Final COPY
Torrance County Board of Commissioners
Regular Commission Meeting
October 14, 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
MICHAEL GARCIA- COUNTY ATTORNEY
SYLVIA CHAVEZ-COUNTY CLERK
GENELL MORRIS- ADMINISTRATIVE CLERK
DON GOEN – PLANNING & ZONING DIRECTOR

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1. Call to Order: Chairman Schwebach called the meeting to order at 9:03 AM

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2. Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation: Pledge led by Chairman Schwebach; Vice Chair Jaramillo said the Invocation.

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3. Changes to the Agenda: Name change on agenda item 13b & 14b from Mr. Larson to Mr. William A. Larson. Also separate items 13d & 14d into four separate agenda items. Separate legal representatives and DWI Coordinator.

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4. PROCLAMATIONS:

A. Manager: Proclamation naming October as " Breast Cancer Awareness" Month in Torrance County. Read by **Victoria Archuleta**.

Torrance County Board of County Commissioners naming October Breast Cancer Awareness Month, whereas October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month,

and whereas National Breast Cancer Awareness Month is an annual campaign to increase awareness of this disease and increase public knowledge about the importance of early detection of breast cancer diagnosis and treatment,

and whereas today there are more than 4 million breast cancer survivors in the U.S., more than any other group of cancer survivors, the American Cancer Society estimates there will be more than 5 million breast cancer survivors by 2035.

And whereas while breast cancer is most common among women, about one in 833 men will also be diagnosed in their lifetime. And whereas early detection is the strongest defense if found before spreading, the five-year survival rate is over 99%. The American Cancer Society recommends annual mammograms starting at age 40, a 15-minute screening to save your life.

And whereas the Torrance County Board of Torrance County Board of Commissioners acknowledges the profound impact breast cancer has had on our workforce and community, some are actively fighting, some have survived, and others are remembered. We honor the strength of survivors, stand beside those currently in treatment, and extend our compassion to the families who have lost loved ones.

And whereas the Torrance County Board of Commissioners affirms the commitment to support every member of the county, women and men, by encouraging screening, providing education, and offering compassion to all touched by this disease.

Now, therefore, the Torrance County Board of Commissioners do hereby proclaim October 2026 as Breast Cancer Awareness Month in Torrance County.

B. Manager: Proclamation naming October as " Domestic Violence Awareness" Month in Torrance County. Read by **Victoria Archuleta**.

Torrance County Board of County Commissioners naming October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Whereas domestic violence is a serious crime that affects individuals of all ages, races, genders, socio-economic backgrounds, and education levels, shattering families and straining community resources,

and whereas domestic violence can take many forms, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, ethnic deprivation, and psychological intimidation, leaving deep and lasting trauma on victims, their children, and the community at large.

And whereas the Torrance County Domestic Violence Program works tirelessly alongside local law enforcement, healthcare professionals, and community advocates to provide safety, support, and vulnerable resources to the survivors in their time of greatest need,

and whereas October is nationally recognized as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a time dedicated to honoring survivors, mourning those who have lost their lives to abuse, and connecting those who work to end violence; and whereas breaking the cycle of domestic abuse requires a coordinated community response built on public education, strict legal accountability for offenders, and robust, accessible resources for victims seeking safety.

And whereas the Torrance County Board of County Commissioners is dedicated to building a safe, supportive, and healthy community where every resident can live free from fear, intimidation, and violence in their own homes.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Board of County Commissioners of Torrance County, New Mexico, do hereby proclaim the month of October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month throughout Torrance County and urge all citizens, local businesses, schools, and community organizations to support the effort of the Torrance County Domestic Violence Program to learn the signs of abuse and work together to eliminate domestic violence from our community.

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

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

Motion Carried

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5. AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS: County Manager

A. Announcement of employee years of service.

a. Treasurer – Helen Gutierrez (5)

b. Manager – Deminica Garcia (5)

c. Assessor – Alanna Chavez (6)

d. Sherrif – Alexander Schwerdel (8)

e. Clerk – Genell Chavez-Morris (9)

f. Assessor – Crystal Salas (13)

g. Fire/EMS – Hanna Sanchez (19)

h. Animal Control – Danette Langdon (19)

i. Sheriff – Erwin Young (22)

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6. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Kim Ortiz – Resident: Clarification of Community Support for Economic Growth

- Kim Ortiz addressed comments made by Commissioner McCall and Commissioner Schwebach during the previous meeting.
- She disputed their characterization that the community had shut down the County's largest economic development project before it could be formally considered and that residents did not want economic growth.
- Ms. Ortiz emphasized that the community supports economic development but wants projects that protect Torrance County's rural character, agricultural lands, rural properties, and residents' overall well-being.

- Support for Community Engagement and Transparency

- Ms. Ortiz commended residents for taking action, asking questions, seeking information, and demanding transparency in county government.
- She expressed pride in the community for participating in the decision-making process and raising concerns about proposed economic development projects before decisions are finalized.
- She stressed that community opposition to a particular project should not be interpreted as opposition to all economic growth.

- Comparison to Project Ranger in Sierra County

- Ms. Ortiz referenced Project Ranger in neighboring Sierra County as an example of the potential consequences of advancing a major industrial development without sufficient public awareness or engagement.
- She described the project as a hypersonic missile manufacturing and testing facility associated with a defense contractor.
- According to Ms. Ortiz, Sierra County purchased land, leased state trust land, and subleased property to a private company. She stated that the project was supported by approximately $125 million in industrial revenue bonds (IRBs) and additional public incentives.
- Ms. Ortiz expressed concern that the bonds were approved before many residents became aware of the project and that significant public questions arose after the deal was already moving forward.

- Concerns Regarding Water Use and Public Safety

- Ms. Ortiz stated that residents raised concerns about potential explosions, water consumption, and the effects of the project on their community.
- She reported that water was being transported outside city limits to support Project Ranger, noting that this had not occurred since 2009.

- She also expressed concern about the facility's manufacturing and testing operations, chemical storage, and stockpiling of explosive materials.
- Ms. Ortiz stated that residents felt they had been let down by local officials because they believed they had not received adequate information or meaningful opportunities to influence the decision-making process.

- Application to Torrance County

- Ms. Ortiz characterized Project Ranger as a cautionary example of what she believed could happen if Torrance County advanced a major economic development project without adequate transparency and community involvement.
- She expressed support for residents who questioned the proposed project and sought additional information before it proceeded.
- She emphasized the importance of balancing economic opportunities with the protection of rural lands, agricultural resources, water supplies, public safety, and community well-being.

Speaker's Position and Key Message

- Kim Ortiz: Asserted that Torrance County residents are not opposed to economic growth; rather, they want responsible development that respects local priorities and preserves the county's rural and agricultural character.
- Emphasized that residents should receive timely information and have meaningful opportunities to ask questions before major economic development decisions are made.
- Commended residents for speaking up, requesting transparency, and participating in local government.
- Ms. Ortiz concluded by expressing pride in the community for taking action and working to prevent what she viewed as a potentially harmful development process similar to the one described in Project Ranger.

***Zoom* – None**

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7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. COMMISSION: Request Approval of the September 09, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes of the Board of County Commissioners.

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

- Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

B. COMMISSION: Request Approval of the September 23, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes of the Board of County Commissioners.

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

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

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8. Consent Agenda:

A. FINANCE: Request Approval of Payables with a date range of September 14, 2026, through October 6, 2026.

1. CoreCivic Invoice – Federal Pass-Through Funding

Linda Jaramillo, County Vice Chair: Raised a question regarding an invoice listed on page 3 of the financial documents for CoreCivic for approximately $120,000, expressing concern about the large expenditure and asking whether the County's contract with CoreCivic had already ended.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager: Confirmed that the county's contract with CoreCivic had ended, reportedly in May. However, the representative explained that the invoice was part of a federal pass-through funding arrangement.

- Funding Explanation:

- The funds originate from the federal government and are passed through Torrance County to CoreCivic.
- The invoice does not represent an expenditure of Torrance County's own funds.
- Additional invoices may be submitted as remaining funds are expended, and outstanding monthly invoices are received from the federal government and CoreCivic.

- The County representative indicated that a few additional invoices could still be forthcoming.

Linda Jaramillo, County Vice Chair: Asked whether the remaining money was being held in reserve to cover outstanding expenses and finalize the arrangement.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager: Confirmed that the funds were available for this purpose and reiterated that the money was received from the federal government and then forwarded to CoreCivic.

2. EMWT Growth Fund – $320,000 Capital Outlay Award

Linda Jaramillo, County Vice Chair: Referenced page 14 of the financial documents and asked for clarification regarding a $320,000 award to the EMWT Growth Fund, including the purpose of the funding and whether any of it would benefit Melody Ranch.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager: Explained that the $320,000 was a capital outlay award provided to EMWT for the purchase of Sunset Acres.

- Clarification Regarding Melody Ranch:

- The representative confirmed that Melody Ranch had not yet reached finalization.
- EMWT was still working with the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (PRC) on matters related to transferring legal ownership to EMWT.
- Funds intended for the project could not be applied until the required legal ownership arrangements were completed.
- Additional financial items related to the project may appear in future county records as funding becomes available and the necessary steps are completed.
- Torrance County is serving as the fiscal agent, meaning funds are processed through the county.

Linda Jaramillo, County Vice Chair: Explained that several residents of Melody Ranch had contacted the commissioner seeking information about the project and its funding.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman: Acknowledged receiving similar inquiries and indicated that Melody Ranch was reportedly close to completion, although no definitive completion date was available. Additional engineering work remained outstanding.

3. Melody Ranch Water Availability

Linda Jaramillo, County Vice Chair: Asked whether Melody Ranch currently had water available.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman: Clarified that Melody Ranch had access to tank-delivered water. It did not establish that a permanent water system or final ownership transfer had been completed.

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

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

Motion Carried

B. PLANNING AND ZONING: Request Approval of the Special Use District for the Palomas Wind Project, approved by Planning and Zoning on September 2, 2026.

Donald Goen, County P & Z Director, informed the Board that the meeting packet included Pattern's comprehensive application for the proposed Special Use District.
Explained that the proposed district is located south of Interstate 40 and primarily east of Highway 285.

Noted that the proposed area borders or adjoins other Special Use Districts established for similar purposes.

Confirmed that the packet contained the meeting minutes, the complete application, and the required public notice documentation.

Reported that all public notice requirements had been satisfied.

Pattern representatives were present at the meeting and available to answer questions from the commissioners regarding the application.

No specific comments or responses from Pattern representatives were included in the provided transcript.

The Board approves the Pattern Special Use District application through the consent agenda process.

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

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

Motion Carried

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9. PRESENTATION: None

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10. ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION / ORDINANCE:

A. MANAGER: (Public Hearing) Motion to adopt the Economic Development Ordinance 2026-04 as amended from the 2003-01 Economic Development Resolution to reflect the removal of the Estancia Valley Economic Development Association (EVEDA) as the source for Economic Development in Torrance County.

Motion: **Chairman Schwebach** motioned to move into Public Hearing; **seconded** by **Vice-Chair Jaramillo**

9:30 AM

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

Motion Carried

1. Public Comment – **Kim Ortiz,** Torrance County Resident, Sworn in by Michael Garcia, County Attorney

- Concerns Regarding Project Mars and Confidentiality

Kim Ortiz referenced Project Mars as her introduction to the economic development process involving the former EVEDA organization and the surrounding area.

She questioned whether the proposed ordinance changes would make economic development activities subject to public hearings, the Open Meetings Act, and the Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA).

Ms. Ortiz expressed concern that a privately operated nonprofit organization could allow elected officials to sign NDAs, potentially limiting public access to information during negotiations.

- Accountability to the Public

Ms. Ortiz emphasized that elected officials are accountable to the residents who elected them.

She argued that confidentiality agreements could prevent residents from participating in discussions about projects that may affect their community before decisions are effectively

finalized. She asked whether the revised ordinance would continue to permit NDAs and what legal authority allows such agreements.

Michael Garcia, County Attorney, explained that confidentiality may be used during economic development negotiations to protect sensitive business information and prevent potential increases in property prices before a company secures a site.

IPRA generally applies to County records, but he indicated that state agencies and private entities may be subject to different disclosure requirements.

Also acknowledged uncertainty about the specific legal exception governing the confidentiality arrangements and indicated that the legal authority would need to be confirmed.

- Concerns About Unanswered Records Requests

Ortiz stated that she had submitted IPRA requests to Commissioner McCall months earlier and was still waiting for answers.

Michael Garcia, County Attorney, clarified that IPRA requires the production of responsive public records, or an appropriate response when records are unavailable, rather than requiring officials to answer questions.

Ms. Ortiz indicated that she had received information about where and when to attend a meeting but had no additional written documentation.

- Recommendation to the Board

Ortiz recommended that the County avoid relying on privately operated nonprofit organizations that can enter into confidential negotiations without direct public participation.

She encouraged the Board to establish a process that allows residents to contribute concerns, offer improvements, and participate meaningfully in economic development discussions.

2. Public Comment – **Andy Chavez**, Torrance County Resident, Sworn in by Michael Garcia, County Attorney

- Recommendation to Restrict NDAs

Andy Chavez encouraged the Board to research efforts in other Counties and states to prohibit County Commissioners from signing NDAs related to economic development projects.

He stated that similar proposals were being considered nationwide and recommended that Torrance County explore adopting comparable restrictions.

Mr. Chavez emphasized that residents should have access to information about projects that may affect their communities and that transparency measures would help protect the public interest.

3. Public Comment – **Charlene Brown**, Resident Participating by Zoom, Sworn in by Michael Garcia, County Attorney

- Recommendation for a County Economic Development Committee

Charlene Brown supported Commissioner Jaramillo suggestion to establish a County economic development committee.

She recommended creating a committee that would allow members of the public to communicate concerns, suggest improvements, and participate in developing the County's economic development priorities.

Ms. Brown asked how residents could submit comments and concerns for consideration, noting that comments previously submitted had apparently not been included in the commissioners' meeting packets.

She clarified that her primary interest was in ensuring public input into the plans and recommendations developed by a future economic development contractor or organization.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, explained that the proposed contractor would help identify the County's economic development opportunities, gather research and statistics, assess community needs, and conduct outreach.

They indicated that public involvement would be part of the economic development planning process.

4. Board and Legal Counsel Discussion – Proposed Ordinance Changes

Michael I. Garcia, County Attorney: Explained that the principal change to the ordinance was removing the requirement that economic development activities involve the former EVEDA organization, which no longer exists.

Stated that the amendment would give the Board flexibility to work with different economic development organizations, hire a contractor, or develop an in-house economic development function.

Clarified that the ordinance amendment was not intended to eliminate existing planning and zoning requirements or other applicable public processes.

Commissioner McCall:

Explained that the former EVEDA organization served a broader region, including municipalities, governmental entities, and private-sector members.

Described EVEDA as an organization that helped gather information and facilitate early-stage economic development discussions but did not have authority to make final decisions for the County or participating municipalities.

Stated that the organization helped bring potential projects forward for consideration and that decisions would ultimately return to the appropriate governmental bodies.

Explained that the County's current approach to Project Mars involved similar preliminary discussions, but without EVEDA serving as the intermediary.

Commissioner Jaramillo:

Asked what would replace EVEDA and how the County would organize its economic development efforts going forward.

Participated in the discussion about establishing a County-level economic development function and the potential role of a contractor.

- County Staff and Board Representatives:

Explained that the County had budgeted $100,000 for an economic development contract.

Reported that the request for proposals (RFP) process had been conducted more than once and was in its second round at the time of the discussion.

Indicated that the contractor would help support economic development planning and outreach and would serve a role similar to the one previously performed by EVEDA for the County.

5. Economic Development Funding – LEDA Funds

County Attorney Garcia explained that LEDA stands for the Local Economic Development Act, a state law that permits certain forms of public assistance for qualifying economic development projects.

The discussion identified potential uses of economic development funding for infrastructure and other project-related needs that could benefit the County economically.

- Reason for Amending the Ordinance

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, explained that the existing ordinance, adopted in 2003, designated the former EVEDA organization as the entity responsible for administering the County's LEDA-related economic development process.

Because EVEDA no longer exists, the ordinance needed to be updated to allow the County to access available funding through an appropriate arrangement.

Kevin McCall, County Commissioner, reported receiving communications from state economic development representatives indicating that the ordinance needed to be updated so the County could access applicable funding when a qualifying project arose.

- Industrial Revenue Bonds (IRBs)

The legal representative discussed industrial revenue bonds as one potential financing mechanism for economic development projects.

The explanation was that such bonds may be sold on the open market to finance qualifying projects, potentially allowing development to proceed without the County directly providing the initial project financing.

The discussion did not establish that every project would qualify for this financing or that the County would have no financial obligations under every possible arrangement.

6. Discussion of Potential Economic Development Projects

- Potential Greenhouse Reopening

Commissioner McCall referenced a potential project involving reopening greenhouses in the County. Also stated that the state had identified possible LEDA funding that could help encourage the project to locate or operate in New Mexico.

When asked for an update, the commissioner indicated that there had been no recent communication and that the project's status was uncertain.

The example was provided to illustrate why the County needed an updated ordinance to access applicable economic development funding.

- Project Mars

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, discussed Project Mars as an example of how a potential development could be introduced through an economic development organization.

The project had been brought forward through AREA, an economic development organization with which the County was involved.

The discussion reflected differing views about whether the public had received sufficient information before concerns about the project emerged.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, noted that public opposition and questions had affected the project's progress, while a speaker emphasized that residents had been asked to respond without having access to all relevant information.

- Planning and Zoning Requirements

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, emphasized that the proposed ordinance amendment would not bypass the County's existing planning and zoning procedures.

Projects requiring zoning changes, special-use approvals, or other land-use authorizations would still need to follow the applicable processes, including public hearings where required.

The legal representative also noted that developments on state land may involve state-level authority and decision-making beyond the County's control.

7. Public Participation and Transparency

Commissioners and staff discussed how residents could participate in future economic development planning and project reviews.

The proposed contractor was described as a potential means of gathering community input, conducting research, and developing an economic development plan.

Representatives stated that the public would have opportunities to participate through appropriate planning processes, public hearings, and other forums.

Kim Ortiz emphasized the importance of having meaningful opportunities to contribute before projects advance too far. Concerns included the use of NDAs by elected officials, access to public records, the transparency of preliminary negotiations, and the need for a formal economic development committee or similar public engagement mechanism.

Michael I. Garcia, County Attorney, stated that the Open Meetings Act generally applies when a quorum of the Board is involved in covered public business, and that IPRA governs access to public records subject to applicable requirements and exceptions.

The discussion did not resolve all questions about the precise legal limits of NDAs or the applicability of disclosure exceptions to specific economic development negotiations.

Motion: **Commissioner McCall** motion to go out of Public Hearing; **seconded** by **Chairman Schwebach**

9:46 AM

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

Motion Carried

B. MANAGER: Request approval of Resolution 2026-37 approving the Economic Development Ordinance 2026-04.

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

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

Motion Carried

C. ROADS: Request approval of Resolution 2026-38 approving participation in the Transportation Project Fund Program administered by the New Mexico Department of Transportation, amended to correct the total budget cost.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager: The resolution was previously adopted during the last meeting. The Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) identified a $0.20 discrepancy in the amount previously submitted. The resolution is being corrected to account for the $0.20 difference and ensure that the amount stated in the resolution matches exactly what DFA approved for the County. This correction is intended to align the previously adopted resolution with DFA's approved amount.

Motion: **Commissioner McCall** motioned to approve, **seconded** by **Commissioner McCall.**

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

Motion Carried

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11. APPROVALS/ACTION ITEM:

A. ASSESSORS: Request approval to reorganize and restructure the position within the Assessor's Office to better align with their actual job description, including pay compensation considerations.

Linda Gallegos, Chief Deputy Assessor, presented a letter included in the Commissioners' meeting packets requesting consideration of budget adjustments to reorganize employee classifications, update job titles, and establish clearer appraisal certification levels with corresponding salary increases. Explained that the proposal had been under consideration for several months and was brought before the current Commission to address long-standing staffing and compensation concerns before the end of the year, when both the elected Assessor and certain commissioners would be leaving office. Emphasized that the Assessor's Office plays a critical role in determining property valuations for ad valorem property taxes, which provide a

significant revenue source for the county. Employees perform specialized duties, receive professional training, and cross-train to maintain accurate property records and valuations.

Employee Classification and Proposed Job Titles: Ms. Gallegos provided a spreadsheet comparing current positions with proposed titles, along with employee task lists detailing their responsibilities and contributions to the department.

- **Geno Jones – 19 years of service:** Currently Office Manager; proposed title of Office Manager/Administrative Assistant to better reflect the administrative duties performed.
- **Cassandra Knoten – 7 years of service:** Currently CAMA Data Analyst; proposed title of CAMA Appraiser and Data Analyst to reflect the additional appraisal knowledge required for data analysis and valuation quality control.
- **Crystal Salas – 13 years of service:** Currently Senior Lead Certified Appraiser; the proposal would clarify the Senior Lead and State Certified Appraiser classifications. Duties include reviewing and verifying property sales, processing property splits and combinations, reviewing permits, and training newer appraisal staff. The representative reported that the office processed 547 sales from January through September.
- **Tanner Solomon: 7 Years of service:** Currently Certified Appraiser; proposed classification of State Certified Appraiser, reflecting the certification level attained.
- **Shelly Cage – 8 months of service:** Previously worked as an appraiser in San Juan County and attained State Certified Appraiser status after completing the required continuing education.
- **Mariah Ortega – 8 months of service:** Hired as an Appraiser Apprentice and advanced to Certified Appraiser I after completing one appraisal course. She was scheduled to take her second appraisal course the following week, which would advance her training toward the next certification level.
- **Alanna Chavez – 5 years of service:** Currently Customer Service Specialist; proposed reclassification to Administrative Assistant. Her duties include processing deeds, updating property ownership records, and verifying legal descriptions.
- **Emily Spurrier – 4 months of service:** Currently Customer Service Specialist; proposed reclassification to Administrative Assistant. She was preparing to assume responsibility for the Business Personal Property (BPP) program.

Certification and Professional Development: The representative explained that State Certified Appraiser status requires completion of four appraisal courses. The proposed certification levels and associated salary increases would provide employees with attainable professional

development goals and encourage continued education to support fair, equitable, current, and accurate property valuations.

Ms. Gallegos stated that the proposal was intended to make salaries more competitive and commensurate with employee responsibilities, training, and compensation in other County departments and comparable County offices. The representative also referenced the County's reported $35 million increase in ad valorem taxes from the previous year to the current year, emphasizing the Assessor's Office's role in producing the property valuation information used in that revenue process.

Ms. Gallegos asked commissioners to review the proposal and supporting task lists, consider the requested adjustments, and ask questions or request additional information as needed.

Questions and Discussion by Commissioners

Chairman Schwebach stated that they were not prepared to approve the proposal at the meeting. The commissioner explained that employee reclassifications and salary adjustments are generally addressed during the budget process and that additional information was needed before a decision could be made.

Chairman Schwebach expressed concern about making significant departmental changes near the end of the current administration, particularly with a new elected Assessor and a new Commission majority expected. The commissioner stated that the proposal needed further review to understand the changes and their implications.

Chairman Schwebach asked for the total annual cost of the proposed salary adjustments and whether the increases could be accommodated within the department's existing budget.

Chief Deputy Assessor Gallegos reported that the proposed increases totaled approximately $18.67 per hour across all employees and acknowledged that the annual budget impact had not yet been calculated, including related insurance costs.

Chairman Schwebach stated that the annual financial impact and funding source were necessary to evaluate the request, particularly given the County's tight budget.

Chairman Schwebach stated that the proposal should have been submitted during the May–June budget process for inclusion in the FY 2027 budget. The Commissioner expressed reluctance to approve changes without knowing their full financial impact and questioned where additional funding would come from.

Ms. Gallegos acknowledged the timing concern but reiterated that the request addressed long-standing issues involving employee classifications, certifications, duties, and compensation. The representative asked commissioners to consider the specialized work performed by the Assessor's Office and the value of retaining trained and experienced employees.

Ms. Gallegos referenced previous salary adjustments in the Road Department for employees who attained additional certifications, noting that the Assessor's Office was requesting a similar approach tied to professional qualifications.

Chairman Schwebach responded that the Road Department restructuring had been discussed over an extended period, involved operational concerns, and was supported by an assessment of its overall financial impact.

Chairman Schwebach also noted that the Road Department is not an elected official's department, distinguishing it from the Assessor's Office.

Direction from the Commission

Chairman Schwebach indicated that further discussion with the Assessor's Office representative and County administration was needed and requested a complete analysis of the proposal's annual budget impact, including salary and associated insurance costs, along with clarification of the funding source.

Commissioner Jaramillo suggested addressing the proposal during the next budget cycle, with input from the incoming Assessor and consideration of compensation equity across County departments.

Motion: **Chairman Schwebach** motioned to table till has more information, **seconded** by Commissioner McCall.

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

Motion Carried

B. DISPATCH: Request approval to amend the Medical Directive for Torrance County EMS to add Emergency Management to the contract for medical direction.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager, explained that the directive amends an existing agreement between Torrance County and Dr. Kaw, a document maintained by Dispatch. The requested change is to include the County Emergency Manager under the agreement's existing provisions and Dr. Kaw's professional direction.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager, clarified that the amendment would allow the current Emergency Manager, who already holds the required certification, to perform authorized functions under Dr. Kaw's direction and within the scope of her existing qualifications.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager, emphasized that the amendment does not require future employees to hold the same certification. It addresses the qualifications of the current employee and does not establish a mandatory certification requirement for future personnel.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, asked why the amendment was being brought forward at this time, given that the agreement had been in place for some time.

Samantha O'Dell, Emergency Manager, explained that the provision had been included in the previous agreement with Dr. Kaw but was inadvertently omitted when the contract was revised. She stated that the directive was intended to correct that oversight and restore a provision that had previously been covered.

The amendment is intended to ensure that the agreement accurately reflects the current Emergency Manager's certification and authorized responsibilities under Dr. Kaw's direction.

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

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

Motion Carried

C. FIRE/EMS: Request approval to revert Grant Funds to the State of New Mexico for the Fire Department's comprehensive plan grant.

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, expressed skepticism about the potential benefit of pursuing the opportunity, stating that the department's primary needs are already known, particularly additional staffing and an adequate water supply. The Chief questioned whether further review would provide any actionable information or practical solutions to address these existing needs.

Chief Smith emphasized that the department continues to face resource challenges and suggested that the opportunity would need to offer a tangible, innovative solution to justify the time and effort required.

Kevin McCall, County Commissioner, thanked the Fire Chief for reviewing the matter and explained that the purpose of requesting an additional review was to obtain another perspective before making a final decision to return or reallocate the funds.

The discussion acknowledged that the department and County are managing numerous ongoing responsibilities and moving quickly through multiple priorities. The Fire Chief indicated that a slower pace might allow more time to explore additional opportunities, but current demands limit that capacity.

The exchange reflected the need to balance the potential value of further review against existing staffing, water supply, workload, and operational priorities before deciding whether to proceed or return the funds.

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

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

Motion Carried

D. FIRE/EMS: Request ratification of application to HB255 grant. The application was due on October 9, 2026, prior to this regularly scheduled meeting.

1. Background and Grant Application

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, explained that the opportunity to apply for funding under House Bill 255 was brought to the County's attention approximately two weeks earlier by State Representative Stephanie Lord, District 22.

Due to the September 9 application deadline and the limited time available, staff proceeded with submitting the grant application after prior discussions with the former County Manager regarding how to proceed if matching funds were not required.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager, explained that the intention was to bring the matter before the Commission for approval and ratification at the next appropriate meeting. The application was submitted and was still being processed at the time of the meeting. The Commission was being asked to ratify the grant proposal already submitted. Ratification would not obligate the County to accept the grant or commit to a long-term staffing expense without further review. If the proposal were not ratified, staff indicated that the application would have to be withdrawn.

2. Grant Structure and Long-Term Financial Responsibilities

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, House Bill 255 establishes a two-year public safety workforce capacity-building grant intended to help agencies recruit and retain personnel while developing sustainable funding sources.

The funding structure is as follows:

- **Year 1:** 100% grant funding.
- **Year 2:** 50% grant funding.

- **After Year 2:** The county would be responsible for funding the positions through an identified, sustainable revenue source.

The program is a bridge to help the County establish staffing capacity while developing a long-term financial plan.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, emphasized that the County must determine how it would pay for the positions after the grant funding decreases and ends. They noted that there could be consequences if the county accepted the grant but could not sustain the positions.

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, acknowledged that additional research was needed to confirm the grant requirements and identify eligible revenue sources.

3. Potential Use of Opioid Settlement Funds

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager, reported that Torrance County had approximately $1.107 million in opioid-specific settlement funds available, which had not yet been used.

The funds are subject to specific restrictions, and staff were reviewing whether they could legally support public safety staffing associated with community paramedicine, behavioral health, rehabilitation, and addiction recovery.

The opioid settlement funds originated from litigation involving pharmaceutical companies and the opioid crisis, making programs focused on rehabilitation and recovery potentially relevant.

There were differing interpretations regarding whether the funds could be used for staffing, and confirmation was needed in writing.

Determining whether opioid settlement funds could support eligible activities would be an important step in establishing a sustainable funding plan beyond the two-year grant period.

4. Proposed Public Safety Positions and Specialized Responsibilities

Chief Smith outlined a plan to use three specialized public safety positions to improve countywide emergency response, prevention, and operational support.

One position would oversee a community paramedicine program while also responding to 911 calls as a single-resource unit.

The program would focus on individuals who repeatedly require emergency services, including people experiencing substance use disorders, overdoses, and behavioral health challenges.

Personnel could conduct community outreach, connect individuals with treatment and rehabilitation services, provide information and support, and help people access appropriate care.

The representative emphasized that the program could go beyond handing out informational materials by helping individuals navigate services and, when appropriate, facilitating transportation to treatment or support programs.

- Wildland Fire Operations

Another position would focus on wildland fire responsibilities and related specialized operations.

Chief Smith cited approximately $31,000 billed for reimbursement associated with the Whiskey Fire as an example of potential revenue recovery connected to these activities.

The representative explained that developing this function could help recover costs and provide additional financial support for the program.

- Fire Safety Officer and Fire Marshal Functions

The third area would build on the Fire Safety Officer position, which had been initiated approximately one month earlier.

Still developing the position's duties and responsibilities.

Chief Smith explained that the county currently relies on the state for certain fire-related reviews and functions associated with planning and zoning because it does not have an internal fire marshal's office.

The proposed development would help the county conduct more of its own fire inspections, fire-plan reviews, and related safety functions, potentially generating revenue through these services.

- Emergency Response and Incident Command

Chief Smith explained that the specialized personnel would remain available for 911 response in addition to their assigned program responsibilities.

The positions would provide experienced personnel to assist municipalities and communities experiencing staffing shortages, including Mountainair, where the representative described difficulties maintaining adequate staffing for emergency calls.

Also assist with patient care, serve as incident commanders during events, and coordinate with other fire chiefs.

Chief Smith described the positions as a countywide resource benefiting both unincorporated areas and incorporated municipalities.

5. Behavioral Health, Addiction Recovery, and Community Outreach

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, asked for further explanation of how the proposed positions would address frequent emergency-service users, prevention, and community-based assistance.

Chief Smith explained that personnel could follow up on incidents such as overdoses and help connect affected individuals with support services, rehabilitation programs, and behavioral health resources.

Chief Smith identified substance use and mental health needs as significant areas of concern across Torrance County and its municipalities.

Chief Smith described the potential for personnel to serve as a consistent point of contact for individuals who may not know where to seek help or how to access available services.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, expressed support for an approach that provides meaningful assistance beyond distributing pamphlets, including coaching, practical support, and helping individuals enter treatment programs.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, asked whether the program could work collaboratively with behavioral health professionals, including Jackie Muncie and the team expected to become involved.

Chief Smith agreed that coordination could create a stronger support network.

The discussion also identified opportunities to collaborate with rehabilitation facilities and other organizations to help individuals transition into treatment and recovery services.

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

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

Motion Carried

E. FIRE/EMS: Request approval to pay an unauthorized purchase from last fiscal year to TCL Uniforms in the amount of $664.16. Replacement of uniforms due to equipment destruction at UMN resulting from the Mountainair incident on May 20, 2026.

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, explained that the reimbursement request resulted from an incident that caused losses for first responders, including uniforms and other personal or department-related items. The representative stated that the overall losses from the event were

estimated at approximately $5,000–$6,000, with no resolution reached regarding the broader losses.

Chief Smith expressed disappointment that first responders who were assisting the community experienced losses themselves. The incident reportedly affected a variety of belongings, including wedding rings, phones, uniforms, and other equipment.

Chief Smith explained that an individual had purchased replacement equipment following the incident, but the reimbursement request for the uniforms had been overlooked. The current request was intended to correct that oversight and reimburse the associated uniform expenses.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, asked whether the uniforms had to be destroyed as a result of the incident. The representative stated that the circumstances were unusual and that the extent of the damage and loss varied among individuals.

Julie Fill explained that efforts to recover lost belongings had been pursued through various avenues, including the University of New Mexico (UNM), but those efforts had largely been exhausted without resolving all the losses.

First Responder Property Losses and Claims Against UNM

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, asked for clarification regarding the status of claims related to the incident in which first responders lost personal belongings. The commissioner recalled previously speaking with Julie Phil, who had indicated that tort claim notices would be filed against the University of New Mexico (UNM). The commissioner noted that such claims can take considerable time to process and asked whether there had been any updates.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, raised concerns about how similar situations should be handled in the future to protect first responders and ensure that losses are properly documented and addressed.

Julie Fill, the Firefighters Union President, clarified that each affected individual was required to file an individual claim with UNM. The President confirmed that the necessary information had been provided and that the claims remained under review and processing by UNM.

Julie Fill explained that the losses varied among personnel. Some individuals experienced relatively minor losses, while others reported more than $5,000 in lost personal belongings. The President stated that their own loss was limited to a watch.

Julie Fill reported that UNM had requested substantial additional information, particularly regarding why documentation of the belongings was not completed. The President explained that personnel had been stripped of their belongings during the incident and sent away, contributing to the unusual circumstances surrounding the losses; claims were still being reviewed by UNM, and no final resolution had been reported.

Motion: **Commissioner McCall** motioned to approve, **seconded** by **Vice-Chair Jaramillo**.

- Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

F. FIRE/EMS: Request approval to reimburse Andrew Jelson for the cost of the intermediate course provided by UNM EMS Academy in the amount of $2,030.00.

1. Background and Purpose of Request

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, presented a request to reimburse an employee for the cost of completing EMT Intermediate training, which enhances emergency medical response capabilities within the department.

The differences between certification levels:

- EMT Basic: Provides basic emergency medical care, including CPR and basic first aid.
- EMT Intermediate: Allows additional medical interventions, including starting IVs, administering cardiac medications, and providing certain medications to stop seizures.
- Paramedic: Provides a more advanced level of emergency medical care and requires more extensive training.

The department had originally planned to send two individuals to EMT Intermediate training. One employee withdrew because of an upcoming addition to his family, leaving the other individual to complete the course.

2. Employee Training and Reimbursement Request

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, explained that the employee had already enrolled in and paid for the training before reimbursement was formally requested.

The department had initially expected the employee to cover the expense personally. However, because the second employee withdrew and the department no longer needed to cover that individual's training, **Chief Smith** wanted to ask the Commission whether the available funds could instead be used to reimburse the employee who completed the course.

The employee completed the course and became one of the department's newest EMT Intermediates.

The employee had been a committed member of the department for longer than the representative had been employed there and described him as a valued employee.

Purpose of Reimbursement: The request was intended to compensate the employee for training that benefits the department by expanding its emergency medical response capabilities.

3. Discussion Regarding Training Policies and Employee Retention

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, asked whether the County had an established program for paying employees' training expenses or supporting additional professional certifications.

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, explained that training support generally depends on available funding. The department attempts to reimburse employees when training improves emergency response and enhances services provided to the public.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, supported funding professional development but suggested establishing a formal training reimbursement agreement that includes an employee retention requirement.

- The proposed agreement could require employees who receive County-funded training to remain with the County for a specified period.
- The obligation could be prorated over time, with the repayment requirement gradually decreasing as the employee continues working for the County.
- If an employee leaves shortly after completing expensive training, a portion of the training cost could potentially be recovered under the agreement.
- The commissioner noted that such an arrangement would help protect the County's investment in employee development.

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, agreed with the recommendation and explained that retention provisions would be particularly important for future paramedic training, which requires a more substantial investment of time and money and may create opportunities for employees to move to other departments.

Motion: **Commissioner Schwebach** motioned to approve, **seconded** by **Vice-Chair Jaramillo**.

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

Motion Carried

G. FIRE/EMS: Request approval to pay an unauthorized purchase from last fiscal year to Airgas in the amount of $2,393.39. There was an emergency oxygen order placed because all oxygen was used during the incident on May 20, 2026, in Mountainair.

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, explained that a significant amount of medical oxygen was used during an incident involving patients who required transportation by emergency medical services. The oxygen was necessary to provide patient care during transport. The department needed to replenish oxygen supplies, including:

- Large oxygen cylinders carried in rescue vehicles.
- Portable oxygen cylinders used by emergency personnel.
- Additional oxygen supplies used during the incident and routine operations.

- Delayed Payment or Processing: Chief Smith expressed uncertainty about why the Airgas expense had not been addressed sooner, noting that approximately three to four months had passed. The representative acknowledged the delay and brought the matter forward to resolve the outstanding expense.

- Cost of Replenishment: An amount of approximately $2,400 was referenced during the discussion for the oxygen-related expense. The exact wording of the amount and the associated vendor reference should be verified against the invoice.

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

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

Motion Carried

H. FIRE/EMS: Request approval to submit a grant application for a special project through the NM EMS Bureau. The grant requires a 25% cash match, which is available through district fire protection funding. Allocations would be for the FY 28 budget.

1. Request and Purpose

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, explained that the department is seeking to secure funding for an additional rescue vehicle through a grant, using a similar approach to the purchase of Rescue 16. The department purchased Rescue 16 using grant funding, supplemented by funds from Fire District 3 to cover the remaining balance.

Using funds from Fire District 2 (Indian Hills) to cover the difference between the anticipated grant award and the cost of another rescue vehicle.

The goal is to strengthen the department's fleet, maintain reliable emergency response capabilities, and ensure that front-line rescue vehicles remain operational.

2. Current Rescue Fleet and Maintenance Concerns

Kevin McCall, County Commissioner, asked about the mileage and overall condition of the department's rescue vehicles.

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, explained that the vehicles accumulate mileage rapidly because of frequent emergency responses and patient transports. The representative noted that the high usage would make the vehicles difficult to maintain economically under a lease arrangement.

Chief Smith provided the following examples:

- **Rescue 13:** Experienced a belt-related mechanical problem approximately three weeks earlier. Although the initial issue was not considered major, a replacement pulley cost approximately $4,200. The vehicle also requires transmission work.
- **Rescue 14:** Identified as another older vehicle in terms of mileage, despite its relatively recent age.
- **Rescue 16:** Purchased through the previous grant-funded process and had accumulated approximately 64,000 miles in just under a year, according to the discussion.

- Operational Concerns: Chief Smith emphasized that the department needs to keep its primary, first-out rescue vehicles ready for immediate deployment while managing maintenance and repairs on high-mileage vehicles.

3. Current Vehicle Availability and Fleet Needs

Gary Smith, County Fire Chief, reported that a rescue vehicle obtained from Valencia County still requires additional work and is currently stationed in Willard, where it sees less frequent use.

Two rescue vehicles were reported as operational at the EMS station, although Rescue 13 still requires transmission repairs.

Chief Smith explained that obtaining another rescue vehicle would help the department move toward its desired fleet configuration:

- Four rescue vehicles available for daily operations.
- Two additional vehicles serving as spares, allowing maintenance and repairs to occur without significantly reducing operational availability.

Chief Smith emphasized that having backup vehicles is important because the department's active units accumulate mileage quickly and require ongoing maintenance.

4. Funding Availability and Matching Funds

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager, informed the Commission that the proposed matching funds would come from the Fire Protection Fund.
The fund had approximately $394,000 available as of the previous Thursday.

This balance indicates that funding was available in the account for consideration as a potential grant match.

The proposed approach would mirror the prior purchase of Rescue 16, using grant funding supplemented by available fire district funds to cover the remaining cost.

5. Additional Operational Consideration

During the discussion, the representative also noted the need to address emergency room access and patient transport arrangements in the area.

The willingness to collaborate on this issue, recognizing that emergency medical transport and destination availability are additional concerns affecting the department's operations.

Motion: **Commissioner McCall** motioned to approve, **seconded** by **Vice-Chair Jaramillo**.

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

Motion Carried

I. JUVENILE JUSTICE (EVYFC), Rebecca Armstrong, Continuum Coordinator: Request approval of the annual board member renewal as presented on September 23, 2023.

Rebecca Armstrong, Coordinator, requested Commission approval of the Estancia Valley Youth and Family Council Board membership list previously presented at the last Commission meeting. The approval of the current list was needed at this time, even though some board representatives may change in January or throughout the coming year as appointments and assignments are updated.

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman, confirmed that the list being considered was the same list presented at the previous meeting. A motion for approval was then proposed, and it was also asked whether a vacancy remained for the Edgewood Police Department.

Ms. Armstrong explained that she had contacted Lieutenant Lavato of the Edgewood Police Department following the previous Commission meeting. Lieutenant Lavato advised her that some positions had been filled and that the department had a new chief.

Ms. Armstrong stated that she was coordinating a meeting with herself, the new police chief, and the lieutenant to explain the purpose and responsibilities of the Estancia Valley Youth and Family Council Board, answer questions, and determine whether the department wished to continue participating and designate a representative, and will provide further information regarding Edgewood Police Department's participation after the meeting.

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

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

Motion Carried

J. PLANNING AND ZONING: Review of the 2026 Zoning Ordinance revision proposal. Request approval to publish before hearing for adoption.

Donald Goen, County P & Z Director, explained that the proposed changes include language clarification, updated definitions, and revised development standards to make the ordinance clearer, more consistent, and enforceable. The county attorney has reviewed the revisions, and the presenter confirmed that the proposal is ready to proceed to publication.

- **Definitions and agricultural regulations:** The revisions clarify definitions for feedlots, kennels, livestock, poultry, temporary agricultural activities, and other land uses.

- Feedlot definitions would be aligned with federal guidelines.
- Livestock equivalencies would be updated to reflect USDA guidelines, changing the comparison from one horse or cow equaling three goats or sheep to five.
- Poultry limits would be established, with more than 24 birds potentially constituting commercial activity and requiring a conditional use permit, depending on the zoning designation and circumstances.
- Kennel provisions would be clarified to restore specific animal-number guidelines.
- Temporary agricultural activities, including school and 4-H projects, would be clarified to avoid conflicts between sections of the ordinance.

- **Mobile home age restrictions: Mr. Goen** proposed prohibiting the placement of used mobile homes more than 30 years old. He explained that the existing requirement allowed mobile homes dating back to 1977, potentially bringing older, deteriorating units into the county. The proposed rolling 30-year limit is intended to improve residential construction quality while preserving access to affordable used housing.

- **Residential structures and living in sheds:** The revisions specifically clarify that sheds are intended for storage and may not be used as dwellings unless they meet applicable residential construction requirements. The presenter explained that this would help code enforcement address unsafe living conditions, including structures without approved plumbing, electrical systems, or appropriate waste disposal. Commissioners asked how the provision would apply to barndominiums and tiny homes; the presenter confirmed that residential structures must meet applicable permitting and construction standards.

- **Water-storage systems and development permits:** The proposed revisions would allow appropriately licensed New Mexico GB-98 contractors to design and install certain water-storage systems for properties relying on hauled water. Contractors would need to provide proof of current state licensure. Plans drawn by property owners would still require review and approval by a New Mexico-licensed engineer or architect. The presenter stated that the change would reduce unnecessary barriers to residential development while maintaining appropriate accountability.

- **Floodplain compliance:** The ordinance would require property owners to submit a post-construction elevation certificate within one year of receiving a land development permit when applicable. The presenter explained that the county had encountered cases in which pre-construction certificates were submitted but final certificates were not provided. This revision would support continued compliance with FEMA requirements and the National Flood Insurance Program.

- **Cannabis production and manufacturing:** A significant portion of the revisions addresses the size and expansion of cannabis operations.

  - One state-issued cannabis production or manufacturing license would be permitted per parcel.
  - Applicants would be required to disclose the number of plants proposed for production.
  - Facility square footage would be tied to the number of mature plants, with limited allowances for variations in facility design.
  - Conditional use permits would specify approved plant counts and facility sizes.
  - Any proposed increase in plant numbers or facility square footage would require modification of the existing conditional use permit through the Planning and Zoning Board.
  - Violations could result in revocation of the conditional use permit.

Mr. Goen explained that these provisions are intended to prevent uncontrolled expansion, excessive water use, and multiple large growing operations on a single parcel. He emphasized that the county is not prohibiting cannabis operations but establishing clearer requirements for their size and operation.

- **Current cannabis activity:** In response to commissioners' questions, the presenter estimated that approximately eight cannabis operations were active, although he would need to verify the exact number. He stated that the county had not received a new application in more than a year and that the state Cannabis Control Division had been made aware of the county's proposed requirements.

- **Domestic wells and water use:** The revisions would clarify that individual domestic wells should not automatically be considered an impairment of prior existing water uses. The presenter distinguished ordinary residential well use from large commercial operations that could significantly affect surrounding water resources. He noted that state law governs domestic well permits and that the intent is to avoid unnecessarily restricting otherwise lawful residential development.

- **Public notification requirements: Mr. Goen's** revisions would simplify certain notification procedures while maintaining reasonable efforts to notify affected property owners. The presenter explained that repeatedly mailing notices to the same address using different delivery methods can create unnecessary administrative work when the original notice is returned.

- **Clarification of zones and districts:** The presenter explained that the ordinance has historically used the terms *zone* and *district* inconsistently.

  - Zones may be changed through the county commission's approval process.
  - Districts, such as special-use and solid-waste districts, operate within established zones.
  - The revisions clarify these distinctions to help applicants understand whether they need a zoning change or a conditional use permit.
  - Commissioners confirmed their understanding that the changes are intended to standardize terminology rather than introduce an entirely new zoning structure.

Commissioner McCall asked whether the cannabis revisions would affect businesses growing traditional crops, such as tomatoes or potted plants.

Mr. Goen clarified that the additional restrictions apply specifically to cannabis operations. Traditional commercial greenhouse activities would continue under the existing applicable requirements, including conditional use permits where required.

Commissioner McCall discussed enforcement of the proposed restrictions on living in sheds and other unpermitted structures.

Mr. Goen reported that the department now has two code enforcement officers and one senior code enforcement officer, compared with one officer previously covering approximately 3,400

square miles. He stated that the additional staffing has allowed the department to be more proactive and to increase the number of cases investigated and addressed.

Mr. Goen explained that a reference sheet was included in the commission's packet to identify proposed changes without requiring commissioners to review all 84 pages of the ordinance line by line. The proposed revisions will be available for public review before the scheduled hearing.

Linda Jaramillo, County Vice Chair, sought clarification regarding feedlot restrictions, mobile home age limits, sheds used as residences, commercial greenhouse operations, cannabis facility expansion, water usage, and the distinction between zoning changes and conditional use permits.

Donald Goen, County P & Z Director, responded that the revisions are primarily intended to clarify existing requirements, close regulatory gaps, and establish more consistent standards for enforcement.

Kevin McCall, County Commissioner, confirmed that feedlots remain prohibited in residential zones and discussed the importance of ensuring the public can review the proposed language before adoption.

Donald Goen, County P & Z Director, confirmed that the proposed revisions had been reviewed by the County Attorney and that he had already received inquiries from members of the public regarding the changes.

Motion: **Commissioner Schwebach** motioned to approve, **seconded** by **Vice-Chair Jaramillo**.

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

Motion Carried

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12. DISCUSSION:

A. CLERK'S REPORT:

1. Election Administration and Early Voting Update

Sylvia Chavez, County Clerk, reported that early voting began the previous Tuesday and provided an update on election preparations, voter participation, and absentee ballot activity.

Election certification: The County completed its election machine certification on September 30. Only 29 ballots needed to be processed through the machine, allowing the certification to be completed before noon.

- The process was completed efficiently.
- She thanked the Republican Party chair for attending and observing the certification, noting that the chair asked questions and expressed confidence in the process.

In-person voting: As of the morning report, 187 voters had cast ballots in person at the Administration Building during the first five days of early voting.

Absentee voting: The County had sent out 537 absentee ballots and received 23 completed ballots back as of the previous afternoon. The Clerk noted that ballots had only recently been mailed and that returns were beginning to arrive.

Absentee drop boxes: The permanent drop boxes in Mountaineer and Moriarty were being used, and election staff had already collected ballots from both locations.

Overseas voters: The County received six overseas ballot requests, including voters residing in Ecuador, England, and Norway. The Clerk reported that three of the six ballots had already been returned. Overseas ballots must be received by the applicable election deadline.

Voter education: The Clerk encouraged Commissioners and members of the public to use voter guides prepared by the nonpartisan League of Women Voters. The guides explain the four proposed constitutional amendments, bond questions, and candidate information.

Additional voting location: The Moriarty Civic Center was scheduled to open as an alternate early voting location that Saturday, with voting available Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

2. New Mexico Counties Legislative Priorities

Sylvia Chavez, County Clerk, reported on information received from the New Mexico Counties Board of Directors meeting. Although she was unable to attend due to illness, she consulted with Vice Chair Joshua Jones, a Sandoval County Commissioner, who provided the meeting information.

Four legislative priorities were identified for the upcoming legislative session:

House Bill 2 appropriations: Items include the detention reimbursement fund, 700 MHz radios, and a special appropriation related to the disabled veterans exemption.

Governmental solvency: Addressing financial stability and sustainability for County governments.

Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA) improvements: Seeking changes to address the administrative burden of public records requests.

EMS as an essential government service: Advancing recognition and support for emergency medical services as an essential public service.

3. Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA) Concerns

Sylvia Chavez, County Clerk, highlighted IPRA reform as a significant concern for Torrance County and smaller Counties throughout New Mexico.

Torrance County ranked among the top 10 counties statewide for the volume of IPRA requests, alongside larger counties such as Bernalillo and San Juan.

The volume and complexity of requests had become a substantial administrative burden, requiring Torrance County to establish a dedicated position to manage IPRA requests. Previously, the responsibilities had been handled as part of the County Clerk's broader duties.

The law was being used in ways that create excessive workloads for county employees rather than serving its original purpose of promoting transparency and open government.

Kevin McCall, County Commissioner, noted that IPRA reform had been a legislative priority for approximately six years but had repeatedly failed to advance.

- **Sylvia Chavez, County Clerk,** agreed that reform should remain a priority until meaningful changes are adopted.

- **Kevin McCall, County Commissioner,** discussed why reform had stalled, with the discussion identifying legislative approval and disagreements over the proposed statutory language as potential obstacles. Questions were also raised about whether state legislators are subject to the same public records requirements as local officials; no definitive answer was established during the discussion.

- Madam Clerk shared an example of the workload, reporting that a County employee had received 33 IPRA requests over a long weekend and emphasized that the objective of reform is to preserve government transparency while ensuring that records requests do not unnecessarily overwhelm County staff.

4. Oil and Gas Revenue Distributed to Torrance County

- **Sylvia Chavez, County Clerk,** shared information from a presentation by the New Mexico Oil and Gas Association regarding funding distributed to Torrance County in 2025.

- The presentation reported approximately $16.1 million in oil and gas-related funding distributed for the benefit of Torrance County.
    - Approximately $12.6 million was allocated to schools.
    - Approximately $3 million was allocated through capital outlay funding.

- The Clerk stated that she had not realized the amount of funding was so substantial and considered the information valuable for understanding the contributions of oil and gas revenues to local education and county projects.

5. Voter Education and Constitutional Amendments

- Madam Clerk explained that she had posted simplified explanations of the constitutional amendments on her Facebook page to help voters understand the choices on the ballot.
- She noted that the amendments address subjects including the governor's veto authority, legislative compensation, and the placement of school bond questions on general election ballots.
- Her goal was to explain the practical effect of voting "yes" or "no" on each amendment so residents could make informed decisions without having to interpret lengthy legal language independently.
- The Clerk reiterated her commitment to providing accessible, nonpartisan election information to the public.

B. MANAGER'S REPORT:

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager:

1. Employee Health Insurance and Benefits

Employees had expressed widespread dissatisfaction with the County's existing health insurance coverage, particularly regarding affordability and the level of benefits provided.

After exploring alternatives, the county pursued an arrangement with the City of Albuquerque to extend its employee benefits program to Torrance County employees, beginning in January.

Cost savings: The County Manager reported the following annual administrative costs:

- Previous benefits consulting arrangement with Gallagher: $27,600 annually.
- Proposed arrangement through the City of Albuquerque: $4,700 annually.
- Estimated annual savings to the county: $22,900.

The available benefits will include medical, dental, vision, life insurance, term insurance, and other benefits offered through the City of Albuquerque.

Employees will have the option to enroll in the available coverage but will not be required to do so if they have other coverage, such as military benefits.

Enthusiasm about the change, emphasizing that the goal was to provide employees with more affordable coverage and improved benefit options. She reported that employees had welcomed the proposed change.

2. County Audit

The County's audit preparation was progressing well.

Auditors had requested documentation from various departments, and department heads and staff were responding diligently to those requests.

An official meeting was scheduled for that day to begin the audit process.

The County Manager acknowledged the cooperation of county personnel in gathering and submitting the requested information.

3. Behavioral Health and Community Coordination

Following discussions with Jackie Muncie regarding the proposed committee and community coordination efforts previously discussed by the Commission.

Ms. Muncie was not yet ready to establish a separate committee and instead wanted county representatives and interested individuals to participate in existing meetings.

A meeting was scheduled for October 26 at 9:00 a.m. at the Neil Mertz Building, located at the judicial complex north of Estancia, at 903 Fifth Street.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager, encouraged Commissioners, previously identified County representatives, and interested members of the public to attend and become more familiar with the ongoing efforts.

4. Requests for Proposals and Employment Vacancies

Two active requests for proposals (RFPs):

- **Domestic Violence Coordinator:** Proposals were scheduled to close October 29.
- **Economic Development Coordinator:** Proposals were scheduled to close November 5. This was the second time the position had been advertised.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager, anticipated providing an update on the economic development recruitment process at the next Commission meeting.

She also reported that Torrance County had only one posted employment vacancy at the time of the meeting: Assistant Chief of Training for the Fire Department.

The low number of vacancies reflected the County's current staffing status.

5. Future Use of the Current Administrative Building

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager, reported that there were no significant new developments regarding the future use of the current administrative building.

The county was considering how to repurpose the building to meet future operational needs.

Linda Jaramillo, County Vice Chair, recalled that the previous discussion had included the possibility of using the building for EMS and law enforcement functions, potentially creating a public safety facility.

Stephanie Reynolds, County Manager, confirmed that she remained open to those possibilities and stated that the general direction was to repurpose the building rather than rent or lease it to an outside party.

No final decision regarding the building's future use was reported.

D. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT:

Kevin McCall, County Vice Chair: None

Ryan Schwebach, County Chairman: Expressed gratitude for the recent rain and moisture, emphasizing hope that the precipitation continues to benefit the County, and acknowledged the Road Department's ongoing work and encouraged the public to be patient as crews address road conditions following the rainfall.

Linda Jaramillo, County Commissioner, reported receiving numerous phone calls and emails and has been responding to constituents' questions and concerns.

I attended the Matanza event hosted by the Manzano Land Grant. State Representative Stephanie Lord and other elected officials were present. The event was enjoyable, with music and a community atmosphere.

I also attended a Sunday meeting with residents in the Mountainair area, specifically in Loma Parda, regarding concerns about utility poles that may be placed through or across their

properties. The issue involves residents seeking clarification about the proposed pole locations and potential property impacts.

I will be absent from the next County Commission meeting due to a 10-day religious pilgrimage with my church parish to Portugal, Spain, France, and the Vatican. This is my first trip to Europe.

Chairman Schwebach instructed County Manager Reynolds to keep the next Commission meeting agenda-light since Vice-Chair Jaramillo will not be in attendance and does not want to make decisions without her here.

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13. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

A. COMMISSION: Limited personnel matters regarding the position of the County Manager, Pursuant to Executive Session NMSA 1978 10-15-1.H (2)

B. COMMISSION: Discussion regarding the purchase and discussion for possible action on a land purchase agreement between Mr. Larson and Torrance County, NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1(H)(8).

C. COMMISSION: Discussion regarding a proposed lease for Torrance County property for the purpose of grazing, NMSA 1978 10-15-1 (H)(6)

D. COMMISSION: Discussion regarding RFP award for legal representation and DWI Coordinator, NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1 (H)(6)

Motion: **Commissioner McCall** motioned to move to Executive Session, **seconded** by **Vice-Chair Jaramillo**.

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

Motion Carried

Motion: **Chairman Schwebach** motioned to move to Regular Session, **seconded** by **Commissioner McCall.**

- Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

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14. CONSIDERATION OF ACTION(S):

A. COMMISSION: Limited personnel matters regarding the position of the County Manager, Pursuant to Executive Session NMSA 1978 10-15-1.H (2)
(Roll Call Vote)

Motion: **Chairman Schwebach** motioned to continue the County Manager's employment for the remainder of the 24-month contract. The County Manager will continue serving under the existing contract and address the probationary review period, **seconded** by **Commissioner McCall.**

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

B. COMMISSION: Discussion regarding the purchase and discussion for possible action on a land purchase agreement between Mr. Larson and Torrance County, NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1(H)(8).
(Roll Call Vote)

Motion: **Chairman Schwebach** motioned to direct the County Manager to execute the closing documents for the purchase of land from William A. Larson. The property is described as being located in the southwest quarter and a portion of the north half of the southeast quarter of Section 9, Township 8 North, Range 8 East. Approximately five gross acres. A plat filed on March 1, 1996, with information updated through November 2, 2026, as stated in the meeting transcript, **seconded** by **Vice-Chair Jaramillo**.

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes

- Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

C. COMMISSION: Discussion regarding a proposed lease for Torrance County property for the purpose of grazing, NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1 (H)(6).
(Roll Call Vote)

No Action Taken

D. COMMISSION: Discussion regarding RFP award for legal representation NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1 (H)(6).
(Roll Call Vote)

1. **Meeting Minutes Summary – Legal Services Contract Award**
   - Motion Made: A commissioner made a motion to award the contract to NMLG Law, the County's existing legal counsel.
   - Clarification of Firm Name: During the motion, the speaker asked for confirmation that the law firm's name was stated correctly. The response indicated that the name was close enough, confirming the intended firm.
   - Purpose: The motion sought to award the contract to the County's current attorney, continuing the existing legal services relationship.
   - Action Status: The transcript does not indicate whether the motion was seconded or approved by the Commission.

Motion: **Commissioner McCall** motioned to approve, **seconded** by **Vice-Chair Jaramillo.**

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

Motion Carried

E. COMMISSION: Discussion regarding RFP award for DWI Coordinator, NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1 (H)(6).

1. **Meeting Minutes Summary – DWI Coordinator Contract Award**

Motion: **Commissioner McCall** motioned to award Michelle Ortiz the position of DWI Coordinator, **seconded** by **Vice-Chair Jaramillo.**

- Roll Call Vote:
  - Schwebach – Yes

- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes

Motion Carried

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

Next meeting: October 28, 2026, 9:00 AM

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16. Signing of official documents:

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17. Adjournment:

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

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

Motion Carried

Meeting adjourned at 11:44 AM.

Ryan Schwebach - Chairman

Genell Morris – Admin Assistant

11-12-2026
Date

Sylvia Chavez – County Clerk

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