

Final COPY
Torrance County Board of Commissioners
Regular Commission Meeting
August 26, 2026 9:00 AM

Commissioners Present:

RYAN SCHWEBACH – COUNTY CHAIRMAN
KEVIN MCCALL- COUNTY COMMISSIONER
LINDA JARAMILLO – COUNTY VICE-CHAIR

Others Present:

STEPHANIE REYNOLDS- COUNTY MANAGER
MICHELLE JONES-DEPUTY COUNTY MANAGER - Absent
MICHAEL GARCIA- COUNTY ATTORNEY
SYLVIA CHAVEZ-COUNTY CLERK
GENELL MORRIS- ADMINISTRATIVE CLERK
DON GOEN – PLANNING & ZONING DIRECTOR

1. **Call to Order:** Chairman Schwebach called the meeting to order at 9:06 AM

2. **Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation:** Pledge led by Chairman Schwebach; Commissioner McCall said the Invocation.

3. **Changes to the Agenda:** Move 7A & 7B after Approval/Action. Item 8E needed to be a Public Hearing; it was not stated on the agenda. Commission will allow public comment, but no action will be taken today on this agenda item.

4. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Debby Maberry, Cooperative Extension Service & 4-H:

- Ms. Maberry is the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service & 4-H Program, Assistant Professor, and community development educator serving Torrance County. Has worked in the community for approximately 21 years. Provides programming countywide, despite being based in/representing District 3. Has extensive personal experience with the County fairgrounds as a 4-H volunteer, club leader, educator, and fair participant.
 - Expressed appreciation to the County Commission for its work and long-term investment in the fairgrounds.
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- Personal experiences were shared to demonstrate the importance of the new fairgrounds building.
- Emphasized the building's potential as a countywide community education and development center, not simply a facility for the annual fair.

Fairgrounds Improvements & Recent Fair

- Ms. Maberry recently completed the County Fair and reported that the experience in the new building was significantly improved.
- Specifically praised:
 - The air conditioning, which provided relief from the extreme heat.
 - The ability to display projects indoors rather than exposing them to sun, monsoon weather, and rain.
 - The overall quality and usefulness of the new facility.
- She noted that for many years, participants had to display projects outdoors and endure difficult weather conditions.
- She brought:
 - Photographs from this year's fair.
 - Examples of first-place projects/items.
 - Cookies for commissioners and attendees to enjoy.

Long-Term Use of the Fairgrounds

- Ms. Maberry stated that she has likely used the fairgrounds more than anyone else in the room over her 21 years in the county.
- Past and current uses include: 4-H club meetings, 4-H project meetings, Fair Board meetings, Diabetic cooking classes, Archery, Air rifle, Horse projects, Fiber arts, Ceramics, Other youth educational activities.
- She emphasized that the facility has supported both youth programming and adult education.

Expanded Countywide Programming

- The new building allows Extension to centralize activities instead of transporting large quantities of equipment throughout the county.
- Ms. Maberry serves residents throughout Torrance County, including communities such as Encino, Stanley, Clines Corner, Other municipalities, and rural communities.
- Having a suitable facility at the fairgrounds means she can:

- Conduct more classes in one central location.
- Reduce the need to haul equipment around the county.
- Expand the number and variety of programs offered.
- One example is pressure-cooking/food-preservation education, which previously was difficult because the speaker's office only has a glass stovetop that is unsuitable for certain activities.

4-H Program Philosophy

- Ms. Maberry emphasized that 4-H is much broader than livestock projects.
- She recalled initially being involved with the Moriarty Garden Club and learning that many community members viewed 4-H primarily as a children's livestock program.
- She highlighted the wide variety of 4-H projects and the importance of supporting both:
 - Indoor educational projects, such as gardening, quilting, ceramics, and food-related skills.
 - Outdoor/livestock projects.
- She referenced the 4-H catalog containing approximately 200 different projects and explained her goal of making 4-H accessible to children regardless of:
 - Where they live.
 - Whether their families own property.
 - Their family's financial resources.

Ms. Maberry's Background & Commitment to Education

- Ms. Maberry described how her own educational experiences influenced her approach to Extension programming.
- She previously had opportunities to learn skills such as: Archery, Home economics, Drafting, and Printing.
- She wants to provide comparable opportunities to local youth.
- She stated that she wants every child in the community to have opportunities to: Explore different interests, learn practical skills, develop confidence, discover potential careers and areas of talent, and become as successful as possible.
- She also noted that 4-H helped her develop her own public-speaking skills, particularly as an adult over the past 21 years.

Future Educational Opportunities at the Fairgrounds

- The speaker sees significant potential for the facility to become a community center for hands-on education.
- Potential programs specifically identified include Ceramics, Food preservation, Cooking and nutrition classes, Archery and air rifle, Fiber arts, Other Extension and 4-H projects.
- She has written a new ceramics project book for 4-H and has traveled throughout New Mexico teaching ceramics to youth.
- She said state Extension specialists are frequently looking for appropriate locations to hold educational classes and could potentially use the new fairgrounds facilities.

Community & Economic Development

- A major theme of the presentation was that youth programming and economic development are closely connected.
- The speaker expressed concern that many young people who participate in 4-H eventually leave Torrance County for college, Employment, or long-term opportunities elsewhere.
- She noted that many former local youth attend school in Texas and ultimately remain outside the County.
- Young people who remain in the area may have to commute to Albuquerque for employment.
- She referenced her husband's experience commuting to Albuquerque for 12 years as an example of the area's limited employment opportunities.
- She emphasized that the county needs to create sustainable, living-wage employment opportunities so young people have a reason to remain or return.
- She cautioned against relying too heavily on the prison as an employment source.
- She also stated that jobs at businesses such as Family Dollar and Dollar General generally do not provide sufficient income to support long-term economic stability.

Adult & Senior Programming

- Extension programming also benefits older residents.
- Ms. Maberry described teaching seniors practical, hands-on skills that can help them supplement Social Security income.
- She views these educational programs as an important component of community resilience and household financial support.

Overall Vision for the Fairgrounds

- Ms. Maberry characterized the improved fairgrounds as: A source of community pride, A centrally located community center, A place where residents of different ages and communities can gather and learn, and a facility capable of supporting year-round programming rather than being used only during the annual fair.
- She encouraged the County Commission to continue investing in and supporting the fairgrounds and the opportunities it creates.

Albert Beckwith, Resident of McIntosh and New Mexico Veteran:

- Mr. Beckwith described a life-threatening medical emergency approximately three weeks ago involving an aortic embolism that was at risk of rupturing and required emergency heart surgery.
- At approximately 3:00 a.m., Mr. Beckwith called an ambulance. However, emergency responders took approximately 40 minutes to locate the home because the area has no street signs or adequate addressing/signage.
- The speaker emphasized that the problem is not limited to one emergency:
 - GPS does not accurately identify or locate their residence.
 - The Community Service Act transportation program for veterans reportedly has difficulty locating residents in the area.
 - Veteran transportation services are also affected because drivers cannot reliably find the homes.
- During the medical emergency, the speaker ultimately had to stand at the end of the road with a flashlight so the ambulance crew could identify the correct location.
- The speaker expressed strong appreciation for local first responders and paramedics, stressing that they are doing their best but are being placed in an extremely difficult situation because they lack reliable location information.
- The speaker characterized the lack of signage as a public safety and emergency-response issue, particularly for:
 - Veterans and disabled residents.
 - Elderly or medically vulnerable residents.
 - Anyone experiencing a life-threatening emergency when every minute matters.
- Mr. Beckwith explained that residents deliberately chose the rural area because they value peace, quiet, and living in the Country, but stated that rural living should not mean being inaccessible to emergency services, also raised concerns about property security

and lack of protection in the area, stating that residents often feel responsible for watching over nearby properties.

- Mr. Beckwith referenced a previous incident in which machinery was stolen from property across from their home. The speaker said authorities subsequently asked whether they had seen or heard anything and stated that they would have reported anything they observed.
- Mr. Beckwith identified themselves as a veteran who served the Country and is now disabled and expressed frustration that changes and improvements have reportedly been promised for a long time but have not been implemented.
- Mr. Beckwith also described receiving advice from the sheriff not to take actions that could result in law enforcement having to respond to the property. The speaker expressed frustration with the perceived lack of adequate protection and used forceful language regarding trespassers.
- Overall, Mr. Beckwith's primary request was for concrete improvements to rural addressing, street signage, GPS/location accuracy, emergency access, and veteran transportation services.

Rebecca Peckarske, McIntosh Resident:

- A recent transplant to New Mexico from Wisconsin.
- Has lived in McIntosh for approximately one year.
- Shared her perspective as a new resident who has lived in several different places, including Siberia and urban communities.

Positive Perspective on Torrance County

- Ms. Peckarske began by emphasizing that she considers New Mexico and Torrance County among the best places in the world.
- She specifically praised the local community for being: Welcoming to newcomers, Engaged and willing to participate, Supportive of neighbors, Interested in helping their community, and invested in the future of Torrance County.
- She expressed appreciation for how warmly she has been welcomed as someone relocating from Wisconsin.

Community's Desire for Responsible Growth

- Ms. Peckarske stated that residents want Torrance County to grow, but they want that growth to occur in the right way.

- She emphasized that community concerns about development are generally rooted in a desire to protect the county rather than opposition to progress.
- Issues she hears residents discussing include Water availability and sustainability, Land and property, Privacy, Public safety, and preservation of the community's quality of life and rural character.

Perspective on Community Concerns

- Ms. Peckarske stressed that residents' concerns are not motivated by selfishness or malicious intent.
- She believes people are primarily trying to make a living and raise their families. Protect their homes and property. Preserve the community they value. Ensure that future development strengthens rather than harms Torrance County.
- She noted that the county has significant promise and potential and encouraged local leaders to protect that potential.

Message to County Commissioners

- Ms. Peckarske asked Commissioners to keep the community's long-term potential and residents' concerns in mind when making decisions.
- She encouraged decision-makers to remember that residents are genuinely trying to live, work, and maintain a good quality of life in the county.
- Her comments emphasized the importance of thoughtful, responsible, community-centered growth.

Caleb Ortiz:

- Mr. Ortiz stated that they have learned a great deal over the preceding several weeks and expressed frustration with what they characterized as the Commission's handling of Project Mars.
- Mr. Ortiz criticized Commissioners for appearing, in their view, to defend and justify signing nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) and pursuing Project Mars by citing:
 - Their responsibility to act in the best interests of Torrance County.
 - Their duty to explore economic-development opportunities.
- The speaker referenced comments made during the previous week's meeting, when commissioners reportedly sought community input regarding economic development and expressed concern about the county's future, including how to create opportunities for local families and children.

- Mr. Ortiz said they could not tell the Commission what Torrance County should do but emphasized what they believed the county should not do.
- They strongly objected to what they described as the Commission conducting negotiations or pursuing the project without adequate public knowledge or involvement.
- Mr. Ortiz accused the Commission of:
 - Acting contrary to its role as public servants.
 - Functioning as private agents for large corporations.
 - Potentially facilitating the acquisition or loss of ranch land and the community's existing way of life.
 - Supporting a corporate project that could involve significant industrial activity and potentially cause major changes to the county.
- Mr. Ortiz also raised concerns about County ordinances and infrastructure costs, asserting that Torrance County residents could be required to bear infrastructure expenses associated with large corporations.
- Mr. Ortiz stated that public trust in the Commission has been seriously damaged, saying that residents had previously asked commissioners about Project Mars and its implications but were unable to obtain information because Commissioners were bound by confidentiality requirements.
- Public-records requests: The speaker stated that residents had to file IPRs (public-records requests) to obtain information about the project.
 - They specifically referenced T.J. Holt, stating that he was able to obtain information simply by asking.
 - Mr. Ortiz said they filed an IPRA request on July 14 and, at the time of the comment, had still not received the requested information more than a month and a half later.
- Mr. Ortiz characterized the delay in receiving the requested records as unacceptable and frustrating.
- The comment concluded with the speaker thanking the Commission.

Ernest Ortiz:

- Mr. Ortiz accused the County Commissioners of misleading the public regarding Project Mars.

- Asserted that the County has not actually lost or ended Project Mars, but that the project has merely been postponed.
- Stated that opponents of the project intend to continue their efforts into the next legislative/session period.
- Urged the Commissioners to return money received from corporate interests, referring to funds associated with the project. Listen more closely to the constituents and residents of Torrance County. Consider the community's concerns and opposition when making future decisions regarding Project Mars.

***Zoom – None**

Public Comment for agenda item 8E

9:25 AM

Ida Lucero:

Swearing-In and Purpose of Testimony

- **County Attorney Mike Garcia** explained that the testimony was being taken under oath because the County intends to incorporate the testimony into the official record for a future public hearing concerning the agenda item.
- Mr. Garcia asked the witness to:
 - State their name.
 - Swear to tell the truth in their testimony.
- Ms. Lucero affirmed that they would tell the truth.

Public Notice and Publication

- Ms. Lucero asked how the upcoming public hearing would be communicated to the public.
- Chairman Schwebach explained that the item would be published in the County's agenda in the same manner as other public-hearing items.
- The item is expected to identify:
 - The ordinance under consideration.
 - ~~The action being considered— whether to approve or not approve the ordinance.~~

- The fact that the matter is a public hearing and action item.
- The information will be published in the same location where County agendas are normally posted, so the public can review the matter in advance.

Timing of the Public Hearing

- Ms. Lucero asked whether the public hearing would occur in the near future.
- Chairman Schwebach stated that the matter is scheduled for the next regular County meeting on September 9, 2026.
- The public will be notified through the posted agenda and public-hearing notice.
- At the future meeting:
 - The matter will be brought forward as a public hearing.
 - Individuals wishing to speak for or against the matter will be sworn in.
 - Members of the public will have an opportunity to provide comments and express their views.
 - After public testimony is received, the hearing will be formally closed.
 - The matter may then proceed as an action item for consideration by the County.

Status of Approval

- Ms. Lucero asked whether the underlying matter had already been approved.
- Chairman Schwebach clarified that the matter itself has not yet been approved.
- Commissioner McCall distinguished this from the inducement resolution, which has already been approved.
- The approved inducement resolution allows the process to move forward but does not constitute final approval of the matter currently scheduled for public hearing/action.

Audra Tapia, Resident:

- Audra Tapia provided comment concerning the proposed project and the process by which affected landowners and residents were informed.
- Ms. Tapia expressed concern that:
 - It was difficult to obtain information about when the meeting would occur and when residents could provide public comment.
 - Landowners were not adequately consulted before the project moved forward.

- Residents were not allowed to provide their opinions or indicate whether they wanted the proposed project on or near their properties.
- She stated that affected property owners should have a voice and a choice regarding projects proposed for their property or surrounding area.
- Ms. Tapia stated clearly that she is opposed to the project being located on or around her property.
- At the Commission's request, Ms. Tapia affirmed under oath that her testimony was truthful so it could be included in the official record.

Art Tapia, Resident:

- Art Tapia, a lifelong resident, addressed the Commission regarding the same agenda item.
- Mr. Tapia explained that information about the matter had been provided to residents late the previous evening, leaving him and other community members with little time to understand the issue.
- He stated that several residents were present and wanted clarification regarding:
 - What the project involves.
 - What the agenda item concerns.
 - How the project could affect the community.
- Mr. Tapia clarified that he was not requesting to testify at that time but was seeking information about the proposal.
- The Commission advised him that a representative, Mr. Burpo, would provide a presentation later in the meeting explaining the project in greater detail.
- Mr. Tapia was informed that the presentation would occur that day.

Public Access to Agendas and Minutes

- **Commissioner Jaramillo** asked Stephanie to explain how members of the public can access meeting agendas and minutes.
- **County Manager Reynolds** explained that:
 - Meeting agendas are available on the County website.
 - Agendas are also posted at the County building, including locations outside and inside the building.
 - Residents may request to have agendas emailed directly to them.

- For this particular project, the County planned additional public notice through the Independent and potentially the Mountainair Dispatch to reach residents who obtain local information through those publications.
- Regarding minutes:
 - Meeting minutes are available on the County website and through the Clerk's Office.
 - Minutes remain draft documents until approved by the County Commission.
 - Once approved, the minutes become the official legal record of the Commission's proceedings.

Don Great, Loma Parda resident, on Zoom:

- Mr. Great was sworn in and stated that he would provide truthful testimony.
- He expressed strong opposition to the proposed PNM 345 kV transmission line.
- His primary concern was the potential route of the transmission line:
 - He stated that the proposed line could potentially pass almost directly over his house.
 - He said that a large portion of Loma Parda residents are also opposed to the proposed route.
- Mr. Great stated that residents intend to continue opposing and fighting the proposed transmission line.
- He identified Loma Parda as being north of Highway 60 near Abo, clarifying the location for the Commission.

Concluded 9:34 AM

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. COMMISSION: Request Approval of the August 12, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes of the Board of County Commissioners.

Motion: **Chairman Schwebach** motioned to approve the minutes; **seconded by Vice-Chair Jaramillo**.

- Roll Call Vote:
 - ~~Schwebach~~ Yes
 - McCall – Yes

- Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

6. Consent Agenda:

- a) **FINANCE:** Request Approval of Payables with a date range of August 4, 2026, through August 19, 2026.

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to approve; **seconded** by **Commissioner McCall**.

- Roll Call Vote:
 - Schwebach – Yes
 - McCall – Yes
 - Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

7. PRESENTATION: Heard after 8D

A. SUPPORTIVE SERVICES for VETERAN FAMILIES – Michelle Fraire, Director. New Mexico Veterans Integration Center with information to share.

B. FIRST AMERICAN FINANCIAL ADVISORS, INC. - Robert Burpo, President. Industrial Revenue Bond (IRB) PILOT presentation, informational/educational.

8. APPROVALS/ACTION ITEM:

A. CLERK’S: Request approval of MOU between Torrance County and the Office of the Secretary of State for the 2026 General Election.

Sylvia Chavez, County Clerk:

- The County Clerk presented the standard MOU with the State for funding the November general election.
- The State has allocated \$59,049.69 to Torrance County for the general election.
- The funding amount is approximately \$8,200 less than the amount provided for the primary election.
- The Clerk explained that the lower allocation is not expected to negatively affect the County's ability to conduct the general election.
- Following the primary election, the County reviewed actual expenditures and reimbursements and returned approximately \$9,000 in unused funding.

- Based on the County's actual election expenses, the Clerk stated that the \$59,049.69 allocation should be sufficient to conduct the General Election. However, some expenses may ultimately need to be covered from the County's election budget.

State Reimbursement Requirements

- The Clerk explained that the State has become more specific about which election expenses qualify for reimbursement.
- Some expenses that counties previously anticipated being reimbursed for are now considered non-reimbursable and must be paid from the County's own budget.
- The Clerk noted that the funding breakdown presented in this MOU was clearer and less confusing than previous funding documents.

Rural County Technology Challenge – MiFi Devices

- A significant concern raised by the Clerk involved MiFi/mobile internet devices used to support election operations.
- Torrance County is rural; not all polling locations have reliable internet access.
- Election officials therefore use MiFi devices to provide the necessary internet connectivity at certain polling locations.
- The Clerk stated that MiFi expenses are currently not considered an allowable reimbursement expense under the State's funding rules.
- As a result, the County must currently pay those costs from its own election budget.
- She explained that approximately five smaller/rural Counties are pushing back on this policy and communicating with the Secretary of State's Office (SOS) in an effort to have MiFi expenses recognized as an allowable election expense in the future.
- The Clerk hopes the issue can be resolved before the next election cycle.

Explanation for the Reduced Funding

- In response to a Commissioner's question about why the allocation was lower, the Clerk explained that:
 - The State has reviewed eligible election expenses more closely.
 - Certain expenses are no longer eligible for reimbursement.
 - State election funding must be distributed among all 33 New Mexico Counties.
 - The State is therefore applying tighter standards to determine which expenses each County can claim.
- The Clerk stated that the County can generally operate the election within the amount allocated by the State.
- However, unexpected or non-reimbursable costs—such as MiFi connectivity—must be absorbed by the County.
- She reiterated that the \$8,200 reduction should not materially affect the County's ability to conduct the November general election.

Election Outlook

- The Clerk expressed hope that Torrance County will have a busy general election.
- She indicated that her office is prepared to conduct the election using the available funding and existing resources.

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to approve; **seconded** by **Vice-Chair Jaramillo**

- Roll Call Vote:
 - Schwebach – Yes
 - McCall – Yes
 - Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

B. GRANTS: Discussion and request for possible approval to apply for Capital Outlay funds in the amount of \$5,000,000.

Jody Cornwall, Grants Administrator:

- Jody Cornwall requested authorization to apply for newly established Capital Development Program funds.
- Ms. Cornwall explained that the program is relatively new and that the Legislature had not yet fully finalized the program, but the application period was scheduled to open on August 31 for approximately four weeks.
- She emphasized the short application and expenditure timelines and requested Commission approval to proceed with applications.

Capital Development Program

- Ms. Cornwall explained that the funding appears to provide two primary opportunities:
 - Project completion: Funding to fully complete a project or bring it to a usable phase when the total project cost is below \$5 million.
 - Planning and design: Funding for capital projects with an estimated total cost exceeding \$5 million.
- Applicants must have at least 25% of project funding already secured.
- The funds must reportedly be used within two years.
- Commissioners discussed whether the program provides up to \$5 million per application and whether the County could submit more than one application.

- Ms. Cornwall indicated that there did not appear to be a stated restriction preventing the County from submitting multiple applications, although she planned to obtain clarification.

ICIP Requirement

- One initial obstacle was that eligible projects must appear on the State's Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan (ICIP).
- The County had removed the fairgrounds project from the current ICIP.
- Ms. Cornwall identified an outstanding prior appropriation for the fairgrounds, which allowed the project to be returned to the ICIP.
- She updated the project description to include the proposed classroom and office-space expansion for Cooperative Extension.
- The County Administration Building is already included on the ICIP and meets the basic eligibility requirement.

Two Potential Projects

1. County Administration Building

- Commissioners discussed using the program to help close the funding gap for the new County Administration Building.
- The project is estimated at approximately \$17 million.
- The County currently has a funding shortfall estimated at approximately \$2–\$3 million.
- The Commission discussed a potential \$5 million application to help address the remaining funding needs.
- Commissioners noted that construction costs could continue increasing and that obtaining additional capital funding would help protect the project from future cost overruns.
- Although a detailed construction bid was not yet available, an architectural estimate exists.
- Commissioners discussed the need for a detailed breakdown of anticipated expenses before determining the final application amount.

2. Fairgrounds / Cooperative Extension Expansion

- The second potential application would continue the originally planned fairgrounds project, specifically the expansion intended to provide Cooperative Extension classroom and office space.

- The project is already approximately 95% designed.
- The County had previously stopped construction when funding became insufficient.
- Existing design work, utility planning, and prior work with Brent Franklen were identified as advantages that could make the project relatively quick to complete.
- The estimated remaining cost was discussed as approximately \$2.5–\$3 million.
- Ms. Cornwall entered approximately \$3 million for construction and \$200,000 for design in the capital system.
- Brent Franklen reportedly indicated that \$3 million should be sufficient to complete the planned addition.
- Commissioners noted that the original design by Studio Southwest may actually provide more space than currently needed, but completing the already-designed project could be the quickest path to obtaining a usable facility.

Cooperative Extension Space

- Commissioners discussed the future location of the Cooperative Extension office.
- It was clarified that the current plans for the new County Administration Building do not include space for Extension.
- The long-term goal had been to move Extension into the fairgrounds expansion.
- Vice-Chair Jaramillo acknowledged the importance of Extension's work and the need to provide the department with an appropriate facility eventually.
- It was discussed that funding for the Extension facility could potentially be pursued separately at a later date.
- Commissioners also noted that the current County building has significant deficiencies and unsatisfactory working conditions, creating a need to address employee space and facility conditions.
- It was clarified that adding an extension to the Administration Building at this stage is not considered practical, particularly because the County has already entered into a contract based on the current design.

Matching Funds

- The program requires the County to have 25% matching/secured funding.
 - The Administration Building already has sufficient County funding to satisfy the 25% requirement.
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- For the fairgrounds/Extension project, the potential County match was discussed:

- At a \$2.5 million project cost, the 25% share would be approximately \$625,000.
- Commissioners discussed whether previous awards associated with the existing fairgrounds project might qualify toward the required match.
- The final amount to request would depend on confirmation of eligible costs, available matching funds, and State program requirements.

Commissioners' Discussion & Direction

- Commissioners generally supported pursuing both funding opportunities simultaneously rather than choosing only one project initially.
- The reasoning included:
 - Both projects appear to be shovel-ready.
 - The Administration Building is already on the ICIP.
 - The fairgrounds expansion has approximately 95% completed design work.
 - The State appears interested in funding projects that can be completed quickly.
 - Submitting both applications provides the County with an opportunity to maximize available capital funding.
- Commissioners stated that if the State ultimately limits the County to one application, the County Administration Building should receive priority.
- Commissioner McCall emphasized the importance of taking advantage of available funding while the opportunity exists.

Discussion of State Capital Funds

- Commissioner discussion suggested that the new program may be related to State capital-outlay funds previously clawed back from projects that were not sufficiently "shovel ready."
- The theory presented was that the State may be reallocating previously committed but unused funds to communities that have projects ready to move forward.
- Commissioners noted that this could explain:
 - The short application window.
 - The requirement to spend the funds within two years.
 - The emphasis on projects that are already substantially designed and ready for construction.

- This interpretation was discussed as a possibility rather than a confirmed explanation of the program.

Upcoming Training & Clarification

- Ms. Cornwall stated that a training webinar/video is scheduled for September 1, which she planned to attend.
- She expects the training to clarify eligibility requirements, whether multiple applications are permitted. Funding limits. Matching-fund requirements. Other program provisions.
- Additional clarification was needed before finalizing the exact amounts and applications.

Potential Special/Emergency Meeting

- Ms. Cornwall advised the Commission that if the County receives an award, there may be only 14 calendar days to fully execute the agreement.
- Because of the County's meeting schedule, this could effectively provide only about eight working/calendar days to complete the required action.
- She warned that the Commission may therefore need to hold a special meeting to approve and execute the agreement within the State's deadline.

Motion: Commissioner McCall motioned to approve possibly two contracts, with the Admin building being the priority; **seconded by Vice-Chair Jaramillo.**

- Roll Call Vote:
 - Schwebach – Yes
 - McCall – Yes
 - Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

C. FIRE/EMS: Discussion and request for guidance and approval to place a monetary cap vs. a number of PRN/seasonal employees in the Fire/EMS Department.

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief:

- Opened discussion regarding expanding the use of part-time seasonal PRN employees, with a particular focus on developing a seasonal wildland team for next year.
- ~~The current program limits the department to three seasonal PRN employees.~~

- Leadership is requesting flexibility in how many PRNs can be hired/used, while maintaining a firm budgetary limit.

Current Budget & Program Status

- A dedicated budget line item was established for seasonal PRN employees this fiscal year.
- Approved budget: \$40,000.
- Approximately \$5,000 has been spent since July 1.
- Approximately \$35,000 remains available based on the figures discussed.
- Leadership emphasized that they are not requesting an increase to the \$40,000 budget.

Requested Change

- Current restriction: Maximum of three seasonal PRN employees.
- Requested approach: Remove the employee-count restriction and instead manage the program through the \$40,000 monetary cap.
- This would allow the department to use, for example, eight or ten PRNs, provided total expenditures remain within the approved \$40,000.
- Once the \$40,000 is exhausted, the department would return to leadership/appropriate decision-makers to request consideration of additional funding or continuation.

Rationale for Flexibility

- The number of PRNs needed may vary depending on availability and operational needs.
- Many PRN employees work for other agencies and may only be available to the department once or twice per month.
- Even limited availability provides value because it:
 - Increases staffing flexibility.
 - Provides additional operational support.
 - Allows the department to evaluate potential future full-time employees.
 - Allows prospective employees to experience the department and determine whether they are a good fit.
 - Brings in personnel with experience from other agencies, providing opportunities to learn different practices and approaches.
- Leadership characterized the arrangement as both a staffing resource and a recruitment tool.

Future Seasonal Wildland Team

- The department is considering using this flexibility to develop a seasonal wildland team beginning next year.
- The goal would be to demonstrate the operational benefits of the program during the current period and use those results to support future expansion.
- Leadership would be able to return next year with measurable results, including:
 - Staffing increases.
 - Wildland team development.
 - Operational benefits.
 - Recruitment successes.
 - Overall value of the PRN program.

Motion: Commissioner McCall motioned to approve, staying within the same monetary budget of \$40,000; **seconded by Vice-Chair Jaramillo.**

- Roll Call Vote:
 - Schwebach – Yes
 - McCall – Yes
 - Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

D. FIRE/EMS/UNION: Discussion/Request approval MOU for compensatory time.

Julie Fill, President, Local 5441:

- Presented a request on behalf of the firefighters regarding compensatory time for overtime.
- Torrance County already has an ordinance allowing county employees to choose between overtime pay or compensatory time when they work overtime.
- The firefighters are requesting to be included under the same provision through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- The proposed change would recognize the firefighters' longer annual work schedule:
 - A standard 40-hour employee works approximately 2,080 hours per year and has a maximum of 160 hours of compensatory time.

- Firefighters average approximately 2,916 hours per year because of their longer workweek.
 - Based on the same proportional calculation, firefighters are requesting a maximum of approximately 230 hours of compensatory time.
- Ms. Fill emphasized that the request represents the same 20% proportional increase applied to the firefighters' higher annual hours.
- Once the firefighter compensatory-time maximum is reached, the existing rules would apply, and additional overtime would be handled accordingly.
- Discussion with Commissioner McCall / County representatives
 - The Commissioners asked whether there would be any issue with establishing a separate compensatory-time cap for firefighters.
 - It was explained that under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), public-safety employees, including firefighters and law enforcement, have different thresholds for when overtime applies.
 - The County indicated that it could establish a different contractual cap for firefighters through an MOU without creating an FLSA liability concern.
 - It was clarified that the County already has different overtime structures for various employee groups:
 - General County employees generally reach overtime after 40 hours per week.
 - Public-safety employees, such as sheriff's personnel, have different FLSA overtime thresholds.
 - The requested firefighter provision would therefore establish a separate compensatory-time maximum appropriate to the firefighters' work schedule.
- Union representation
 - Ms. Fill confirmed that the firefighters are represented by a union.
 - She stated that the department is 100% unionized except for probationary employees.
- Negotiation history
 - A question was raised as to why the compensatory-time provision had not been included during the previous contract negotiations.
 - Ms. Fill explained that the issue was brought up during negotiations, but it was not approved at that time. She indicated that she was unsure why the provision was ultimately not included.

- Commissioner/County response
 - The proposal received a generally favorable response.
 - Commissioner McCall indicated that the request made sense, particularly given the firefighters' longer work schedule and the proportional nature of the requested increase.
- Proposed action / next steps
 - If the Commission approves the request, the firefighter compensatory-time provision will be incorporated into the agreement/MOU and adopted into the next year's agreement.
 - The requested firefighter maximum is approximately 230 hours of compensatory time, consistent with the proportional 20% increase discussed.

Motion: Chairman Schwebach motioned to approve; **seconded by Vice-Chair Jaramillo**

- Roll Call Vote:
 - Schwebach – Yes
 - McCall – Yes
 - Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

E. MANAGER/COMMISSION: Motion to adopt Bond Ordinance 2026- authorizing the issuance and sale of Torrance County, New Mexico, Taxable Industrial Revenue Bonds (Palomas Power LLC Project), Series 2026, in the maximum aggregate principal amount of \$1,221,075,000, and approving associated documents. (Rob Burpo, First American Financial Advisors, Inc. and Jill Sweeney, Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP)

No Action Taken

7A. SUPPORTIVE SERVICES for VETERAN FAMILIES – Michelle Fraire, Director. New Mexico Veterans Integration Center with information to share.

Michelle Fraire, Director of Supportive Services for Veteran Families with the New Mexico Veterans Integration Center (NMVIC), led the presentation:

- Craig, Outreach Specialist and former military member, provided information regarding community outreach and veteran engagement.
- Vanessa Garcia discussed eligibility requirements and housing-prevention assistance.

- Carla Hernandez, Healthcare Navigator, explained assistance with healthcare and public-benefit enrollment.
- NMVIC staff emphasized a holistic, long-term approach to helping veterans and their families achieve stability and self-sufficiency.

Michelle Fraire – Supportive Services Overview:

- Ms. Fraire thanked the Commissioners, veterans, first responders, and attendees for the opportunity to present.
- She explained that Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) assists veterans and their families based on their individual circumstances.
- Services are designed to meet veterans where they are in their current stage of life, rather than requiring them to navigate multiple systems independently.
- Key services include Temporary financial assistance, Transitional housing, Housing stabilization and homelessness prevention, Intensive case management, Behavioral health services, Food assistance, Healthcare navigation, Assistance obtaining identification and military documentation, and employment and self-sufficiency support.
- Ms. Fraire emphasized that seemingly simple barriers—such as replacing a driver's license or obtaining a DD-214—can become overwhelming when a veteran is simultaneously dealing with homelessness, food insecurity, unemployment, or mental-health challenges.
- She noted that she has worked in the field for approximately 20 years and stressed that stabilization after homelessness can take significant time; the organization's goal is therefore to provide lasting stability rather than short-term assistance.

Transitional Housing & Family Support

- NMVIC operates an apartment-style transitional housing program in Albuquerque.
- Veterans and their families can have their own living space rather than sharing rooms with other residents.
- The program is intended to provide a safe, stable environment while veterans work toward permanent housing and independence.
- Families with children can receive adjoining rooms that can function as a small apartment, providing additional safety and privacy.
- Ms. Fraire emphasized that the program is not operated as a traditional shelter and focuses on creating a home-like environment.
- Veterans receive case management and other services while transitioning toward independent living.

Holistic Approach & Mental Health

- Ms. Fraire emphasized that veterans may need assistance with multiple interconnected issues, not simply housing.
- NMVIC offers: Behavioral health counseling and therapy, Suicide-prevention services through the Phoenix Rising program, Case management, Food assistance, Financial assistance, Healthcare navigation, Life-skills support.
- Staff stressed that different forms of support may work for different individuals, including counseling, art activities, and other approaches.
- The organization's philosophy is to address the mind, body, and overall well-being of veterans and their families.
- Ms. Fraire emphasized the organization's commitment to not allowing veterans to fall through the cracks, with staff communicating and coordinating regarding individual cases.

Vanessa Garcia, Eligibility & Financial Assistance:

- Vanessa Garcia explained the basic eligibility requirements for SSVF assistance:
 - The individual must be a veteran with qualifying active-duty service.
 - Income must fall within applicable program limits.
 - For Torrance County, the stated annual income limit is approximately \$56,250.
- Assistance is available for:
 - Veterans who are currently homeless/unhoused.
 - Veterans who are housed but are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Veterans facing eviction or a three-day notice may qualify for assistance with rental arrears.
- Applicants may need to provide:
 - A lease.
 - Three-day notice or eviction documentation.
 - Communications with the landlord regarding the situation.
- Assistance for homelessness prevention or housing stabilization may generally be provided for six to nine months, depending on income and individual circumstances.

Long-Term Housing Stabilization

- Ms. Fraire explained that assistance does not necessarily end after the initial six-to-nine-month period.
- NMVIC may connect eligible veterans with a Shallow Subsidy program for up to two additional years, when appropriate.
- Under the example provided: The veteran pays 50% of the rent; the program pays the remaining 50%. The veteran can use the money saved toward establishing financial stability and an emergency savings reserve.
- The goal is to help veterans transition from temporary assistance to long-term self-sustainability.
- Staff indicated that individual circumstances can be reviewed again if significant difficulties arise after the subsidy period.

Carla Hernandez, Healthcare Navigation:

- Carla Hernandez, Healthcare Navigator, explained that he assists veterans with navigating:
 - Medicaid enrollment.
 - SNAP/food assistance.
 - Social Security disability-related applications.
 - Other healthcare and benefit resources.
- Healthcare navigation is integrated with the organization's other services, so veterans do not have to navigate multiple systems alone.

Craig, Outreach Specialist:

- Craig identified his background as including:
 - Former Marine Corps service.
 - Law enforcement experience.
 - Service as an Army captain.
- He explained that his military and public-safety background gives him a strong connection to veterans who may need assistance.
- NMVIC outreach staff can travel directly to a veteran's home or community location when necessary to complete enrollment and provide services.
- He provided an example of recently meeting with a veteran in Alamogordo at a restaurant to assist.

- Outreach is intended to remove transportation and access barriers for veterans living in rural areas.

Women Veterans & Surviving Spouses

- Craig highlighted NMVIC's particular focus on women veterans, noting that their service and needs can sometimes be overlooked.
- The organization also assists spouses and surviving spouses of veterans when eligible.
- Ms. Fraire clarified that if a veteran receiving services loses a spouse, the organization does not simply terminate services; the program considers the family's continuing circumstances.
- The organization therefore takes a family-centered approach rather than focusing solely on the individual veteran.

NMVIC Campus & Services

- Staff described the NMVIC campus near Gibson Boulevard and I-25 in Albuquerque.
- The facility includes Transitional housing, a food pantry, Offices for case managers and support staff, a computer lab for employment and education purposes, Gathering/common areas, Areas for life-skills activities, and spaces for counseling and other supportive activities.
- The campus currently has approximately 41–42 housing rooms, which staff stated were fully occupied at the time of the presentation.
- An expansion is under construction that will provide additional transitional housing capacity and expand the food pantry/food distribution area.
- Veterans and families can participate in food-pantry services, with the pantry available Fridays.

Torrance County Outreach & Rural Veterans

- Staff emphasized that veterans living in Torrance County do not necessarily have to remain in Albuquerque to receive assistance.
- NMVIC can work to identify landlords in Torrance County willing to participate in the program.
- The organization can potentially provide housing assistance directly to participating landlords so veterans can return to and remain in their local communities.
- NMVIC staff stated that they have already begun receiving referrals involving Torrance County veterans and families, including unhoused and aging veterans.
- Staff plan to continue visiting Torrance County to meet veterans individually and establish relationships.

First Responder Coordination

- NMVIC encouraged local law enforcement, fire, EMS, and other first responders to refer veterans who may need assistance.
- Staff are working on developing food and essential-item bags that can be provided to veterans through coordination with local first responders.
- A QR code referral system was presented as a simple way for agencies or individuals to refer veterans directly to NMVIC.
- Referral information can include the veteran's name, contact information, and a brief description of the situation.
- The referral process is designed to allow NMVIC staff to contact the veteran directly and determine what services are needed.

Vice-Chair Jaramillo:

- Commissioner Jaramillo reported having personally visited the NMVIC facility and toured the building.
- The Veterans living there appeared very happy and content with their accommodations and described the facility as a beautiful place.
- It was noted that residents gather in a common area for meals rather than having individual kitchens in their rooms.
- NMVIC staff offered to provide tours of the facility to Commissioners, community members, and interested agencies.

Partnership with Torrance County

- NMVIC indicated that it has participated in local outreach activities, including National Night Out, and is participating in local community meetings such as the LAPC meeting.
- Staff encouraged the County to help by:
 - Making sure first responders know how to contact and refer veterans.
 - Sharing NMVIC information throughout the County.
 - Connecting NMVIC with local veterans and families in need.
- NMVIC emphasized that building trust and rapport is an important part of outreach. Staff stated they will not pressure veterans into accepting services but will work patiently with individuals to establish trust and determine what assistance they need.

B. FIRST AMERICAN FINANCIAL ADVISORS, INC. - Robert Burpo, President. Industrial Revenue Bond (IRB) PILOT presentation, informational/educational.

Rob Burpo, Municipal Advisor, First American Financial Advisors, Albuquerque:
Safety Offices:

- Rob Burpo, Torrance County's financial advisor since 2019, addressed the Commission regarding only the Palomas wind turbine project and clarified that his presentation was not about Project Mars or the PNM transmission-line project.
- Mr. Burpo explained the purpose and structure of an Industrial Revenue Bond (IRB) as an economic-development tool:
 - An IRB does not create debt for Torrance County or its taxpayers.
 - The project developer/borrower, not the County, is responsible for repayment.
 - The County serves as the issuer, essentially lending its tax-exempt status to the project in exchange for revenue.
 - The three parties involved are:
 - Borrower: Pattern, for the Palomas project.
 - Lender: Banks, Farm Credit, credit unions, insurance companies, mutual funds, etc.
 - Issuer: Torrance County.
 - Mr. Burpo emphasized repeatedly that County funds do not flow out to pay the IRB debt and that the County is not legally permitted to assume the developer's debt.
- Mr. Burpo gave examples of other New Mexico IRBs, including:
 - Intel in Sandoval County.
 - Walmart's distribution center in Los Lunas.
 - General Mills in Albuquerque.
 - Previous wind and solar projects.
- He explained that the key financial benefit to the County is the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT):
 - PILOT and PILT were explained as essentially the same concept.
 - Pattern will make payments to the County under the negotiated agreement.
 - The payments cover costs associated with the transaction, including financial advisory and legal services.
 - ~~Mr. Burpo stated that approximately \$21.4 million in total PILOT~~
payments would be generated over the 30-year term of the Palomas project.

PILOT Revenue and School District Distribution

- Mr. Burpo explained that the distribution of PILOT funds to the five affected school districts is controlled by a state legislative formula, which he strongly criticized.
- The formula considers:
 - Location of the turbines.
 - Acreage within each school district.
 - Student enrollment.
- Mr. Burpo stated that 60% of the PILOT payment will go to Torrance County and approximately 39.19% will be distributed among the school districts according to the statutory formula.
- Under the proposed Palomas project:
 - Annual PILOT starts at approximately \$630,000 for the first five years.
 - Payments increase approximately 5% every five years.
 - Payments rise to approximately \$661,500, \$694,575, \$729,304, and approximately \$804,000 in later periods.
 - Total projected PILOT revenue over 30 years: approximately \$21,426,000.
 - Torrance County's estimated share: approximately \$13,021,000.
 - Five school districts collectively: approximately \$8,351,000.
- Mr. Burpo noted that the existing formula creates substantially different amounts per student among districts and said he had personally testified in Santa Fe three times against the formula.

Examples of School District Benefits

Mr. Burpo provided examples of PILOT distributions from prior transactions:

- Vaughn School District: approximately \$20.4 million over 18 years, serving approximately 58 students.
- Corona School District: approximately \$12 million over 18 years, serving approximately 92 students.
- Estancia School District: approximately \$12.8 million.
- Moriarty School District: approximately \$6.6 million, with the per-student amount substantially lower because of its larger enrollment.
- Mountainair School District: approximately \$5.5 million.

- Mr. Burpo emphasized that these differences are driven by the state formula rather than local negotiation.

Negotiating Team

Mr. Burpo identified the County's team involved in negotiating the transaction:

- Jordan Barela, former County Manager.
- Stephanie, current County representative/manager involved in the process.
- Commissioner McCall, who has participated in prior transactions.
- Jill Sweeney, the County's bond counsel, whom Burpo described as a highly recognized public-finance attorney.
- Mike Garcia, County contract counsel, responsible for ensuring the bond documents comply with New Mexico statutes and County law.
- Mr. Burpo described his own experience as extensive, noting that he has worked on more than \$21 billion in IRBs and completed his first IRB transaction in 1982.

Torrance County and San Miguel County Negotiations

- Mr. Burpo credited Commissioner McCall with contacting San Miguel County during negotiations.
- San Miguel County subsequently joined Torrance County's effort to seek better PILOT terms from Pattern.
- Mr. Burpo characterized the negotiations as normal business negotiations:
 - Pattern sought to minimize its costs.
 - The County's representatives sought to maximize County revenue.
 - The parties ultimately negotiated an agreement without the negotiations indicating hostility between the parties.

Use of County PILOT Revenue

- Mr. Burpo explained that previous PILOT revenue has been used responsibly by the County.
- Examples included:
 - Paying off approximately \$180,000 in equipment obligations in 2023.
 - Helping make payments on the County's new administration building without imposing additional costs on taxpayers.
 - Supporting other County improvements.

- He noted that the County has accumulated millions of dollars in Treasury securities and Treasury bills, which generate additional interest income.
- School districts can determine how to use their PILOT revenue within their own authority.

Questions and Concerns Raised by Commissioners and Citizens

What Happens to the Turbines After 30 Years?

- **Commissioner Jaramillo** asked what happens to the wind turbines when the 30-year agreement expires and whether the County would own them.
- Mr. Burpo explained:
 - The County does not automatically receive ownership of the turbines.
 - Pattern generally has 18 months after the end of the term to remove the equipment.
 - Pattern must remove the equipment from the County unless the County and Pattern enter into another arrangement.
 - The County could potentially choose to reuse or repurpose the equipment through a future agreement.
 - Pattern must restore the land to approximately its original condition.
 - The lease contains decommissioning and disposal requirements.
- Mr. Burpo noted that newer agreements include stronger removal provisions because older projects left wind-turbine blades and equipment in the area.
- The agreement also requires a performance bond to provide financial security for decommissioning.

Future Power Generation

- Questions were raised about what happens to the electricity and transmission infrastructure after the 30-year term.
- Mr. Burpo explained:
 - The Palomas project's electricity is expected to be sold to PNM.
 - The current project is intended to feed into the PNM system and serve the PNM service area.
 - Electricity entering the larger grid can ultimately flow to different locations within the system.

- Mr. Burpo clarified that he is not an engineer and did not want to speculate about the precise destination of the electricity.

Transmission-Line Concerns

- Commissioners and citizens expressed significant concern that approving the wind project could indirectly facilitate a future transmission-line project.
- Mr. Burpo stated that:
 - The wind generation project and transmission-line project are separate matters.
 - He does not handle transmission-line negotiations.
 - The Rural Electric Transmission Authority (RETA) and other state agencies have authority over transmission issues.
 - Torrance County has historically had very limited or no authority over certain transmission-line decisions.
 - The Public Regulation Commission (PRC) may also have a role.
- Mr. Burpo agreed to conduct additional research and provide information to the Commission regarding:
 - RETA.
 - PNM.
 - The proposed transmission line.
 - Whether the Palomas project depends upon the proposed new transmission line.
 - Where the project's electricity would ultimately be transmitted.

Property Taxes vs. PILOT

- A question was raised about the difference between existing property-tax revenue and the proposed PILOT revenue.
- Mr. Burpo estimated that the County currently receives only approximately \$12,000–\$15,000 annually in property taxes from the land associated with the project area.
- He explained that much of the land is:
 - State Land Office property.
 - Non-taxable trust property.
 - Otherwise subject to different tax treatment.
- He agreed to work with the County Assessor's Office to obtain a more precise estimate of current property-tax revenue.

- Mr. Burpo explained that under the statutory IRB structure, the PILOT is primarily based on the improvements, turbines, and project infrastructure, rather than simply taxing the underlying land as conventional developed property.

Concerns About Water Usage

- Citizens raised strong concerns about water consumption, particularly in light of ongoing local water conservation concerns.
- Citizens stated that large quantities of water are reportedly being transported out of the area for turbine-related activities while residents are being asked to conserve water.
- Mr. Burpo acknowledged that water usage had not previously been raised with him during his work on the project.
- He stated that water issues are outside his normal financial-advisory scope but agreed to investigate.
- Mr. Burpo committed to bringing information regarding:
 - The amount of water being used.
 - Where the water is coming from.
 - Whether water is being purchased legally.
 - The construction-related water requirements.
 - Any applicable state or federal requirements.
- He specifically committed to addressing the water issue at the September 9 meeting.

County Responsibility for Water Oversight

- A Commissioner asked which County department is responsible for evaluating the impact of development on the local water table.
- Discussion indicated that:
 - Water-resource oversight is largely handled at the state level, including the State Engineer's Office and the Interstate Stream Commission.
 - Construction water requirements may also be governed by federal standards.
 - The County does not currently have a dedicated system for independently monitoring the overall water table impact of such development.

Environmental and Wildlife Concerns

- Several citizens expressed strong opposition to the turbines because of concerns regarding:
 - Wildlife.

- Hunting areas.
 - The appearance and impact of turbines on the landscape.
 - Possible environmental consequences.
- Citizens stated that they believe existing wind development has negatively affected hunting areas and deer populations.
- Mr. Burpo acknowledged that these concerns are important but explained that environmental and wildlife analysis is outside his financial role.
- He stated that Pattern is required to conduct substantial environmental studies and agreed to request additional information for the Commission.
- Mr. Burpo indicated that he would ask Pattern to address environmental concerns directly at the next meeting.

Landowner and Private Property Concerns

- A citizen asked whether Mr. Burpo represents or negotiates with private landowners.
- Mr. Burpo clarified:
 - He does not represent private landowners.
 - He is prohibited from negotiating with individual landowners because of conflict-of-interest concerns.
 - Pattern conducts its own negotiations with landowners regarding turbine locations.
- Mr. Burpo explained that wind developers typically conduct several years of preliminary work, including installing temporary wind-monitoring equipment to determine the most suitable turbine locations.
- Questions about whether Pattern notified individual landowners were referred to Pattern for response.

Pattern's Environmental and Development Responsibilities

- Citizens questioned whether Torrance County itself had conducted sufficient studies rather than relying upon Pattern.
- Mr. Burpo explained that substantial studies and regulatory reviews generally occur before projects reach the County level.
- He referenced involvement by:
 - Pattern, PNM, PRC, Environmental, and other regulatory agencies.

- Mr. Burpo stated that wind projects can take approximately five years to develop before reaching the final local approval stage.
- He agreed that additional information should be presented to the Commission so Commissioners and residents can better understand the project's impacts.

Michael Garcia, County Attorney:

- Mr. Garcia emphasized that the comments were not requested by the Commissioners and were offered independently.
- The speaker stated that they have worked with the Commissioners for more than four years and have observed their work closely.
- Based on nearly 30 years of experience working with county and city governments, the speaker described the commissioners as:
 - Among the most conscientious and dedicated government officials they have encountered. Selfless and genuinely committed to public service. People who care deeply about what happens in the county.
- Mr. Garcia stated that they have never observed any indication of self-dealing by the Commissioners.
- Mr. Garcia strongly rejected what they characterized as immoral or insulting accusations directed toward the Commissioners, saying such accusations were inaccurate and “wide of the mark.”
- At the same time, the speaker acknowledged the value of open discussion and dialogue, emphasizing that it is appropriate for people to communicate about what they want to accomplish and what concerns them.
- The speaker concluded by thanking the Chair and reiterating that personal insults or unfounded accusations against the Commissioners were not accurate.

9. DISCUSSION:

A. CLERK’S REPORT:

Sylvia Chavez, County Clerk: None

B. MANAGER’S REPORT:

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager:

- A brief update regarding outstanding ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds.
- Two ARPA-funded projects have already been obligated, but the funds must be spent before December:
 - Emergency Plan Update: \$22,358.32 remaining to be spent.
 - EMWT: \$387,866.10 remaining to be spent.
- Madam Manager emphasized the importance of keeping these funds on the Commission's radar and beginning the necessary work now to ensure the obligated funds are expended within the required timeframe.

ARPA Well/Architect Payment Clarification

- Commissioner Jaramillo asked about a previously discussed architect/professional payment related to the well situation in Torrance County and whether it had been paid using ARPA funds.
- Madam Manager clarified that:
 - The expense was part of the prior year's ARPA expenditures.
 - Those funds have since been zeroed out and are not part of the current funds that need to be spent.
 - The payment has been made, resolving the immediate concern, and agreed to provide a more detailed update if needed.

Courthouse/County Office Air Conditioning

- Madam Manager reported that the air-conditioning system has been repaired and is operating properly.
- During the period of extreme heat:
 - County offices experienced significant heat-related conditions.
 - Some offices had to close early for employee and public safety.
 - Business was adjusted to allow some operations to be conducted during the morning hours when temperatures were more manageable.
- Madam Manager expressed appreciation to County employees for continuing to work through the extreme heat and thanked the community for its understanding and support of the temporary office closures and modified schedule. The building is now comfortable again, and the issue has been resolved.

Upcoming Holiday Closure

- The community was reminded that Torrance County offices will be closed Monday, September 7, for Labor Day.
- Regular County operations will resume following the holiday closure.

C. TREASURER'S REPORT:

Kathryn Hernandez, County Treasurer:

Bank Reconciliation & Financial Records

- Madam Treasurer reported that all bank reconciliation balances are current and up to date, except for the main account for July.

- The office is working closely with the Finance Office to resolve discrepancies involving amounts recorded in the books versus amounts actually withdrawn from the bank.
- Once the discrepancies are corrected in coordination with the Finance Office, the July financial period will be officially closed.

Staffing & Cross-Training

- Madam Treasurer reported two open positions within the office.
- Interviews are scheduled for tomorrow for one of the vacant positions.
- Despite being short-staffed, Madam Treasurer recognized and commended the staff for their hard work, teamwork, and commitment.
- The office has placed a strong emphasis on cross-training employees, which has helped maintain operations and provide coverage while staffing levels remain limited.
- Madam Treasurer stated that the cross-training effort has been working very well and has helped the office continue operating effectively.

Delinquent Manufactured/Mobile Home Tax Auction

- On July 30, the Treasurer's Office conducted an auction for delinquent manufactured/mobile home taxes.
- 43 manufactured homes were placed on the auction list.
- 16 homes were sold, generating approximately \$38,250 in delinquent tax collections.
- The Treasurer noted that several properties on the delinquent list were severely deteriorated or abandoned, with some homes at risk of literally coming apart or "blowing away."
- The Treasurer's Office is working with Planning and Zoning to determine how these properties can be addressed or removed because of the safety, debris, and nuisance concerns they are creating.

Employee Recognition — Miles Rodriguez

- Madam Treasurer specifically recognized Miles Rodriguez for his outstanding work addressing delinquent manufactured/mobile home taxes.
- Rodriguez joined the Treasurer's team in December and completed his training within approximately one month.
- By February, he was actively working delinquent accounts in the field.
- The Treasurer reported that Rodriguez has addressed nearly every delinquent manufactured/mobile home account in the county assigned to him.
- His efforts have resulted in approximately \$279,161 in delinquent manufactured/mobile home tax collections.
- These collections go directly toward the Academy's operating fund.
- Madam Treasurer emphasized that Rodriguez's performance is particularly noteworthy given the office's current staffing shortages.

D. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT:

Kevin McCall, County Vice Chair: Had to leave early.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman:

Recognition of Veterans' Resources

- Chairman Schwebach thanked Vice-Chair Jaramillo for bringing the presentation to the Commission and described it as enlightening.
- Emphasized that many veterans in the community may need assistance and that resources are available.
- Encouraged Commissioners, residents, and community members to identify veterans in need and discreetly or openly notify county management or the Sheriff's Department so available resources can be connected with those individuals.

Education Regarding PILT, Bonds, and Windmill Projects

- Chairman Schwebach thanked Mr. Burpo for his presentation and recognized his extensive experience with the subject matter.
- Explained that Mr. Burpo was invited to clarify and educate the public because there are significant misunderstandings surrounding bonds, PILT programs, and wind-energy projects.
- Stated that the purpose of the presentation was not to "smooth over" concerns but to provide accurate information and explain the issues.
- Announced that additional discussion will take place at the September 9 meeting, when Pattern will be present.
- Chairman Schwebach intends to address the issues in as much depth as necessary and allow additional questions and discussion.

Public Input and Treatment of Elected Officials

- Thanked Michael for his comments and observations.
- Acknowledged that elected officials frequently face criticism, some of which can be undeserved.
- At the same time, Chairman Schwebach recognized that residents often ask difficult questions because they are genuinely trying to understand what is happening in their community.
- Encouraged residents to:
 - Ask questions.
 - Seek clarification and understand the facts.
 - Bring constructive ideas forward.
 - Participate in finding solutions to county problems.
- Distinguished legitimate public criticism and questions from slander, name-calling, and false accusations, which Chairman Schwebach stated are unacceptable.

County Water Issues

- Explained that water historically was not a major issue associated with these projects because water availability had not previously presented the same level of concern.

- Stated that water is now an issue affecting multiple people and multiple levels of government.
- Clarified that the county is working on matters within its authority, but the county is not a water authority and does not control:
 - Rainfall or natural water availability.
 - Regulations established by the State Engineer's Office.
 - Well regulations and related state-level requirements.
- Emphasized that the county must focus on what it can control, facilitate, or help coordinate.

EMWT and Long-Term Water Planning

- Discussed EMWT as a distribution system that is still in its early stages.
- Explained that the concept originated approximately 20 years ago as an effort to help the valley and county address and manage its own water challenges.
- Described the water situation as highly complex because it involves multiple jurisdictions, systems, and property interests, including:
 - The State Engineer's Office.
 - Natural water conditions.
 - Mutual domestic water systems such as Estancia/Moriarty Mutual Domestic systems.
 - Residential wells.
 - Private property rights.
 - Easements and access issues.
- Emphasized that multiple layers must be addressed to develop solutions.

PILT Revenue and County Finances

- Addressed the importance of PILT program revenues to the County's financial stability.
- Stated that approximately \$2.5 million in PILT-related money is currently being used in the County's general budget to maintain county operations.
- Characterized these funds as an important source of revenue that is helping keep the County financially stable.
- Indicated that the financial implications of PILT and related projects need to be understood as part of the larger economic picture.

Economic Impact of the Prison

- Identified the future status of the prison—whether it remains open or closes—as one of the county's largest economic uncertainties.
- Clarified that the primary financial concern is not simply lost revenue, noting that much of the direct revenue goes to the Town of Estancia.
- The larger concern for the county is the cost of incarceration and detention.
- Explained that, by law, the county must provide safe detention for individuals arrested for offenses including:
 - DWI.
 - Domestic violence.
 - Other offenses requiring detention.

- If the local prison/detention facility closes, the county would need to transport and house detainees elsewhere.

Alternative Detention Arrangements

- Identified Santa Fe County as the most practical alternative based on cost and availability.
- Mentioned Bernalillo County as another potential detention facility, although its facility is frequently full.
- Explained that the county has agreements allowing detainees to be housed in Santa Fe County.
- However, the Commissioner stated that the cost is approximately five times higher than the current arrangement.
- The additional expense includes not only the cost of incarceration but also approximately four staff members needed for transportation, along with other operational and court-related requirements.
- Used this example to demonstrate that county issues often involve multiple interconnected financial, staffing, legal, and operational impacts.

Transmission Lines, Hunting Lands, and Community Concerns

- Acknowledged ongoing public concerns regarding:
 - Transmission lines.
 - Hunting grounds.
 - State-owned lands.
 - Private lands.
 - Other impacts associated with developing projects in the county.
- Assured residents that their concerns are being heard.
- Recognized that as projects and circumstances develop, additional issues and questions will arise.
- Indicated that the County will continue to address those concerns as they emerge.

Linda Jaramillo, County Commissioner:

- Vice-Chair Jaramillo shared that her sister was visiting from California, and she spent much of her time with her during the reporting period.
- She also attended the Merced de Manzano Land Grant meeting on the 16th, where a strong community turnout was present.
- The Manzano Land Grant is preparing to elect its officers, and the Commissioner noted that the organization is making significant progress.
- Commissioner disclosed that she is an heir to the Manzano Land Grant, giving her a personal connection to the organization and its activities.

Transition from County Clerk to Commissioner

- Vice-Chair Jaramillo reflected on how serving as a Commissioner has been substantially different from her previous role as County Clerk.

- As County Clerk, she primarily administered elections and stated that elections were conducted effectively, resulting in relatively little public criticism.
- When questions or concerns arose during her tenure as Clerk, she emphasized that she would personally explain the situation, often bringing citizens into her office to explain election procedures and applicable laws.
- She also recalled dealing with disputes involving recording and probate matters, recognizing that probate issues can be especially sensitive because they occur following the death of a loved one.

Approach to Public Service

- Vice-Chair Jaramillo acknowledged that serving as an elected Commissioner presents different challenges and that public scrutiny can be greater.
- She stated that she expects that, at some point, she may face opposition or criticism regarding decisions she makes.
- She emphasized that her decisions are guided by the interests of the people she serves and by compliance with the law.
- Drawing on her prior experience with elections, she reiterated that elected officials must follow applicable laws while doing their best to serve their constituents.
- Vice-Chair Jaramillo concluded by affirming her commitment to doing the best she can for the residents of Torrance County.

11. EXECUTIVE SESSION: None

12. CONSIDERATION OF ACTION(S): None

13. Announcement of the next Board of County Commissioners Meeting:

Next meeting: September 09, 2026, 9:00 AM

14. Signing of official documents:

15. Adjournment:

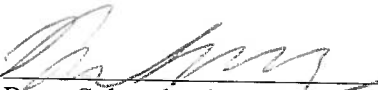
Motion: Chairman Schwebach motions to adjourn. **Vice-Chair Jaramillo.**

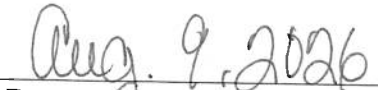
- Roll Call Vote:
 - Schwebach – Yes
 - McCall – Left early

- o Jaramillo – Yes

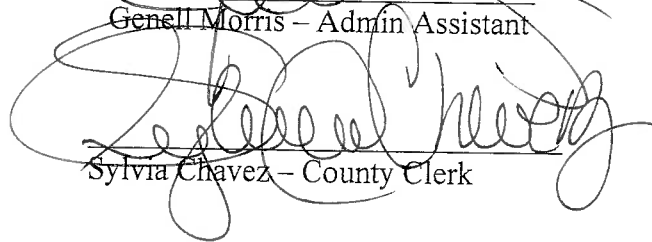
Motion Carried

Meeting adjourned at 11:44 AM.


Ryan Schwebach - Chairman


Date


Genell Morris – Admin Assistant


Sylvia Chavez – County Clerk

*The video and audio of this meeting are available upon request.