

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

## Small Town and Rural Council

**Small Town and Rural Committee Meeting | Virtual Only**

**Wednesday, December 18, 2024, | 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 November Meeting Minutes (Gov. Kari Petrasek)
2. WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Kevin Plachy)
3. State Law School Hubs & Rural Access (Dean Anthony Verona)
4. Project Team Updates
  - a. Job Fair at Gonzaga
  - b. Summit Project Team (Kevin Plachy & Merf Ehman)
  - c. Rural Day of Service (Kathryn Burke, Kevin Plachy)
5. Summit Venue Planning Discussion
6. Legal Lunchbox – April 2025
7. Announcements
8. Next Steps/Conclusion
9. Next Meeting: January 22, 2024
10. Adjournment

## **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.

### **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.*

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, November 27, 2024 | 12:11 p.m. – 12:57 p.m.

*Virtual meeting via Zoom*

**Committee Members Present:** Allison Foreman, Governor Kari Petrasek, Merf Ehman, Rusty McGuire, Ashley Cummins, Jesse Lamp, Philip Hunsucker, Sean King, Travis Pietila, Governor Mary Rathbone

**Committee Members Absent:** Judge Kathryn Burke, Thomas Garvey, Dan Clark, Matthew Dresden

**WSBA Staff Present:** Kevin Plachy, Chelle Gegax, Vanessa Sweeney

**Public Attendees Present:** Jason Walker, Chris Fox

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

Governor Kari Petrasek called the meeting to order at 12:11 p.m. Governor Petrasek invited those in attendance to provide introductions. On motion by Council Member Rusty McGuire, seconded by Council Member Phil Hunsucker, the council voted (9-0-1) to approve the October STAR Council Meeting minutes. STAR Council Member, Travis Pietila, abstains as he was officially appointed to the STAR Council after the occurrence of the October meeting.

### WSBA Updates (Gov. Petrasek and Kevin Plachy)

Governor Petrasek provided updates on the recent November Board of Governors (BOG) meeting. A discussion with law school deans, largely focused on law school tuition and access to law schools for students from rural areas. Kari shared that Seattle University School of Law Dean Anthony Verona will be attending the December STAR Council meeting to discuss the statewide and Alaska hubs that have been designed to reduce costs and improve accessibility. Next, the member status workgroup proposed changes to member statuses, including allowing retired members to display their status as “retired” on their WSBA profile instead of “resigned.” Additionally, inactive members may now serve on committees, councils, and executive committees as deemed appropriate. Finally, one At-Large Governor has resigned, and applications are open, it’s short turn around as the DEI council will select candidates to present to the BOG at the January meeting. If you, or know anyone who is interested, let them know or apply.

WSBA Member Engagement Specialist Chelle Gegax shared an update on the Washington Young Lawyers Committee, noting one open seat to for the Greater Olympia Region. This is the last vacancy before reaching a full committee. If anyone knows a new or young lawyer, please let Chelle know, or encourage them to apply.

There were no further updates.

## Project Team Updates

### a. Job Fair at Gonzaga (Sean)

STAR Council Member Sean King shared he is currently coordinating with Gonzaga's Student Bar Association to avoid scheduling conflicts, considering dates during the weeks of either March 24 or March 31, with a preference for Tuesday April 1<sup>st</sup>. STAR Council Member Travis Pietila asked if the event is solely virtual. Sean replied that the event has been largely virtual the last couple of years, but there will be an in-person component. Kari emphasized the importance of promoting the event to ensure rural area law firms can also use this to interview for internships, as \$5000 grants are available for law student internships in rural areas. WSBA Advancement Director Kevin Plachy added that an eblast will be sent to rural practitioners to promote the job fair along with internships, and that it's important to ensure we maximize participation while utilizing the funding.

### b. Summit Project Team (Kevin Plachy & Merf Ehman)

Kevin kicked off the update indicating that Chelle has been researching venues Central Washington University (CWU) and Heritage University. Chelle shared that CWU's meeting space costs range from \$200-600, with a \$4178 catering quote, and \$6 per vehicle parking fee, which could be included in the registration fee. Hosting a welcome reception on campus is restricted due to alcohol policies, but nearby off-campus venues are available. The budget for the event is \$10,000. Concerns were raised about parking at CWU. Chelle will gather more information, and further details between the two potential venues will be reviewed at December's Council meeting. Decisions for the council include welcome reception location, event date (June 6 – easier WSBA staffing support, but CWU students will be present; or June 27 – WSBA staffing conflicts) and recording the event for later access.

### c. Rural Day of Service (Kathryn Burke, Kevin Plachy)

Kevin shared that the Board approved the budget, allowing the program to move forward after an internal review. The next steps involve developing the procedure manual for a legal clinic aimed at providing legal services on specific topics, such as wills and estates, to rural communities. Judge Kathryn Burke has identified a legal aid organization in Okanogan County to partner with - they will be responsible for the clinic logistics, provide malpractice insurance, and receive a \$3000 stipend for staffing and logistical support. We provide volunteers, including law students under Rule 9 to assist, with experienced attorneys providing guidance. The procedure manual will be ready for council review by mid to late December after input from Kari and Judge Burke. Additionally, the council will need to decide what the topic will be – Kari noted that this can be discussed between Kevin, Kari, and Kathryn.

## Summit Venue Planning Discussion

Discussed during summit project team update.

## Legal Lunchbox – April 2025

STAR Council Member Ashley Cummins shared insights from a meeting with WSBA Education Program Lead Rachel Matz, emphasizing the need to avoid CLEs that will be offered during the STAR Summit. Coming from last summit, the focus is on mentoring and supervising new attorneys in rural practice and incorporating Rule 6 with traditional practice. Kari asked if volunteers are needed, Ashley confirmed

none are needed. STAR Council Merf Ehman supports the Rule 6 idea. Ashley will reach out if help is needed in planning.

## Bar News Article Discussion (Free Law School Tuition)

In response to a recent [Bar News article](#), there was a written comment suggesting the idea of offering free law school tuition or loan forgiveness to incentivize lawyers to practice in rural areas. Kari noted there are challenges related to monetary responsibility and the willingness of law schools to participate. Kevin suggested that it would be interesting to explore the idea of loan forgiveness for those who practice in rural areas. Hunter Abell may be someone we can reach out to. Jason emphasized an existing issue is that federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) already exists, and with overlap with state funding, students ultimately don't have faith in it. Travis clarified a separate program than PSLF, requiring a five-year public service commitment for loan forgiveness.

## Announcements

None.

## Next Steps/Conclusion

None.

Next Meeting: December 18, 2024

## Adjournment

Kari adjourned the meeting at 12:57 p.m.