



Board of Commissioners

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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 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: Julie Arena, Gerald Dyer, Jr., Sara Hartstein, April Holland, Rebecca Taylor, Health Services; Rachel Bulder, Maura Kwiatkowski, Board Staff; Laurel Byer, Ian McGuire, Public Works; Sean McGuire, Sustainability; Erika Milo, Board Recorder

Guests: James Feldmann, Oregon Department of Transportation

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. Comments from the Public

No comments were made.

5. Work Session

5.1 Communicable Disease Update, October 2025 - Dr. Gerald Dyer, Jr., PhD, Communicable Disease Program Manager, Health Department; Sara Hartstein, Public Health Director, Health Department

Dyer reported that Oregon has high levels of COVID-19 in wastewater. There has been a sustained increase of COVID-19 in Corvallis wastewater, which may indicate increased risk of COVID-19 infection and hospitalizations. Currently, Oregon has experienced a decrease in COVID-19 hospitalizations since August 2025, but cases usually increase in the fall. Overall, the previous respiratory season had the lowest COVID-19 hospitalization rate since 2020. COVID-19 accounted for about 2-3% of all Oregon emergency department visits last season, while influenza caused 10%. Vaccination is still the best way to prevent severe COVID-19 outcomes. In fall 2024, Benton County had a 23% vaccination rate, one of the highest in the state. In solidarity with the West Coast Health Alliance (WCHA), Oregon updated COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to everyone six months and older.

Hartstein shared updated eligibility guidelines for the 2025-26 COVID-19 vaccine [see presentation]. In June 2025, the Secretary of Health and Human Services removed 17 members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), which votes on critical recommendations that guide national vaccine policy and insurance coverage. This has caused confusion and a slower COVID-19 vaccine rollout. WCHA will provide unified science-based health recommendations on who should receive immunizations. On September 17, 2025, WCHA updated guidance on all three respiratory virus vaccines (COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)), so the updated 2025-26 COVID-19 vaccine is now available without a prescription in Oregon and is covered by private insurers, Medicaid, and Medicare. Hartstein reviewed guidelines for the RSV vaccine [see presentation]. Adults do not need an RSV booster.

Dyer emphasized that protection from COVID-19 and influenza vaccines decreases with time. It is especially important for high-risk individuals to receive the fall 2025 COVID-19 and influenza vaccines. Effective treatments for COVID-19 and influenza are widely available. Population immunity to COVID-19 is high, which can lead to fewer hospitalizations, complications, and deaths from the virus. Layering prevention strategies can be especially helpful if you or someone around you was exposed to a respiratory virus, has risk factors, is ill, or is recovering from illness.

Malone commented that the 23% vaccination rate seemed low and requested context.

Dyer replied that the work done to implement therapeutics and vaccinations has improved current health outcomes. COVID-19 is becoming more like influenza in terms of severity. Health Services will continue to encourage vaccinations for respiratory viruses.

Hartstein added that for many people, the fall 2024 vaccine was a booster.

Wyse asked whether there was a target rate for COVID-19 vaccination levels.

Dyer replied that higher rates are always better, but Benton County's rate is good. When there is not a declared emergency response, COVID-19 vaccination levels may stay close to influenza vaccination levels. Dyer recommended a focus on making vaccines accessible and building community trust in the vaccines, especially for individuals at elevated risk. Health Services will work to keep vaccination rates as high as possible.

Wyse noted that several constituents had reported being unable to find a vaccine.

Hartstein shared that the Centers for Disease Control had just approved the ACIP recommendations, so the Federal stock of COVID-19 vaccines can be released. Oregon Health Authority will distribute the vaccines as soon as possible. Benton County Health Services does not have the vaccine yet. In the meantime, Holland suggested that individuals seven and older seek vaccination at pharmacies. Calling ahead is recommended.

5.2 Local Homeless Shelter Funding Discussion - Rebecca Taylor,
Coordinated Homeless Response Office (CHRO) Manager; April Holland,
Health Department Director

Taylor provided background on funding for local homeless shelters. Governor Tina Kotek's 2023 emergency declaration on homelessness combined funds from House Bill (HB) 5019 with pandemic funding to increase shelter capacity. HB 3644, the Statewide Shelter Program (SSP), is now issuing funding through Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) to continue those investments and fund Phase 1 of the Bill. Benton County is receiving a portion of those funds.

In 2020-21, the State used surveys to determine the number of shelter beds OHCS would fund. CHRO secured additional funds through HB 5019 to reopen 50 shelter beds at Unity Shelter. The State estimated Benton County's award for HB 3644 Phase 1 and issued a grant contract that obligated the County to provide 241 shelter beds, despite a 35% reduction in funding. CHRO worked with the shelter organizations and service providers listed in the contract to identify funding needs, funding sources, and impacts of the \$773,541 reduction over the next few months. Based on the percentage of total funding each provider received in Fiscal Year 2025, staff determined shares of the Fiscal Year 2026 initial allocation. Each Benton County shelter bed with services costs about \$21,000 per year.

CHRO staff evaluated ways to reduce the impact on critical shelter providers not named in the contract, including Unity Shelter and Jackson Street Youth Services (JSYS). Staff found potential funding for Corvallis Daytime Drop-in Center (CDDC) and will use future

State rapid rehousing programs to provide street outreach and daytime shelter. Other funding could include exchanging Department of Administrative Services (DAS) grants with the City of Corvallis, which could help Unity Shelter and Corvallis establish affordable housing units for the Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool (FHSP). There may be some remaining funds to help bridge the gap for severe weather sheltering.

Even with those adjustments, there would still be a \$365,257 reduction for the shelters listed in the Phase 1 grant, and even if severe weather sheltering is excluded from the bed numbers, the contract still requires Benton County to maintain 171 beds. The State recently asked the County where beds would be reduced. The County replied it is too soon to tell, because shelter program modifications take time, and CHRO is working to leverage in-kind donations and volunteer work.

Through CHRO, the County, the State, and local providers, including the Community Action Agency and Linn-Benton Housing Authority, will collaborate to understand how the rental assistance programs mirror existing programs from other agencies, and how to fill the gaps. CHRO will receive about \$1.2 million from the Oregon Rehousing Initiative (ORI). The Housing 360 Pilot will utilize foundational work from the FHSP and Behavioral Health Services. OHCS is responsive to needs, but it takes local staff advocacy, time, and capacity to communicate those needs and leverage funding to avoid a significant negative impact on Benton's homeless response.

Responding to questions from Shepherd, Taylor clarified that the State told Benton County to expect a 6% reduction in funding compared to the previous year, and said this was how the grant amount would be calculated in future. Staff informed the State that the estimate was much lower than what the listed organizations received last year. Slide four [packet page 25] shows assorted funding that CHRO has identified to help fill the gap. The County may be able to sustain CDDC with housing allocations through ORI and Housing 360 instead of also using those funds for street outreach. In addition, before the end of the 2023-25 biennium, staff chose to use Operational Support for Shelters (OPSS) funds for housing-focused activities. Staff were told the County's future SSP award would reimburse the County for using housing funds to sustain Unity Shelter operations. However, at least \$365,257 in expected reimbursement is no longer available. The full gap could be even larger than the current estimate.

If the County could fund CDDC operations with a shelter grant, it might be possible to redirect rapid rehousing funds to shelter. Compromises are being made in every direction. Staff were surprised that CDDC was included in the grant, because staff believed the State used only Unity Shelter data. When staff received the list of providers in this grant, they realized the State was considering data for HB 5419 and OPSS but not changing the funding allocation for the added shelter beds.

Shepherd noted that the Board had given Benton legislators this information. The legislators seemed unaware that Benton's funding reduction was more than 6%.

Taylor shared that staff are filling out an OHCS survey to estimate shelter operating costs in each community. It is not clear whether this survey will inform only HB 3644 Phase 2, or will also inform a second funding round for Phase 1. If the latter, Taylor was concerned that the State would use the same data from previous years, perpetuating the funding gap. Staff need more transparency and clarification of what data the State uses and how allocation is calculated. Though staff have requested this information for two months, OHCS stated this was not an important point at this time and Benton should focus on solutions.

Wyse asked if the Board would be willing to send a support letter.

Malone preferred to receive more specifics first.

Wyse offered to send an email as Chair or wait until staff think the time is appropriate.

Responding to a question from Malone, Taylor replied that Benton staff believe the data the State used to calculate Benton's allocation did not match the providers and commitments the State wanted. One set of data includes both HB 5019 funding and the OPSS funding. Staff believe the funding allocation did not include the estimate to sustain the Executive Order services. So all the funding Benton received over the last two years for the Executive Order operations, which included Unity Shelter and a portion of CDDC, was excluded from the new allocation. Staff thought the County and OCHS were negotiating for funding and what was included in the data, but the latest meeting with OCHS only concerned reducing the shelter bed count.

Malone asked whether that was how CHRO went from 241 to 171 beds.

Taylor explained that is because staff were already identifying local funding to bridge the gap. The second table [packet page 25] shows what would happen if the County attempted to maintain all the shelter beds and supportive services listed in the contract, while also finding another local fund. When staff asked the State about the funding gap, the reply was, "Tell us when you need to reduce beds, and we will ensure you are not penalized." Staff expressed concern that if Benton County receives less State funding (and cannot fill the gap with local funding), and thus must reduce beds, the State might rate Benton's performance as poor, which could in turn reduce Benton's future State allocations. The State told staff not to worry about that, but due to conflicting information, staff still seek clarity about the impacts of reporting reduced shelter.

Responding to a question from Malone, Taylor replied that staff do not know when the reductions would start; for now, the goal is to issue an initial payment to the shelters, including JSYS and Unity, to avoid a temporary funding gap. Home, Opportunity, Planning, and Equity Program Coordinator Julie Arena is finding ways to increase the capacity of the County's volunteer corps so as to reduce the cost of shelter operations.

But that will take time, so staff will also seek non-financial solutions. Currently there is strong local advocacy about addressing homelessness. Many community members are working on solutions, but it is important to avoid proposals for shelter alternatives that could pull funding from shelter operators. Encouraging people to contact CHRO and sharing this information will help staff build and focus the community response.

Responding to a question from Malone, Holland replied that staff need to identify a funding source before providing specifics about severe weather sheltering. Multiple sites are needed for congregate and other types of sheltering. Given the delays in funding clarity, staff have been unable to add these provisions to some of the sub-contracts. There is still the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Corvallis to use the Benton-Corvallis Library meeting room for sheltering. Holland preferred to reserve that location for extreme need only, and instead work on consistent, robust, and feasible overflow winter sheltering. Weather thresholds for shelter activation may need to be revised based on cost analysis.

6. Consent Calendar

- 6.1 Approval of the April 8, 2025 Board of Commissioners Goal-setting Meeting Minutes**
- 6.2 Approval of the August 12, 2025 Board of Commissioners Goal-setting Meeting Minutes**
- 6.3 Approval of the September 16, 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes**
- 6.4 Ratification of Benton County Public Comment Letter Dated October 6, 2025, Regarding the FEMA Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Integration of the Endangered Species Act and the National Flood Insurance Program in Oregon**
- 6.5 Proclaiming October 2025 as Great ShakeOut Month in Benton County, Proclamation No. P2025-027**
- 6.6 Proclaiming October 13, 2025 as Indigenous Peoples' Day in Benton County, Proclamation No. P2025-025**
- 6.7 Proclaiming September 15 to October 15, 2025 as Hispanic and Latinx American Heritage Month in Benton County**
- 6.8 Appointment of Benton County Sheriff Jefri Van Arsdall to the Community Services Consortium's Community Action Advisory Council, Order No. D2025-065**

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

7. New Business

7.1 Imposing Traffic Control on Southwest Country Club Drive, County Road No. 25845. Order D2025-064 - Ian McGuire, Civil Engineer, Public Works

Ian McGuire presented a speed order issued by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). The change, made with the City of Corvallis, lowers the speed limit to 30 miles per hour on Southwest Country Club Drive from Southwest 53rd Avenue to just west of Southwest Barley Hill Drive. The area has become more developed and an ODOT speed study showed justification for the reduction, which creates consistency across the corridor.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to adopt Order #D2025-064, imposing traffic control on Southwest Country Club Drive, County Road #25845, and direct staff to erect the traffic devices necessary to post speed limits in accordance with the State speed zone order and the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Malone seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

Chair Wyse recessed the meeting at 9:59 AM and reconvened at 10:09 AM.

7.2 North Benton County Communities Pathway Status and Request for Direction - Laurel Byer, County Engineer, Public Works; James Feldmann, Senior Planner, Oregon Department of Transportation

Feldmann explained that the County was awarded \$666,245 for path planning and design through the Oregon Community Paths Program (OCP). The County contributed \$76,254 in matching funds for a total of \$742,499. Planning and design will begin later this year and be completed by summer 2026.

Byer explained that an east-west connection between Jackson-Frazier Wetland (JFW) and Owens Farm and Natural Area is well established due to conservation easements held by Greenbelt Land Trust (GBLT). Byer and Feldmann have conducted public outreach on whether a north-south path should be built east or west of Highway 99.

Feldmann added that staff have convened a work group of Key Interested Parties (KIPs) including members of GBLT, the Owens Farm group, County and Corvallis staff, and others.

Byer developed an evaluation matrix [see packet page 112] based on feedback from the

KIP work group, in-person and online open houses, and an online survey. Both sides received similar scores in the gathered feedback. The west side had slightly more positive features. The east side had the highest user experience rating by seven points. The 30 attendees at the in-person open house did not reach a clear consensus about which side to use.

Feldmann added the KIPs also did not have a strong preference, although one preferred the west side; the group noted better connectivity on the west due to potential growth and the potential annexation north of Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center (GSRMC), but the east side would have a better user experience because it is part of JFW. Both sides are in the floodplain and contain wetlands.

Byer shared key takeaways from the open house:

- The public wants safe separation from traffic and connectivity to local destinations all the way to McDonald Forest.
- There are many recreational path-users as well as commuters.
- The east side was strongly preferred, but many respondents had no preference.
- User comfort and environmental protection were highly valued.
- Primary users include local residents and recreational visitors.

The goal is to determine where the consultant should perform a study for this grant request, to be followed by surveying, environmental concept design, and more public outreach. Most of the property that would be affected is owned by Benton County, the City, or GBLT.

Malone asked whether sections north of the Northeast Elliott Circle area were being considered at this time.

Byer replied that staff are aware of the larger goal to connect the Community of Lewisburg and the City of Adair Village. Elliot Circle is somewhat safer than the west side because it has some separation from Highway 99, and there is potential for a path going north from there. However, at some point the path would need to cross back to the west side, which could involve a traffic signal or other approaches.

Feldmann noted that in the long-term, the Benton County Transportation Plan calls for intersection improvements at Adair Village, which would create a safer Highway 99 crossing.

Shepherd asked whether Natural Areas, Parks, and Events Director Jesse Ott was concerned about increased traffic through a wetland.

Byer replied that this connection could help realize planned paths on JFW. Ott has been involved as a member of the KIP group.

Feldmann shared that Frazier Creek runs along the west side of Highway 99, which would require moving the path away from the highway, causing more impact on JFW. Both sides have conservation easements.

Wyse asked about studying both sides to make a determination.

Feldmann replied there are only designing/planning funds for one side. It will be a while before the north-south work is done; the Board could change its decision later.

Byer noted that studying another side would probably add years to the project. If the east side is chosen now, but the west side is preferred later, the east side work is still useful as part of the JFW Plan and will inform potential JFW grant requests.

Responding to a question from Wyse, Feldmann replied that either side would be similar in terms of cost and speed of construction. The main distinguishing factors are connectivity, safety, and user experience.

Byer noted that public survey respondents preferred the east side by 60%. Primary users of the path include local residents. According to the survey, 75% of participants recreate in the area, 72% travel through it, and about 63% reside outside of the immediate project area. Of 140 respondents, 14% live east of Highway 99, 22% live west, and 63% live outside of that area.

Wyse requested Byer's personal opinion.

Byer preferred the east side due to high community support. That work would inform other projects, such as additional roads from the GSRMC annexation, including a connector to Highway 99. In the public outreach, only 21% of respondents preferred the west side, while 19% were neutral.

Shepherd commented that connecting to Elliott Circle provides a better next step on the northward path than waiting for a separate grant. Shepherd prioritized having a safer path from Corvallis to Adair Village than bicycling on Highway 99. Connecting Elliott Circle to Northeast Granger Avenue provides another connection that can continue in the future.

MOTION: Malone moved to direct staff to proceed with further investigation and concept design for the north-south alignment on the east side of Highway 99-W. Shepherd seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

7.3 Approval of the Home, Opportunity, Planning, and Equity (HOPE) Advisory Board Amended Bylaws - Rebecca Taylor, Coordinated Homeless Response Office Manager; Julie Arena, Coordinated Homeless

Response Office Program Coordinator; April Holland, Health Department Director

Arena reviewed how HOPE was created six years ago to help people who are unsheltered. An advisory body was formed to gather widespread community involvement. Staff have implemented many of the HOPE recommendations; now it is time to pivot from widespread engagement to coordinated operation. Six years ago, the County had no State funding for homelessness and fewer providers. Now the County has the SafePlace micro-shelter program, severe weather overflow sheltering, congregate and hotel sheltering with Faith Hope and Charity, the Crisis Outreach Response and Engagement Team, the Situation Table for high-risk triage, and a Crisis Center. The County also has paid street outreach as part of the Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool (FHSP) and five units of permanent supportive housing, and will break ground for 46 units of housing in 2026. There are now about 500 units of affordable housing in Corvallis in development, under construction, or being lived in. The County is doing property manager outreach and engagement through the FHSP and case management to help people transition out of homelessness. Health-Related Special Needs (HRSN) benefits for tenancy support are beginning now. In the past year, the County rehoused 54 households consisting of 122 people, including 53 children.

Arena explained that HOPE Advisory Board (AB) members should include key funders, operational decision-makers, and policy decision-makers. Partners should include Community Services Consortium and Linn-Benton Housing authority. Staff have adjusted the HOPE bylaws to incorporate system improvements, current operational needs, and provider requests.

Due to Federal changes, the letter 'e' in HOPE now stands for 'engagement' instead of 'equity', but there is no change in HOPE values. A key change in the bylaws is membership: operational decision-makers need to be able to appoint staff to work with HOPE and report back. The bylaws outline the role, responsibilities, and authorities of CHRO, the HOPE AB, and HOPE work groups.

Taylor noted that the new bylaws would consolidate the HOPE Executive Committee and general advisory board into one body, the HOPE AB. Different meeting forums are now established; the Situation Table and FHSP meet weekly with contracted providers.

Arena hosts monthly provider meetings for those who are not involved in FHSP. Arena also attends meetings hosted by InterCommunity Health Network (IHN), such as the Coalition for Housing Equity and the HRSN benefits meeting. An IHN grant has funded outreach to private property managers and management companies to support affordable developments.

Taylor commented that the work will require strong coordination among the agencies that staff hope will join the HOPE AB. While the AB previously played a strong role in

community engagement, staff are finding work groups with focused subject matter experts to be effective for implementing grants and demonstrating compliance with required community planning components.

Shepherd noted that the new bylaws refer to member organizations, but do not define what a member organization is or does.

Taylor responded that staff would follow extant County policy for advisory board and committee member recruitment. The HOPE AB bylaws define the qualifications for a member organization, which would be a quasi-governmental entity, funder, or policy-maker. Recruitment would include outreach to organizations based on involvement in homeless response; staff could recommend the types of qualifications for committee openings. It is still to be determined whether to use an instrument besides normal recruitment, such as a Memorandum of Understanding. Staff avoided listing specific members in the proposed bylaws because agencies are expected to change.

Shepherd noted that the only mention of what constitutes a member was in the clean copy of proposed bylaws page 3 [packet page 139], Section IV.A.1 "Membership and Procedures", which states: "The Hope Board shall have leadership representation from each member organization," then mentions including governmental entities and all other HOPE member organizations.

Arena shared that the clean copy of the revised bylaws page 2 [packet page 138], Section III.B.2 provides more information about Board members and expectations. Section IV.A.1 provides guidance about member characteristics.

Shepherd commented that typically bylaws include a list of membership or how people become members. These bylaws do not say how membership organizations are determined or how many participants there should be. Shepherd also noted that under new State public meeting laws, if members of a public body meet in work groups, those are considered public meetings and must adhere to public meeting laws.

Taylor noted that since the HOPE AB is a local advisory body to the Board of Commissioners, staff assumed that County advisory board and committee regulations would dictate the HOPE recruitment process. Taylor offered to clarify membership qualifications in the bylaws, such as including references to Benton County Code. However, it is difficult to know what agencies or entities will do this work in the future.

Wyse felt that those points were reflected in the HOPE Board discussions that developed this document. The HOPE EC recommends these bylaws, even though the bylaws differ from other County and City ones. The information is called out in other documents, so adding specific references in these bylaws could make the document complicated or cause it to become rapidly out of date.

Shepherd asked Counsel about the legality of the proposed bylaws.

Counsel expressed unease about the mechanical uncertainty in this version of the bylaws and stated that ambiguities should be removed. Counsel raised the following concerns:

- These bylaws do not establish a total number of members, who is eligible to sit, or what number of members would constitute a quorum.
- These bylaws do not establish how long a chair serves and when the chair's term would end.
- These bylaws do not specify whether a decision-maker's designee is appointed for one meeting, or permanently.

Wyse observed that staff usually lead the HOPE meeting, rather than a designated chair.

Counsel replied that typically committees have chairs, even if the group leans heavily on staff. The board, not staff, would establish a work group and its charge, and that conversation is typically led by a chair.

Wyse preferred that a chair facilitate the meeting but not have special powers over other committee members.

Counsel replied that could be easily built into these bylaws. The chair follows the meeting order, sets the agenda, and then the whole board votes on the work groups. Having a leader is helpful for the board and staff.

Wyse noted that HOPE has traditionally had co-chairs. Given the extent of requested changes, the proposed bylaws should return to the HOPE EC for review.

Taylor noted the importance of ensuring collective consensus in a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional advisory board. Taylor asked if a template or examples could be consulted when revising the bylaws.

Counsel offered to review other committee bylaws, as previous templates might not apply. A committee can have co-chairs. Bylaws should be clear enough for everyone to understand the roles, process, limits of authority, and how this committee should be populated and function.

7.4 National Association of Counties (NACo) 2026 Membership Renewal - Nancy Wyse, Chair, Board of Commissioners

Wyse noted that membership costs \$1,904, which was included in the current budget. There is value in the service the County receives from NACo.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to approve the renewal of Benton County's membership in the NACo for 2026. Malone seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

7.5 Corvallis Holiday Parade 2025 Discussion - Nancy Wyse, Board Chair, Board of Commissioners

Wyse noted that the Board of Commissioners had been invited to provide a float in the Holiday Parade on December 26, 2025. The County-sponsored Christmas tree that is usually placed at the Historic Courthouse has been moved to Riverfront Park to coincide with the parade route.

MOTION: Malone moved to approve Benton County's participation in the 2025 Corvallis Holiday Parade and the payment of the \$100 entry fee. Shepherd seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

8. Other

No other business was discussed.

9. Adjournment

Chair Wyse adjourned the meeting at 11:42 AM.



Nancy Wyse, Chair

Erika Milo, Recorder

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