

Crook County Board of County Commissioners Minutes of February 11, 2026, Work Session

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of County Commissioners met in a Work Session on February 11, 2026, at 9:00 AM in the Administration Conference Room, located at 203 NE Court Street, Prineville, OR 97754.

Work 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; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; HR Director Meghan McKee; IT Director Blaine Cheney; Finance Director Christina Haron; Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson; Public Health Modernization Manager Stephanie O'Neal; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Librarian Team Lead Kiim Bales; Senior Library Technician Amber Dozhier; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; County Clerk Cheryl Seely; NewSun Director of Community Investments Josie Norris; NewSun CEO Jake Stephens; Max Yoklic; Carlin MacMillan; Steve Uffleman; Ferris; Laura; Justin Alderman; Bill Anderson; Mike Ervin; Julie Thompson; Jessica Barnes; and members of the public.

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

Public Comment

Commissioner Crawford introduced a new approach to public comment. At the beginning of meetings, members of the public are invited to comment specifically on agenda items. A separate public comment period at the end of the meeting will be reserved for general questions or topics not on the agenda. No comments were received at the start of this meeting.

Discussion

1. Treasurer's Report for January 2026

Requester:

Christina Haron, Finance Director

Details: Finance Director Christina Haron presented the January report, outlining bank and investment account balances, reconciling items, and the allocation of funds by county fund and fund number. The report also included pooled cash accounts, general ledger balances, and current investment allocations by type. Total book value was compared to market value, with investments held to maturity in accordance with the County's investment policy to reduce risk and ensure predictable returns. Interest rate

trends were reviewed, noting \$75,000 received in investment interest, \$98,000 from the local government investment pool, and \$69,000 in accrued interest for January. Cash balances showed a slight month-over-month increase, consistent with seasonal trends. Commissioners had no questions. The Board congratulated Christina on earning the Certified Public Funds Investment Manager designation.

2. Meeting Rooms at the Library—Hours of Use

Requester:

Kim Bales, Team Lead Librarian

Details: Team Lead Librarian Kim Bales and Circulation Services Technician Amber Dozhier attended the Work Session to discuss the library's meeting room policy. Kim reported ongoing issues with after-hours use, including alcohol consumption, unlocked buildings, overnight stays, unreturned keys, and unauthorized access to the main library. Kim proposed that meeting rooms only be available during normal library business hours—Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Saturdays, 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; and no use on Sundays—to improve security and oversight.

Commissioners and library staff discussed ongoing issues with the library's meeting room, including unmanageable parties, extended hours, and staff cleanup after events. Commissioner Hermreck noted that providing a party space is not part of the library's core services and expressed concern about wear and tear, liability, and unpaid damages. Staff confirmed that commercial use will continue, with fees increased from \$20 to \$40 per hour.

Team Lead Librarian Kim Bales reported that new hours have been implemented, limiting meeting room use to regular library hours, restricting reservations to six hours per booking, and allowing bookings up to three months in advance. Current reservations are booked through May 1st, with no further bookings until the policy is finalized. Commissioners Crawford and Barney agreed that the restrictions are appropriate. A draft policy will be presented to the Library Board of Trustees tomorrow; once approved, it will return to the Board for final consideration. Commissioners also discussed posting signage and liability measures for event attendees.

3. Review and Discuss Draft Order 2026-09

Requester:

Eric Blaine, County Counsel

Presenter(s):

Eric Blaine, County Counsel

Details: County Counsel Eric Blaine provided an update on revisions to the County's real property foreclosure process to align with changes mandated by House Bill 2089. The update is informational only at this time and not presented for approval, but the Board was given an opportunity for discussion. The proposed policy is intended to document the County's compliance with current law, outlining required procedures for handling foreclosed properties, including situations where the County must retain

property for 12 months or longer and explore alternative methods for sale. Staff noted that the legislation is unlikely to change during the short session, and the updated process is expected to remain in effect for several years. It was suggested that once the policy is finalized, it be presented for formal adoption as part of a future Board order, with a tentative target date of the February 18th meeting. The policy update is designed to ensure clarity, consistency, and adherence to legal requirements in the County's foreclosure practices.

Commissioner Hermreck asked whether the County could retain foreclosed property indefinitely instead of selling it. Eric explained that while the County is not legally required to sell foreclosed property, there is a strong incentive to do so. Unsold property does not generate tax revenue, and proceeds from sales are distributed to local taxing districts, such as schools and irrigation districts. Eric also noted that under the new process mandated by House Bill 2089, the County may retain ownership for public purposes, but must follow specific procedures, including accounting for surplus value, locating heirs or former owners, and distributing any proceeds appropriately. Retaining property can complicate determining its actual value, increase the potential for litigation, and may require additional documentation of costs and expenses incurred by the County.

Commissioners and staff agreed that while retaining property is possible, it is generally more practical for the County to sell foreclosed properties to return them to the tax rolls, avoid disputes, and minimize liability. Staff also emphasized the importance of developing a standard operating procedure to track all costs associated with foreclosed properties, including maintenance, demolition, and other County expenses, to ensure proper reimbursement and accounting.

It was further noted that many foreclosed properties have issues such as unpermitted structures or refuse, making them less attractive for development. Consequently, the County rarely encounters foreclosed properties that are ideal for building or immediate use. Overall, selling the property is considered the cleaner and more efficient approach.

4. NewSun Energy Local Community Benefits Program

Requester:

Jacob Ripper, Director of Permitting and Entitlement

Presenter(s):

Josie Norris, Director of Community Investments

Jake Stephens, NewSun Energy CEO

Details: Josie Norris (Director of Community Investments) and Jake Stevens (CEO) presented an overview of New Sun Energy's community investment strategy, highlighting a total statewide contribution of \$1.4 million since 2016, with over \$232,000 specifically dedicated to Crook County. The program is built into the company's "DNA," utilizing a percentage of annual project revenue to fund a Community Benefits Fund that supports local initiatives for the life of their solar projects. Their "trust-based" funding model emphasizes agility and long-term relationships, allowing the company to

make rapid decisions—such as emergency infrastructure repairs or multi-year grants—without the burden of rigorous application processes for local nonprofits. The presentation detailed several key investment pillars in Crook County, with the largest portion of funds supporting youth and agriculture through 4-H and FFA livestock auctions. The company also prioritizes education and recreation, citing a \$55,000 grant to the Environmental Center for school garden boxes and support for the Central Oregon Trail Alliance (CODA) for ADA-accessible trails at Barnes Butte. Additionally, the speakers highlighted their Climate and Ag Scholarship program, which uses student essays to bridge the political divide between rural ranching communities and state legislators, illustrating how renewable energy revenue can provide essential financial stability for family ranches. As New Sun Energy moves into active construction on more local projects, the presenters reaffirmed their commitment to scaling these investments alongside their operational growth.

Manager Report

None

Commissioner Updates

Commissioner Hermreck mentioned she is attending COHC and COAC tomorrow; no comments are expected at COHC. Breyanna assisted by preparing and printing all letters for presentation. The letters drafted last week will be presented, supported by statistics provided by Bill and Brad. Susan committed to advocate on behalf of Crook County, recognizing that while outcomes may be uncertain, efforts will be made to represent the county's interests effectively.

Commissioner Barney No commissioner update provided.

Commissioner Crawford No commissioner update provided.

Executive Session

At 9:59AM the Board of Commissioners convened into Executive Session under the following statute(s): 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.

5. 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: Brian Barney moved to decline to pursue action as discussed in the executive session, and then if circumstances ever change, we'll bring it back to you

guys for reconsideration. Susan Hermreck seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to adjourn the work session meeting. 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 10:07 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant