

**CROOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MINUTES
OF OCTOBER 29, 2025, WORK SESSION
Open Portion**

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of Commissioners met in a regularly scheduled Work Session on October 29, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. in the Administration Conference room located at 203 NE Court Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

Board Members Present: Commissioner Brian Barney, Commissioner Susan Hermreck, and Commissioner Seth Crawford

Absentees:

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Counsel Eric Blaine; Assistant County Counsel Bryan Libel; County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; Community Development Director John Eisler; Building Official Randy Davis; Landfill Director Jacquie Davis; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb; Sheriff John Gautney; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Triangle; Administrative Assistant Mona Glade; HR Director Meghan McKee; Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson; Chief Behavioral Health Officer Melissa Thompson; Behavioral Health Director Angela Cumming; Ann Beier; Christina Cedric; JJ; and members of the public.

WORK SESSION

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

Public Comment: None

Discussion item #1: BestCare Program & Community Update:

Requester: Melissa Thompson

Details: Chief Behavioral Health Officer Melissa Thompson and Behavioral Health Director Angela Cumming presented an update on the BestCare Program to the Board of Commissioners. They reported that the CFAA grant is still being negotiated and that local CCOs are facing challenges following Pacific Source's withdrawal from Lane County, which resulted in Medicaid clients being reassigned to Trillium and over 300 Pacific Source employees being laid off. Melissa noted that the end of COVID-related funding has exposed deeper system issues, though BestCare continues to perform well through its partnership with St. Charles. The Child and Family team will relocate to a new facility on 4th Street by year-end, with IT, electrical, and ADA upgrades in progress. Discussion also covered a proposed mental health housing project. Melissa emphasized that the housing would support Crook County residents with mental illness—many of whom grew up locally and are unhoused—by providing stability and rehabilitation opportunities. Commissioners raised concerns about safety, community expectations, and substance use rules; Melissa clarified that while drug and alcohol use is prohibited, enforcement can be challenging. The proposed project includes six units, with typical stays lasting around two years before transition, and is intended as mental health housing rather than sober living.

Discussion item #2: Regional Fire Specialist WildFire Program Update:

Requester: Rebecca Keegan

Details: Regional Fire Specialist Ariel Cowan attended the Work Session and presented on wildfire preparedness efforts in Crook County and the surrounding region. She shared her background in fire ecology and firefighting, emphasizing her passion for helping communities become more fire adapted. The OSU Extension Fire Program, launched in 2020, works statewide to promote fire resilience through education, outreach, and partnerships with local agencies such as Crook County Fire & Rescue, ODF, and the Oregon State Fire Marshal. Ariel highlighted her focus on connecting fragmented wildfire mitigation projects, engaging property owners, and promoting defensible space and home hardening. She discussed community workshops like Wildfire Home Protection Strategies, wildfire preparedness fairs, and publications such as the Fire-Resistant Plants guide. Despite progress, she noted limited local participation in wildfire education and aims to increase outreach through better marketing—such as advertising in local media, using community boards, and collaborating with trusted local figures (“spark plugs”). Upcoming plans include repeating the Juniper Canyon workshop early next year, expanding homeowner education, and training Master Gardeners to help spread fire-resilient landscaping practices. Commissioners encouraged Cowan to emphasize available assistance programs and manpower for residents who need help preparing their properties, and to coordinate outreach through local newspapers and community events to boost engagement.

Discussion item #3: Signature on CJC Grant for Justice Reinvestment Program for 25-27 budget year:

Requester: Aaron Boyce

Details: Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson attended the Work Session to obtain a signature for the CJC Grant supporting the Justice Reinvestment Program for the 2025–2027 budget cycle. The Crook County Community Corrections Office manages this grant and has been awarded approximately \$466,000 by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission. The funding supports key program components, including a mental health position with PMP, half of a probation officer position, and half of a DEA bill. Wilson noted that the grant had previously been presented to the Board in April and that the signature was needed to finalize and collect the funds.

MOTION that we sign the CJC grant for Justice Reinvestment Program for 25-27 budget cycle. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Ayes, and Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Discussion item #4: Funding Approval for Four Leased Dump Trucks (Including Two with Sanders):

Requester: Brad Haynes

Details: Road Superintendent Brad Haynes attended the Work Session to request approval to move forward with purchasing four new Western Star dump trucks through a seven-year lease-to-own agreement. The trucks will replace aging vehicles in the county fleet and come equipped with new high-capacity sanders and extended plows to

improve winter road maintenance efficiency. The trucks will also feature four axles for greater hauling capacity, with delivery expected around February. The annual lease cost will be approximately \$149,751, which is lower than initially estimated. Financing has been reviewed by the finance department. Procurement is being handled through SourceWell, eliminating the need for a separate bid process. County Counsel advised confirming that SourceWell's RFP was properly advertised in Oregon to meet statutory requirements. The Board agreed to place the item on next week's agenda for final approval after verifying compliance.

Discussion item #5: Letter of Support for Goal 5 Update DLCD Technical Assistance Grant:

Requester: John Eisler

Details: Community Development Director John Eisler requested a letter of support from the Commissioners for a DLCD Technical Assistance Grant to update Crook County's Goal 5 inventory, which hasn't been revised since 1978. The grant application, submitted by the October 10, 2025, deadline, requests \$75,000 for an 18-month project to update the county's natural resources inventory, comprehensive plan, maps, and ordinances, aligning with Eastern Oregon siting rules and improving aggregate and solar development codes. John emphasized the critical need for updated data and public involvement to manage growth pressures, preserve county resources, and create community and agricultural benefit opportunities. The project will include extensive public engagement and be led by Eisler, consultant Ann Beier, and law student volunteer Christina Cedric, who brings prior county planning experience. Ann Beier highlighted the project's long-term value, noting alignment with state initiatives, while Cedric expressed enthusiasm for contributing to Crook County's planning efforts. Commissioners were urged to approve the letter of support immediately to strengthen the grant application and expedite the project, which also supports ongoing county planning needs and future decision-making.

MOTION to sign today the letter of support for Goal 5 Update DLCD Technical Assistant Program. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Ayes, and Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Discussion item #6: Community Development Monthly Update:

Requester: John Eisler

Details: Community Development Director John Eisler and Building Official Randy Davis attended the Work Session to provide the board with the monthly department update. Building activity remains steady, with 177 houses, 802 other residential, and 320 commercial permits active, averaging 1,000 inspections per month. Rich Evans will return full-time through next July, with HR approval. Planning activity is slightly up from last year, with 23 applications in September (85 year-to-date). Key projects include a daycare in Powell Butte (noticing requirements met despite public concerns), the approved Moffat solar project, and a Verizon tower in Powell Butte with significant public comment. Planning commission work sessions are ongoing for ADUs and accessory structures, and a code update addressing compliance and revenue allocation is scheduled for December. Other updates included City and County TSPs are current, on-

site inspections are up, an IGA with Jefferson County is being updated, and code compliance is performing well. Commissioner Hermreck acknowledged the quality of a letter written by John Eisler regarding water contamination, expressing hope that the recipients would reach out to Eisler directly to share their appreciation. Eisler confirmed that he had already spoken with Dick Zimi, who was very appreciative of the letter and the attention to the issue. John provided an update on the Woodward Conditional Use Permit situation. Knife River has submitted an imported fill plan to bring rock from outside the site to the Woodward property for processing. The situation is complex due to the wording of the Conditional Development Plan (CDP) and issues related to settling ponds on the FB ground. Eisler is coordinating with DOGAMI, which is reviewing the interpretation of certain provisions, and expects a response soon and additionally, Matt Roth from Knife River has reached out to discuss their plans in Crook County. Eisler emphasized that much of this work happens behind the scenes and that progress is ongoing, with the goal of eventually resolving the issues so they no longer affect residents.

Discussion item #7: Distribution of ODA Grasshopper Funds:

Requester: Susan Hermreck

Details: County Commissioner Susan Hermreck attended the Work Session provided an update on the grasshopper mitigation efforts in Crook County. Originally, the county was set to receive \$108,000 for mitigation of grasshoppers that originated from Grant and Harney counties, but at the last moment, Malheur County needed some funds, so Crook County received \$90,000. The county proceeded with spraying, which proved very effective, particularly because the East Timor ranches were proactive. While not all ranches participated, those involved successfully addressed the infestation early, reducing overall costs. Helena Chemical Company managed the pilot program, including mapping and implementation. Only \$59,000 of the grant was spent, leaving roughly \$30,000 in reserve for potential future surveys or mitigation needs. Commissioner Hermreck noted a personal conflict of interest, as one of his ranches was in the affected area, but participation was necessary for effective control.

Commissioner Hermreck stated the following for the record: I will not be participating in any discussion, debate, or voting related to the County's 2025 grant from the Oregon Department of Agriculture for grasshopper and Mormon cricket mitigation. The grant funds are intended to assist the general public in addressing the impact of these insects. Beaver Creek Ranch LLC, of which I am a member and manager, will apply for these funds on the same terms and conditions as all other qualified members of the public. My recusals will include, but are not limited to, discussions on how the County establishes criteria for fund distribution, decisions regarding the amount or timing of any distributions to applicants, and the submission of reports to the Department of Agriculture on behalf of the County.

County Counsel Eric Blaine requested that Commissioner Hermreck's recusal statement be included in the minutes. He clarified that during today's work session, which is a more informal setting, she does not need to physically leave the room, though she should remain "blacked out" from discussions and avoid gestures or engagement to protect both the County and herself. Counsel then reviewed the Department of

Agriculture grant contract and invoice, confirming there were no issues and that the finance department could proceed with payment. He recommended making a formal motion to ratify the execution of the grant to prevent potential issues in the future. While the motion does not need to be made immediately, he suggested it should occur at the next meeting.

MOTION to ratify the execution of the Department of Agriculture 2025 Grant number GHMC-2-2025. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. No discussion. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye and Commissioner Barney votes Ayes. Commissioner Hermreck recused herself and is abstaining. Motion carried 2-0.

County Counsel Eric Blaine, Commissioner Crawford, and Commissioner Barney discussed how the 2025 Oregon Department of Agriculture grant funds would be distributed to qualifying ranchers. The packet included a chart showing acreages and a \$6 per acre compensation rate, ranging from about \$1,700 to \$400 per ranch. Counsel noted that no prior commitments had been made and that formal approval for distribution had not occurred. They clarified that Helena Chemical had contracted with the ranchers to perform the grasshopper mitigation work, and ranchers would submit invoices for reimbursement. The county's role would be to reimburse the ranchers based on verified invoices, which would reflect the acreage treated. It was agreed that the finance department could manage the process to ensure fair distribution of funds, without the need for detailed additional discussion.

MOTION to direct the finance office to implement that system as discussed today. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. No discussion. Commissioner Crawford votes Aye and Commissioner Barney votes Ayes. Commissioner Hermreck recused herself and is abstaining. Motion carried 2-0.

Manager Report:

Will Van Vactor provided a brief update, noting that the packet includes the quarterly landfill report. The report highlights successes, challenges, upcoming activities, and high-level budget information. The manager emphasized that these quarterly reports would continue to be included with future managers' reports for review and follow-up discussions as needed. Will also recognized Jacquie for her excellent work and contributions to the department.

Commissioner Updates:

Commissioner Hermreck reported an update on the SNAP program in Oregon, noting that due to the federal government shutdown, SNAP benefits will end on October 31. Approximately 1 in 6 Oregonians (757,000 people in 450,000 households) participate in SNAP. While EBT cardholders can still use any remaining funds, no new benefits will be issued during the shutdown. Statewide, Oregon could see \$425 million in lost or reduced benefits, \$95 million in increased administrative costs, and may be required to partially fund \$438 million of the program. Impacts include refugees, asylees, human trafficking victims, and other residents losing or receiving reduced benefits. New work requirements for adults aged 18–64 without dependents under 5 include working 20 hours per week, volunteering 20 hours per week, or participating in continuing

education/training to qualify for benefits. While these changes may be disruptive, some community members could benefit from increased work or volunteer opportunities for skill-building, pride, and work experience.

Commissioner Barney reported that he and Will attended the Core3 open house and touring the site. He noted that it was an interesting visit with a roundtable discussion. Key points included limited funding availability, as the state is currently down a billion dollars. While the project is progressing well, there are questions about how to fund both construction and ongoing operations. Commissioner Barney emphasized the county's need to stay engaged and ensure equitable participation for Crook County. Russ Deboodt raised concerns regarding future financing of the project.

Commissioner Crawford reported an update regarding ongoing federal issues related to FEMA and biOp regulations in Oregon. The current federal administration is unlikely to address Oregon-specific concerns, so a new organization has been formed to push back. They are requesting approximately \$5,000 from the county to support this effort, with the city potentially matching the contribution. Commissioner Crawford emphasized the importance of protecting local citizens and the economy from federal overreach and suggested exploring funding through the community development budget. He noted the urgency of the situation, as the organization has retained an attorney experienced in similar cases. No decision was made during the meeting, but the matter may be placed on a future consent agenda after clarifying the funding source and confirming coordination with the city. Commissioner Crawford will follow up with the city and Will volunteered to draft a memo outlining the details of the contribution.

MOTION to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. 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 1054AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp