

**CROOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MINUTES
OF APRIL 16, 2025, REGULAR MEETING
Open Portion**

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular meeting on April 16, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. in the County Annex 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; Executive Assistant /Communications Officer Sarah Puerner; County Manager Will Van Vactor; Administrative Assistant Mona Glade; Finance Director Christina Haron; Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; Assessor Jon Soliz; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Modernization Manager Stephanie O’Neal; Clerk Cheryl Seely; HR Director Meghan McKee; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Community Development Director John Eisler; Natural Resource Manager Tim Deboodt; Library Director Sarah Beeler; Undersheriff Bill Elliott; Katie McDonald; Aaron Boyce; Russ Deboodt; Kelsey Lucas; Jon Stark; Mike Ervin; Julie Thompson; Joanna Gardner; Adam Mikulski; Karen Mikulski; Greg Lambert; Tawndy Byrd; Lori Desjardins; Brian Carmack; Ken Smith; Denise Smith; Prineville Review; Susan Crawford; and members of the public.

REGULAR SESSION

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

Public Comment:

Adam Mikulski commented on the EDCO funding request on the agenda. He expressed concern as a taxpayer about increasing public contributions to a non-governmental lobbying organization, noting EDCO is requesting an additional \$10,000 each from the County and City. He questioned the need for more funding, especially when the justification seemed to be retaining one employee and emphasized that many community members are struggling financially. Adam also raised concerns about EDCO’s role in easing regulations, which he believes are in place to protect the public. He stressed the importance of transparency and encouraged more citizens to attend public meetings to understand how taxpayer money is being spent. Commissioner Crawford responded by encouraging community members to participate in meetings.

Ken Smith commented on the proposed biomass facility, expressing concerns about its location near his 150-acre property of productive farmland. He questioned why the city and county would consider removing agricultural land for industrial use, specifically a rock pit and biomass facility. Ken raised concerns about potential health impacts from such a facility and inquired whether financial ties to Knife River or the Stafford family might influence decision-making.

Commissioner Barney clarified that he has no conflicts of interest, and the County has not been approached regarding the biomass project and noted that the area has long been zoned as a rock pit and classified as a Goal 5 resource. Commissioner Crawford disclosed that he owns property in the area. Ken also asked about the approval process, and Commissioner Barney explained that any changes to the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) would need to go through the city, then be reviewed by the Planning Department, Planning Commission, and ultimately the Board of Commissioners.

Julie Thompson voiced concerns about the Stafford pit and the potential rezoning of nearby agricultural land (currently EFU). She questioned whether the land is truly zoned for industrial use and emphasized that, even with a Conditional Use Permit (CUP), changes to the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) would significantly alter land use requirements. Julie expressed frustration that CUP conditions are not being followed and raised concerns about the long-term impact of mining on neighboring properties. She noted that there are still seven heavy industrial parcels available and questioned why prime farmland should be converted. Julie also asked whether the property in question is being annexed into the city and who is responsible for sending public notices, clarified by Commissioner Hermreck as a city action.

Commissioner Hermreck suggested waiting until the April 23rd special session when DEQ will present water testing results, but Julie expressed frustration with ongoing delays, stating that DEQ indicated testing could take two years unless \$50,000 is provided to expedite it. She criticized the County for allocating funds to other entities while local environmental concerns remain unresolved.

Julie also requested better public notice procedures, emphasizing that the current 750-foot notification radius is too limited to inform the broader neighborhood. Commissioner Barney confirmed the County would notify residents if the proposal advances and will work on improving communication.

John Eisler, Community Development Director, encouraged residents to be patient with government processes but persistent in raising concerns. He acknowledged that public voices have been heard and noted that the City has tabled the UGB proposal and is returning to the drawing board. John also shared that his office is working on creating an events page for the Community Development Department to improve transparency and public access to updates.

Maureen, a resident of Quail Valley Drive, asked whether the Board of Commissioners was the appropriate body to address concerns about the proposed biomass plant, referring to a previous comment by Commissioner Barney that the project is still in preliminary stages.

Commissioner Barney clarified that the City of Prineville is leading the biomass project and has been involved for several years. While the County supports the concept, particularly for its potential benefits to the agricultural industry and juniper management, the city is spearheading the effort.

In response, Maureen asked whether concerned residents should attend City Council meetings to express their concerns. Julie Thompson added that public input must be

submitted in writing or by email to be officially counted. Community Development Director John Eisler confirmed that, at this stage, comments should be directed to the City. The County would only become involved if the issue progresses to a UGB amendment, at which point it would enter the County's review process.

Mike Ervin provided a reminder that the City Council will be holding a meeting on Tuesday, April 22nd, where the biomass plant may be discussed. He encouraged anyone seeking to learn more or provide input to attend, emphasizing that Commissioner Barney was correct, the City of Prineville is currently the appropriate entity to address related concerns.

Consent Agenda:

1. Approve Minutes

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

Discussion item #2: Proclamation regarding April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month:

Requester: Joanna Gardner

Details: Joanna Gardner, Regional Services Manager for Saving Grace, requested the Board of Commissioners proclaim April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Commissioner Barney read the proclamation, which emphasized the widespread impact of sexual violence, the role of systemic oppression in creating barriers to services, and the importance of community accountability and prevention. It honored advocates' efforts and affirmed that sexual violence is preventable through collective action. The Board officially proclaimed April 2025 as Sexual Assault Awareness Month in Crook County and encouraged public participation.

MOTION to proclaim April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month and to approve this proclamation. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Discussion item #3: EDCO Budget Proposal for Sustainable Economic Development: Addressing Rising Costs with an Indexed Funding Model:

Requester: Kelsey Lucas

Details: Kelsey Lucas and Jon Stark from EDCO (Economic Development for Central Oregon) presented a budget request to address rising operational costs and propose a sustainable funding model for long-term stability. They requested a 20% increase to the local Crook County EDCO program, from \$50,000 to \$60,000, and an additional \$10,000 investment for a Platinum membership in EDCO Regional. EDCO also proposed a 3–5% annual indexed increase (COLA/CPI) moving forward to keep pace with inflation and avoid future large funding gaps.

Jon emphasized that EDCO is not a lobbying organization but does engage in advocacy, supports traded-sector industries, and helps attract and retain quality jobs in Crook County. He highlighted measurable impacts, including 52% growth in GDP over the past 3 years, support for large employers like Facebook and Apple, and the creation of a desirable brand for businesses seeking affordable alternatives to Bend.

Commissioners asked for clarification on EDCO's deliverables, regional resource management, and how increased funding would be allocated. Jon responded that maintaining Kelsey Lucas's full-time role is key and that Crook County benefits directly from her efforts.

County Manager Will Van Vactor confirmed the request has not yet been budgeted and noted that any new funding might have an impact on other services. He recommended further review with the Finance Department to determine feasibility.

The Board of Commissioners agreed to further evaluate the request, directing Will to return with a funding proposal. Commissioner Hermreck emphasized the importance of local economic vitality and the need to create job opportunities that will encourage younger residents to stay in the community.

MOTION to approve at the 10k local and the 10k regional, subject to budget approval. Motion seconded by Commissioner Hermreck. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Discussion item #4: Letter of Support for the Crook County Justice Reinvestment Program Grant Application:

Requester: Aaron Boyce

Details: Aaron Boyce from Community Corrections requested a letter of support from the Board of Commissioners for the County's 2025–2027 Justice Reinvestment Program grant application. The grant has been managed locally for the past eight years and currently funds two key positions: a half-time mental health technician/probation officer and a part-time Deputy District Attorney. The letter of support is a requirement for the application, which is due this Friday. Commissioner Barney expressed strong support for the program and thanked Aaron for his continued efforts.

MOTION to approve the letter of support for the Justice Reinvestment Grant for 25-27. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Discussion item #5: Notification of Fair Board Vacancy:

Requester: Casey Daly

Details: Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly informed the Board of Commissioners of a vacancy on the Crook County Fair Board following the resignation of Stanley Flynn from Position 7, which is set to expire on December 31, 2026. This notice initiates the 30-day recruitment process, with a public advertisement to be published next week. Stanley expressed appreciation for his time on the fair board, stating he is stepping down to

focus on other commitments. The Board of Commissioners thanked Stanley for his many years of dedicated service and contributions to the Crook County Fair.

Discussion item #6: Public Hearing: First Reading of Ordinance 350 - Crook County Code Flood Damage Prevention code amendment:

Requester: John Eisler

Details: Community Development Director John Eisler presented the Public Hearing for the First Reading of Ordinance 350, a proposed amendment to Crook County's Flood Damage Prevention Code. The amendment updates and consolidates language governing development in Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA), revising Chapters 18.84 and 15.04 of the Crook County Code, which have not been updated since 2012. The changes aim to establish clear, objective standards for development within the SFHA and come to the Board with a recommendation from the Planning Commission. This marks the first of two required readings for Ordinance 350.

MOTION to read by title only. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Commissioner Barney read the ordinance by title only. The public hearing was opened.

Senior Planner Katie McDonald presented the Planning Commission's recommendation to update Crook County's development code for mapped Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA). She outlined three key components: (1) removing outdated irrigation language from the farm use table in Chapter 18.16, originally added during the 2019 model code update; (2) consolidating floodplain development standards, currently split between Chapter 15 (structural requirements) and Chapter 18 (land use regulations), into one section with updated definitions; and (3) aligning the County's code with the State's 2019 model ordinance, already adopted by jurisdictions such as the City of Prineville, to provide greater clarity for staff and applicants. After two work sessions, the Planning Commission has forwarded these recommended updates to the Board for consideration.

Commissioner Crawford asked whether the proposed changes were intended to align with State requirements. Ms. McDonald clarified that no new State rules were being added; the goal is simply to improve clarity by consolidating information that was previously located in two separate sections of the code.

No public comment was received. The public hearing was closed. The next reading for Ordinance 350 will be May 7th.

Manager Report:

County Manager Will Van Vactor provided several updates to the Board. He noted that the courthouse project is moving forward, with geotechnical analysis scheduled to begin soon. Department heads are currently reviewing draft budgets, and the Budget Committee is set to meet on May 12 and 13. He also announced two upcoming open houses for the Transportation System Plan, with a noon session focused on Juniper Canyon alternatives and an evening session at 6:00 p.m. to review recommended projects countywide. In addition, a Special Session is scheduled for April 23 at 5:30 p.m.

for agencies to present findings from testing at the KR Pit. Finally, with wildfire season approaching, staff will meet in May with Matt Smith to review the 2022 delegation of authority and informally begin fire season preparations.

Commissioner Crawford raised concerns about whether the meeting room would be large enough for the upcoming DEQ meeting and suggested using Carey Foster Hall. Julie Thompson confirmed the current room would not accommodate the expected turnout. John Eisler agreed to follow up with Casey about Carey Foster Hall's availability and, if unavailable, check with Rebecca about the Clover Building. Other options discussed included the school (not feasible due to cost and notice requirements), the jury assembly room at the Justice Center (which would require a sheriff on duty), the Museum, or the Annex. Commissioner Barney emphasized the need for a space with sufficient room and technical capabilities, and the Board agreed that staff would work to secure an appropriate location.

Commissioner Updates:

Commissioner Hermreck reported that the Transportation System Plan meetings are being held today. Commissioner Crawford will attend the Juniper Canyon session, while she will participate in the 6:00 p.m. meeting. She noted that a public notice was not issued in time for all Commissioners to attend but stated this will be addressed more effectively in the future.

Commissioner Crawford reported on a recent site visit with John and representatives from Congressman Cliff Bentz's office to explore potential alternative access routes in Juniper Canyon. Several promising options were identified, and John will conduct further research before presenting a plan. He also noted funding challenges related to halted federal timber sales but highlighted a short-term solution through receiving 25% of activity revenues from the Ochocos, which will benefit the community. Additionally, he discussed concerns raised by Powell Butte residents regarding proposed power lines and stated he will work with County Manager Will Van Vactor to develop a response.

Commissioner Barney reported that geotechnical testing is moving forward and noted ongoing facility issues at the courthouse, including the need to remove vines and address structural problems. He emphasized the importance of continuing with the planned expansion and identifying overall repair costs.

Public Comment:

Community members raised concerns regarding County priorities and permitting processes. Julie Thompson questioned why the Board would consider funding for raises but not for geologist water testing related to ongoing issues at the Stafford pit. She cited repeated complaints about noncompliance with the CUP and pressed the Board on its authority to suspend the permit. Commissioners Crawford and Hermreck, along with County Counsel and staff, emphasized that water and geological matters fall under state agency jurisdiction, though the County has invested significant staff time, legal resources, and outside counsel in the matter. John Eisler noted the County could revoke the CUP, but that would trigger a lengthy process likely resulting in re-approval.

Residents also voiced frustration about transparency, enforcement, and the need for stronger oversight in future land use decisions, particularly with the upcoming UGB expansion. Adam Mikulski expressed opposition to rezoning farmland for a proposed biomass project, citing pollution risks, lack of public understanding, and concerns about urea and toxin emissions. He urged the Board to fully evaluate the impacts without relying solely on consultants or DEQ. Commissioner Crawford clarified that he recused himself from involvement once the project location was determined due to a conflict of interest. The discussion concluded with notes on postponed hearings, Planning Commission applications, and the need for additional agricultural representation.

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

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 11:08 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Puerner