

**CROOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MINUTES
OF MARCH 12, 2025, WORK SESSION
Open Portion**

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of Commissioners met in a regularly scheduled Work Session on March 12, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. in the Administration Conference room located at 203 NE Court Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

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

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: Legal Counsel Eric Blaine; Executive Administrative Assistant Sarah Puerner; Community Development Director John Eisler; County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; Extension Manager Rebecca Keegan; HR Director Meghan McKee; Airport Manager Kelly Coffelt; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Finance Director Christina Haron; Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Agronomist Gordon Jones; Emergency Manager AJ Crawford; Undersheriff Bill Elliott; Associate Planner Hannah Elliott; Senior Planner Katie McDonald; IT Manager Blaine Cheney; Mike Ervin; Garth Finley; Justin Alderman; Laura York; Austin; Jeremy Briggs; James Facer; George Stuzen; and members of the public.

WORK SESSION

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

Public Comment:

Justin Alderman from the *Prineville Review* addressed the Board of Commissioners regarding a public records request dating back to November concerning an allegedly illegal NRAC meeting. He referenced earlier communication with Mr. Albert, whose comments highlighted concerning county practices and “weird policies” around public records. Alderman is appealing for the Board to grant a full fee waiver for the request and to act on staff recommendations to resolve underlying transparency issues. He criticized delays in decision-making, particularly around the December 4 meeting, and pointed to public interest as justification for waiving the fees entirely. He also noted that while a partial payment was offered on December 18, a full waiver remains the appropriate course of action.

County Manager Will Van Vactor noted that he intended to address the public records request in his Manager Report and noted that staff had planned to bring it back for next week’s meeting. However, given the public comments made today, the Board may want to take a different approach. The Board could either direct staff to proceed or authorize Will to re-review the request and make a determination. Commissioner Crawford expressed he is fine with either option.

The Zoom video ended at 9:12 a.m. due to a security breach where an individual engaged in inappropriate behavior. The decision was made to suspend the use of Zoom

for the remainder of the meeting. Justin Alderman was attending the meeting via Zoom, so he was unfortunately not able to resume participation via zoom. Will Van Vactor called Justin Alderman from his phone and put Justin on speaker phone.

Mr. Van Vactor asked for clarification on the date of the records request. Mr. Blaine confirmed it was around November 21, with follow-up at the December 4 and December 18 meetings, and noted recent conversations with Mr. Albert. Mr. Van Vactor wanted to clarify which specific requests he's being authorized to review. Mr. Eisler suggested the December 4 request. Commissioner Crawford asked Justin Alderman which fees he was referring to, and Justin responded that a full fee waiver is being requested for all records related to NRAC and Mr. Kiser. Commissioner Crawford proposed that Justin and Will work together offline, with Will being given authority to proceed. Justin emphasized that the NRAC-related requests have the strongest justification and noted a backlog of requests, aiming to resolve the December 4 and 18 requests by the end of the week.

MOTION to authorize Will Van Vactor, County Manager, to invoke a policy for current public records requests and to develop a policy for future public records requests, and to provide documents to the *Prineville Review* by end of day Friday March 14th. Motion seconded by Commissioner Hermreck. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

Discussion item #1: OSU Extension Program Update:

Requester: Rebecca Keegan

Details: Ag Extension Manager Rebecca Keegan attended the Work Session to introduce Gordon Jones, Agronomist with OSU Extension's Department of Crop and Soil Science. Gordon shared an overview of his Extension Agronomy program, which serves Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson counties. His work includes informal classes and outreach on key agricultural topics such as pest management, forages, small grains, water and nutrient efficiency, and greenhouse techniques. Commissioner Hermreck raised concerns about the ongoing grasshopper issue in Eastern Oregon, noting a meeting scheduled in Paulina on Tuesday, March 18 at noon with representatives from the Oregon Department of Agriculture. She invited Gordon to attend and highlighted the availability of remaining program funds (~\$600,000) for mitigation. Rebecca also noted that Gordon's office is located in Prineville.

Discussion item #2: HR Department Update:

Requester: Meghan McKee

Details: Human Resources Director Meghan McKee attended the Work Session to provide an update on department activities and discuss two key items with the Board of Commissioners. The new Human Resources Information System (HRIS) is currently in the validation phase and is expected to go live by the end of the month. Initial rollout will include onboarding tools, followed by the benefits module in April/May. The system will feature a self-service portal allowing employees to access personal HR information. Additional modules, including time and attendance (which will require employees to clock in/out), training, e-forms, and recruitment, will be introduced in phases throughout the year. Ms. McKee recommended removing the short version of the

Employee Handbook from the County website. This version was added in September 2023 alongside the original, resulting in two published versions. Moving forward, the County will maintain only a single, updated version of the handbook.

Discussion item #3: Inter-County Mutual Aid Agreement Review & Update:

Requester: Katie Plumb

Details: Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb and Emergency Manager AJ Crawford attended the Work Session to present an overview of the Multi-County Omnibus Mutual Aid Agreement and request updated signatures from the Board of Commissioners. The existing agreement, originally adopted by Crook County in 2010/2011, outlines protocols for mutual aid across 20 counties during emergencies such as wildfires, floods, and public health events. Though reviewed annually by legal and emergency management staff, changes in contact information and operational updates have prompted a formal request for the Board to re-sign the agreement. AJ Crawford noted that the agreement ensures a streamlined, pre-authorized process for resource sharing across counties during emergencies. Recent examples include deploying local SAR members and canines to assist in a child search and providing law enforcement support in Wheeler County following a tragedy. Katie Plumb added that the agreement also covers public health staff, who may be called upon during disease outbreaks or large-scale events such as a Cascadia subduction zone incident. The updated agreement will be placed on the March 19th Consent Agenda for final approval.

Discussion item #4: Request for Reconsideration - Greenbar Excavation:

Requester: John Eisler

Details: Community Development Director John Eisler attended the Work Session to discuss a request for reconsideration. The Crook County Board of Commissioners recently held a hearing on Greenbar Excavation, LLC's application to add a portion of the Bartels Site to the County's inventory of significant resources. During the hearing, there appeared to be agreement on setback concerns related to a neighboring property, but the Board has not yet signed a final decision. Greenbar's attorney has now submitted a formal Request to Reconsider a single issue — specifically, the setback between the proposed mining area and a neighboring property owned by Carter (Tax Lot 501/Lot 14 in the Cimmarron Hills Subdivision). Because the decision hasn't been finalized, this is not technically a reconsideration under state law, but rather a request to reopen the record under Crook County Code 18.172.080(18). If the Board agrees to reopen the record, a third hearing would be necessary, with notice given to all parties entitled to participate. The new hearing would only address the limited issue raised in the request. During the discussion, Commissioner Hermreck expressed support for holding another hearing to clarify the setback issue, stating she felt it was the right thing to do. Commissioner Crawford questioned whether the entire process would need to be reopened, and Mr. Eisler confirmed that it would not. Commissioner Hermreck emphasized that the specific setback—particularly the 50-foot distance—remains unclear and needs to be addressed. Mr. Eisler noted that a date would need to be set for the third hearing, and Commissioners indicated that April 8th would work for them. The Board agreed to schedule the third hearing for April 8th at 1:00 p.m.

MOTION to withdraw the final motion on Ordinance 346 Application 217-24-000070-PLNG for Greenbar Excavation, LLC made on November 6, 2024, and to reopen the record for a third public hearing to consider the limited issue of the setback of the mining operation to the dwelling on tax lot 501 lot 14 on the Cimmaron Hills subdivision owned by Carter at the Crook County Annex on April 8th at 1 pm. Motion seconded by Commissioner Hermreck. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

Discussion item #5: 2025 Land Use Legislative Update:

Requester: John Eisler

Details: Community Development Director John Eisler provided an update on potential significant land use legislation for the 2025 Regular Session. With over 3,000 bills introduced, Mr. Eisler presented a broad overview and sought input on which bills the County should focus on, suggesting they limit comments to the most impactful ones. Housing bills are a primary focus, with several proposals including changes to land use application deadlines, accessory dwelling unit regulations, and land use on farm and forest zones. Notable housing bills include SB 974, reducing land use application decision time to 45 days for single-family dwellings, and HB 3673, reducing the decision time for housing or mental health facilities to 90 days. Additionally, several bills target exclusive farm use (EFU) lands, such as SB 77 (allowing home occupations on farm or forest land) and SB 788 (permitting weddings or events on EFU lands east of the Cascade Range). Other bills discuss changes to land use for various purposes, like SB 940, allowing certain developments on farmland, and HB 2455, permitting home occupations by non-resident property owners on resource lands. Miscellaneous bills include SB 501 & HB 2178, which limit standing in appeals, and SB 502, which awards attorney fees in unsuccessful appeals. These bills aim to address a variety of land use, zoning, and housing issues in Oregon.

Discussion item #6: Oregon Dept. of Forestry IGA for leasing ramp space at Airport for Fire season:

Requester: Kelly Coffelt

Details: Airport Manager Kelly Coffelt attended the Work Session to discuss the Oregon Department of Forestry's annual agreement to lease ramp space at the Airport for fire season operations. The lease, a standard agreement in place for several years, allows the Department to station single engine air tankers on-site from May 15 through October and provides the Airport with approximately \$1,400 per month, totaling around \$8,400 for the season. Some minor revisions are being proposed to remove certain services from the agreement, such as trash, toilets, and wash stations previously provided by the Airport (valued at \$300–\$500 per month). The updated agreement will return to the Board for approval via the consent agenda in the coming weeks.

Discussion item #7: Request for Hangar Building Land Lease at Airport:

Requester: Kelly Coffelt

Details: Airport Manager Kelly Coffelt attended the Work Session to present a request from Kay Larkin to enter into a standard hangar land lease at the Crook County Airport for the construction of a new private-use hangar. Mr. Coffelt has reviewed the proposed building plans and selected location and recommends approval of the lease. The terms

include an initial rent payment of \$25,000 and an annual rent of \$1,976. The lease represents a positive addition to the airport, generating additional lease revenue. A draft lease has been prepared, and County Counsel is finalizing the document. Mr. Coffelt anticipates having Kay sign the lease by Friday, with the item planned for inclusion on next week's consent agenda for final approval from the Board of Commissioners.

Discussion item #8: Airport Hangar Project - Discuss request for approval for Precision Approach Engineering Service during Construction Contract:

Requester: Kelly Coffelt

Details: Airport Manager Kelly Coffelt attended the Work Session to request approval for a contract with Precision Approach Engineering (PAE) to provide construction-phase services for the Airport Hangar Project. The Airport has been awarded an FAA grant to support the engineering, design, and construction of a new 10-unit aircraft storage hangar aimed at generating additional revenue. PAE, the Airport's consulting engineer, will handle oversight, inspections, and coordination in compliance with FAA requirements. The project aligns with the Airport's capital budget and has been previously reviewed by the Board of Commissioners and the Finance Director. While the proposed contract is valued at \$89,000 (assuming full consultant oversight), Mr. Coffelt's active involvement may reduce the cost by \$10,000–\$20,000. Construction is targeted to begin in April, and the item is expected to be placed on the March 19th consent agenda for final approval.

Discussion item #9: Discussion on grant opportunities and bridge replacements needed in the future, and use of Consulting group Scope of Work (SOW):

Requester: Brad Haynes

Details: Road Superintendent Brad Haynes attended the Work Session to begin discussions on replacing seven bridges in Crook County, four in Paulina, two in Powell Butte, and one in Lone Pine. He proposed engaging a consulting group to prepare a Scope of Work (SOW) that includes required impact studies and grant research to make the County competitive for future federal infrastructure grants. The consultant's initial fee is \$50,000, which Mr. Haynes proposes to include in the FY 2025–26 budget. Mr. Haynes presented three major grant opportunities: BIP Grant: Minimum award of \$2.5M, up to 80% of eligible project costs, requiring a 20% local match or in-kind services; RAISE Grant: Up to \$25M, 100% federally funded, no local match required; missed 2025 deadline but hopes to apply in 2026; FLAP Grant: Supports maintenance and pedestrian infrastructure, typically requires a 20% match. The estimated cost to replace all seven bridges is \$10–15 million. These projects require extensive documentation, including NEPA compliance, to qualify for funding. Mr. Haynes emphasized that this is a proactive step to prepare for future grant cycles, bundle all bridges into a single application, and address currently failing infrastructure. While funding is not yet available, it is expected to be budgeted. The presentation was intended to inform the Board of Commissioners and initiate planning.

Discussion item #10: 2025-2027 Community Dispute Resolution Program Grant Funds:

Requester: Will Van Vactor

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor attended the Work Session to discuss the 2025–2027 Community Dispute Resolution Program Grant, which would fund mediation services to help resolve local disputes—such as conflicts between neighbors—before escalating to formal hearings. Commissioner Crawford voiced concern about using a local mediator, and Community Development Director John Eisler noted that Dave Allen, who currently handles family law and land use mediation, could be a strong candidate if the County can bypass the RFP process. The grant would cover up to 16 disputes and requires a formal resolution to proceed. The item is scheduled for final approval on the March 19th consent agenda.

Discussion item #11: Sheriff's Office Monthly Update:

Requester: Bill Elliott

Details: Undersheriff Bill Elliott provided the Sheriff's Office monthly update for February at the Work Session. Personal crimes dropped by 17%, community crimes by 9.7%, and mental health-related cases decreased by 66%, while property crimes remained steady and sex crimes rose by 18%. Elliott noted that crime numbers may rise in March with improving weather. Calls for service increased 17%. He also shared details of a recent robbery case at the end of February, where deputies responded quickly, detained a male and female from Deschutes County, recovered stolen items, and discovered narcotics. The case went to a grand jury the following week.

Manager Report:

County Manager Will Van Vactor noted that the only item he was going to discuss was the fee waiver which was addressed earlier in the meeting.

Commissioner Updates:

Commissioner Crawford provided an update on his recent trip to Washington, D.C., where he met with Representative Bentz's office to discuss Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding and related issues. He raised concerns about FEMA's limitations in addressing water-related impacts, noting that a FEMA representative is now conducting a deeper review to explore alternatives to simply increasing insurance rates. Crawford also emphasized the importance of restoring the 25% share of timber receipts to counties and discussed stewardship contracts and potential increases in logging. Bentz's office expressed interest in pursuing legislation to support these efforts.

Commissioner Hermreck shared that she and Commissioner Barney have been actively drafting letters on key legislative issues. They submitted a letter in support of HB 2408, emphasizing the importance of agriculture and OSU extension stations. They opposed HB 2548, which proposes creating an additional board to regulate agriculture and employment. They also supported HB 3349 and HB 3350, which would provide funding and resources for rural fire protection, particularly benefiting rangeland agencies with aging equipment. An action alert was issued for HB 5004, which addresses jail funding; current rates underestimate actual costs (\$15 per inmate versus \$18), and Crook County is already facing a funding shortfall. The County is advocating for adequate financial support for local jails and community corrections through this bill.

MOTION to sign today the letter in support of HB5004. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

Public Comment:

Mike Ervin expressed his appreciation for the Citizen's Academy, commending Bill Elliott for his leadership in the program. He noted that both he and his wife are currently participating and praised the strong collaboration among all agencies involved. Mr. Ervin also encouraged others in the community to participate, recommending the program as a valuable and informative experience.

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 11:13 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Puerner / Breyanna Cupp