Columbia Soil & Water Conservation District
Clean Water, Healthy Earth

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Minutes of the
Columbia SWCD Board of Directors
Budget Hearing and Board Meeting
June 17, 2026

Directors Present:
Debra Brimacombe, Director
Michael Calhoun, Chair
Paul Gibbons, Secretary
Jason Busch, Director (via Zoom at 5:18pm)
Alex Devin, Vice Chair

Directors Absent:
Bill Eagle, Treasurer
Dave Freytag, Director

Associate Directors Present:
David Taylor
Alison Charbonneau

Lower Columbia River Watershed Council (LCRWC):
Rachael Barry, Interim Coordinator

Columbia SWCD Staff:
Taylor Murray, Executive Director
Rebekah Gaxiola, Working Lands Conservationist
Jennifer Chavez, Operations & Communications Manager

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):
Hannah Isaacs, District Conservationist

Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD):
Dean Moberg, OACD Board Member

Public:
Julia Rutherford

BOARD MEETING & PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING CALL TO ORDER AT 5:04 PM

Prior Month's Minutes: Paul and Alex noted that they were not present for the May meeting. Deb **moved, and Paul seconded a motion** to approve the Minutes from the Board meeting held on 05/20/26, as presented. **Approved Motion passed.**

Vote Record: Approve the May 20, 2026, meeting minutes as presented.

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒			☒	
Jason Busch					
Michael Calhoun	☒				
Alex Devin	☒				
Paul Gibbons	☒				☒

Financial Report: Taylor presented the Treasurer's Report. Paul asked about More Power Technology Group, and Taylor explained that the company is the District's current IT provider. He noted that the District is in the process of transitioning IT services to Pacific Office Automation. A brief discussion followed. **Paul moved, and Deb seconded a motion** to approve the Treasurer's Report from 5-31-26. **Approved Motion passed**.

Vote Record: Accept the Financial Report for May.

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒				☒
Jason Busch					
Michael Calhoun	☒				
Alex Devin	☒				
Paul Gibbons	☒			☒	

BILLS TO PAY (US Bank) June 17, 2026					
				Expenditure Splits	
Ck #	Payee	Memo	Amount	CSWCD	GRANT
3244	Pershing LLC	Retirement	$2,964.70	$2,964.70	$0.00
3245	Jennifer Wassmuth	Cleaning Services	$750.00	$750.00	$0.00
3246	Historical Research Associates	Conyers Creek Project	$105.75	$0.00	$105.75
3247	RA Barry Consulting	Monthly LCRWC Services	$5,079.00	$885.00	$4,194.00
		SUBTOTALS >>>>>>>>	$10,750.70	$4,122.70	$6,628.00
		TOTAL REQUESTS >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>			$11,159.09

<u>Bills to Pay</u>: Deb moved, and Paul seconded a motion to approve paying the bills. **Approved Motion passed**.

Vote Record: Approve to pay the bills as presented

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒			☒	
Jason Busch					
Michael Calhoun	☒				
Alex Devin	☒				
Paul Gibbons	☒				☒

<u>Public Comment</u>*:*

Dean Moberg introduced himself as a representative of the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD), which he joined in January. He also serves on the Tualatin SWCD Board and previously worked for the Natural Resources Conservation Service for approximately 35 years.

Dean explained that he serves as an OACD liaison to approximately six SWCDs and aims to attend two to three board meetings for each district annually. He noted that the OACD Board consists of nine members, including staff and directors from conservation districts throughout the state.

Dean provided a brief overview of the resources OACD offers to the District, including its monthly newsletter and annual conference.

<u>REPORTS</u>

- **<u>NRCS:</u>** Hannah reported that NRCS recently announced another upcoming reorganization plan. She noted that the announcement did not include specific details but that additional information is expected by late July or August. Hannah will update the District as more information becomes available. She added that NRCS staff remain busy despite limited staffing and are continuing to manage their time and workload as effectively as possible.

- **<u>LCRWC</u>:** Rachael reported that the Lower Columbia River Watershed Council, Upper Nehalem Watershed Council, Columbia SWCD, and Columbia County are collaborating on an application for place-based water planning funds through the Oregon Water Resources Department. The proposed 18-month "preparation phase" would focus on building trust, engaging the community, and preparing for a four-year planning phase. During the planning phase, the partners would develop a state-recognized water plan for the designated geographic area.

  Alison asked whether the Scappoose Bay Watershed Council would be included. Rachael explained that SBWC is located within a different administrative basin but expressed hope that resources developed through the process could be shared.

  Julia asked whether the plan would focus specifically on groundwater. Rachael explained that the planning process would seek to balance instream and out-of-stream water uses related to environmental needs, communities, industry, and economic development. The plan would also address drought, wildfire, and climate-related impacts.

  Jason arrived at 5:18 p.m.

  Alison asked whether creeks within the Scappoose Bay area fall within the planning boundary. Rachael explained that the proposed planning area extends to the Merrill Creek and Tide Creek areas, which mark the geographic boundary and do not include the Scappoose Bay Watershed Council service area. She noted that creeks within SBWC's service area are considered part of the Willamette Basin. Alison asked whether Rachell, SBWC Executive Director, had connections with Multnomah County, and it was noted that she works closely with West Multnomah SWCD. Rachael added that funding awards are expected to be announced in the fall and expressed hope that neighboring organizations are pursuing similar planning efforts.

  Rachael also reported that LCRWC is partnering with Columbia County Public Works to pursue funding for restoration work associated with the Little Clatskanie and Apiary fish passage upgrades. The partners plan to seek federal funding to replace the failed culverts with a bridge. LCRWC hopes to serve as the partner responsible for incorporating restoration treatments into the project.

  Rachael also announced that LCRWC will host a celebration on August 13 and will provide flyers with additional information.

- **<u>Staff:</u>** Taylor reported that he participated in a recent Strategic Planning Work Group meeting. He noted that although the July Board meeting is typically canceled, a meeting will likely be necessary this year. Due to District and community events, July 8 and July 22 were identified as possible meeting dates, both at 5:00 p.m. Taylor expressed concern that general business materials may not be ready for Board review by July 8. Following a brief discussion, Alex recommended scheduling the meeting for July 22 at 5:00 p.m. Taylor will contact Bill and Dave to confirm their availability and ensure a quorum.

  Taylor also reminded the Board of the upcoming election and reviewed important dates for individuals seeking placement on the ballot. He noted that election-related questions should be directed to Sandi Hiatt with the Oregon Department of Agriculture, but offered to assist with obtaining answers as needed.

  Following up on discussion from the previous meeting, Taylor distributed the District's current Meeting Room Rental Policy and noted that no revisions have been made at this time. He outlined several parameters he plans to incorporate into the policy and stated that a revised version will be presented for discussion at the July 22 Board meeting. The Board will also review approximately five or six standalone policies that still require approval. Taylor stated that the meeting materials will be distributed at least 10 days in advance for review.

  Taylor added that the Personnel Handbook is expected to be approved and returned by HR Answers by July 1. He noted that the handbook references the standalone policies throughout.

  Jason asked whether he would need to run in the upcoming election because he was appointed to his current position. Taylor confirmed that he would, and stated that he would email Jason the election packet.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Strategic Plan Board Development:** The strategic planning team met two weeks earlier and reviewed and discussed a proposed Board Director job description outlining the role, responsibilities, and expectations of Board members. The team hopes to present the job description for discussion and possible approval at the July 22 Board meeting.

  The team would also like the Board to consider scheduling another half-day planning retreat at the Columbia SWCD office. Taylor noted that he has appreciated hearing ideas from the Directors and would like to see another retreat take place, with everyone meeting face-to-face if possible.

  Alison expressed interest in developing an interactive map with supporting metadata that could be used collaboratively with the local watershed councils. Rebekah explained that partners have discussed the concept and that developing a system has proven challenging, but efforts are ongoing. A brief discussion followed.

NEW BUSINESS

Adopt the Budget for 2026/2027 Fiscal Year: Taylor read Resolution No. 25/26-03, which maintained the permanent tax rate of $0.10 per $1,000 of assessed value and adopted an annual budget totaling $2,618,479.

Paul asked why the budget continued to include $50,000 for vehicle expenses following the purchase of a new truck. Taylor explained that, as discussed at previous meetings, the District's transportation needs are increasing as the organization grows. He noted that the District is considering the purchase of a small SUV to provide an additional reliable and fuel-efficient option for conference travel and local site visits.

Taylor also provided additional information regarding the capital outlay expenses. He explained that the shop requires repairs and improvements, including the addition of a bathroom and replacement of the flooring to address safety concerns. A discussion followed.

Alex asked where the unappropriated funds are held, how they are being used, and whether they are earning income for the District. He also asked whether the District has a policy requiring a specific percentage of funds to remain unappropriated.

Taylor contacted Malyssa, who advised that the purpose of the funds is explained in the Budget Message: "The unappropriated ending balance is budgeted at $175,000 and will ensure the continued operation of the District through the first four months of the next fiscal year, or until the District begins receiving property tax funds in November or December. Property tax funds received in November are distributed weekly to the District's LGIP account, with monthly transfers beginning in December."

Michael asked whether there were any additional issues or concerns regarding the proposed budget. No additional comments or concerns were raised, and no public testimony regarding the proposed budget was received.

Alex moved, and Deb seconded a motion to approve adopting the budget for the 2026/2027 Fiscal year, totaling $2,618,479.00, with a permanent tax rate of $0.10/$1,000. **Motion passed**.

Vote Record: Adopt the 2026/2027 Budget

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒				☒
Jason Busch	☒				
Michael Calhoun	☒				
Alex Devin	☒			☒	
Paul Gibbons	☒				

- **2026 Columbia SWCD Salary Chart:** Taylor explained that the provided salary chart remains largely unchanged from the version approved the previous year, with adjustments reflecting the 3% cost-of-living increase from last year and the 2.5% increase for the current year. He noted that the schedule generally aligns with employees' current salaries within the District.

  Taylor added that the budget includes funding for potential salary increases of up to 3% for each employee, based on performance evaluations. He also reported that he has been working with OACD on pay equity by comparing compensation levels among other SWCDs to help ensure District salaries remain fair and competitive.

Jason signed off Zoom at 5:48 pm

Paul noted that the salary schedule does not fully address previous questions regarding the use of $2,000 increments between steps rather than percentage-based increases, which may result in proportionally smaller increases for employees at the higher end of the schedule. A discussion followed.

Taylor expressed interest in developing a clearer and more consistent process for awarding salary increases. He plans to continue consulting with other SWCD managers and OACD.

- **<u>Strategic Plan Retreat:</u>** Taylor explained that the Strategic Planning Work Group has advised a half-day, Director-specific retreat at the SWCD office in hopes that all Board members could attend. Taylor explained that this retreat was not in the initial quote and will cost additional funds. He read the scope of work for the retreat that Amy Stork provided, outlining what the Work group hopes for the retreat to entail. Taylor noted that the retreat would cost $2,300, but believes it is worth it. Paul added that he believes it is necessary. A date for the retreat will be scheduled at the July board meeting. **Paul moved, and Alex seconded a motion** to approve the Director's Strategic Planning Retreat and associated fee of $2,300. **Approved Motion passed**.

Vote Record: Approve Director's Strategic Planning Retreat

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒				
Jason Busch	☐				
Michael Calhoun	☒				
Alex Devin	☒				☒
Paul Gibbons	☒			☒	

- **<u>Field Technician:</u>** Taylor reported that the District has hired a new employee. Of the 72 applicants, seven were selected for interviews, and two candidates participated in field interviews. Taylor expressed enthusiasm and confidence in the selected candidate, Laurel, who will officially begin work on July 1. He provided a brief overview of her background and noted that she will begin by assisting with Science in the Park the following week.

  David also expressed confidence in Laurel based on his experience meeting her during the field interview conducted at his property.

- **<u>LEED Certification</u>:** Michael expressed interest in having the District office recognized for its sustainability practices and suggested pursuing a green building certification, such as LEED or a similar program.

  Paul asked whether an assessment had been completed to determine how the building currently aligns with certification criteria. Taylor explained that Jennifer's husband has experience with LEED and other green building certifications and had recommended consulting Al and Kannikar Peterson, the architects involved in the office remodel. They may be able to provide information about the sustainable features incorporated into the building and why certification was not pursued at that time.

  A brief discussion followed. Alison suggested adding signage to educate visitors about the building's sustainable features. Alex noted that Energy Trust of Oregon may also offer a free consultation.

- **<u>Outdoor Wildlife Friendly Bulbs</u>:** Taylor reported that the District has conducted considerable research on the existing and proposed light bulbs. He estimated the total cost at approximately $1,200 and noted that it has not yet been determined whether all bulbs throughout the facility will be replaced.

  Taylor also explained that the yellow-hued bulbs reduce the clarity of the security camera footage. The District is exploring wildlife-friendly lighting options that would maintain camera visibility while still meeting wildlife considerations.

  Alex asked whether the District is certified as a Pollinator Habitat and suggested pursuing that certification in addition to the existing wildlife habitat certification.

  Hannah reiterated concerns raised during previous discussions regarding staff safety during the cooler months, when the grounds are dark as employees arrive and leave. Michael explained that wildlife-friendly bulbs can provide similar lumen output and intensity while using a different color temperature. A discussion followed.

Paul moved, and Alex seconded a motion to approve working towards wildlife-friendly lighting that doesn't sacrifice security and safety. **Approved Motion passed**.

Vote Record: Approve wildlife-friendly lighting without compromising safety.

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒				
Jason Busch	☒				
Michael Calhoun	☒				
Alex Devin	☒				☒
Paul Gibbons	☒			☒	

BOARD REPORTS

- Deb announced that next week is Pollinator Week. The BugNutz will be at this Saturday's Farmer's Market in Scappoose to kick off the celebration. She encouraged everyone to submit pollinator photos to the Pollinator Partnership on iNaturalist.
- Taylor reminded everyone that the office will be closed on Friday, June 19, as well as Friday, July 3rd, with Science in the Park the following week, July 6-10. He encouraged volunteer participation, or at least stopping by to check it out. Alison noted that the event filled up within two hours.
  Taylor continued with upcoming events, noting that the District will have a booth at the upcoming Fair July 15-18, and is still in need of volunteers to assist manning the booth.

The public budget hearing and regular Board meeting were adjourned at 6:29 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by: *Jennifer Chavez,* Operations & Communications Manager