

Union County Board of Commissioners
Joseph Building Annex Conference Room
Regular Commission Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 1, 2026

Present: Commissioner R. Matthew Scarfo, Chair
Commissioner Paul Anderes
Commissioner Jake Seavert

Commissioner Scarfo opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. and the Pledge of Allegiance was given with all three Commissioners present.

AGENDA REVIEW

There were no revisions to the agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Commissioner Scarfo opened the public comment period and asked that comments be limited to 3 minutes.

Beth Upshaw, Union, thanked the Commissioners for allowing public comment and then addressed them with her concerns related to the property at 865 N. Second Street in Union. She provided a copy of her comments to the Commissioners for the record. Ms. Upshaw stated there is a tax foreclosure on the property, but nothing will happen until the fall. The property is not occupied by the owner, or any person or entity that appears in the records of the county to have a lien or other interest in the property for a period of six consecutive months. The property has suffered substantial depreciated value if not occupied. The property has burnt down mostly and there are trailers parked in there who are not owners of the property. It is in disarray.

Ms. Upshaw read from the ORS; If the property is subject to waste or abandonment; the county governing body may determine that any rights of possession the owner may have on the property are forfeited and direct the property be deeded to the county by the tax collector. After an expiration period of 30 days from the date of the action the county governing body determined property subject for forfeiture. This information appears in the records of the county. ORS 312.122 states that the county has the right to invoke the 30-day notice and take over the piece of property. She wanted the Commissioners to be aware of this information because she cares about the community she resides in.

Administrative Officer Burgess was asked to provide an update on the property for the record. The county is not ignoring the situation, but following required processes. Currently there are steps in place with regard to the property that she is not allowed to disclose at this time. However, she can share that the county and legal counsel have been aware of these statutes and are following appropriate legal avenues.

2026 Program of Work – Wallowa Whitman National Forest

Shaun McKinney, Forest Supervisor, and Stephaney Kerley, District Manager, presented the 2026 Program of Work to the Commissioners for their information along with a brief staff update.

Mr. McKinney stated that without the partnership of the County and the Wallowa Whitman National Forest La Grande Ranger District, there is no way they are successful in their communities. He wanted to

acknowledge and recognize Union County as a fantastic partner in helping get work done in the communities.

Rather than going through the entire program of work, Mr. McKinney focused on the highlights.

Yesterday, the US Forest Service announced an agency wide reorganization. Their National Headquarters (NHQ) will be moved from Washington DC to Salt Lake City and will be closing down regional offices into service hubs. A lot of activity above the infrastructure of the national forests system. They do not anticipate tremendous change or impacts at the local level.

Mr. McKinney recognized Commissioner Anderes as he has been an incredible leader in his role with the BIC. He noted they will have increased timber harvest soon publish a draft EIS on the Blue Mountain forest plan revisions, and fill some vacant positions. They are in good shape for fire protection and response.

Stephaney Kerley, District Manager, provided a brief update to the Commissioners regarding B2H. Currently, she is meeting weekly with the contractor overseeing the implementation of the line. There is approximately 6 miles of line that goes across the forest and the La Grande Ranger District. Idaho Power is currently working outside of the forest but heading this way. She expects to see them doing some vegetation clearing and getting ready to start the road infrastructure that they need to start building the line this summer.

She also provided a list of tentative projects and projects currently being worked on which include much fuel reduction work utilizing contracts and some timber sales, they will be addressing the overlook at Indian Rock.

Commissioner Anderes thanked Mr. McKinney and Ms. Kerley for their partnership in particular to Union County and the great working relationship with the Forest Service. He has not read the Blue Mountain Forest Plan – Alternative 2 from front to back, but has made some notes in hopes of meeting with Mr. Kerley and Supervisor Watrud in particular about it.

Commissioner Anderes noted that this Forest Service hosts the largest wilderness area in the State of Oregon, the Eagle Cap Wilderness. We have a beautiful state, and a lot of wilderness areas and the biggest is right out our back door. He is pleased Alternatives 1 and 2 propose no new wilderness.

Commissioner Seavert also appreciates the collaboration and working relationship as well and thanked them for keeping the Commissioners up to date on all of the projects.

Commissioner Scarfo thanked the representatives for their presentation and invited them to state for the upcoming CWPP presentation.

Community Wildfire Protection Plan

Nick Vora, Emergency Manager, and Willie Crippen, presented the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) to the Commissioners for their consideration. He noted that Willie Crippen did the vast majority of the heavy lifting on this project.

A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is a plan that is federally facilitated and locally developed. This is the third iteration of developing the CWPP, the first version was in 2005 and the second version was developed in 2016 and adopted by the county in 2017.

The county has CWPP's for a variety of reasons but primarily it is for grant eligibility. There are a lot of funding streams that only apply if the project or jurisdiction has a current CWPP that applies to the project. The reason for that is the CWPP fosters interagency coordination, e.g., the most recent update to the plan took two years of meetings and discussions working with the Oregon Department of Forestry, Forest Service, Firewise Coordinators and local fire districts and fire departments. With that is the risk-based prioritization, where rather than approaching things from a whack-a-mole fashion, they are able to take a very strategic look at what needs to be done at the county level, but also not discounting projects of opportunity. If funding comes available for a specific area or project, they can jump on that and get it done without losing sight of the big picture.

The CWPP helps the county approach projects with a strategy. It is not something that obligates the county to spend money and doesn't create any mandates on property owners or jurisdictions to do work. It is more of a framework that they approach the fire mitigation with a common approach rather than individual, uncoordinated efforts.

Previous versions did not focus on expanding the risk scope beyond the forest land; into our fire-prone rangelands and agricultural land. Also using more relevant and updated risk methodologies so they can use risk assessments in the plan that are very closely aligned to the risk assessments that the grant programs they would be seeking funding from are using as well.

Willie Crippen noted that the CWPP is mandated and designated by Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA), which allows federal partners, such as the Forest Service to put fuel money on the ground; which is a big component. It requires collaboration with all of our partners, bringing them together. They are also prioritizing, using the latest science available, the latest fire behavior and burn possibilities and have identified within the county and communities at risk in the WUI zone.

Mr. Crippen said this has been a great project. He has enjoyed working with their partners and feels good about the product moving forward. Lastly, he mentioned the plan identifies a lot of mitigation action items and is the key.

Commissioner Anderes thanked Nick, Willie and all of the partners for their efforts in revitalizing the CWPP. He was a part of the first version, and is aware of how much work goes into it. It is a true testament to how well the cooperators work together, whether it is the Forest Service, ODF, Emergency Management, Rural Fire Departments, Sheriff's Office, and everyone else that goes into making this plan. He noted that he is a huge fan of Firewise because it is not government coming in to private property saying, "thou shall". He is also a big fan of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA). Representative Greg Walden was the architect of it and worked really hard to get it done.

Commissioner Anderes also reported that the Public Works Department is currently exploring the option of adding a third pit for filling retardant planes. They have expanded fuel capacity at the airport as well.

Commissioner Seavert noted that the plan was very well thought out and put together. He especially likes the back of the plan with the mitigation plans in the living document. It holds accountability to every agency and every partner that we have to show some measurement and hopes to see some growth

there. The statistic of Union County being 94% higher in risk in counties across the nation for wildfire is astounding, but it isn't new news. As long as we as a county are making progressive steps to mitigate that, that is all we can do.

Commissioner Scarfo thanked Nick and Willie for a substantial job on the plan. He also quoted a section from the Executive Summary, "Human life and safety is the plans first priority, everything else follows from that".

Emergency Manager Vora noted that the appreciation goes to Willie, he did the vast majority of the work.

Commissioner Scarfo asked how many years until they sit down and review the plan again. Emergency Manager Vora said in about 7-8 years they will get back together, but will be doing annual reviews so it shouldn't be something extravagant.

Administrative Officer Burgess read the Declaration of Agreement and Plan Adoption that has been prepared as part of the document. It has been signed by Nick Vora, Emergency Manager, James Sauer, Union County Fire Defense Board Chief, Merle Laci, City of La Grande Fire Chief, and Justin Lauer, Unit Forester for the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve the 2026 Community Wildfire Protection Plan as presented by Nick Vora and Willie Crippen. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Seavert moved approval of the consent agenda which included the March 18 & 25, 2026 claims journals and February 18 and March 4, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Jubilee Lake Pilot Project Letter of Support

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, noted that Commissioner Seavert drafted the letter of support for consideration and asked him to provide information related to the request.

The letter is at the request of Brent Oliver related to the Jubilee Lake trail system. Commissioner Seavert met with him last week about the hard surface trail system at Jubilee Lake; a dock and gates to restrooms that are in disrepair as well. This inhibits the disabled and elderly at this highly recreated site in north Union County. A hard surface trail was put in in 1992 and has had no maintenance since then; so, as you can imagine with weather conditions and tree roots has become nearly impassable.

Union County's population consists of 22 percent seniors and 15 percent disabled. That is approximately a third of our population with needs for access to facilities such as these. He thinks this is a great way to make an impact and bring more meaningful access to that. This will also be a stepping stone for Mr. Oliver and his foundations efforts to carry these projects to other parks throughout the Western US.

Commissioner Anderes stated much like Commissioner Seavert, Mr. Oliver made an appointment to meet with him individually. Mr. Oliver is a fascinating individual and has taken up access as his cause. He explains his full story on the Six Ranch podcast.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve the Jubilee Lake Pilot Project Letter of Support as presented. Commissioner Seavert seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular Commission meeting is scheduled to be held Wednesday, April 15, 2026 at 9 am.

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Commissioner Anderes noted there is a demonstration on April 9th of a curtain burner which is an apparatus that they use to burn forest waste and create biochar. He will share the flyer with the Commissioners. The Weed Board meeting he is scheduled to attend tomorrow reminded him of the weed levy that will be on the ballot this year to continue the levy with no increase to the taxpayers. The valuable program offers \$500 per individual credit towards chemical or services to help control and mitigate our weeds in Union County. He has taken advantage of the program in years passed when he found white top on his property that he bought in 2018.

Commissioner Seavert said there is an interesting film being broadcasted at EOU this evening that talks about the unexplained mutilations of livestock.

Commissioner Scarfo noted the Sunrise Rotary is going to be hosting an easter egg hunt on Sunday at the Union County Fairgrounds. He asked everyone to be careful with the waste water project going on in the area.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Scarfo adjourned the meeting at 9:57 am.

Respectfully submitted,



Allison Moore
Senior Department Specialist