

**OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF BLAINE COUNTY
REGULAR MEETING OF THE JANUARY 2026 SESSION**

First Day

Tuesday, January 6, 2026

Pursuant to Statutory Provisions, the Board of Blaine County Commissioners (BCC) met this day at 9:00 a.m. Present were Chair Angenie McCleary, Vice-Chair Lindsay Mollineaux, Commissioner Muffy Davis; Department Support Specialist Morgan Baird; Chief Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Tim Graves; Prosecuting Attorney Matt Fredback; County Administrator Kirk Flannigan; County Clerk Stephen Graham; Disaster Services Coordinator Chris Corwin; Road & Bridge Manager Steve Thompson; Human Resources Generalist Justin Highhouse; Grants, Contracts, Procurements (GCP) Administrator Danielle McKee; Land Use Planner Crystal Rigby; Deputy Clerk-Auditor-Recorder Roxy Ruiz; Blaine County Sheriff Morgan Ballis; Blaine County Patrol Captain Mike Abaid; Hailey Police Chief Steve England; Bellevue Marshal Chief Kirt Gaston, Sun Valley Police Chief Kim Orchard, Hospice & Palliative Care of the Wood River Valley (HPCWRV) RN Executive Director Allison Collins, HPCWRV Chaplain Mike Higgs, HPCWRV RN Bill Boyce, HPCWRV RN David Holloway, HPCWRV RN Bridget LaRock, HPCWRV Office Manager Margaret Richards, and former Blaine County Deputy Coroner Stephen Gaylord were present for part of the morning session.

Some participants in this meeting were by web conference or teleconference.

Chair McCleary called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Chair McCleary opened public comment, hearing none, she closed public comment.

CONSENT CALENDAR

There were no items for approval on the consent calendar.

STALKER CREEK BRIDGE

• Resolution 2026-02 Supporting the Project Identification Submittal for the Construction of Stalker Creek Bridge

Road & Bridge Manager, Steve Thompson, presented a resolution supporting Blaine County's Federal Grant Application for the Stalker Creek Bridge Project, noting it was required to confirm the County's participation if funding is awarded. The Board discussed the future match requirement, and Thompson reported the project is estimated at \$2.5–\$3 million with an expected County share of approximately 7.34% (about \$250,000), which would be budgeted over multiple years.

Mollineaux moved, seconded by Davis, to adopt Resolution 2026-02 supporting the project identification submittal for the construction of Stalker Creek Bridge. Motion passed unanimously.

• Stalker Creek Bridge Grant Support Letter

The Board confirmed moving forward with providing a letter of support for the Stalker Creek Bridge grant application. Staff indicated they would proceed with the application and include the support letter through the Blaine County Regional Transportation Committee.

CONTRACTS, GRANTS AND AGREEMENTS

• Equitable Sharing Agreement and Certification

Danielle McKee, Grants, Contracts, and Procurements Administrator, reviewed the Sheriff's Office Equitable Sharing Agreement and annual certification report, explaining it reflected pass-through funds and documented prior-year funding sources and the upcoming fiscal year budget. She confirmed Blaine

County remains below the federal single-audit threshold, and no additional audit requirements were triggered.

Mollineaux moved, seconded by Davis, to approve the Equitable Sharing Agreement and Certification for an end date of 09/30/2025 and in a total agency FY 2026 budget amount of \$4,042,373. Motion passed unanimously.

• Client Consulting Agreement with Avalanche Risk Solutions

Chris Corwin, Disaster Services Coordinator, presented Phase II of the County's avalanche study, which would use Phase I data to develop a countywide decision framework for localized avalanche risk and response decisions. The Board supported moving forward, confirmed a 50/50 cost share with the City of Ketchum, and directed staff to bring the agreement back on a future consent agenda.

• Phasing Agreement Glendale Industrial Condominiums Blaine County, Idaho

Land Use Planner, Crystal Rigby, presented the Glendale Industrial Condominiums phasing agreement required after Phase 1 final plat approval. The Board supported the agreement, confirmed the exhibits were in color, and requested a copy for signature.

Mollineaux moved, seconded by Davis, to approve the Phasing Agreement for Glendale Industrial Condominiums buy between Blaine County, Idaho and Glendale Industrial LLC as of December 2025. Motion passed unanimously.

• Passthrough Funds Agreement Form FY26

McKee explained the FY2026 pass-through funds agreement for Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections funding provided to the Probation Department, noting it formalizes an arrangement that has existed in prior years. The Board asked about potential matching fund requirements, and staff confirmed there should be no issue meeting any match within the approved department budget.

Mollineaux moved, seconded by Davis, to approve the Passthrough Funds Recipient Agreement with the recipient being Blaine County and the sender is the Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections, where the legislative passed their funds, appropriation is a total distribution of \$77,948. Motion passed unanimously.

COUNTY DEPARTMENT REPORTS

• Prosecuting Attorney – Matt Fredback

Chief Deputy Prosecuting Attorney – Tim Graves

Chief Deputy Prosecuting Attorney, Tim Graves, reported increased civil workload, including time-sensitive election litigation and public records request cases, and noted ongoing efforts to implement a countywide public records fee resolution with staff training planned. He also reported upcoming ordinance work (including a proposed prohibition on elk/big game feeding), continued contract and land use reviews, and committee and crisis intervention training involvement by staff.

Prosecuting Attorney Matt Fredback reported criminal activity slowed over the holiday period but emphasized ongoing concerns with obtaining timely autopsies and forensic pathology services, which could limit the County's ability to investigate and prosecute serious cases. The Board asked about alternatives and actions taken, and Fredback explained accredited forensic pathologists are costly, require the same standards, and that the County has worked with the Ada County Coroner's Office through ongoing communication and joint training efforts. He further reported that, because the Blaine County Coroner Russ Mikel is not providing the required investigative documentation, the Ada County Coroner's Office and forensic pathologists have declined certain cases for autopsy, which could leave the County without the evidence needed to prosecute serious crimes and noted Ada County Coroner Office offered and provided free training to the Blaine County Coroner, but the same investigative

deficiencies continue to occur.

• Sheriff – Morgan Ballis

Sheriff Morgan Ballis reported that ongoing deficiencies in Blaine County Coroner Russ Mikel's investigations are affecting law enforcement's ability to gather and preserve evidence for criminal prosecutions and are delaying families' receipt of remains while investigations remain pending. In response to Board questions, Ballis stated the coroner is contacted immediately through dispatch and has access to death scenes, but delays occur when law enforcement must complete additional evidence collection and documentation. Ballis described recurring investigative shortcomings, including Mikel not taking photographs, in some cases not collecting evidence, and relying on law enforcement reports rather than completing an independent coroner investigation and narrative, which has required law enforcement agencies to remain on scene longer and perform work beyond standard practice to meet the documentation requirements for Ada County and forensic pathology review, despite state law requiring coroners to conduct medicolegal death investigations, coordinate with law enforcement, and complete and file written reports documenting the material facts, cause, and manner of death.

Hailey Chief of Police – Steve England

Hailey Police Chief, Steve England, stated that his experience, and that of other law enforcement leaders, aligned with Sheriff Ballis and Prosecuting Attorney Fredback regarding longstanding concerns with coroner-related investigative deficiencies, while noting Blaine County Coroner Mikel is compassionate with families on scene. England emphasized that law enforcement promptly notifies and allows the coroner access to death scenes, but reported he has not observed Mikel take photos or investigative notes and that officers often remain on scene to assist with removal of remains, creating additional physical and mental strain on personnel.

Public Comment: Hospice & Palliative Care of the Wood River Valley RN Executive Director Allison Collins reported ongoing service and responsiveness issues with the Wood River Chapel mortician/owner and Blaine County Coroner Russ Mikel, including difficulty reaching him, delays in body removal, cremation processing, and timely death certificates, which created burdens for hospice staff and families. She stated their organization began using out-of-county providers who were more efficient, transparent, and professional, and she emphasized the need for accountability and a qualified individual to fulfill the role consistent with statutory and professional standards.

Ballis connected Collins' comments to Mikel's statutory duties and cited a recent hospice-related death in which the death certificate was signed even though Mikel did not examine the body. He stated this was a critical issue affecting families' right to accurate determinations and demonstrated how the mortician and coroner roles can overlap, causing a conflict of interest, while still requiring the coroner to meet statutory standards.

Stephen Gaylord stated he was hired by Mikel as a deputy coroner and began required training but said his attempts to improve death investigation practices including documentation, evidence collection, PPE use, and additional training were dismissed and ultimately led to his termination. He reported he was never sworn in or given access to coroner files, believed he was used primarily for maintenance work, and stated he now works for an out-of-county funeral home and intends to run for coroner in Blaine County next election.

Ballis confirmed Gaylord's account, stating that Gaylord's termination followed an incident during a death investigation when the Sheriff's Office was unable to reach Coroner Mikel directly to obtain authorization to release a decedent's name for a press release, as the listed contact number routed to a third-party answering service. Ballis explained that he contacted Gaylord for assistance, and after Gaylord handed the phone to Mikel to provide the authorization, Mikel later terminated Gaylord, believing he had improperly communicated with the Sheriff's Office.

Commissioner Davis reported that, as liaison to the coroner, the Board has repeatedly requested required annual case reports but has not received them, limiting its ability to assess coroner activity. She also noted the County currently pays for use of the coroner's facilities under contract and has been planning for future transitions without duplicating taxpayer costs.

• Human Resources – Justin Highhouse

HR Generalist Justin Highhouse reported that he requested department heads and elected officials provide notice by the end of January regarding potential staffing or organizational changes for the upcoming budget cycle, noting early requests were tracking similarly to last year but at a lower level than the nine new positions approved during his first year. County Administrator Kirk Flannigan added that the department head meeting later in January would include a discussion of critical needs over the next 1–3 years to support more proactive budget planning. The Board thanked Highhouse for his work and noted HR issues have been limited recently, reflecting a positive workplace culture and effective coaching support.

• Clerk – Stephen F. Graham

County Clerk Stephen Graham reported that his office was preparing for multiple petition signature verification efforts, coordinating temporary staffing, and tracking upcoming election deadlines, including ballot question language due March 13 and candidate filing periods in late February through mid-March. The Board asked about the expected signature volume for the proposed library district petition, and Graham estimated it could require approximately 1,800 verified signatures (subject to confirmation) and noted he would be attending the annual elections conference to coordinate with state partners on election process clarifications.

• County Administrator – Kirk Flannigan

County Administrator Kirk Flannigan reported on priority projects, including progress on the County's ADA transition plan with community engagement planned for late winter, ongoing planning for the Mountain Towns 2030 event, coordination meetings with ITD and potential consideration of an origin-destination traffic study, and upcoming Board discussions regarding a potential ambulance district levy. Commissioner Davis added that Senior Connection and other community partners were willing to help distribute the ADA survey and host engagement meetings, and the Board expressed appreciation for the updates and noted an interest in hearing outcomes from the National Leadership Training Program.

BOARD of COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

• FMAA Meeting Agenda Discussion

Vice-Chair Mollineaux reported receiving increased public questions and concerns about helicopter activity and low-flying aircraft near Friedman Memorial Airport, including potential impacts on nearby areas and wildlife. The Board discussed distinguishing emergency medical flights from discretionary/private traffic and agreed it was too early to form a committee but planned to seek additional information and updates from airport leadership and an upcoming LifeFlight presentation.

• Correspondence & Other

Commissioner Davis reported she was unable to attend the upcoming Wood River Water Collaborative meeting due to a conflict, and Vice-Chair Mollineaux agreed to attend as the Board's representative and provide an update at a future meeting. Davis also noted interest in monitoring an uncertain water year, with current conditions suggesting above-average water levels but below-average snowpack.

Vice-Chair Mollineaux reported that ITD is expected to release an updated statewide wildlife-vehicle collision study, and she anticipated the findings could inform upcoming subcommittee recommendations and potential next steps for the Board. She also provided an update from the Solid Waste meeting at the Twin Falls Transfer Station, noting the shredder pilot program has been highly successful in increasing hauling efficiency and could significantly reduce transportation and fuel costs across the district.

Vice-Chair Mollineaux reported receiving multiple constituent complaints about significant potholes and deteriorating asphalt along the highway corridor, including areas north and south of Ketchum near the bridge and the Elkhorn light area, with some incidents resulting in blown tires and tows. She noted ITD crews had begun patching with cold asphalt and offered to contact ITD and local officials to share concerns and seek clarification on whether the issues are related to temporary asphalt or project conditions.

Commissioner Davis commented on the ongoing history and confusion surrounding the “Stalker” name spelling, referencing a blog post that explains the background. She thanked Chair McCleary and staff for making recent updates to the signage and noted the issue was more complex than it appeared.

BREAK

LAND USE and BUILDING SERVICES HEARINGS

Also present: Land Use Director Rachel Martin; Land Use Planner Denise Ford; Land Use Planner Dawn Cieslik; Surveyor Wes Van Duser, and Opal Engineering owner Samantha Stahlnecker.

Plat Amendment – 303 Williams Street, Picabo: A public hearing and consideration of an application by Philip and Liann Arnold, for a plat amendment at Picabo Townsite Lots 11, 12 and west one-half (W ½) of the alley of Blk 9, to consolidate into one lot. Lots 11, 12 and west one-half (W ½) of the alley comprise .32 acres, zoned Medium Density Residential District (R-.40) and within Wellhead Protection District. The property is located within T1S, R20E, BM, Blaine County, Idaho.

Notice: Land Use Planner Dawn Cieslik summarized notice as: published in the Idaho Mountain Express on December 17, 2025; mailed to property owners within 300 feet of the external boundaries of the subject property on December 16, 2025, and to all political subdivisions on December 17, 2025; and posted on the property on December 17, 2025, at least seven days prior to the hearing, as evidenced by affidavits on file, with application materials posted to the Blaine County website on December 18, 2025.

Mollineaux moved, seconded by Davis, to find that notice is adequate for the Minor Plat Amendment Application and the Variance Hearing is in compliance with the applicable code Idaho 67-6512 and Blaine County Zoning Ordinance 9-30-3. Motion passed unanimously.

New Materials: Land Use Planner Dawn Cieslik reported that one new piece of material was received for the record, identified as Exhibit D1, consisting of a public comment letter on the minor plat dated December 21, 2025, and received by mail the previous day. She confirmed that no other new materials were submitted.

Applicant Presentation: Applicant representative, Surveyor, Wes Van Duser explained that the plat amendment is a procedural action to consolidate Lots 11 and 12 and a previously vacated alley into Lot 11A, while the variance request is driven by site constraints caused by extensive lava bedrock. He stated that the proposed reduced setbacks would allow construction to avoid costly excavation and accommodate the already-installed septic system without further disturbance.

Board Questions: The Board asked the applicant to clarify where reduced setbacks would allow construction to avoid bedrock, whether any utilities or rights-of-way would be affected, and if existing gravel or driveway areas would encroach into the right-of-way. The Board also requested background on the history and rationale for the partial alley vacation and why the subject property had not previously completed the required lot line amendment.

Applicant Response: The applicant explained that the proposed building location minimizes additional excavation through lava rock and that the existing gravel area functions as a driveway, which would be addressed through an encroachment permit at building permit review. He further explained that the alley

was fully vacated in 2013, with half granted to each adjacent owner, and while the neighboring property completed its lot consolidation at that time, the subject property had not, making the current minor plat a necessary step to finalize the earlier approval.

Public Comment: Chair McCleary opened public comment, hearing none, she closed public comment.

Deliberation: The Board discussed the plat amendment and variance together, finding that staff comments, mapping, and testimony adequately addressed concerns about encroachments, future road needs, and public comment related to the prior alley vacation. The Board concluded that the extensive bedrock conditions established a clear hardship, that the requested setbacks were the minimum necessary, and that both the plat amendment and variance met applicable standards and were reasonable given existing infrastructure and site constraints.

Mollineaux moved, seconded by Davis, to approve this Application by Phillip and Leanne Arnold for a 25ft Variance to the northeast corner setback at a 9ft 6in Variance to the side yard setback on Lots 11/12 and the West half of the alley for Picabo Townsite Block 9, finding that the application complies with the applicable criteria set forth under Title 9 Zoning Regulations and applicable criteria of review, subject to the following conditions in the staff report. Motion passed unanimously.

Mollineaux moved, seconded by Davis, to approve the application by Phillip and Leanne Arnold for a Minor Plat Amendment of Picabo Townsite Lots 11/12 and the West half of the alley for Block 9, finding compliance with notable Notice Requirements and the Applicable Title 9 and Title 10 Standards. Motion passed unanimously.

LAND USE and BUILDING SERVICES

• Findings of Fact: Beaver Creek Final Plat

Land Use Planner Dawn Cieslik reported that the RC District findings will be amended only to update the ordinance number to 2026, with both the findings and ordinance returning on a properly noticed agenda next week, and that this week's action is limited to the Beaver Creek final plat and recreational development agreement.

Mollineaux moved, seconded by Davis, to approve the Findings of Fact, Conclusion of Law and Decision for Land Use Application 25-51 regarding an application of The Beev LLC for the final plat of Beaver Creek Cabins, Condominiums. Motion passed unanimously.

• Agreement: Beaver Creek Recreational Development Agreement

The Board was joined remotely by the applicant's representative, Samantha Stahlnecker from Opal Engineering, who noted a potential clarification issue in the recreational development agreement; staff explained the language had been included in prior versions and was not a new change. At staff's recommendation, the Board agreed to defer approval of the agreement to a future meeting to incorporate clarifying language addressing conflicts with existing easements and to allow additional review before final action.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - Idaho Code Section 74-206(1)(a) - To consider hiring a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent and Idaho Code Section 74-206(1)(b) - Evaluation, Dismissal or Disciplining of Employees or Public Officers.

Mollineaux moved, seconded by Davis, to enter into Executive Session pursuant to - Idaho Code Section 74-206(1)(a) - To consider hiring a public officer, employee, staff member or individual agent and Idaho Code Section 74-206(1)(b) – Evaluation, Dismissal or Disciplining of Employees or Public Officers. Roll Call Vote: Mollineaux (Aye) Davis (Aye) McCleary (Aye).

EXECUTIVE SESSION CONSIDERATIONS

The Board of Blaine County Commissioners reconvened, and no action was taken.

ADJOURN:

At the hour of 4:03 p.m., with no more business before them, the County Commissioners adjourned.

Attest: _____ Approved _____
Stephen Graham Angenie McCleary
County Clerk Chair