

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.

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

CHARTER

Small Town and Rural Council

Adopted: April 17, 2021. Amended July 17, 2021; September 7, 2024; November 14, 2025; TBD.

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-(ca) articulates the Washington Supreme Court's regulatory objective to provide, in part, "meaningful access to justice. . ." while GR 12.1(ed) strives for "~~affordable and accessible legal services.~~ delivery of 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 sociogeographical 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 or Pro Bono WSBA Member At Large (voting member)
- 4 Active or Pro Bono WSBA Members from rural communities - see above for definition of "rural" (voting members)
- 1 Active WSBA New Member, as defined in WSBA Bylaws (voting member)
- 3 Law School Representatives (voting members, must be currently employed with a Washington Law School ~~which that~~ is not currently represented on the Committee.)
- 1 Active or Pro Bono 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, staggered

~~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 New 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.

Council Committee Evaluation

The STAR Council should conduct an assessment within five years from the date of Board of Governors' initial approval of the STAR Council 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.

Commented [JU1]: This may need to be updated pending Sep. BOG meeting report.