Board of Commissioners

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

June 10, 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

Staff: Erika Milo, Board Recorder; Maura Kwiatkowski, Board Staff; Sean McGuire, Sustainability; Bailey Payne, Community Development; Gary Stockhoff, Public Works; Anne Thwaits, Public Information Officer

Guests: Jessica Andrade, Philomath City Councilor; Rose Bricker, Amanda Polley, Philomath Pride Collective

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Wyse called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM, and introductions were made.

2. Review and Approve Agenda

No changes were made to the agenda.

3. Announcements

No announcements were made.

4. Proclamation

4.1 Proclaiming June 2025 as Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual Plus (2SLGBTQIA+) Pride Month in Benton County, Proclamation No. P2025-018 – Rose Bricker; Amanda Polley, Philomath Pride Collective

Bricker and Polley read the Proclamation aloud.

MOTION: Malone moved to adopt Proclamation No. P2025-018 and proclaim June 2025 as 2SLGBTQIA Plus Pride Month in Benton County. Shepherd seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0.**

Bricker shared details about the 2025 Philomath Community Pride event.

Wyse announced that the County held its first ever Pride flag-raising event at the new flagpole outside the Kalapuya Building.

5. Work Sesson

5.1 2024 Agriculture and Wildlife Protection Program (AWPP) Annual Report – Sheanna Steingass, Environmental Projects Coordinator, Public Works

Steingass presented the annual report on the 2024 AWPP, a citizen-founded program that provides reimbursable grants up to $5,000 for Benton County farmers to create proactive, wildlife-friendly, sustainable deterrence projects to protect livestock, poultry, and crops. AWPP also performs outreach, including participation at the Benton County Fair and Rodeo and the Oregon Small Farms Conference. In addition to a coordinator, the program has a grants committee of six community experts. Any level of farming is eligible. The program also provides year-round grants for beaver-related flooding or damage. Beavers can cause problems for farmers and infrastructure, but also increase landscape resilience by creating wildlife habitat during drought and wildfire, storing groundwater, and improving water quality.

AWPP works collaboratively with other organizations and municipalities. In 2024-25, the main project was installing a pond leveler in the 53rd Street Underpass/Dunawi Creek area. The $12 million project will take several more years to complete. The project decreases the monitoring workload for the Benton County Sheriff's Office and Public Works Department, as well as improving safety and protecting animals.

In 2024, AWPP switched from an annual application period to year-round applications. The County held a panel in the Community of Alsea with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, United States Department of Agriculture, and some local trappers about resources for residents. AWPP awarded four grants in Alsea. Steingass detailed other 2024 grants and outcomes.

Malone asked whether more outreach is needed to inform people about the program.

Steingass confirmed, and offered free telephone consultations or site visits.

Shepherd asked if the County's AWPP program was one of only a few in the state.

Steingass affirmed. In 2024, Oregon legislation to create similar programs statewide was issued, but did not pass. Lincoln County has contacted Benton about emulating the AWPP, as have some counties in other states.

Shepherd asked how ‘farmer’ is defined for this program.

Steingass replied that anyone with an agricultural operation, whether or not the operator derives money from it, is considered a farmer for the purposes of AWPP.

Shepherd asked whether the program would apply to Corvallis residents who own poultry.

Steingass had not received any requests from Corvallis, but offered to serve as a resource. Another criterion the program uses is the recipient’s presence on the urban/rural interface. For instance, farms with cougar issues would be prioritized over less urgent situations.

MOTION: Malone moved to approve the 2024 Agriculture and Wildlife Protection Program Annual Report. Shepherd seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0.**

5.2 Regional Sustainable Materials Management Plan (SMMP) Update – Sean McGuire, Sustainability Coordinator, Board of Commissioners; Bailey Payne, Solid Waste Coordinator, Community Development

McGuire noted that the last full SMMP Task Force meeting was held on May 28, 2025. The SMMP consultant will present the final report to the Board on June 17, 2025, highlighting the findings and recommendations. Another factor is the interaction between different levels of government. Each city has its own franchise agreement, resulting in a large, decentralized system. Fortunately, there are many partners. At the last SMMP meeting, members showed a strong commitment to advancing the project with or without State Representative Sarah Finger McDonald’s proposed legislation to make a State task force on solid waste management. Lane and Marion Counties intend to stay involved in the effort. McGuire thanked Courtney Flathers (Governor’s Office), the Department of Environmental Quality, the Commissioners and other elected officials, and the various solid waste coordinators and non-profit organizations who contributed to the project. Next week, the Task Force will consider how to advance the goals. Groups should continue to meet monthly. Thwaits will issue a press release about the SMMP this week. The final report will be done mid-July 2025.

Malone noted the County has made a significant investment of time and funding to reach this point and is committed to continuing. A great deal of progress has been made. The best outcome would be for Finger McDonald's Task Force bill to pass through the Ways and Means Committee with funding, but Benton County will proceed in any case.

6. Consent Calendar

6.1 Approval of the November 5, 2024 Board Meeting Minutes

6.2 Approval of the January 7, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes

6.3 Approval of the January 21, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes

6.4 Approval of the February 4, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes

6.5 Ratification of the June 4, 2025 Letter of Support for Grant Funding for the Preservation and Revitalization of the Historic College of Philomath Building

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

7. Old Business

7.1 Continued Discussion Regarding the Performance Evaluation Process for the County Administrator and County Counsel – Nancy Wyse, Board Chair

Wyse quoted from Exhibit 1, stating the objective is 'to effectively conduct annual evaluations of the County Administrator and County Counsel to support County goals, enhance operational efficiency, and contribute to the overall organizational success of Benton County.' Wyse asked whether the other Commissioners felt this objective was accurate. The Board is looking for a more effective evaluation process for these two positions.

Shepherd felt the objective was accurately stated.

Wyse explained that the current evaluation process uses NEOGOV, an online Human Resources and Management platform which can be difficult to use. The evaluation is divided into core and functional competencies. It uses numerical ratings plus comments. There is an open-ended section for overall comment, and a goals section. Wyse would prefer more guidance on writing open-ended comments, as the current form can be quite time-consuming to complete. Wyse's Evaluation Format document [Exhibit 2] shows the current process, which includes evaluations from staff, other directors, city managers, and so on. Responses are collected by Human Resources (HR), names and identities are removed, and then the comments and the CA's self-evaluation are passed to the Board. Each Commissioner incorporates themes and feedback from the anonymous staff comments into their own comments. In the past, HR facilitated and took the minutes for the Executive Session where the Board delivers the evaluation to the CA. McEneny noted a possible conflict of interest since the HR Director reports directly to the CA. In 2024, Counsel allowed the Board to use his staff to take minutes and facilitate, and has agreed to do so again in 2025.

Wyse stated that Counsel's evaluation process is more streamlined than the CA's. Counsel fills out the self-evaluation, the Commissioners write individual evaluations, and there is time to read each others' comments. As with the CA, Counsel's staff takes minutes for the evaluation Executive Session. Both the County Administrator and Counsel choose yearly goals which are discussed by the Board at that meeting. Wyse identified some challenges with the existing process:

- The format lacks structured guidance, making it time-consuming.
- NEOGOV can be frustrating to use.
- The open-ended focus areas are not a good fit for County Counsel evaluations.

Malone agreed that NEOGOV can be difficult to use. The software is constraining and sometimes malfunctions. Malone stated that evaluations should be an ongoing process, not just an annual process.

Wyse concurred.

Shepherd stated he could not offer an opinion on NEOGOV due to lack of experience with the current evaluation method.

McEneny mentioned that the CA meets often with the Commissioners, all of whom give the CA up-to-date feedback. The annual evaluation should also identify the CA's potential blind spots and ways to improve. A '360-degree' evaluation should include a discussion of whom to ask for feedback, and have a rotation of evaluators. McEneny suggested comparing the process with other CAs in the Association of Oregon Counties. A local union president might be involved, depending on personnel or current issues. McEneny also asked whether goals were pass/fail. For instance, McEneny advanced some 2024-25 goals, but some projects had to be dropped. Sometimes key personnel leave, or unexpected events occur, and leadership must pivot, while maintaining County priorities and values.

Wyse felt this was important to keep in mind. The benefits of NEOGOV are that it is an extant tool, and the format is used County-wide, creating consistency. Wyse had compared evaluation methods with representatives from seven other jurisdictions, and found these methods in use:

- No evaluation (Linn and Monroe Counties; Umatilla County does not have a CA).

- An outside facilitator leads the evaluation. Washington County partners with Blue Tiger Leadership and uses core competencies based on the Center for Executive Leadership guidelines, which are similar to Benton's current evaluation.
- One person leads the evaluation, such as a mayor, the Board Chair, or an HR staff member. That person talks to staff, collects verbal or written evaluations, and compiles those for the Board of Commissioners or City Council to evaluate. Deschutes County, Polk County, and the Cities of Albany and Corvallis use that approach.

Wyse concluded there is no single unified method, and posed questions about the Board's possible approach:

- What is the most important thing the Board wants to accomplish in an evaluation?
- What is the Board trying to measure?
- What aspects does the Board want to include in the format and the process?
- Should anything be added or removed from the list in Exhibit 3? The Board should have clear objectives, specific feedback, and a balanced approach.
- Does the Board want to set performance standards and specific goals (such as being honest and specific with criticism, evaluating performance not personality, holding open conversation, identifying strengths and potential areas of improvements, and determining ratings), or just provide open-ended feedback?
- Does the Board want to track improvements and accomplishments over time?
- Is there an opportunity for the employee to demonstrate accountability?
- Is the evaluation a time to show recognition for the employee's work?

Shepherd felt these were sound elements. To make the ratings more objective, Shepherd preferred a combination of rating scales and open-ended comment. Shepherd preferred to use 'agree/disagree/strongly disagree' scales, including a middle option, rather than interpreting numbers. A combination of agreed-upon goals is an important part of the evaluation. Shepherd expressed an interest in using an outside facilitator, but if that proved costly, Shepherd was also comfortable with the Board Chair overseeing the evaluation. The group providing evaluations should consist of a wide range of people, including outside partners, external people that the CA or Counsel works with, and both direct and non-direct reports. For the CA, it is important to engage unions and union leadership.

Wyse asked who should be invited to participate in CA evaluations, and whether the participants' comments should be anonymous. Wyse preferred anonymous comments.

Shepherd agreed that commenters' names should be anonymous, but the County could tell the CA that this group included certain types of individuals or groups, such as city managers or board chairs. One could ask whether the evaluator meets with the CA at least monthly.

Wyse agreed that there should be a question identifying how much experience the individual has with the employee. Should staff answer different questions than the Board does, or the same questions? The Board only sees some of the CA's and Counsel's work. Wyse did not have an opinion on whether to include union presidents; at times, such as during a strike or contract negotiations, that might not be appropriate.

Malone noted that annual evaluations are an important time to examine the person's goals, which often change. NEOGOV has a penalty for incomplete goals, which is not always reasonable. Evaluations provide a way to chart County progress on specific topics. Evaluations should be anonymous; otherwise, the information is of questionable accuracy. Malone recommended using a fairly simple group of commenters, including key people who interact with that person on a regular basis.

Wyse favored the idea of rotating the evaluators year to year. Wyse would like to hear from department directors whether the person has shown positive change or not. Ideally, an evaluator would fill also the form out in a subsequent year, to see whether the challenges they raised were addressed.

Malone recommended having a core group that remains the same year-to-year to create consistency and make comparisons easier.

Wyse asked who should facilitate collecting the 360-degree evaluations. This should not be the Chair, because that could create disparities in knowledge between Commissioners, and could deter people from giving a complete review. HR might not be the best fit. Counsel's staff could be used, or an outside facilitator (though determining cost and a strategy to find a facilitator could take longer). Wyse asked how McEneny would feel about HR collecting the comments, removing the identifying information, and sending the comments to the Board.

McEneny felt the process worked well with Counsel's Legal Specialist, Teresa Larson, taking those actions. After the discussion, the evaluation could be added to the CA's personnel file.

Counsel agreed that either Larson or Counsel could facilitate the process. Counsel suggested that McEneny might feel more comfortable if the evaluation went through Counsel's Office, because that would not involve any of the CA's direct reports.

The Board favored having Larson manage the evaluation.

Wyse asked whether the Board should continue using NEOGOV for CA and Counsel evaluations, and whether HR should help create the questions. HR Director Tracy

Martineau has stated that staff have capacity to do so. Wyse asked whether the Board should create new questions; who would write the questions; whether a rating should be incorporated, and if so, what kind; and whether the Board should incorporate goals. Currently, the County Administrator writes their own goals. Should that approach continue, should the Board set goals, or should there be a combination of agreed-upon goals?

Shepherd did not want to continue using NEOGOV and favored requesting other HR suggestions as a starting point. Shepherd preferred a combination rating system with word-based (rather than numerical) scales and open-ended options for details. Shepherd preferred a combination of goals which are mostly determined by the person being evaluated, but still allowing the Board to add some goals. Shepherd recommended that each Commissioner ponder what questions should be asked, that the CA and Counsel consider what aspects they want to be evaluated on, that HR provide a list of standardized questions, and that the Board discuss all this in an future meeting.

Malone also preferred to stop using NEOGOV and to have the CA and Counsel set goals. Then the Board can evaluate the degree to which those goals were met in the previous year.

Wyse agreed. The Board does not need to micromanage the employees' goals.

Shepherd felt that the CA goals should mostly come from the CA, but the Board's input should not be limited.

Wyse asked who should participate in Counsel's evaluation. Currently, Counsel creates a self-evaluation but does not have other evaluators.

Shepherd suggested including some individuals who work with Counsel on contracts. The Board should also look into Counsel's court appearances and lawsuit/risk management activities throughout the County.

Counsel replied that the names of individuals who could provide a 360-degree evaluation change year-to-year. Asking Counsel to provide those names risks selection bias. There should be a way to filter Counsel's list to provide diverse perspectives and an honest assessment.

Wyse asked who should facilitate the collection of 360 evaluations.

Shepherd felt that HR should collect evaluations for Counsel, and Larson for McEneny.

Counsel preferred that Larson collect Counsel's evaluations, rather than a department

Counsel works with and advises.

Shepherd advised that the person collecting evaluations should not be a direct report to Counsel. Crager, McEneny, or a member of the Board's administrative staff could collect the evaluations.

McEneny commented that it would be feasible for her or Crager to do so.

Wyse also felt this was feasible, and will follow up with HR. Wyse asked whether Counsel felt comfortable with the Chair or the Board working with HR to create evaluation questions.

Counsel felt comfortable with this approach, but recommended that the Board also discuss that year's activities with Counsel to provide a better framework to develop the questions and the list of evaluators. For Counsel, one is evaluating whether the legal advice provided has been adequate and useful, so preliminary sideboards and detailed questions are needed.

The Board favored these suggestions.

Wyse shared a draft timeline (Exhibit 1) for the evaluation process, and asked how long Counsel or the CA would like to review the evaluations before the related Executive Session.

McEneny noted feeling rushed last year. Because McEneny's hire date was October 1, it makes sense to start collecting one's thoughts in early September.

Counsel requested five days to review comments before the Executive Session.

Wyse described the evaluation framework examples and sample questions in Exhibit 3, which include:

- Basing the evaluation on the current focus areas and competencies (stewardship, integrity, communication, service, teamwork, and managing people). NEOGOV offers a rater's guide which is helpful for the evaluator, but completing the evaluation is still time-consuming.
- Keeping the current framework, providing statements from the rater's guide and supplying a rating and open-ended comment box for each, rather than just one open-ended comment area. This could be faster than the current approach.
- Basing the evaluation on each position's job description. However, there is no job description for Counsel, and this approach seems more aspirational and vague.
- Basing the evaluation based on Harvard's Organizational Leadership Principles, such as 'Motivates teammates' and 'Promotes problem-solving and decision-making.'

- Basing the evaluation on some other framework.

Shepherd preferred to delve into each option/question (such as ‘Does the person motivate their teammates?’) with additional questions. Shepherd favored combining provided information with open-ended information .

Wyse noted that follow-up conversations will examine the details of each specific piece.

Shepherd favored using the Harvard Principles. The current six areas need work because they overlap and are slightly vague.

Wyse suggesting using the current core competencies and adding several additional questions to assist if the evaluator had difficulty selecting an overall rating.

Counsel recommended keeping the evaluation framework relatively simple to allow timely completion by evaluators.

Malone felt that more discussion of the specific questions was needed. Malone asked if the Board would try to move to a different system in time to evaluate Counsel.

Wyse replied the timing was open for discussion.

Shepherd requested more time to consider which questions should be asked, followed by detailed discussion at another Board Meeting.

Wyse concurred.

Wyse and Malone favored a five-option verbal rating scale such as ‘strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree’ rather than a numerical scale.

Wyse concluded that a second discussion would take place, and Wyse would consult HR.

Shepherd specified that the Chair engage with HR to acquire a list of the standard questions employees are asked at evaluations, and the Board would then consider whether to integrate any of those questions.

{Exhibit 1: County Administrator and County Counsel Annual Evaluation Process Discussion}

{Exhibit 2: Attachment 1 – Current Evaluation Format}

{Exhibit 3: Attachment 2 – Evaluation Framework Examples}

Chair Wyse recessed the meeting at 10:56 AM and reconvened at 11:22 AM.

8. New Business

8.1 Request for Direction Regarding Reappointment of Advisory Body Members – Maura Kwiatkowski, Board of Commissioners Office

Kwiatkowski requested direction on the re-appointment of members of County advisory boards, committees, or commissions. Staff recommended re-appointment of all six members whose terms will expire on June 30, 2025. All these members are willing to continue to serve. One anomaly is that Debbie Morey is completing a second term on the Corvallis-Benton Library Board, but still wishes to continue. Generally, bylaws indicate that members can serve up to two full terms as well as a partial term. The Library Board does not have bylaws, because it was created by an Inter-governmental Agreement with Corvallis. Neither Corvallis City Code nor Benton County Code defines a number of terms for members of that board, so Morey could be appointed to a third term if desired.

The Enterprise Zone Advisory Committee has three Benton County members and three City of Corvallis members, with the County Administrator as a standing member. The committee meets only as needed, generally when an organization applies for an Enterprise Zone exemption. The previous meeting was in September 2023. Community member Tom Powell is completing a fifth term and would like to continue. Christopher Jacobs, Corvallis-Benton Economic Development Office Director, favors Powell continuing to serve. Kwiatkowski requested direction to present Orders of reappointment at the June 17, 2025 meeting, or other direction.

Wyse favored proceeding with the recommended re-appointments.

Shepherd did not favor re-appointing individuals simply because those individuals have already served. Shepherd preferred to get to know the individuals before re-appointing them.

Malone also did not favor lifetime appointments, but felt that since there are many new members on the Enterprise Zone Advisory Committee, it made sense to retain an experienced member. Malone was willing to accept staff recommendations in this case.

Responding to a question from Shepherd, Stockhoff stated that the State Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) Advisory Committee meets at least twice per year, or from five to seven times in years when the County creates a new STIF plan.

Shepherd was comfortable with the Enterprise Zone Advisory Committee appointment, since it meets infrequently. Shepherd would prefer to interview Library Board and STIF Advisory Committee candidates before re-appointment.

Wyse noted it has been difficult in the past to keep some boards, commissions, and committees fully staffed with volunteers, so when an individual is recommended by staff and motivated to keep serving, Wyse was motivated to approve. Also, Wyse had met most of the individuals in question, and had no concerns about reappointment. Wyse suggested that Shepherd contact some of the relevant advisory board members to get acquainted.

Shepherd stated that he would abstain from the vote today and endeavor to meet with some of the individuals in the next week.

MOTION: Malone moved to direct staff to prepare Orders of Reappointment for the 10 members whose terms expire on June 30, 2025, and to place those Orders on the June 17, 2025 Board Meeting agenda for Board approval. Wyse seconded the motion, which **carried 2-0 (Shepherd abstained).**

9. Commissioner Updates

Shepherd provided these updates:

- Shepherd's County College sessions concluded in late June 2025.
- The 2026 Methane Monitoring Bill passed the Oregon House of Representatives and the Senate, and now awaits Governor Tina Kotek's signature. Shepherd wrote a letter of support to the Governor.
- Shepherd was appointed to the Corvallis Downtown Vitality Task Force and will co-chair the Downtown Safety and Environment Subcommittee.
- Shepherd will hold eight Town Hall events in June-August 2025, including two events in Corvallis and one each in the North Albany district, the Cities of Monroe, Adair Village, and Philomath, and the Community of Wren. Shepherd will relay the resulting community feedback to the Board.

Malone provided these updates:

- In May 2025, Malone participated in the annual Ride of Silence with the Mid-Valley Bicycle Club, which commemorates bicyclists killed while riding in the area. Malone emphasized safety and sharing the roads, and the importance of separated bicycle paths when possible.

- In May 2025, Malone attended the Linn-Benton Community College (LBCC) Agricultural Center ground-breaking in Tangent. The building will hold livestock for veterinary training activities.
- Malone toured the Law Enforcement Building with McEneny and Sheriff Jef Van Arsdall. The County will examine moving departments or areas in the Benton County Sheriff's Office to other facilities to relieve some of the crowding.
- Malone attended the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) Legislative Retreat.
- Malone testified to the Capital Construction Subcommittee about the need for funding to finish renovating the Jackson-Frazier Boardwalk.
- The 2025 Transportation Bill has been released, which would address backlogged maintenance on Oregon roads and bridges. Additional funding is still needed.

Wyse provided these updates:

- Wyse attended the AOC Board of Directors Retreat, which facilitated relationship-building and learning more about good leadership strategy.
- Wyse will attend the Natural Areas, Parks, and Events tour of Bellfountain Campground, Hubert K. McBee Memorial Campground, Bailey Branch Railroad, and Crystal Lake Masonic Cemetery.
- The Benton chapter of the NCAAP will hold its Juneteenth celebration at LBCC on June 21, 2025.
- The Local Officials Advisory Committee, which Wyse chairs, will hold its joint meeting with the Land Conservation and Development Committee to network and discuss common interests.

10. County Administrator Updates

McEneny's recent activities included meeting Oregon State University President Jayathi Murthy, work on the biennial budget, and standing meetings with Corvallis-Benton Economic Development Office Director Christopher Jacobs. Selection of a new Chief Financial Officer is underway. June events include the Pride flag-raising ceremony, the Avery Building Pride Event, the Juneteenth holiday, and the Crisis Center opening on June 20, 2025.

11. Assistant County Administrator Updates

Crager provided an update about Unity Shelter's financial situation. [Recorder's note: Unity Shelter was recently forced to scale back operations due to loss or delays of State funding.] Benton County continues to work with Unity to better understand the situation, and is examining various solutions with cross-funding. The short legislative session granted the County $2.5 Million for permanent supportive housing; staff continue to determine how those funds will be utilized.

12. Other

No other business was conducted.

13. Adjournment

Chair Wyse adjourned the meeting at 12:23 PM.

Nancy Wyse, Chair

Erika Milo, Recorder

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