

EAST CENTRAL COUNCIL OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

COLORADO'S CENTRAL PLAINS



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EAST CENTRAL COUNCIL OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES MARCH 4, 2026

Call to Order

Chairman Dave Hornung called the March 4, 2026, meeting of the ECCOG Board of Directors to order at 7:04PM held at the Hub City Senior Center, 220 E Avenue in Limon, Colorado.

Roll Call and Guest Introductions

Directors in attendance included: Mike Buck, Ben Ferree, Dave Hornung, Derek Isom, Terry Jaques, Sherry Jones, Hal McNerney, Valerie Rhoades, and Ron Smith. ECCOG Executive Director Candace Payne attended. Senior & Transit Services Director Sean Vanous was unable to attend. Directors Rhonda Brown, Ryan Fulmer, and Megan Gardner were unable to attend. A quorum was declared. Guests attending were Eva Branson of Colorado's Office of Federal Funds & Strategic Initiatives and Cindy Tacha of Workforce Colorado Rural Alliance a part of Colorado Department of Labor & Employment.

Guest Speaker Eva Branson

Chairman Dave Hornung invited Eva Branson of the Office of Federal Funds & Strategic Initiatives to explain her program to the attendees. Ms. Branson had a handout, which is part of the Board packet to share. The State's Regional Grants Navigator program has ended so she is now working across the state to provide assistance and information on Federal funding. Ms. Branson provided her email address on the handout which explained grant writing, technical assistance and the Local Match Assistance Program. She also tracks federal funds that are awarded and helps with monitoring. Congressionally Directed Spending deadlines were mentioned. Chairman Dave Hornung thanked her for the information and she excused herself from the meeting after thanking the Board for their time.

Approval of January 7, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes

The Minutes of the January 7, 2026, regular meeting were provided via email prior to the meeting. Director Terry Jaques made a motion to approve the Minutes as corrected. Director Hal McNerney seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Financial Report of March 4, 2025

Noted for the record: The February 5, 2025, Financial Report was approved by email ballot. The March 4, 2026, Financial Report, was not available due to the software conversion and report generation. It will be emailed to the group later in March.

Approval of Bills & Payroll

Payroll and Bills for January 2026 were approved by email ballot. Payroll and bills for February 28, 2026, were provided at the meeting. The February payroll included \$44,773.08. February 2026 checks and payments totaled \$59,554.53 including taxes, vendors, staff reimbursements, monthly utilities, provider costs, and Enterprise Zone contributions. Treasurer Hal McNerney made a motion to ratify payroll and approve the bills as presented. Director Ben Ferree seconded the motion. Motion carried.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Accounting Software Conversion

Progress continues slower than expected for the conversion, however the Fiscal Officer reports she likes the system and it is simpler than the former software. Payroll and Account Payable payments have been run for January and February 2026 but report generating is still in process.

COG Staffing

Executive Director Candace Payne reported for Senior & Transit Services Director Sean Vanous on Burlington's meal program hiring of two new staff members. An application has been received for Cheyenne County's Assistant Cook position along with an application for a Lincoln County driver. Interviews will be conducted this month.

Renewable Energy Impact Study Committee

Director Terry Jaques reported on the recent Renewable Energy committee meeting held in February by Council of Governments region to gain input on stakeholder outreach and engagement. Social media, newspapers, and word of mouth will be used to contact the people who might like to learn more about the study and its findings. On March 5, 2026, the whole committee will meet with Energeia (pronounced in-er-jay-uh) to plan the scope and methodology of the study. Chairman Dave Hornung stated he felt the study was worthwhile and will produce good information for Colorado's eastern plains.

CDOT Letter on Single Audit (in packet)

Executive Director Candace Payne drew attention to the Colorado Department of Transportation's letter in response to the 2024 Single Audit regarding our software conversion. ECCOG's Fiscal Officer believes the software meets our needs and is easier to use than the previous software except that reports have not been produced yet. This information has been reported to CDOT staff and their letter of acceptance demonstrates that has been shared. CDOT will be informed if our perception changes later in 2026 after further use of the accounting system.

NEW BUSINESS:

Opportunity Zone (Map included)

The Opportunity Zone 2.0 map was included in the packet and was reviewed as potential zones are being developed by each state. This map shows parts of the ECCOG region may be approved for investment priorities by 2027 if strong recommendations from the region are accepted and approved by Colorado's governor. The colored areas of gold are potential areas to be considered. A special training session is planned for the eastern plains including Regions 1, 5 & 6 on **April 23rd** in Limon starting at 10AM at the Community Building, 220 D Ave. A variety of state staff will present the materials in a morning and afternoon session separated by lunch. More information will be sent out via email and all board members are encouraged to attend. Save the Date emails have been sent previously to economic development organizations, county and town boards, and development partners.

CDOT Vehicle Application

Lincoln County's vehicle application was submitted on time but no further update has been provided from CDOT.

Enterprise Zone

Executive Director Candace Payne explained the 2026 Purchase Order with the state has not come through yet. Until it does, we are assessing expenses to the local match share. Two contribution project applications were processed in 2026 and both have now been approved at the state level. The World's Wonder View Tower of Genoa held a fundraiser in Denver in February and received good support including three tax credit requests at ECCOG. The Tower plans to open this spring and continues to gain excitement and support for it's new purpose and ideas to bring tourists to Lincoln County.

SUA Desk Evaluation

The State Unit on Aging is still processing our submission to determine if an onsite desk evaluation will occur in 2026. They have new staff to train and ECCOG might be a good example of training for multiple programs.

2026 Our Journey

This year publicity will be handled by Danielle Dascalos again as she's been working on Colorado 150 events and activities and promotions in March. Danielle is also helping Lincoln County with the first gravel bike ride starting at the Genoa Tower for a special promotion of birding, bikes and beef as is Executive Director Candace Payne as part of the contribution project summer kickoff. Forms for the Our Journey brochures are going out this week to counties, towns, and event planners to get the 2026 Fun Fairs and Festivals brochure ready for printing. The 2026 Places brochure and a new museum rack card also in information gathering mode this month. It was noted that Colorado150 events may be featured on the Colorado150 state website which Executive Director Candace Payne is part of for the Pioneering Plains region. Chairman Dave Hornung mentioned activities including the state drone show will be featured in our region.

Economic Development Administration Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Our five-year CEDS is due to EDA by September 30th explained Executive Director Candace Payne. Plans are in place to host public meetings, CEDS committee meetings and other methods of information gathering for Region 5. This new update must be approved by the ECCOG Board before submission to EDA by the deadline. A 30-day public comment period must be offered also before submission. Executive Director Candace Payne stated this CEDS will be in paper form, which is standard for most all CEDS. ECCOG staff will perform the duties related to the CEDS as it is part of our everyday work.

Startup Colorado is offering entrepreneurship mentoring as part of our CEDS work which is being explored with Region 6 of the Southeast Colorado Economic Development office. A federal EDA grant is being discussed to advance this effort.

Regional Housing Needs Assessment

Work continues on the next steps of the Regional Housing Needs Assessment as a survey has been emailed to the board and other interested parties to take part in a special housing training event this spring. The survey asks for ideas on what the attendees want to learn more about and if they are willing to serve on a regional housing advisory committee. Our HNA was approved in December 2025 and Department of Local Affairs has reimbursed ECCOG for the funds expended in full.

Other

Prairie Development Corporation has appointed Ben Ferree to the At Large position on ECCOG. Director Ben Ferree accepted the appointment, which starts in 2026 as his Limon town council term will end in April. Thank you for being willing to continue to serve on ECCOG's Board. Director Hal McNerney explained his term on Burlington's town council will be determined at the April election based on the number of votes received. Regardless, Director Hal McNerney will serve on the ECCOG Board for either 2 or 4 years. Thanks for your willingness to serve!

Next Meeting Dates/Locations (1st Wed of each month)

April 1st – Email ballot

May 6 – Zoom

June 3 – Limon – Audit Presentation must be approved in June so submission is completed by June 30th to the state auditor

July 1 – Email /Zoom

Adjournment

Chairman Dave Hornung adjourned the meeting at 8:30PM.

All handouts and reports are retained in the permanent file of ECCOG Board meetings.