

Crook County Board of County Commissioners Minutes of July 22, 2026, Work Session

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of County Commissioners met in a Work Session on July 22, 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

Board Members Absent: Brian Barney

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp, County Counsel Eric Blaine; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Public Health Modernization Manager Stephanie O'Neal; Finance Director Christina Haron; Community Development Director John Eisler; Building Official Randy Davis; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Museum Director Sean Briscoe; Natural Resources Coordinator Tim Deboodt; Phil Burgess; Julie Thompson; Lorian Maxham; Jessica Barnes; and members of the public.

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

Public Comment

None

Discussion

1. Bowman Museum Local Option Tax Levy

Requester:

Sean Briscoe, Bowman Museum Director

Presenter(s):

Sean Briscoe, Bowman Museum Director

Details: Museum Director Sean Briscoe attended the Work Session to provide background information on the Crook County Museum's upcoming five-year local option tax levy, which will be brought before the Board for placement on the November ballot. He explained the levy will remain at its current rate of \$0.06 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, the same rate in place since 1998. The levy provides approximately one-third of the museum's operating budget and supports daily operations, facility maintenance, collections management, and preservation of Crook County history. Sean noted that the museum's financial outlook is positive, eliminating the need to seek an increase at this time.

Commissioners commended the museum's strong financial management and encouraged staff to emphasize the museum's growth, increased visitation, and responsible use of tax dollars in public informational materials. They also discussed

opportunities to increase public awareness during the Crook County Fair, including promotional signage and directing visitors to the Ranchers Memorial Museum. Museum staff shared plans to improve visibility and exhibits during the fair.

Sean also discussed the importance of keeping county resources separate from any campaign activities supporting the levy while ensuring compliance with state election laws. It was agreed that the Board would hold a formal discussion on the levy during a future regular meeting rather than placing the matter on the consent agenda.

2. Secure Rural Schools (Title III) Allocation Elections

Requester:

Christina Haron, Finance Director

Presenter(s):

Christina Haron, Finance Director

Details: Finance Director Christina Haron attended the Work Session and presented the required election for the County's Secure Rural Schools (SRS) Forest Service payment allocation. She explained that the County must periodically choose between receiving payments under the 1908 seven-year rolling average of forest receipts or the SRS Title I, II, and III allocation. Christina recommended maintaining the County's current SRS allocation, which was adopted in 2023: 85% to Title I, 7% to Title III (the maximum allowed), and 8% to Title II. She reviewed the purpose of each title, noting that Title I funds are distributed to roads and schools, Title III supports emergency response and other eligible county projects, and Title II funds remain with the federal government for approved federal land management projects. Christina also presented a financial comparison showing that the 1908 payment option would provide approximately \$51,000 annually, while the current SRS allocation provides approximately \$1.1 million, making the SRS option significantly more beneficial to the County.

Commissioners discussed whether any changes to the allocation percentages were warranted. Christina advised that the current allocation maximizes the County's available benefit and that reducing Title III funds would only shift those dollars to Title II rather than increasing the County's direct share. Commissioners also discussed the limited information available regarding how Title II funds are ultimately used by the federal government, noting they generally support projects such as forest management, campgrounds, signage, and other federal land improvements. Overall, there was consensus that maintaining the current allocation remained the best option.

Tim Deboodt provided background on the use of Secure Rural Schools Title II funds, explaining that they have historically been used for projects on U.S. Forest Service lands or adjacent private lands that provide a public benefit, such as fencing, weed control, and fuel reduction. He noted that project funding is intended to be guided by a 15-member Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) but stated that the Central Oregon RAC has been inactive for nearly ten years. As a result, he explained that the Forest Service continues funding projects that were approved years ago, with limited ability to

modify funding priorities until the committee is reestablished.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve the current, the secure rural school allocation and its present percentages are 85% to Title I, 8% to Title II and 7% to Title III. Seth Crawford seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

3. Purchase of Asphalt from Tri County Paving, LLC, for Juniper Heights Development Project

Requester:

Brad Haynes, Road Superintendent

Presenter(s):

Brad Haynes, Road Superintendent

Details: Road Superintendent Brad Haynes attended the Work Session to present a request for Board approval to purchase approximately 4,690 tons of asphalt from Tri-County Paving at \$62 per ton, for an estimated total cost of \$402,000, to support the County's 2025 in-house paving project. Brad noted that supporting reports had been provided outlining the project's costs and benefits and requested authorization to move forward with the purchase. Commissioners commended the quality of the reports and discussed whether the item should be considered on the consent agenda or as a regular presentation. Brad advised that while the decision was at the Board's discretion, the paving project is scheduled to begin on August 10th, making the timing a consideration. The discussion concluded with the Board considering how best to place the item on an upcoming agenda.

County Counsel Eric Blaine advised that a purchase of this size would normally require a Request for Proposals (RFP). If an RFP was not previously issued, he explained that the County could proceed through the special procurement process authorized under ORS 279B.085. This process requires the Board to adopt findings supporting the special procurement and publish public notice in the same manner as an RFP. Eric recommended placing the item on the August 5 agenda to allow sufficient time to prepare the required order, draft the necessary findings, and complete the public notice requirements. He confirmed he would work with Roadmaster Brad to ensure all statutory requirements were met before the Board considered the purchase.

Following the discussion, the Board agreed to schedule the item for the August 5th meeting, and no action was taken at the work session.

4. Community Development June 2026 Update

Requester:

John Eisler, Community Development Director

Presenter(s):

John Eisler, Community Development Director

Randy Davis, Building Official

Details: Community Development Director John Eisler and Building Official Randy

Davis attended the Work Session to provide the June 2026 update for the department.

Randy Davis presented the Building Department's June activity report, noting continued steady construction activity. During the month, the department issued permits for 10 new homes, 50 residential accessory projects, and 36 commercial permits. Randy reported that permit activity remains consistent with the County's three-year average, providing a stable baseline for budgeting, staffing, inspections, and plan review. Randy stated that staff are currently managing inspections for 156 active residential homes, approximately 700 additional permits, and 287 commercial permits. The department continues to average about 1,000 inspections per month, with that number expected to increase when larger commercial projects ramp up.

He provided updates on several major commercial projects, noting that the Apple Data Center and PRN1 retrofit are nearing completion, Pop-It-In is awaiting power service before opening, and additional data halls are anticipated as part of a future expansion. Updates were also provided on CV International, Crooked Tails, and the Ochoco Manor renovation project. Randy explained that large commercial buildings must meet emergency radio communication requirements to ensure first responders maintain reliable communications during emergencies. Randy also informed the Board that the department has begun preliminary discussions with a developer regarding another potential large project on the hill. While details remain confidential, early coordination is underway to align permitting, inspections, and construction schedules.

The Board also requested an update on the hemp extraction facility following a recent fire. Randy explained that the incident resulted from operational procedures rather than building systems. During the response, inspectors discovered the facility's fire suppression system was without water, prompting the Building Department to condemn the facility until safety concerns could be addressed. The department has worked closely with Crook County Fire and Rescue, the Oregon State Fire Marshal, electrical contractors, sprinkler contractors, and third-party engineering consultants to verify the integrity of the building systems, fire suppression, electrical equipment, sensors, and extraction equipment. Most of the facility has since been reopened, while the hazardous extraction area will remain closed until all required safety standards have been met.

Finally, Randy advised the Board of an upcoming staffing challenge. Two senior employees who hold the department's highest-level electrical certifications have announced their retirements within the next year. Because these certifications are difficult to replace and are critical for reviewing large commercial electrical projects, Randy indicated he may return to the Board with a request for a budget amendment to begin recruiting and training a replacement before the retirements occur, ensuring continuity of service for future development projects.

John Eisler provided an update on Planning Department activity for June. A total of 28 planning applications were received during the month, compared to 43 during the same period last year. Overall planning activity has leveled out into a consistent range

following the significant post-COVID growth period. John reported several upcoming projects and activities, including the Hege Pit scheduled for early fall, the Woodward Pit revocation/modification hearing scheduled for the following week, a Lawson Creek cell tower application, and a Comprehensive Plan and Zone Plan Amendment in Kyle Butte. Staff also provided an update on the Goal 5 update process and noted that recruitment is underway for public advisory committee members, with applications available online.

Discussion was held regarding the upcoming Woodward Pit hearing. Staff explained that the hearing officer will consider whether there is reasonable suspicion to initiate a modification or revocation proceeding under county code. The record remains open to additional evidence and arguments until the hearing begins. The Commissioners discussed whether they could attend the public hearing, and County Counsel Eric Blaine advised that, due to the possibility of future appeals and the sensitivity of the matter, it would be prudent for Commissioners to avoid attending at this time to prevent any potential procedural concerns. Staff also provided an update on onsite septic activity, reporting 20 applications in June compared to 26 during the same period last year. Year-to-date activity remains slightly higher than in recent years but is trending toward a more consistent range. Code Compliance activity was also reviewed, with staff noting a strong month of case closures and only five new cases opened in June.

5. Public Newsletter – Board Review and Direction

Requester:

Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant

Presenter(s):

Will Van Vactor, County Manager

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor and Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp attended the Work Session to present an update on the development of a public county newsletter. Will explained that a newsletter template has been created based on the process used for the internal employee newsletter, and they feel confident moving forward with a public version to help keep community members informed about county activities and services. Will recommended starting with a quarterly newsletter to ensure the process is sustainable, with the ability to expand in the future. The newsletter would be made available through the updated county website, allowing residents to sign up for distribution. Breyanna also discussed utilizing existing distribution lists initially while providing an option for recipients to unsubscribe.

Commissioners provided feedback on potential content, including highlighting county services, upcoming events, infrastructure projects, community impacts, employee recognition, and opportunities for public involvement. Suggested recurring sections included a commissioner message, a “Road Ahead” feature highlighting upcoming projects, service spotlights, department highlights, employee recognition, and calls to action for boards, committees, and other opportunities to engage with local government. Discussion emphasized the importance of making the newsletter useful

and accessible to the public by including timely information such as meeting schedules, community events, county programs, and other updates. Commissioners expressed support for the newsletter concept as an additional communication tool to improve outreach and public engagement.

Staff will continue developing the newsletter template and plans to bring forward a draft for review before distributing the first edition.

Manager Report

Will Van Vactor provided a brief update regarding the delegation of authority process discussed previously with Matt Smith related to fire incidents threatening structures outside the designated fire district. Will reported that a delegation of authority was signed on Saturday evening in response to the Brewer Fire to support the necessary response efforts.

Commissioner Updates

Commissioner Crawford thanked the Sheriff's Office, Road Department, firefighters, state agencies, and other supporting agencies for their efforts in keeping the community safe during the recent fire activity throughout the county. He recognized the significant work being done by emergency personnel and encouraged residents to utilize available resources, including information shared through the Sheriff's Office and other public safety websites regarding fire updates, air quality, and available assistance.

Commissioner Hermreck also expressed appreciation for all firefighters, volunteers, and community members supporting fire response efforts. They recognized the dedication of those working to protect lives, structures, and property, and highlighted the cooperation and unity demonstrated by agencies, organizations, and neighbors working together during challenging circumstances. The Commissioners noted that this spirit of neighbors helping neighbors reflects the community values they strive to support.

Public Comment

Lorian Maxham expressed support for the proposed public newsletter and encouraged staff to include information on upcoming opportunities for public involvement, such as items open for comment, upcoming hearings, and community engagement opportunities, in addition to updates on completed projects. Staff noted the newsletter would include both past updates and upcoming events, while also recognizing that official public notices would continue to be published through required channels.

Discussion followed regarding public access to information, including the importance of linking the newsletter to meeting calendars, agendas, and public notice resources.

Staff explained that public notices are posted on the County website and distributed through existing email lists but acknowledged the ongoing challenge of reaching all residents. Lorian raised concerns about communication gaps, particularly regarding important hearings and public processes, and suggested that more prominent notification methods could help increase awareness. Commissioners and staff discussed the difficulty of reaching residents through traditional media, the cost of expanded newspaper advertising, and the value of using low-cost digital tools such as newsletters, website updates, and email distribution lists.

Staff shared that the newsletter is intended to provide another communication avenue with the public and may include meeting schedules, department highlights, community events, and opportunities for residents to engage with County activities. The group agreed that promoting the newsletter through existing communication channels, including local media and the County website, would help encourage public participation.

Executive Session

6. None scheduled.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to adjourn. Seth Crawford seconded. No discussion. Seth Crawford votes Aye, Susan Hermreck votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 10:01 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant