

Crook County Board of County Commissioners Minutes of January 12, 2026, Special Session

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of County Commissioners met in a Special Session on January 12, 2026, at 8:15 AM in the Crook County Justice Center, Room 120, located at 260 NW 2nd Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

Special Session Agenda

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

Board Members Absent:

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; County Counsel Eric Blaine; Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson; Budget Manager Jamie Berger; Finance Director Christina Haron; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; HR Director Meghan McKee; IT Director Blaine Cheney; Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb; Erika Frickey; Facilities Director James Preuss; Undersheriff Bill Elliott; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; Systems Engineer Chelsea Watson; District Attorney Kari Hathorn; Human Resources; Landfill Manager Jacquie Davis; Lieutenant Mitch Madden; Veteran Services Officer Tom Evans; Haley Morris; Jessica Barnes; Scott Tibbs; Steve Brown; Triangle; and members of the public.

The meeting was called to order at 08:15 AM.

Details:

County Manager Will Van Vactor opened the meeting and addressed the automatic appointment of Seth as the chair under Order 2024-13, following a temporary fill-in by Commissioner Barney. The meeting's primary focus was on mid-year presentations from various county departments, such as Administration, Juvenile Department, Sheriff's Office, among others. These presentations are critical for reviewing department progress, identifying challenges, and evaluating budget performance as the county prepares for FY27 planning. Will emphasized the importance of these presentations in setting up goal-setting discussions scheduled to start on Wednesday. The mid-year updates serve as a foundation for informed decision-making, ensuring that goals and budgets are grounded in real-time data from all areas of county government. As presentations unfold, board members are encouraged to consider how current goals align with realities and opportunities, and whether there are cross-departmental challenges or themes that require focus. Overall, these sessions are intended to enhance transparency and accountability by aligning resources, policies, and service expectations with the needs of county residents. The presentations intend to facilitate data-driven decisions crucial for the planning and budget cycles. Appreciation was extended to staff and coordinators for their efforts in preparing these updates. By thoroughly understanding and utilizing insights from these updates, the county can better align its strategic planning and resource allocation with its priorities and challenges.

Discussion

1. Mid-Year Department Presentations; Findings from Department Mid-Year Presentations & Summary of Goals and Progress, Goal-Setting and Long-Range Planning, and Discussion with Budget Committee on updated Goals and Assumptions for FY27 Budget Process

Details:

Administration & Board of Commissioners, Will Van Vactor provided the mid-year presentation and the focus for the Administration and Board of Commissioners revolved around progress and priorities for FY26, with an outlook to FY27. Key priorities included completing the core service description review to define and deliver outstanding services, contributing to the quality of life, and supporting key board of commissioner goals. Financial sustainability was highlighted as a priority, with a focus on aligning departmental needs with realistic long-term funding strategies to manage rising costs effectively. Long-range planning was also emphasized, incorporating communication and facilities planning to support transparency and stewardship of county resources. Achievements from the past year included implementing a new agenda building system to enhance efficiency and public engagement, supporting the Crook County College initiative, and participating in the AOC County College program. County Administration has been active in advocacy efforts for fair funding, notably during the 2025 legislative session. Ongoing projects involve developing a new county website and finalizing FY27 budget planning to improve sustainability. Upcoming tasks include adopting core service descriptions, updating public records request policies, and revising internal service fee structures. The focus for FY27 will shift towards the implementation of these projects to align with anticipated benefits and address challenges presented by population growth, rising costs, and service demands. The presentation concluded with a brief update on the admin budget, which is tracking well at 47% of expenditures, allowing staff to closely monitor trends as they plan for future fiscal years. Will invited questions from the board following the presentation.

Juvenile Services, Erika Frickey highlighted several key initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for youth in Crook County. A significant focus was on increasing diversion options to keep youth out of the formal court system, resulting in 82% of referrals managed through informal probation, surpassing the initial goal of 60%. Erika emphasized the importance of communication and collaboration with community partners, which have been crucial in reducing recidivism and keeping youth within the community. The department made strides in expanding diversion programs, purchasing the R1 curriculum for consistent skill-building, and increasing community service partnerships, enabling youth to gain valuable skills while contributing to the community. The restitution program allowed youth to pay victims through community service, significantly increasing compensation. Substance use remains a concern, and partnerships with Rimrock facilitated life skills groups to address this issue. The introduction of anger management and equine therapy programs, in collaboration with M3 Alliance, offered additional support. Monthly BestCare meetings improved

consistency in youth care, and a new process for automatic expunctions of misdemeanors was implemented to facilitate clean records for eligible youths. Erika highlighted ongoing projects, such as the implementation of R1 groups, regular meetings with DHS, and introduction of a mental health intern for crisis intervention. The transportation fleet is set for an upgrade to support essential youth transport needs. Challenges remain in securing adequate outside placement resources and addressing mental health crises. The fiscal aspect is significantly affected by these issues, as prolonged detention stays increase costs. Erika concluded by noting the importance of these initiatives and improvements in resource allocation to ensure effective and efficient service delivery for the community's youth.

In the discussion on Juvenile Services, Scott Tibbs sought clarification on statistics related to youth avoiding the court system and referral rates. Erika explained that the numbers represented individual youths counted by their most serious offenses, with a total of 73 youths involved. Steve Brown inquired about the sustainability of using the R1 curriculum and funding for the restitution program. Erika confirmed that the R1 curriculum is reusable without needing additional grants each year, while the restitution program depends on grant funding and may be included in the general fund if necessary. Erika assured that a new mental health intern would maintain services at no extra cost, thanks to a partnership with the M3 Alliance. Community service opportunities were highlighted, emphasizing partnerships that maintain youth confidentiality. Commissioner Hermreck praised the Juvenile Department's teamwork and advocated for local facilities like Canal House to prevent youth homelessness, stressing the need for consistent support and education for youth within the community. Challenges with external placements and maintaining youth education continuity were acknowledged. Erika noted that automatic expunctions are state-funded, while other fees might be waived based on individual circumstances. Scott Tibbs raised a query about community involvement in finding placement opportunities, to which Erika responded that this involves careful collaboration with formal agreements to ensure confidentiality. Overall, the discussion emphasized the importance of community partnerships, sustainable funding, and maintaining educational continuity to effectively support youth.

District Attorney, Kari Hathorn focused on key priorities and challenges in her mid-year presentation. Highlighting goals of increasing efficiency and managing a high turnover rate, she emphasized efforts to stabilize staffing and improve case handling. The office hired a new Deputy District Attorney, a Chief Deputy, and a District Attorney Investigator, enhancing their ability to manage cases more effectively. The implementation of a new hire checklist aimed to streamline onboarding and provide necessary resources quickly. Digital evidence management was a significant focus, with the adoption of Evidence.com to handle the rising volume of digital evidence and streamline storage costs through unlimited storage options. The office also dealt with challenges in billing and payment of discovery fees, advocating for legislative changes to address the financial burden on counties. Expungement processes remain labor-intensive, with increased demands due to expanded legislative requirements. Mental health and drug-related crimes pose ongoing challenges, exacerbated by limited

access to treatment facilities, contributing to rising caseloads and complicated case management. Budgetary updates included securing a \$50,000 child abuse grant, maximizing the justice reinvestment grant, and successfully obtaining full VOCA grant funding. Despite vacancies affecting budget expenditures, the use of grants helps offset costs. Overall, Kari expressed optimism about the progress made and the strategic direction despite ongoing challenges related to increased crime and resource allocation.

Sheriff's Department, Bill Elliott highlighted several critical priorities, focusing on maintaining staffing stability, managing public safety operations, and investing in ready-made equipment for long-term resilience. The department has successfully upfitted one of the patrol vehicles and installed mobile repeaters to enhance communication safety for officers in the field. In the jail, three new staff members were hired, and the department secured a two-year Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) MAT grant to aid in the Medical Assisted Treatment of inmates struggling with substance use disorders. Expanded in-house programming for low-level drug users is underway to help guide them into voluntary treatment programs. Emergency management saw significant advances with the updating of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, and Emergency Operations Plan. These updates ensure the department's readiness for federal assistance if needed. Support staff transitioned warrant management to jail staff, aligning with state practices. The Axon camera program, a leading system for law enforcement, is being implemented to improve digital evidence management and reduce redaction workload. This move will simplify evidence handling and reduce manual efforts, thereby cutting costs and enhancing compliance with public records requests. Future initiatives include restoring patrol division supervision at the sergeant level, replacing outdated AEDs acquired from Delta Airlines, and enhancing less-lethal options with 40mm foam projectiles to improve response options. The department aims to expand its drone program with Avada drones for indoor operations, boosting officer safety. Filling vacancies remains a priority, with jail staffing targeted to reach teams of five to meet baseline needs. The enhancement of body camera availability for jail staff is planned to improve accountability and reduce liability. The department faces challenges with hiring delays, budget constraints, and staffing turnover. Patrol teams were occasionally reassigned to cover jail staffing shortfalls, impacting patrol capabilities. The department is addressing these by requesting increased FTEs to manage operations effectively across locations. In terms of performance metrics, the department saw a 4% increase in incident reports, a 33% reduction in arrests, and a decline in service calls by 5%, with a total of 15,840 calls handled in 2025. Justice Center foot traffic totaled 37,016 people for the year. The budget tracking shows expenditures at 45% for the Sheriff's office and 39% for PMP, reflecting careful financial management amid operational demands. Overall, the presentation detailed a strategic approach to enhancing public safety infrastructure and resource management, positioning the department to better address future challenges and community growth.

During the meeting, Scott Tibbs initiated a discussion on asset management, suggesting the potential benefits of a county-wide system to manage assets like fleet,

guns, and technology. He proposed that this could be coordinated through IT rather than individual departments. Will responded by indicating that the county is working on a policy management framework to create consistency across departments and expressed interest in exploring options in collaboration with the Sheriff's Office. Steve Brown followed up by asking about the potential to collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions, such as the City of Prineville, to streamline processes and leverage existing systems. Mitch Madden explained his evaluation of five asset management systems, emphasizing the need to consider the broader county's requirements. He noted that although many agencies rely on Excel, it is labor-intensive, and he is exploring cost-effective options like a \$3,000-per-year system already used by a city. The discussion underlined the importance of developing a comprehensive and cost-effective asset management strategy for the county, with an emphasis on collaboration and integration across departments.

Finance, Christina Haron highlighted key priorities for the finance department, focusing on ERP implementation and departmental training, marking it as a monumental task aided by IT. This initiative aligns with the department's goals of providing outstanding service, fostering a collaborative culture, ensuring financial sustainability, and improving communication. Additionally, the department is revising its monthly and quarterly reporting to enhance user experience and insight, and updating internal control policies to automate and simplify procedures, further supporting the county's safety and livability. Completed projects include a revamp of monthly budget reports, which received positive feedback for helping departments interpret their financial standing. The finance department also celebrated receiving the GFOA Distinguished Budget Award and updated the investment mix per county policy to optimize returns. In-progress initiatives include the phased ERP implementation with the core finance portion expected by late FY26 and the payroll portion by mid FY27, considering timing constraints. Reporting revamps are anticipated by mid-late FY26, while the FY25 audit, delayed due to single audit requirements, is projected for completion by January's end. Future compliance with new Governmental and County Standards procedures is also underway. Future plans entail conducting cash flow and revenue analysis for departments facing revenue uncertainties and expenditure increases, with a focus on efficiency and new revenue opportunities. New governmental accounting standards requiring changes in financial statements will also be implemented. Challenges faced include staffing shortages, budget constraints, and the need to produce machine-readable financial statements (XBRL), aligning with public entity standards. Despite this, the department's budget is on track, with 46% of expected revenue and 45% of expenditures achieved, including ERP costs. In summary, the department is striving to modernize its systems, improve reporting, and adapt to regulatory changes, while exploring ways to enhance efficiency and revenue generation amidst staffing and budget challenges.

During discussions about the Finance presentation, Steve Brown inquired about the implementation of the ERP system and the challenges of running dual systems. Christina Haron explained that there will be a three-month overlap of the old and new systems to ensure correct posting and allow for debugging, with no additional costs due

to vendor agreements. Training for other departments on the ERP system is set for FY27 with a focus on minimizing learning curves through user-friendly features and customizable reports using the Cognos system. The system offers around 140 built-in reports, with options for further customization to meet specific department needs. Commissioner Hermreck asked about property tax collection, and Christina Haron confirmed that it is on track with typical expectations through the year-end.

County Counsel, Eric Blaine highlighted the reactive nature of the county legal office, adapting to legal changes and emerging projects. Despite this reactive stance, the team strives for proactive project management. Recent accomplishments include finalizing labor bargaining for the road department union and completing public contracting training, aimed at helping departments navigate procurement efficiently. The Sheriff's Office towing rotation program and updates to real property tax foreclosure sales processes were other notable achievements. Ongoing tasks involve continuous file review for active projects and notable contracts, like the community mental health program and furniture transfer agreements. Future goals include adopting a unified project ticketing system for better efficiency, updating identity theft prevention processes, and conducting training for staff on using Word's track changes feature. Challenges such as a staff vacancy and difficulties finding third-party firms for projects are being managed by distributing work externally. Blaine also foresees upcoming legal inquiries related to election law and public meeting disputes, necessitating increased preparation. He concluded with a budget outlook, emphasizing frugality and expecting to double the expenditure by the fiscal year's end.

Steve Brown inquired about the review of a solar project decommissioning plan and a long-term rental agreement for the fairgrounds. Eric Blaine explained that the rental agreement relates to the Crooked River Roundup Rodeo and Horse Races. Crafting a satisfactory multi-year agreement may require considerable staff effort. The decommissioning plan is a county requirement for solar projects to ensure site remediation at the end of a project. The county prefers a bond for security to cover cleanup costs if a company fails, necessitating negotiation over terms with solar developers, consuming significant staff time. Scott Tibbs asked about public meeting disputes, and Eric described a law allowing complaints without proof of harm, triggering responses filed with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission. This change, from 2019, has led to a surge in complaints, requiring fast response times. This has affected how Crook County and other local bodies conduct public meetings, particularly impacting volunteer committees. These issues demand ongoing adaptability and resource allocation from the legal office.

Human Resource, Meghan McKee detailed the ongoing implementation of the new HRIS system, transitioning from paper to electronic timecards. Payroll will integrate with the system to enhance reporting. A new training schedule now begins each January, addressing low participation rates. Additional onboarding trainings are introduced, and the employee handbook is being rewritten for consistency and review by multiple stakeholders. An exit interview process has been established, and job descriptions are being centralized in the HRIS system for consistency in recruitment. Proposed changes

to job descriptions undergo review to ensure no impact on salaries unless necessary. The HRIS system features a self-service portal for employee access to personal and professional details, with benefits enrollment moving online. Full HRIS integration is expected to take another year, with ongoing consultation support ending soon. A streamlined performance review module is being developed for meaningful feedback and goal alignment. Budget constraints impact recruitment and retention, aligning with industry standards. With one HR position cut, the team focuses on supporting leadership training across departments within the available budget.

Commissioner Hermreck acknowledged the challenges Meghan McKee has faced in HR and encouraged her continued progress. Meghan expressed her enjoyment of the challenge. Steve Brown questioned the transition of HRIS system management to Meghan following the consultant's contract expiration. Meghan, supported by her team, felt confident despite added responsibilities, acknowledging the need for consultant support if overwhelmed. She addressed the potential impacts of removing an FTE, stating she would request reinstatement if necessary. The HRIS system now facilitates recruitment through governmentjobs.com and streamlines processes like offer letters and onboarding, which should free up time and maintain service levels.

Information Technology, Blaine Cheney outlined priorities for aligning IT services with Crook County's core objectives. Key projects include the Civic Plus Agenda Builder, website migration for an enhanced look, and transitioning from the PATS to PSO system for property management. Network redundancy and landfill network enhancements are underway, alongside evaluating direct internet access strategies. Completed initiatives featured AI chatbots for internal use, fiber mapping, network monitoring, and antivirus upgrades, achieving cost savings. Off-site disaster recovery services were also implemented to enhance data security. Upcoming tasks involve launching the website migration, implementing role-based access control, and upgrading landfill network equipment. Future plans include integrating water utilities data with spatial databases and updating public meetings recordings. Challenges include managing growing service desk needs and balancing AI and hardware requirements, with potential contract support needed for data center relocation. Staffing adjustments may involve adding roles to support IT functions. Current budgets reflect resource realignment to meet service needs effectively.

Steve Brown inquired about the Eagle View flyover update's scope. Blaine Cheney confirmed it would focus on county areas without federal agency involvement. Steve also raised questions about the county's PCI compliance status. Blaine explained that the IT and finance departments are evaluating credit card data security and the use of merchant and terminal IDs. Currently, there is no Report on Compliance (ROC) for PCI. Christina Haron elaborated that the county primarily uses Point and Pay for credit card processing, handling PCI compliance unless data is stored or payments are taken over the phone. However, the county has begun identifying the use of other payment processors like Square, Stripe, and ValPay, particularly in specialized areas like the landfill, and is working to define the full compliance scope.

Facilities, James Preuss focused on a comprehensive assessment of county-owned buildings and the implementation of preventative maintenance strategies. Key achievements included developing emergency evacuation plans, replacing unsafe sidewalks, and upgrading the camera systems at the jail. Significant improvements were made with LED lighting for energy efficiency and the installation of heat strips for snow removal. The department also established service vendors for ongoing operations and maintenance. A notable upgrade was the work order system, allowing mobile access and asset tagging for better efficiency. Future plans involve replacing the roof and HVAC system at the Finance building and developing training programs for facility staff. Challenges include maintaining aging buildings and managing staffing as a retirement approaches. Current expenditures are at 45%, reflecting careful budget management. Planning for the next fiscal year includes addressing ADA compliance, upgrading access control, and prioritizing building renovations with comprehensive cost estimates.

Veteran Services, Katie Plumb focused on increasing access and outreach effectiveness. The hiring of a new veteran services officer significantly doubled appointment availability, reducing wait times. The department met and exceeded its target for processed claims, reaching 430 by December, with a goal of 750 for the fiscal year. Efforts to expand reach included attending more community events and exploring staggered shifts to accommodate working veterans. The department noted an increase in complex claims from outside the county, highlighting the office's skill level. Katie emphasized the need to advocate for support within veterans' local jurisdictions to reduce travel burdens. A detailed analysis of office time management showed that the administrative assistant handled 50% of communications, increasing overall efficiency. However, budget constraints threaten this position's future. Staffing costs constitute the majority of the budget, and underspending was attributed to delays in onboarding the new officer. Katie underscored the importance of ensuring staff operate at the top of their certification level, focusing on complex case management and care coordination. The department is looking for creative ways to maintain capacity and improve outreach and service delivery within budget limitations.

Scott Tibbs noted the department's success and inquired about the impact of serving veterans from outside Crook County on budget allocations. Katie Plumb explained that while some veterans remain linked to their original veteran service officer, others are transitioned to Crook County without additional state funding. The department is vigilant about maintaining service quality and sustainability, given the high acuity of cases they manage, while actively seeking additional funding and advocating for veterans' care across jurisdictions. Commissioner Hermreck shared that he raised awareness of this issue with neighboring commissioners without complaint, emphasizing that cooperative efforts exist to ensure veterans receive the necessary support. Communication improvements are needed as referrals often come from various agencies across Central Oregon, leading to overlaps and misdirection. Both emphasized the importance of coordination and collaboration to address these complexities effectively.

Health and Human Services, Katie Plumb highlighted strategic goals such as staff retention, financial stability, and community engagement. The department continues to identify new funding sources, maximizing existing funds, and enhancing accessibility to public health services. Community engagement is vital, as many services are sought voluntarily by residents, and the department strives to meet both state and federal requirements while staying rooted in local needs. Staff participation in community meetings ensures stronger relationships and effective collaboration. A performance management system is being developed for regular feedback, moving beyond annual evaluations to monthly touchpoints, supported by a committed leadership team. Cross training is essential to manage workloads, especially during staff absences, ensuring roles like communicable disease response are covered. Communication improvements have been supported by a contractor handling media relations, allowing for focused messaging during times of increased public interest. The department faces staffing challenges due to specialized requirements and market competitiveness, yet it is creating pathways for career growth within the organization by recruiting based on attitude and training in necessary skills. Budgeting has remained stable despite initial uncertainties, with underspending largely due to staffing vacancies. Katie emphasized commitment to promoting staff growth and providing regular feedback to foster a robust team. The update on core services included maintaining clinical and family health service capacities, particularly through RN licensing and innovative staffing arrangements such as per diem work.

Commissioner Hermreck commented on the importance of community outreach, referencing a recent meeting on food insecurity involving various community stakeholders like churches and the library. Rita, who runs the WIC program under Katie Plumb's leadership, provided valuable insights into the needs and funding constraints of the program. This collaborative brainstorming aims to support mothers beyond the WIC program's duration, emphasizing the importance of maintaining strong community relationships. Commissioner Hermreck praised Katie for facilitating these connections, noting that such teamwork helps mitigate service gaps and directly benefits families.

County Manager Will Van Vactor concluded the meeting by thanking all department heads for their presentations. He reminded attendees of the following day's presentations, which would cover topics from the fairgrounds, community development, road department, museum, library, assessment clerk, weed control, airport, and landfill. The meeting will reconvene at 8:15 a.m. in the same location. He expressed gratitude to the board and all participants for their attendance.

MOTION: Seth Crawford moved to Adjourn. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 11:18 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant