

**BENEWAH COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**  
**MINUTES OF MEETING**  
**February 23, 2026**

**Be it remembered that at this time the Board of County Commissioners met in regular session. The meeting was opened by Chairman Lampert.**

<b>Present:</b>	<b>Philip R. Lampert</b>	<b>Chairman</b>
	<b>Robert Short</b>	<b>Commissioner</b>
	<b>Mark Reynolds</b>	<b>Commissioner</b>
	<b>Janeen LeWan</b>	<b>Clerk</b>
	<b>Mariah Dunham</b>	<b>Attorney</b>
	<b>Aaron Frudenthal</b>	<b>Attorney</b>
	<b>Jim Roletto</b>	<b>Public Works Director</b>

**The Board met at 8:01 a.m., whereupon the following proceedings were had to-wit.**

1. Approve the minutes of the previous meeting(s) (ACTION): A motion to approve this item was made by Commissioner Short, seconded by Commissioner Reynolds. Motion carried.
2. Expenditure Requests (ACTION):
  - a) Airport – Skid Steer Attachments (ACTION): Jim Roletto presented this expenditure. He reminded the board this will be reimbursed by grant funds. These attachments were discussed previously, this request is to formalize the purchase and should be delivered a couple of weeks after submitting payment. A motion to approve this item was made by Commissioner Short, seconded by Commissioner Reynolds. Motion carried.
3. County Equipment Surplus Sale Discussion: Commissioners reported that there are quite a lot of items to include in the auction sale. Inquiries into who handled the auction previously, and it was noted that the previous company is now out of business. Commissioner Short mentioned that items will start being brought to the transfer station. The group agreed that a finalized list should be prepared by the end of March. Jim Roletto was tasked with finding a new company to host the auction.
4. IDL RipRap Application L95S6194 – Review: Both projects were discussed in conjunction. Jim Roletto reported there was a positive to both projects. It is very common for them to send out these applications. When reviewing consideration about access and routes are important. No comments were needed to IDL. Chairman Lampert entertained a motion of approval. The motion was made by Commissioner Reynolds. Seconded by Commissioner Short. Motion Carried.
5. IDL Rip Rap Application L95S5287A – Review: Discussed in conjunction with item 4.
6. Gateway Fire Protection District Letter of Support (ACTION): A motion to approve this item was made by Commissioner Reynolds, seconded by Commissioner Short. Motion carried.
7. City of St. Maries – Addressing Outstanding City-County Issues & Strengthening Collaboration Letter – (ACTION): The Commissioners discussed the City Council’s letter and the approach for responding to the identified topics. Jim Roletto suggested that water and sewer should also be added to the list of discussion items. Chairman Lampert recommended sending a letter in response. Attorney Dunham encouraged the Commission to consider how they would like the discussions structured, noting that the City Council plans to assign individual council members to the topics and asking whether those representatives should

meet with the full Commission, individually, or first with Jim for efficiency. Jim suggested starting with smaller meetings between one commissioner and the designated council member before bringing matters to the full Commission. Commissioner Reynolds indicated he would be willing to meet with any or all of the council representatives as needed. A motion to approve a letter to the city was made by Commissioner Reynolds, seconded by Commissioner Short. Motion carried.

8. Road District Staff Schedules (ACTION): The Commissioners discussed department budgets and overtime, focusing on road crew operations and equipment maintenance. Commissioner Reynolds explained that his district relies heavily on its crew to perform mechanical work on equipment due to the lack of available mechanics in the St. Maries area, with crews repairing over 90% of their own equipment and only sending out major overhauls. He stated that overtime is often necessary to keep equipment operational and maintain safe roads, particularly since crews are called out at all hours for road conditions. Commissioner Reynolds noted that paying overtime can be more cost-effective than hiring additional full-time employees or outsourcing repairs. Commissioner Short acknowledged that his crew also performs mechanical work and has been working to manage overtime but still sees consistent overtime levels. Commissioners discussed the challenges of balancing safety, staffing, and equipment needs while managing overtime costs. Chairman Lampert noted that certain situations, such as heavy snow, require crews to work additional hours and stated that all departments are trying to keep overtime down. After discussion, Commissioner Lampert suggested tabling the item to revisit it at the next meeting. Commissioner Reynolds made a motion to table the item. Commissioner Short seconded the motion. Motion carried.
9. General Road Budget Update (ACTION): Clerk LeWan opened the discussion up requesting the Commissioners review the road budget by each line to determine any cuts that are needed. The Commissioners discussed potential state budget cuts and the impact they could have on county funding. Attorney Dunham noted that the state has not finalized the cuts yet, but counties were encouraged to contact legislators and the Governor's office to emphasize how important these funds are to county budgets. The state is currently facing a budget shortfall, and noted that hearing directly from counties could be productive. The county's budget was discussed. Attorney Dunham suggested further discussion on the issue and recommended drafting a letter to the Governor's office. Chairman Lampert indicated he would contact Seth Grigg for additional information. Jim noted that the county typically purchases magnesium chloride at this time of year but emphasized that spending will need to be paused until funding levels are known unless payments are already committed. The Commissioners agreed that Jim will draft a letter and Mariah will review it. Commissioner Reynolds also noted that Benewah County faces unique challenges due to factors such as state land, tribal lands, and a limited taxpayer base, which places additional strain on county funding. Commissioner Short made a motion for the letter to be drafted. Commissioner Reynolds seconded. Motion carried.
10. Right of Way Clean-up Countywide – Discussion: The Commissioners discussed issues related to snow plowing and right-of-way obstructions. Commissioner Reynolds reported that while assisting with snow plowing, crews encountered several right-of-ways that were blocked by items placed within them. He noted that although the county does not currently have a junkyard ordinance, right-of-ways should still be kept clear, and if the county has to remove the items, the cost ultimately falls on taxpayers. Commissioner Short added that his district also has two locations that need to be cleaned up. Commissioner Reynolds stated that flyers have been posted on the items requesting removal, but the items are often just being moved around rather than fully cleared from the right-of-way.

11. Dumpster Relocation (ACTION): The Commissioners discussed concerns regarding the relocation of dumpsters and the impact on residents. Commissioner Reynolds reported that some residents have called with concerns, noting that moving dumpsters may require some people to drive up to 20 minutes to the transfer station. He suggested a proposal to consolidate dumpsters at the site off 1st Street to reduce costs and possibly include a separate dumpster for metal. Commissioner Short emphasized that the county is currently focused on cutting costs rather than expanding services. Chairman Lampert noted that dumpsters have already been consolidated in the Plummer area and suggested to the City of Plummer about providing their own dumpsters. Jim stated that staff are continuing to monitor dumpster use and provide public education, which has helped somewhat, and emphasized the importance of transparency about the current situation. Commissioner Reynolds clarified that his goal is not to increase spending but to ensure residents are treated equally, noting that dumpsters will need to be moved away from the highway and questioning whether the dumpster in lower St. Joe should remain.

**8:45 AM JIM ROLETTO, BENEWAH COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR:**

<b>Emergency Management</b>	<b>Road Projects</b>	<b>Public Works</b>	<b>Solid Waste</b>
	<b>Sewer System</b>	<b>Airport</b>	<b>Planning &amp; Zoning</b>

**FEMA Update from wind storm:** FEMA is shut down right now. No update at this time.

**Solid Waste:** The Commissioners received an update on the potential use of the landfill at Washatucna. Jim reported that the county has sent a letter and when ready they apply for the required state permit, with an estimated disposal cost of \$35 per ton and a potential timeline of less than six months if approved. Discussion also included how to manage green waste, with the possibility of designating a specific dumpster for yard waste and providing public information through flyers and the county website once plans are finalized. The group discussed solid waste tonnage and financial projections, noting that while current operations are close to breaking even, anticipated equipment issues may increase costs. Commissioner Short noted that two trucks will likely need engine replacements, estimated at about \$30,000 each. Commissioners discussed potential cost savings, including removing dumpsters and reducing services, while recognizing the impact on residents. Transportation routes for hauling waste were also discussed, with concerns raised about highway routes and permitting requirements. Jim reported that the RFQ proposal is prepared, dumpsters are on schedule to be removed for the previously scheduled date March 11. Jim also reported that overall tonnage is currently down and that the solid waste contract with Republic remains in progress while the county works to balance operational needs and requests from involved parties.

**Emergency Management:** Jim reported that the all hazardous plan is scheduled for next April, and a meeting with five northern counties will take place in March.

**Road Projects:** They will not order magnesium chloride. Road inventory is still ongoing, and it was noted that there had been communication with District 7 concerning their drainage ditch and efforts to protect the dike in the Riverdale area.

**Sewer:** It was noted that sewer tie-ins have been discovered that were not previously processed, with some work occurring without permits and without coordination with Panhandle Health. Process not in place to prevent this issue.

**Airport:** There was a building permit in the works for either lot 25 or 26.

**P&Z:** It was reported that the final plat for the Ragan’s subdivision will be signed today. The process began when the surveyor was first contacted in March of last year and has taken about a

year to move through the process, with progress beginning after discussions with the owner in August. It was also noted that the Drake subdivision application was withdrawn after a clause in the CCRs stating the property could not be split was identified, though the county does not enforce CCRs and had only required the clause be noted on the plat. The Silfast subdivision is continuing through the process, and if it proceeds, a bond will be required for the septic system, with a meeting may or may not be scheduled later this week.

### **9:00 AM BCH Challenges w/ Private Insurance Companies – Burt Keltner**

Burt provided an update on the hospital's financial status, noting that the hospital finished the year strongly on the revenue side. He explained that contracts with private insurers are currently paying significantly less than comparable reimbursement rates, creating challenges during negotiations. Burt stated that hospitals sometimes issue a notice of termination to prompt insurers to renegotiate contracts, and the hospital is considering terminating its agreement with Cigna in March, which currently covers approximately 30–40 people in the community, in hopes of reaching a better agreement. Commissioners discussed the county's current coverage with Blue Cross, and questions were raised about reimbursement rates and how private insurers structure payments, which are often based on a percentage of Medicare rates with additional contract language that can further reduce payments. Clerk LeWan made note that the county is not insured by Blue Cross. They are considered self insured through the Gem Plan and Blue Cross is only the administrator. Burt also mentioned that Medicare currently has a coding error affecting more than \$200,000 in funds. He discussed the Rural Hospital Transformation Fund, noting that Idaho received funding for the next five years and that the hospital hopes to request support for infrastructure expenses, including bond payments. Burt emphasized that successful negotiations with insurers could help the hospital move toward long-term sustainability and viability. He also asked commissioners to reach out to legislators to support the hospital's efforts. Phil noted that he recently used the hospital's emergency services and had a positive experience with the care provided.

### **9:15 AM PUBLIC COMMENT**

**Maureen Hodgson** – Stated she is still considering issues related to the road department and noted that some of the quandaries had already been discussed. She asked whether she could return to providing tally sheets for the drivers. She described an observation involving Joe operating a belly dump truck, noting that he loaded and hauled nine loads during his workday. She commented that he has a lot of experience and that he was taking his final load when he took the clipboard with him. She followed to observe how much he could haul and noted that the road may not be conducive to operating that type of rig. She stated that one route now appears almost paved due to the rock placed on it, while another route has significant changes in topography. She suggested there may be a way to use a belly dump in District 3 and wanted to share her observation, adding that Joe did a great job. She also commented that the main road is smooth and in good condition. Maureen further acknowledged improvements at the transfer station, stating that Jim works hard to get things done and that the site is user friendly and well run.

**Racheal Johnson** – Stated that FEMA assistance was not really needed during the five-day windstorm. She noted that when the Red Cross was present, people did not stay very long. She also gave compliments to Burt and the hospital for being among the first facilities with the lights back on.

**Cody Crandall** – Commended Bob for his efforts in reducing and monitoring overtime. He stated that there needs to be a balance between the quality of service provided and the amount of money paid to employees, and that if overtime can be reduced it should be. Commissioner Reynolds responded that sending county vehicles to outside mechanics would cost around \$100 per hour and noted that the crew’s in-house repairs save taxpayer money. He stated they are trying to find a balance and believes the overtime being used is necessary and spent wisely. Cody commended the crew’s in-house repairs and stated he was not advocating for outsourcing work. He noted that in the public sector there can sometimes be more waste than in the private sector and questioned whether all hours being worked are necessary he echoed that the county has a finite amount of money available. Commissioner Reynolds stated there are ways to reduce balloon payments on equipment, though it may not be the preferred approach, and echoed that the county is continuing to look at areas where cuts can be made. Commissioner Short commented on balloon payments related to equipment purchases, noting that while he was initially against purchasing equipment, it is necessary to maintain newer equipment if the county wants to keep it operational. Cody said the situation is a difficult balance, noting that older equipment still uses the same types of components and that he supports in-house work. He added that some newer equipment, such as certain CAT models, may not allow the county to perform their own repairs. Commissioner Reynolds concluded that there are several options being considered and noted one possibility of restructuring payments into approximately \$60,000 per year for three years with a remaining balance of about \$120,000 for the current year.

**Cheryl Blake** – Stated she has concerns about the dumpsters that are being removed, noting that the ones targeted appear to be those within a certain mile radius. She asked whether the county had considered the dumpsters located in Plummer and questioned whether the Tribe reimburses the county. It was noted that Southlake Services pays when they cross the scales and that the Plummer dumpsters have been consolidated to one site. She also asked who is currently using the Plummer dumpsters and why those or the Lapwai dumpsters are not being removed. Jim noted that signage was posted at the dumpsters directing who could use them. Cheryl questioned why the Plummer dumpsters are still needed. Commissioner Short noted only dumpsters within a 4 mile radius of the transfer station are being removed. Cheryl asked whether a dumpster could be made available 24/7. Commissioner Short noted they are looking to extend the transfer station’s hours. She stated that she feels the current approach penalizes residents.

**Doug Pratt** – Stated that he is not aware of any landfills that operate 24/7 and said he was surprised the transfer station opens as early as 6:00 a.m. He noted that the transfer station is a long distance for residents in the Hells Gulch area. He suggested eliminating paving entirely since the county does not have the equipment to properly patch pavement and stated that paving and magnesium chloride could both provide cost savings. Doug also shared his experience working in public works, noting that their department had a full-time mechanic and that overtime for repairs was not typically allowed unless approved because equipment needed to be ready for use the following day.

**Wayne Glassman** – Commented that when the county receives funding it tends to spend it quickly and suggested setting money aside for future needs. He stated that if employees work additional hours, they could potentially take time off during slower times of the year. He also said that when he has visited the Tensed shop he has seen employees not actively working. He shared an experience traveling on Sanders Road where he encountered icy conditions and two trees down across the road, stating he stopped and cut them out and that the public should also

help when possible. Wayne expressed concern about the financial future of both the hospital and the county and suggested selling or closing the hospital, stating that many residents travel to Kootenai for services. He also commented on issues with dumpsters, stating he has seen items such as a washing machine and couches dumped and questioned why photos are not taken and citations issued. He suggested using cameras to monitor dumpsters and identify non-residents using them. He added that he tries to use the dumpsters shortly after they are emptied because they fill quickly and stated the county should take more aggressive action to address misuse.

**Waylon Newton** – Stated that the council is excited to work with the county, noting that there are four new council members and that it has been a positive experience working with county staff. He said they look forward to working together to address and resolve outstanding issues for the benefit of the community. Commissioner Short asked how coordination between the groups would work. Waylon suggested starting with smaller meetings involving a commissioner, the clerk, and staff to work through one or two issues at a time before opening the discussions to the public.

Chairman Lampert left the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

### **9:30 AM Whitetail Flats Settlement Agreement (ACTION) – Terrun Zolman**

Terrun Zolman stated he was representing Bill Eichelburg and Jim Crawley regarding a property originally deeded to the Chicago, Milwaukee Railway in 1908. He explained that the deed description contained two specifications, but when it was accepted by the county only one area was addressed. The property has since been surveyed by Chris Reynaldo, and the deeds reference lots rather than metes and bounds. After discussion with the assessor, it was noted that the property owners have been paying taxes on the disputed area and have made improvements, including fencing, a drain field, and an RV park area shown on the map. Zolman stated the proposed solution is for the county to quitclaim the disputed portion to the property owners, noting that the survey indicates the northern 20–30 feet would remain with the county while additional area on the south side would go to the property owners due to the discrepancy created when the original plat was accepted. Commissioner Reynolds asked whether the area being surveyed was the same area the owners had been taxed on. Terrun responded that it was the majority of that area and that the final survey may include a small additional portion. Commissioners suggested the language be adjusted to reference 25 feet. Commissioner Reynolds made a motion to approve pending legal review and 25’ adjustment. Commissioner Short seconded. Motion carried.

### **9:45 AM Healthcare Support Letter - Michael Done**

Michael Done requested support from the county and asked for a letter of support. He stated that he is a chiropractor from New Zealand and is seeking assistance. Jim asked him to provide his resume, and Michael agreed to send his information for the county to review. The matter will be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

### **9:55 AM Ragan Estates Rural Subdivision Final Plat – Final Signatures**

The item had previously been approved and was not an action item. Signatures were provided to finalize the matter.

