

# BEFORE THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

## FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON

ORDINANCE NO. \_\_\_\_\_

### IN THE MATTER OF ESTABLISHING COMMISSIONER DEPARTMENT LIAISONS AND DEFINING DELEGATED OVERSIGHT AUTHORITY

**WHEREAS**, Columbia County is governed by a Board of County Commissioners ("Board") which serves as the governing body of the County; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board is responsible for establishing County policy, approving the County budget, establishing priorities, and overseeing the administration of County government; and

**WHEREAS**, Columbia County does not have a County Administrator or County Manager serving as a single administrative authority between the Board and County departments; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board recognizes that effective County government requires regular communication, accountability, and coordination between the Board, Department Heads, Elected Officials, managers, employees, contractors, and members of the public; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board adopted Order No. 21-2025, establishing the Columbia County Policy on Board Direction, which recognizes that individual Commissioners acting individually cannot make decisions for the County, while also recognizing that Commissioners require information and assistance from County departments in carrying out their governmental responsibilities; and

**WHEREAS**, Order No. 21-2025 establishes procedures for addressing direction from individual Commissioners but does not establish a formal system for assigning individual Commissioners responsibility for ongoing oversight and coordination of particular County departments; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board finds that designating individual Commissioners as Department Liaisons will improve communication, accountability, strategic planning, budget oversight, project completion, and coordination between the Board and County departments; and

**WHEREAS,** the Board intends that a Commissioner Liaison exercise only those powers and responsibilities expressly delegated by the Board and that a Commissioner Liaison shall not possess independent authority to act for or bind the County; and

**WHEREAS,** the Board intends to maintain a clear distinction between policy oversight and day-to-day departmental administration, with Department Heads remaining responsible for the ordinary operation and management of their respective departments except where authority is expressly delegated by the Board; and

**WHEREAS,** the Board finds that establishing a formal liaison system will provide County Department Heads with a clear point of contact on the Board while establishing a defined process for matters that require consideration and action by the full Board;

**NOW, THEREFORE,**

THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON, ORDAINS AS FOLLOWS:

**SECTION 1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this ordinance is to establish a formal Commissioner Department Liaison system.

The liaison system is intended to:

1. Establish clear communication between individual County departments and the Board;
2. Provide each designated liaison with an understanding of the operations, needs, challenges, and priorities of the assigned department;
3. Improve accountability for implementation of Board-approved policies and priorities;
4. Provide ongoing oversight of significant departmental matters;
5. Improve coordination of departmental budget, capital, personnel, and strategic planning matters;
6. Identify issues before they become significant problems;
7. Improve accountability for the timely completion of Board-approved projects, programs, and initiatives;
8. Establish a defined method for escalating matters to the full Board; and
9. Provide Department Heads with clear guidance concerning the authority of a Commissioner Liaison.

## **SECTION 2. DEFINITIONS**

For purposes of this ordinance:

### **A. "Board"**

Means the Columbia County Board of County Commissioners.

### **B. "Commissioner Liaison"**

Means a County Commissioner designated by the Board to serve as the Board's primary oversight and communication representative for an assigned County department, office, program, board, commission, or other County function.

### **C. "Department Head"**

Means the person responsible for the administration and management of a County department or organizational unit.

### **D. "Department"**

Includes County departments, offices, divisions, programs, and other organizational units designated by the Board.

### **E. "Delegated Authority"**

Means authority expressly granted by the Board to a Commissioner Liaison through this ordinance, a subsequent ordinance, Board Order, Resolution, or other formal action of the Board.

### **F. "Significant Departmental Matter"**

Means a matter involving a substantial policy issue, significant expenditure, major capital project, substantial change in service delivery, significant personnel matter, major contract, legal concern, public safety concern, or other matter that could materially affect County operations, finances, or services.

## **SECTION 3. DESIGNATION OF COMMISSIONER LIAISONS**

### **A. Annual Assignment**

The Board shall annually designate Commissioners to serve as liaisons for County departments and other organizational units.

### **B. Board Order**

Liaison assignments shall be established by Board Order and shall identify:

1. The Commissioner Liaison;
2. The assigned department or organizational unit;
3. Any specific delegated authority applicable to that assignment; and
4. Any limitations on the liaison's authority.

### **C. Modification**

The Board may modify liaison assignments at any time by Board Order.

### **D. Term**

A liaison assignment shall terminate upon the expiration of the Commissioner's term, resignation from office, or removal or modification of the assignment by the Board.

## **SECTION 4. STATUS OF COMMISSIONER LIAISON**

A Commissioner Liaison acts pursuant to authority delegated by the Board of County Commissioners.

A Commissioner Liaison does not exercise authority merely because the Commissioner holds elected office.

Authority exercised pursuant to this ordinance or a subsequent Board Order shall be considered delegated Board authority, subject to the limitations established by the Board.

Nothing in this ordinance authorizes an individual Commissioner to independently make a decision for Columbia County outside the authority expressly delegated by the Board.

## **SECTION 5. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMISSIONER LIAISONS**

Each Commissioner Liaison shall:

1. Maintain regular communication with the assigned Department Head;
2. Meet regularly with the Department Head regarding departmental operations, goals, priorities, and challenges;
3. Become familiar with the department's budget, programs, contracts, major projects, and statutory responsibilities;
4. Monitor implementation of Board-approved policies and priorities;
5. Monitor progress toward Board-approved departmental goals;
6. Review significant departmental matters;
7. Communicate significant issues to the full Board;
8. Assist in identifying matters requiring Board action;
9. Participate in the Department Head's annual performance evaluation;
10. Review significant complaints or concerns relating to the department;
11. Assist the Department Head in presenting departmental needs and priorities to the Board;
12. Perform other duties specifically delegated by the Board; and
13. Assist the Department Head in monitoring and ensuring that Board-approved projects, programs, and initiatives are completed in a timely manner and consistent with the scope, budget, and objectives approved by the Board.

## **SECTION 6. REGULAR LIAISON MEETINGS**

The Commissioner Liaison and Department Head shall meet regularly.

Unless otherwise established by the Board, the liaison and Department Head should meet at least once each month.

The purpose of the meetings may include:

- Department operations;
- Budget status;
- Staffing;
- Major projects;

- Capital needs;
- Legislative or regulatory changes;
- Public concerns;
- Board priorities;
- Policy implementation;
- Performance goals; and
- Matters requiring Board action.

Liaison meetings shall not be used to circumvent the Oregon Public Meetings Law or to conduct deliberations of a quorum of the Board outside a properly noticed public meeting.

## **SECTION 7. INFORMATION AND REPORTING**

A Commissioner Liaison may request reasonable information from the assigned Department Head concerning the operation of the assigned department.

The Department Head shall provide reasonable information necessary for the liaison to perform the responsibilities delegated by the Board, subject to:

1. Applicable confidentiality requirements;
2. Attorney-client privilege;
3. Personnel confidentiality;
4. Oregon public records law;
5. Applicable federal or state law; and
6. Other legal restrictions.

The Commissioner Liaison may request that the Department Head provide periodic reports concerning departmental goals, projects, expenditures, staffing, and other significant matters.

## **SECTION 8. DEPARTMENTAL OVERSIGHT AUTHORITY**

Subject to this ordinance and any limitations established by the Board, the Commissioner Liaison shall have authority to provide oversight concerning:

1. Implementation of Board-approved policies;
2. Implementation of Board-approved departmental goals;

3. Major departmental projects;
4. Departmental budget priorities;
5. Capital improvement priorities;
6. Significant contracts;
7. Significant grant applications;
8. Proposed organizational changes;
9. Significant staffing changes;
10. Departmental performance;
11. Significant operational concerns; and
12. Other matters expressly delegated by the Board.

The purpose of such oversight is to ensure that Board-approved policies and priorities are being implemented and that the Board is informed of significant issues affecting County government.

## **SECTION 9. AUTHORITY TO REQUIRE BOARD REVIEW**

A Commissioner Liaison may require that a Significant Departmental Matter be presented to the full Board before the Department takes final action when:

1. The matter requires Board approval;
2. The matter involves a substantial policy question;
3. The matter involves a significant unbudgeted expenditure;
4. The matter materially changes a County program or service;
5. The matter creates a significant legal or financial concern;
6. The matter conflicts with an established Board policy or priority; or
7. The liaison determines that Board direction is appropriate.

When a liaison requires Board review under this section, the Department Head shall place the matter on the appropriate Board agenda or otherwise present it to the Board through established County procedures.

## **SECTION 10. BUDGET AND FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT**

The Commissioner Liaison shall have the opportunity to review significant departmental budget requests before presentation to the Board.

The Department Head shall provide the liaison reasonable notice of:

1. Significant budget requests;
2. Supplemental budget requests;
3. Significant expenditures;
4. Major purchases;
5. Capital projects;
6. Significant grant applications;
7. Major contracts;
8. Proposed new programs; and
9. Other financial matters established by Board policy or Board Order.

The liaison may:

1. Request additional information;
2. Request that a proposal be clarified;
3. Recommend approval or modification;
4. Recommend that the matter be delayed for additional information;
5. Request presentation to the full Board; or
6. Make a recommendation to the Board.

Nothing in this section permits an individual Commissioner to appropriate money, authorize an expenditure, execute a contract, or otherwise bind the County unless the Board has expressly delegated such authority.

## **SECTION 11. PERSONNEL AND DEPARTMENT HEAD OVERSIGHT**

### **A. Department Head Accountability**

The Commissioner Liaison shall serve as the Board's primary oversight of contact concerning the performance and administration of the assigned Department Head.

### **B. Annual Evaluation**

The Commissioner Liaison shall participate in the annual performance evaluation of the Department Head.

The liaison shall report to the full Board concerning:

1. Performance against established goals;
2. Departmental accomplishments;
3. Budget performance;
4. Management concerns;
5. Compliance with Board policies;
6. Significant operational concerns; and
7. Recommended goals for the following evaluation period.

### **C. Personnel Recommendations**

The liaison may make recommendations to the full Board concerning the appointment, compensation, evaluation, discipline, or termination of a Department Head when such matters are within the Board's authority.

### **D. No Independent Employee Discipline**

A Commissioner Liaison shall not independently discipline, suspend, terminate, demote, or otherwise take adverse employment action against a County employee unless such authority has been expressly delegated by the full Board and is permitted by applicable law, County ordinance, personnel rules, employment contract, or collective bargaining agreement.

## **SECTION 12. AUTHORITY CONCERNING DEPARTMENT HEADS**

The Board may, by subsequent Board Order, delegate specific authority to a Commissioner Liaison concerning an assigned Department Head.

Such delegated authority may include, but is not limited to:

1. Approval of specified administrative matters;
2. Review and approval of specified expenditures;
3. Review of personnel requests;
4. Participation in compensation decisions;
5. Approval of defined departmental projects;
6. Establishment of Board-approved performance goals;
7. Review of significant contracts;
8. Authorization to require specified reports; and
9. Other matters specifically identified by the Board.

Any such delegation shall be stated in writing and shall identify the scope and limitations of the authority delegated.

### **SECTION 13. DAY-TO-DAY DEPARTMENTAL OPERATIONS**

Unless expressly delegated by the Board, Department Heads remain responsible for the day-to-day operation and administration of their respective departments.

A Commissioner Liaison shall not:

1. Assign work to individual employees;
2. Establish individual employee schedules;
3. Countermand routine supervisory decisions;
4. Direct individual employees regarding their daily duties;
5. Conduct routine employee discipline;
6. Direct routine purchasing;
7. Direct routine hiring decisions; or
8. Otherwise interfere with ordinary departmental administration.

Nothing in this section prevents the liaison from identifying concerns, requesting information, making recommendations, or requiring matters within the liaison's delegated authority to be brought before the Board.

### **SECTION 14. INDIVIDUAL COMMISSIONER DIRECTION**

Order No. 21-2025, Columbia County Policy on Board Direction, remains in effect.

Except when acting pursuant to authority expressly delegated to the Commissioner Liaison under this ordinance or subsequent Board action, an individual Commissioner shall comply with Order No. 21-2025.

When a Commissioner Liaison is acting within the specific authority delegated by the Board, the liaison's direction shall be considered an exercise of delegated Board authority.

When a matter exceeds the liaison's delegated authority, the Department Head shall follow the procedures established by Order No. 21-2025 and bring the matter to the full Board when required.

## **SECTION 15. CONFLICT BETWEEN LIAISON AND DEPARTMENT HEAD**

If a Department Head believes that a Commissioner Liaison is requesting action outside the liaison's delegated authority, the Department Head shall advise the liaison of the concern.

If the disagreement cannot be resolved, the matter shall be referred to the full Board.

Pending Board direction, the Department Head shall not be required to take an action that:

1. Exceeds the liaison's delegated authority;
2. Violates County ordinance, order, policy, contract, or Board decision;
3. Violates state or federal law;
4. Would create an unauthorized expenditure; or
5. Would otherwise expose the County to significant legal or financial risk.

## **SECTION 16. FULL BOARD AUTHORITY RESERVED**

Nothing in this ordinance limits or transfers the ultimate authority of the full Board.

The following matters shall remain reserved to the full Board unless otherwise expressly authorized by law or Board action:

1. Adoption or amendment of County policy;
2. Adoption of County ordinances;
3. Adoption of the County budget;
4. Appropriation of County funds;
5. Major contracts requiring Board approval;
6. Appointment or removal of officials where Board action is required;
7. Major capital projects requiring Board approval;
8. Litigation decisions requiring Board action;
9. Changes to County-wide programs or services;

10. Matters specifically reserved to the full Board by law, ordinance, Board Order, or policy;  
and
11. Any matter upon which the Board determines that a full Board decision is necessary.

## **SECTION 17. ELECTED OFFICIALS AND INDEPENDENT COUNTY OFFICERS**

Nothing in this ordinance shall be construed to authorize a Commissioner Liaison to direct an elected County official or an officer whose authority is established independently by Oregon law.

This ordinance shall not limit the statutory authority of the:

- Sheriff;
- District Attorney;
- County Clerk;
- County Treasurer;
- County Assessor;
- Justice of the Peace; or
- Any other officer whose authority is established by state law.

The Board may establish liaison relationships with such offices for purposes of communication, coordination, budget review, and other matters within the Board's lawful authority.

## **SECTION 18. CONTRACTORS AND VENDORS**

A Commissioner Liaison shall not independently direct a County contractor or vendor unless the Board has expressly delegated such authority.

Direction to contractors and vendors shall comply with Order No. 21-2025, County contracts, procurement policies, and applicable law.

## **SECTION 19. PUBLIC MEETINGS AND ETHICS**

Commissioners and Department Heads shall perform liaison responsibilities consistent with:

1. Oregon Public Meetings Law;
2. Oregon Public Records Law;
3. Oregon Government Ethics Law;
4. Applicable County ethics policies;
5. Confidentiality requirements; and
6. Other applicable federal, state, and local law.

Nothing in this ordinance authorizes a Commissioner Liaison to conduct deliberations of a quorum of the Board outside a properly noticed public meeting.

## **SECTION 20. ANNUAL REPORT**

Each Commissioner Liaison shall provide an annual report to the Board concerning the assigned department.

The report should address:

1. Department goals;
2. Progress toward goals;
3. Budget performance;
4. Major projects;
5. Staffing issues;
6. Significant accomplishments;
7. Significant concerns;
8. Recommended priorities; and
9. Matters requiring future Board action.

The Board may establish a different reporting schedule when appropriate.

## **SECTION 21. BOARD ORDER ESTABLISHING LIAISON ASSIGNMENTS**

Following adoption of this ordinance, the Board shall adopt a Board Order identifying the initial Commissioner Liaison assignments.

The Board Order shall identify any special authority delegated to a liaison beyond the general responsibilities established by this ordinance.

## **SECTION 22. IMPLEMENTATION**

The Board shall establish the initial liaison assignments within sixty (60) days following the effective date of this ordinance.

The Board may adopt administrative procedures necessary to implement this ordinance.

## **SECTION 23. SEVERABILITY**

If any section, subsection, sentence, clause, phrase, or portion of this ordinance is determined to be invalid or unconstitutional, such determination shall not affect the validity of the remaining provisions.

## **SECTION 24. EFFECTIVE DATE**

This ordinance shall become effective thirty (30) days after adoption, unless a different effective date is required by applicable law.

**ADOPTED** this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2026.

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

**FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON**