

# WASHINGTON STATE B A R A S S O C I A T I O N

## Small Town and Rural Council

**Small Town and Rural Council Meeting I Virtual Only**

**Wednesday, June 25, 2025 | 12:10 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.**

*Via [Zoom](#) / Meeting ID: 873 3538 6159 / Passcode: 595209 / Call-in: 888-788-0099*

## AGENDA

1. Introductions and Approval of May Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
3. Project Updates
  - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)
  - b. Summit Project Team (Merf Ehman, Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)
  - c. Council Position - Hybrid Hub Student (Ashley Cummins)
  - d. Rural Day of Service (Judge Kathryn Burke, Gov. Petrasek, Kevin Plachy)
4. Announcements
5. Next Steps/Conclusion
6. Next Meeting: July 23, 2025
7. Adjourn

## **CHARTER**

### **Small Town and Rural Council**

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**Adopted: April 17, 2021. Amended July 17, 2021; September 7, 2024.**

#### **Purpose**

As an advisory entity to the WSBA Board of Governors, the Small Town and Rural (STAR) Council is committed to strengthen and support the practice of law in the rural communities throughout Washington state. Members of the STAR Council will work to ensure that the practice of law in rural communities is present, growing, and thriving.

Practitioners in rural communities are few and far between. Additionally, many of these practitioners are nearing retirement without a clear plan of succession for their clients, leaving a void of access to legal representation and counsel. The STAR Council will guide policy & program development, serves as ambassadors between the WSBA and these communities, explore and advocate for creative and innovative solutions, and regularly assess the legal landscape in rural communities to determine if WSBA policy, advocacy and program development require further resource for sustainability and improvements.

The STAR Council aligns with the authorized activities outlined in General Rule 12. More specifically, GR 12.1 (a) articulates the Washington Supreme Court's regulatory objective to provide, in part, "meaningful access to justice. . ." while GR 12.1(d) strives for "affordable and accessible legal services." In addition, the STAR Council aligns with the authorized activities outlined in GR 12.2, in particular by providing "services to members and the public," and "fostering collegiality among its members and goodwill between the legal profession and the public."

Further, the STAR Council furthers the WSBA mission to serve the public and the members of the Bar by providing focused attention on the unique needs of residents and members in rural areas both by improving access to legal practitioners in rural communities and outreach and development of a pipeline of younger rural residents to pursue a legal career and serve their communities.

#### **Definition of "Rural"**

For the purpose of the STAR Council and reflective of Washington's unique geographic and sociogeographic landscape, the definition of "rural" is as follows:

Based on the definitions produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (ERS) and an overview of Washington county population, we focused on counties with populations of less than 50,000 and more than 2,500. These areas are considered 'urban nonmetro areas not part of larger labor markets' by ERS. As part of the working definition, and for ease, we have termed these counties as 'rural.' Based upon WA county population data, we've pursued a hypothesis that counties with 30,000 or more are rural, but likely adjacent to a labor market and perhaps have a varying set of circumstances that may differ from counties that are less than 30,000.

This definition will serve as the "per se" definition of rural. The STAR Council has the authority to change this definition based on specific programming objectives.

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**Composition**

The member appointment process will follow the process for WSBA Committees. Members of the STAR Council should have demonstrated experience and/or interest in a thriving legal practice in Washington's rural communities. The STAR Council will consist of 13 members and are outlined as:

- Chair (voting member)
- 2 Current or Former WSBA Board of Governors Members (voting members)
- 1 Active WSBA Member At Large (voting member)
- 4 Active WSBA Members from rural communities - see above for definition of "rural" (voting members)
- 1 Active WSBA Young Lawyer Member, as defined in WSBA Bylaws (voting member)
- 3 Law School Representatives (voting members, must be currently employed with a WA Law School which is not currently represented on the Committee.)
- 1 Active WSBA Lawyer Member currently employed with a Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP) (voting member).

WSBA Staff Liaison: Member Services and Engagement Manager or staff member in the Advancement Department, non-voting.

Board of Governor Liaison: as assigned annually, non-voting.

**Terms**

- Chair: two-year term
- Members: three-year term

**Initial Committee Terms**

In FY21, the first appointments to the STAR Council were effectuated in a staggered rotation of STAR Council members. Therefore, the following terms were in place for the first appointment cycle only. All subsequent terms should adhere to the term limits stated above. STAR Council members serving an initial term less than three years, should be considered an incomplete term. Therefore, the member is eligible to serve two subsequent complete three-year terms per WSBA Bylaws.

- 2 Active WSBA Members  
*1 member with two-year term, 1 member with three-year term.*
- 4 Active WSBA Members from rural communities (see above for definition)  
*1 member with one-year term, 1 member with two years term, 2 members with three-years term.*
- 3 Law School Representatives (voting, must be currently employed with a WA Law School)  
*1 member with one-year term, 1 member with two-years term, 1 member with three-years term.*

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The following positions will begin as a standard term as set forth in this charter.

- Chair
- 1 Active WSBA Young Lawyer Member
- 1 Active WSBA Lawyer Member currently employed with a Qualified Legal Service Provider (QLSP).

**Scope of Work**

The scope of the STAR Council's work will focus on what the WSBA is uniquely positioned to do in supporting a sustaining and thriving environment for the practice of law and increase access to justice in Washington's rural communities. The STAR Council will work with all relevant and interested stakeholders to collaborate where needed. The provision of direct legal services and civil legal aid to the public is outside the scope of the STAR Council.

**Measures of Success**

- Increased awareness of the issues and possible solutions to address any gap in practicing members in rural communities.
- A sustainable pipeline of legal practitioners in rural communities.
- Increased numbers of legal practitioners in rural communities.
- The establishment of funding for programs and initiatives for the practice of law in rural communities.

**STAR Council Roles**

**1. Community Education and Outreach**

Coordinated efforts to educate members and potential members about the unique needs, opportunities and benefits of a rural practice. This can include, but should not be limited to, comprehensive information on WSBA's website, features in WSBA publications, presentations at high schools, law schools and community colleges. Meetings and events, such as a summit or symposium, to highlight the issue, convene interested stakeholders to share their concerns and strategize on possible solutions.

**2. Pipeline and Placement Program(s)**

Develop WSBA programming, or WSBA supported/partnered programming designed to build a pipeline of practitioners in rural areas as well as an incentive program to encourage members to explore a rural practice on a time-limited or multi-year timeframe. This role should explore a possible collaboration or strategic overlap with WSBA existing and future mentorship program(s). In particular, this role will require extensive strategic planning and identification of external stakeholder support and additional funding sources. Coordinate with law schools and other stakeholders regarding economic incentives to practice in rural areas.

**3. Job Opportunities and Clearinghouse**

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Utilize existing and future WSBA resources to support and highlight job opportunities in rural communities. This role should include making it easier, and perhaps more cost-effective, to add job postings to WSBA's service. Develop a clearing house to assist retiring members with succession planning and the buying/selling of a practice.

**Committee Evaluation**

The STAR Council should conduct an assessment within five years from the date of Board of Governors' initial approval of the STAR Committee by 1) conducting a survey of rural practitioners to provide stakeholder feedback regarding the impact of this Council to effectuate change in these areas, 2) assessing the scope of work to reflect impact and progress in this area and align with trends in the greater legal community, and 3) earnestly examining if the Council is necessary to continue the scope of work.

# WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

## Small Town and Rural Council

### Small Town and Rural Council Meeting Minutes Wednesday, May 28, 2025 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

**Council Members Present:** Governor Kari Petrasek, Merf Ehman, Philip Hunsucker, Judge Kathryn Burke (arrived 12:23 p.m.), Jesse Lamp, Past President Dan Clark, Rusty McGuire (arrived 12:15 p.m.), Travis Pietila, Allison Foreman

**Council Members Absent:** Thomas Garvey (unexcused), Sean King (excused), Ashley Cummins (excused), Governor Mary Rathbone (unexcused)

**WSBA Board of Governors Present:** Matthew Dresden

**WSBA Staff Present:** Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite, Vanessa Sweeney

**Public Attendees Present:** Sophia Bird McSherry, Rachel Cortez, Brian Brunkow

## Introductions and Approval of April Meeting Minutes (Gov. Petrasek)

STAR Council Chair, Governor Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:12 p.m. On motion by STAR Council Member and Past President Dan Clark, seconded by STAR Council Member Merf Ehman, and abstention by STAR Council member Travis Pietila, the Council approved by majority vote the May STAR Council Meeting minutes. (6-0-1)

## WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

### BOG Update and Volunteer Applications

Gov. Petrasek shared updates from the May 2<sup>nd</sup> Board of Governors (BOG) meeting held in Port Angeles. The BOG unanimously approved the Equity and Justice Plan that was proposed by the DEI Council. The BOG also reviewed the licensing fee policy going forward, and the interim report from the Member Wellbeing Taskforce. Gov. Petrasek reminded Council members that if their term is ending, they should submit an application if they wish to continue. WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite noted the STAR Council has two positions open with terms beginning October 1, 2025: a rural council member, which must fit the definition of rural. This position is currently held by Judge Kathryn Burke; and the Gonzaga seat, which is only open to Gonzaga staff. Applications are due this Friday, May 30, please reach out to Julianne or Gov. Petrasek with questions. Julianne also mentioned that communication from WSBA Volunteer Manager Paris Eriksen, and Julianne regarding the sunset of WSBACommunity. Based on feedback and evaluations, it was decided not to continue with that tool. WSBACommunity will no longer be active or available to log into as of June 13. The communication

transition will be utilizing the list serve and/or email tools, and if the Council is interested in utilizing other collaboration tools, this can be discussed. Julianne noted that WSBA staff have all the files downloaded, but suggested folks should download items themselves if they wish.

Gov. Petrasek added the BOG is holding a special meeting tomorrow, May 29 at 11:00 am, to discuss an Amicus Curiae Request Re: In Re Detention of M.E. The topic was tabled at the May BOG meeting as more information was needed.

## Project Updates

### Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean King)

The topic, with a focus on next year's job fair plans, will be revisited at the June Council meeting as STAR Council Member Sean King was absent today.

### Summit Project Team (Merf Ehman, Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy)

WSBA Director of Advancement Kevin Plachy shared that things are coming together well for the STAR Summit, scheduled for June 27 at Heritage University in Toppenish, WA. An opening reception will be held at Cowiche Canyon Kitchen + Icehouse on the evening of June 26. Hotel rooms have been arranged at the Hilton Garden Inn, which is within walking distance from the restaurant. The registration link is live on the website, and the registration fees will be comped for STAR Council members. Kevin continued; a remaining detail is confirming a speaker for the Indian Law session. Once this is done, the project team will finalize the agenda and prepare an e-flyer for marketing. There are currently 10 people registered, with more anticipated as the date approaches. The cost is \$30 and pending 6 CLE credits. There will be a reception at the Heritage at the conclusion of the conference. Julianne asked Council members who plan to attend and have not yet booked a hotel room, to send an email to Julianne now. The room charges will be direct billed to the Bar, but individuals will need to cover their own incidentals. If there are questions around what is eligible for reimbursement, email Julianne before incurring the expense.

### Council Position – Hybrid Hub Student (Ashley Cummins)

Gov. Petrasek reminded this was discussed at last month's STAR Council meeting and proceeding with recruiting a Hub Student for the STAR Council. Gov. Petrasek asked how the Council would like to implement this, and whether the open position can be added to the list of STAR Council open seats, since there are two other position currently open. Kevin clarified that since the position is an unofficial, ad-hoc, non-voting position Gov. Petrasek has the authority to appoint somebody. Kevin added, it can be run by the Council before a final decision is made, and WSBA staff can assist in outreach. Julianne noted a form can be created if the application process is preferred. Gov. Petrasek suggested the application be limited to 3-4 questions and asked whether the Council has specific questions for what should be included. No suggestions were made. Gov. Petrasek will work with Julianne and Kevin for next steps.

#### Rural Grant Internships (Ashley Cummins, Sean King, Travis Pietila, Kevin Plachy)

All the grants have been distributed. There are seven law students, all from this year's program, registered to attend the Summit. It could be considered to invite last year's grant recipients but there is concern that there isn't enough funding to cover additional travel stipends.

#### Rural Day of Service (Judge Kathryn Burke, Gov. Petrasek, Kevin Plachy)

Kevin confirmed the clinic will take place on Friday, September 12 in Okanogan County and will focus on estate planning, primarily wills. Julianne has reached out to Coco Holbrook at Northwest Justice Project (NJP) to schedule a meeting with the project team in early to mid-June to begin defining WSBA and NJP roles. Julianne continued they are aiming to meet early to mid-June with project team. Julianne asked the Council to think about and start spreading the word to recruit potential volunteers with experience in estate planning. Gov. Petrasek has run a Senior Wills Clinic since 2010 and is happy to discuss details and offered templates.

Kevin asked whether the advertising should clarify the clinic's limitations – stating that it is limited to simple wills and does not include trusts. Gov. Petrasek agreed, noting that situations requiring a trust would not qualify, as attorneys at the clinic won't be prepared to handle those. Kevin suggested the advertising can potentially be presented as 'simple estate planning.' NJP will manage initial screening to determine the appropriate level of need for each client.

#### Legal Lunchbox – April 2025 (Ashley Cummins)

Kevin shared an update that over 1,500 people attended the April Legal Lunchbox, which focused on APR6 law clerks and bridging the gap in rural communities. Julianne noted, the reviews indicated that 98% received information they expected. Feedback was positive, including comments that this particular CLE was very engaging, the panel was great, and it was nice having Kat Skinner, WSBA's Law Clerk Program staff liaison, moderating the chat and answering questions in real time. Gov. Petrasek asked whether the Council would be interested in doing two Legal Lunchboxes per year as there is a lot of information the group has to offer, and other topics could be considered. Kevin explained the Legal Lunchbox events are scheduled a year in advance and is unsure about availability. Merf added that there had been previous discussions about holding the Summit every other year, and in the off year, the Council could offer two Legal Lunchboxes, which would fill the Summit gap. Additionally, there was a suggestion to alternate the Summit with the Access to Justice (ATJ) Conference years. When the Summit is on an off year, additional programming, such as Legal Lunchbox, can be added. Gov. Petrasek agreed this sounds positive and the Council can revisit the idea in the future.

#### OAH Presentation (Gov. Petrasek, Julianne Unite)

Gov. Petrasek shared an update on a recent presentation to the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) given by Gov. Petrasek and Julianne. They provided a history of how the Council was formed, an update



on the Summit, internship grants, and the Council's ongoing work. They provided information on how to become more involved, including the option to attend meetings. The OAH was excited to hear about the work the STAR Council is doing, and lots of questions were asked. Julianne noted there hasn't been any follow up and suggested it may be helpful to follow up with Tony from OAH.

## Announcements

Merf reminded the Council that the ATJ Conference will take place in Yakima, September 18-19, 2025, at the Yakima Convention Center.

Kevin congratulated Gov. Petrasek on being elected President-Elect of the WSBA starting October of this year. Gov. Petrasek will move into the President role in October 2026.

Merf suggested a potential agenda item around the Entity Regulation Pilot Project. The WSBA is working on it, and it could be helpful for STAR Council as people may not know a lot about it. Kari suggested inviting Craig Shank, a member of the Practice of Law Board, to attend the next STAR Council meeting to talk about it.

Julianne reminded the Council that beginning next month, new calendar invitations for the monthly STAR Council meeting will be sent via Outlook, to replace the invitations previously scheduled through WSBACommunity.

## Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

## Next Meeting: June 25, 2025

## Adjournment

Gov. Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 12:52 p.m.