

**CROOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MINUTES
OF FEBRUARY 19, 2025, REGULAR MEETING
Open Portion**

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Session on February 19, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. in the County meeting room located at 320 NE Court Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

Board Members Present: Commissioner Brian Barney, Commissioner Susan Hermreck, and Commissioner Seth Crawford

Absentees: None

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: Legal Counsel Eric Blaine; Community Development Director John Eisler; Executive Administrative Assistant Sarah Puerner; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; County Manager Will Van Vactor; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; Extension Manager Rebecca Keegan; Assessor Jon Soliz; Finance Director Christina Haron; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Assessment Technician Linda Pepper; Library Director Sarah Beeler; Administrative Assistant Mona Glade; Kelsey Lucas; Dr. Jen Fenton; Jodie Barram; Kathleen Soliz; Adam Mikulski; Ashley McCormick; Mike Ervin; Justin Alderman; Rory Rodgers; Julie Thompson; Valerie Rhoden; Steve Holliday; Craig Neher; Roger Nonelle; Ryan Fessler; Ashley Fessler; Paisley Jennings; Alyssa Blavay; Hadee Keegan; Tawndy Byrd; Derik Vowels; Dick Zimmerlee; Debbie Zimmerlee; and members of the public.

REGULAR SESSION

The meeting was **called to order at 9:00 a.m.**

Public Comment: None

Additions/Removals: None

Consent Agenda:

1. Approve Minutes
2. Approval of recommended updates to Crook County Fiscal Policies from Finance Committee
3. Annual Adoption of Crook County Investment Policy
4. FY 2024 Financial Statements, Audit & Governing Body letter from Auditors
5. Letter of Support for House Bill 2395

MOTION to approve the consent agenda as presented. Motion seconded by Commissioner Hermreck. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Discussion item #6: Fee Waiver Request for 2025 Pee Wee Rodeos & Banquet at Crook County Fairgrounds:

Requester: Craig Neher

Details: Craig Neher, President of the Central Oregon Pee Wee Rodeo Association (COPWRA), along with contestants, attended the Regular Session to request the waiving of rental fees for the Crook County Fairgrounds for their 2025 rodeo events. These events are scheduled for April 26-27, May 10-11, May 31-June 1, with an Awards banquet on October 11. COPWRA, founded in 1968, is one of Oregon's oldest and largest youth rodeo associations, with over 200 contestants aged 3 to 14 from Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. This all-volunteer group emphasizes leadership, sportsmanship, rural lifestyle, and community involvement. They requested the waiver for fees totaling around \$4,000, citing the economic impact of hosting over 200 families across four events, which significantly benefits local businesses in Prineville and Crook County. The estimated economic value from these visits is up to \$450 per family per weekend. The fee waiver would aid the association in achieving its objectives amidst rising costs. Several young contestants spoke at the meeting, expressing their gratitude and sharing their rodeo experiences. Commissioners Hermreck and Barney acknowledged and appreciated the presentations and presence of the young contestants and their families.

MOTION to approve the funds for the Pee Wee Rodeo. Motion seconded by Commissioner Hermreck. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

Discussion item #7: Update and Feedback Request: Blueprint South 500-kV Transmission Line Project Crossing Crook County:

Requester: Ruby Nunez

Details: Senior Project Manager Derik Vowels attended the Regular Session to provide an update on Pacific Power's Blueprint South 500-kilovolt Transmission Line Project. The project, first introduced to the Commissioners on March 20, 2024, involves constructing approximately 180 miles of high-voltage transmission lines connecting substations across five counties: Deschutes, Crook, Klamath, Lake, and Harney. Currently, Pacific Power is beginning a routing study to identify potential routes for the transmission line, with plans to select a preferred route by early 2025. This phase will include extensive public outreach to gather input. Although no immediate action is required from the County, Pacific Power is seeking feedback from the Commissioners. The project will eventually require compliance with multiple regulatory processes, including the Oregon Energy Facilities Siting Council, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the Oregon Public Utilities Commission, among others.

Discussion item #8: Oregon Living with Fire Presentation of 2024 Annual Report and 2025 Program of Work:

Requester: Jodie Barram

Details: Jodie Barram and Dr. Jennifer Fenton, co-coordinators of Oregon Living With Fire, presented their 2024 annual report and outlined the projected work for 2025 to the Crook County Board of Commissioners. Oregon Living With Fire works under a Memorandum of Understanding with Crook, Deschutes, Jefferson, and Klamath Counties to support the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. Their efforts focus on coordination, communication, and convening stakeholders. During the

session, Ms. Barram discussed the organization's current initiatives, including a new program that educates residents on controlled burning practices. Dr. Jennifer Fenton, joining via Zoom, talked about navigating current challenges with paused funding opportunities. She expressed hope for these to resume, allowing Crook County to access more significant funding. Despite current restrictions on funding reimbursements, Barram noted that they are managing with available reserves and continuing their educational efforts.

Manager Report:

Will Van Vactor reported on a few departmental updates.

Department Updates:

Veteran Services – Tom Evans, the County's Veterans Service Officer (VSO), has recently achieved his VSO accreditation from the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs. On behalf of the County and our veterans, we would like to extend our gratitude and congratulations to him for this accomplishment.

Facilities & Infrastructure:

Road – The department has had a busy year, handling four storms and covering about 1500 miles of sanding and plowing. So far, they've laid down 1097 yards of cinders and logged 1001.5 hours of staff time. This includes 358.5 hours of overtime for after-hours responses and 942.5 hours dedicated to Shop time. Their efforts are all in the name of keeping the community safe.

Community & Public Engagement:

Admin - Crook County is currently seeking community members to fill open positions on various Boards and Committees. Interested individuals can either visit the County Admin Office or download an application from the County's website. Applications must be submitted by 5:00 pm on Monday, February 24, 2025, to be considered for these vacancies.

Policy & Legislative Updates:

HB 2944 – Permits labor organizations to initiate civil action against public employers who do not provide required information about public employees in a timely manner. Additionally, it mandates that the Employment Relations Board impose civil penalties on public employers who fail to meet specific obligations under PECBA.

Senate Bill 754 - Relating to penalties for failure to comply with certain requirements under the laws governing public employee collective bargaining.

Major Projects & Initiatives:

Community Development - The Planning Department held the TSAP kick-off meeting on February 11th with the Parametrix team. It is anticipated that implementation funding from the federal government will still be available in the spring of 2026. Currently, the team is collecting data to identify high-risk areas and high-injury networks. The objective is to expand on the TSP and pinpoint location-based projects that will significantly reduce or eliminate traffic fatalities. Parametrix is scheduled to present to the BOCC on April 23rd. Regarding the TSP, they plan to make their presentation in the latter half of March.

Commissioner Updates:

Commissioner Hermreck highlighted an issue with grasshoppers affecting native grasses

in the eastern part of the county near Paulina, noting that these pests do not impact irrigated lands as much. The problem has persisted for about three years, with last year seeing a significant infestation that covered the ground. A meeting has been scheduled for March 18th at the Pau Mau Club to discuss solutions for eradicating the grasshoppers, with local ranchers expected to attend. Additionally, Commissioner Hermreck expressed appreciation for the public meeting ethics training conducted by the city of Prineville, from which she and other board members received certificates, describing it as very educational and beneficial.

Commissioner Crawford highlighted Crook County's leadership in advancing a letter on behalf of the Eastern Oregon County Associations (EOCA), which was discussed at a recent conference with Senate and House Republicans. The letter, emphasizing local concerns, was sent out by both Crook County and EOCA. Additionally, Commissioner Crawford, along with Assistant County Counsel, addressed concerns about a high-risk property owned by the county, planning to file an appeal against state-imposed regulations that lack proper validation. This effort aims to demonstrate widespread discomfort with the new rules and to potentially influence state understanding and policy adjustments.

MOTION for Board of Commissioners to delegate authority to Seth Crawford and John Eisler to prepare and issue an appeal on the wildfire mapping designation for Crook County owned properties. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. During discussion, Commissioner Hermreck expressed concerns about the wildfire hazard map, noting that despite assurances to the contrary, it has impacted insurance policies. She shared that numerous individuals, including herself, have faced situations where their insurance coverage was dropped or threatened within a year due to these maps. Additionally, there have been reports of increased insurance rates linked to areas designated as high-risk. Commissioner Crawford added that the governor has acknowledged these issues, emphasizing that the matter should be addressed by insurance entities and that the real challenges are being faced by those on the ground dealing with insurance companies. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

County Manager Will Van Vactor wanted to clarify the situation regarding the Governor's decision to pause the processing of appeals, which has caused some confusion about its implications. Will emphasized the importance of the public being aware of the upcoming March 10th deadline for filing appeals. He stressed that filing remains crucial as the pause in processing will only last until the end of the legislative session.

Commissioner Crawford also mentioned that HB 777 will be heard on February 27th, and he plans to attend and testify online. This bill is for funding to ensure that we take care of people that lose animals to wolves as well as funding for non-lethal. Commissioner Hermreck stated that the Board of Commissioners submitted a letter of support on this bill last week.

Commissioner Hermreck also commended the City of Prineville for their ethics training, noting that the meeting was well-attended and provided a wealth of information.

Public Comment:

Adam Mikulski raised concerns about the compliance of Knife River with their Conditional Use Permit (CUP), particularly regarding their dewatering activities that violated environmental regulations. He highlighted that the company had incurred significant fines and had over 100 class 1 violations due to improperly draining and pumping water from a mining pond. Despite these issues, enforcement of the CUP has been lax, and Mikulski called for stricter adherence to and enforcement of these regulations to ensure responsible environmental management. He noted that while Knife River profits from operations in the county, their non-compliance with regulatory standards continues. Additionally, Mikulski's reflections on compliance reports and a video of the violations pointed to a need for more robust enforcement actions to hold the company accountable.

Derik Vowels mentioned that the Open House for the Transmission Line Project, hosted by PacificPower, will take place at Carey Foster Hall at the Fairgrounds. The event is scheduled for Monday, March 10th from 5-7 pm and will include a presentation.

Justin Alderman has approached the Commissioners concerning public records requests and a fee waiver, asserting that these requests are in the public interest according to Oregon's public records law. His requests, particularly those for NRAC records, have been entirely denied. Additionally, the Prineville Review has faced difficulties obtaining records pertaining to Clif Kiser. Alderman has proposed using facilitated dispute resolution with the Oregon public records advocate, although this would be an informal process. He has expressed concerns that the fees charged for accessing these records are excessive and is prepared to legally contest them, citing precedents where judges in other counties have ruled fees for records as excessively high.

Julie Thompson, impacted by the operations at the Knife River mine, raised concerns and posed a few straightforward questions regarding the mine's compliance. She inquired about the number of compliance reports required to either suspend or revoke the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) that the mine is allegedly not adhering to. She also sought updates on any progress in addressing these issues. Additionally, she mentioned receiving a 552-page DEQ report, which is currently pending analysis by geologists.

Commissioner Hermreck thanked the citizens for sending in all the compliance reports and we are working in the right direction. Taking these requests very seriously. Thankful for folks like Julie for sending this information in.

Ashley McCormick expressed frustration over the handling of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP), questioning why the Board of Commissioners (BOC) can't pause operations during ongoing investigations instead of having to prove violations first, as the situation continues to worsen. John Eisler explained that the CUP was issued a long time ago and that not every complaint necessarily indicates a violation; the county is diligently investigating.

Concerns were raised about the quality of water and whether Knife River (KR) was responsible. Commissioner Crawford noted that state agencies have not identified KR as the problem and stated that the decision rests with the state, leaving local hands tied. Commissioner Hermreck asked for patience, acknowledging that the state has not been proactive but assuring that John Eisler is working hard on the issue. Julie Thompson questioned who controls the CUP, whether it's the county or the state, to which Commissioner Crawford indicated that it's a separate issue, implying complexities in jurisdiction or responsibility.

At 10:17 a.m. the Board of Commissioners convened into Executive Session under the following statute(s): ORS 192.660(2)(d) To conduct deliberations with persons designated by the governing body to carry on labor negotiations; ORS 192.660(2)(a) To consider the employment of a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent; and ORS 192.660(2)(h) Consulting with Counsel concerning the legal rights and duties of a public body with regard to current litigation or litigation likely to be filed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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 to direct staff to proceed as instructed in the Executive Session. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

John Eisler mentioned that Matt Ropp from Knife River would like to come and meet with the Commissioners about their studies, and they will be in town March 5th or 7th. John Eisler has a meeting scheduled with them and Knife River would like to do a presentation for the Commissioners. Commissioners had discussions about meeting location, whether to have a special meeting or not, and how to conduct meetings. Will Van Vactor recommended not having a meeting until outside counsel is hired.

MOTION to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 3-0.

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting was **adjourned at 11:45 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Puerner / Breyanna Cupp