

Kane County Commission

76 N. Main Street, Kanab, Utah 84741



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What is a Local District or Special Service District?

Recently, the county commission has been responding to constituent inquiries regarding county services and how local and special districts works. The commission thought it appropriate to provide the following to better inform the public at-large.

In the State of Utah, counties provide many valuable services to residents across the county and some additional services to residents of unincorporated areas. This includes the administration of public health systems, behavioral health services, conducting elections, running hospitals and emergency rooms, providing law enforcement and criminal prosecution, wild fire prevention and suppression, county road maintenance and others. Typically, municipal level services are provided by municipalities. These include sewer, water, structural fire protection, trash collection, parks, and more.

For residents of unincorporated areas that want to have municipal level services without living in a city or town, the county is not likely to provide these municipal type services directly. Also, because some cities or towns are too small to provide a cost effective service, they may cooperate with each other and/or the county to provide the service jointly for their residents.

This is where local districts or special service district come in. These districts can provide up to a total of four specific services within their boundaries. They can be as big as the entire county, like the Human Resources Special Service District that operates the Kane County Hospital. They can also include small or large portions of the county like the Western Kane County Special Service District that provides trash collection to the western half of the county including Kanab, Glendale, and Orderville, or the Cedar Mountain Fire Protection District that provides municipal type fire services and snow removal for certain unincorporated areas on Cedar Mountain. Currently Kane County has eleven of these district in operation.

There are several benefits for using these districts.

First, they can only collect fees or taxes from their specific area which means that the residents who benefit from the service are those that pay for the service instead of all county tax payers.

Second, these districts can also help limit the liability for the county so that any harm that a district causes only effects the tax payers and tax revenue of the district instead of the county at large.

Third, these districts are often governed by individuals who are subject matter experts both for their specific geographic area and the services that are provided. This way, they can better serve the residents of that area.

All of the districts are run by a board of volunteers. Some of them have elections like the Hospital Board but most are appointed by the county commission through an application process.

A district can be created or an existing district can expand its boundaries or services in two main ways.

First the county commission can pass a resolution giving their notice of intent to create or expand a district. This is followed by one or public hearings, sometimes a protest period, and typically an election is required. The last stage of the process is for the Lieutenant Governor to review the process and issue a certificate of creation or annexation.

The Second main way to create or expand a district is by a petition of the voters or residents in an area that want a specific service. Similar to the resolution process, under a petition of voters or residents the county is required to hold one or more public hearings. In some circumstances there is a protest period and typically an election. If the sponsors of the petition follow all the appropriate steps they can also ultimately have the Lieutenant Governor issue a certificate of creation or annexation and the district can then provide the requested services.

In summary, local and/or special districts are a useful tool in the local government tool-kit that help provide necessary services to the public in a responsible and highly focused manner.