

Morrow County Board of Commissioners Special Session
July 22, 2026
Upper Conference Room, Bartholomew Building
Heppner, Oregon

Present In Person Commissioner Jeff Wenholz, Commissioner Gus Peterson, Matthew Jensen, Valerie Ballard, Mike Gorman, Kevin Ince

Present Via Zoom Rose Kylo, Sandi Pointer, Bobbi Childers, George Cress, Clint Shoemake, Tamra Mabbott, Sabrina Bailey-Cave, Michelle Kestler, Robin Canaday, ; non-staff: Karen Pettigrew

Absent Commissioner David Sykes

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

9:00 a.m.

Public Comment

No comments

Consideration and Adoption of Agenda

County Administrator, Matthew Jensen, notified the Board that item 5D Exemption to Insurance Requirements for Fair Small Vendors/Contractors was added to the agenda the day prior and requested adding an amendment to a motion made regarding Fair management and the previous BOC meeting.

Commissioner Peterson motioned to add the items requested to the agenda and approve as presented. Commissioner Wenholz seconded. Vote: 2 in favor (Peterson, Wenholz), 1 absent (Sykes). Motion carried.

Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of Amendment No. 3 – Rock Crushing Services Agreement, Dougherty Pit and Invoice approval

Commissioner Peterson motioned to approve the consent agenda as presented. Commissioner Wenholz seconded. Vote: 2 in favor (Peterson, Wenholz), 1 absent (Sykes). Motion carried.

Business Items

Change in Motion from July 15 Interim Fair Manager Coverage

Matthew Jensen, County Administrator

The motion made on July 15 was changed from approving an exception to the standard county hiring process and authorize hiring interim fair management assistants due to the critical time frame which was meant to provide flexibility for staff to immediately fill the positions. While the Assistant County Administrator will manage the fair, the interim staff would also manage superintendents and other aspects of the Fair. Impacts to the budget are not anticipated as the vacated Fair Manager position is generally full-time around the fair season.

Commissioner Peterson motioned to approve an exemption to the standard county hiring practice and authorize the County Administrator to hire temporary fair managing assistance due to a critical timeframe with a compensation level of up to \$30 per hour. Motion died for lack of second.

Commissioner Peterson motioned to amend the motion at the July 15 meeting regarding the temporary fair staffing, so that it reads as follows: to approve an exemption to the standard county hiring process and authorize the County Administrator to hire temporary fair management assistants due to the critical time frame with a compensation level of up to \$30 per hour. Commissioner Wenholtz seconded. Vote: 2 in favor (Peterson, Wenholtz), 1 absent (Sykes). Motion carried.

Consideration of Industrial/Data Center Development Resident Workshop

Matthew Jensen, County Administrator

A listening session focused on data center and industrial development is planned for September 2 in Boardman, at the Sage Center. The listening session will begin with tables for key stakeholders such as the Planning Department (zoning), Department of Land Conservation and Development (statewide planning goals), Port of Morrow (industrial utilities), Amazon Web Services (data center development), and Umatilla Electric Coop (power load).

During the listening session, there will be a third-party facilitator, acting as a neutral party to ensure discussions stay on topic and time.

County Assessor Mike Gorman felt it would be important to include property tax incentives and answer questions regarding tax exemptions.

Commissioner Wenholtz raised concerns that the workshop/listening session targets one industry, especially when it's the one industry "putting steel in the ground and developing anything in this region". Adding Morrow County has lost two food processors, the coal-fire power generation plant, and without data centers, the tax base would not be increasing. He asked what the County's goals are for this event and how success will be determined.

Commissioner Peterson responded that strategic goals include open communication and building positive relationships with those they [commissioners] are elected to represent. There is also a need to create spaces for people to have open, healthy dialog, not just via certain platforms online.

County Administrator, Matthew Jensen added that this will provide an opportunity for the County to share its viewpoint on the subject and Amazon was very positive in their response about participating.

Election and Allocation for Secure Rural Schools Payments

Matthew Jensen, County Administrator; Kevin Ince, Finance Director

The Secure Rural Schools Program provides payments to counties in lieu of revenue lost due to federal activities. Historically, Morrow County has divided its allocation 85% to Title I, 12% to Title II, and 3% to Title III. This proposal is to continue the historic distribution amounts.

Commissioner Peterson motioned to approve election and allocation for Secure Rural School payments consistent with historic distribution efforts. Commissioner Wenholz seconded. Vote: 2 in favor (Peterson, Wenholz), 1 absent (Sykes). Motion carried.

Request to Donate Capital Improvements to Fairgrounds

Matthew Jensen, County Administrator

Money has become available via donation from Amazon Web Services (AWS) to the Morrow County Livestock Growers Association. The Livestock Growers Association has several proposed projects: vent/fan improvements to the sheep and goat barn, expansion of the sheep show shelter constructed last year, installation of a new cattle wash rack, and improvement to the dirty chip pit.

There is no financial obligation to the County, and the Livestock Growers Association would be responsible for funding with Silvercreek Contracting donating building services. Columbia Basin Electric and Windwave have committed to relocating lines is already permitted for future expansion and permits for the wash rack are expected to come through next week.

Commissioner Peterson motioned to accept the donations of all of the proposed projects at the Fairgrounds with the requirement that they have all required permits, that there are engineering plans or drawings to get those permits, and there is official Fair Board approval for those projects. Commissioner Wenholz seconded. Vote: 2 in favor (Peterson, Wenholz), 1 absent (Sykes) motion carried.

Exemption to Insurance Requirements for Fair Small Vendors/Contractors

Matthew Jensen, County Administrator

Earlier in the year, Morrow County established a policy for minimum requirements insurance coverage for contractors and vendors providing service for the County. Some small vendors and performers typically don't carry insurance. Entertainers are often covered by the venue's insurance while some small booth vendors and Fair judges are considered low risk with single engagements. Staff are recommending a one-time waiver on insurance requirements for entertainment and small vendors and reevaluate the policy to better accommodate future events and Fairs.

Commissioner Peterson motioned to authorize a single-year exemption to County insurance requirements for the following fair contractors: entertainment vendors, small craft and clothing sale booths, and Fair judges, and; to direct staff to review the County's policies after the Fair for possible changes to accommodate such activities for future Fairs and similar events. Commissioner Wenholz seconded. Vote: 2 in favor (Peterson, Wenholz), 1 absent (Sykes). Motion carried.

Executive Session

9:57 a.m.

The Board met in executive session pursuant to ORS 192.660 (2) (b), The governing body of a public body may hold an executive session to conduct deliberations with person designated by the governing body to negotiate real property transactions.

Return to Open Session

10:24 a.m.

No action taken

Adjourn

10:25 a.m.