

**CROOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MINUTES
OF MARCH 5, 2025, REGULAR MEETING
Open Portion**

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Meeting on March 5, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. in the County meeting room located at 320 NE Court Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

Board Members Present: Commissioner Brian Barney; Commissioner Susan Hermreck
Absentees: Commissioner Seth Crawford

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Counsel Eric Blaine; Community Development Director John Eisler; Executive Assistant/Communications Officer Sarah Puerner; County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; Clerk Cheryl Seely; Extension Manager Rebecca Keegan; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Human Resources Director Meghan McKee; Assessor Jon Soliz; Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb; Library Director Sarah Beeler; Appraiser Stephanie West; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Appraiser Karen Bushnell; Community Health Worker Shelby Fisher; Assessment Technician Linda Pepper; Adam and Karen Mikulski; Tommy Brooks; Ashley McCormick; Justin Alderman; Don Profily; Mike Ervin; Greg Svelund; Jim Newton; Lori Desjardins; Larry and Dianna Scheffler; Tawndy Byrd; Ryann Bafford; Landyn Bafford; Brady Bafford; Tim Deboodt; Julie Thompson; Bobbi Aldrich; Dick Zimmerlee; Matt Smith; and members of the public.

REGULAR SESSION

The meeting was **called to order at 9:00 a.m.**

Public Comment: None

Consent Agenda:

1. Approve Minutes
2. Approve Crook County Ambulance Service Plan
3. Approve Grant Acceptance for eBikes Addition to Crook County's Library of Things Collection
4. 2017 GO Bond IRS Examination Results
5. FY 23 Oregon Department of Health and Human Services Audit

MOTION to approve the consent agenda as presented. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

Discussion item #6: Approval of Funding for Facility Rental at Crook County Fairgrounds: Tri County and Oregon High School Rodeo State Finals:

Requester: Bobbi Aldrich

Details: OHSRA Secretary Bobbi Aldrich, along with student contestants, attended the Regular Session to request a waiver of facility fees at the Crook County Fairgrounds for

the upcoming Tri-County High School Rodeo and the Oregon High School Rodeo State Finals. The Oregon High School Rodeo Association (OHSRA) is a statewide 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides high school students with opportunities to compete and grow in the sport of rodeo. With approximately 200 members, each event draws an estimated 400 to 600 attendees including family and supporters. OHSRA continues to see growth, with the Tri-County High School Rodeo (the largest club in Oregon) scheduled to host a major event May 2–4, followed by the State Finals in June. The total facility fees for both weekends amount to \$6,000. Last year, OHSRA raised over \$50,000 in scholarships to help students pursue college or trade school, with many continuing on to college rodeo programs. Bobbi Aldrich expressed appreciation for Crook County’s support, noting challenges statewide in securing affordable arenas for rodeos. For example, the Portland Rodeo Club has relocated to Sisters due to high costs. These events provide significant benefits to local businesses and tourism. Commissioner Brian Barney emphasized Crook County’s ranching heritage, while Commissioner Susan Hermreck noted the strong rodeo culture, pointing out the cowboy hats and western pride during these local events.

MOTION to approve the funding for facility rental at Crook County Fairgrounds for the Tri-County and Oregon High School Rodeo State Finals. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

Discussion item #7: Highland Subdivision Water District - Possible Dissolution:

Requester: Richard Mayers

Details: Highland Water District Vice President Richard Mayers attended the Regular Session to inform the Board of Commissioners about the district’s urgent need for support and to inquire whether the County might consider stepping in to assist or potentially assume responsibility for the district. The board is on the verge of collapse, with multiple members stepping down due to health issues and Mayers himself preparing to move out of the area. Despite posting vacancies twice, the district has been unable to find volunteers to fill the roles—all of which are unpaid. Mayers explained that, in accordance with SDAO guidelines, he was bringing this matter to the County's attention. Commissioner Brian Barney acknowledged the seriousness of the situation, stating the County would review the matter, explore potential solutions, and follow up with Mayers. The Highland Water District currently serves approximately 156 homes.

Discussion item #8: Recommendation to the Natural Resource Advisory Committee:

Requester: Tim Deboodt

Details: Natural Resources Manager Tim Deboodt attended the Regular Session to present a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners regarding a vacancy on the County’s Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC). The County advertised the open position, and the application period closed on Friday, February 28. Two highly qualified applications were received. The NRAC met on Monday via Zoom to review and discuss the applications. Given the strong qualifications of both candidates, the committee plans to discuss amending its bylaws at an upcoming meeting to allow for an increase in membership. In the meantime, the committee has recommended the

reappointment of Clif Kiser to a new four-year term, set to expire on December 31, 2028.

MOTION to approve Order 2025-06 in the matter of the appointment to the Natural Resource Advisory Committee of Cliff Kiser to a 4-year term expiring December 31, 2028. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

Discussion item #9: Recommendations to the Ag Extension Service District Board:

Requester: Rebecca Keegan

Details: Ag Extension Manager Rebecca Keegan attended the Regular Session to present a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners regarding appointments to the Agricultural Extension Service District Advisory Board. There are currently three open positions, and two applications were received—from returning members John Dehler and Janice Flegel. The Advisory Board met via Zoom on Monday to review the applications. After discussion, the board unanimously recommended both applicants for reappointment to new three-year terms. One position remains vacant, and it was agreed that Administration will move forward with readvertising to fill the remaining seat.

MOTION to approve Order 2025-07 in the matter of the appointment to the Ag Extension Service District Advisory Board of position #5 John Dehler for a 3-year term expiring December 31, 2027, and position #7 Janice Flegel for a 3-year term expiring December 31, 2027. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

Discussion item #10: Discussion about Janitorial Procurement:

Requester: James Preuss

Details: Assistant County Counsel John Eisler attended the Regular Session to present the janitorial services procurement for Crook County Facilities on behalf of Facilities Director James Preuss. This procurement falls under the County's intermediate procurement rules (CCC 3.12.060), which allow the contract to be awarded to the proposer that best serves the County's interests, taking into account not only cost, but also factors such as experience, expertise, product functionality, and contractor responsibility. Four proposals were received, and staff recommended awarding the contract to Central Oregon Janitorial (COJ). In addition to submitting the lowest-cost bid, COJ has demonstrated strong performance, responsiveness, and reliability through their current janitorial services contract at the Crook County Justice Center. Their proven experience makes them the best fit for County-wide janitorial needs. The transition to the new provider will begin promptly following termination of the current contract.

MOTION to approve the contract for Central Oregon Janitorial Services LLC to start at the specified time on this contract. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

Discussion item #11: Discussion on Proposing an Amendment to the Intergovernmental Agreement with the City of Prineville: Changes to Crook County Road Agency Board Membership and Agency Independence

Requester: Eric Blaine

Details: County Counsel Eric Blaine attended the Regular Session to present a proposed amendment to the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the City of Prineville. This amendment relates to Crook County's implementation of House Bill 2174, which provides a pathway for eligible counties to receive Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding by forming one of three authorized governmental entities. In response to this legislation, Crook, Jefferson, and Deschutes Counties jointly formed an intergovernmental entity under ORS Chapter 190, while Klamath County created a service district under ORS Chapter 451. As part of a coordinated effort, the counties submitted a joint response to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) clarifying that shared board membership between public entities does not automatically imply dependency. However, to avoid any potential disputes over future SRS payments, the County is considering revisions to the existing IGA that would alter the board structure of the Crook County Road Agency. One option under discussion includes expanding the board to incorporate appointments from both the County and the City of Prineville, and possibly opening positions to public volunteers. While the future allocation of SRS funds remains uncertain due to the number of eligible jurisdictions nationwide, Crook County's 2024 allocation—free of dispute—exceeded \$2 million. Commissioner Brian Barney voiced strong support for pursuing the amendment, emphasizing the importance of preserving access to this critical funding. County Counsel Eric Blaine will contact the City of Prineville to initiate a conversation, explore options, and begin drafting a proposed amendment to the IGA.

Manager Report:

Will Van Vactor took a moment to thank Jamie Berger and the Finance Department for their hard work in preparing the County's budget this season. Budget meetings are now scheduled, and appreciation was also extended to all department heads for their contributions in moving the process forward. He noted that the upcoming fiscal year may present significant budget challenges. In terms of public and community engagement, Van Vactor shared that the Elected Officials Compensation Committee will meet tomorrow to recommend an appointment for the committee's third member. He also acknowledged that the County continues to receive feedback from citizens and department heads regarding legislative concerns and affirmed that these issues will continue to be addressed as needed.

Commissioner Updates:

Commissioner Hermreck shared that she had planned to testify earlier that morning on House Bill 3487, which addresses the growing grasshopper issue, but was unable to do so prior to the meeting. Testimony can still be submitted within the next 48 hours, and she confirmed it will be submitted. She also announced a grasshopper-focused community meeting scheduled for March 18th at noon at the Pow Mow Club in Paulina. Representatives from the Oregon Department of Agriculture will be in attendance. The purpose of the meeting is to answer questions, hear from local ranchers, and begin coordinating proactive efforts ahead of the anticipated grasshopper outbreak in Eastern

Oregon. Commissioner Hermreck stressed the urgency of securing equipment and resources, especially given the history of wildfires in the Post and Paulina areas. She also noted that Representative Vikki Breese Iverson has asked the County to track House Bill 3349, which would authorize the State Forestry Department to take specific actions related to motor vehicles and equipment. Iverson is also supporting House Bill 3350, which allocates General Fund resources to the State Forestry Department for the Rangeland Protection Association Fund. Commissioner Hermreck concluded her remarks by turning the update over to County Counsel John Eisler.

County Counsel John Eisler provided an update on a letter he drafted to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, advocating for potential funding to support the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) neighborhood sampling plan related to the groundwater contamination issue. The funding request totals \$250,000—\$150,000 for the initial round of testing and an additional \$100,000 for follow-up testing. Although the letter was not included in the meeting packet due to a missed submission deadline, Eisler read the full letter aloud for the record.

MOTION to approve the letter for support for further study of groundwater quality concerns in Crook County. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. During discussion, it was mentioned that the Letter will be sent to Senator Fred Girod, Rep. Rob Nosse and The Joint Committee on Ways & Means, subcommittee on Capital Construction. No further discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

County Counsel John Eisler also provided an update on the Wildfire Hazard Risk Map appeal. He shared that the draft appeal is complete and on track to be filed by Friday. The appeal challenges the map on behalf of both a specific County-owned property and all properties within Crook County, asserting that the map lacks sufficient detail to accurately reflect wildfire risk at the property-ownership level and that certain risk factors were incorrectly applied. Eisler noted that the draft is awaiting final review by Commissioner Crawford. Commissioner Brian Barney confirmed he has reviewed the draft and its supporting exhibits and is in full support of the filing.

Public Comment:

Julie Thompson thanked the County for the surprise funding support for groundwater testing and acknowledged the progress being made. She emphasized the urgency of completing the geologist's report from the first round of testing and reiterated her request for financial assistance from the County, noting previous denials. Julie shared that residents have already spent thousands of dollars on private water testing and are hesitant to invest more without certainty. After thoroughly reviewing the County's 246-page budget, she pointed out that departments such as Environmental Health and Natural Resources may have resources or personnel that could assist. She specifically cited the role of Environmental Health in protecting public health and questioned whether existing budgeted funds—such as a \$194,000 line item—could be used to help cover the remaining \$50,000 needed to complete the geologist's report. Julie also mentioned her personal investment of \$11,000 in a filtered water system to protect her septic well and submitted supporting documents to County Counsel John Eisler. Eisler

added that if DEQ funding is approved by Friday, the geologist's final report could be completed by the end of May.

John Eisler shared that, based on conversations with DEQ, if the requested funding is approved on Friday, it must be spent immediately—potentially by May. Commissioner Hermreck noted that if the funding is secured and testing is completed, the results could significantly strengthen the County’s position with the State.

Commissioner Barney emphasized the County’s efforts to collaborate with DEQ and clarified that it would be very difficult to allocate additional County funds for this purpose. Julie Thompson brought up concerns about a perceived “secret meeting” involving the Commissioners and Knife River. Commissioner Barney clarified that the meeting is not an official public or Board of Commissioners meeting, but a discussion involving Commissioner Hermreck, County Counsel John Eisler, and Knife River.

Julie also asked for an update on whether Knife River would allow third-party testing of their water. John Eisler confirmed that third-party testing is already underway.

Dick Zimmerlee expressed support for Julie Thompson’s request for County funding, emphasizing that geologist Jim Newton has been involved since the beginning of the groundwater concerns, including the original Woodward permit process. Zimmerlee noted that Newton, a licensed geologist and certified water right examiner, has already compiled extensive data from both community-led and state-conducted tests and could complete a final report within 60 days for approximately \$50,000. He cautioned that bringing in outside counsel unfamiliar with the background may increase costs and delay progress.

Commissioner Hermreck clarified that the County has not yet hired outside counsel and assured Zimmerlee that his input is being taken seriously. Commissioner Barney explained that any outside legal support would be to replace County Counsel John Eisler, who has transitioned into Community Development, and not to replace scientific expertise. Hermreck emphasized the value of an independent review, or “second set of eyes,” on behalf of the County. When Zimmerlee asked whether the County would participate financially in Newton’s report, both Commissioners Hermreck and Barney responded that, at this time, the County does not plan to fund that effort.

Adam Mikulski expressed frustration over repeated complaints he and others have filed regarding Knife River’s operations under their Conditional Use Permit (CUP), particularly around violations such as truck parking and dewatering without proper permits. He noted that while some responses have been received from County staff—often relayed through Knife River—they feel more like excuses than solutions. He questioned whether the County is taking meaningful action to enforce the CUP and expressed fatigue over having to continually monitor and report violations. County Counsel John Eisler acknowledged the concerns, stating that recent complaints have led to the submission of a vector and weed management plan, which the County can now track. He also noted this was the first formal complaint received about parking

violations. Eisler assured that Knife River is treated like any other entity in the County, without special treatment, and believes some progress is being made.

Commissioner Hermreck thanked the Mikulskis for their ongoing involvement and confirmed she received photos from Karen Mikulski, even though she hadn't yet replied via email. Hermreck expressed appreciation for their diligence and acknowledged the slow pace of the process, wishing it could move faster for the community's benefit.

At 10:00 a.m. the Board of Commissioners convened into Executive Session under the following statute(s): ORS 192.660(2)(h) Consulting with Counsel concerning the legal rights and duties of a public body with regard to current litigation or litigation likely to be filed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At the conclusion of the Executive Session, the Board of Commissioners convened back into Open Session, inviting members of the public into the meeting room.

MOTION for staff to proceed as directed in the Executive Session. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting was **adjourned at 10:44 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Puerner / Breyanna Cupp