

Crook County Board of County Commissioners Minutes of January 7, 2026, Regular Session

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of County Commissioners met in a Regular Session on January 7, 2026, at 9:00 AM in the Crook County Annex Meeting Room, located at 320 NE Court Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

Regular Session Agenda

Board Members Present: Susan Hermreck, Brian Barney

Board Members Absent: Seth Crawford

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Counsel Eric Blaine; County Manager Will Van Vactor; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; Finance Director Christina Haron; Natural Resources Manager Tim Deboodt; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Associate Planner Hannah Elliott; Budget Manager Jamie Berger; Senior Planner Katie McDonald; County Clerk Cheryl Seely; Fairgrounds Manager Casey Daly; IT Director Blaine Cheney; HR Director Meghan McKee; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Community Development Director John Eisler; Public Health Modernization Manager Stephanie O'Neal; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Code Compliance Officer Louis Seals; Triangle; Beth Peer; Mike Ervin; Ashley McCormick; Julie Thompson; Jessica Barnes; Mike Warren; Brad Wilson; John Heylin; and members of the public.

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

Details:

County Manager Will Van Vactor brought forth a housekeeping matter concerning the appointment of a chair for the day was addressed. Under Order Number 2024-13, the board of commissioners operates with a rotating chair structure requiring automatic changes unless the next commissioner in line declines. Within this framework, Commissioner Hermreck is identified as Commissioner 1, Commissioner Barney as Commissioner 2, and Commissioner Crawford as Commissioner 3. The previous year saw Commissioner Barney stepping in as chair after Commissioner Hermreck declined. Currently, Commissioner Crawford is next in line to serve as chair but is absent from today's meeting. As such, a temporary chair must be appointed for the day, without affecting Commissioner Crawford's future role unless he opts out upon his return. The board must take action to appoint this interim chair to ensure the meeting's smooth operation. This procedure highlights the importance of maintaining structured protocols, even in the absence of designated commissioners.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to appoint Brian Barney as the chair of our January 7th, 2026, meeting. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

Public Comment

None

Consent Agenda

1. Approve Minutes

2. Order 2026-01 Designation of Newspapers of Record

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to approve the consent agenda as presented. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

Discussion

3. Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Report

Requester:

Deb Shaw, Director of Commerce & Tourism

Andrea Weaver, Tourism Development Specialist

Commissioner Barney noted a change in the agenda lineup. The Chamber of Commerce's quarterly meeting has been postponed at their request. Additionally, agenda item six, regarding the amendment to the service contract with the City of Prineville, is also postponed due to pending paperwork. Items seven and eight are rescheduled as the necessary documents from the state remain incomplete, requiring further time to address. This adjustment underscores the reliance on document readiness for proceeding with scheduled agenda items.

Details: This item has been removed from this agenda and will be provided as an update at the January 21st Regular Session.

4. Annual Review and Adoption of Crook County Investment Policy

Requester:

Christina Haron, Finance Director

Details:

Finance Director Christina Haron presented the investment policy in compliance with ORS 294-135A, which mandates that local governments invest in securities with maturities longer than 18 months adopt an annual investment policy. The last review occurred in February, and the policy has been evaluated by investment advisors in alignment with state regulations. Their assessment confirmed compliance, noting no substantive changes required other than updating the year from 2025 to 2026. Christina expressed readiness to answer any questions, though there appeared to be none from those in attendance.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to accept the annual review and adoption of the Crook County Investment Policy. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

5. Annual review of recommended updates to Crook County Fiscal Policies from Finance Committee

Requester:

Christina Haron, Finance Director

Presenter(s):

Will Van Vactor, County Manager

Details:

County Manager Will Van Vactor presented revisions to the county's fiscal policies for FY27 after a review by the Finance Committee on December 17, 2025. The revisions focus on two main changes: an editorial correction adding a hyphen to "cost-effective" and an adjustment to the landfill fiscal policy, allowing for annual modifications based on inflation and post-closure liabilities, aligning with DEQ requirements. The committee also recommended creating a separate comprehensive debt policy to enhance fiscal discipline and manage debt effectively. Will seeks board approval for the fiscal policy amendments and direction on developing a draft debt policy framework.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to adopt the revisions and modifications to the fiscal policies as outlined in the fiscal policy redline draft included in the packet for today's meeting. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

Commissioner Hermreck and Will Van Vactor discussed the proposed direction for developing a comprehensive debt policy. Commissioner Hermreck expressed trust in Will's approach and the finance team's capabilities, agreeing that the direction seemed appropriate. Will sought board confirmation before working with the finance director to draft a framework for future consideration. Commissioner Hermreck reiterated confidence in the finance department and agreed with proceeding without a formal motion. They planned to revisit the topic in a future work session, with both expressing gratitude towards the Finance Committee for their efforts in reviewing and suggesting the necessary policy recommendations.

6. Amendment Service Contract with City of Prineville

Requester:

Jacquie Davis, Landfill Director

Details: This item has been removed from this agenda and will be provided as an update at the January 14th Work Session.

7. 2026 County Financial Assistance Agreement for Behavioral Health Services

Requester:

Eric Blaine, County Counsel

Details: This item was removed from the agenda at the beginning of the regular session and will be scheduled for a future meeting.

8. Local Plan and Budget for Behavioral Health Services

Requester:

Eric Blaine, County Counsel

Details: This item was removed from the agenda at the beginning of the regular session and will be scheduled for a future meeting.

9. Public Hearing: First Reading of Ordinance 357 An Ordinance Amending Titles 1,17, and 18 of the Crook County Code, and Declaring an Emergency

Requester:

John Eisler, Community Development Director

Details:

The meeting proceeded with a public hearing for the first reading of Ordinance 357, amending Titles 17 and 18 of the Crook County Code and declaring an emergency. John Eisler, the Community Development Director, introduced the session. The Crook County Board of Commissioners convened on January 7, 2026, at 9:13 a.m. to conduct the first of two scheduled public hearings. The ordinance relates to Land Use Application Number 217, 25000323PLNG, marking a legislative amendment to the county code.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to read by title only. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

Commissioner Barney read into the record the script for the first hearing of Ordinance 357, which amends Titles 1, 17, and 18 of the Crook County Code, declaring an emergency. The hearing aims to consider the Planning Commission's recommendation for code amendments. The full staff memo and amendments are available online or from the Planning Department. The Board may modify, uphold, or revise these recommendations, and a second hearing is scheduled for January 21, 2026. The de novo hearing follows standard legislative land use procedures, focusing on criteria from the Crook County Code, Comprehensive Plan, Oregon Administrative Rules, and Revised Statutes. Commissioner Barney conducted a check for ex parte communications and conflicts of interest, declaring none. The hearing procedure requires testimony and evidence to address applicable standards, with the record remaining open until the second hearing. Appeals are possible per ORS-197 and OAR661. Participants intending to testify must register their intent either in person or online, and all testimony must adhere to procedural requirements.

Community Development Director John Eisler provided a detailed review of proposed text amendments to the Crook County Code, aligning it with current State statutes and OAR rules. The amendments aim to improve compliance, offer clearer zoning ordinance criteria, allow for local flexibility, correct inaccuracies, and remove outdated

references. Key changes include updating ADU language, modifying exclusive farm use zones, adjusting planning commission roles, clarifying flood damage prevention, and enhancing definitions related to dwelling units. New provisions include allowing certain recreational uses, and refining manufactured dwelling standards. Language updates also replace "County Court" with "Board of County Commissioners," ensuring the code remains relevant and understandable.

Commissioner Hermreck questioned the removal of the requirement for a fire truck turnaround verification and notification to the fire and rescue district. Katie McDonald, Senior Planner, explained that the removal was due to redundant notifications causing confusion. Previously, applicants interacted with the fire department twice, which led to misunderstandings about the initial sign-off. The change consolidates the process to one point of contact after filing an application, simplifying coordination with the fire department. Susan acknowledged understanding the reasoning once Katie provided this context.

The discussion centered around proposed changes to the definition of a "dwelling unit" in the Crook County Code, focusing on clarifying ambiguous elements. The aim is to strike the prohibition on having more than one cooking facility to accommodate modern living preferences, like outdoor kitchens. A significant challenge identified is distinguishing between accessory structures and primary dwellings, especially with unauthorized conversions for habitation. The revised definition for "designed for occupancy" considers structures with comprehensive living facilities. The conversation also clarified the inclusion of kitchen elements and questioned the necessity of a dishwasher in defining a kitchen. The intent is to create clear standards while allowing flexibility, considering factors like public feedback and ongoing housing challenges.

Public Comment:

Julie Thompson inquired about the revised date for code updates and the definition of "reasonable space." John Eisler explained that code changes occur through ordinances, typically with a 90-day waiting period due to state statutes and appeal processes through the Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA). Changes become effective afterwards, with no retroactive application. They are posted online with the ordinance date once updated in code publishing. Regarding "reasonable space," John noted that the term, like many in land use codes, remains undefined to avoid excessive code length. In case of disputes, the County Commissioners define such terms, and their definition carries deference if appealed, a complexity often utilized by attorneys due to its inherent ambiguity.

Mike Warren, speaking neutrally, expressed concern about potential legislative changes allowing more than one dwelling per parcel, requiring future code revision. He emphasized the need to consider this possibility while supporting current amendments due to compliance issues and public feedback. His comment aimed to ensure awareness of possible future impacts without opposing the current changes.

Brad Wilson expressed his opposition during the meeting, specifically addressing

concerns about Ordinance 357 and proposed amendments to sections 18.08.040, 18.08.110, and 17.12.060. He questioned the implications of defining independent living facilities and kitchens, arguing that stricter definitions could increase code violations and economic burdens on residents. Brad emphasized the unintended consequences of such regulatory decisions, drawing parallels with past issues like solar arrays lacking sufficient setbacks. He advocated for maintaining current standards, particularly concerning kitchen definitions, to support residents facing housing and economic challenges. Additionally, he criticized potential overreach in fire safety measures and urged the need for government decisions to respect property rights and freedoms. Brad called for more active communication with constituents to better educate them about proposed changes, asserting that words and decisions have significant impacts.

John Eisler responded to comments on proposed legislation for second dwellings, clarifying that the definitions being set provide a foundational framework and would not require changes if such legislation passes. These definitions help differentiate dwellings from accessory structures, supporting future changes without modification. He explained that all dwelling criteria need to be met for classification, and missing elements indicate an accessory structure. The changes aim to clarify state-granted property rights rather than infringe upon them.

Regarding ADUs, John discussed current restrictions to certain areas due to egress concerns, with plans in place to develop safe routes through the Transportation System Plan (TSP). He acknowledged the public's pressure for more housing and expressed support for expanded ADU use and potential legislative changes. He addressed fire safety concerns by explaining that fire sprinkler requirements are determined on a case-by-case basis by the subdivision review committee, which includes multiple county officials.

Compliance Officer Louis Seals highlighted that nearly half of the 2025 compliance cases involved unauthorized accessory structures lacking permits, raising significant fire and safety concerns. He emphasized that many structures were used unsafely, such as bedrooms without proper egress. John Eisler responded by stressing the need for clear definitions of dwellings versus accessory structures to prevent these issues. He supported allowing future conversions under controlled conditions, like periodic inspections, to ensure safety and compliance. Commissioners Hermreck and Commissioner Barney agreed on the importance of establishing clear, proactive regulations to prevent legal and financial issues for homeowners, emphasizing that the language used should prevent misconceptions about permitted uses. The discussion underscored the ongoing collaboration between county staff, officials, and the public to refine regulations as necessary, adapting to new challenges and community feedback.

John emphasized the need for clear definitions in housing regulations to ensure safety and compliance, highlighting efforts to address housing demands quickly while respecting public health and property rights. He encouraged public input and confirmed the Community Development Department's commitment to finding practical housing solutions aligned with state laws and community safety.

Manager Report

Details:

County Manager Will Van Vactor highlighted the opportunity for Crook County to appoint a commissioner to the legislative committee of the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC). Currently lacking a voting member, the county needs to act quickly to secure representation before the AOC board meets next week. Commissioner Hermreck expressed support for participating in this critical process, and following positive comments about her communication skills and dedication, she agreed to take on the role. The discussion clarified AOC's importance, mentioning affiliations with Eastern Oregon Counties and the National Association of Counties (NACO), emphasizing the significance of legislative coordination and lobbying efforts for initiatives like secure rural schools. A motion was required to make the appointment official.

MOTION: Brian Barney moved to appoint Commissioner Hermreck AOC legislative committee. Susan Hermreck seconded. No discussion. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

In addition to his closing remarks, County Manager Will Van Vactor reminded everyone about the upcoming series of public meetings. Mid-year presentations from all departments are scheduled for Monday and Tuesday mornings. Starting Wednesday afternoon, the board will engage in goal setting, which will influence the FY27 budget planning process. The meetings will wrap up Thursday afternoon with discussions between the Budget Committee and the board about guidelines and assumptions for the upcoming fiscal year. All sessions will take place at the Justice Center.

Commissioner Updates

Details:

Susan Hermreck clarified scheduling details, noting the AOC board meeting on Monday for confirming appointments to the legislative committee. She confirmed her roles as the Crook County Representative for the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC), Central Oregon Health Council (COHC), and Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation (COACT). She inquired about the need for a formal motion for reappointment, though these roles have typically been volunteer-based. She plans to attend meetings for COHC and COIC in Bend the following day. County Counsel Eric Blaine suggested that Commissioner Hermreck continue in her roles as the representative for COIC, COHC, and COACT until the Board of Commissioners decides otherwise. If a formal appointment becomes necessary, they can address it at that time.

Commissioner Hermreck also reported submitting Crook County's priority list to ODOT, highlighting the roundabout at Powell Butte per the Transportation System Plan (TSP).

This submission was well-received. She discussed the need to pressure senators to support delisting wolves after recent livestock attacks, including the holiday killing of a cow and similar incidents in California. She emphasized the value of such animals and advocated for state-controlled wolf management. She concluded her update with these points.

Brian Barney None

Public Comment

None

Executive Session

10. None scheduled.

MOTION: Susan Hermreck moved to Adjourn. Brian Barney seconded. No discussion. Susan Hermreck votes Aye, Brian Barney votes Aye. Motion Passed 2-0.

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 10:26 AM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Breyanna Cupp, Executive Assistant