

UNION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Joseph Building Annex Conference Room
Regular Commission Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 16, 2026

Present: Commissioner R. Matthew Scarfo, Chair
Commissioner Paul Anderes – via Zoom
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

Commissioner Seavert requested to add a letter of support for Union County Safe Communities Coalition under Administrative Matters.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Commissioner Scarfo offered the opportunity for public comment from those in attendance or online.

There were no public comments presented.

Burn Restriction Update

Nick Vora, Emergency Manager, and James Sauer, Fire Defense Board Chief, provided an update on the current burn restrictions.

Fire Defense Board Chief Sauer reported after discussion with all of the fire chiefs, they would like to recommend coming out of the full burn ban. The reasoning is due to the moisture there has been and shorter days. There has been good humidity recovery in the evenings and early morning. The potential for fires is still there, but the extreme fire behavior that we have been seeing this last month is not a concern at this time.

Fire Defense Board Chief Sauer indicated they would also like to recommend extending the regulated burn season to October 15.

Emergency Manager Vora noted that leaving a burn ban and returning to regulated fire season would mean under Ordinance 2024-02, campfires are allowed with certain restrictions, recreational fires, charcoal BBQ's and burn barrels during specific times. All of the items that are currently prohibited; would be allowed within the guidelines, except open burning.

By extending burn season through October 15, that is what would be allowed through October 1. After that point, open burning would be allowed; which includes burning ditches, slash piles, etc. Imbler has a program that continues and is staffed through the end of September.

Fire Defense Board Chief Sauer noted that Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) is also moving their regulation down to moderate.

Commissioner Seavert appreciates the collaboration between the Fire Defense Board and ODF.

Commissioner Anderes extended his thanks to Emergency Manager Vora in working with the North Powder Mayor Allan Brown.

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to accept the recommendation of ending the burn ban and going into regulated fire season through October 15. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

ELECTED OFFICIAL, DEPARTMENT HEAD AND EMPLOYEE COMMENTS

There were no comments at this time.

CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Seavert moved approval of the consent agenda which included the September 2 & 9, 2026 claims journals as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Public Records Fee Waiver Request – Bakke

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer, presented the Public Records Fee Waiver Request to the Commissioners for their consideration along with a staff report that focused on key highlights.

Levi Bakke of Valor Investigations has submitted a five-part public records request. As part of the request, he requested a waiver or reduction of fees referencing the appropriate ORS. Administrative Officer Burgess provided information regarding the process that was followed, which includes response to Mr. Bakke.

The request is rather extensive and would involve a number of department and staff time. She worked with each department to try and estimate and identify records that would be responsive and the time involved in producing the records. This information was provided to Mr. Bakke in a July 10 letter which included some alternatives because she was trying to offer a less costly option. While it was not the exact record he was requesting, it was records that would provide information sought.

Mr. Bakke declared that he did not want to pursue any of those options. Administrative Officer Burgess went back and redid the estimate including the records that were specifically requested and he is asking for an action on his fee waiver request.

Included in the staff report is information on the Oregon statutes about the fee waiver requests. Mr. Bakke is asking for a fee waiver or reduction based on his statement that the release of the records would primarily benefit the general public. The records that he seeks do relate to the use of public funds, grants and public procurement.

It may be that the Commissioners determine that there is a general public interest in the record, then the next step is an analysis of whether or not they would grant the request and provided things to consider in the decision.

The estimate includes a total of 1,942 document copies and 35.5 hours of staff labor. The labor includes staff from four different departments. In some cases, it would involve bound documents that would have to be unbound to be copied and rebound. Due to the age of the records, there may be need to access archived records.

Administrative Officer Burgess recommends denial of the fee waiver request in the amount of \$1,728. Information provided to the Commissioners include correspondence with Mr. Bakke and the statute information.

Administrative Officer Burgess reiterated that this does not mean the County is not providing records. If the fee is waived, or the fee is paid, the documents will be provided; just not at the county's expense.

Commissioner Scarfo pointed out that Administrative Officer Burgess has already spent a great amount of staff time on this.

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

Commissioner Seavert indicated that it feels like an attempt to utilize county resources and funds for personal gain without having a broad and credible media source.

Motion carried unanimously.

Roadless Rules Comment Letter

Commissioner Anderes prepared testimony in regards to the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. He has authored the letter from himself and has invited the Commissioners to sign if they choose.

Commissioner Anderes noted that the Roadless Rule has been around for quite some time and the Hagen Fire is a good example of the results of that. He read a strong article written by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation that lays out that this is a broken system and need to be at local control of the national forest.

Commissioner Seavert made a motion to support the Roadless Rules Letter of Support from all three Commissioners as presented. Commissioner Anderes seconded.

Commissioner Seavert added that protecting our access to forest lands is our right. Access to public forest lands is critical; to be able to recreate and harvest foods. It is his opinion, there is a need to have better public land management to reduce the size and destruction of wilderness or wild fires that we have had over the last few years.

Motion carried unanimously.

Safe Communities Coalition Letter of Support

Commissioner Seavert indicated that the Safe Communities Coalition reached out to him on Monday and apologized for the short notice as today is the deadline.

The letter of support is for grant funding to help with the program in their mission of prevention and advocacy throughout the community, especially the younger generation.

Commissioner Anderes made a motion to approve the Safe Communities Coalition Letter of Support as presented. Commissioner Seavert seconded.

Commissioner Seavert feels like the coalition is getting a lot of traction with new volunteers on the board and it has been fun to see it come together.

Motion carried unanimously.

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Commissioner Anderes is learning a lot at the biomass conference and has made some good contacts in Denmark.

Commissioner Seavert attended Legislative Days in Salem and went to Ag and Natural Resource Committee meetings. Sounds like data centers will be a topic of conversation along with water uses, especially concerning Klamath Basin and the removal of two more dams. It was good to get their faces back in the capitol so they don't forget about us in Eastern Oregon. He also attended the Eastern Oregon Ag Research Center's 125th celebration. It was great, a lot of good conversations with old teachers and professors. ODF&W Commission will be in town Thursday and Friday this week to hold their meeting at EOU at 8 am in the Gilbert Hall. Also, the Safe Communities Coalition Drug Free Run will be held Saturday morning and lastly, the Career Talk, Trades Walk will be held on September 30 at the EOLS grounds. There are currently 180 students registered.

Commissioner Scarfo also attended Legislative Days in Salem. Regular session is going to be a doozy.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular Commission meeting is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, October 7, 2026 at 9 AM.

The next Idaho Border meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 14, 2026 at 9 AM.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Chair called an executive session ORS 192.660(2)(e) Real Property Transactions and ORS 192.660(2)(b) Personnel.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Scarfo adjourned the meeting at 9:57 AM.

Respectfully submitted,



Allison Moore
Senior Department Specialist