Crook County Board of County Commissioners Minutes of February 18, 2026, Regular Session

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of County Commissioners met in a Regular Session on February 18, 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, Brian Barney
Board Members Absent: Susan Hermreck
Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; County Counsel Eric Blaine; Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; HR Director Meghan McKee; Finance Director Christina Haron; IT Director Blaine Cheney; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; County Clerk Cheryl Seely; Fire Chief Matt Smith; Fire Marshall Russ Deboodt; NewSun CEO Jake Stephens; Max Yoklic; Carlin MacMillan; Jacob Ripper; Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Systems Engineer Chelsea Watson; Assessor Jon Soliz; Human Resources; Harney County Assessor Corey Hill; Kathy Eby; Julie Thompson; Laura; Bob Townsend; Ashley McCormick; Steve Yancey; Ken Fahlgren; Stephanie Fahlgren; Jeff Minkowski; Adam Mikulski; Cliff Kiser; Jessica Barnes; Dick Zimmerlee; Steve Brown; Alicia; Mike Ervin; Mike Warren; Ed Jones; Tom Teaford; Christian Radubcal; Bob Hindman; Frank Hook; Julie Reed; Jeffrey Benkosky; and members of the public.

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

Commissioner Crawford explained that the first public comment period is reserved for comments related to items listed on the meeting agenda. A second public comment period will be held at the end of the meeting, allowing community members to share any additional thoughts or concerns.

Public Comment

Mike Ervin asked the board if there was a consent agenda today. Commissioner Crawford answered that there is no consent agenda today and explained what a consent agenda is due to Mike's previous comment about making the public aware of what that is.

Commissioner Crawford clarified that there was no consent agenda scheduled for this meeting. Commissioner Crawford also explained that consent agenda items typically include matters previously discussed in prior meetings or work sessions and are generally considered non-contentious, allowing them to be approved together to streamline the meeting process. The public was reminded that any item on a consent agenda may be requested to be removed for discussion if desired.

Discussion

1. STIF Advisory Committee Member Renewals and New Appointment
Requester:
Andrea Wasilew, Outreach & Engagement Administrator of Cascades East Transit
Presenter(s):
Bob Townsend, Transit Director of Cascades East Transit

Details: Bob Townsend attended the Regular Session to present a request regarding the Crook County Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) Advisory Committee. He explained that STIF funds are generated through the statewide payroll tax for transit and are distributed through counties, tribes, and transit districts. The STIF Advisory Committee meets three to four times per year and plays an important role in recommending how transit funds are allocated within the county. Bob noted that this year will be significant as the committee will help determine the allocation of available funds. He stated that the committee's next meeting is scheduled for April, and future meeting requirements may depend on guidance from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and potential legislative changes. Bob requested the renewal of current committee members Josh Smith, Kim Curley, Dennis Marston, Keya Rohovit-Wrolson, and himself, as well as the addition of a new member, John Eisler. He explained that there is no maximum number of members allowed for the STIF committee and that having a diverse group helps support transit-related decision-making in Crook County. Final funding recommendations made by the committee are ultimately reviewed and approved by the Crook County Board of Commissioners.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to renew, Josh Smith, Chair, Kim Curley, Dennis Marston, Keya Rohovit-Wrolson, Bob Townsend, and new member John Eisler on the STIF. Seth Crawford seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

2. Crooked River Roundup Contract Consideration
Requester:
Casey Daly, Fairgrounds Manager

Details: Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly attended the Regular Session to present a new long-term agreement between the Crooked River Roundup Board and Crook County. The agreement has already been ratified by both the Crook County Fair Board and the Crooked River Roundup Board and was brought before the Commissioners for consideration. Casey explained that the agreement establishes a 10-year contract and includes confirmed dates for the Crooked River Roundup over the next ten years. The agreement addresses several short-term concerns that had arisen in the past and provides greater clarity and stability moving forward. Commissioners acknowledged the significant amount of work put into developing the agreement by Casey, the Fair Board, and others involved. The agreement was noted as providing long-term certainty for the rodeo and was viewed positively as a collaborative effort that will benefit the event and the community.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to approve the use agreement with the Crook County Fairgrounds. Seth Crawford seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Brian Barney vote Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

3. PILOT Agreement Request
Requester:
Will Van Vactor, County Manager
Presenter(s):
Will Van Vactor and Christina Haron (County staff)
Jake Stephens and Max Yoklic (New Sun Energy)

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor attended the Regular Session to discuss and potentially approve a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreement requested by New Sun Energy for the Cartwright solar facility located near Highway 126 outside of Powell Butte. He explained that a PILOT agreement is an arrangement between a taxpayer and a governing body in which the project is exempt from standard property taxes and instead makes negotiated annual payments. Will clarified that the request is unrelated to land use approval, noting that the solar facility was previously approved in 2019 and has since been constructed. The request concerns the financial structure for tax payments associated with the project.

He reviewed the statutory framework under Oregon Revised Statute (ORS) 307.175, which allows counties to enter into PILOT agreements with eligible energy facilities. These agreements can last up to 20 years and require annual payments ranging from $5,500 to $7,000 per megawatt of capacity. The Cartwright facility has a total capacity of 56 megawatts.

Will explained that New Sun Energy initially proposed a payment of $5,500 per megawatt along with a $250,000 community benefit payment. Following further discussions, the company indicated it is willing to pay the maximum statutory amount of $7,000 per megawatt and provide a $1 million community benefit payment, plus an additional $250,000 through its community benefit fund.

He outlined potential advantages of a PILOT agreement, including predictable and stable revenue for the county and other taxing districts. He also noted that solar facilities are centrally assessed by the Oregon Department of Revenue, which creates uncertainty in future property tax assessments and potential appeals.

Will also discussed potential disadvantages, including the possibility of reduced revenue compared to traditional property taxes. He noted that county staff conducted an analysis to estimate potential property tax revenue and compare it to the proposed PILOT payments, while acknowledging that final property tax assessments are ultimately determined by the state.

Finance Director Christina Haron explained that she used the Department of Revenue's income approach framework for solar facilities and applied New Sun's project numbers to estimate potential property tax revenues. Because the project would be centrally assessed by the state, some assumptions used by the Department of Revenue are not available to the County. Using the available framework, staff estimated property tax revenues over the 20-year period requested for the PILOT agreement and calculated the present value of those taxes. They also calculated the net present value of potential PILOT payments under three options. Based solely on PILOT payments at $7,000 per megawatt for a 56-megawatt project, and excluding any community benefit payments, the analysis estimates approximately $2.4 million in foregone revenue compared to collecting regular property taxes. Herron noted she could provide additional detail if desired.

Jake Stephens CEO/ Founder NewSun Energy clarified that the estimated $2.4 million difference represents the discounted present value of anticipated property tax revenues over the 20-year period compared to the proposed PILOT payments and does not include the separate community benefit payment. When the community benefit payments—approximately $1 million plus $250,000 received upfront—are included, the difference is reduced to roughly $1.2 million. The $2.4 million figure reflects the present value of projected tax payments over time, while the community benefit payments are considered current dollars because they would be received immediately.

Commissioner Seth Crawford asked for clarification regarding the $2.4 million figure discussed. Christina explained that the $2.4 million represents the anticipated tax payments over a 20-year period and reflects the discounted present value of those payments. She clarified that this amount does not include the separate community benefit payment currently being discussed. She also noted that the proposed $1 million and $250,000 payments would be received immediately, so no discount was applied to those amounts because they would be received in today's dollars. Brian indicated he had no additional questions.

County Manager Will Van Vactor noted that a draft PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) agreement was included in the meeting packet and highlighted one outstanding issue regarding the treatment of a substation located on one of the applicable tax lots. He explained that it is unclear whether the substation should be included in the PILOT agreement, as the statute appears intended to apply to solar-related facilities. Because the substation may serve other generating facilities beyond the solar project, additional clarification is needed on whether it should be covered under the agreement. Van

Vactor stated that further research has been conducted on the matter and that additional information would be provided.

Will summarized that a potential benefit of the PILOT agreement would be stable and predictable revenue for the county over the 20-year term of the agreement, while a potential drawback could be lost revenue compared to standard taxation. He also provided context that the county has previously supported legislative efforts related to the PILOT statute to ensure local governments have input in how it is implemented, but emphasized that this does not obligate the Board to pursue a PILOT agreement.

Jake Stephens, CEO and founder of NewSun Energy, provided an overview of the company and its investment in Central Oregon. He explained that NewSun was founded in 2016 and has grown to approximately 25 employees, primarily based in Oregon, with plans to establish an operations and maintenance team in Prineville to support the company's local projects.

Jake discussed the long timelines and financial risks associated with developing power infrastructure projects, noting that solar developments often take many years due to permitting, interconnection, and construction processes. He stated that NewSun initially pursued development in Crook County because of the area's existing power infrastructure, including the Ponderosa substation, and described the nearly ten-year timeline required to complete the interconnection process with the Bonneville Power Administration.

Jake explained that the PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) program provides a fixed tax structure over a 20-year period, offering financial certainty for both the developer and the county compared to the Oregon Department of Revenue's annual valuation process, which can fluctuate based on operating costs and market conditions. He noted that rising transmission costs and other economic variables create uncertainty for developers and can also impact property tax valuations under the standard taxation method.

He also described the company's proposal to include an upfront payment component as part of the agreement to provide earlier financial benefits to the county. Jake stated that NewSun intends to continue working with the county on future projects and expressed interest in exploring other economic development tools, such as Strategic Investment Partnership (SIP) agreements, when feasible. He emphasized that the company's goal is to maintain a cooperative relationship with the county while continuing to invest in energy infrastructure in the region.

Jake continued his presentation by outlining NewSun Energy's proposal for a PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) agreement for the West Prineville Solar Farm projects, beginning with the Cartwright 1 and Cartwright 2 projects. He requested that the county adopt the $7,000 per megawatt rate allowed under the statute. Stephens stated that the solar facility permit includes the infrastructure necessary to connect the generation facility to the grid and suggested that the associated substation should be considered part of the qualifying facility under the statute.

Jake also discussed NewSun's prior experience with PILOT agreements in Harney and Lake Counties and noted that a representative from Harney County was present to speak about their experience administering similar agreements. He highlighted the company's financial investment in the region, including approximately $40–$50 million in wages paid during project construction and the use of several local contractors and union labor.

Stephens emphasized that the company's investment in solar generation and power infrastructure contributes to the local power supply and may help support future economic development by increasing available energy capacity in the region. He described the significant cost increases and risks associated with the projects, including higher interconnection costs, tariffs on materials, and other economic changes over time.

Jake summarized NewSun's proposal, which includes the $7,000 per megawatt PILOT rate, a proposed $1 million lump-sum impact payment to the county, and a community investment component to support local initiatives such as scholarships, agricultural programs, and community projects. During discussion, a commissioner expressed concern that community investment funds should instead be directed toward county services that benefit taxpayers. Jake indicated the company would be willing to work with the county on structuring those payments. Jake also noted NewSun's plans to incorporate agricultural uses, such as sheep grazing, at the solar site and discussed the company's investment in a local operations and maintenance team to support current and future projects. He concluded by emphasizing the company's long-term investment in Crook County and the importance of the PILOT agreement in maintaining the financial viability of the projects.

Will Van Vactor requested additional clarification regarding the interpretation of the PILOT statute as it relates to whether the project substation would be included as part of the solar facility. A representative for NewSun explained that the substation is considered part of the power generation facility because it is necessary infrastructure that allows the solar project to connect to the electrical grid and is owned by the project developers rather than a utility provider. Jake cited language from state statutes and administrative rules governing photovoltaic solar power generation facilities, noting that permitted facilities include the equipment necessary to convert, store, and transmit electricity, as well as the infrastructure required for grid integration. Based on this interpretation, the substation was described as a component of the solar project rather than part of the broader transmission system.

Commissioner Brian Barney addressed the potential addition of battery storage at the site in the future. NewSun indicated that any future storage capacity would be treated separately and could be assessed at the same $7,000 per megawatt rate if included under a similar program. Commissioners clarified that battery storage is not part of the current proposal and that any future storage development would require a separate negotiation or agreement with the county.

Matt Smith Fire Chief for Crook County Fire and Rescue, provided testimony regarding the proposed PILOT agreement. He clarified that Crook County Fire and Rescue is a separate special taxing district, though it serves the county by providing fire services within the district and ambulance services countywide. Matt stated that his comments were not related to the land use aspects of the project or whether it should be built, but rather focused on the importance of stable and predictable revenue for emergency service planning. He explained that the fire district is responsible for providing services to the project site and must plan for staffing, equipment, and response capacity accordingly. Matt expressed support for a stable taxation mechanism, noting that fluctuations in property valuation or depreciation can make it difficult to accurately project revenues and maintain consistent service levels. He stated that a predictable revenue structure would help the district plan for and deliver the necessary emergency services.

Ed Jones a contractor with NewSun Energy and resident of Powell Butte, provided testimony in support of the proposal. He stated that his company generated over $2 million in revenue from work related to the project last year and expects similar revenue this year, employing approximately eight people. Ed commented that NewSun Energy has been positive to work with and noted the company’s contributions and donations to the local community. He expressed support for a consistent revenue structure associated with the project and thanked the Board for the opportunity to comment.

Tom Green provided public comment expressing opposition to the expansion of solar developments in the area. He stated that he believes solar farms negatively impact the local landscape and encouraged the Board to gather input from Crook County residents regarding future solar development. During discussion, commissioners clarified that the item under consideration was related to a tax agreement for an existing project rather than approval of a new solar development. Green reiterated his view that the county should have broader public conversation about solar projects and their long-term impact on the community.

Commissioner Crawford responded to public comment by stating that discussions are underway with Community Development staff regarding the possibility of a six-month moratorium on new solar development applications. The commissioner explained that the county’s solar siting rules were adopted approximately ten years ago, when community conditions and expectations regarding solar projects were different. Seth indicated that the potential moratorium would allow the county time to conduct a more comprehensive review of the current regulations and approval processes. This review would include input from a variety of stakeholders, such as landowners, solar developers, and community members who live near existing or proposed projects. Seth emphasized the importance of evaluating factors such as community input, economic development, and potential environmental impacts as part of a broader discussion about future solar development in Crook County.

Julie Thompson asked several questions regarding the PILOT program and whether it was available to individual citizens or only to large energy projects. It was clarified that the PILOT program is a state program applicable to certain renewable energy developments rather than a county-created program.

Discussion followed regarding the financial implications of the PILOT agreement compared to traditional property taxation. Commissioners explained that earlier estimates indicated approximately a $2.4 million difference over time between standard taxation and the PILOT structure, while the proposal currently under discussion would reduce that difference to roughly $1.2 million when considering the negotiated payments and upfront contributions. Commissioners also discussed the potential value of receiving a portion of the funds upfront rather than over the 20-year term.

Commissioners further explained that renewable energy facilities are assessed by the state based on an income approach, which evaluates the profitability and operating costs of the project rather than the physical value of the land and structures. Because those valuations can fluctuate over time, the PILOT structure could provide more predictable revenue to the county.

Questions were also raised regarding the long-term future of the solar facility and the property after the agreement ends. Commissioners noted that Crook County requires solar developments to provide a decommissioning bond to ensure the facility is removed and the land restored when operations end.

Jake Stephens added that the state's valuation method relies on long-term projections of a project's profitability, which can change due to factors such as inflation, energy prices, and operating costs. He explained that the proposed PILOT structure would establish a fixed annual payment of $7,000 per megawatt while also providing a lump-sum payment upfront, giving the county more financial certainty compared to the variable state assessment model.

Adam Mikulski provided public comment regarding the project and the proposed PILOT agreement. Drawing on his experience working with Bonneville, he discussed transmission "wheeling" charges and noted that increases in those costs reflect the actual cost of operating and maintaining the electrical transmission system. Adam also questioned how the power generated by the solar project would benefit the local area if the electricity is transmitted to other regions. He commented on the variability of solar generation and expressed skepticism about some aspects of the project, including the feasibility of grazing livestock on the site. He further stated that energy prices and the value of electricity generation may increase over time and suggested that the county could potentially receive greater tax revenue in the future under a traditional property tax structure rather than locking in a fixed payment through a long-term PILOT agreement.

Commissioner Brian Barney stated that the Board is working to evaluate the best available information in order to determine what option would provide the greatest benefit to Crook County taxpayers. He noted that financial projections include variables that could change over time and emphasized the importance of making a careful and informed decision.

During the discussion, Commissioner Barney also addressed comments made during public testimony regarding grazing at solar facilities, noting that grazing sheep on solar sites is a common and proven practice used to manage vegetation without mowing or chemical treatments. Additional comments reiterated the importance of carefully considering the long-term financial implications of the agreement, recognizing that the project developer is operating as a business while the Board's responsibility is to ensure the county and its taxpayers receive the best possible outcome.

Jake clarified that BPA rates have historically been kept lower due to efforts by co-ops and others to limit bonding tied to rates. While this helped keep costs down, it also delayed investments in grid infrastructure. As a result, there is now a "catch-up" effect, and rates are expected to increase as Bonneville builds new transmission lines and makes additional grid investments. He noted that these rising costs will affect future power prices. Jake also explained that the current power contract is a fixed-price, 20-year agreement with the City of Seattle, meaning the price will remain the same throughout the contract term and is not subject to inflation. This fixed rate acts as a ceiling while other operating expenses may increase over time.

Regarding grazing, he noted that it is not a requirement but is an effort to follow local practices and make the best use of the land. He also highlighted potential local power benefits, explaining that Central Oregon largely relies on power imported through transmission lines from The Dalles. Because system limits are determined by peak demand periods—particularly hot August afternoons when air conditioning use is high—local solar generation during those times can provide regional grid support, even if the power is technically exported elsewhere.

Corey Hill, Harney County Assessor, shared Harney County's experience with solar farms, noting they have been financially beneficial for the county. He explained that a property that previously generated about $700 annually in taxes now generates approximately $280,000 per year, providing significant revenue stability for the next 20 years. Hill also noted that funding associated with the project helped support community improvements, including a new Special Care Unit connected to the local hospital, which now allows residents to access services such as oncology, dermatology, and surgery locally rather than traveling long distances. He added that, based on his experience, centrally assessed solar facilities depreciate significantly each year, making a 20-year agreement a secure and beneficial approach for the county.

Commissioners discussed the proposed agreement and the importance of securing a stable and predictable revenue source for the county. Commissioner Barney expressed support for moving forward with the agreement, emphasizing that a consistent annual payment would provide financial stability and reduce the risk associated with potential tax appeals, referencing a recent example involving Pacific Power where an appeal could have required the county to repay previously collected funds. Commissioner Barney also noted that the agreement would generate significantly more revenue than the property previously produced and viewed it as a form of economic development that could support future jobs and community growth.

Commissioner Crawford agreed with moving forward but emphasized the importance of ensuring the county receives the best value for taxpayers. While supportive of the steady revenue approach, the commissioner expressed concern about the broader impacts of solar development and stated that the county should more carefully evaluate future solar projects and seek additional public input. The commissioner also highlighted the need to balance economic development with protecting the character of the community and residents' quality of life.

Commissioner Crawford and Commissioner Barney agreed that while this project is already constructed and should move forward, the county should take a closer look at how future solar developments are evaluated and approved. The discussion also acknowledged the importance of considering property rights and ensuring that landowners retain the ability to use their property within existing laws while maintaining community involvement in future decisions.

Before the Board moved to a motion, staff noted that several issues still needed clarification, including whether the project's substation should be included in the PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) agreement and how battery storage would be treated. Commissioners were asked to consider whether they had received enough information during the meeting to determine if the substation should be included in the agreement and whether any modifications to the draft PILOT agreement in the meeting packet were necessary.

County Counsel Eric Blaine advised that additional review may be needed before making a final determination on the substation's inclusion. While project representatives provided administrative rule language suggesting the substation could be considered part of the solar project, counsel stated he had not yet had sufficient time to review the material and recommended conducting further legal research and providing a formal opinion to the Board.

Staff noted that the timeline for approving the PILOT agreement is limited, with a deadline of March 1st, and the cancellation of the upcoming work session further restricts opportunities for additional discussion. Commissioners agreed that obtaining a legal opinion would help ensure the agreement is thoroughly reviewed. It was also noted that battery storage would not be included in the PILOT agreement.

Corey Hill, Harney County Assessor, added that in Harney County the interpretation has been that substations are included as part of the solar facility for PILOT agreements. She explained that the substations exist solely to serve the solar project, and therefore their county has treated them as part of the solar site and included them within their PILOT programs.

Commissioners discussed key terms of the proposed PILOT agreement, including the per-megawatt fee and the community benefit payment. Staff confirmed that the state statute allows a per-megawatt fee ranging from $5,500 to $7,000, and there appeared to be consensus among commissioners to apply the maximum rate of $7,000 per megawatt for the project. Commissioners also discussed the one-time community benefit payment of $1.25 million, noting that it should be documented through a separate agreement or letter of commitment from the developer to ensure it is enforceable.

The Board also reviewed outstanding questions regarding the inclusion of the project's substation in the PILOT agreement. While some commissioners indicated that common sense suggested the substation should be included as part of the solar facility, they also expressed interest in confirming this through legal review. Commissioners discussed the possibility of approving the agreement based on the agreed parameters while awaiting confirmation on the substation issue.

County Manager Will Van Vactor and County Counsel Eric Blaine outlined options for proceeding, including approving the agreement and signing it outside a meeting once final details are confirmed, or holding a special meeting to finalize the decision to allow additional public visibility and discussion. Commissioners acknowledged the time sensitivity of the project, including financing and operational timelines, while also emphasizing the importance of transparency.

As a potential solution, Will Van Vactor suggested including language in the agreement allowing for adjustments if future clarification from the state determines that substations should not be included in the PILOT program. The discussion concluded with commissioners preparing to move toward a formal motion based on the agreed terms.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to direct staff to draft and finalize for execution a pilot agreement based on the conversation in today's meeting, and including, all of the parameters that have been discussed and as part of that motion, to authorize the Board of Commissioners to execute outside the regular meeting. Seth Crawford seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

4. Order 2026-09 Tax Foreclosure Surplus Policy
Requester:
Eric Blaine, County Counsel

Details: County Counsel Eric Blaine attended the Regular Session to present Order 2026-09, explaining that recent changes in state law—specifically House Bills 4056 and 2089—have significantly modified the process Oregon counties must follow when foreclosing on properties with delinquent real property taxes. The proposed order formalizes the county's process to comply with these updated statutory requirements. Eric explained that under the new law, after a property is foreclosed due to unpaid taxes, the county must follow additional procedures to attempt to return the property to the former owner, particularly for residential zoned properties. This may include negotiating with the former owner for up to one year before proceeding through a multistep public auction process. He also noted that if a foreclosed property sells for more than the total taxes, interest, and fees owed, the surplus funds will no longer be distributed to local taxing districts. Instead, the surplus must be transferred to the Oregon Department of Revenue, which will manage distribution to potential claimants. Commissioners clarified that these procedures are mandated by state law and that counties are required to foreclose on properties with three years of delinquent property taxes. The order does not change those statutory requirements but establishes a formal process for implementing them locally.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to approve Order 2026-10 Tax Foreclosure Surplus Policy. Seth Crawford seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

5. Special Joint Meeting with Vector Control District Board of Trustees
Requester:
Will Van Vactor, County Manager
Presenter(s):
Crook County Vector Control District

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor attended the Regular Session and convened a joint meeting with the Crook County Vector Control District Board. Representatives from the Vector Control District were introduced, including Cliff Kiser, District Manager, and Ken Fahlgren, Chair of the Vector Control District Board. Additional board members present included Tom Teaford, Jeff Minkowski, and another board member, along with Stephanie Fahlgren, who currently serves as Board Secretary. Members introduced themselves for the record before the discussion began.

Will opened the joint meeting by explaining the statutory requirements for the annual meeting between the Crook County Board of Commissioners and the Crook County Vector Control District Board. He noted that the meeting is required under ORS 452.120, which directs the county governing body to hold at least one annual meeting to investigate and supervise district affairs and review district activities.

He explained that the statute requires the Vector Control District to present a proposed annual work plan, including an estimate of funds needed for the coming year and a description of planned work and methods. The Board of Commissioners may approve the work plan after consulting with the local public health official. Will also noted that the statute requires the district to provide an annual report detailing funds expended, methods used, and work accomplished. He then turned the meeting over to the Vector Control District Board to present its report and discuss past and future activities.

Cliff Kiser presented the Crook County Vector Control District's pesticide use plan (PUP), which is submitted annually to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Oregon Health Authority for approval. The plan outlines treatment thresholds, surveillance activities, and mosquito control methods used by the district. Cliff explained that the district follows Best Management Practices, prioritizing physical and cultural control methods such as reducing standing water and adjusting irrigation practices. When necessary, biological controls such as Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis (BTI) are used, along with biochemical larvicides that prevent mosquito larvae from developing into adults.

The primary mosquito sources in the district are older flood-irrigated pastures where eggs can survive for many years. Staff conducts field surveillance by sampling water for larvae and applying treatments when thresholds are met. Applications are typically done using granular larvicide distributed by vehicle, with monitoring conducted every 10–15 days to ensure effectiveness.

If adult mosquito populations emerge, the district uses targeted ground fogging with pyrethrin-based products. Aerial spraying is rarely used and has only occurred once in the past 25 years. The district also collaborates with the City of Prineville on wetland management to reduce mosquito habitat and improve control efforts. Cliff also discussed West Nile virus preparedness, noting that Crook County has had two positive detections (one equine and one bird) but no human cases. Maintaining strong mosquito control practices helps reduce the risk of transmission.

The district operates with an annual budget of approximately $400,000–$450,000, though typical yearly expenses range from $140,000 to $160,000. Reserve funds are maintained for potential aerial spraying, equipment replacement, and building needs. For the upcoming fiscal year, the district anticipates levying between $140,000 and $200,000, depending on operational needs, which remains below the maximum levy authority.

Following the presentation, staff asked whether the Board of Commissioners had sufficient information to consider approval of the district's annual work plan as required by statute.

Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb stated that she had no significant additions to the Vector Control District's presentation but noted that the district has been very responsive when contacted by the Health Department. She shared that when a member of the public raised concerns about mosquitoes, the district promptly followed up. Katie credited the district's work and partnerships as an important factor in

Crook County not experiencing human cases of West Nile virus, while acknowledging that some level of luck also plays a role. She concluded that the district's efforts have been effective in protecting public health from vector-related risks.

Commissioners expressed support for approving the Vector Control District's work plan, noting that the presentation was clear and well prepared. Commissioner Crawford asked for additional financial details, specifically a check register or summary of the district's bank accounts and reserve balances.

District representatives explained that they maintain approximately $104,000 in the equipment reserve account and about $162,000 in the building reserve account, totaling roughly $260,000 in reserves. In addition, the district currently has about $240,000 in its operating account, which allows it to cover expenses throughout the year until tax revenues are received. The district typically ends each fiscal year with an ending fund balance between $200,000 and $240,000.

They also discussed their financial management practices, noting that accounting services are provided by an external accountant. The district is in the process of moving funds into the Oregon Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP) to allow the funds to earn better interest while remaining accessible. Currently, funds are held in bank accounts, with the district mindful of FDIC insurance limits.

Will referenced ORS 452.120, noting that the statute provides the County Board with oversight authority over the Vector Control District. He emphasized that his comments were not intended to detract from the district's effective work controlling mosquitoes, but rather to ensure the Board of Commissioners is appropriately exercising its oversight responsibilities.

Will noted that some local concerns had been raised regarding public meeting practices and certain employment practices. He suggested that the Vector Control District may benefit from consulting resources available through the Oregon Government Ethics Commission, including training, guidance, and advisory opinions related to public meetings law.

He also recommended that the district consider consulting with an accountant or legal counsel regarding employment structure and contractor arrangements to ensure compliance with applicable rules. Will stated that he wanted to raise these topics during the joint meeting so the Board of Commissioners could discuss whether any follow-up or additional guidance would be appropriate.

Commissioner Crawford recommended that the Vector Control District consult with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC) to review its public meeting practices. He noted that the County had previously worked with OGEC after receiving questions from the public and media, and found their guidance helpful in improving transparency and ensuring compliance with public meeting laws.

Vector Control representatives stated they were willing to learn and improve their processes. They noted that they had already been working to address compliance issues brought to their attention and credited recent guidance for helping them better understand requirements.

Discussion also addressed the district's use of a contract position. Will and Commissioner Crawford suggested obtaining additional review from a third party—such as a state agency, accountant, or legal professional—to ensure the contractor arrangement is clearly structured and compliant with applicable rules. District representatives explained that the contract and RFP had been drafted by their attorney and expressed willingness to review it further if needed.

Commissioner Crawford clarified that many of the compliance concerns had only been raised within the last year and that the board had been working to correct practices since becoming aware of them. Commissioners emphasized that the purpose of the discussion was not to assign blame but to ensure the district takes steps to confirm compliance and improve procedures.

Additional discussion included operational topics such as meeting locations and facility use. The district noted challenges securing meeting space and asked about the possibility of a long-term lease agreement for their building to provide stability and reduce financial pressure. Commissioners indicated the value of the district's work and expressed openness to future discussions on that topic, while reiterating the importance of improving public meeting processes.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to approve the work plan. Seth Crawford seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

The parties agreed that the Vector Control District would follow up on the discussed items, including reviewing public meeting practices and the contractor arrangement. Commissioners suggested reconvening in approximately three to four months to review progress and continue the discussion.

Commissioner Crawford noted that the follow-up meeting could include a conversation about a potential long-term lease agreement. Early May was identified as a possible timeframe to allow the district time to complete its review and to align with the upcoming budget cycle. The discussion concluded with agreement to reconnect at that time and continue working collaboratively on the issues discussed.

<u>Manager Report</u>

None

Commissioner Updates
None

Public Comment

Dave McMichael a resident on Alfalfa Road, spoke during public comment regarding Ordinance 356 and asked whether there was a process to appeal or amend the ordinance. He expressed concerns about safety and traffic impacts on the narrow county road near his property, noting limited visibility, lack of pull-offs, and existing school bus traffic. McMichael also raised concerns that allowing commercial OHV (side-by-side) tours in the area could increase traffic, trespassing, and enforcement challenges, which he stated had already been ongoing issues in the area. Commissioners responded that the road meets state standards for a county road and that the ordinance only allows individuals or businesses to apply for authorization, rather than broadly opening the road to unrestricted OHV traffic. They explained that any approved operations would be limited, structured, and subject to county requirements and accountability measures. Enforcement would occur through existing law enforcement processes. Commissioners acknowledged Dave's concerns and encouraged him and other nearby landowners to report any problems or negative impacts if they occur. Commissioner Crawford stated that while the county intends to move forward with the current process, the Board would be willing to review the situation in the future if documented issues arise that negatively affect neighboring properties or the surrounding area. Commissioners also noted that no specific operator had yet been approved under the ordinance.

Adam Mikulski asked for clarification about the process for reporting issues if problems arise with a permitted OHV operation. He asked whether concerns would need to be submitted as a formal complaint through the county, noting that in past situations the public was not aware that a specific complaint form was required to initiate review.County Counsel Eric Blaine responded that the appropriate reporting process would depend on the nature of the issue. Criminal violations would be handled by the Sheriff's Office, while violations of a county-issued permit would be addressed through the county's administrative processes rather than through the Sheriff or county counsel.

Julie Thompson thanked the county for removing traffic cones at the intersection of Elliott and Stahancyk, noting that the change has improved traffic flow in the area. She also expressed understanding of the concerns raised by another resident regarding potential impacts from increased side-by-side traffic and encouraged the county to monitor the situation and address any issues if they arise. Julie also referenced recently announced federal funding related to ongoing environmental concerns and asked how the funds would be used. Commissioners noted that they had requested clarification from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) regarding the funding and intended to share additional details with the public once more information becomes available. Julie commented that while she believed the issue could have been addressed earlier at a lower cost, she supported efforts to use the funding to better understand and address the problem.

Mike Ervin expressed concern about the recent decision to discontinue after-hours reservations for the library meeting room. He noted that public meeting spaces in the community are limited and that the library room has been an important resource for activities such as birthday parties, quilting groups, and other community gatherings. While acknowledging concerns about misuse of the facility, Ervin suggested the Library Board of Directors should be involved in developing any policy changes and asked the county to reconsider the decision and explore alternative solutions. Commissioner Crawford responded that they are in the process of reviewing the issue and agreed that input from stakeholders, including community members and the Library Board, would be valuable. They indicated interest in scheduling time at a future meeting to gather public feedback and work toward a balanced solution that protects the facility while continuing to provide community access to the meeting space.

Executive Session

At 12:14PM the Board of Commissioners convened into Executive Session under the following statute(s): ORS 192.660(2)(e) For the purpose of conducting deliberations with persons designated by the governing body to negotiate real property transactions.

6. ORS 192.660(2)(e) For the purpose of conducting deliberations with persons designated by the governing body to negotiate real property transactions.

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 delegate authority to Commissioner Barney to sign the real property listing agreement as discussed in the executive session. Seth Crawford seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to Adjourn. Seth Crawford seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford 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 12:21 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant