

**CROOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MINUTES
OF MARCH 19, 2025, REGULAR MEETING
Open Portion**

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Meeting on March 19, 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; Commissioner Seth Crawford

Absentees: None

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Counsel Eric Blaine; Community Development Director John Eisler; Executive Assistant and Communications Officer Sarah Puerner; County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; Airport Manager Kelly Coffelt; Finance Director Christina Haron; Emergency Manager AJ Crawford; Systems Administrator Chelsea Watson; Clerk Cheryl Seely; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; Library Director Sarah Beeler; District Attorney Kari Hathorn; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Undersheriff Bill Elliott; Business Analyst Micheala Edwards; Senior Planner Katie McDonald; Sheriff Gautney; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Assessment Technician Linda Pepper; Appraiser Karen Bushnell; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Natural Resources Manager Tim Deboodt; Monty Kurtz; Steve Warring; Mandi Puckett; Duane Porter; Kim Paterson; Seth Anderson; Lindsey McGuire; Andrea Weaber; Justin Alderman; Chris Cookston; and members of the public.

REGULAR SESSION

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

Public Comment:

Community Development Director John Eisler addressed questions raised during Senator Wyden's recent town hall regarding the Conditional Use Permit (CUP). He clarified that while the County has the authority to revoke a CUP, doing so is often ineffective due to the potential for higher courts to overturn the decision.

Julie Thompson asked how many violations or complaints would need to occur before the County has sufficient legal standing to revoke a permit without it being overturned, and whether the involvement of an additional law firm is related to that effort.

Commissioner Crawford responded by explaining that issues related to water quality and testing fall under the jurisdiction of state agencies such as the Governor's Office, DOGAMI, DEQ, and state legislators. He emphasized that the County is doing what it can, but does not have control over those agencies.

Adam Mikulski suggested the County consider hiring additional support to ensure future CUPs are more enforceable and better protect the public. In response, John Eisler confirmed that moving forward, the County will fully enforce its development code.

Mike Ervin voiced his support for the HDCA program, stating that “The Hub” is a good program and deserving of continued backing.

Consent Agenda:

1. Inter-County Mutual Aid Agreement Review & Update
2. Approval of Hangar Building Land Lease at Airport
3. Airport Hangar Project - Approval for Precision Approach Engineering Service during Construction Contract
4. 2025-2027 Community Dispute Resolution Program Grant Funds

MOTION to approve the consent agenda as presented. Motion seconded by Commissioner Hermreck. No discussion. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, and Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Discussion item #5: The Hub Project Grant Funding Request for Year 1:

Requester: Mandi Puckett

Details: HDCA Community Relations Director Mandi Puckett attended the Regular Session to request funding for Phase 1 of the HDCA Hub Project, a multi-phased initiative aimed at expanding services for families and children in Crook County. While the overall budget can be projected, it cannot be finalized until the Facility and Property Assessment is completed. This assessment will address building use codes, occupancy permits, and identify any required maintenance, renovations, or construction costs. The immediate funding request covers three key components of Phase 1: Completion of the Facility and Property Assessment; Upgrades to meet childcare room requirements so children on the waiting list can be served; and Project coordination for continued development of The Hub. Several community members and local leaders spoke in support of the project, including Duane Porter (HDCA Board Vice President and Financial Advisor), Kim Patterson (HDCA Board Director and Mortgage Officer), and Mandi Puckett. Additional support was expressed by Seth Anderson and Lindsay MacGuire of SAJ Architecture, Steve Waring and Andrea Weaver from Crook County Parks & Recreation, and City Manager Steve Forrester from the City of Prineville. No formal action was taken at the meeting. Commissioners noted that they will need to consult with the Finance Department to evaluate funding options for the request.

Discussion item #6: Consider recommendation to the Compensation Committee:

Requester: Will Van Vactor

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor presented an update to the Board of Commissioners regarding the Elected Officials Compensation Committee and outlined options for moving forward. The Compensation Committee met on March 6 and 13 to review applications for a vacant third member position and recommended the appointment of Blane Noland. Mr. Van Vactor outlined three options for the Board: Accept and appoint Blane Noland; consider other applicants or reopen recruitment; or restructure the committee to consist of citizen members of the Budget Committee, a change he was already planning to propose for next year. This shift would improve efficiency, align compensation discussions with broader budget considerations, and reduce administrative burden. Commissioners expressed mixed views. Commissioner

Crawford proposed expanding the Budget Committee to five citizen members, allowing current compensation committee members to transition over. Commissioner Hermreck opposed appointing the recommended candidate due to concerns raised by community members and the selection process that was followed. Commissioner Hermreck supported merging the committees and agreed to moving Rhonda to the Budget Committee. Commissioner Barney also expressed dissatisfaction with the process and supported the idea of using Budget Committee members, who are more engaged with overall county finances. The suggested Compensation Committee for this year would include Bill, Rhonda, and two Budget Committee members: Scott Tibbs and Steve Brown. County Counsel noted that while the Compensation Committee cannot be eliminated, the Board has authority to appoint its members, including repurposing citizen members of the Budget Committee to serve in this role.

MOTION to appoint to the current year's Crook County Elected Official Compensation Committee, the members Ronda Sneva, William Anderson, Scott Tibbs, and Steven Brown. Motion seconded by Commissioner Hermreck. No discussion. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, and Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

County Manager Will Van Vactor recommended bringing a formal policy back to the Board of Commissioners at a future date to establish a clear and consistent process for the coming years.

Manager Report:

Will Van Vactor requested clarification from the Board regarding last week's motion on Justin Alderman's public records fee waiver request. While a response was provided for Alderman's November 25th request—previously discussed on December 4th and 18th—there is still a pending request dated December 31st related to NRAC. Mr. Van Vactor asked whether the Board's recent motion also applies to the December 31st request and whether he should respond accordingly. Commissioner Crawford suggested waiving that request as well and recommended developing a formal policy for handling records requests moving forward. Mr. Van Vactor agreed, noting this is an opportunity to streamline the process. Commissioner Hermreck also supported focusing on creating a policy. Commissioner Barney confirmed that the intention is to include the December 31st request under the same waiver action.

MOTION to authorize Will Van Vactor to make a decision on the request and to extend the request to also include the December 31st request. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, and Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Letter of Support - Reauthorization of SRS Program

Will Van Vactor informed the Board that a draft letter of support for the reauthorization

of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) Program is ready for their review and signature. He noted that signing the letter would be a meaningful show of support for the program.

MOTION to send the SRS letter to Bentz, Wyden, and Merkley in support of SRS funding. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, and Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Commissioner Updates:

Commissioner Crawford recognized National Sunshine Week, which highlights the importance of transparency in government and celebrates the Freedom of Information Act, ensuring public access to records. He took the opportunity to commend Sarah Puerner for her outstanding work in promptly posting Board meetings to the County website. Commissioner Crawford emphasized the importance of extending this transparency to all boards and committees, encouraging them to conduct meetings via Zoom and upload recordings to the website within 2–3 days. The Board agreed with this goal and expressed support for improving public access to all committee and board meetings.

Commissioner Barney reported on his recent visit to training centers in Denver with Core3, focused on law enforcement and fire services. He described the tour as informative and valuable, offering insight into emergency response operations at those facilities. He plans to compile the information and present it at an upcoming meeting.

Commissioner Hermreck shared that the recent grasshopper meeting was very well attended. She noted that grasshopper populations have been tracked in Oregon since 1959, and highlighted a striking historical example from 1979, when grasshoppers in Jordan Valley consumed the paint off buildings without being affected. She emphasized that grasshoppers are becoming an increasingly serious issue across the state.

Public Comment:

Mike Ervin asked whether "SRS" stands for Secure Rural Schools, and the Commissioners confirmed that it does.

Karen Mikulski addressed the Board regarding a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) violation she submitted concerning uncontrolled dust at the Knife River site. She stated that Knife River's response—that their records showed no equipment issues on the day in question—was unsatisfactory, a point Commissioner Crawford also acknowledged. Karen noted she would be submitting another complaint to Louis Seals following the meeting. She also referenced a separate CUP violation related to sediment at the Woodward pit, seeking clarification on Knife River's response, which suggested the area was no longer an active mining cell due to being filled with overburden. Karen requested to review Knife River's full response to that complaint.

Community Development Director John Eisler recommended that Karen submit a public records request and noted that there is no charge for receiving the documents in PDF format. A fee would only apply if printed copies are requested.

Dick Zimmerlee informed the Board that funding for the next round of testing was approved last Friday. He noted that Knife River currently oversees the Stafford site, and there appears to be co-mingling of materials from Stafford onto the Woodward site. Zimmerlee stressed that the County is at a critical point and should consider hiring a geologist or mining industry expert to ensure proper oversight and compliance.

John Eisler added that the Stafford site is currently under review by the City of Prineville for inclusion in its Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). A meeting was held on the topic the previous night, with another scheduled soon. The property is expected to be rezoned from Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) to Heavy Industrial while still under County jurisdiction, after which it will be annexed into the city.

Justin Alderman thanked the Commissioners for addressing community concerns and acknowledged that the County Manager is currently working on the public records request, along with reviewing the standards outlined in Oregon's public records law. He requested a fee reduction or waiver for the records request due today, citing strong public interest. Additionally, he asked that the County Manager be authorized to review and determine appropriate responses to all future records requests until a formal public records process is adopted, in order to help prevent delays moving forward.

Adam Mikulski spoke as a concerned citizen, noting that while The Hub is requesting funding, it's unclear exactly how much is being asked of the County. He acknowledged the current budget constraints at both the local and federal levels and expressed appreciation for the Commissioners' consideration of the financial impact. Adam suggested exploring alternative funding sources, such as seeking a grant from Knife River. He also raised concerns about the status of the former mining pond, questioning whether claims—such as it being filled to six feet—are being verified. He emphasized the importance of having someone inspect the site to ensure compliance with required conditions. Commissioner Hermreck and Community Development Director John Eisler will look further into this.

MOTION to adjourn. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, and Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 10:56 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Puerner / Breyanna Cupp