

“Sunshine” or openness in government refers to access to public records and meetings. Regardless of what label an access law is given – “sunshine,” freedom of information, or transparency – the premise is that everyday people have the right to know what actions their government is taking.¹

The ☀️ Sunshine Report from the LWVLC Observer Corps:

Lane County Board of Commissioners

August 18, 2026 [\[agenda and webcast recording\]](#)

In a joint meeting with the Lane County Board of Health, commissioners reviewed a report on alcohol and other drug use and related programs. Noting that alcohol is the third leading cause of preventable deaths in Oregon, Community Health Analyst Luis Pimentel, Sr., shared alarming statistics from student health surveys among 8th and 11th graders: 25 percent said they had used alcohol, marijuana, or prescription drugs. Food insecurity is associated with higher rates of drug use; more than half of all students who reported being hungry almost every day were more likely to use prescription and illicit drugs.

Lane County is distributing \$214,000 in grants to six organizations with youth substance abuse prevention programs: Wellmama, Oregon Social Learning Center, Looking Glass Youth and Family Services, Whitaker Family Market, Lane County Bounty, and Relief Nursery.

Surveys have shown strong community support for sales taxes on wine and beer, which might be a deterrent to buying alcohol. Commissioner Farr said such taxes would require a state law change; so far, the legislature has been reluctant to promote this tax.

Senior Community Health Analyst Michelle Hampton reported that the state’s suicide rate among children and youth is 13.5 per 100,000, compared to the national average of 9.9. Lane County is part of a Suicide Prevention Coalition with the Lane Educational

¹ LWV Observing Your Government in Action

Service District, which provides education and outreach programs, safe weapon storage, and the 988 crisis line.

Commissioners had several questions about these reports, including how children from families with food insecurity could access alcohol and other drugs. Staff noted that young people can easily buy inexpensive alcohol drinks in containers that look like energy drinks, tea, and soda.

In other reports, the Lane County Board of Health has been awarded national health accreditation for the next five years. A \$650,000 grant through the Rural Health Transformation Program will be used for various programs in Cottage Grove, Oakridge, Mapleton, and the Siuslaw Outreach area.

In their afternoon session, Commissioners voted 3-2 in favor of two administrative motions regarding the Clean Lane Facility, including authorization of up to \$300,000 for preconstruction work to determine costs for building the facility at the Short Mountain Landfill. Commissioners Loveall and Ceniga opposed both measures, citing rising user and transfer fees and the tight county budget.

Commissioners congratulated Brittany Young, Lane County's Law Librarian, who received the Oregon Law Library Association Award for her outstanding work, including her commitment to equity, anti-racism, and library access for all and for her podcast, "Overdue."

In the Public Comments portion of the meeting, two people thanked Lane County, especially the Parks Department, for the recent work to provide access to all individuals to the top of Mt. Pisgah. With two new "track chairs" available, people with mobility disabilities can now access the trails and go all the way to the top.

 **Reported by: Judy Leahy**

Springfield School Board

July 27, 2026 [\[webcast recording\]](#)

The Springfield Board of Education voted 4-0 to appoint Matthew Brandt to fill a board seat opening created by Nicole De Graff's resignation. Brandt will serve through June 30, 2027.

The Board received 10 applications, and five candidates attended the special meeting to be interviewed: Brandt, Ky Fireside, Tracy Lilley, Hollea Puzio, and Christina Scott.

Applicants were asked to respond to these questions:

1. What is your motivation in applying for the open Board position and what unique qualities will you bring to the Board if appointed?
2. What do you believe is the role and responsibility of a school board member?

3. Describe a time you had to navigate conflict while maintaining respectful relationships. How did you go about resolving the conflict?
4. How would you balance representing the interests of multiple perspectives or constituents? Please provide an example of how you've done this in the past.
5. Given the short-term nature of this appointment, how would you quickly become a contributing member and make informed student-centered decisions? What would you need from us and staff to support you?
6. How should a Board build trust with students, staff and community?
7. The appointment of Position 4 expires June 30, 2027. If appointed today, what would success look like for you after one year?

August 5, 2026 [[webcast recording](#)]

The Board talked through issues raised during recent difficulties and set short- and long-term goals during a daylong retreat convened by Lane Educational Service District Superintendent Tenneal Wetherell, assisted by the district's Interim Superintendent Shawn Stover and Assistant Interim Superintendent Brian Megert.

The school district has worked through budget shortfalls and layoffs, compliance issues regarding its elementary science and social studies curriculum, and grievances among administrators and board members that resulted in multiple resignations. During the retreat, board members agreed to move forward. As Stover put it, "There is a sense of hope, a sense of pride, and a sense that our people are our strength."

The Board agreed on the following short-term goals:

- Clear schedules for staff presentations and other priorities at board meetings
- Timely follow-up on board requests for information
- Process for board members to schedule school visits
- Superintendent evaluation and establishment of a hiring process for a permanent superintendent

The Board agreed on the following long-term goals:

- Consideration of placing a levy on the ballot
- Facility planning and possible school closures
- More investigation of enrollment declines, exit surveys for families, and student satisfaction surveys
- Follow-up on various reports, including bullying
- State-level legislative advocacy

August 10, 2026 [[webcast recording](#)]

In a busy special meeting, Board members unanimously approved a staff bargaining agreement and were briefed on the new interim superintendent's plans for the coming school year.

Oregon School Employees Association President Melinda Blomquist spoke of a collaborative and mutually respectful bargaining process, which marked a stark contrast with interactions between the district and Springfield Education Association that resulted in the layoff of 27 teachers at the mid-year break during the last school year.

Interim Superintendent Shawn Stover reported that he plans to devote his first 100 days listening to learn and lead. He intends to ride bus routes, shadow students at each grade level, team teach with educators, attend community events, and visit every school at least twice. Based on these “listening activities,” Stover will share his plan for the remainder of the school year, which will include family surveys in the fall and spring.

The personnel report by Dustin Reese included ten new hires, eight resignations, and one leave of absence among certified teachers. Vice Chair Amber Langworthy reiterated that she would like to see information from the exit reports for all teachers leaving the district. She also requested status reports about how the district is addressing compliance with findings from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) late last spring that Springfield Public Schools were not properly addressing the teaching of all subjects.

Action items included approval of the revenue/expenditure forecast report by Brett Yancey and a resolution authorizing financing for structural repairs currently going in the district. Director Ken Kohl requested monthly progress reports on those projects.

Following two executive sessions, the Board voted to retain a private investigator, with the Chair responsible for dealing with the complaints. Each decision was approved 4-0-1 with Langworthy abstaining on one of the decisions and Kohl abstaining on the other.

Seven community members spoke during the Public Comments period on a range of topics:

- concerns about overemphasis on reading and math at the expense of other subjects;
- the need for transparency with the district’s compliance with the ODE findings;
- a request that the administration collaborate with parents to effectuate cultural change;
- requested funding for a football program for third to eighth graders in the Thurston area similar to other sports entities, so they can get a better rental rate on district fields;
- a request to restore the dual language program using funds left in the budget. One speaker, Crystal Sundstrom, said dual language programs produce students with greater academic success in much the same way that compound interest works.
- A seventh speaker, former Board Member Nicole De Graff, was given two different opportunities to comment via a remote connection, but technology issues could not be resolved.

 Reported by: Patty Sandoz and Kim Weston

Eugene Water and Electric Board of Commissioners

August 4, 2026 [[meeting agenda](#)]

The costs to ratepayers of a new water treatment facility was the top issue before the EWEB Board. Staff presented [a capital improvement and finance plan](#) that prioritizes work on the new Willamette water treatment plan and defers approximately \$36 million in improvements to year 5 or later in the 10-year cycle. Deferred projects would include hardening of pipes crossing the Willamette River, which could mean loss of water to residents in Wards 4 and 5 if a catastrophic event damaged existing water pipes.

In July, the Board voted to proceed with a 30 million gallon per day (MGD) plant, but staff reported that financing this high-output plant would max out EWEB's borrowing capacity and put the utility in a position of "extreme risk" of not being able to respond to unforeseen needs. Staff again recommended a smaller 19.4 MGD plant, which would reduce costs by \$67 million but still require significant rate increases.

Several options for financing the project were presented. The traditional financing model, which would issue bonds as necessary to fund work, results in proposed water rate increases of 19.75 percent each year until 2031, when rate increases would drop because a large part of the construction costs would be paid for. Because water tends to be a smaller part of the overall utility bill, with a 3.5 percent increase proposed for electric, staff estimates EWEB bills will increase 6.2 percent overall annually in 2027.

Commissioners agreed unanimously to scale back the plant from 30 to 19.4 MGD. Staff is scheduled to present to the Board in October final proposals for financing in 2027, with the direction not to exceed a 19.75 percent annual water rate increase.

A technical presentation to the Board provided an overview of the type of contracting recommended for this project: Construction Manager/General Contractor Contract, which requires a Request for Proposal for a Guaranteed Maximum Price. A public hearing was opened, but no one called in to comment. Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the use of this contracting method for the new treatment facility.

Two members of the public, one private and one representing the Sierra Club, encouraged the Board to establish a policy to protect current residential and commercial ratepayers from the costs of water and power for data centers, one of which is being considered in the old Hynix plant near Willow Creek.

☀️ Reported by: Jenny Lippert

Oakridge City Council

August 6, 2026 [[meeting agenda](#); [webcast recording](#)]

The Council met with tourism consultant Vanessa Tharp on projects she completed under contract with the city. Tharp recommended that recreation opportunities in Oakridge and Westfir should be promoted together, similar to promoting regional tourism events. She also suggested exploring ways to bring tour groups to the area, similar to tours offered on the Oregon coast, and relying more on high-traffic promotional resources, such as the Travel Lane County website, rather than smaller local sites.

When Councilor Brewer asked how much funding she would request if she applied for another city contract, Tharp said she hopes to work with the Council and the Rural Tourism Marketing Program (RTMP) Committee to develop a budget before reapplying. Mayor Cutchen said he would ask the RTMP Committee to create a budget with broad categories, but City Administrator James Cleavenger noted that broad categories could be difficult because requests vary significantly each year. Councilor Newell said Oakridge and Westfir are fortunate to have Tharp as an advocate, and Councilor Scott suggested that the volunteers on the tourism committee should be trusted to make more decisions.

The Council reviewed possible topics for discussion at an upcoming joint work session with the Oakridge School Board. Cutchen suggested workforce development, emergency preparedness coordination, school enrollment trends, safe routes to school, youth internship opportunities, and long-term community growth. Community Development Director Guen DiGioia suggested facility plans and a review of the multiple intergovernmental service agreements between the school and city, which were last updated in 2010.

In other business, the Council allocated \$1,207 for a new entrance sign for the recently renamed John Milandin Oakridge Industrial Park and chose a design for the sign. Friends of Milandin have agreed to contribute the remaining \$1,000 to complete this new sign to honor his work on behalf of the industrial park.

The Council also discussed and approved several revisions to supplemental paperwork for Resolution 09-2026, which would create a property tax levy to help fund the ambulance service over the next five years, with Brewer voting nay.

☀️ **Reported by: Leslie Heaton**

The Observer Corps is a group of LWVLC members who pledge to regularly attend government meetings and report back to the Lane County League. We have Observers at the County Commissioners meetings, Eugene City Council, Springfield City Council, Oakridge City Council, Lane Community College Board, Springfield School District, and Eugene Water and Electricity Board. To keep you informed, we will distribute their reports

by email twice a month. When topics arise that require action or attendance by a larger number of us, LWVLC will send out an email "Call for Action".

If you are interested in joining the Observer Corps, please contact Terry Parker, President (president@lwvlc.com) or Beatrice McKenzie (beatricem@lwvlc.org). We hope to recruit one or two members for each government group. You can attend a meeting first before you pledge to go regularly.