

**CROOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MINUTES
OF SEPTEMBER 29, 2025, SPECIAL MEETING
Open Portion**

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of Commissioners met in a Special meeting on September 29, 2025, at 2:00 p.m. in the County meeting room located at 320 NE Court Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

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

Absentees:

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Counsel Eric Blaine; Assistant County Counsel Bryan Libel; County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Sheriff John Gautney; Undersheriff Bill Elliott; Administrative Division Manager Stephanie Wilson; Finance Director Christina Haron; Jail Commander Andrew Rasmussen; Patrol Lieutenant Mitch Madden; Community Corrections Lieutenant Aaron Boyce; Kristal Hughes; Civil Tech Deputy Brand Lange; Patrol Sergeant Javier Sanchez; Emergency Manager AJ Crawford; Nigel Ballard; Human Resources; and members of the public.

SPECIAL SESSION

The meeting was **called to order at 2:00 p.m.**

Discussion item #1: Review Sheriff's Office Core Services and Level of Service for Each Division:

Requester: Will Van Vactor

Details: County Manager Will Van Vactor attended the Special Session to facilitate an informational discussion regarding the core services of the Crook County Sheriff's Office (SO). The purpose of the meeting was to review and clarify the fundamental functions, responsibilities, and legal obligations of the Sheriff's Office as part of ongoing efforts to ensure organizational alignment and inform future budget development. Will provided an overview of the session's purpose, defined core services, reviewed the Sheriff's Office core functions and division-specific goals, discussed state-mandated services and levels of service, and invited Board input on questions and next steps. Jail Commander Andrew Rasmussen gave a presentation outlining current, ideal, critical, and minimum staffing levels for the jail, offering clarification based on the requirements of ORS 169.076. Patrol Lieutenant Mitch Madden presented staffing levels for the patrol unit, including ideal (green), critical (yellow), and statutory minimum (red) thresholds. Mitch informed the Board that the patrol unit has been operating at critical staffing since September 2, 2025. Community Corrections Lieutenant Aaron Boyce also presented, reviewing the department's ideal staffing levels, current staffing status (yellow), and the minimum required staffing for parole and probation operations. Undersheriff Bill Elliott presented comparative statistics on calls for service between Crook County and other counties, noting that he is still awaiting data from several jurisdictions. He also shared year-to-date statistics from the Justice Center, reporting that 28,142 individuals have been screened. As a result of these screenings, 650 knives, 28 pepper sprays, 2 tasers,

and 7 firearms were turned away. Additionally, 67 cases have been flagged for security concerns this year, and several other incidents have required the presence of an additional deputy.

Commissioner Hermreck asked Community Corrections Lieutenant Aaron Boyce whether the Parole and Probation Division receives any federal funding. Aaron responded that the division does not receive federal grants for supervision, and all current grant funding comes through the state via the Criminal Justice Commission. He noted that he is unaware if any of that funding is federally passed through. County Manager Will Van Vactor provided a summary of the different levels of service. He explained that the minimum level is more reactive, comes with increased compliance risk, and poses higher liability exposure. The current or mid-level service balances mandated responsibilities and provides some public safety presence. The ideal level is proactive, offers greater flexibility, and fosters community partnerships. Will added that the Sheriff's Office had presented this framework earlier in the summer, and tables were created for each division to clearly compare services across all three levels—ideal, current, and minimum—on a single page for easier reference. He emphasized that the session was intended to focus on understanding service levels without discussing costs, encouraging the Board to consider what each level provides before financial decisions are made. He offered to provide additional materials, such as consolidated comparison tables, if it would help the Board better understand core services and service levels.

Commissioner Crawford raised the possibility of looking into the state's potential next steps regarding Parole and Probation. He suggested it would be helpful to understand what changes might be coming and whether there is a risk of significant funding loss or program impact in the future.

Commissioner Barney asked whether there is current data on the amount of time the Sheriff's Office is spending in the courtroom on special cases. Undersheriff Bill Elliott responded that while he may have some statistics, the duration is not consistently tracked, so complete data may not be available. Commissioner Barney also inquired about the level of backup support the Sheriff's Office is receiving from the Oregon State Police.

Undersheriff Bill Elliott recounted the challenges faced during the March Cook Fire, which occurred along a state highway. He stated that although assistance was requested from the Oregon State Police, only one sergeant responded and provided limited support, which raised concerns for firefighter safety. Additionally, he shared that ODOT declined a request to provide additional signage to reduce traffic speeds, citing the need for a traffic study and vehicle count. In response, the County Road Department, with support from Mitch, stepped in to install signage and implement speed reductions to help protect firefighters working on the scene. Despite the limited assistance, Undersheriff Elliott noted that communication with the OSP lieutenant was positive.

Commissioner Barney requested data on the number of accidents occurring on state highways and the amount of time the County spends responding to those incidents. In response, Undersheriff Bill Elliott acknowledged the importance of the question and emphasized the expectations the community has for the Sheriff's Office and the level of service they rely on. He noted that while there have been past conversations about deferring state highway incidents to the Oregon State Police, community expectations often necessitate County involvement regardless of jurisdiction.

Commissioner Crawford asked about the level of support the Sheriff's Office receives from the City Police Department during times of need. Undersheriff Bill Elliott responded that over his 21 years with the County, the relationship with the City Police Department has significantly improved. He stated that the current working relationship is very positive, noting that while the Sheriff's Office is not currently providing 24-hour coverage, the City Police are, and they regularly assist by responding to calls. He emphasized that the cooperation is mutual, with both agencies supporting each other when needed.

Will Van Vactor suggested that one additional special meeting be scheduled to allow staff and the Sheriff's Office time to compile and present the additional information requested during the current session. The purpose would be to give commissioners time to reflect on the levels of service presented—minimum, current, and ideal—and then shift the conversation toward the costs associated with each level. The intent of the current meeting was to focus on understanding the scope and impact of different service levels, without attaching financial considerations just yet. The follow-up meeting, proposed to take place before the October 23rd meeting, would include cost discussions and any requested data. Additionally, it was noted that a series of upcoming special meetings will be scheduled over the next few months to review core services for all departments, including upcoming sessions focused on the Health Department and the Library.

Sheriff Gautney expressed appreciation for the comprehensive information provided during the meeting, noting that the key points had been well covered by the subject matter experts. Sheriff Gautney extended gratitude to Will for his efforts in organizing the session, and to the Finance Director Christina Haron for her contributions on the financial side, emphasizing that the progress made would not have been possible without their hard work.

Public Comment:

Nigel Ballard who manages the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and volunteers with Search and Rescue (SAR), shared their perspective on the impact of current staffing levels within the Sheriff's Office. They explained that SAR often responds to remote missions—particularly in areas like the Ochocos—that would otherwise require a deputy, potentially taking up a significant portion of their shift. As unpaid volunteers, SAR helps alleviate the burden on law enforcement. However, some rescue situations evolve into law enforcement matters, requiring a sworn deputy, particularly when individuals involved have criminal history or present safety concerns. The resident emphasized the strain on resources, noting instances where only two deputies are on

duty, and one may be hours away on a call, leaving the county vulnerable. They expressed concern over the staffing shortage and its implications for public and responder safety.

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 of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 316PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp