Crook County Board of County Commissioners Minutes of March 4, 2026, Regular Session

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of County Commissioners met in a Regular Session on March 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; County Clerk Cheryl Seely; IT Director Blaine Cheney; HR Director Meghan McKee; Finance Director Christina Haron; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Systems Engineer Chelsea Watson; Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson; Community Corrections Lieutenant Aaron Boyce; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Senior Planner Katie McDonald; Community Development Director; Human Resources; Natural Resources Coordinator Tim Deboodt; Jessica Barnes; Mike Ervin; Julie Thompson; Monty Kurtz; Dawn Mountz; and members of the public.

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

Public Comment

None

Consent Agenda

1. Approve Minutes

Commissioner Crawford briefly explained the purpose of the consent agenda, noting that items placed on it have typically already been discussed and are generally considered noncontroversial. The commissioner added that if members of the public wish to discuss an item listed on the consent agenda, they are encouraged to raise the issue during public comment or contact the Board, and the item can be moved to the regular discussion agenda if needed.

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

Discussion

2. Signature Request for Acceptance of Phase Two BHD Grant Funding BHD-27-05
Requester:
Aaron Boyce, Community Corrections Lieutenant

Details: Community Corrections Lieutenant Aaron Boyce attended the Regular Session to request for the Board's signature to accept the second half of Behavioral Health Deflection Grant funding for an ongoing program that has been in place for the past two years. The grant had already been awarded, and the request was for formal acceptance of the remaining funds. Commissioners expressed appreciation for the Sheriff's Office efforts to secure grant funding to support behavioral health and probation-related programs. No additional questions were raised.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to sign for acceptance of Phase 2 BHD grant funding BHD27-05. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

3. Order 2026-08 Planning Commissioner Appointment
Requester:
John Eisler, Community Development Director

Details: Community Development Director Job Eisler attended the Regular Session to present Order 2026-08, recommending the appointment of Monty Kurtz to Position 7 on the Planning Commission for a four-year term ending in 2029. The position had been advertised beginning in November through the county's standard recruitment process. Three applications were received. John reported that the Planning Commission reviewed the applicants and recommended Monty for the appointment. He noted that Monty has been serving as a pro tem commissioner and has demonstrated preparedness, thoughtful participation, and strong engagement during hearings. The Planning Commission expressed support for appointing him as a regular member.

Commissioner Hermreck commented that she had received positive feedback from other Planning Commission members regarding Monty Kurtz's service as a pro tem commissioner. She noted that Kurtz had been well-prepared for the meetings and had taken the time to review materials, which commissioners indicated was greatly appreciated.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve Monty Kurtz to position 7 of the Crook County Planning Commission, Order 2026-08. Brian Barney seconded. Discussion: Commissioner Crawford stated he had received feedback from several community members who expressed concerns about appointing Monty Kurtz to the Planning Commission and said, based on that input, he was not in favor of the appointment. Community Development Director John Eisler responded that diversity of perspectives is important for the Planning Commission and noted that the commission itself recommended Monty for the position. Commissioner Hermreck expressed support for the appointment, citing Monty's preparation and commitment, and encouraged the public to attend meetings to better understand the commission's work. Commissioner Barney also supported the appointment, expressing appreciation for the Planning Commission and acknowledging the significant time and effort required of its volunteer members. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Seth Crawford votes Nay. Motion Passed 2-1.

4. Appointment of Ag Extension Budget Officer for FY27
Requester:
Will Van Vactor, County Manager

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor attended the Regular Session to make a recommendation for the Board to appoint Tim Deboodt as the Budget Officer for the Ag Extension Service District for Fiscal Year 2027. He explained that under Oregon Local Budget Law, the governing body must designate a budget officer to prepare the proposed budget, assemble the required financial documents, coordinate with staff, and present the budget to the Budget Committee. Will recommended Tim due to his extensive experience with the Ag Extension District and his prior service as the district's budget officer, noting his familiarity with local budget law. Commissioners indicated their support for the recommendation.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to that we accept Tim. Susan Hermreck seconded. Discussion: Commissioners thanked Tim for his willingness to serve as Budget Officer, noting that his experience and long-standing involvement with the Extension District provide valuable continuity as the Board continues to establish roles and processes. They expressed appreciation for his continued service and willingness to step into the role. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

5. Approval of Board of Commissioners Goals and Priorities for FY27
Requester:
Will Van Vactor, County Manager

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor attended the Regular Session to present the Board's Fiscal Year 2027 goals and priorities, which were previously discussed at the January Budget Committee meeting. He requested the Board formally adopt the goals to guide budget planning and departmental requests for the upcoming fiscal year. The six goals include continuing to provide high-quality services to the community, maintaining financial sustainability, fostering a collaborative organizational culture, enhancing quality of life and safety in Crook County, improving organizational communication and transparency, and implementing a countywide facilities and asset management plan. Will noted that the goals had already been shared with departments to help inform their budget planning for FY27.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved that the Board of County Commissioners approve the goals and priorities for fiscal year 2027 as presented to guide department planning, budgeting, and organization initiatives. Susan Hermreck seconded. Discussion: Commissioners expressed support for the goals and priorities, noting they were thoroughly reviewed at the January Budget Committee meeting and provided strong guidance for county planning. They also thanked County Manager Will Van Vactor and county staff for their work developing the goals and supporting the annual budget process. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

Manager Report

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor provided an update on the Fiscal Year 2027 budget planning process, noting that meetings with all county departments had begun to review budget requests and would continue over the next two weeks. He stated that the process is progressing on schedule according to the previously approved budget calendar, with departmental budget narratives due later in the month. Will also noted that the March 25th work session would likely be canceled due to a lack of quorum, and notice would be provided. Additionally, he reported that the county's new website platform is now live, with most content migrated from the previous site. Staff will continue refining the site and addressing minor issues. Will and the Commissioners expressed appreciation to staff involved in the project, particularly Breyanna and Chelsea, for their work implementing the new system.

Commissioner Updates

6. Order 2026-10- Declaration of Local Drought Emergency
Requester:
Brian Barney, County Commissioner

Details:
Commissioner Barney reported that the Board received a request from the Deschutes Basin Board of Control to declare a local drought. He contacted Ochoco Irrigation District for information regarding current conditions, and the district subsequently provided supporting documentation and a letter requesting that the county declare a drought. Barney noted that Order 2026-10, declaring a local drought and requesting a state drought emergency declaration for Crook County, was presented to the Board for consideration. He also disclosed that he serves on the Ochoco Irrigation District Board of Directors and sought guidance from legal counsel regarding any potential conflict of interest. County Counsel advised that participation in the discussion and vote did not present a conflict.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to approve a resolution in order 2026-10. Susan Hermreck seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

Commissioner Crawford reported on a recent trip to Washington, D.C. with Commissioner Hermreck, where they met with several senators and representatives to discuss issues impacting Crook County. Discussions included potential Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land acquisition to provide a second access route out of Juniper Canyon and create additional safety areas in subdivisions. They also discussed the Highway 126 intersection near the post office and explored opportunities for federal funding to help advance improvements. Seth also thanked Senator McLane for his work supporting increased funding for the county fairgrounds, including potential changes that could increase the county's share of state funding and additional support for horse racing facilities. He noted these funding opportunities could significantly increase annual funding for the fairgrounds.

Commissioner Hermreck reported on attending the National Association of Counties (NACo) conference, where discussions focused on public lands, forestry management, and rural policy issues. She met with federal forestry officials and other county commissioners to discuss forest health, biomass energy opportunities, and challenges facing the local timber industry following the closure of the area's last sawmill. Susan also discussed wolf delisting efforts with members of Oregon's congressional delegation and attended sessions on SNAP and Medicaid. She highlighted upcoming community events, including the Crooked River Roundup Queen kickoff, and proposed that the county sponsor BestCare's "Restoring Hope" community luncheon at the $500 community partner level to support local mental health services.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to be a community partner sponsor for $500 at the bestcare luncheon. Brian Barney seconded. Discussion: The board expressed support for sponsoring the BestCare "Restoring Hope" luncheon, noting the organization provides important services to many residents in the community. The commissioner shared observations from participating in the point-in-time count, where individuals experiencing homelessness spoke positively about their experiences with BestCare programs, including classes and access to services such as showers. These conversations reinforced confidence in BestCare as the county's contracted provider and the value of supporting their work. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

Commissioners also discussed federal policy issues addressed during their recent trip, including efforts to increase timber production, remove the 21-inch harvest rule, and support legislation aimed at expediting federal permitting processes. They noted ongoing challenges with managing secondary wood products and discussed biomass energy as a potential solution. Concerns were also raised about forest health, including tree mortality from disease and beetles, wildfire risk, and increasing difficulties obtaining insurance in high-risk areas. Commissioners emphasized the importance of regional collaboration among Eastern Oregon counties to advocate for shared priorities and improve understanding of rural issues at the state and federal levels.

Public Comment

Tim Deboodt provided public comment regarding a recent trip to Washington, D.C., where he represented the Oregon Farm Bureau on federal lands issues. He reported that discussions with federal officials focused on supporting the beef cattle industry, including identifying and repopulating vacant grazing allotments on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands. He noted that agencies are working to address these allotments but that the NEPA process continues to present challenges. Tim also discussed meetings with federal officials and congressional staff regarding forestry, wild horse management, data center development on public lands, and rebuilding forest industry infrastructure. Additional discussions included concerns about a proposed animal rights initiative and a Lane County watershed measure, as well as advocacy for removing wolves from the Endangered Species Act and returning management to the states.

Commissioner Hermreck thanked Tim for sharing his report and noted that during recent meetings in Washington, D.C., she found federal agency leadership to be accessible and willing to engage directly with local officials. She shared an example from a meeting with the head of Veteran Services, who discussed progress in reducing a backlog of veteran cases and emphasized a willingness to assist local veterans directly. Commissioner Hermreck and Commissioner Crawford commented that the openness and responsiveness she experienced from federal officials, including those from forestry and BLM, was refreshing compared to past experiences and appreciated the opportunity for direct communication about issues affecting local communities.

Executive Session

At 9:41AM 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; and ORS 192.660(2)(f) To consider information or records that are exempt by law from public inspection.

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.

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

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve the letters of intent as discussed in the executive session. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

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

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to authorize staff to participate in the third-party mediation subject to the parameters discussed in the executive session. Susan Hermreck seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 3-0.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to adjourn the meeting. 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 10:55 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant