

**Morrow County Board of Commissioners Special Session
October 30, 2025
Upper Conference Room, Bartholomew Building
Heppner, Oregon**

Present In Person Chair David Sykes, Commissioner Jeff Wenholz, Commissioner Gus Peterson, Valerie Ballard, Matthew Jensen

Present Via Zoom Bob Blackmore, Wyatt Baum, Tamra Mabbott

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

9:00 a.m.

Public Comment

No Comment

Consideration and Adoption of Agenda

Commissioner Peterson motioned to approve and adopt the agenda as presented.

Commissioner Wenholz seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval.

Business Items

Interviews for Outside Legal Counsel

There are two positions in the county that the Board of Commissioners handles directly, which are the administrator and county counsel. As the interviews were for firms rather than individuals, the interviews for outside legal counsel were held in open session, per Oregon Public Meeting Law.

Innova Legal Advisors

The Board of Commissioners took turns asking questions to Bob Blackmore, attorney, Innova Legal Advisors PC.

Recess

9:34 a.m.

Resume

9:54 a.m.

Baum Smith

The Board of Commissioners took turns asking questions to Wyatt Baum, attorney, Baum Smith, LLC.

Chair Sykes motioned to hire Innova Legal Advisors, PC as outside legal counsel and authorize the Commission Chair and County Administrator to prepare and sign necessary engagement letters. Commissioner Wenholz seconded.

Discussion

Commissioner Peterson said that he thought the Board was presented with two good options which was nice and asked where Innova Legal Advisors is based (Lake Oswego, Oregon).

Chair Sykes explained that he and Commissioner Wenholz engaged with Bob Blackmore and Innova Legal Advisors on the recommendation of District Attorney/County Counsel, Justin Nelson, when the County was working on the Ambulance Service Area Plan (ASA). Since then, Mr. Blackmore has worked with the Board and County Administrator, Matt Jensen, on the ASA and other issues and is familiar with the County and its background. The Board is already familiar and satisfied with the work done by Mr. Blackmore and Innova Legal Advisors and expressed preference for Innova Legal Advisors as opposed to an unfamiliar entity.

Commissioner Wenholz echoed what Commissioner Peterson said. He thought that the County is fortunate to have two qualified candidates and either option would do a great job, but the familiarity with Mr. Blackmore and Innova influenced his preference toward Innova.

Commissioner Peterson said he leaned towards Baum Smith and appreciated that they are relatively local being in Eastern Oregon. Both are good options, and he asked to amend the motion make it very clear that the topic will be brought back before the Board for final review.

Commissioner Peterson motioned to amend the motion on the table to say move to approve the hiring of Innova Legal Advisors as outside legal counsel and authorize the Commission Chair and County Administrator to prepare engagement letters to then be approved by the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Wenholz seconded. Vote: Unanimous approval.

Adjourn

10:19 a.m.