

***Union County Board of Commissioners***

Joseph Building Annex Conference Room

Regular Commission Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 6, 2026

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

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

**AGENDA REVIEW**

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, requested to add an EOU Presentation on a Community Health Study Project after the Spring Clean Up Day Funding Request.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

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

Dick Kenton, Cove, addressed the Commissioners regarding term limits in Union County. Mr. Kenton stated he helped disseminate a petition to uphold term limits in Union County and the state of Oregon. He is currently a resident and was a resident at the time of the petition. During that time, over 2/3 of the people voted for term limits and suddenly they were deemed unconstitutional. It is his opinion that one person on the Commission is going to benefit from this, and he thinks it is wrong. It was set through a court process that was a little bit iffy, because we didn't hear about it until it was already passed with no transparency. The will of the people of this county is to have fair elections and fair elections involves term limits, because whoever is in that seat gets most of the benefit. It is time to stop spending taxpayer money to work against the people, through a court process and attorneys. He believes that Commissioner Scarfo and Donna Beverage should step aside.

Beth Upshaw, Union, addressed the Commissioners regarding term limits in Union County. Ms. Upshaw stated she has been involved in government in general and knows there are set guidelines that are to be followed; some may respect it and some may not. She was not involved in getting the petition out there but she was a citizen who did vote, so that brings her to the heart and soul of what she believes in this county. The way the term limits were handled was pretty quiet. There wasn't a lot of information put out there, there wasn't an opportunity to speak on it. The Commissioners followed the rules, but in the end, we all know this isn't right. She knows there is an attorney, and they follow guidelines but asked that all the Commissioners be thoughtful. This is bigger than just one position, the history changed. She doesn't want this election to be about personal gain.

Valerie Morrow, La Grande, addressed the Commissioners regarding term limits in Union County. Ms. Morrow stated she has lived in Union County for almost 40 years. Ms. Morrow is the Treasurer for the group called Union County Citizens for Good Government (UCCGG). She stated there have been a lot of misnomers put out about what their group does and who they are. Their group is listed with the Secretary of State as the Political Action Committee, number 24507. The group was formed in 2016 when there was an outcry from citizenry regarding Commissioners not effective in their positions. Jim

Mollerstrom, a long time La Grande citizen, became Chief Petitioner of a movement to initiate term limits. He has since been asked to lead the UCCGG again in 2026. He is not a sole person working on this, this is a core group and then they have a much broader group who are involved in this effort. She also stated that Mr. Mollerstrom is not a Russian colluder as has been suggested. He is again, a long-time citizen from Union County who now resides in Independence, Oregon. UCCGG was able to start the process of giving a referendum on the ballot. Contrary to what has been said on social media, there were many steps taken, including getting the signatures needed. Ms. Morrow was a part of that signature gathering group and there was a long process of vetting the referendum, contrary to popular belief and what has been stated on social media. Term limits passed by 68.21% of the electorate, in other words, 7 out of 10 voters wanted term limits for County Commissioners. Ms. Morrow has seen misleading and untrue statements meant to push a narrative that disrespects the will of the people. The statements push an unfounded story that term limits were not vetted and should have never been on the ballot. Other misinformation is that UCCGG is supporting one particular candidate in this commission race and that is false. Their mission is to support a process that values all of Union County, not a particular candidate for Commissioner. She encouraged the Commissioners who use social media to be mindful of the message they send; Union County deserves Commissioners who believe in the will of the people. 7 out of 10 voters are not going away.

Maggie Willis, La Grande, addressed the Commissioners regarding term limits in Union County. Ms. Willis has difficulties logging into the Observer as they reset their system in an inconvenient time where she could not access any of the announcements regarding the term limits. If she had known, she would have shown up to speak against the judge's decision. She also stated that she was unable to attend the forum that was held at Pleasant Grove and would like to see the version from EOActive without the edits. Ms. Willis proceeded to ask Commissioner Scarfo to have EOActive release the unedited version.

Commissioner Scarfo indicated that Brent Clapp of EOActive purposely left out part of it because one of the candidates was getting attacked. He recommended that Ms. Willis reach out to EOActive for a copy.

Jim Mollerstrom, Independence, Oregon addressed the Commissioners regarding term limits and the recall process in Union County. He started by asking for clarification from Shelley that the document he sent the other day had been received. It is a document for review by the Commission as a reminder of the Oregon Constitution, summarizing steps involved in the initiative, referendum, and recall process. His suggestion is for the County Clerk and, or the County Attorney to hold a tutorial training for the Commissioners about the legality in the Oregon Constitution of the initiative referendum.

Administrative Officer Burgess confirmed that she did receive the information Mr. Mollerstrom submitted and it has been distributed.

#### 2026 Spring Clean Up Day Funding Request

Lana Shira, Cove City Recorder, addressed the Commissioners with her request for the Cove Spring Clean Up Day for their consideration.

The City of Cove Spring Clean Up Day has been scheduled for Saturday, May 16. Over the years, the event has been very successful and well received by the city. In the past, the city has received funding from the Solid Waste District to assist in the cost. Cove has a budget for the clean up day, however, the match funds help them get started for the following year.

**Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve the 2026 Cove Spring Clean Up Day funding request up to \$2,000 in matching funds. Commissioner Anderes seconded.**

Commissioner Seavert said it is great that the county can have these partnerships with the communities for these types of events. It goes to show how keen they are on keeping their community clean and inviting to people who are visiting.

Clarification was provided that the funds come from the Union County Solid Waste District.

**Motion carried unanimously.**

#### EOU Presentation

Commissioner Seavert provided an explanation about the EOU Presentation. Union County Safe Communities Coalition reached out to EOU Health Class and asked if they could help them develop a survey to distribute throughout the community to gain perspective on how effective the coalition is doing as far as getting the message out on drug and alcohol use within our youth in the county. The students did a fantastic job on the survey and getting out to meet with local elected officials, law enforcement and school districts. In February, the class presented their findings and results of the survey to the Safe Communities Coalition and put Union County in a category that the community is aware. Once that was complete, they went back to the students and asked them if they could implement a strategy to get the message out to the public.

Before the students presented, they asked members of the audience to complete a brief survey asking what they know about drug and alcohol abuse in Union County. The students presented information on the process they used and the outcomes discovered. Once they were finished, there were questions and input from the audience.

All three Commissioner thanked the students for coming and presenting.

#### 2026 Umatilla Nation Forest Program of Work

Eric Watrud, Forest Supervisor, Umatilla National Forest, and Aaron Gagnon, Deputy Forest Supervisor, addressed the Commissioners with a presentation regarding the 2026 Forest Program of Work for their information. Also, in attendance were several employees of the Umatilla National Forest.

Mr. Watrud started off by expressing his appreciation for the engagement from the entire Board of Commissioner over the years as they've worked on designing a revised forest plan for the Umatilla, Wallowa Whitman and Malheur National Forests. Mr. Watrud went on to provide an overall update on their program of work which included forest plan revisions, and preparations for the upcoming fire season.

A Forest Plan doesn't lay out any specific projects, but it sets the broad sideboards for how the 5.5 million acres of the three national forests will be managed for the next several decades. He stated public engagement is very important to help craft the plan and having leaders of the local community engage early in the process has been very helpful to them. There will be an environmental impact statement out later this summer that will have a 90-day public comment period. There are three primary alternatives that they will be asking the public for their feedback on.

Commissioner Anderes asked about the public engagement meeting dates for the plan revision. Mr. Watrud indicated they are looking at potentially having public meetings the first two weeks of June, in a similar format as they have done in previous round with a virtual option available. They are aiming to send out the public meeting schedule soon as they are finalizing some of the specifics.

Commissioner Seavert asked Mr. Watrud to state the plan moving forward with wilderness and road closure for the record. Mr. Watrud stated one of the required processes in the forest plan revision is analyzing every acre on the National Forest to see if it is eligible for inclusion in the National Wilderness System. The no-action alternative is to continue the current status quo of the existing wilderness areas they already have in the Blue Mountains. Alternative 2 is not going to recommend any additional wilderness acres, that is zero additional acres in the wilderness. Alternative 3 is active management with some additional resource considerations such as, analysis of potential additional wilderness acres. The proposed action will not have any additional acres.

In regards to roads, the forest plans explicitly do not include any gravel management or direct road management. The road network remains the same. The intent with the Active Management Alternative, is that it would actually improve the road systems.

Aaron Gagnon, Deputy Forest Supervisor, provided an update to the Commissioners on their preparations for fire season. The hiring of firefighters has been favorable and now they are getting trained up and ready to respond. The most common question asked is what the fire season will look like; and the standard answer is we won't know until October. He is working hard to get his crew trained and ready.

Commissioner Anderes appreciates Mr. Gagnon's efforts and is looking forward to working with him.

Commissioner Seavert asked how many acres of prescribed burns they have done in preparation for fire season over the course of the winter. Mr. Watrud indicated on the Umatilla National Forest, they are aiming to have over 20,000 acres of treatments across the forest. Some are prescribed fire, and others are treatments to reduce the fuels.

Commissioner Seavert stated that Union County prides itself on the tanker base at the airport and asked if there is anything that Union County can do to be of assistance. Mr. Watrud appreciates the partnership with Union County as La Grande has been an important resource for them during record fire seasons. He also stated that he appreciates the support for active management.

Kevin Baumerger, North Folk John Day Ranger District provided an update on specific ongoing projects such as the P52 fuel break, and the 54 North Project.

Commissioner Anderes asked if there were specific plans in salvaging the excessive amount of blowdown from last winter. Mr. Baumerger stated their district didn't experience the amount that the northern half of the forest experienced. For the salvage of the south half of the Umatilla, he wouldn't think there is much opportunity there.

In regards to blowdown, Andy Steele, North Zone Recreation Staff Officer, noted that Walla Walla and Pomeroy got hit a lot harder than the south half of the forest. They are making plans for salvaging operations there. Fire crews have been out logging roads and getting roads that are snow free open for the public and making them passable. There are many other areas with a significant amount of downed trees and they are working on decisions on how to handle those.

Mr. Steele also provided an update on Walla Walla projects that involve Union County. The Summit Commercial Thinning Project on Mt. Emily Summit Road is an ODF Good Neighbor Authority Project. The project is going to be one large contract that should be up to bid shortly.

Mr. Steele also provided an update on the Spout Springs ski area development. He thanked Union County for their cooperation with Umatilla County in working through the process. Umatilla County has a request for proposals out looking for a new, future owner and operator of the ski area. The deadline for the RFP is May 20, at which point they will be working on selecting an individual or entity to take it over.

Commissioner Anderes expressed his appreciation to Umatilla County, as they have the financial and personnel capacity that the Union County didn't have to move this project forward with Sprout Springs. He was able to visit with a group that is very interested in working on this project so he hopes good proposals will be received.

Commissioner Seavert indicated that Union County couldn't get involved with the project and is thankful Umatilla County can. The ski area is located in Union County and facilitates a lot of Union County residents as well.

Commissioner Anderes reiterated his appreciation for the strong working relationship with Umatilla National Forest, especially on the forest plan revision.

#### **ELECTED OFFICIAL, DEPARTMENT HEAD & EMPLOYEE COMMENTS**

##### 2026 Noxious Weed List

On behalf of Brian Clapp, Weed Supervisor, Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the 2026 Noxious Weed List to the Commissioners for their consideration.

Each year the Union County Weed Advisory Board reviews the Noxious Weed List which is then presented to the Commissioners for approval. This year they reviewed the list and are recommending no changes.

**Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve the 2026 Noxious Weed List as presented with no changes from last year. Commissioner Anderes seconded.**

Commissioner Seavert noted that there is great representation from all corners of the county on the Weed Board.

**Motion carried unanimously.**

#### **CONSENT AGENDA**

**Commissioner Seavert moved approval of the consent agenda which included the April 15, 16, 29 & 30, 2026 claims journals and April 1 & 15, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**

#### **ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

##### Mental Health Hold Authority Designation

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the Mental Health Hold Authority letter to the Commissioners for their consideration.

Daisy Duren has been selected by CHD to serve as Community Mental Health Program Director and the Oregon Health Authority has approved her designation. To establish documentation showing that Daisy has been authorized by the local mental health authority to place holds for the involuntary commitment process and designate qualified crisis workers as well, a letter has been prepared.

**Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve the Mental Health Hold Authority Designation to Daisy Duren the CHD Director of the Mental Health Program as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**

#### FTA 5310 Public Transportation Grant

Union County is eligible to receive \$339,497 in Section 5310 Public Transportation Grant Funds for the period of October 1, 2027 to September 2029. This federal funding source supports public transportation for seniors and individuals with disabilities by funding eligible capital, purchased service and preventative maintenance projects for transportation providers.

Union County issued a Request for Proposals for services to be provided utilizing the funds. Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, the only eligible transportation provider in Union County, submitted a proposal to provide purchased service rides and have agreed to provide the matching funds.

**Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve the 5310 Public Transportation Grant Authorization in the amount of \$339,497 identifying Community Connection of Northeast Oregon as a service provider. Commissioner Seavert seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**

#### 516 Ranch Road Letter

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the 516 Ranch Road Letter to the Commissioners for their consideration.

The 516 Ranch owner Doug Bean continues to request Commission action on roads on private property related to the B2H Project. Mr. Bean also contacted Emergency Manager Vora due to his work on evacuation routes and fire safety in the area.

Emergency Manager Vora drafted a well written letter which he provided to Mr. Bean, who also wanted a similar letter from the Board of Commissioners. With that request, Administrative Officer Burgess revised the letter accordingly for Commission signature.

Commissioner Seavert indicated it is a touchy subject when you start talking about private property owners and authorizing the county to set up regulations concerning the public and private road access. His only response is that private landowners have the authority in themselves within negotiations to require these suggestions. He is in favor of the letter and it doesn't hurt to have suggestions, especially when it comes to wildfire.

Commissioner Scarfo appreciates Nick's expertise from an emergency standpoint. The location for an evacuation route for Morgan Lake would be very beneficial to the people who live up there.

Commissioner Anderes agrees with the comments that have already been relayed and is very appreciative of the work from Emergency Manager Vora on the letter.

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to accept the letter to be issued to 516 Ranch as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

**GOOD OF THE ORDER**

Commissioner Seavert has been working hard on the Opportunity Zone application. He is pretty optimistic about it and still waiting on a few things from Island City. He also reminded everyone of the Ag Timber Parade this coming Friday in Island City.

Commissioner Scarfo reminded everyone of the upcoming budget committee meeting on May 19 and 20 at 4 pm.

**NEXT MEETING**

The next regular Commission meeting is scheduled to be held Wednesday, May 20, 2026 at 9 am.

The Union County Budget Committee meetings will be held Tuesday, May 19 at 4 pm and Wednesday, May 20 at 4 pm.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Scarfo adjourned the meeting at 10:17 am.

Respectfully submitted,



Allison Moore  
Senior Department Specialist