

CROOK COUNTY BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING MAY 12, 2025

Crook County Budget Committee met in a scheduled meeting. The meeting was held on Monday, May 12, 2025, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and was held at the Crook County Justice Center, located at 260 NW 2nd Street, Prineville, OR 97754. The principal subject discussed was the budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026.

Committee Members Present: Commissioner Seth Crawford, Commissioner Susan Hermreck, Commissioner Brian Barney, William “Bill” Anderson, Scott Tibbs, and Steve Brown

Absentees: None

Presenters: County Manager Will Van Vactor; Budget Manager Jamie Berger; County Clerk Cheryl Seely; Landfill Manager Jacquie Davis; Facilities Director James Preuss; County Counsel Eric Blaine; Library Director Sarah Beeler; Sheriff John Gautney; District Attorney Kari Hathorn; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Community Development Director John Eisler; Airport Manager Kelly Coffelt; Weed Control Supervisor Thomas Laird; Assessor Jon Soliz; HR Director Meghan McKee;
Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Administration Executive Assistant and Communication Officer Sarah Puerner; Administrative Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; IT Operations Manager Blaine Cheney; Patrol Lieutenant Mitch Madden; Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson; Community Corrections Lieutenant Aaron Boyce; Emergency Manager AJ Crawford; Jail Commander Andrew Rasmussen; Treasurer Galan Carter; Health and Human Services Deputy Director Camille Day; Administrative Services Manager Katrina Weitman;

The meeting was **called to order at 8:30 a.m.**

County Manager Will Van Vactor provided an introduction of the committee members. The budget committee discussed appointing a chairperson for the committee.

MOTION to nominate Bill Anderson as chairperson of the budget committee. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Committee Member Steve Brown votes Aye, Committee Member Scott Tibbs votes Aye, and Committee Member Bill Anderson votes Aye. Motion carried 6-0.

County Manager Will Van Vactor opened the committee meeting with a budget message, noting that the FY 2026 proposed budget was developed amid economic uncertainty, ongoing organizational restructuring, and a push for greater transparency. He described the budget as conservative and focused on essential services and long-term sustainability. Will presented key figures, including the general fund, appropriations, contingency, and reserves. He also reviewed strategic goals, budget challenges and actions, total budget, personnel changes, capital outlay, fee adjustments, property tax and levy information, and key points from the budget process. He concluded by

expressing appreciation for the budget committee, board of commissioners, staff, and the commitment of Crook County employees.

Will explained that a potential refund credit may be issued due to an unresolved appeal in the Oregon Tax Court concerning the centrally assessed value of intangible property.

Jamie Berger presented the proposed budget for the General Fund, including an overview of its resources and requirements. Christina Haron followed with an explanation of the non-departmental funds, describing this account as a "catch-all" for county items that don't fall under specific departments. The presentation also covered the Internal Service Departments, which include Administration and the Board of Commissioners, Legal Counsel, Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, and Facilities.

Administration: Will Van Vactor presented the proposed budget for Administration and the Board of Commissioners. He noted that the County's form of governance changed in March 2024, with a new County Manager hired in November 2024. The primary goal of the Administration is to deliver the highest possible level of service within the limits of available and allocated resources. For FY26, the Administration will focus on finalizing both the Facilities and Communications Plans, as well as supporting county-wide efforts to evaluate core services across departments. Will also informed the Budget Committee about the key performance indicators (KPIs) included in the proposed budget and noted that a live survey is currently underway to collect data in support of those KPIs.

County Counsel: Eric Blaine presented the proposed budget for County Legal Counsel and outlined the department's key goals. These include developing and delivering training as requested, collaborating with the Board of Commissioners, County Manager, and department directors to identify opportunities to offload or improve non-legal or non-essential functions, and transitioning the office to focus exclusively on providing legal services and related training.

Finance: Christina Haron presented the proposed budget for the Finance Department and outlined key departmental goals. These include continuing the implementation of the new ERP system and updated Chart of Accounts, along with integration across other County software platforms. Additional priorities are updating procedures and policies to align with new ERP workflow capabilities, enhancing internal controls, and streamlining Accounts Payable processes. The department also aims to improve both internal and external financial reporting, including the use of encumbrances and the implementation of a contract and grant management system within the ERP.

Human Resources: Meghan McKee presented the goals for the Human Resources department, focusing on the continued build-out and implementation of NeoGov (HRIS). The recruiting and onboarding modules are scheduled to go live in summer 2025, with a full system-wide launch planned for January 2026. Additional goals include updating job descriptions and the employee handbook, targeting completion by

summer 2025, obtaining SHRM certification, and completing exit interviews, which will be incorporated into NeoGov in 2025.

Information Technology: Will Van Vactor presented the goals for the IT department, which include reassessing and continuing the implementation of the Strategic Road Map, implementing a new department structure, and advancing the HRIS and Finance ERP software implementations. The department's focus is to build on a strong IT foundation to deliver excellent service across the organization. This includes enhancing IT staff and countywide training, increasing investment in cybersecurity and critical infrastructure, and conducting an assessment of the existing software stack.

Facilities: James Preuss presented the goals for the Facilities team, which include successfully commissioning and operating the new Justice Center, conducting a comprehensive review of all County facilities to identify cost-saving opportunities, and assessing and finalizing the County's space requirements. Additionally, the team plans to initiate the design phase for the Courthouse renovation and develop plans for buildings that will be vacated.

Sheriff: John Gautney provided an overview of the Sheriff's Office, highlighting recent accomplishments and ongoing challenges. In 2024, the jail processed 1,258 bookings, averaging 105 per month, and maintained several programs addressing substance abuse and transition issues. Court security handled over 12,800 people entering through security, recovering numerous weapons and prohibited items. Patrol services saw a 22% increase in calls for service, with additional deputies allowing more proactive enforcement, resulting in fewer complaints and increased impaired driving arrests. Technological upgrades and new vehicles have improved safety and communication. Parole and Probation adapted to recent state law changes, with manageable caseloads and the introduction of the state-funded L.E.A.D.S. program to support drug user accountability and treatment. Emergency and Special Services experienced an increase in Search and Rescue operations and mutual aid assistance, including wildfire responses. A new Emergency Manager updated key county emergency plans.

Challenges ahead include courthouse security, training new hires, rising violent crime caseloads, mental health issues, homelessness, staff reductions leading to burnout and mandatory overtime, impacts from recent legislation (HB4002 and Measure 114), and decreasing grant funding. Sheriff Gautney stressed that without additional staffing—specifically 13.5 unfunded FTEs—the office cannot maintain current service levels, and losing positions could force the shutdown of patrol shifts. The board discussed mental health funding and the jail's capacity for inmates with such needs. Funding for the L.E.A.D.S. program was noted as \$150K, the minimum state allocation.

District Attorney: Kari Hathorn presented the budget for the District Attorney's office, outlining the services provided, key highlights, and challenges faced. The office is currently short-staffed, lacking a Chief Deputy District Attorney, and experiencing high turnover among Deputy District Attorneys. Increased costs for training and recruiting are impacting on the budget. To address these issues, the DA is proposing the addition of an Investigator position. Challenges include heavy caseloads, with the DA handling

over 200 cases and Deputy District Attorneys managing between 120 to 150 cases each, as well as the lack of available attorneys to appear in court and at grand jury sessions.

Juvenile: Jamie Berger and Christina Haron presented the Juvenile Department's budget. Christina shared on the record notes from Erika Frickey, who was unable to attend the meeting, outlining services provided and potential changes to line items. The presentation included a review of the department's highlights, challenges, and services.

Assessor: Jon Soliz presented the Assessor's Office budget and highlighted several key areas. He noted the successful completion of a software conversion, with mobile Assessor tools now fully ready for field use. The department has maintained a strong focus on staff retention and training to ensure consistent service delivery and hired a new position within the last year. The office continues to provide essential services, including the assessment of market value for all real and personal property, and remains open to the public from 8 AM to 5 PM. Additionally, the department offers detailed, web-based information to better serve the community.

Jon also discussed current challenges, including the upcoming transition to new web search software. While the underlying data will remain the same, the format will change, and the department plans to proactively support frequent users—referred to as “power users”—in navigating the new platform. The Assessor's Office continues to provide reliable services through online data access, in-office support, and a highly experienced team with over 100 years of combined experience.

County Clerk: Cheryl Seely presented the budget for the County Clerk's Office and highlighted several key updates. She noted that the new statewide voter registration system (ORVIS) was terminated, and the office successfully completed the November 2024 General Election. Preparations are currently underway for the May 2025 Special District Election, with the May 2026 Primary Election on the horizon for the next fiscal year. Cheryl also mentioned ongoing work with the Archiving and Records Retention Committee, including projects involving the Commissioner Journal and road records. Challenges facing the office include a significant decline in recording activity compared to previous years, staff succession planning, microfilming of permanent records, space limitations, and preparation for the upcoming courthouse remodel. Core services provided by the Clerk's Office include document recording, ballot signature verification, and processing public records requests. Additionally, new services such as a digital research room and a Property Recording Alert Service will be available soon.

Library Director: Sarah Beeler presented the proposed budget for the Crook County Library, outlining key highlights, challenges, and services. Highlights included an increased number of library card holders, completion of ADA compliance upgrades, improvements to the library catalog, and alignment of services with the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan to better serve the county, especially residents in Juniper Canyon. Challenges focused on staffing shortages, with the library director handling dual roles, outreach service limitations, and difficult decisions about reducing hours or cutting services due to budget constraints. The library anticipates losing two Mid Oregon personnel employees, and vacant positions will be carefully evaluated to maintain

service levels. To support outreach, a current part-time position will be promoted to full-time.

Fairgrounds: Casey Daly presented the proposed budget for the Fairgrounds Department, highlighting key accomplishments, challenges, and services. Highlights included completion of the new 3,200-square-foot Jockey Room (Caldera Building), efforts to reduce the annual fair budget deficit, renegotiation of event contracts to increase revenue, expansion of RV space rentals, support for state revenue measures SB780 and HB2304, pursuit of additional transient room tax revenue, ongoing upgrades to Grizzly Mountain Pavilion and arenas, and equipment refreshes. Challenges involve rising energy and operational costs, aging infrastructure, the need to accommodate larger events, keeping up with venue technology standards, balancing innovation with resistance to change, and competition with two other large arena facilities in the county. Services provided include cost-effective entertainment at the annual fair, support from 4-H, FFA, and the Livestock Sales Committee for fair premiums and judging costs, expanded open-class exhibits, stable fairgrounds staffing and maintenance, and the use of an event host to manage set-up and teardown duties.

Health and Human Services: Katie Plumb presented the proposed budget for Health and Human Services, outlining key highlights, challenges, and services in public health and mental health. Public health highlights include prevention and health promotion programs, an updated strategic plan, increased coordination for communicable disease mitigation, and active engagement in regional and state initiatives to advocate for Crook County and secure funding. Challenges include administrative burdens exceeding current capacity, reliance on temporary and siloed grant funding, space limitations due to staff being split between two buildings, and rapid internal and external changes. Public health services cover clinical preventive care such as reproductive health, immunizations, communicable disease prevention, emergency preparedness, family health programs like WIC and nurse home visiting, prevention efforts, and environmental health, which has shown stability and consistent outcomes with a goal of fiscal sustainability. Mental health highlights include the Mental Health Fund activity beginning FY24, contracted services funded through federal, state, and insurance sources, and ongoing involvement of the Community Health Advisory Council to support and ensure accountability for community mental health programs.

Veteran Services: Katie Plumb presented the proposed budget for the Veterans Services fund, highlighting an increase in new awards and total funds awarded to local veterans. Staffing remains a challenge due to limited office coverage when both staff members are out, prompting a request for an additional Veteran Service Officer to address these limitations. The office provides advocacy and assistance to veterans and their families in applying for a wide range of benefits from local, state, and federal agencies. These benefits include service-connected disability compensation, non-service-connected pensions, widows' pensions, burial benefits, education assistance, home improvement grants for handicap accessibility, specially adapted automobile grants, vocational rehabilitation, clothing allowances, and emergency grant funding.

Road Department: Brad Haynes presented the proposed budget for the Road Department, highlighting recent projects such as a 2-mile overlay on Barnes Road from Barnes Butte to Highway 126, deep base repairs and chip sealing, and an in-house thin lift leveling course on Upper Davis Loop covering 2 miles. The Transportation System Plan (TSP) update, led and funded by the Community Development department, was also noted as a key highlight. Challenges facing the department include catching up on deferred maintenance amid dwindling revenue streams, grant opportunities being on hold due to federal administration changes, aging equipment requiring upgrades, and difficulties with parts availability. Brad also discussed upcoming planned projects.

Community Development: John Eisler presented the proposed budget for the Planning and Building Department, highlighting that all seven building inspectors hold all four residential certifications and at least one commercial certification. In fiscal year 2025, the planning department received 272 land use applications, processed 181 onsite applications, and opened 68 code compliance cases. Challenges for the department include impacts from rising interest rates and tariffs leading to lower revenue, difficulties in recruitment and retention, and ongoing regulatory changes. John also outlined the broad range of services provided by the department, which include functions within building inspection, land use planning, onsite, code compliance, and general operations.

Landfill Manager: Jacquie Davis presented the proposed budget for the Landfill fund, outlining key highlights, challenges, and services. Highlights included the completion of the Solid Waste Management Plan final report, successful completion of four quarters of SEM testing for methane, a septic agreement with the City of Prineville, the purchase of a water truck, an updated franchise agreement with Republic Services, preparations for implementing the Recycling Modernization Act, and hosting three free community events. Challenges facing the landfill include continued SEM testing, potential implementation of methane collection and monitoring systems, new state-mandated programs, and partial final closure of the construction and demolition (C&D) cell due to an exterior slope change, all while working to keep public disposal costs low. The landfill operates as an enterprise fund primarily funded through tipping fees, which are adjusted as needed to cover operational costs. However, the potential cost of methane collection and monitoring systems is uncertain and could significantly impact the landfill's budget, possibly requiring alternative funding sources.

Airport Manager: Kelly Coffelt presented the proposed Airport budget, highlighting the completion and implementation of the new business plan and key capital improvements, including revenue-generating aircraft storage hangars and a \$750,000 FAA-funded runway reconstruction project. Challenges include making strategic decisions for future opportunities and generating enough revenue for long-term self-sustainability. The airport provides a safe, welcoming facility for air travel, training, emergency services, aircraft maintenance, and refueling. Kelly also discussed current private and business development, noting the number of available spots at the airport.

Weed Control: Thomas Laird presented the proposed budget for the Weed Control Department, outlining key highlights, challenges, and services. Highlights include a goal to fully recover the cost of operations, continued billing partnership with the Finance Department, increased public education and outreach through social media and websites, drafting a strategic plan, and expanding services to the Prineville Airport and Reservoir Park in FY26. The primary challenge is uncertainty around contract obligations. Weed Control provides services that, when fully reimbursed through contracts, offer net benefits to taxpayers by covering areas like public and private lands, utilities, rights-of-way, riparian zones, and forests. The department also offers free educational support to landowners to support weed control and wildfire mitigation.

Other Special Revenue Funds: Will Van Vactor, Jamie Berger, and Christina Haron presented an overview of the County's special revenue funds to the committee. These include the County Clerk's Special Revenue Fund, Community College Education Center Fund, Risk Management Fund, Title III Fund, Tourism Fund, Video Lottery Fund, Crook County School Fund, Special Transportation Fund, Surveyor Fund, and Taylor Grazing Fund.

Capital Projects Fund: Will Van Vactor provided an explanation of the Capital Projects Fund, while Christina Haron detailed the purpose and operation of the Capital Asset Reserve Fund and the Debt Service Fund.

Scott Tibbs inquired about a \$15,000 general fund allocation to the Wolf Committee, questioning whether the expenses were for tools. Commissioner Crawford clarified that the expenses were not for tools but for box lights and other non-lethal deterrents, which are funded through a state pass-through grant. Commissioner Crawford also explained that the 10% match requirement only applies to administrative costs, which the Wolf Committee does not request from the state. The funds in question are entirely grant-funded.

Public Comment: None

Compensation Committee Recommendation: Will Van Vactor presented the budget committee with the Compensation Committee's recommendation for elected official salaries. This year, for the first time, the recommendation included anchoring salaries to specific steps within the county's salary schedule and removing stipends. Will explained the steps each elected official was placed on and the resulting changes. Commissioner Hermreck inquired why the County Clerk's salary decreased by \$255. Jamie Berger clarified that the selected step was the closest fit once stipends were removed. Steve Brown and Scott Tibbs confirmed that the chosen step was the most appropriate based on the committee's evaluation.

Scott Tibbs made a **MOTION** to approve the recommendation for the elected officials' compensation. Motion seconded by Steve Brown. Commissioner Hermreck mentions that she would like to abstain and doesn't feel comfortable voting for her own compensation. The committee discussed whether elected officials should vote on their own compensation. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes

Aye. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Committee Member Steve Brown votes Aye, Committee Member Scott Tibbs votes Aye, and Committee Member Bill Anderson votes Aye. Motion carried 6-0.

Budget Committee Discussion: Bill Anderson expressed concern about the gap between the Sheriff's Office expectations and what the budget can realistically support. Commissioner Crawford acknowledged the difficulty and proposed working with County Manager Will Van Vactor to explore funding options. Scott Tibbs agreed, emphasizing the need for data-driven analysis to show the public what service levels correspond with different funding levels. He noted that staffing reductions have occurred, and their impact should be clearly communicated. Steve Brown added that the Sheriff's \$1 million loan will double next year and warned that anticipated funds, like those from the data center, are already committed. The budget committee discussed the current challenges and future planning. Christina noted Will is leading efforts to define core services for each department. Commissioner Hermreck agreed that long-term financial sustainability is a broader issue involving more than just the Sheriff's Office, mentioning aging infrastructure and other priorities. Commissioner Barney stressed the need for a concrete action plan. Will concluded by stating that the current proposed budget is a temporary balance, and the County must ensure organizational alignment around core services. The budget committee discussed the importance of reviewing departmental core services and establishing a timeline for developing a long-term plan. Will stated that the Sheriff's Office is the top priority in this process, with a goal to complete the review and have a plan in place by the end of summer. Will noted that in addition to prioritizing the Sheriff's Office for a core services review and planning effort by the end of summer, he anticipates having further analysis and detailed budget information for the Sheriff's Office available by mid-fall. The committee also discussed the staffing issues within the District Attorney's Office, particularly the difficulty of hiring and retaining prosecutors. The meeting concluded with the budget committee discussing scheduling its next session, emphasizing the importance of having a clear sustainability plan and supporting data prepared in advance. The committee also reviewed procedural options for how motions should be made, noting that in the previous year, a motion was passed to allocate any rollover funds to the Sheriff's Office.

Scott Tibbs made **MOTION** that any tax base that comes in over the projected 4% for Crook County get allocated to the Sheriff's department for this budget period. Motion seconded by Steve Brown. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Committee Member Steve Brown votes Aye, Committee Member Scott Tibbs votes Aye, and Committee Member Bill Anderson votes Aye. Motion carried 6-0.

Bill Anderson made **MOTION** that the budget committee of Crook County, Oregon approve the budget for 2026 fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, as proposed in the amount of \$132,182,000.00. Motion seconded by Scott Tibbs. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Committee Member Steve Brown votes Aye, Committee Member Scott Tibbs votes Aye, and Committee Member Bill Anderson votes Aye. Motion carried 6-0.

Bill Anderson made **MOTION** that the budget committee of Crook County, Oregon approve property taxes for the 2026 fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025, in the amount of \$3.8702 per \$1000.00 of assessed value for the permanent rate tax levy and in the amount \$673,000.00 for the general obligation bond levy. Motion seconded by Steve Brown. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Committee Member Steve Brown votes Aye, Committee Member Scott Tibbs votes Aye, and Committee Member Bill Anderson votes Aye. Motion carried 6-0.

Jamie informed the budget committee that the time scheduled for the following day would no longer be needed, as the committee successfully completed all its intended work during the current meeting.

Commissioner Hermreck made **MOTION** that budget committee as formed will meet on October 23rd to discuss the next steps to review levels of service across the organization, review any sort of action plans, recommendations, etc. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Committee Member Steve Brown votes Aye, Committee Member Scott Tibbs votes Aye, and Committee Member Bill Anderson votes Aye. Motion carried 6-0.

There being no further business, the meeting was **adjourned at 3:47 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp