

Union County Board of Commissioners
Joseph Building Annex Conference Room
Regular Commission Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, June 24, 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 agenda revisions.

PUBLIC HEARING: In the Matter of Adopting the 4-H & Extension Service District Budget FY 2026-27

Staff Report

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, provided a brief staff report regarding the adoption of the 4-H & Extension Service District Budget for fiscal year 2026-27.

A summary of the budget approved by the Union County 4-H & Extension Service District Budget Committee on June 3, 2026 was published in The East Oregonian in accordance with Oregon Revised Statutes. No changes to the \$800,934 budget approved by the Budget Committee are requested at this time.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Resolution 2026-05: In the Matter of Adopting the 4-H & Extension Service District

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve Resolution 2026-05; In the Matter of Adopting the 4-H & Extension Service District as presented. Commissioner Seavert seconded.

All three Commissioners thanked Honour Bowen and the 4-H & Extension Budget Committee for their work on the proposed budget.

Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING: In the Matter of Adopting the Solid Waste District Budget FY 2026-27

Staff Report

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, provided a brief staff report regarding the adoption of the Solid Waste District Budget for fiscal year 2026-27.

A summary of the Solid Waste District budget approved by the Budget Committee on May 19 was published in the East Oregonian on June 3, 2026 and posted on the Union County website with notice of a public hearing to be held on June 24, 2026.

There were no changes proposed to the total budget of \$998,477 which was approved by the Budget Committee.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Resolution 2026-06: In the Matter of Adopting the Solid Waste District Budget

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve Resolution 2026-06; In the Matter of Adopting the Union County Solid Waste District Budget as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded.

PUBLIC HEARING: In the Matter of the Union County Budget FY 2026-27

Staff Report

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, provided a brief staff report regarding the adoption of the Union County Budget for fiscal year 2026-27.

A summary of the budget approved by the Budget Committee on May 20 was published in the East Oregonian on June 3, 2026, and posted on the Union County website with notice of a public hearing to be held on June 24, 2026.

Since the time of the budget committee meeting, additional information has become available which indicates the need to make a few adjustments to the budget prior to the final adoption. Local Budget Law allows for changes after publication, prior to adoption, of up to 10 percent in any fund. All proposed changes fell within the allowable limit.

Administrative Officer Burgess read the changes out loud for the record.

Public Comment

Beth Upshaw, Union, provided public comment related to the Union County Fair budget and where the funding is coming from for the new waste water project. She understands that the funding will not be available until 2027 and asked how expenses are paid before the funding has been received. Ms. Upshaw referred to the importance of 4-H and asked that the Commissioners relay the information to their constituents as they deserve.

Lastly, Ms. Upshaw referred to the debt service at the golf course. She asked that the county keep it going; she isn't sure what it takes but enjoys seeing all of the activity out there.

Vivian Young, La Grande, addressed the Commissioners regarding the funding request from Cat Utopia during an April Commission meeting that has not seemed to have been included in the proposed Union County budget for adoption. Ms. Young is here to put a good word in and would like to see they receive the funding. She has driven with Beverly Beach to Portland to drop kittens off to a lady who bottle feeds and picked up ones that she has fed and are ready for adoption. A lot of time and effort goes into the cats that are released into our communities. When Cat Utopia take cats in, they do not adopt them out until they are spayed or neutered.

There were no further public comments.

Administrative Officer Burgess provided an update on the Cat Utopia funding request. She stated during the budget committee meeting, there was a discussion of two new funding requests that had not typically been included as part of the county budget; one being the request from Cat Utopia. At that time, it was not included as a new line item in the budget, but were able to identify the discretionary funds from the transient room tax might be an option. She has the application and information readily available once the budget is adopted.

The second funding request is for the David's Chair program that supports mobility access for individuals who have challenges getting around. The Budget Committee discussed the request and after some research is available for funding under the Special Transportation Improvement Plan. Because the current plan goes through next fiscal year, it couldn't be funded through that program but could be added for the following year. She also noted that there is \$5,000 that the county has had in their budget for special transport projects that the Budget Committee recommended utilizing this year.

Resolution 2026-07: In the Matter of Adopting the Union County Budget
Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve Resolution 2026-07; In the Matter of Adopting the Union County Budget as presented with adjustments. Commissioner Seavert seconded.

All three Commissioners thanked the Budget Committee for volunteering their time, it is a lot to go through. They also thanked Administrative Officer Burgess for all of her diligent work on the budget over the years and indicated the county is really going to miss her after retirement.

Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Commissioner Scarfo asked those providing public comment to limit their time to 3 minutes.

Beth Upshaw, Union, provided public comment to the Commissioners. She has been coming to these meetings and thanked the Commissioner for making them open to the public. However, there are many other people who would like to attend, but can't because the meetings are held during the day. She understands it's been talked about before and would like to see evening meetings as an option; once every 3 months, or once a month. It is critical if they really want to hear what their constituents have to say. Sometimes she feels when she comes here, the Commissioners are looking at her but she wonders if they are really hearing her. She never gets a response back and that is troublesome for her. She asked the Commissioners to "think deep into their mind and soul" about the true meaning of public comment. Once she was finished, she referred back to the idea of evening meetings. She stated that the City of La Grande does it. City of Union does it. So, there is no reason the Commissioners can't.

Her next public comment was directed towards Commissioner Scarfo and the million-dollar funding for the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show. She told him to be sensitive and cognitive of that and asked if he was really getting the funding, or is it a purpose for him on his campaign to draw folks in. She knows there is some funding to fairs, but cannot find information on the million-dollar funding to the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show.

Vivian Young, La Grande, addressed the Commissioners regarding the value of Good of the Order and wanting to hear what the Commissioners have to say. She would like their announcements to be in detail, where and when things are happening so other people can attend. She used the Prosperity Council as an example because she really enjoyed it; but had to ask for the detailed information.

She also noted that before the election, she requested an explanation in plain English so she could understand what it is about the term limits that is unconstitutional. All she has ever understood is, "no one showed up in favor of the term limits, the ruling went in favor by the judge". She has a copy of the ruling, but it is in legalese and she does not understand it. In her request she asked for it to be put on an agenda, whatever it would take to get an explanation. There are term limits in a lot of different areas, how is it only unconstitutional in Union County. She doesn't feel like it is an unreasonable request. She was also told that citizens cannot make that request, so she is doing it during public comment in hopes of seeing it on the agenda in July. Her suggestion is to have Wyatt Baum come in and explain, since he does work for them.

Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) Contract out of District Agreement – FY 2026-27

Mavis Hartz, BMCC COD Community Coordinator, La Grande and Arnaud Prevot, Pendleton BMCC presented the Contract out of District Agreement to the Commissioners for their consideration.

Ms. Hartz was recently hired by Blue Mountain Community College as the COD Community Coordinator here in La Grande. This agreement is entered into between Union County and Blue Mountain Community College between September 1, 2026 and June 30, 2027. She briefly explained what she is currently working on in her new role. She will be able to visit each school in Union County once or twice a month providing student support and advising. Her predecessor did a great job setting up a system within the school to go in and help the teachers. She will be housed in the hub at the La Grande High School if there are students wanting to talk about what is next for them. Worksource Oregon also has a space for her in their building.

Commissioner Anderes said he is happy to hear Ms. Hartz recognize her predecessor, Barbara Peden. Prior to Ms. Peden taking the position, the program was ineffective at best. It was a revolving door of people coming through and not staying long. She got it going in a great direction and he is very appreciative of that.

Ms. Hartz shared the projects she is currently working on and will carry on into the next fiscal year.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve the Contract out of District Agreement for Blue Mountain Community College in Union County as presented. Commissioner Seavert seconded.

Commissioner Seavert noted he is very happy to see that BMCC also supports trades and encouraged them to participate in the Trades Fair in October.

Motion carried unanimously.

Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Jeff Nelson, SBDC Director, provided a quick breakdown of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to the Commissioners for their information.

In the 1980's, President Reagan wanted entrepreneurs and small businesses to have the same resources as major corporations. At that time, the Small Business Association (SBA), offered free one-on-one advising and specialized trainings. In 1984, SBA came to Oregon and partnered with Oregon Community Colleges. Since then, Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) has been part of the network.

The goal is to help those who are interested in starting up their own business and helping them become successful. Mr. Nelson noted that he is currently looking to fill a position on the SBDC Advisory Board in Union County. He introduced the Wallowa County service representative and indicated they hope to have a presence in Union County by the end of July.

All three Commissioners thanked Mr. Nelson for his presentation and the work done by BMCC Small Business Development Center.

ELECTED OFFICIAL, DEPARTMENT HEAD & EMPLOYEE COMMENTS

Resolution 2026-09: Drought Declaration Recommendation

Nick Vora, Emergency Manager, provided a brief staff report to the Commissioners regarding Resolution 2026-09 to the Commissioners for their consideration.

Per the US Drought Monitor, Union County is experiencing drought conditions with 100 percent of the county affected. Approximately 77 percent of the county by area is in Severe Drought (D2) and roughly 17% in Extreme Drought. Despite periodic winter precipitation, warmer temperatures prevented snowpack leaving nearly 50% of Union County below normal precipitation. Some crop growth has already been reduced and stream flows for irrigation are declining quickly.

Approval of the resolution will declare a local state of drought emergency and facilitate a request to the State of Oregon asking that all applicable drought relief programs are made available to Union County citizens.

Commissioner Seavert was hoping to hold off a little longer, but is thankful April was a good month of precipitation. He thanked Emergency Manager Vora for his work on the declaration.

Commissioner Anderes thanked Emergency Manager Vora for always being thorough.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve Resolution 2026-09; In the Matter of a Resolution Declaring a Local State of Emergency within Union County Due to Drought Conditions and Requesting that the State of Oregon Declare a Drought Emergency in Union County. Commissioner Seavert seconded.

Commissioner Scarfo asked Emergency Manager Vora if there were any fires after the lightening storm last evening. Emergency Manager Vora reported there were a few fires between midnight and 2 am; but the fire agencies have been on scene to keep them under control.

Motion carried unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Seavert moved approval of the consent agenda which included the June 3, 10 & 17, 2026 claims journals and meeting minutes of June 3 & 10, 2026 as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Court Order 2026-13: Appointment to the Union County Planning Commission

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented Court Order 2026-13 to the Commissioners for their consideration.

There is an open position available for an At-Large Representative and this position has been advertised and an application was received from Javan Ireland expressing an interest in serving.

His term will begin immediately and expire on December 31, 2027.

Commissioner Seavert thanked Mr. Ireland for his service in the military and his willingness to serve the community.

Commissioner Scarfo knows Mr. Ireland and is happy to see him doing more in our community.

Commissioner Anderes is excited to see that Mr. Ireland is joining the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve Court Order 2026-13; In the Matter of Appointment to the Union County Planning Commission as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Javan Ireland was online to attend the meeting and thanked the Commissioners for the opportunity.

Resolution 2026-08: Transfer of Appropriated Funds

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented Resolution 2026-08 to the Commissioners for their consideration.

Since this is the last Commission meeting of the current fiscal year, it is necessary to make a few transfers of appropriation authorizations within the 25-26 budget to ensure that all of the funds are within the appropriated budget.

Administrative Officer Burgess read the appropriations from Resolution 2026-08 out loud for the record.

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve Resolution 2026-08; In the Matter of Transferring Appropriated Funds as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Title II Project Funding Requests

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the Title III Project Funding Requests to the Commissioners for their consideration.

Union County has received Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding in this current budget year. Most of the funds come for the Road Department and the schools, but there is also Title III funding available to the county that comes with a process to allow for applications. A notice of Project Application Acceptance was posted on the county website and seven applications were received by the deadline of April 27, 2026. The applications were made available for 45-days for public comment; none were received.

The applications were submitted by Union County Search and Rescue (SAR) and Union County Emergency Services. Sufficient funding is available within the County's Title III fund to fully award all applications received. Total amount requested is \$186,357.

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve the Title III Project Funding as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded.

Commissioner Seavert is glad that they are able to play catch up keeping SAR fully equipped.

Commissioner Anderes noted that the counties really depend on the SRS funding and he is glad to see it is making its way back. He gave his thanks to Senator Ron Wyden for introducing it over 25 years ago, it was not easy.

Motion carried unanimously.

Transient Tax Grant Application Recommendation

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the Transient Tax Grant Application Recommendation to the Commissioners for their consideration.

A public notice was posted on the county website with an application deadline of May 31, 2026. Seven applications were received for a total of \$41,730 with \$51,000 available in funding. The applications were reviewed by the Transient Tax Advisory Committee and the following applications have been recommended:

- Eastern Oregon Film Festival
Bad Day for Bigfoot - \$18,000

- Wallowa Mountain Hells Canyon Trails Association
WMHCTA 2026 Union County Trails Projects - \$5,000
- Friends of the Opera House
Annual Advertising Budget - \$5,495
- Friends of La Grande Main Street
Crazy Days and the La Grande Classic Car Show - \$3,000-\$4,000
- Elgin EDGE / Elgin Chamber of Commerce
Elgin Holiday Light Project - \$ 2,235
- Union County Chamber of Commerce
Thunder at the Peak - \$3,500
- Union County Museum Society
2026 Event Promotions - \$3,500

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve the Transient Tax Grant Applications as presented. Commissioner Seavert seconded.

Commissioner Anderes is thankful the funding is available for projects and events like these.

Commissioner Scarfo thanked the committee who took the time to review.

Motion carried unanimously.

Union County, City of La Grande & Union County Chamber Joint Memorandum of Agreement – Tourism Promotion

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the Memorandum of Agreement for Tourism Promotion to the Commissioners for their consideration.

The County has partnered with the City of La Grande for tourism promotion activities and have contracted with the Union County Chamber of Commerce and the agreement expires on June 30, 2026.

A new agreement has been prepared as a 3-year agreement that would begin July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2029. The agreement outlines the work to be completed. It does not address the funding, as the funding is done each year in the budget of the county and the city. The Agreement has been approved by the City of La Grande and the Union County Chamber of Commerce.

Commissioner Anderes received an email from a citizen who is very concerned about the contract and would like to postpone. However, he realizes the time sensitivity. Administrative Officer Burgess noted there are termination opportunities within the Agreement if it becomes necessary.

Commissioner Anderes noted it is more of a financial concern than the actual contract.

Commissioner Seavert wants to make sure they are able to make changes in the agreement without waiting another 3-years. Administrative Officer Burgess clarified if the county is unhappy with the agreement itself, we would give notice by April 1st.

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve the Union County, City of La Grande and Union County Chamber of Commerce Joint Memorandum of Agreement as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded.

Roll call – Commissioner Anderes, no. Commissioner Seavert, yes. Commissioner Scarfo, yes.

Commissioner Seavert would like to dive more into the agreement before the April 1 deadline.

Commissioner Scarfo would also like to speak to the person who has expressed concern with the financial aspect of the contract. Commissioner Anderes will share the contact information.

Motion carried.

HB 4153A Proper Use of Farm Stands

Commissioner Anderes provided a copy of House Bill 4153A and the summary from Legislative Labor Counsel on Joint Ways and Means.

This is a Farm Stand Bill that looks at updating Oregon's land use laws, and goes into a fair amount of detail. He has been working on this topic for all 8 years he has been in office. The Legislature appointed a committee to rewrite the rules and got pushback from the citizens of Oregon. At that time, the Governor did not take or implement recommendations and sent it back to the Legislature.

Commissioner Anderes proposed to direct the Union County Planning Department to implement the new farm stand rules into the county Land Use Planning with the least restrictions as possible.

Commissioner Seavert is a big supporter of the ag community and has been in support of this bill since he took office.

Commissioner Anderes believes the bill supports the ag community pretty well and has had people ask him about on-site sales of items, and farm to table.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to support Implementation of HB 4153 Proper Use of Farm Stands in Union County as quickly as possible and as least restrictive as possible based on legislation. Commissioner Seavert seconded.

Commissioner Seavert believes this is a great opportunity for our county.

Commissioner Scarfo thanked Representative Breese-Iverson for all of her heavy lifting on this bill.

Motion carried unanimously.

Medical Services Contract for Union County Jail

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the Medical Services Contract for the Union County Jail to the Commissioners for their consideration.

This is a Personal Services agreement for medical services between the Union County Jail and Western Skies Medical Center. If approved, the agreement would be effective July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027. This is a continuation of an agreement already in place.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve the Medical Services Agreement with Western Skies in the Union County Jail. Commissioner Seavert seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mental Health Services Contract for Union County Jail

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the Mental Health Services Contract for the Union County Jail to the Commissioners for their consideration.

This is a Personal Services agreement for mental health services between the Union County Jail and Missy Brown, LCSW. If approved, the agreement would be effective July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027. This is a continuation of an agreement already in place.

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve the Mental Health Services Agreement with Missy Brown, LCSW in the Union County Jail. Commissioner Anderes seconded.

Commissioner Anderes is happy to see these are local people and not international companies.

Motion carried unanimously.

Conley Lake Letter of Support Update

Commissioner Seavert provided an update related to the Conley Lake Letter of Support.

The Conley Lake letter of support was originally approved during the last Commission meeting. Since then, he decided the letter needed an update to present a more accurate position regarding the project outcome of removing the wetland reserve program off that parcel.

By updating the letter, it would encourage more water storage within our valley. The only change that was made was very minor, but necessary to give a more accurate description of what removing the wetland reserve program would do.

Commissioner Scarfo is glad to see the committee bringing forth some projects. He isn't going to pretend this is his expertise and is 100 percent backing Commissioner Seavert.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve the update on the Conley Lake Letter of Support as presented. Commissioner Seavert seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Blue Mountain Humane Association – Shelter Operating Agreement

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the Shelter Operating Agreement to the Commissioners for their consideration.

The contract with Blue Mountain Humane Association (BMHA) to operate the animal shelter expires on June 30, 2026. The contract recommended for approval is for a 3-year period of July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2029.

The funding for the first year is a total of \$65,000 which includes \$14,500 committed by the City of La Grande for FY 2026-27 and \$50,500 from the county. The amount will fit within the approved 2026-27 budget. The contract provides a 3 percent increase in the county's contribution in the second and third years of the contract, which also allows for pass through of any increased amount approved by the City of La Grande.

BMHA has made significant improvements in the shelter operations and is working hard to regain community support.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve the Blue Mountain Humane Association Shelter Operating Agreement as presented. Commissioner Seavert seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Commissioner Anderes noted that there is a mattress recycling event being held at First Lutheran Church on Saturday, June 27. This week the Oregon Agricultural Teachers Association is having their annual conference in Union County with 150+ ag teachers improving their skills. He also noted that he was notified there were 2 loads of Jet A fuel just delivered to the Union County Airport.

Commissioner Seavert is headed to Baker for the OTEC Summit and starting Sunday to Tuesday will be in Sisters, Oregon for the AOC Legislative Retreat.

Commissioner Scarfo will also be attending the AOC Legislative Retreat in Sisters through Tuesday next week.

Executive Session ORS 192.660(2)(h) Pending Litigation

The Chair called an executive session at 10:34 am.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular Commission meeting is scheduled to be held Wednesday, July 1, 2026 at 9 am.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Scarfo adjourned the meeting at 10:45 am.

Respectfully submitted,



Allison Moore
Senior Department Specialist