Board of Commissioners

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
June 17, 2025

Present: Nancy Wyse, Chair; Pat Malone, Vice Chair; Gabe Shepherd, Commissioner; Vance Croney, County Counsel; Rachel McEneny, County Administrator; Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator

Elected Official: Jef Van Arsdall, Sheriff

Staff: Erika Milo, Board Recorder; Rachel Bulder, Maura Kwiatkowski, Board Staff; Sean McGuire, Sustainability; Debbie Sessions, Financial Services; Anne Thwaits, Public Information Officer; Bailey Payne, Community Development

Guests: John Harris, Horsepower Productions; Jason Dorsette, Linn Benton Community College; Kathleen Van Camp; Marge Popp; Mark Yeager; Joel Schoening, Resource Recycling Systems; Elizabeth Start, Start Consulting; Cierra Dawson, Michael Ahr, Benton Soil and Water Conservation District

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Wyse called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM, and introductions were made.

2. Review and Approve Agenda

The following item was removed from the agenda:

10. Executive Session under ORS 192.660[2][d] – Labor Negotiations

3. Announcements

Malone referred to the recent shootings of two Minnesota lawmakers, crimes which appear to be politically motivated. Malone cautioned against crossing the line from disagreeing with someone to viewing them as an enemy. It is important to honor the tradition of civil political discourse and be able to disagree on issues but see each other as equals.

4. Proclamation

4.1 Proclaiming June 19, 2025 as Juneteenth in Benton County, Proclamation No. 2025-019 – Jason Dorsette, Institutional Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC)

[Recorder's note: this item was heard after Item 5.]

Dorsette read the Proclamation aloud.

MOTION: Malone moved to adopt Proclamation No. 2025-019, proclaiming June 19, 2025 as Juneteenth in Benton County. Shepherd seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

Dorsette indicated that on June 21, LBCC will host its annual Juneteenth holiday. All Benton and Linn County community members are invited to the free event. The event will feature speakers, workshops, live music, dancing, games, arts and crafts, food, and book and plant giveaways.

5. Comments from the Public

[Recorder's note: Van Camp's testimony related to Item 8, Public Hearings, Public Hearing 2, Adopting a Budget, Making Appropriations, and Levying Taxes for the Biennium beginning July 1, 2025 and ending June 30, 2027, Resolution No. R2025-018, but was heard at this time for logistical reasons.]

Kathleen Van Camp, Benton County resident, asked the following questions about the amount of money Benton County is spending on behalf of the public:

- Why has the proposed County budget increased so much when the population has barely changed?
- Why is the County putting out so much debt, which citizens will have to pay for long into the future instead of conserving funds?
- Why were the top managers of the Benton County staff given massive raises a few years ago while the rest of the County struggled to obtain a few percentages of cost-of-living increases?

Marge Popp, Benton County resident, expressed concerns about expenditures of nearly $500,000 in Benton County taxpayer funds on the Sustainable Materials Management Plan (SMMP) project, especially since the project's goals largely overlap with existing Oregon state initiatives. Given the County's current financial constraints, the County should focus on developing a comprehensive solid waste management plan specifically tailored to the needs of Benton County, rather than duplicating Federal and State policies aimed at source reduction, an area where the County has limited direct influence over corporate producers. Developing a solid waste management plan should have been the first priority, prioritizing solutions for waste that cannot be recycled or reused, including exploring better disposal methods than Coffin Butte Landfill (CBL), which is in a highly unsuitable location. A crucial component of the County's waste management strategy should be an improved recycling system that offers more effective options than the current waste hauler provides. Popp urged the County to direct resources toward these tangible needs, rather than broad concepts, and described the SMMP project as a costly and misdirected effort to divert attention from the expansion plans of a profitable out-of-state corporation.

6. Work Session

6.1 Regional Sustainable Materials Management Plan (SMMP) Task Force Final Report – Joel Schoening, Resource Recycling Systems; Elizabeth Start, Start Consulting; Sean McGuire, Sustainability; Bailey Payne, Community Development

McGuire introduced the final report of the regional SMMP task force and summarized the role of the consultants: review research and provide technical assistance, facilitation, and staffing to move the process forward. County staff began listening sessions on July 2, 2024 and met with over 40 regional elected officials, staff, experts, state officials, the Governor's Office, and the Department of Environmental Quality to ensure an understanding of the entire regional system, not just one location. The task force's kickoff meeting was held on October 21, and four additional task force meetings followed. There were also 21 subcommittee meetings.

McGuire reminded that the principal purpose of SMMP was to address, explore, and collaborate to find solutions together to deal with systemic challenges. The task force explored solutions to address challenges and prepare for the closure of CBL. There were two questions to answer, the first being how can our region support the efforts to reduce material generation and increase sustainable materials management? This was the focus of three of the subcommittees. The second question was, how can we proactively prepare for the closure of CBL? This region, including the coast, does not have the infrastructure to address that eventuality. This question was the focus of the fourth subcommittee.

Start provided an overview of the waste system and how it is all interconnected. The presentation included a review of the timeline of the task force, information regarding the task force's work, and the work of the four different subcommittees, the recommendations that came from that, and the work that will come from that. Lastly, some recommendations and final thoughts about the state and regional context of waste management.

Schoening indicated the process began by taking a statewide view. The waste landfilled material generated in the state is around six million tons. Three quarters of that material is generated in the northwest region, which was the original focus of the project: roughly Lane County north to the Columbia River and Cascade Mountains and west to the coast. This region also accounts for about three quarters of the state's population. This region recovers 2.4 million tons; material that is diverted from the landfill stream. The northwest region is somewhat better at recovery than the rest of Oregon, a state that is a national leader.

The region faces a future where there will be a long-term need for managing waste. Eighty-four percent is an admirable diversion relative to many areas of the country, but there is still a waste stream that will need to be managed. The SMMP effort initiated by Benton County took a step to look at this region; to bring together partners – the counties, trade associations, nonprofits, and academic experts – to start to look at the region's needs from a sustainable materials management perspective; looking at materials for their full life cycle impact. The SMMP task force’s approach was to look at the entire waste and recycling stream for potential alternatives and strategies.

A look at the 13-county region indicates that half of all material currently landfilled goes east of the Cascades; it is trucked or barged out up the Columbia River to distant landfills. Approximately 60% of the other half goes to CBL. When the Metro counties are removed, 60 to 62% of the material in this 10-county region goes to CBL. Ninety-seven percent of the landfill material generated in seven counties (Benton, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Polk, Tillamook, and Yamhill) goes to CBL. There are few other choices for where that landfill material can go, which is a challenge for resiliency. It is the problem statement that drove the SMMP work and was a driving focus of the SMMP task force’s conversations.

Start stressed the need for a systems approach to the problem, which is not expanding the landfill or having more landfill space. More material needs to be kept out of the landfill, which can only be done by taking a systems approach through a sustainable materials management plan that is focused on reducing the amount of waste generated.

The SMMP task force brought together 19 members to address waste reduction challenges in Benton County. The task force focused on regional waste management collaboration, particularly for the seven-county mid-Willamette Valley region that is most dependent on CBL. Over eight months, the task force analyzed waste streams, success stories, and systems to develop recommendations across four categories: regional waste, food and organics, the built environment, and products and packaging. Key recommendations included creating a regional waste authority, adopting a hub-and-spoke network plan for waste transport, expanding food waste prevention and recovery programs, improving built environment material recovery infrastructure, and establishing reuse hubs for products and packaging. The task force emphasized the need for regional collaboration, policy alignment, and investments in infrastructure and programs to achieve sustainable waste management.

The recommendations are not consultant-driven recommendations; they are driven by the local experts who understand the region and its needs. The recommendations are grouped into four categories to match the focus area of each subcommittee.

Start indicated the subcommittees considered a number of questions:

1. Where are we now? What is our future state? Where do we need to go?
2. What do we want from this process?
3. If we make this recommendation, what do we have to be thinking about? What are the consequences? Unintended consequences?
4. What are the social impacts?
5. What are the economic impacts? Is there opportunity for job creation?
6. How do we actually move to the next level?
7. Who needs to act on this? Who is going to pay for this?
8. What barriers and legislation or policy need to be addressed?

The following recommendations were presented:

1. **Regional Waste Recommendation Summary:** desired future state: the mid-northwest region has a publicly owned transfer infrastructure network designed for recovery and with access to intermodal transport.

   Recommendation Package:

   Phase 1: Create a regional waste authority.
   Phase 2: Study and adopt a regional intermodal hub-and-spoke network plan.
   Phase 3: Finance and develop publicly owned transfer infrastructure.

2. **Food and Organics Recommendation Summary:** desired future state: the Willamette Valley has a coordinated approach to sharing best practices among local governments, nonprofits, and businesses; collaborating on engagement campaigns; and improving infrastructure for food waste prevention, donation, and recovery.

   Recommendation Package:

   1. Create regional collaboration for food and organic waste prevention, donation, and recovery.
   2. Make the case and provide tools and programs for commercial and institutional prevention.

3. Increase coordination regionally among local governments and nonprofits while improving infrastructure to support donation.
4. Expand collection, processing, and end-use mid valley (Commercial/Single Family) and in Lane County and the Metro (Multifamily).

3. **Built Environment Recommendation Summary:** desired future state: the State and the Mid-Willamette valley region are aligning strategies to address Oregon's housing needs by maximizing the use of existing structures, building with low impact materials, and diverting reusable material from landfills.

Recommendation Package:

1. Improve infrastructure for recovery and management of construction, renovation, and demolition debris.
2. Integrate adaptive building reuse into state housing strategy.
3. Adopt policies to require healthier, more circular building materials.

4. **Products and Packaging Recommendation Summary:** desired future state: the Mid-Willamette Valley employs sustainable materials management strategies for economic development and community benefit.

Recommendation Package:

1. Establish hubs for reuse infrastructure, programming, and economic development.
2. Pursue policies that shift costs of materials management to producers.
3. Increase collaboration and public education for recovery and reuse of bulky products.

Schoening noted that while the process began with a 13-county region, there is a narrower, seven-county region loosely referred to as the Mid-Willamette Valley that is most dependent on CBL. Those seven counties likely have the greatest need for collaboration for long-range planning and for shared policy approaches and programmatic support. However, there is still a role for the State and the other counties. Lane County, the Metro area, and the State have all done some innovative work. The seven-county region can learn from that work and adopt the things that fit for the seven-county region. The final recommendation is to consider a scenario where a regional collaboration is established. Regional collaboration is the foundation for advancing policies, making investments, and creating programs and sustaining them over time.

McGuire mentioned Representative Finger McDonald's bill to have a state-level task force going forward. The bill is out of the Ways and Means Committee and is now in Capital Construction. At the final task force meeting, all the attendees agreed that regardless of the disposition of that bill, regional collaboration is needed. Conversations are continuing with elected officials, among staff, and with the Department of Environmental Quality.

Shepherd asked about the regional waste authority. Would that be the seven or 13 counties? Schoening responded that this would be dependent on how it is structured and the first steps. At a minimum, it would be the seven counties. If an intergovernmental agreement structure is used, it could include all 13. If an official authority is created, Schoening recommends the authority prioritize the seven counties with the others having an advisory role.

Malone noted four counties are actively engaged (Benton, Marion, Linn and Polk); this is the core group with the best chance of moving forward; they are willing and able to devote resources. Lincoln and Tillamook are interested, but they may not initially have the capacity to engage.

Shepherd suggested the Phase 3 recommendation for publicly owned infrastructure development implies a vision that the disposition of materials is outside this region. Is that the takeaway from the group? Start noted that realistically, CBL has a limited lifespan, and landfill locations close to people are undesirable. The solution is to remove by rail predominantly. Schoening pointed out that ideally disposal will be decreased as much as possible, but we will not reach a place of complete circularity; materials have to go somewhere.

Shepherd indicated some recommendations are focused on state-level policy; how do the consultants envision the local nexus to those statewide policies? What is the vision for a statewide task force if HB 3794 passes? What work would that task force do? Schoening responded that the nexus is similar to the Recycling Modernization Act. If the State implemented an extended producer responsibility law for appliances, furniture, tires, etc., it all would play out in similar way. A producer responsibility organization would be created, funded by producers, and the funds would flow into communities for management of material at the local level.

McEneny commented that the task force work was an investment by the Board. The amount was not $500,000 as suggested previously, and the effort was completed below the project budget. The remaining funding will be targeted toward a solid waste plan in the County.

Shepherd asked about the source of the data used by the task force. Schoening indicated it was 2016 Department of Environmental Quality waste composition data. The data is due to be updated soon. Shepherd requested a link to the online data.

Chair Wyse recessed the meeting at 10:22 AM and reconvened at 10:30 AM.

6.2 Benton Soil and Water Conservation District Invasive Species Program Annual Report – Cierra Dawson, Invasive Species Program Coordinator, Michael Ahr, Executive Director, Benton Soil and Water Conservation District

Ahr reminded the Board of having reported to the Commissioners about the Benton Soil and Water Conservation District's (BSWCD's) activities for the past three years. Following the retirement of longtime BSWCD Executive Director Holly Cross, Ahr was appointed to that position. Cierra Dawson joined BSWCD and is now the Invasive Species Program Coordinator.

Dawson reported that BSWCD's invasive species work is included in an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with Benton County Public Works. The current IGA expires this year, and BSWCD hopes for renewal for the 2025-27 biennium.

The presentation to the Board is the same one presented to the County's road crew. The presentation focuses on the early detection/rapid response to invasive species in Benton County, primarily plants. Also, some wood boring pests that threaten some of the region's keystone species. The purpose is to ensure that the crews working on public roads have an eye for some of these species.

The current cycle of the agreement covered five species: Emerald Ash Borer, Tree of heaven, Meadow knapweed, Oblong spurge, and Mediterranean Oak Borer. The Emerald Ash Borer threatening native Oregon ash trees. The other wood boring pest is the Mediterranean oak borer, which is a threat to native Oregon white oak.

Other recent presentations to the road crews focused on meadow knapweed, tree of heaven, and Oblong Spurge. BSWCD has a grant from the Oregon State Weed Board to help private landowners in Benton County remove this plant that usually starts as a garden ornamental and then escapes into natural areas.

BSWCD also works with the County and Greenbelt Land Trust (GLT) to remove meadow knapweed in an area next to an important property owned by GLT. The property is an area for the Fender's blue butterfly, which is now a federally listed threatened species in the Willamette Valley. Removing meadow knapweed protects the prairie plant species the Fender's blue butterfly needs, particularly Kincaid's lupine. Seven HP employees volunteered this year with GLT to remove meadow knapweed.

Another program hosted by BSWCD is the Benton County Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA). Dawson coordinates the CWMA, which is a collaboration of a variety of nonprofits, natural resource professionals, and community members. The group meets twice a year to talk about broader, invasive species issues in Benton County. This year, the CWMA hosted the annual Let's Pull Together event, which brings together volunteers to remove invasive species in the County's natural areas. More than

30 volunteers gathered at three sites to pull invasive weeds. The sites were Marys Peak, the Witham Hill Natural Area, and the East Thornton Lake in North Albany.

Dawson reported visiting homeowners in the County over the last 60 days who have what is called an A-list plant as specified by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. A-list plants are high priorities for removal due to having the most potential for detrimental impacts on humans or livestock. At over 55 oblong spurred sites, largely residential home sites, BSWCD worked with homeowners to remove the plant manually; or if the population was very extensive, working with either the Oregon Department of Agriculture or a local contractor on removal. This year so far, Dawson has discovered 16 new sites. This is the fourth consecutive year for the project.

On July 19 and August 3, 2024, BSWCD worked with the Willamette Riverkeeper, Oregon Department of Agriculture, and Oregon Parks and Recreation Department to lead volunteers on a canoe trip down the Willamette River to pull parrots feather and Ludwigia. Seventeen volunteers participated in the Paddle and Pull Event, and hundreds of pounds of weeds were hauled away. This is the work of the Willamette Mainstem Cooperative, which is another group hosted by BSWCD. Community members go out onto the Willamette River via canoes and kayaks and learn to identify and remove, mainly through pulling, aquatic invasive species. The focus is generally on yellow floating heart, another A-list species, as designated by the Oregon Department of Agriculture. Volunteers remove yellow floating heart, as well as Ludwigia such floating primrose, willow, and other aquatic invasive species on the main stem of the Willamette River. Two more Paddle and Pull events are being planned for July.

Wyse asked about the disposition of the pulled weeds. Dawson responded that BSWCD encourages disposal in the trash rather than in yard waste bins. Yard waste is composted, and there would be a chance for the weeds to reseed and reestablish where the compost is used.

Malone asked about the work with County road crews and whether Dawson receives many sighting reports. Dawson indicated having received a few reports directly, but most reports from the public are received via a telephone reporting line or via email.

7. Consent Calendar

Prior to the vote to approve the Consent Calendar, Shepherd advised having spoken with the individuals proposed for appointment via Order Nos. D2025-053 through D2025-058. Shepherd restated a preference for interviewing candidates, but having spoken with those proposed is confident they are all qualified individuals.

7.1 Approval of Contract No. 504488, Oregon Health Authority Grant for Mental Health Renovation

7.2 Renewal of Annual Liquor Licenses for Fiscal Year 2025-26

7.3 In the Matter of Appointments to Boards, Commissions, and Committees, Order Nos. D2025-053, D2025-054, D2025-055, D2025-056, D2025-057, and D2025-058

7.4 Approval of the September 17, 2024 Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes

7.5 Approval of the October 15, 2024 Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes

7.6 Approval of the February 18, 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes

MOTION: Malone moved Consent Calendar. Shepherd seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

Malone reported that as of June 16, fire season was declared by the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF); it is early for this declaration. The declaration institutes some restrictions on activities in unincorporated areas protected by ODF. One benefit of the early declaration is that July 4 fireworks are prohibited on all ODF-protected lands. Malone asked the Communications team to distribute messaging about the restrictions now in place in the County.

Shepherd advised that his first town hall is scheduled for June 21 at 1 PM at the Corvallis Community Center. The Corvallis Mayor will also attend. Also, on June 16, the Governor signed Senate Bill 726, the methane monitoring bill, which is effective January 2027. Shepherd reached out to Sarah Gelser Blouin with thanks for the leadership on the bill. Malone noted the legislation only applies to landfills in Benton County.

Wyse recessed the meeting at 10:50 AM and reconvened at 11:01 AM.

8. Public Hearings

PH1 2023-2025 Supplemental Budget Proposal, Resolution No. R2025-021 – Debbie Sessions, Deputy Director, Financial Services; Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator

<u>Staff report</u>

Crager provided an overview of the 2023-25 budget supplement. It is a relatively minor supplement to straighten appropriations and make a few adjustments.

Sessions indicated the handout showed that prior to the supplement, the budget was at $510 million; the proposed supplement is for $6.1 million additional. The most significant changes are transfers, capital outlay, and contingency.

Thirteen funds are affected by the supplemental; however, not all are increases. Some are decreases and some are moves. Major changes include:

1. Public safety: two grants received, which increases spending authority
2. Transfers approved by the Board from the employee benefit trust cost centers to relieve the prior year's fleet deficit
3. Grant and logging revenue for McBee Campground
4. More interest earnings
5. Transfer to move the remainder of the Barbara Ross Building grant funds to fund the Monroe School-based Health Center
6. A small increase to the mediation trust cost center for additional received funding
7. Costs originally budgeted in 2021-23 with expenditures occurring in 2023-25
8. Transfer from the ARPA (American Resue Plan Act) road fund for engineering costs for evacuation routes
9. Reduction of the contingency in the General Fund to pay for unforeseen costs in Natural Areas, Parks, and Events (NAPE)
10. A capital improvement fund transfer from the building reserve fund for the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) project

Crager reminded that it is dedicated State dollars going into the General Fund. There was a conversation with the Board in September 2024 regarding fleet and addressing the previous biennium's deficit. All committed dollars were used to address that deficit, and fleet will be an ongoing discussion in the coming biennium. The $756,000 increase in the Building Development Reserve Fund was a result of a transfer from the General Fund (Capital Improvement Projects allocation) for the EOC building. The $426,000 increase in the NAPE Operations Program due to unforeseen costs reduced the contingency in the General Fund by $274,000 and the Enterprise Operations Fund by $152,000.

Crager noted that if the 2023-25 supplement is approved, the final 2025-27 budget totals will be adjusted.

Wyse opened the Public Hearing at 11:11 AM.

<u>Public Testimony</u>

No testimony was offered.

Wyse closed the Public Hearing at 11:12 AM.

MOTION: Malone moved to adopt Resolution No. R2025-021, in the matter of Supplemental Budget No. 25-0601, amending the 2023-25 budget. Shepherd seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

{Exhibit 1: 2023-25 Budget Supplemental Presentation}

PH2 Public Hearing: Adopting a Budget, Making Appropriations, and Levying Taxes for the Biennium beginning July 1, 2025 and ending June 30, 2027, Resolution No. R2025-018 – Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator; Debbie Sessions, Deputy Director, Financial Services

Crager presented the 2025-27 approved budget and adoption request, Resolution No. R2025-018. Crager addressed earlier comments, indicating the total budget increase is 5.7%, and the General Fund increase is 0.7%. The County has $6.3 million of debt related to PERS (Public Employee Retirement System) bonds, which expire in 2027-28 and are specifically to help keep down employer rates. The $47.78 million remaining debt includes that issued for the Kalapuya Building in 2020, for the Avery facility remodel, the Lincoln and Benton Health Center projects, and the largest portion for the new Courthouse. Debt requires financial responsibility; and two years ago, the County's credit rating was upgraded just before the bonds were issued. The County was able to secure excellent rates, and there are protections in place to ensure the amount of debt is at the appropriate level. Each year, Moody's Ratings Agency examines the County's balance sheet, and the County again received a stable rating.

The new Courthouse project funds were matched 50/50 by the State.

Regarding salaries, management versus represented, all employees were severely behind in terms of the market. A market study was done for management and unrepresented employees, and there was a contract renewal process for AFSCME employees. The difference in fiscal impact for management was a 19.7% increase, and for represented it was 19.2% increase.

Crager referenced the memorandum in the meeting packet regarding the change from the proposed budget and what is being considered now; a $847,000 increase during budget hearings for the Behavioral Health Deflection Program. This should have been included; it was an oversight. The Capital Development Fund was changed by increasing transfers to debt service. Some interest from the bond proceeds can be used to pay debt service; this saved $500,000 of General Funds that would have been used. Also, a NAPE position was shifted to the Fair Fund, which generated $808,000 in General Fund savings by adding back $237,169 for the Sheriff's Office inmate work crew program; established a cost center in the General Fund for a new correctional facility; and a $238,948 increase to maintain the 3% employer contribution for management and unrepresented employees. The remainder of General Fund change was $200,243 for an increase in parks and natural resources to reduce a vacancy factor that was forecasted too high.

Crager noted the rest of the non-General Fund was budget neutral, using existing contingencies to maintain the 3% deferred compensation for management and non-represented employees. The total budget is $540,274,492, 613.75 FTE, and a request to maintain the current permanent rate and local option levy rate of $3.10, 3.1052% of assessed value.

Wyse highlighted the amount of effort required to build the budget. At Wyse's request, Crager discussed the budget preparation process. The process began in the fall with the creation of standardization in developing current service level cost. Staff had to account for things that are needed, requests are usually reviewed in December, and there is a review of new or changed positions. The County Administrator enters the review process in February, then staff ensures the County meets the three stages required by Oregon law: budget is proposed, the budget is heard by the Budget Committee, approved, and then adopted by the Board. The printed adopted budget must be recorded with the County Clerk by November 27, 2025.

Wyse asked about the number of Financial Services staff that participated in the process. Crager indicated five budget analyst positions are budgeted, but analysts were at approximately 2.5 in past several months.

Crager noted the 2025-27 budget was quite different from previous budgets. A total of $11.8 million was trimmed from the budget, which required a great deal of effort by departments to identify reductions while preserving services, jobs, and staff. The process was highly successful, and the County was able to maintain reserves and ratings.

Wyse noted the County debt is not an extra burden on residents; there is no increase in property taxes. Crager noted that taxes must be approved by voters.

Wyse asked about funding for the new Courthouse received from the State. Crager indicated approximately $32 million.

Wyse cited comments about raises for County employees; however, according to www.govsalaries.com, City of Corvallis employees make 36% less than national average and 31% less than the Oregon average.

Malone thanked Crager for guiding the County through a challenging process. Malone pointed out that debt is only half the picture; the County used the funds to acquire facilities. The County is getting closer to one-stop shopping, making it as convenient as possible for community members to access County services. The County has the same credit rating as the Federal government. Crager responded yes, and perhaps better; the County is just under LEED status.

Malone noted the budget shows the County is a careful steward of the public's money. Regarding the comment earlier about a large County budget, part of the reason is the one-time construction projects. Malone also asked when the budget document will be online. Crager indicated that the current approved document is posted online; the 300-page budget will be online by September 30. In the meantime, staff may put together a smaller version for transparency.

Shepherd thanked staff and acknowledged it was difficult to make cuts and impressive that it was done in a way that preserved employees' jobs. Shepherd looks forward to seeing how the County meets its goals of generating income from facilities. Shepherd thanked Wyse for requesting creation of a fund for a new correctional facility, something which had never been done before. Now that the fund is established, Shepherd was glad to see the County will identify ways to build that fund.

Crager mentioned that of the $808,000 in changes recommended by the Budget Committee, $132,000 went to contingency, thereby increasing reserves. The budget is not all about spending; it is also about being prudent.

Public Hearing

Chair Wyse opened the Public Hearing at 11:37 AM.

Mark Yeager, Benton County resident, commented on the proposed budget and that there were no members of the public participating in the process, which is very sad. Benton County property taxes are ranked fourth highest in the State behind the three Portland Metro Counties. Actual spending in 2017-19 was $217.7 million, and the County's proposed budget for 2025-27 is $529 million, a 134% increase. The County ended the 2019 FY with 456 full-time employees. The new budget provides funding for 612.75 FTE, a 34% increase. Total salary growth from 2023-25 to 2025-27 (page 15) is a 29.2% increase. Those increases are often attributed to PERS, but a primary driver of increased cost is due to the management increases that were based on a market study comparing Benton County to Metro counties is not responsible. Other concerns are increased borrowing, $53.6 million since 2018, which has gone to accumulating private buildings, paying for the new Courthouse, which did not involve a property tax increase, but was a full faith in credit bond, so when it comes time to pay that debt, other services will have to be cut. Benton County taxpayer money and ARPA funds to subsidize the money-losing external fleet operations. That fleet operation should be shut down. Proposed budget increases costs to County departments force departments to use the internal fleet management system. For instance, the Sheriff's Office budgeted $691,000 in its 2023-25 budget and now will have to pay $1.6 million to operate their vehicles using the County system, a 130% increase. Police departments in the Cities of Albany and Corvallis use private shops, but the County does not allow that option. What is going on here is reckless and unsustainable; it is sad there is not any additional participation in the process by members of the public and urges County residents to get educated and voice their opinion. More money is not the solution; we need more responsible governance.

Wyse closed the Public Hearing at 11:42 AM.

Malone asked whether the supplemental budget required a change in the motion. Crager responded no.

MOTION: Malone moved to approve Resolution No. R2025-018, that hereby adopts the 2025-2027 Biennial approved budget for Benton County and levies property taxes for the tax years 2025-2026 for both the permanent tax rate and the local option levy tax rate. Shepherd seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

9. Other

In light of the shootings in Minnesota, Shepherd requested that the Board hold a future Executive Session under ORS 192.660[2][o] – Safety of the Governing Body to discuss elected official safety in Benton County.

McEneny suggested inviting the Sheriff, and Shepherd agreed.

10. Executive Session

This item was removed from the agenda.

11. Adjournment

Chair Wyse adjourned the meeting at 11:44 AM.

Nancy Wyse, Chair

Erika Milo, Recorder

Maura Kwiatkowski, Transcriptionist

* NOTE: Items denoted with an asterisk do NOT have accompanying written materials in the meeting packet.