

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, September 23, 2026 | 12:10 p.m. – 1:10 p.m.

AGENDA

1. Introductions and Approval of July Meeting Minutes (Pres.-Elect Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Pres.-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)
 - a. Board of Governors updates
3. STAR Council Presentation to the Board of Governors (Pres.-Elect Kari Petrasek)
4. STAR Charter Revisions
5. Project Updates
 - a. Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)
 - b. Virtual Job Fair (Sean King)
 - c. Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy, Michele Moore, Gloria Guizar)
6. FY27 Meeting Schedule
7. Announcements
8. Next Steps/Conclusion
9. Next Meeting: October 28, 2026
10. Adjourn

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

Small Town and Rural Council

Small Town and Rural Council Meeting Minutes Wednesday, July 26, 2026 *Virtual meeting via Zoom*

Council Members Present: President-Elect Kari Petrasek, Travis Pietila, Governor Mary Rathbone, Ashley Cummins, Past-President Dan Clark, Hyun-Ji Lee, Rusty McGuire, Allison Foreman (joined 12:15 p.m.), Michele Moore (left 12:50 p.m.), Sean King, Gloria Guizar (non-voting)

Council Members Absent: Philip Hunsucker (excused)

WSBA Board of Governors Present: N/A

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

Public Attendees Present: Sophia Byrd McSherry, Annalise Martucci, Mike Chin

Introductions and Approval of June Meeting Minutes (President Elect Petrasek)

STAR Council Chair and WSBA President-Elect Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:11 p.m. On motion by STAR Council Member Dan Clark, seconded by STAR Council Member Rusty McGuire, the Council approved by unanimous vote the June STAR Council Meeting minutes.

WSBA Updates (President-Elect Petrasek and Julianne Unite)

Board of Governors updates

President-Elect Petrasek noted that the Board of Governors (BOG) new governor orientation is currently taking place in Tulalip, followed by the retreat tomorrow, and the BOG meeting on Friday and Saturday.

WSBA Member Services and Engagement Manager Julianne Unite announced the WSBA CLE Summer Sale is currently underway through July 30. Julianne added that the STAR Council recommendations team met earlier this month to review Council applications for positions starting October 1. There were multiple applicants for each open position other than Seattle University. The cover memo and the recommendations list has been forwarded to the BOG Nominations Committee for review and approval at the July 30 BOG Nominations Committee meeting.

STAR Council Presentation to the Board of Governors (Pres.-Elect Petrasek)

Survey

President-Elect Petrasek noted that the subcommittee is working on the report and Julianne confirmed that since there is no STAR Council meeting in August, the report will be shared to the Council for review

and agreement via email, schedule a meeting if needed, and get into materials in mid-August for the September BOG meeting.

Access to Justice Conference

The Council discussed partnering with the Access to Justice (ATJ) Conference, taking place next year. ATJ has invited the STAR Council to propose a session for next year's conference, and the group agreed to brainstorm topics and speakers, aiming to be ready when the proposal window opens. President-Elect Petrasek will attend the upcoming ATJ Board meeting in August to confirm interest and gather details about the conference theme and deadlines, ensuring STAR is prepared to pitch a session once more information is available.

STAR Charter Revisions

The STAR Council discussed revising its charter to address eligibility concerns for Council positions. Currently, only active members in Washington are permitted to serve, which excludes pro bono and inactive attorneys who may be valuable contributors. Members noted that pro bono attorneys, though technically inactive, must volunteer a significant number of hours annually and often serve rural communities, making their perspectives important. The group debated whether to simply remove the "active" requirement or to specifically add "pro bono status" as an eligible category, ultimately favoring the latter to maintain standards while broadening participation.

The conversation also covered the charter's current structure, which includes slots for active WSBA members from rural communities and at-large positions. There was consensus to add pro bono status as a qualifier for these roles, but uncertainty remained about whether new members with pro bono status would qualify, given that the WSBA Bylaws that require active status for new members. The group agreed to draft proposed revisions, with several members volunteering to prepare language for review at the next meeting. Timing was discussed, noting that the next meeting is just before the September BOG meeting, and that the change could be approved as a consent item, streamlining the process. The revision is not urgent, as it will not affect current elections, but will ensure future inclusivity for Council positions.

Project Updates

Summit Project Team (Ashley Cummins, Kevin Plachy, Michele Moore, Gloria Guizar)

STAR Council Member Michele Moore reported that the initial feedback she received during the Summit was very positive. Attendees expressed satisfaction with the event, highlighting its overall success. Ashley agreed and emphasized that the Central Washington University campus was an excellent venue, suggesting it should be considered for future events. Ashley also mentioned that the partnership with ATJ for the reception added significant value to the Summit. In addition, WSBA Advancement Department Director Kevin Plachy noted that the networking activity was particularly successful, contributing to the positive experience for participants. Julianne added that thanks to collaboration with CWU, the event achieved some cost savings, though logistical challenges—such as parking and snack distribution—were noted. The travel snacks were charged by consumption, and there was an unexpected incident where a basketball team took some items intended for summit participants. Staff

responded quickly to address this, and future event planning will consider ways to better manage food setup and access.

Rural Day of Service (Kevin Plachy, Julianne Unite)

Kevin noted that the first clinic this fiscal year is taking place on Monday July 27 in Chewelah, in partnership with Inland Empire Legal Aid. Kevin and WSBA Member Services and Engagement Program Coordinator Vanessa Sweeney will be there. There currently are six clients confirmed and there will be two groups of volunteer attorneys, with three appointments each. The goal is to provide them with completed estate planning documents. Julianne added that the second Day of Service clinic is scheduled for September 18, in partnership with Northwest Justice Project. The clinic will take place in Moses Lake at the Moses Lake Community Health Center. Marketing will begin soon.

FY27 Legal Lunchbox

Julianne asked the Council to consider whether they would like to host a Legal Lunchbox event during fiscal year 2027. Ashley suggested choosing June for the event, as this would allow it to align with the proclamation, if it continues, and recommended potentially adding a Rural Day of Service in the same month to promote rural activities. Julianne will follow up with the CLE team to inform them of the Council's decision to select June for the event and will provide confirmation once details are finalized.

ATJ Board Updates

Mike Chin shared an update from the Access to Justice Board, explaining that the Board is revising its Supreme Court order to reflect newly updated mission, vision, and values, which were shaped by the hallmarks of effective civil legal aid. Established in 1994 and appointed by the Supreme Court, the Board will expand from 10 to 15 members, including community members with lived experience to ensure broader representation and input from those impacted by the legal system. This change aims to strengthen the Board's commitment to civil legal aid, coordination of access to justice across Washington state, advocacy for sustainable legal resources, and efforts to remove barriers through policy and court practice improvements. Mike emphasized the importance of community feedback, noting that while the survey deadline was initially set for Friday, additional input will be welcomed beyond that date. The discussion also highlighted concerns about communication and outreach, with suggestions to improve notice to bar members and utilize various channels, such as list serves and the WSBA's Take Note newsletter, to ensure all stakeholders are informed and have the opportunity to contribute. The revised order will be finalized and presented to the Supreme Court later this year.

Rusty expressed concerns about the retention of young lawyers in rural practices, and shared frustration over losing four out of four new hires despite offering competitive pay and benefits. Rusty attributes this trend, in part, to law school teachings—specifically a “Professional Foundations” class—that allegedly encourage students to view jobs as short-term steppingstones, advising them to move on after two to four years for financial advancement. This perceived cultural shift, away from long-term commitment,

has led to a crisis in rural legal communities, where once-thriving towns now have only one attorney serving thousands of unrepresented residents. Sean, Ashley, and Travis acknowledged the broader generational trend of job-hopping but dispute that law schools actively promote it, emphasizing instead the importance of commitment and cautioning against frequent moves, which can harm job prospects. The conversation also touched on the challenges of recruiting and retaining talent in rural areas, the impact of incentives offered by public sector employers, and the need for strategic programming to encourage longer tenures. The group recognizes the urgency of addressing “legal deserts” and considers ways to adapt committee efforts to foster stability and access to justice in underserved communities.

Announcements

None.

Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: September 23, 2026

Adjournment

President-Elect Petrasek adjourned the meeting at 1:09 p.m.

Some material in this document was generated using Microsoft Copilot and was reviewed and modified by Vanessa Sweeney, WSBA Member Services and Engagement.