

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Tuesday, September 2, 2025, 9:00 AM**

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 Officials: Ryan Joslin, District Attorney; Jef Van Arsdall, Sheriff

Staff: Rachel Bulder, Maura Kwiatkowski, Board staff; Jennifer Ferrer-Santa Ines, Financial Services; Cory Grogan, Anne Thwaites, Public Information; Avalon Mason, Health Services; Jennifer Martin, Jesse Ott, Natural Areas, Parks, and Events; Sean McGuire, Sustainability; Erika Milo, Board Recorder

Guests: Bruce Ashenbrenner, Kristi Schrock, Benton County Fair Board; Dan Chapel, Claudia Daly, Heidi Hagler, Roen Hogg, Jacky Lee, Tere O'Rourke, Mark Worden, residents; Carolyn Ashton, Elli Korthuis, Oregon State University Extension Service; Dr. Robert Fallows, Catherine Rupkus, Samaritan Health Services; Steven Harder, Dial-A-Bus; Charles Maughan, Mark Shepard, City of Corvallis; Ryan Noss, Corvallis School District; Christina Rehkla, Visit Corvallis; Jennifer Wehr, City of Albany

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

3.1 Introduction of the New County Chief Financial Officer - Rachel McEneny, County Administrator; Jennifer Ferrer-Santa Ines, Chief Financial Officer

McEneny introduced Ferrer-Santa Ines, the new Benton County Chief Financial Officer.

The Commissioners welcomed Ferrer-Santa Ines.

4. Proclamations

4.1 Proclaiming September 2025 as National Suicide Prevention Month, Proclamation No. P2025-023 - Avalon Mason, Mental Health Promotion and Prevention Coordinator, Health Services; Dr. Robert Fallows, Catherine Rupkus, Samaritan Health Services

Mason explained that suicide continues to deeply affect families, schools, workplaces, and communities, and prevention is a collective effort. The Benton County Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition (YSPC) works locally to ensure young people know they are not alone, and that help is always available. The YSPC works regionally with the Linn-Benton Suicide Care Coalition. Fallows and Rupkus are closely involved in this work.

Rupkus and Fallows read the Proclamation aloud.

Joslin expressed appreciation for the focus on suicide prevention. Benton County tracks how suicide affects different demographics and will continue to monitor this issue.

MOTION: Malone moved to adopt Proclamation No. P2025-023, proclaiming September 2025 as National Suicide Prevention Month in Benton County. Shepherd seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

5. *Comments from the Public

***Dan Chapel, resident, owner-operator of Cardwell Hill Cellars**, requested County permission to host a food truck on the 23-acre Exclusive Farm Use-zoned portion of his property. Chapel stated that Cardwell events would also qualify as charitable events under Oregon Revised Statutes and Benton County Code. Cardwell has held six free public events so far this year, each benefiting a local charity.

{Exhibit 1: Dan Chapel Public Comment}

Mark Worden, resident, retired Osborn Aquatic Center (OAC) Director, described the importance of OAC to adult swimmers. OAC is an unusual facility due to its features and ability to host large events which draw attendees from other areas. Worden requested that Benton County recognize the importance of health and wellness by helping fund OAC roof repairs.

***Tere O'Rourke, City of Corvallis resident**, moved to Corvallis because of OAC and its programs. O'Rourke considers repair of OAC to be a community effort which began with the Corvallis School District, has been managed by the City of Corvallis, and

received State legislative financial support for repairs. O'Rourke requested that Benton County provide some of the remaining funding to repair and refurbish OAC.

{Exhibit 2: Tere O'Rourke Public Comment}

***Jacky Lee, Corvallis resident**, shared a proposal from the Housing Justice Coalition (HJC), a group of service providers, unhoused individuals, and Corvallis residents working on the homelessness crisis in Corvallis and Benton County. The County has an extreme shortage of all types of housing, particularly no- or low-barrier shelter options. Corvallis has a combined shelter bed capacity of 185 units, but there are at least 550 unhoused individuals in Benton County, including at least 261 who are unsheltered. As a short-term solution, HJC will ask Corvallis to create a managed rolling moratorium in collaboration with the County. This would designate pre-planned locations (such as parks) where unhoused community members could camp for several months at a time, after which camping would close there and open at a different location. Lee asked the Board to discuss this proposal at a future meeting.

{Exhibit 3: Housing Justice Coalition Proposal}

***Heidi Hagler, Corvallis resident**, thanked the Board for the letter of support for OAC's legislative funding request. Hagler asked that the County collaborate with other stakeholders to raise the funds needed to reopen OAC. Hagler described how OAC provides value for residents countywide as well as Corvallis residents. The Oak Creek Evacuation Route offered a precedent for such a collaboration between multiple jurisdictions and other stakeholders.

{Exhibit 4: Heidi Hagler Public Comment}

***Christina Rehklau, Visit Corvallis Executive Director**, presented information in support of the funding request to reopen OAC, calling the facility a community anchor, tourist attraction, and economic driver. When OAC hosted regional and state swim meets, area hotels showed a 10-20% occupancy increase. Families who visit OAC also use other local businesses. In Benton County, year-to-date hotel occupancy is 49%, down from 54% in 2024, and revenue is down more than 11%. In July 2025, hotel occupancy fell from 63% to 53%, and revenue was down 16%. This indicates the tourism economy is under stress. Reopening OAC provides a dependable tourism activity. Tourism already contributes significantly in Corvallis, with overnight visitor spending generating \$163 million in 2024, almost \$4 million in local tax revenue, and supporting nearly 2,000 jobs. Reinvesting in OAC helps increase that impact, while also supporting wellness, youth programs, and resident quality of life and health.

Steven Harder, Dial-A-Bus Executive Director, provided an update on Dial-A-Bus operations. Three months ago, Dial-A-Bus increased service during peak hours by 40%. However, demand for services is still considerable. The organization's partnership with

Benton County is very strong; the situation is trending in the right direction, but many Benton County residents still experience transportation challenges.

Roan Hogg, Corvallis resident, described how OAC benefits students, who learn not only swimming skills, but also life lessons on working together as a team on long-term goals. OAC is a great investment in the community, and Hogg encouraged the Board to consider providing funding.

Claudia Daly, resident, described growing up in an area of the eastern United States that did not have public swimming pools, only expensive private facilities. Daly did not learn to swim until age 10 but later became a competitive swimmer and swim coach. Daly advocated for the safety and fitness benefits of swimming lessons and competitive swimming for children, and encouraged the Board to help fund OAC, a community-supported public resource.

Charles Maughan, Corvallis Mayor, stated that OAC is not just a City resource, but a County resource. Maughan used to live outside Corvallis city limits, at a time when his family was struggling financially; the main resources for Maughan's children were the public library, public parks, and OAC. City and County visitors pay the same rate to use OAC. Maughan encouraged the Board to work collaboratively to keep this important facility open for future generations.

The written public testimony summarized below was received before the meeting, but after publication of the meeting packet:

***Joanna Friesner, County resident**, described how swimming at OAC benefited her son through exercise and socialization opportunities. Friesner commented that OAC is important for children and adults of all ages, providing a place to learn water safety skills and develop friendships and teamwork. OAC is also a source of employment for many teens and young adults. Friesner urged the Board to help support reopening OAC.

{Exhibit 5: Joanna Friesner Public Comment}

***Shannon Bowdle, resident**, explained how access to OAC has helped her daughter become a skilled competitive swimmer and Olympic hopeful. However, the closure of OAC has severely limited opportunities for local swimmers. The facility also serves the community by providing over 100 jobs and providing over 700 children with swimming lessons. OAC also offers water fitness classes for adults and warm water therapy for seniors. OAC hosts the Oregon Special Olympics and state districts and championships. These events bring in considerable revenue for local businesses. Bowdle encouraged the Board to help fund OAC.

{Exhibit 6: Shannon Bowdle Public Comment}

***Marg Bartosek, Corvallis resident,** explained that OAC was one of the major reasons she chose to live in Corvallis. Bartosek relies on swimming for physical health, mental acuity, and emotional stability, and knows many others who feel the same. In addition to affecting individual health and well-being, OAC impacts the economy and quality of life for the entire area. Thousands of visitors attend swim meets, staying in local hotels and purchasing from nearby businesses. OAC is one of the only 50-meter indoor pools on the west coast. Thousands of children and adults participate in OAC classes. Because the window to use State funding is limited, Bartosek asked the Board to help support reopening OAC.

{Exhibit 7: Marg Bartosek Public Comment}

***Carol Cina, resident,** described how she swam laps at OAC three times a week, 50 weeks per year, from 1992 until the facility closed in October 2024. Cina stated that OAC has been a center of her life and urged the Board to financially support the repairs needed to reopen the facility.

{Exhibit 8: Carol Cina Public Comment}

***Christina Fox, County resident,** asked the Board to provide funding to reopen OAC. OAC provide a range of affordable programs for people of many age groups and abilities. This includes youth and adult swimming programs, fitness classes for adults, youth and adult swim teams and meets, Special Olympic and Senior Games events, and safety programs, such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation training. Visit Corvallis estimates that lodging revenue loss is about \$1.5 million since OAC ceased hosting meets. Most importantly, OAC helps mitigate Oregon's unacceptably high drowning rates.

{Exhibit 9: Christina Fox Public Comment}

6. Work Session

6.1 Osborn Aquatic Center (OAC) Discussion - Ryan Noss, Corvallis School District Superintendent; Mark Shepard, Corvallis City Manager

Noss explained that OAC is a community asset that is considered one of the top five pools on the west coast. Other than OAC, only one other pool in Oregon is used for certain swimming events such as races. The facility allows for both competitive swimming and community use and draws teams from all over the west coast.

Shepard explained that in the past, the Corvallis School District (CSD) passed a facility bond for interior pool improvements at OAC. The City of Corvallis and CSD entered an agreement whereby the City provides daily staffing, operations, programming, and maintenance while receiving financial support from CSD. Since 2020, the City has invested over \$1 million in OAC ongoing maintenance. OAC closed in October 2024

after severe roof corrosion was discovered. Reports from an engineer and a building official declared OAC unsafe. The City started shoring up the roof and investigated repair solutions. Then CSD made a full assessment of OAC.

Noss explained that in the comprehensive assessment, CSD received a report highlighting three levels of work and funding needed: Priority 1: \$6 million to reopen OAC (including roof repair, a new pool liner, and several safety upgrades). Priority 2: \$3 million for 5- to 10-year improvements. Priority 3: \$10 million for 10- to 20-year improvements. Thanks to statewide community advocacy to legislators, CSD received \$4 million in State bonds towards reopening OAC. The City of Corvallis provided \$500,000, and CSD has contributed \$100,000 annually for maintenance; now CSD will contribute \$500,000. About \$1 million more is needed to reopen OAC.

Shepard noted that the City has committed to providing \$500,000. CSD funded the assessment, and the City has paid over \$.5 million to shore up and assess the roof. The City pays an ongoing cost for the roof. OAC is used by people of all ages in the City, Benton County, and across the state, with 230,000 visitors annually. The City and CSD invited the County to help close the funding gap.

Wyse concurred that OAC is a valuable community asset. The Board was happy to assist by sending a letter of support to the legislature. Wyse asked what other funding mechanisms organizers were exploring.

Noss replied that the County request was one option, and some degree of public fundraising will also be needed.

Wyse asked if organizers had sought any grants or matching funds.

Noss was not aware of any opportunities but encouraged ideas and suggestions. A community event will be held soon to brainstorm ideas.

Wyse asked whether the organizers were requesting a specific amount from Benton County.

Noss suggested an amount similar to the amount from CSD and the City. However, organizers are open to any and all support.

Shepard clarified that the request was \$500,000 from Benton County, with the remaining \$500,000 from fundraising.

Shepherd was familiar with the economic impact and importance of OAC for the community, but noted this discussion concerned funding. Shepherd asked if there was a master plan for OAC before the roof failure, and whether that problem was still considered an unexpected critical failure. Since then, the pool lining has been added to the list of needed improvements, and now the 5- to 10-year and 10- to 20-year requests.

Shepherd asked whether there was a prior master plan, and these issues were simply occurring happening sooner than expected.

Shepard replied there was an ongoing plan, but not at the scale of the recent assessment. The hope is to stay ahead of routine maintenance.

Noss noted that the pool liner becomes an issue when shoring is added to the pool. That repair was a known need and will cost about \$400,000.

Shepherd shared that the County is committed to discussing the matter. However, on August 28, 2025, there was a meeting with Community Services Coalition (CSC), which helps the poorest community members in Linn, Benton, and Lincoln Counties through rental and energy assistance. CSC is having financial difficulties and will ask the County for a donation toward potential operational expenses. Given the recent adoption of a biennial budget in which County staff positions were cut, and given CSC's anticipated funding request, it is difficult to find \$500,000 in the budget to support a facility the County does not own or operate. Shepherd expressed willingness to personally donate to OAC and work on a fundraising campaign. These services are critical to the community, but this is a lean year budget with other County commitments. Shepherd asked whether the \$500,000 from CSD represented five years of regular funding being provided at one time.

Noss confirmed. Noss and Shepard felt it was important to bring this matter to the Board, as OAC is a County asset.

Shepherd clarified that OAC belongs to Benton County as a community, but not to Benton County as a government. The County does not have a fiscal investment in the building.

Noss will provide the Board with the date of the community forum.

Shepard suggested the County commit to providing \$500,000 over the biennium, rather than the whole amount up front.

Malone commented that the County is only two months into a biennial budget and has already been unable to fund some priority projects. The Capital Improvement Program has been cut from \$3 million before the pandemic to \$1 million in this biennium, which will impact some known and unknown needs. As Shepherd noted, the Board has near-to medium-term financial demands, including funding for the Mental Health Crisis Center and five Community Health Clinics which have experienced Federal budget cuts. Malone offered to help seek alternatives to fund OAC.

Noss noted that the organizers are working with a contractor who has a specific timeline.

Wyse asked how urgent the timeline was.

Noss replied that there was time for the Board to discuss the matter further.

Wyse asked staff to add the topic to a future Goal-Setting meeting to facilitate discussion.

Malone requested updated County budget status information from Financial Services.

Shepherd would also like to meet with Financial Services about suggestions for funding sources. Natural Areas, Parks, and Events staff might be able to suggest grants. Shepherd committed to working collaboratively on this project.

McEneny agreed to lead the County effort to develop options and opportunities.

Wyse echoed the sentiments of Shepherd and Malone. Wyse acknowledged the community value of the facility, but the County has cut vacant positions, which places more load on remaining staff. Eleven point eight million dollars was cut from the biennial budget. Hopefully some solutions for OAC can be found.

Chair Wyse recessed the meeting at 10:15 AM and reconvened at 10:28 AM.

6.2 Benton County Fair and Rodeo 2025 Report - Jesse Ott, Director, Jennifer Martin, Benton County Fair Manager; Natural Areas, Parks and Events. Carolyn Ashton, Elli Korthuis, 4-H OSU Extension; Bruce Ashenbrenner, Kristi Schrock, Fair Board members

Ott reported that everything went well at the 2025 Benton County Fair. Ott acknowledged the support of many County departments in putting on the Fair.

Martin shared that attendance and revenue were up over last year on every day of the 2025 Fair. Successful new features included a butterfly exhibit and a trackless train. Mindy Johnson, Fair sponsorship specialist, arranged for over \$100,000 in sponsorships. The community stage showcased local talent. Next year, staff will make the stage more visible and sign up more performers. The Battle of the Bands was highly successful. Overall, there was great teamwork, including assistance from the Fair Board.

Ashton shared that 400 youth participated in fair-related activities, including projects in animal, family, and consumer science and a marketing contest.

Korthuis described youth demonstrations in the 4-H Exhibit Building, including arts, clothing, science, and robotics. A fairgrounds tour for the Clover Buds (a 4-H program for younger children) and a 4-H parade were well received.

Ashenbrunner reported on the Lee Allen Memorial Livestock Auction, which teaches children important life lessons. In 2025, 250 children raised \$1.1 million through the auction. Five percent of the proceeds is used to run the auction; any remaining funds are used for fairgrounds improvements. Over 600 businesses and individuals support the auction. In the last 25 years, the auction has raised over \$11.5 million and supported 6,000 children.

Shrock reported on the Larry Bell Memorial All Girls Rodeo (AGR) and the Northwest Professional Rodeo Association (NPRA) event. Rodeo is one of the most popular Fair events. The AGR had over 103 contestants aged nine through 64 and is the only all-women's rodeo in Oregon. Contestants from throughout the west participate in the NPRA rodeo, bringing a large influx of visitors and revenue. Feedback on the rodeos was very positive. Community volunteers and contractor Knife River provided many improvements to the rodeo arena.

Malone praised the balance between keeping traditions and trying new features, noting that Fair staff showed increased entrepreneurial spirit and proactive approaches to new opportunities.

Shepherd and Wyse also expressed appreciation for the Fair and the work of the team.

7. Consent Calendar

- 7.1 Approval of the June 11, 2024 Board of Commissioners Goal-setting Meeting Minutes**
- 7.2 Approval of the May 13, 2025 Board of Commissioners Goal-setting Meeting Minutes**
- 7.3 Approval of the August 5, 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes**
- 7.4 Approval of the August 19, 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes**

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

8. New Business

- 8.1 Support for the Use of the Multi-Unit Property Tax Exemption (MUPTE) Program Within the City of Albany, Oregon, Resolution No. R2025-023 – Jennifer Wehr, City of Albany**

Wehr explained that City of Albany staff presented this matter at the April 8, 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting. At that time, the Board provided verbal support for the program; this resolution simply formalizes the arrangement.

Shepherd asked whether a planned low-income property tax exemption had gone forward.

Wehr replied that the property tax element did not go forward, so Albany is only pursuing MUPTe.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to adopt Resolution #R2025-023, affirming Benton County's support of the City of Albany adopting the MUPTe program. Malone seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

9. Old Business

9.1 Approval of the Hubert K. McBee Park and Campground Master Plan, 2025-2045 - Jesse Ott, Director, Natural Areas, Parks, and Events

Ott explained that the Hubert K. McBee Park and Campground Master Plan was recently approved by the Planning Commission, confirming the Conditional Use Permit. The Parks Advisory Board has also approved the plan. The campground is located near the Alsea Falls Campground owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) provided \$645,000 for the preliminary design. The value of the land donation acts as the funding match. The Alliance for Recreation and Natural Areas helped the County acquire the property, as did a donation from Hull-Oakes Lumber Company. Ott discussed the impact of planned work in the vicinity of the campground, which will fit well with the character of the area. The County will continue to maintain the Sustainable Forestry Certification. There will be some initial forestry, mainly because the Oregon State Fire Marshall required fire vehicle access corridors on the site. To maintain water quality in the Alsea River South Fork, riparian setbacks will be bigger than required. The camp will have quiet hours of operation, unobtrusive lights, interpretive signage, sealed vault toilets, and a nearby well system. The BLM District Manager supports this work emphatically and was thrilled by the possibility of collaborating with Benton County, offering potential site management agreements. Ott described mitigation measures relating to wildfire risk, forest use compatibility, access and infrastructure, environmental protection, and operations and oversight [see presentation in packet]. Staff secured an easement for extra fire access from Weyerhaeuser lumber company. Funding sources for the McBee project include forestry revenue, camping revenue, and State grants. Soon, staff will apply for the OPRD County Opportunity Grant. With current funding, the campground can open as soon as construction is completed; the goal is to open in early 2027. Extensive public outreach was conducted. The work at McBee will align well with the Alsea Falls Campground's new parking lot and trails.

Wyse asked whether the County could still start site preparation and cleaning in fall to early winter of 2025.

Ott confirmed.

Wyse noted that McBee is one of her favorite campsites, so change there is unnerving, but the campground will serve more people as a result.

Malone was pleased about the BLM partnership and suggested that BLM staff could help County staff check on McBee, which is fairly remote from County offices. Improvements are needed to make McBee a modern, accessible campground.

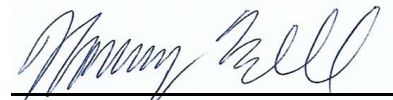
MOTION: Malone moved to approve the Hubert K. McBee Park and Campground Master Plan for 2025-2045. Shepherd seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0.**

10. Other

No other business was discussed.

11. Adjournment

Chair Wyse adjourned the meeting at 11:33 AM.



Nancy Wyse, Chair



Erika Milo, Recorder

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