

**CROOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MINUTES  
OF JUNE 25, 2025, WORK SESSION  
Open Portion**

**Be It Remembered** that the Crook County Board of Commissioners met in a regularly scheduled Work Session on June 25, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. in the Administration Conference room located at 203 NE Court Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

Board Members Present: Commissioner Susan Hermreck and Commissioner Seth Crawford

Absentees: Commissioner Brian Barney

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Counsel Eric Blaine; Community Development Director John Eisler; Executive Assistant and Communications Officer Sarah Puerner; County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; Superintendent Brad Haynes; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; District Attorney Kari Hathorn; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; HR Director Meghan McKee; Human Resources; Sheriff John Gautney; Associate Professor of Chemistry Danielle Cass; Reed College Chemistry Student Ellie Provost; Office Manager Rebeccas Keegan; Natural Resources Extension Agent Jenna Deibel; Facilities Director James Preuss; Appraiser Stephanie West; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Administrative Assistant Mona Glade; Undersheriff Bill Elliott; Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson; Community Corrections Lieutenant Aaron Boyce; Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb; Assessor Jon Soliz; Airport Manager Kelly Coffelt; and members of the public.

**WORK SESSION**

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

Public Comment: None

Discussion item #1: Presentation about a Juniper Tree Ring Study and how it may provide historical information on metal content in the Crook County ground water:

Requester: Danielle Cass

Details: Associate Professor of Chemistry Danielle Cass and Reed College Chemistry Student Ellie Provost attended the Work Session to present an informational item on a juniper tree-ring study to reconstruct historical metal concentrations in Crook County groundwater and compare those trends with DEQ sampling results. With limited continuous monitoring and 2025 testing showing elevated manganese in roughly half of 61 well samples, the team proposes coring two pencil-diameter samples at waist height from junipers—which are abundant and draw relatively deep water—to create an annual record of metal uptake; coring is not expected to harm trees. Preliminary data from two October 2024 cores show year-to-year variation in manganese and aluminum, but additional samples—preferably from older trees—and correlation with hydrologic conditions are needed. The research is funded by Reed College and the Environmental Studies Summer Experience Fellowship, with no county budget impact. The team requested permission to core junipers on private property (or use cut sections) and

offered optional well-sampling and will coordinate outreach with County staff. Commissioners discussed aquifer representativeness, root depth, and variability across wet and dry years, and asked the researchers to return with results; no action was taken.

**Discussion item #2: OSU Extension: Forestry & Natural Resources Program Update:**

**Requester:** Rebecca Keegan

**Details:** Central Oregon Forestry and Natural Resources Extension Agent Jenna Deibel attended the Work Session and introduced herself as a regional, tax-supported resource for Crook, Deschutes, Jefferson counties and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, outlining four programming priorities based on her first-year needs assessment: forest health (frequent landowner questions on “why is my tree dying?”), East-side markets including opportunities like cross-laminated timber from small-diameter thinning, outreach to new rural landowners unfamiliar with high-desert management, and flexible Tribal forestry support focused on capacity and land reconnection. She detailed Crook County engagement and leadership with the Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative, which voted in May to pause for at least three months amid funding and membership challenges; during the pause she will host quarterly “Science Pub” talks in Prineville to sustain shared learning across federal, state, county, and private land topics. Dybal is developing accessible juniper management materials (“I’ve Got Juniper—What Now?”) as a presentation and forthcoming publication and is rolling out “Pest Scene Investigator” workshops (recently delivered in Warm Springs; sessions set for July 11<sup>th</sup> in Camp Sherman and July 12<sup>th</sup> in La Pine; the Crook County session was postponed due to low registrations). She requested outreach ideas to reach woodland lot owners and was encouraged to coordinate with County staff for posting on County Facebook and bulletin boards and to use channels like the Central Oregon Rancher and Roundup. In Q&A, she affirmed a balanced, active-management ethic and described a media effort on Eastern Oregon’s forest products industry decline. She also plans a basic forestry short course with ODF in Crook County this fall. No Board action was requested.

**Discussion item #3: Recommendation for Ag Extension Advisory Board Position:**

**Requester:** Rebecca Keegan

**Details:** Office Manager Rebecca Keegan attended the Work Session to recommend that the Extension Advisory Board, which has 10 positions and one remaining vacancy, held a special meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup> and voted to recommend appointing Laura York to fill the final seat. Commissioners confirmed all public meeting requirements had been met and directed the appointment to the consent agenda, after which the board will be fully staffed.

**Discussion item #4: Signature on amendment to Crook County Deflection program grant allowing additional time to spend funds:**

**Requester:** Aaron Boyce

**Details:** Community Corrections Lieutenant Aaron Boyce attended the Work Session to request a signature on an amendment to the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) grant to extend the spending deadline from July 1<sup>st</sup> to September, allowing additional time to spend remaining funds with no increase to the award amount. Commissioners noted the item is not time-sensitive and directed it to the consent agenda.

**Discussion item #5: Genetec (Siemen's) Preventive Maintenance Agreement:**

**Requester:** James Preuss

**Details:** Facilities Director James Preuss attended the Work Session to present the maintenance options for the Justice Center's security system. After confirming the system isn't locked to one brand, he withdrew Order 2025-21 and will instead arrange a one-year service contract (covering cameras, door access, and panic buttons) for under \$40,000 using the County's standard protection. Because the amount is over \$25,000, staff will get competitive quotes, and the County Manager will handle the signature. Next year, the County will seek broader bids from multiple firms to reduce long-term costs.

**Discussion item #6: Discussion of CIS Renewal:**

**Requester:** Will Van Vactor

**Details:** Elaina Huffman attended the Work Session to brief the Board on the 2025 CIS insurance renewal. CIS made a notable coverage tweak for vacant buildings, adding a \$100,000 sublimit for water damage after 90+ days of vacancy (while vandalism, glass breakage, and theft remain excluded). Year-over-year cost shows about an 11% increase on paper, but after accounting for the new Justice Center being added in 2024 (about \$50–55k of annual premium), the underlying premium change is under 6%. Key cost drivers include growth in operations and property values (buildings up roughly \$40 million), while the claims modifier stayed flat and the 2021–22 claim impact should phase out in two years. Since 2019, the County's higher-deductible liability plan has produced over \$340,000 in savings. Next steps include a CIS best-practices risk survey (with Facilities) and optional department-head meetings on claims, safety, and risk strategy.

**Discussion item #7: Airport Update / Status of Projects:**

**Requester:** Kelly Coffelt

**Details:** Airport Manager Kelly Coffelt attended the Work Session to provide an update on the airport. The crosswind runway reopened before fire season and the project is about 99% complete, with final seal/striping in the next few weeks and re-hydroseeding planned for fall. Because FAA seldom funds crosswind runways, completing this work is a major safety improvement for air tankers during strong afternoon crosswinds. The runway grindings will be reused on other County projects. The new hangar project has finished excavation and is forming foundations; due to building manufacturer delays, completion is now expected in late September or early October instead of August 31. Facilities will help finish the interior restroom, and leasing will begin soon given strong demand. The required five-year land-lease appraisal is underway with results expected by the end of July, after which lease rates will be reset to market. One older hangar sale will shift its ground lease from roughly \$800 per year to about \$3,000 under the updated lease terms. Operations are busy with active fire season tanker and helicopter activity, and the June 14 Wings & Wheels event was well attended. Hood Aero, the FBO, reports stable operations; after previous turnover they have a new maintenance crew, added part-time fuel support for fire season, and launched on-field flight training with an instructor and aircraft.

**Discussion item #8: Community Development Monthly Update:**

**Requester:** John Eilser

**Details:** Community Development Director John Eisler and Building Official Randy Davis attended the Work Session to provide monthly update. Randy Davis reported that Building Department activity remains steady and slightly improved over last year, with approximately 1,940 permits issued to date across residential and commercial projects and inspection activity increasing seasonally. Key updates included proposed wood pellet and brick mill redevelopment in design review, final approval of the Humane Society dog wing, early construction progress at the Ochoco Mill site, and ongoing groundwater-related delays at the Madras Highway project. Additional notes included upcoming work on a convenience store project, completion of a new fuel island at the Sinclair station, continued planning for a church renovation within city limits, and confirmation that the data center is operational with no new major projects announced. John Eisler reported that planning applications remain steady compared to last year and are still significantly up year-to-date and for the fiscal year following an early-year surge. Key land use items include the Moffett Solar project and another Sun Solar project, the Lester Zone Map Amendment scheduled for a second hearing on June 2, the Mueller Subdivision set for July 9, TSR North rescheduled for July 1, and Department of Defense Military Overlay updates later in July. A major new Hidden Canyon application was received, proposing six phases with approximately 125 single-family homes and 100 overnight lodging units, and is currently under review. John noted that the Multi-Care Complex and BestCare UGB applications were reportedly voted down and may require further revisions, emphasizing the need for improved communication on mental health-related projects. Overall on-site activity remains consistent with recent years, and code compliance staff continue to work through an active caseload, including ongoing building-without-permit cases.

Commissioner Hermreck expressed concern regarding recent news that a door manufacturing facility in Prineville is expected to close, resulting in a loss of approximately 184 jobs. She noted that this development is troubling, particularly in the context of ongoing discussions about economic development in Prineville and highlighted the potential impact on the community. She also commented that while the closure is not part of the formal community development agenda, it is an important issue to acknowledge. In closing, she made a lighthearted remark ahead of the upcoming report from Bill Elliott on county crime trends.

**Discussion item #9: Sheriff's Office Monthly Update:**

**Requester:** Bill Elliott

**Details:** Undersheriff Bill Elliott attended the Work Session and provided a statistical update from the Sheriff's Office and jail operations, noting mixed trends in criminal activity and enforcement. Person crimes increased by 11 percent compared to the prior year, while property crimes declined significantly. Community crime problems and sex crime reports were both up, with sex crimes showing a notable year-over-year increase. Mental health-related incidents also rose slightly. Sheriff's Office arrests for May were down overall, including a decrease in felony arrests, while misdemeanor arrests showed some increases. Jail statistics reflected relatively stable booking numbers compared to

last year, though DUI arrests increased substantially. Use-of-force incidents declined, and there was no suicide attempts reported in May, though suicide watches increased slightly. Calls for service decreased modestly from both the prior year and the previous month. Justice Center security activity reached its highest monthly level since opening, with increased visitor screenings and prohibited items turned away, including knives, pepper spray, and one firearm. Bill explained the use of “flagged” security cases for court proceedings requiring heightened awareness and noted that additional deputy responses were required in most flagged cases. He concluded by emphasizing the seasonal rise in activity expected during warmer months and major community events, underscoring the need for potential increases in incidents.

Commissioner Hermreck commented that she has recently observed individuals in the community who appear to be new to the area and exhibiting concerning behavior, noting an increase in visible mental health-related activity in public spaces. Bill Elliott responded that the Sheriff’s Office is also aware of an influx of individuals who have not previously been in the area, confirming that this trend had been anticipated and is now being observed locally. Commissioner Hermreck also acknowledged seeing several such individuals herself and expressed appreciation for the information provided.

**Manager Report:**

Will Van Vactor reminded the Board that a special meeting is scheduled for Monday afternoon to consider and adopt budget resolutions. He also noted that the Road Agency Board will meet the same afternoon to adopt its budget, following approval by the Road Agency Budget Committee last week. Commissioner Barney serves as the County’s representative on the Road Agency Board. Will reported that the budget processes are on track and had no additional updates at this time.

**Commissioner Updates:**

Commissioner Crawford shared that the County is working with Pacific Power to set up a community meeting at the community center. A date is tentatively planned for late next month, but it will be announced once everything is fully confirmed.

Commissioner Hermreck reported that Crook County received a 2025 National Association of Counties Achievement Award for the Bowman (Belknap) Exhibit Center, with plans for a certificate presentation at the site and recognition at a future Commissioner meeting. She also announced the County was awarded \$108,000 in grant funding for grasshopper control, which will be distributed based on treated acreage with any remaining funds used for a survey. Additionally, she shared that a grant application submitted by Angela Ostrander for livestock pens at the Crook County Fairgrounds was awarded \$25,000, exceeding the expected amount. The grant will support future improvements to junior livestock facilities, with the County to formally accept the grant at a later meeting.

**Discussion item #10: Letter- Request for project update:**

**Requester:** Commissioner Hermreck

**Details:** Commissioner Hermreck requested that the Board of Commissioners draft a letter to John Aniello project manager for Pacific Power, expressing Crook County’s

significant concerns about the Blueprint Transmission project. The letter will highlight potential impacts on prime irrigated farmland, as well as cultural and wildlife resources, emphasizing that any harm to these limited and irreplaceable resources is unacceptable. It will also invite Pacific Power to provide an update and conduct a presentation and Q&A session for the citizens of Powell Butte.

**MOTION** for us to be able to sign this letter. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

Commissioner Crawford suggested drafting a letter regarding the Secure Rural Schools legislation, which has passed the Senate and returned to the House. He emphasized the importance of sending the letter to Congress to support approval and recommended adding the item to the next agenda so the Board can review, make a motion, and sign the letter at that time.

**MOTION** to adjourn. Motion seconded by Commissioner Crawford. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Crawford votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 1041AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

**Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant**