



APA UTAH 2026 SPRING CONFERENCE SESSION

# “Where Everyone Knows Your Name”

**Ethics Challenges in Utah's Small Towns and Rural Places**

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and

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## AGENDA

# What this session covers

1

### Why rural ethics feels different

Small populations, repeated contact, and overlapping roles make neutrality harder to demonstrate.

2

### Conflict-of-interest triggers

Recognizing when financial, family, business, or advocacy ties require disclosure or recusal.

3

### Dual relationships

Working through cases where neighbors, clients, church members, or relatives appear before the body.

4

### Transparency and accountability

Creating defensible records, consistent process, and public trust in visible local decisions.

5

### Utah laws

Reviewing state-law details and how they affect planning and land-use decisions.

6

### Take-home tools

Reference materials, meeting habits, and checklists participants can use immediately.



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## CHALLENGES

# Common conflict scenarios



### Family ties

A relative or in-law appears before the body.



### Business links

You employ, contract with, or rent to an applicant.



### Public advocacy

You took a strong position before the hearing began.



### Nearby property

Your own land value may rise or fall with the decision.

## A quick working test

Would a reasonable resident question your impartiality if they knew the relationship?

Could the outcome create a direct benefit, burden, or special access for you or someone close to you?

Have you engaged in any private communication during the public process that could raise concerns about fairness, transparency, or equal access for all participants?











INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS

# Mock Scenario 1

1

## Public Concerns

A small town just outside a popular national park has been seeing a slow but steady increase in tourism. At this month's Planning Commission meeting, there's a single agenda item drawing an unusually large crowd. A company is seeking administrative site plan approval and a Conditional Use Permit to build a 40-cabin "eco-retreat" on 25 acres of land on the edge of town. The project promises new jobs for residents, increased tax revenue for schools and infrastructure, and design features that highlight the town's historic charm. The area has a General Plan designation appropriate for the proposed use, and the zoning allows it. However, public opinion is sharply divided: many younger residents and business owners support the project, while many longtime locals oppose it, fearing irreversible damage to the landscape and town identity.



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## Mock Scenario 2

1

### Conflicts of Interest

A proposal has been submitted to rezone 15 acres of agricultural land on the edge of town into a mixed-use zone. The developer plans to build a small commercial center, 10 townhomes, and a gas station/convenience store. The project is being pitched as a way to reduce residents' need to drive 25+ miles for basic services, boost business and employment opportunities in the community, and strengthen the tax base. The property being discussed is directly across from a 10-acre parcel owned by one of the Planning Commissioners. In addition, the Mayor has privately expressed strong support for the project, which is being proposed by a company owned by his brother-in-law.

