



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

1300 NW Wall Street, Bend, Oregon
(541) 388-6570

FOR RECORDING STAMP ONLY

BOCC 2026 RETREAT MEETING MINUTES

9:00 AM

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2026

Riverbend Community Room
and via Zoom

Present were Commissioners Phil Chang, Anthony DeBone and Patti Adair. Also present were County Administrator Nick Lelack; Deputy County Administrator Erik Kropp; Deputy County Administrator Whitney Hale; Sheriff Ty Rupert; Health Services Director Holly Harris; Assessor Scot Langton; Director of Solid Waste Tim Brownell; Community Development Director Peter Gutowsky; Strategic Initiatives Manager Jen Patterson; and BOCC Executive Assistant Brenda Fritsvold.

This meeting was audio recorded and can be accessed at the Deschutes County Meeting Portal website www.deschutes.org/meetings.

Call to Order: Chair Chang called the meeting to order at 9:07 am.

Commissioner Priorities for 2026

Commissioner Adair:

- Requested that this year's annual joint meeting with the Circuit Court be scheduled later in the day to enable attendance by all nine judges.
- Reminded that taxpayers are projected to contribute approximately \$48 million to the courthouse expansion project.
- Described property tax increases over the past decade and associated affordability impacts, including effects on rents and household relocations to lower-cost areas; encouraged clearer public information about how bills are calculated.

- Asked that Building Department customer service be improved; cited a wildfire-rebuild example where nearly \$16,000 in permit fees were not covered by insurance and suggested exploring fee relief for affected property owners.
- Requested recognition of service partners Shepherd's House and Bethlehem Inn who are developing and offering needed shelter and thereby helping to transition people out of homelessness.
- Reported that she and Health Services transmitted an analysis of duplicative reporting requirements to Oregon Health Authority leadership with the goal of relieving the growing administrative burden on Community Mental Health Providers.
- Relayed concerns about the emergence of the Japanese beetle—an invasive species—in Oregon and spoke to mitigation needed to address this problem.
- Identified a housing concept whereby 50 acres in low-population areas would be used for affordable housing and asked that the associated bill be tracked on the County's legislative list during the upcoming short session.
- Requested review of Veterans Services performance and capacity after hearing reports of veterans who live in Deschutes County seeking services in Crook County.
- Referred to a grant application for a bio-char project and highlighted potential benefits of diverting woody debris from the landfill.
- Stressed the need to improve school-provided meals by reducing added sugars and suggested exploring a pilot program to assess implementing changes.

Commissioner DeBone:

- Supported long-range solid waste planning, including renegotiation of the franchise agreements, Solid Waste Advisory Committee work, and siting a next-generation landfill, and said diversion and recycling programs will remain necessary in view of continuing environmental concerns.
- Spoke to planning for the CORE3 public safety facility and the possibility of a public/private partnership to help bring that to fruition.
- Encouraged fuels reduction efforts on a regular basis by private property owners to aid in deterring large-scale wildfire events.
- Stressed that customer service is the foundational culture of the County, and credited the many staff who make that happen.
- Urged economic development, in particular heightening opportunities to diversify the economy in Central Oregon.
- With respect to homelessness, said the County needs to be clear about where homeless persons can camp and where they cannot. Acknowledged this will require tough choices to determine the right thing for Deschutes County, especially in view of current code enforcement violations on County-owned property relating to sanctioned encampments.

- Referred to land use matters, including appeals of Board decisions which follow recommendations from hearings officers, and encouraged working to resolve pending appeals (e.g., of the updated Comprehensive Plan).
- Supported continued planning for the downtown campus in anticipation of a five-member Board and potential reconfigurations to address space needs for the Clerk and Assessor functions.
- Noted the projected completion of the courthouse expansion project later this year and anticipated operational benefits for the District Attorney's Office.
- Identified South County groundwater protection as an ongoing priority; referenced historic discussion of Goal 11 pathways and expressed interest in community water and sewer infrastructure for legacy subdivisions. Encouraged approaching these issues in a way that facilitates the acceptance of affected property owners.
- Suggested that the Board consider holding some of its meetings outside Bend.

Commissioner Chang:

- Identified housing supply across income levels as a central priority and asked how the County can sustain investments of land and funding through predictable, long-term revenue sources, particularly in Bend and Redmond.
- Described a "ladder" of shelter and housing options and highlighted near-term rungs needing attention, including a managed camp to be operated with the City of Redmond, outdoor shelter, and vehicle shelter; suggested that the Fair & Expo explore contributing to managed camp operations in cash or via in-kind donations.
- Pointed to manufactured home parks as an affordable option near the urban edge; referenced an anticipated legislative concept to allow streamlined inclusion of land into urban growth boundaries for such parks and suggested addressing underlying rural densities through rezoning or rulemaking, including potential County-initiated rulemaking requests to DLCD.
- Stated that the County must both secure a landfill site and improve diversion of fuels-reduction materials; requested an avoided-cost analysis from Solid Waste to quantify the value of each cubic yard diverted (e.g., to biochar or expanded composting).
- Supported advancing South County groundwater work using tools provided by recently enacted state legislation and noted that County effort will be required to realize those opportunities.
- Noted instability in State and federal funding for Health Services and asked that reducing the administrative burden on behavioral health providers be included among the County's 2026 legislative priorities.

Department Priorities and Organizational Transitions

Nick Lelack, County Administrator, provided an overview of fiscal and operational challenges and opportunities identified by departments. Challenges cited include ongoing

inflation; uncertainty whether the federal government will reauthorize the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program; rising demands on the District Attorney, Health Services, Assessor and the Justice Court (including automated photo enforcement in Redmond); growth in public records requests; cybersecurity needs; and organizational transitions including new leaders at Health Services, the Sheriff's Office, and Human Resources, as well as upcoming leadership changes at Fair & Expo and Solid Waste, and the decision of the Assessor to not seek re-election. He also noted the additional workload of transitioning from a three- to five-member Commission and reminded of the organization-wide wage equity study.

Selection of Departments/Offices to attend the afternoon session

The Board directed staff to invite Health Services, the Sheriff's Office, the Assessor's Office, and Solid Waste for afternoon discussions. Commissioner Chang also expressed interest in discussing, with the director of Community Development, South County groundwater tools and potential uses of sale proceeds from County-owned property in the Newberry neighborhood.

***Break:** A break was announced at 10:31 am. The meeting resumed at 10:41 am.*

District Mapping Position Assignments

Strategic Initiatives Manager Jen Patterson reviewed the background of the BOCC district mapping effort and oversaw the random assignment of position numbers to proposed districts by two students of Central Oregon Community College government and civics professor Judy Stiegler. Though a blind drawing method, the position numbers assigned to the draft Districts A-E was determined as follows: District A (Sisters) = Position 5; District B (East Bend) = Position 1; District C (La Pine) = Position 4; District D (West Bend) = Position 2; and District E (Redmond) = Position 3.

County Commission Expansion

Lelack summarized the November 2024 voter approval which directed the expansion of the BOCC from three to five members, with two positions to be elected in 2026 for initial two-year terms beginning January 2027. Commissioner DeBone added that 2026 elections will be at-large, with potential for future by-district elections if approved by voters.

Lelack shared that Facilities will add two Commissioner offices along the window line in the Board's office area, with construction expected to begin in the summer and conclude by mid-fall. Cost estimates for this work will be presented during Budget Week in May. No changes are currently proposed to the Barnes Sawyer dais configuration, although technology enhancements for that room are under evaluation.

Committee Assignments for 2026

The Board discussed current committee assignments and potential adjustments.

Deschutes Trails Coalition Steering Committee: Commissioner Chang is no longer serving on this

AOC Legislative Committee: remove from Commissioner Adair's assignments

Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Steering Committee: remove as this is Oregon Living With Fire; simultaneously edit Commissioner DeBone's list of assignments to reflect he serves on OLWF's Steering Committee

Deschutes County Historical Society: retain appointment as Commissioner DeBone's; add "ex officio" to clarify the status of that appointment

State Interoperability Executive Council: Commissioner DeBone's appointment to this will expire on July 1, 2026

The Board also briefly discussed COIC Board appointments and the FairWell Festival's decision not to renew its Fair & Expo contract.

Legislative Session Update

Doug Riggs from Northwest Policy Advocates briefed the Board on anticipated 2026 short session items. Transportation was highlighted, including the Governor's request to repeal the 2025 transportation measure and the formation of a transportation accountability group to analyze cost escalation on major projects. In addition, the Governor has appointed a Prosperity Council to develop recommendations for addressing economic competitiveness and how to stem job losses.

The update also covered recent federal tax provisions (e.g., how tips and overtime are taxed); Central Oregon caucus topics such as housing, homelessness and shelter funding; an OSU-Cascades health center request; rural emergency medical services; a port of Central Oregon concept; road safety; the farmstand bill; and legislation related to battery fires at landfills. Riggs noted approximately 350-360 bills are expected in the short session and confirmed dates for AOC policy meetings and County Day at the Capitol.

Break: A lunch break was taken at 12:23 pm. The meeting reconvened at 12:54 p.m.

Department/Office Participation

Health Services

Director Holly Harris discussed the instability of State and federal funding and how fewer Behavioral Health Resource Network dollars led to ending the harm reduction program. She confirmed the Homeless Outreach Services Team is not supported by external funding,

noted a single grant-funded Veterans peer support specialist serves the entire county, and reported recruitment underway to fill the Environmental Health supervisor vacancy.

Discussion ensued regarding school nutrition concerns, potential engagement with the Governor's policy staff, permanent supportive housing, and the County's recent letter supporting continued public health funding.

Assessor's Office

Assessor Scot Langton reviewed workload trends, including a 12% year-over-year increase in permits and continued concentration of construction inside cities. He described technology investments as a strategy to maintain service levels and spoke to succession planning for retirements. With respect to the need to defend appeals of assessments, Langton reported that most residential appeals are resolved administratively or at the Board of Property Tax Appeals, while many commercial appeals proceed to tax court. He projected a 12–20% workload increase over the next few years.

Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Ty Rupert reported that approximately 40% of the DCSO's budget has been expended midway through the fiscal year. He further reported on: progress made to enhance evidence tracking systems, planned procurement of body-worn and in-car cameras (preliminary estimate \$2.4 million), expected pay equity budget adjustments, and current staffing at 239.5 FTE with near-full patrol staffing helping to reduce overtime. He further spoke to the relocation of the Digital Forensics Lab and the intention to resume contributions to the Stabilization Center as well as ongoing work to support staff wellness.

***Break:** A break was announced at 2:35 pm. The meeting resumed at 2:43 pm.*

Solid Waste

Director Tim Brownell reported on day-to-day materials management, implementation of the Recycling Modernization Act, and the landfill siting process. He anticipated that the Solid Waste Advisory Committee will recommend a site for a new landfill to the Board in June and said appraisals of candidate sites, including one ODOT-owned parcel, are in process with an expected 60-day turnaround and results by late February. The department is also evaluating new diversion facilities and compost expansion to handle organic debris while making progress on a renewable natural gas project with Cascade Natural Gas and preparing for new franchise agreements following Bend's issuance of a notice of termination to the current franchise holders which mirrored the County's December action.

Brownell further outlined plans for universal recycling service alongside garbage service countywide beginning in 2027, expanding to multifamily and commercial thereafter.

Community Development

Director Peter Gutowsky distributed the Southern Deschutes County Groundwater Protection Program Annual Report, dated January 12, 2026, and summarized 2025 developments, including Senate Bill 1154 and related rulemaking that clarifies service provider roles, maintenance reporting, and variance practices, and allows DEQ/EQC to declare a groundwater quality concern area without a Goal 11 exception.

Gutowsky additionally described a prospective purchaser agreement for one Newberry quadrant that could net over \$1 million for South County groundwater protection tools such as enhanced rebates or loan programs for septic upgrades. Discussion ensued of historic local rule changes, DEQ's leadership role since 2015, potential declaration benefits to mobilize state partners, and opportunities to leverage modular and shared wastewater solutions.

Development of FY 2027 Goals and Objectives

The Board agreed to take up the development of FY 2027 goals and objectives at its meeting on Monday, January 26th.

ADJOURN: Being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:53 p.m.

DATED this 11th day of Feb. 2026 for the Deschutes County Board of Commissioners.



PHIL CHANG, CHAIR

ATTEST:



ANTHONY DEBONE, VICE CHAIR



RECORDING SECRETARY



PATTI ADAIR, COMMISSIONER