

Union County Board of Commissioners

Joseph Building Annex Conference Room

Regular Commission Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 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 reminded the audience to limit their comment time to 3 minutes.

Vivian Young, La Grande, expressed her frustration about not having Commission meeting materials available on the county website so she can fully participate. She suggested the Commissioners look at the City of La Grande website and mimic what information they share with the public. She stated they aren't stupid people, and would like to be informed.

Ms. Young also shared her comments related to Cat Utopia. She believes they deserve more respect and financial support, as they are doing a tremendous service to our county. From what she understands, there was supposed to be a line item added to the budget and that was not done. She is here to speak in their defense.

Commissioner Scarfo closed the public comment period.

ELECTED OFFICIAL, DEPARTMENT HEAD & EMPLOYEE COMMENTS

Court Order 2026-14: Request for Cancellation of Uncollectable Taxes

Cody Vavra, Tax Assessor/Collector, presented Court Order 2026-14 to the Commissioners for their consideration.

The Tax Assessor has determined personal property taxes that are wholly uncollectable. The manufactured structures have either been demolished, moved or no longer locatable. The business personal property accounts have not been operational for many years or the property has been sold. Mr. Vavra provided a list of said properties.

With the approval of the District Attorney, the taxes owing for personal property tax accounts are wholly uncollectable in the amount of \$55,146.39.

Commissioner Scarfo did research on the taxes owed on Spout Springs and reached out to Eric Watrud, District Ranger of the Umatilla National Forest, to see if they could pay what is owed and it was a no go.

Mr. Vavra said Spout Springs is an interesting one because the US Forest Service had to go through the legal seizure process to get those back in their possession. The operator of the property at that time didn't own the land that they resided on.

Commissioner Anderes said this cleans things up for Umatilla County to be able to take it over without the encumbrance on it. His suspicion is there will be more revenue in the long run.

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to approve Court Order 2026-14; Request for Cancellation of Uncollectable Taxes as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Sheriff Surplus Vehicles

Ken Woodward, Lieutenant, presented the Surplus Vehicles request to the Commissioners for their consideration.

The Union County Sheriff's Office is requesting to move one (1) vehicle from their possession to surplus status and begin the process of removing the vehicle from their possession by way of transfer. The vehicle is a 2015 Chevrolet Tahoe with over 200,000 miles.

The Sheriff's Office is currently paying all maintenance, insurance and registration fees on a vehicle that is not being utilized.

Commissioner Seavert asked if there have been recent repairs and what the estimated value of the vehicle would be. Lieutenant Woodward follows county policy to auction and receives between \$500 to \$1,000.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve the move of one Chevrolet Tahoe from the Sheriff's Office to surplus status. Commissioner Seavert seconded.

Commissioner Scarfo thinks this is a good move and could easily put another 15,000 miles on it over the next 2 years.

Motion carried unanimously.

Homeland Security Grant Agreement Acceptance

Nick Vora, Emergency Manager, presented the Homeland Security Grant Agreement Acceptance to the Commissioners for their consideration.

This grant agreement is between the Oregon Department of Emergency Management and Union County Emergency Services for acquiring and equipping the command post and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) trailer.

The use of the grant funding would be to have the equipment for establishing a command post in the field if the EOC was not functionable. It would allow them to establish a functionable emergency operations center in any facility that would have space for it. It would also provide the ability to assist jurisdictions in Union County and neighboring counties with local incidents.

Project activities may begin on October 1, 2025 through September 30, 2027. Total grant funding is in the amount of \$32,993.

Commissioner Anderes thanked Emergency Manager Vora for the explanation and the grant seems pretty straight forward. He is curious to know how many grants he has brought in in his short tenure with the county. It has been incredible.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve the Homeland Security Grant Agreement in the amount of \$32,995 as presented by Emergency Manager Vora. Commissioner Seavert seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Seavert thanked Emergency Manager Vora for his due diligence in trying to get every penny that is available for equipment, radios and technology to help the county.

CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Seavert moved approval of the consent agenda which included the June 23, 2026 claims journals as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Secure Rural Schools Election & Title Allocations

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the Secure Rural Schools Election & Title Allocations to the Commissioners for their consideration.

Union County is eligible to elect to receive Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding or a timber receipt payment equal to 25% of the 7-year rolling average. The amount estimated for FY 2026-27 in SRS funding is \$802,203, while the 25%, 7-year rolling average is \$144,359.

Administrative Officer Burgess stated, if the county chooses to select the SRS payment, they are required to submit the allocation election for Title I, II and III. Roads and schools are Title I at 85%; special projects on federal lands are Title II and wildfire protection projects, SAR activities, broadband access and emergency services are Title III at 7%.

She also provided the information that shows Union County's previous allocations, the funding amount, as well as a comparison of other Oregon counties.

Commissioner Anderes stated that applications for the Resource Advisory Council (RAC) are open and he would be happy to share that information with anyone that is interested. While Commissioner Anderes was on the RAC, some of the things that were funded were the 51 Road between Starkey and Granite, road blading on the Wallowa-Whitman, and a fair amount of noxious weed control projects.

Commissioner Anderes noted the SRS funding will expire on September 30, 2026 and will need to continue to lobby. While he was attending NACo last week, he and a few Commissioners lobbied for both PILT and SRS.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to authorize submission of Union County's SRS election at 85% for Title I, 8% for Title II and 7% for Title III. Commissioner Seavert seconded.

Commissioner Seavert said it makes sense to fund the roads and schools at the highest level possible. He also likes to see the 7% for SAR and wildfire protection. They are all proactive measures.

Motion carried unanimously.

Public Records Fee Waiver Request

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the Public Records Fee Waiver Request to the Commissioners for their consideration.

The county frequently receives public records requests which follow a process that complies with Oregon Revised Statute 192.324. This statute addresses how the county responds to public records requests.

In 2021, the Commission adopted a court order that designates fees for costs to produce those type of records. Most of the time the requests are for a few documents which require limited staff time. The court order has a provision that allows for 15-minutes of staff time, up to 4 pages at no cost to the requester. Anything over that involves a fee schedule.

This particular request is significant in volume and time. The ORS requires anytime the cost to produce a public records request is more than \$25, the county is required to provide an estimate to the requester prior to producing the records. The requester would have to agree to pay the fee before staff invests their time to produce the records.

In responding to this request, the county has followed the procedure and provided an estimate of the cost of producing the records. The individual making the request is applying for a fee waiver or reduction, which is allowed under ORS 192.324(5). The justification that the individual used is that on the grounds of furnishing these records primarily benefits the general public.

ORS 192.324 does state that the custodian of the public records “may” furnish; it doesn’t say “shall” furnish. It comes to the decision of the county as to whether or not the fee waiver is granted. The estimated fee in this request is between \$802.50 and \$1,050 for production.

Administrative Officer Burgess’ recommendation is to deny the fee waiver request because it involves significant staff time. As well as engaging in legal counsel because some of the information is protected and would have to be redacted. The county pays legal counsel on a fee for service basis. That would be an additional cost to the county just to approve this request.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to deny the Public Records Fee Waiver Request as presented. Commissioner Seavert seconded.

Commissioner Anderes stated that the cost estimate is very conservative. He referred back to the request of documents between January 1, 2012 and the date of production; which includes, any contract, retainer agreement, letter of engagement, memorandum of understanding, any Wyatt Baum correspondence between the Commissioners or Mr. Baum individually. That is 5 different requests for the last 14 years of documents. The county has nothing to hide, but it would take quite a bit of time to produce this volume of material. That is why he is not in favor of granting their request.

Commissioner Seavert agrees that it is good to point out staff hours. The county runs a tight budget with the staff that they do have.

Motion carried unanimously.

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Commissioner Anderes referred to HB 5204 which was out of the 83rd Oregon Legislative Assembly – 2026 regular session. HB 5204 is related to the Union County Fair Association Water and Wastewater project in the amount of \$2,539,405 and the distribution of \$1,000,000 to support horse racing events. On March 6, 2026 on the third reading carried by Representative Sanchez, it passed 38-17. That same day, the Senate suspended rules on the third reading carried by Senator Kate Lieber, passed 24-4. On March 10, Speaker Fahey and President Rob Wagner signed it and on April 7, the Governor signed it and it took effect. There were copies of the bill available for the record and for those in attendance. He obtained this information from OLIS (Oregon Legislative Information System).

Commissioner Anderes welcomed newly elected Cody Lathrop to the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners. Mr. Lathrop replaced interim Commissioner Mike Hayward, who did a remarkable job and is very much appreciated.

Commissioner Anderes also reported on retardant planes flying in and out of the Union County Airport. At one point there were 6 planes making laps to Umatilla County and a county in Washington; going through 30,000 gallons of Jet A fuel in one afternoon.

Commissioner Seavert just returned from AOC Legislative Retreat in Sisters where they discussed priorities for counties statewide. It was a well put together event and he learned a lot. He knows there are concerns about having the fireworks at Buffalo Peak; in this scenario the county is well prepared and well-staffed. He reminded everyone it is rodeo season and encouraged folks to take advantage of Loveland Safe Ride if you need a ride. He also reported there were no DUI's the week of stock show; which really points out the value of the Loveland Safe Ride program.

Commissioner Scarfo also attended AOC Legislative Retreat in Sisters. The policies and priorities look really good, he is excited to implement them. There was about a 50% Commissioner turnout; it was a good turnout.

Commissioner Anderes referred back to Loveland Safe Ride and reported that Jerry Hopkins called and asked him to be a driver at Chief Joseph Days. He is happy to assist.

Commissioner Scarfo wished America a Happy Birthday! On July 8 at 10 am, Senator Wyden will be in Union County.

NEXT MEETING

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

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Scarfo adjourned the meeting at 9:42 am

Respectfully submitted,



Allison Moore
Senior Department Specialist