

## **Crook County Board of County Commissioners Minutes of February 4, 2026, Regular Session**

**Be It Remembered** that the Crook County Board of County Commissioners met in a Regular Session on February 4, 2026, at 9:00 AM in the Crook County Annex Meeting Room, located at 320 NE Court Street, Prineville, OR 97754.

### **Regular 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; Landfill Director Jacquie Davis; 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; Undersheriff Bill Elliott; Assessor Jon Soliz; Senior Health Programs Coordinator Alex Greenberg; Public Health Modernization Manager Stephanie O'Neal; Natural Resources Manager Tim Deboodt; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Craig Kilpatrick; Karen Mikulski; Adam Mikulski; Ashley McCormick; Twandy Byrd; Laura; Julie Thompson; Melissa Thompson; Jessica Barnes; and members of the public.

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

### **Public Comment**

Craig Kilpatrick identified himself as a local resident and thanked the Board for allowing public comment. He stated a serious objection to newly introduced Senate Bill 1545, describing it as legislation related to “corner-to-corner” access (corner crossing) to public lands and associated landowner liability/trespass issues. Mr. Kilpatrick read a letter into the record from Matt Smith (GI Ranch Corporation / William Smith Properties, Inc.), asserting that SB 1545 is prompted by a recent Wyoming/10th Circuit corner-crossing decision that does not apply in Oregon, and warning Oregon should not become a “test case.” The letter argued the bill conflicts with long-standing property law, would create ambiguity and increased conflict because corners are often unmarked and difficult to locate accurately, and could lead to inevitable or intentional trespass while placing landowners in the position of having to police boundaries at significant cost. The letter also stated landowners, farmers, and ranchers were not meaningfully consulted and that the bill erodes private property rights. Mr. Kilpatrick requested that the Crook County Board of Commissioners write a letter of objection or, at minimum, not support SB 1545 in its current form, and asked that the process be slowed to allow more public and representative review due to the short special-session timeline and limited hearing schedule.

The Board discussed a proposed bill related to corner crossing and associated impacts

to private landowners and agriculture. Commissioner Susan Hermreck expressed opposition to the bill as presented, citing concerns about impacts to private landowners, lack of fencing delineating public and private lands (particularly in eastern portions of the county), potential effects on agriculture, and possible wildlife impacts. She supported drafting a letter from the County requesting additional study, greater public input, and specific consideration of agricultural interests.

Commissioner Brian Barney also expressed opposition to the legislation as presented and stated that he does not support the bill in its current form.

Commissioner Seth indicated he would like additional information and broader public input before taking a definitive position. He supported a letter focused on concerns about the expedited process and lack of stakeholder engagement, rather than a simple statement of opposition.

Tim Deboodt, speaking as a private landowner and in a natural resources context, noted concerns about the short legislative session timeline, limited public process, and lack of engagement with agricultural organizations. He recommended the Commission submit a joint letter opposing the bill as currently presented and requesting withdrawal and further public discussion, potentially during a longer legislative session. He also noted that individual commissioners could submit separate letters reflecting their personal positions.

The Board discussed the possibility of drafting a joint letter expressing opposition as currently written, requesting withdrawal of the bill, and calling for expanded public and agricultural input prior to further consideration.

**MOTION:** Susan Hermreck moved to present a letter that we currently oppose as is presented. We ask for its withdrawal until there can be more public input and also authorize the letter's execution and signature outside the meeting. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0

Julie Thompson provided public comment regarding cones or barrels placed on the shoulders of Elliott Road and Stahancyk Road. She stated she received a voicemail from Brad Haynes indicating that Knife River placed the barriers to prevent trucks from parking in the area in an effort to comply with Conditional Use Permit (CUP) requirements. Julie raised concerns about safety, noting that the shoulders are used for oversized loads detouring due to the railroad overpass and that blocking the shoulder eliminates space for vehicles to safely move aside. She stated the roads are narrow with limited shoulder area and expressed concern that the barriers prevent use of the shoulder for emergency purposes. She also questioned whether Knife River has obtained the necessary permits to place cones or barrels on the road shoulders and requested clarification from the County regarding authorization for blocking the shoulder areas.

Road Superintendent Brad Haynes responded to concerns regarding traffic drums

placed along Elliott Road and Stahancyk Road. After clarifying that the items in question were orange traffic drums (likely water-filled), he stated that Knife River installed them to prevent owner-operators and trucks from parking along the roadway while waiting to be loaded at the pit. He indicated action was taken to avoid impeding traffic and to be a good neighbor. Brad stated he had spoken with both Knife River and representatives near the area (RBC). He noted that Elliott Lane is a designated heavy haul route and that the area where the drums are located was previously used informally for truck parking during prior log mill operations, though it is technically a shoulder rather than a designated parking lane. He reported that the drums on Elliott are generally placed approximately five feet off the edge of the roadway and do not significantly inhibit the travel lane. Regarding Stahancyk Road, he stated the drums are positioned on the shoulder, set back from the pavement edge, and were placed to prevent trucks from parking in a manner that could create traffic conflicts near RBC.

Julie Thompson questioned why Knife River could not simply instruct truck drivers not to park on the shoulder rather than placing barrels along the roadway. She expressed concern about the appearance of the bright orange drums and stated she believes a better solution could be found. She also noted that, to her knowledge, no permit had been issued for the placement of the drums.

Brad Haynes responded that the trucks involved include numerous owner-operators, making consistent compliance difficult to enforce. He explained that similar parking issues have occurred in other areas of the county despite signage and communication efforts. He noted that enforcement would require involvement from the Sheriff's Office and could become an ongoing issue if the drums were removed.

Commissioner Crawford acknowledged the concerns raised but emphasized that efforts were being made to find a workable solution and expressed appreciation that Knife River and staff were attempting to address the problem. Additional comments reflected mixed perspectives—recognizing the visual and potential safety concerns associated with the barrels, while also acknowledging the challenges of preventing truck parking and the possibility that removing the drums could recreate prior traffic conflicts.

Ashley McCormick provided comment to clarify that her primary concern is safety rather than the appearance of the traffic drums. She described a recent incident in which, while traveling on Elliott Road, multiple vehicles encountered oncoming tractors near a corner. Due to the placement of the drums blocking the shoulder, there was no safe area to pull over, resulting in vehicles having to back down and around the corner to allow the tractors to pass. Ashley emphasized that, previously, drivers could utilize the shoulder to safely yield, but that option is no longer available. She reiterated that her concern is the loss of a safe pull-off area, not the visual presence of the orange barrels.

Road Superintendent Brad Haynes explained that Elliott Lane is a rural secondary and designated heavy haul route. Oversized loads are required to utilize pilot vehicles and follow specific safety protocols. He noted that wide agricultural equipment is also subject to similar safety requirements.

Julie Thompson suggested Knife River should take greater responsibility for policing its truck drivers and ensuring compliance with the CUP rather than relying on the Sheriff's Office. She stated that repeated violations should result in enforcement action under the CUP and potential hearings if noncompliance continues.

Commissioner Crawford emphasized the need to find a solution that addresses neighboring concerns while also resolving operational issues. He acknowledged that the current use of cones does not fully meet safety or neighborhood expectations and supported reevaluating alternative solutions.

County staff discussed the code compliance process, noting that complaints are typically investigated through observation from public right-of-way or with permission to enter private property. It was acknowledged that documenting violations in real time can be challenging, particularly when trucks are temporarily parked and may leave before enforcement personnel arrive. Staff indicated that photographs or video taken from public property or private property with appropriate documentation could potentially be used in enforcement proceedings.

County Counsel Eric Blaine clarified that a CUP violation is not a criminal matter and that the Sheriff's Office would only become involved if there were broader traffic safety concerns. Enforcement of CUP conditions primarily falls under the County's code compliance process.

Commissioners and staff acknowledged the difficulty of balancing operational realities of mining and trucking logistics with compliance requirements and neighborhood impacts. It was noted that truck staging may not have been fully addressed during the original CUP process and that future consideration of staging areas may be necessary. The discussion concluded with agreement to further evaluate the situation, explore alternative solutions to the cone placement, and improve clarity around the complaint and enforcement process to better serve the public.

Adam Mikulski stated that responsibility for resolving the truck parking and staging issues rests with Knife River, not the County or staff. He emphasized that the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) clearly requires parking to occur on-site and not on the street, and that it is the company's management responsibility to ensure compliance by employees and contractors. He expressed frustration that the issue has persisted for several years and referenced prior violations, stating that Knife River has not consistently taken the CUP requirements seriously. He suggested that if additional measures such as no-parking signage are necessary, the company should implement and enforce them. Adam also commented more broadly on land use processes, noting the importance of establishing clearer protocols when reviewing mining and similar applications to ensure appropriate conditions are applied at the outset. He stated that as the County grows, land use conflicts are increasing and require more proactive planning and oversight. Additionally, Adam expressed support for requesting more public input regarding the proposed land access legislation discussed earlier in the

meeting. He stated that many property owners would likely oppose measures allowing individuals to cross private property and encouraged the Commission to oppose the bill in its current form and seek additional review and public involvement before it advances further.

Karen Mikulski inquired about the process and timeline for installing “No Parking” signs, asking how quickly signs could be put up if needed. Brad responded that each sign costs approximately \$500–\$600 and takes about two weeks to purchase. He also noted that even if the signs are installed, they are not legally enforceable, limiting their effectiveness in controlling parking.

### **Consent Agenda**

1. Approve Minutes
2. Request for an amendment to easement previously granted to the City of Prineville
3. Barb Wire Pit Mining Lease
4. USDA APHIS Wildlife Services Agreement Renewal

Commissioner Crawford explained that a consent agenda is a grouping of items that have already been discussed in-depth at previous meetings and generally do not require further public input. These items are approved together to streamline the meeting process. He emphasized that any member of the public can request an item be removed from the consent agenda for separate discussion during the meeting.

Commissioner Hermreck added that the board meets four times a month—two public meetings at the Annex and two work sessions at another location, all open to the public. Items placed on the consent agenda have been thoroughly discussed at prior meetings, ensuring transparency, and using consent agendas helps streamline meetings and reduce staff workload. She reassured the public that being on a consent agenda does not prevent discussion if concerns arise. Commissioner Crawford further clarified that if the public has concerns about any item, they can request it be moved from the consent agenda to the discussion portion of the meeting, which allows proper procedural consideration and ensures their questions are addressed.

**MOTION:** Susan Hermreck moved to approve the consent agenda as presented. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

### **Discussion**

5. Order 2026-05 - Appointments to the Crook County Natural Resources Advisory

Committee

**Requester:**

Tim Deboodt, Coordinator, Crook County Natural Resources

**Details:** Tim Deboodt, Natural Resource Advisory Committee Coordinator, attended the Regular Session to bring forward a recommendation from the NRAC. The board reviewed the recommendation from the Natural Resources Advisory Committee for two new members. At their January meeting, the committee reviewed applications for two vacancies, including one applicant who attended and answered questions. The committee unanimously recommended Laura York and Andy Gallagher for appointment to four-year terms on the County's Natural Resources Advisory Committee.

**MOTION:** Susan Hermreck moved to approve Andy Gallagher and Laura York for four-year terms, expiring in 12-31-2029 for the Natural Resource Advisory Committee Order 2026-05. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

6. Ambulance Service Area Advisory Council Appointment Recommendations

**Requester:**

Katie Plumb, Health & Human Services Director

**Details:** Katie Plumb, Health and Human Services Director, attended the Regular Session and presented recommendations for appointments to the Crook County Ambulance Service Area Advisory Council. A special meeting was held on January 23rd to review applicants, as the advisory group did not have a quorum. The review team included Katie Plum, Will Van Vactor the Emergency Manager from St. Charles Prineville Emergency Department, and Stephanie O'Neill from the Health Department. Four applicants were considered for six openings. Jeremiah Kenfield was recommended to represent an ambulance service provider, bringing long-time county employment and strong community ties. Lieutenant Madden was recommended to represent the Sheriff's Office, with extensive experience and relationships within the community. Dr. Gruz was recommended as the EMS Medical Director representative, with decades of experience in medical director roles and prior state-level appointments reviewing ambulance service area plans. Tom Evans was recommended as a community representative, with experience in emergency medical services, service as a Veteran Service Officer, and strong local connections. All four applicants were recommended for appointment based on their qualifications, experience, and dedication to the advisory council's work.

Commissioner Barney thanked Katie, and thanked the four people that had stepped up here.

**MOTION:** Susan Hermreck moved to approve in the matter of the appointment to the Crook County Ambulance Service Area Advisory Committee, Order 2026-07. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes



Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

7. Consider approval of County Financial Assistance Agreement # 054285, Community Mental Health Program

**Requester:**

Eric Blaine, County Counsel

**Details:** County Counsel Eric Blaine attended the Regular Session to present the Funding Agreement for the Community Mental Health Program and the associated Local Plan. It was noted that the Local Plan for Crook County was drafted by Melissa Thompson (BestCare), and appreciation was expressed for her work. The funding agreement is the result of extended negotiations between the State and all 36 counties. This year's agreement differs significantly from prior versions. Historically, agreements were lengthy (often 150–200 pages) and relied heavily on “service elements” or “program elements.” The new agreement shifts away from that model and instead emphasizes the Local Plan. The Local Plan framework is intended to provide greater flexibility by allowing counties to structure service delivery based on local resources, challenges, and community needs. As a result, each county's plan will vary. The goal of this approach is to maintain service levels while enabling more responsive and locally tailored mental health service delivery. It was also noted that shortly after issuing the agreement, the State identified an error involving the inclusion of a section (Section 4A7 in Exhibit B) that had previously been negotiated out. The State has indicated it will correct the issue through a future amendment rather than reissuing the agreement. Consultation with AOC suggests the error is not ideal but is not significant enough to delay execution of the agreement. The recommendation is to proceed with execution and address the correction through the anticipated amendment.

Finally, it was explained that the Local Plan will be reviewed by the State and involves an interactive approval process. Approved plans are not permanent and may be revised as local circumstances change. The new system is expected to allow for increased flexibility and local control while maintaining statewide service quality standards.

**MOTION:** Brian Barney moved to approve the 2026-2027 Intergovernmental Agreement for the financing of community mental health programs, Agreement #44300-00054285. Susan Hermreck seconded. Discussion: Susan Hermreck made a comment regarding the length of the document, noting that even in its condensed form it remains extensive (over 400 pages). It was further observed that the local mental health contracts—and especially the public health contracts—are even longer. Acknowledgment was given to Katie for managing the administration of these lengthy contracts. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

8. Consider Approval of Local Mental Health Plan and Budget

**Requester:**

Eric Blaine, County Counsel

**Details:** County Counsel Eric Blaine clarified that although the Local Plan and Budget are referenced in and incorporated into the Funding Agreement (Item 7), they require a separate motion for approval. He noted that Melissa did an excellent job drafting the Local Plan and Budget, and that the State has reviewed and approved the document as to form. While connected to the funding agreement, the Local Plan and Budget are a separate document, which is why it was presented as a separate agenda item for consideration and action.

**MOTION:** Brian Barney moved to approve the CFAA local plan and healthcare budget. Susan Hermreck seconded. Discussion: Susan expressed support for Melissa Thompson as she steps into the role following Rick's retirement, noting that she has been very effective, clear in her communication, and beneficial to the County in assuming these responsibilities. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

### **Manager Report**

County Manager Will Van Vactor provided brief updates on two policies currently in development. IT Director Blaine Chaney is leading the effort to draft an Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy designed to help the County and staff utilize AI tools effectively while addressing potential ethical, legal, and operational risks. The policy will be presented to the Board in the near future. The Manager noted that AI is already becoming integrated into the workplace, and establishing clear guidelines will help ensure responsible and successful implementation. Additionally, progress is being made on revisions to the public records request policy, with assistance from outside counsel. A draft is expected to be presented for Board review during a work session later this month.

### **Commissioner Updates**

9. Letter re: Urgent Safety Needs at the Powell Butte Highway / U.S. Highway 126 Intersection

**Requester:**

Susan Hermreck, County Commissioner

**Details:** Commissioner Hermreck addressed a recent fatality on Highway 126 near the intersection with Powell Butte Highway, noting that while the crash did not occur directly at the intersection, it underscores ongoing and serious safety concerns along that corridor. She reiterated that the roundabout at Highway 126 and Powell Butte Highway remains the County's top transportation priority under the TSP; however, as the roadway is under ODOT jurisdiction, progress and funding are controlled by the state. She noted that projected costs for the roundabout have increased from approximately \$3.5 million to \$6 million, with potential to rise significantly higher once right-of-way acquisition is included, and that construction could still be many years away. Commissioner Hermreck reported that she has drafted a letter to ODOT and the Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation (COACT) requesting support for interim safety measures. These include installation of temporary speed feedback signs in both directions approaching the intersection, review and potential adjustment of



posted speeds, and consideration of additional near-term traffic-calming or safety treatments deemed feasible by ODOT. She plans to present the County's priority and supporting data at an upcoming COACT meeting. Traffic data compiled by the Sheriff's Office from January 1, 2016, through early February 2026 reflects significant crash history in the area, including numerous injured and non-injured motor vehicle accidents at or near the intersection. Additional recent traffic counts indicate approximately 4,000 vehicles per day in the corridor, further demonstrating the volume of use and need for safety improvements.

**MOTION:** Susan Hermreck moved to Sign on behalf of Crook County this letter for safety needs at Powell Butte Highway, U.S. Highway 126 intersection. Brian Barney seconded. Discussion: Commissioners Seth and Susan discussed ongoing efforts to improve safety on Highway 126. Seth noted the County's active advocacy, the importance of the updated transportation plan for shovel-ready projects, and ODOT Region 4's interest in timely solutions. Susan added that the County's priority list supports these efforts, and the recent traffic data and letter will strengthen the case amid competing regional projects. Seth emphasized that the safety issue is regional, affecting drivers from Deschutes, Jefferson, and Crook counties. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

#### 10. Letter of Support for HB 4121

**Requester:**

Brian Barney, County Commissioner

**Details:** Commissioner Barney requested Board approval to send a letter supporting House Bill 4121, which aims to strengthen emergency preparedness, training, coordination, and resilience across Oregon, including in the event of a Cascadia earthquake. He noted that the bill could also provide additional funding to support completion of the Core 3 facility in the County.

**MOTION:** Brian Barney moved to send a letter to representatives in support of House Bill 4121. Susan Hermreck seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

Commissioner Seth reported that he will be traveling to Salem over the weekend and into next week to meet with legislators during the short legislative session. He will participate in meetings organized through the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) and other opportunities to discuss the County's ideas and concerns. Commissioner Susan noted that the recent Capitol visit, including a lunch and various activities, was open to all commissioners, and Commissioner Seth chose to attend. The conversation briefly touched on the new \$1.7 billion state Capitol building, with Commissioners sharing personal opinions about its appearance compared to the local courthouse. The discussion concluded with a light exchange about courthouse rankings and notable buildings in other counties, before moving to public comment.

#### **Public Comment**

None

**Executive Session**

11. None scheduled.

**MOTION:** Brian Barney moved to Adjourn. Susan Hermreck 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 10:24 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant