersection Roundabout Project in the amount not to exceed \$200,000.00, authorize the Town Manager to sign all documents necessary to implement the Agreement.

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

Mover: Mayor Merl Abel

Second: Council Member Rick Denison

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

6. Declare Existing Equipment as Surplus and Authorize the Sale of Surplus Equipment

Motion:

Declare Units #24, #25, and #56 as surplus and authorizes the sale of surplus equipment.

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

Mover: Council Member Robert Lombardo

Second: Council Member Jeff Drozd

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

7. Professional Services Contract Proposal Amendment #2 - PlaceWorks - Yucca Trail Widening CEQA

Motion:

Approve Amendment #2 to the professional services agreement with Placeworks, increasing from \$111,359 to \$178,794, and authorize the Town Manager to execute the agreement between the Town of Yucca Valley and PlaceWorks, for the Yucca Trail Widening, in the amount not to exceed \$178,794.

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

8. Resolution No. 26-07 Updating Assessment Engineer's Reports for Previously Formed Street & Drainage and Landscape and Lighting Maintenance Assessment Districts

Motion:

Adopt Resolution No 26-07, ordering preparation of the annual assessment district engineer's reports, describing any new improvements or any substantial changes to the existing improvements, within the existing assessment districts.

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

9. Amendment 2 to Agreement with EcoFert for System Installation and Services - Phase II Irrigation Water Use Reduction

Motion:

Approve Amendment 2 to the 2022 agreement with EcoFert Inc., for a two (2) year extension (from July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2028) of the soil fertility and water conservation solutions and equipment maintenance of the irrigation/fertilization system at nine (9) Town parks for the additional amount of \$57,528.00 and authorizes the Town Manager to sign Amendment #2.

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

Department Reports

10. San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA) Measure I 3.0 Continuation Expenditure Plan.

Town Manager Yakimow introduced the staff report regarding San Bernardino County and the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBTCA), with Otis Greer presenting.

Council Member Denison, serving as SBTCA President, provided additional comments acknowledging the agency's work in the Morongo Basin and the benefits of Measure I funding. Comments included the importance of local funding in positioning the County as a self-help county, ongoing and completed transportation improvements, and the role of Measure I in supporting maintenance programs and safety enhancements.

Mayor Abel thanked Council Member Denison for the information and remarks.

The Mayor opened public comment. With no members of the public wishing to speak, public comment was closed.

Council Member Denison emphasized the importance of transportation funding, noting public safety as a primary priority.

Mayor Abel expressed appreciation to the presenter.

Motion:

Adopt Resolution No. 26-08 approving the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA) Measure I 3.0 Continuation Expenditure Plan.

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

Mover: Council Member Robert Lombardo

Second: Council Member Rick Denison

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

11. FY2024-26 Draft General Fund Budget Review

Finance Manager Gumbish presented the Fiscal Year 2024–2028 Final Budget.

Mayor Abel opened public comment. With no members of the public wishing to speak, public comment was closed.

Mayor Abel commented that the budget was well prepared and noted the Council's conservative fiscal approach. Mayor Abel identified areas for future consideration, including potential funding alignment for the Welcome Center and continued evaluation of animal shelter funding.

Council Member Denison noted the budget was well prepared and expressed interest

in monitoring revenue performance specific to the new Aquatic and Recreation Center, and evaluating revenue trends and staffing impacts.

Council Member Lombardo thanked staff for the presentation, discussed tourism-related revenue considerations, and expressed interest in exploring opportunities to increase revenues, particularly following the opening of the Aquatic and Recreation Center.

Mayor Abel suggested exploring regional marketing opportunities for Town facilities.

Council Member Drozd expressed appreciation for the report and looked forward to future updates.

Council Member Schooler expressed support for identified priorities, including the Welcome Center and animal shelter, and inquired about timing for further review.

Town Manager Yakimow responded that related items will return separately for Council consideration, including operational components.

Staff provided additional clarification regarding existing and future programming, associated operational costs, and anticipated revenue tracking.

Council Member Lombardo emphasized the importance of maintaining a supportive environment for business growth and community engagement.

The report was received and filed; no formal action was taken.

12. Town Project No. 4100 – : Community Center Pickleball Court Project - Change Order #5

Public Works Director Qishta presented the proposed Change Order No. 5 for the Community Center Pickleball Court project.

Mayor Abel opened public comment. With no members of the public wishing to speak, public comment was closed.

Mayor Abel commented that the item relates to deferred maintenance needs and noted it represents an appropriate use of public funds.

Council Member Lombardo inquired about the potential reuse of removed asphalt for maintenance on dirt roads.

Staff responded that the volume of material would be limited and may be used for

transitional or maintenance purposes, as appropriate.

Motion:

1. Adopt Resolution 26-09, amending the budget to allocate \$420,000.00 from Capital Projects Reserve Fund 800 for Town Project No. 4100.
2. Approve Change Order #5 to the contract with Van Engineering Inc. for removing and replacing the existing asphalt parking lot surface, increasing the contract by \$380,000.00, and a contingency of \$40,000.00, bringing the contract amount of \$2,633,885.70 to \$3,319,055.70.

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

Mover: Council Member Rick Denison

Second: Council Member Jeff Drozd

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

Future Agenda Items

Council Member Lombardo requested exploration of revising commercial zoning to allow light industrial uses, including breweries and distilleries, to support adaptive reuse, increase visitors, and improve ease of change of use for entrepreneurs. He noted the need for flexibility to support redevelopment of older buildings.

Mayor Abel expressed support for responsible development with appropriate flexibility while maintaining protections for health, safety, and noise. He suggested reviewing the Old Town Master Plan or potential expansion to further support small business development.

There was general Council consensus to explore the item further.

Deputy Town Manager Stueckle noted the zoning code already provides flexibility within commercial districts and is generally business-friendly, with established standards. He also raised considerations regarding light industrial uses, including safety concerns related to flammable materials near residential areas, and emphasized the need for clear, enforceable regulations. Staff indicated willingness to bring the item back for further discussion and public input.

The Town Manager added that without a formal application, it is difficult to assess impacts, and any changes would need to go through the standard entitlement process.

Public Comments

Mayor Abel opened Public Comment.

Cheryl Contopolis provided an update on the animal shelter, noting a decrease in euthanasia numbers. She commented on intake, spay/neuter needs, and the need for facility expansion, including additional kennels and noise reduction. She noted the facility is not built to current community needs but stated overall operations are improving and thanked staff.

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

Staff Reports and Comments

Captain Scovel reported on OHV enforcement operations and noted additional operations are planned. Town Manager Yakimow noted ongoing tracking of complaints.

Community Services Manager Earnest thanked Mayor Abel for attending the Eggstravaganza event and provided a brief April program update.

Public Works Director Qishta provided updates on Tri-Valley projects, upcoming public hearings, commercial development updates, and noted the upcoming Planning Commission meeting.

Chief Villarino reported on upcoming fire apparatus and equipment, progress on the fire station project moving toward bid following land donation completion, and recognized the 20-year anniversary of the Sawtooth Fire.

Town Manager Yakimow noted RMOC is fully seated with comments to be incorporated and a potential cancellation of the May 19 meeting due to lack of quorum.

Mayor and Council Member Reports and Comments

Council Member Denison thanked public speakers, expressed appreciation for staff and enforcement efforts, and encouraged spring cleanup. He also noted positive comments on recent business and development activity.

Council Member Drozd congratulated staff and thanked enforcement for their work.

Council Member Lombardo congratulated staff, thanked the Clerk and Captain for enforcement efforts, and shared brief comments on museum programming and upcoming community involvement.

Mayor Pro Tem Schooler congratulated staff and expressed support for Council comments.

Mayor Abel encouraged residents to clear dry brush, thanked staff, and noted recent community meetings and events, including discussions on childcare and community programs.

Announcements

Mayor Abel closed the meeting In memory of Frank Medeiros with warm thoughts.

Mayor Abel adjourned the regular meeting at 6:44 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brooke Dudra
Town Clerk