



35285 Millard Road
St. Helens, OR 97051
Ph: 503.433.3205

www.columbiaswcd.com

**Minutes of the
Columbia SWCD Board of Directors
Meeting April 16, 2025**

Directors Present:

Debra Brimacombe, Vice Chair
Michael Calhoun, Chair
Bill Eagle, Treasurer
Paul Gibbons, Secretary
Jason Busch, Director (via Zoom)

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
(NRCS):**

Hannah Isaacs, District Conservationist
Rebekah Gaxiola, Natural Resource Specialist

CSWCD Staff:

Amber Kester, Interim District Manager
Jennifer Chavez, Operations & Outreach
Coordinator
Crystalyn Bush, Resource Conservationist
Malyssa Legg, Financial Manager (via Zoom)

Associate Directors:

David Taylor (via Zoom)
Alison Charbonneau
Rachell Meyers, SBWC (via Zoom)

Public:

Claudia Eagle
Rachael Barry

CALL TO ORDER OF REGULAR BOARD MEETING: 5:01 PM

Prior Month's Minutes: Paul moved, and Bill seconded a motion to approve the Minutes from the Board meeting on 3-19-25 as presented. **Approved Motion passed by unanimous vote.**

Vote Record: Approve February 19, 2025, meeting minutes as presented.

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Paul Gibbons	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Dave Freytag	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Debra Brimacombe	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Bill Eagle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Michael Calhoun	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Jason Busch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

Financial Report: Bill read the Treasurer's report aloud.

Bill moved, and Deb seconded a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report from 3-31-25. **Approved Motion passed by unanimous vote.**

Vote Record: Accept the Financial Report from February.

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Paul Gibbons	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Dave Freytag	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Debra Brimacombe	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Bill Eagle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Michael Calhoun	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Jason Busch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

OLD BUSINESS

- **New Resource Conservationist:** The board welcomed Rebekah Gaxiola to the Columbia SWCD team. Amber informed the Board that Rebekah will officially begin her role on May 1st, following a transition period from her current position with NRCS.
- **District Manager Job Announcement:** Deb reported that she has received four resumes to date. None have been mailed to or received at the office.

Rachell joined via Zoom

- **Review Current Salary Chart:** Michael revisited the salary chart topic from the previous meeting, noting that follow-up questions had been submitted by three different people. Paul recommended that the Board review the questions and answers together, as he had only received the responses shortly before the meeting and had not yet had time to evaluate them thoroughly.

Among his 10 submitted questions, Paul sought clarification on whether the chart presented at the last meeting was a new proposal or an already approved version, as it had been labeled "Approved 3.20.24." Malysa clarified that the label was an oversight, likely left during the creation of the new draft. The group paused briefly to accurately label the copies of salary charts that were emailed to the board ahead of this meeting.

Paul also requested that future salary charts include a legend for abbreviations and maintain consistent formatting to ensure clarity, especially since these documents are public. He asked for an explanation of how pay increases are funded and the effect on the budget. Malysa explained that the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) capacity grant [SOW] now supports 1.5 full-time Resource Conservationists, and the District is projected to begin the next fiscal year with more cash on hand. Amber added that the updated Scope of Work (SOW) included a \$35,000 increase, and Malysa mentioned a recent email from OWEB about upcoming funding opportunities, adding her recommendation that the board submit a testimony.

Additional discussion included Paul's request for a draft of the Personnel Services section of the budget showing how proposed changes would affect future budgets. As he had only received the draft that day, he requested more time for review. He emphasized the need for timely information to allow the Board to make informed decisions and suggested delaying a vote on the salary chart.

Paul also asked for up-to-date salary comparisons with other SWCDs. Malysa said the last full comparison was done in 2013, and while informal sharing still occurs, a large-scale assessment has not been done since. She offered to request an updated survey from the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD). Amber noted she connected with Andy, the Yamhill SWCD Manager, at last week's conference, who is willing to assist with policy and salary questions. Malysa shared Andy's history, and he inspired her to implement a flat rate increase in the current proposal.

Lastly, Paul raised concerns about the District's step system versus percentage-based increases, suggesting that a flat \$2,000 step may not fairly recognize high performers. He encouraged further discussion, possibly with outside input. Malysa noted the District has always used a step system, but is open to changes. She confirmed that staff typically move up one step per year. Paul asked if an employee has ever moved up two steps, to which Amber confirmed that she has received a 1.5-step increase, and that Crystalyn has received a 2-step increase in the past.

Amber proposed that both staff and Board members collaborate to create a revised salary chart. She noted that a key issue is determining an appropriate salary for Malysa, who is still receiving the District Manager wage. Amber recommended forming a committee to move forward with the process. Alison asked if the budget committee needed to be involved, but Malysa clarified that salary decisions are made by the Board and then reflected in the numbers presented to the budget committee. Paul

agreed that Malysa's salary should be addressed first, followed by appropriate COLA and merit adjustments for all staff. He added that more time is needed to refine the salary chart.

Amber suggested that a budget amendment may be necessary, which Malysa confirmed would require convening the budget committee. Rachell asked if the budget committee meeting could be delayed until after the next Board meeting. Malysa said it could, but noted that the final budget hearing must still take place by the posted date [May 21].

Jason asked whether the Board was expected to decide Malysa's salary during this meeting. The Board agreed to postpone that decision and instead move forward with forming a salary committee, citing the need for more time to review the materials sent earlier that day. Alison emphasized the value of consulting with other local SWCDs during this process.

Paul moved, and Deb seconded a motion to create a committee to look into the salary chart.
Approved Motion passed.

Vote Record: To create a committee to look into the salary chart.

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Paul Gibbons	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Jason Busch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Dave Freytag	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Debra Brimacombe	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Bill Eagle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Michael Calhoun	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Jason Busch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

Alison asked who would be leading the committee and whether any deadlines would be set to ensure the topic continues to move forward. Paul volunteered to take the lead and said he would follow up with Amber. Jason also volunteered to join the committee. Malysa asked if the scheduled budget committee meeting dates would remain the same; they will.

- **Ethics Training by our Lawyer:** Michael reminded the board that the training will take place at the CSWCD office on Friday, April 18th, at 3:00 pm. Amber added that the meeting will be recorded.

NEW BUSINESS

2025/26 Work plan: A draft of the 2025–2026 Workplan was distributed to the Board. Amber noted that due to a short timeline, the format is similar to previous versions but expressed interest in enhancing its appearance and providing more information in the future. Crystalyn shared that she, Amber, and Jenn collaborated to make this year's plan more specific, aiming to align line items with measurable goals. The team also hopes the work plan can be referenced during staff meetings and potentially used as a tool for staff evaluations. Bill observed that some line items appeared vague and suggested more clarity. Deb added that she believes that ODA requires the annual work plan to identify who is responsible for each item. **Paul moved, and Deb seconded a motion** to approve the proposed Columbia SWCD 2025-2026 Work plan. **Approved Motion passed.**

Vote Record: To approve the 2025-2026 Work Plan.

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Paul Gibbons	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Jason Busch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Dave Freytag	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Debra Brimacombe	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Bill Eagle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Michael Calhoun	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Jason Busch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

- **Policies:** The Board was provided with draft cell phone and leaf blower policies for review. Bill expressed that a cell phone policy may not be necessary, noting that phones are generally not an issue, aside from a recent Annual Meeting incident. Paul agreed, adding that phones are useful tools during meetings. Michael shared his strong dislike for cell phones, while Amber noted that most staff keep their phones on silent nearby due to family needs. Crystalyn clarified that the proposed policy allows phones on silent.

Amber also questioned the tone the District wants to set by adopting numerous policies, asking how necessary they truly are. Alison added that policies are primarily for legal protection and advised that a cell phone policy could create confusion, especially since many people attend meetings virtually using their phones.

Discussion then shifted to the leaf blower policy, with Michael concerned that policies may be undone in the future, and he does not want the effort to feel wasted. Amber expressed the value in consistent policy committee meetings and keeping documents organized and up to date. She suggested that including members of the public with more expertise on specific topics would be beneficial. The board agreed to table the policies for now.

- **Commissioning a Strategic Planning Committee:** Paul shared a proposal from Amy Stork to assist with facilitating the District's Strategic Planning process, noting that he does not expect Board approval at this time but would like to use it as a starting point for the newly formed committee. A brief discussion followed regarding the proposal and goals for the Strategic Planning meeting. Paul mentioned Vernonia Springs as the likely venue, pending scheduled tours. Amber added that the committee will likely seek 1-2 additional quotes for comparison. **Paul moved, and Bill seconded a motion to commission a Strategic Planning Committee. Approved Motion passed by unanimous vote.**

Vote Record: To commission a Strategic Planning Committee

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Paul Gibbons	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Jason Busch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Dave Freytag	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Debra Brimacombe	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Bill Eagle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Michael Calhoun	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Jason Busch	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

The committee will include Paul, Deb, Amber, Jennifer, and Alison.

BOARD REPORTS

There were no reports.

Amber noted that a Zoom comment from Jason had been missed earlier. Jason asked what amount would be allocated in the budget for the Fiscal Manager position and whether the District would continue paying the District Manager's wage until the issue is resolved. Bill said of course. Deb recommended maintaining the current arrangement until new forms are created.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 6:59 PM

Respectfully Submitted by: *Jennifer Chavez*
Jennifer Chavez, Operations & Outreach Coordinator