

**BENEWAH COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING
September 19th, 2025**

Be it remembered that at this time the Board of County Commissioners met in a special session. The meeting was opened by Commissioner Lampert.

Present:	Philip R. Lampert	Chairman
	Robert Short	Commissioner
	Mark Reynolds	Commissioner
	Janeen LeWan	Clerk
	Jim Roletto	Public Works Director
	Sara Sexton	Treasurer

The Board met at 9:00 a.m., whereupon the following proceedings were had to-wit.

The Clerk opened the meeting with a welcome and guidelines on the meeting structure to create a clear record and opportunity for each attendee to speak.

Building Permit Fee Discussion:

Jim Roletto – presented a proposed change to building fees, outlining three separate options: (1) align county fees with the City of St. Maries, (2) coordinate commercial inspections with the city, and (3) adopt the state-recommended permit fee schedule.

Cody Crandall – He opposed adopting the City of St. Maries’ fee structure, citing increases were unaffordable for the county. He also objected to the engineering plan review requirement, citing concerns of liability on subdivisions, constitutionality, and the potential for lawsuits.

Cheryl Blake – Spoke in opposition, stating the increases were too high, not warranted.

Joseph Maimone - Inquired about proposed building permit requirements for construction in Benewah County. He expressed concern that increased regulations may place burdens on citizens, noting significant changes occurring in the county. He also questioned the definition of “commencement of work before permit issuance.”

A motion to keep the current building permit schedule with no changes was made by Commissioner Short and seconded by Commissioner Reynolds. Motion carried.

Sewer Fee Discussion:

It was reported that numerous stations operate throughout the county, with pumps being replaced as they fail. A \$5.00 monthly fee increase is needed to support ongoing operations and future pump purchases. It was recommended that these expenses be included in the capital improvement plan to ensure timely replacements.

A motion to increase the county sewer by \$5.00 to cover capital investment was made by Commissioner Reynolds and seconded by Commissioner Short. Motion carried.

Sara Sexton noted the \$0.25 on the fee was a hardship on the local offices and bank. She requested the fee be reduced to \$59.00.

A motion to amend the increase was made to have the fee be \$59.00 by Commissioner Reynolds and seconded by Commissioner Short. Motion carried.

Solid Waste Discussion:

Jim Roletto - A fee increase is being proposed for solid waste due to rising costs of handling, transferring, and landfill fees in Montana. The proposal would increase each resident's annual fee by \$13, ensuring costs are covered without relying on general funds such as sales tax. He emphasized that utilities should pay for themselves, and noted additional scale increases due to higher operating costs.

Bob Short - Discussed issues with mixed loads of trash being dumped inside the transfer station. Staff have spent significant time sorting these loads back out. It was recommended to implement an additional fee to offset the labor costs. A suggestion was made to charge 10 cents per pound for mixed loads in the future.

Sara Sexton - Reported on the proposed fee only structure for solid waste, noting support from the City of St. Maries, Plummer, and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe. The plan emphasizes equal treatment for all property owners. Southlake willing to look at a shift from ton-based to yard-based billing to reduce costs. While some parcel fees will increase and others decrease, public feedback has been generally positive once the process is explained. She also discussed the difficulty of weighing residential dumpsters during pickup, noting that some estimation is required and that wet materials can increase tonnage. Commercial accounts will continue to cover their own costs at the scale. A uniform annual residential fee was reviewed to simplify billing and ensure costs are covered directly within the solid waste budget, reducing reliance on general funds. The approach is not final but is viewed as a path toward a self-funded system. A new recycling center on the Plummer side is willing to accept glass, plastic, and cardboard, and is willing to take recyclables from the City of St. Maries service area.

Sara also updated on discussions with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe. The Tribe confirmed they are willing to work with the County and would accept direct billings for tax-exempt rental houses, pending council approval once the number of rental units is determined. The Tribe clarified that such charges cannot be applied through a tax bill but can be invoiced separately. Sara & Mariah had conversations with tribal representatives and legal counsel, and property counts are currently being compiled.

Ed Spooner - Expressed support for moving to a no-levy system, stating it is a fair start between the city and county and should be tried to see how it works, as the current approach is not sustainable. He also noted he has tracked the costs of hauling waste to Missoula. Suggested that the county consider developing a local landfill, noting the area's suitable clay draws and the potential for job creation if other counties utilized the site.

Cody Crandall – Supports the proposal, noting it is a valuable discussion on addressing the solid waste deficit. He raised concerns about preventing fees from growing excessively and suggested separating cardboard from trash and baling it to reduce costs.

Summary points of other discussion: The Board discussed proposed changes to solid waste funding, including eliminating the levy and shifting to a fee-only system.

- Jim Roletto explained the need for an annual fee increase per resident to cover rising operating and landfill costs without relying on general funds.
- Sara Sexton outlined options for billing and collection, including potential contracts based on volume (per yard) rather than weight (per ton), with support from the City of St. Maries, Plummer, and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe.
- Discussion noted that while an exact breakdown of tribal-owned homes in Plummer is not available, the Tribe is included in the 489 accounts billed and pays South Lake Services for private tax-exempt dumpsters. This has helped ensure coverage of tribal properties, addressing past concerns about unpaid waste services.
- It was also noted that the J&E contract requires residential and commercial dumpsters to be picked up separately from county dumpsters. Commissioners suggested reviewing procedures, including the possibility of designating specific days for private versus county hauling, to ensure accurate tracking.

A motion to table the solid waste costs until Monday September 22nd, 2025 was made by Commissioner Short and seconded by Commissioner Reynolds. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 10:44 am.

Minutes read and approved this 27th day of October, 2025.

By the Board of Benewah County Commissioners:

 /s/ /s/ /s/
 Philip R. Lampert, Chairman Robert Short, Commissioner Mark Reynolds, Commissioner

Attest:

 /s/
 Janeen LeWan, Clerk