

Crook County Board of County Commissioners Minutes of December 17, 2025, Regular Session

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of County Commissioners met in a Regular Session on December 17, 2025, at 9:00 AM in the Crook Annex Meeting Room, located at County Annex Meeting Room 320 NE Court Street, Prineville, OR 97754.

Regular Session Agenda

Board Members Present: Susan Hermreck, Brian Barney

Board Members Absent: Seth Crawford

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Counsel Eric Blaine; County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; Community Development Director John Eisler; Finance Director Christina Haron; Senior Planner Katie McDonald; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Undersheriff Bill Elliott; Assessor Jon Soliz; Elsie Ray; HR Director Meghan McKee; Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson; Natural Resources Manager Tim Deboodt; Emergency Manager AJ Crawford; Systems Engineer Chelsea Watson; Russ Deboodt; County Clerk Cheryl Seely; Budget Manager Jamie Berger; Justin Alderman; Adam Mikulski; Ashley McCormick; Julie Thompson; Tawndy Byrd; Terry Flores; Joel Komarek; Jacob Ripper; Community Development; SWCD Director Andy Gallagher; and members of the public.

The meeting was called to order at 09:00 AM.

Public Comment

None

Consent Agenda

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve the consent agenda as presented. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck noted that the meetings and agendas now follow a new format. She explained that prior meeting minutes did not clearly identify who made motions, requiring readers to search for that information. The new format improves clarity by clearly documenting motions and seconds. She expressed appreciation for the updated format and noted that it represents a positive step toward modernization. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

1. Approve Minutes

2. Approval of Amendment 2 to County / Parks and Rec Intergovernmental Agreement

3. Approval of Calendar for FY27 Budget Process

Discussion

4. Recommendation of Appointment to Hahlen Special Road District (HSRD)

Requester:

Terry Flores, HSRD Secretary

Details: HSRD Secretary Terry Flores attended the Regular Session and requested that the Board of Commissioners approve the appointment of Tanya Doherty to the Hahlen Special Road District (HSRD) Board for a three-year term, as recommended by the HSRD Board, to ensure a full Board is in place. The HSRD was formed in 1996 to oversee the financing, construction, and maintenance of roads within the District, with Crook County authorized to levy and collect property taxes to fund operations. Public notice of the vacancy was posted in September in accordance with District bylaws, and the County also advertised the position in local newspapers. Ms. Doherty was the sole applicant, and the HSRD Board reviewed her application and supported her appointment at its November 12, 2025, meeting.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to In the matter of the appointment to the Halen Special Road District Order 2025-41, the appointment of Tonya Doherty to the Hahlen Special Road District, position number 2. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

5. Signature Request for Acceptance of Measure 57 Supplemental Funds Contract

Requester:

Aaron Boyce, Community Corrections Lieutenant

Details: Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson attended the Regular Session to request a signature for acceptance of Measure 57 supplemental funds contract. Crook County Community Corrections receives funds from Oregon DOC to fund Parole and Probation Work with the Ballot Measure 57 population. This has been a long-standing program. This provides 109,700.00 dollars to the Community Correction biannual budget.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved for the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners to sign Intergovernmental Agreement 6930 in the matter of acceptance of Measure 57 Supplemental Funds contract for the sum of \$109,700. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

6. Lieutenant and Undersheriff Salary Schedule/Compensation Update

Requester:

Stephanie Wilson, Administrative Division Manager

Details: Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson attended the Regular Session and discussed establishing a competitive baseline for the lieutenant level, noting that this year presents an opportunity to set a new starting point for non-represented staff while maintaining a strong contract for represented employees. She explained that the proposal requests a single rate of pay for lieutenants, who hold significant responsibilities across different divisions, and emphasized that this approach is common in law enforcement. The plan provides budget flexibility for the future while ensuring fair and adequate compensation. With assistance from Jamie, Stephanie estimated the cost to implement the adjustment for three lieutenants at approximately \$66,000, which can be

accommodated within the current budget due to attrition and vacancies.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve the Lieutenant and Undersheriff's salary schedule compensation update. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0

7. Recommendation of Appointment to the Budget Committee

Requester:

Will Van Vactor, County Manager/Budget Officer

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor attended the Regular Session to present a recommendation to reappoint Steve Brown to the Budget Committee for a three-year term. He explained that, following a public meeting with the two other citizen members to review applications, the committee unanimously decided to reappoint Mr. Brown due to his continuity, experience, and background in finance. Will Van Vactor requested the Board's approval of the reappointment.

Commissioner Barney commented that he thinks that it was a good choice and Commissioner Hermreck commented that the County was fortunate to have highly qualified applicants. She supported the reappointment, noting that it is a good decision for continuity, especially given the challenges the Board has addressed.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve Order 2025-39 the recommendation of appointments to the Budget Committee of Steve Brown. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

8. Approve 2026 Holiday Schedule, 2026 Regular Session Schedule, & 2026 Work Session Schedule

Requester:

Will Van Vactor, County Manager

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor attended the Regular Session to present the 2026 Holiday Schedule, 2026 Regular Session Schedule, & 2026 Work Session Schedule. Will explained the holidays are the same from last year and those have already been approved by the board in prior years. Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp mentioned that there would not be any work sessions in the month of November due to AOC and then the make-up for a regular session.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve Order 2025-40, which concerns the 2026 holiday schedule, 2026 regular session schedule, and 2026 work session schedule. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

9. Wolf Depredation Compensation Committee Mitigation and Depredation Funds Disbursement

Requester:

Hunter Neuharth, Wolf Depredation Compensation Committee Chair

Details: Commissioner Hermreck attended the Regular Session and presented the wolf depredation funds. Last year, the process for funding wolf depredation was discussed, requiring submission of an application detailing losses, use of non-lethal measures, and affected animals. With beef cattle prices up, the funding reflects claims from last year as agreed upon by the committee. Allocations include McCormick Ranch at \$31,500, Hatfield High at \$11,500, Desert Creek at \$6,000, and ODFW at \$1,000 for stolen cameras. McCormick Ranch will also receive

additional funding related to livestock losses, with performance reported at 28 out of the depredation claim.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to accept the Wolf Deprivation Compensation Committee Mitigation and Deprivation Fund distribution. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

10. Update on SWCD programs during fiscal year 2024-2025

Requester:

Andy Gallagher, SWCD District Manager

Details: SWCD District Manager Andy Gallagher attended the Regular Session and provided a condensed update to the Board of Commissioners on ongoing conservation and restoration efforts. He reported that one Sage Grouse CCAA plan is under review and, once approved, will increase enrollment in the Crook/Deschutes CCAA to 247,134.3 acres, with annual reporting underway. Multiple projects are moving forward through the Oregon Sage Grouse Partnership and the America the Beautiful Challenge, including juniper treatments, native seed production, and completion of cultural and NEPA requirements, with treatments expected to begin next spring. Several grant programs are active, including small grants, OWEB funding for Upper Ochoco Creek fish passage, and restoration and technical assistance grants supporting work across the county. Andy also highlighted progress on juniper removal, solar mitigation projects, and wildlife habitat improvements, with several treatments scheduled for this fall and winter. Wildfire recovery efforts are underway to assist landowners affected by the 2024 fires, though current funding supports planning only. He noted that funding has been received under Juniper Bill HB 5006, with applications due January 16, 2025, and strong landowner interest anticipated. Additional updates included a temporary freeze on NRCS contribution agreement funding due to a government shutdown and the recent hiring of a Prineville LIT Coordinator, funded through NRCS and BLM agreements.

Commissioner Hermreck asked questions regarding flood irrigation, which Andy addressed and explained. Susan expressed her appreciation for the work being done. Commissioner Barney also thanked Andy for his efforts and acknowledged the value of his work and contributions.

11. Amendment Service Contract with Muck Septic Service

Requester:

Bryan Libel, Assistant County Counsel

Presenter(s):

Eric Blaine, County Counsel

Details: County Counsel Eric Blaine attended the Regular Session and explained that the proposed contract amendment is modest but addresses two important items. First, it extends the current service agreement with Muck Septic Services LLC by one calendar year, moving the expiration date from December 31, 2025, to December 31, 2026. Second, the amendment allows Muck Septic to assign the contract to an affiliated entity, Superior Sanitation LLC, as part of an ongoing business restructuring, which staff did not find objectionable. He noted that a related use agreement with the City of Prineville for septic material storage is still under development. Eric concluded by recommending approval of the Second Amendment to the service agreement with Muck Septic Services LLC.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve this Second Amendment of the service agreement

with Muck Septic Services LLC. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

12. NewSun Energy Local Community Benefits and PILOT Agreement

Requester:

Jacob Ripper, Director of Permitting and Entitlements

Presenter(s):

Jake Stephens, CEO

Josie Norris, Director of Community Investments

Details: This item was removed from the agenda at the beginning of the meeting and no action was taken.

13. Order 2025-37 Opting out of New Eastern Oregon Solar Siting Rules

Requester:

John Eisler, Community Development Director

Details: Community Development Director John Eisler attended the Regular Session and explained that the amended order, reflecting the recently received grant agreement, remains straightforward. Under the new state rules, counties have three options: take no action (allowing larger solar projects without the exception process), create their own program with community input (an abbreviated Goal 5 update), or opt out temporarily. The proposed order opts out to maintain the current process, requiring projects over 320 acres to go through the exception process. With the DLCD technical assistance grant, the county will update its Goal 5 inventory, gather public input, and consider factors like transmission distance, slope, solar resources, and proximity to the urban growth boundary to guide future solar siting. Eisler emphasized that this approach allows Crook County to thoughtfully create its own program while maintaining the status quo until the planning process is complete.

Commissioner Hermreck stated that she does agree that this is the way that we need to go. We need to make our county special and do our own rules.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve Order 2025-37, which is opting out of the new Eastern Oregon Solar Siting Rules. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

14. Second Reading and Hearing of Ordinance 356: Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV)

Ordinance

Requester:

Bryan Libel, Assistant County Counsel

Presenter(s):

Eric Blaine, County Counsel

Details: County Counsel Eric Blaine attended the Regular Session to explain that Ordinance 356, now in its second reading and public hearing, is intended to allow limited use of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) on county roads to promote tourism and economic development while preserving public safety. The ordinance establishes a licensing process for applicants to obtain permission to cross from private property onto county roads and access federal lands. It applies only to county roads, not city streets or state highways, and requires applicants to meet safety and insurance requirements. The ordinance does not have an emergency clause, so it would take effect 90 days

after approval. Once effective, the county will implement the application process, including at least one public hearing to gather community feedback. Blaine emphasized that existing agricultural and slow-moving vehicle regulations under Oregon law will not be affected, and the ordinance solely addresses limited OHV use for the stated purposes.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to read by title only Ordinance 356. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

Commissioner Barney Opened the 2nd Public Hearing at 9:40 AM.

Public Comment:

Adam Mikulski raised a question regarding the permitting process for off-highway vehicles on county roads. He asked whether the permits will include guidance or requirements for addressing potential road damage caused by vehicle use, noting that similar situations at Bonneville Power required users to cover repair costs. He emphasized the importance of establishing clear rules and responsibilities for road maintenance within the permitting process. Brian Barney noted that guidance regarding road use and potential impacts will be provided both in the permit details and on an individual basis when applicants apply for a license. He referenced a specific applicant whose use involves less than a mile on a county road to access federal land and indicated that no significant road damage is anticipated. Barney also mentioned that it is preferable for vehicles to stay on the roadway rather than off to the side, to avoid disturbing adjacent areas. Eric Blaine explained that the ordinance's permitting requirements include specific insurance coverage to protect the county in case of damage to facilities. Additionally, if damage occurs, permit holders could face citations or legal action to recover costs for taxpayers. He emphasized that the ordinance is detailed, with multiple requirements designed to ensure accountability and protect county assets.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve ordinance 356. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

Manager Report

15. Finance Committee Appointment

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor reported that the only item under his manager's report was the appointment to the county's Finance Committee. In accordance with county fiscal policies, which require an annual review by the Finance Committee, he has appointed Steve Forrester to serve alongside the county treasurer and finance director. This appointment will support the upcoming fiscal year budget planning process.

Commissioner Updates

Commissioner Hermreck reported on her recent participation in a National Association of Counties event, fully funded at no cost to Crook County taxpayers. She delivered presentations on solar, wind, and data centers across Wasco, Gilliam, and Sherman counties and found the experience highly informative. She highlighted community benefits, renewable energy infrastructure, and innovative land-use practices—such as using sheep to manage vegetation at solar farms without damaging equipment. She also observed workforce development programs, including trade school and electrical engineering opportunities that can position students for high-demand jobs in renewable energy and manufacturing. Hermreck noted insights into energy transmission, wastewater management, and data center operations, as well as perspectives from other states and tribal representatives. She concluded with a reminder about caroling at the historic courthouse steps.

Commissioner Barney None.

Public Comment

None

Executive Session

16. ORS 192.660(2)(f) To consider information or records that are exempt by law from public inspection

17. ORS 192.660(2)(h) Consulting with Counsel concerning the legal rights and duties of a public body with regard to current litigation or litigation likely to be filed.

At the conclusion of the Executive Session, the Board of Commissioners convened back into Open Session, inviting members of the public into the meeting room.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to authorize the county manager to consult with outside counsel, as discussed in the executive session. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to authorize the legal proceeding discussed in the executive session, without further deliberation by the Board of Commissioners. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to adjourn the public, or the Board of Commissioner meeting. Brian Barney seconded. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 10:16 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant