Benton County OREGON

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 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

Staff: Rachel Bulder, Maura Kwiatkowski, Board staff; Carly Fredericks, Cory Grogan, Anne Thwaits, Communications; Sara Hartstein, Scott Kruger, Health Services; Toby Lewis, Community Development; Erika Milo, Board Recorder; Gary Stockhoff, Public Works

Guests: Ryan Vogt, Executive Director, Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments/ Community Services Consortium

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Wyse called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM and introductions were made.

2. Review and Approve Agenda

No changes were made to the agenda.

3. Announcements

Malone announced he had instructed Financial Services to hold his paycheck until the impasse in Congress is resolved. Malone expressed appreciation that Democrats had stood firm on prioritizing affordable health insurance. Malone stated he was making a symbolic gesture, but it was important to let people know that everyone is in this situation together, and healthcare and health insurance is critical for a healthy and functioning community.

4. Comments from the Public

No comments were offered.

5. Work Session

5.1 Floodplain Program Update - Toby Lewis, Floodplain Administrator, Community Development Department

Lewis recently did public outreach at the City of Albany Farmers Market about emergency preparedness. Lewis attended the Northwest Regional Floodplain Management Association Conference.

Lewis provided an update about the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which is the integration of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA). About 600 public comments from Oregon were submitted to FEMA on October 6, 2025, and ratified the next day. FEMA will evaluate the comments, choose a preferred alternative, and draft and publish the final EIS. The Federal government shutdown has affected some of the people working on this project. A hearing for the lawsuits being reviewed at the Oregon State Court level was scheduled for October 1, 2025, but was postponed by the shutdown.

Lewis provided flood hazard mapping updates. Yesterday, Lewis submitted final revisions for the Luckiamute River watershed project, covering the Community of Kings Valley; this is expected to be complete by the end of November 2025. In summer 2025, Benton County provided community feedback on the Upper Willamette watershed project, which covers the rest of Benton County. FEMA has responded to most comments. Responses fall into three categories: areas where FEMA cannot make adjustments; areas where FEMA will make minor adjustments based on feedback; and larger changes that require more engineering analysis. FEMA is waiting for funding authorization to identify which of the larger adjustments can be made, before sending the finalized draft to the communities and holding a public outreach meeting. FEMA hopes to provide the next round of draft maps in 2026.

Lewis explained that flood insurance policies that were in effect when the shutdown began are still in effect throughout the period of the policy, but once the policy expires, there is a 30-day extension period if the shutdown is still in place. NFIP has expired before; re-authorization is usually retroactive. In August 2025, staff sent the annual notice to lenders and mortgage companies in the area, then sent the annual floodplain brochures to Benton County residents who own land in the floodplain.

Lewis provided some winter flooding reminders, such as: clear debris away from flood vents, avoid driving through flood water, and sign up for local emergency alerts.

Wyse noted the typical danger of flooding at the Corvallis 53rd Street underpass; drivers should consider an alternate route when it is raining.

Malone asked how changes in the rating system affect Benton County.

Lewis explained there are changes to how national flood insurance policies are written, but this does not affect private policies. The NFIP flood risk rating system was overhauled several years ago, so people are still adjusting to the changes. As flood insurance policies transition from past prices to full actuarial risk, those who already pay a reduced or subsidized floodplain rate might not see the effect of the discount immediately.

5.2 Community Services Consortium (CSC) Fiscal State and Challenges - Ryan Vogt, Executive Director, Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments (COG) and Community Services Consortium (CSC)

Vogt presented information about the current state of CSC finances and possible solutions. The CSC Governing Board has suggested that CSC request financial assistance from each of the involved counties (Benton, Linn, and Lincoln), which has not happened in the recent past. CSC is one of only three Community Action Agencies (CAAs) in Oregon that have a government model; the rest are non-profit agencies. Thus, CSC has higher staffing and operational costs than non-profits. Vogt reviewed challenges CSC has experienced, as described in Vogt's October 12, 2025 memorandum [packet p.14]:

- Considerable change and turnover in the CSC Finance Department. The current finance team has three people who have worked at CSC longer than a year, three or four vacancies, and six people who have worked at CSC seven months or less. There have been five finance directors in the past five years; the current director began in the last quarter of 2025.
- CSC implemented new finance and payroll software in 2024 which continues to create challenges. It will take time for the new staff to gain experience with the software.
- CSC is five years behind on audits. The Fiscal Year 2024 audit probably will not be done until late 2025 or early 2026.
- Ideally, CSC should have about $10 million in operational reserves, with about $6.5 million reserved for Linn-Benton Food Share (LBFS). However, CSC has borrowed against the LBFS funds as costs increased, without a deliberate recovery plan. Currently, CSC has about $2.7-3.1 million on hand, $2-2.5 million of payables that have not been issued, and $1.5-2 million of receivables that have not been paid. CSC's work is almost entirely receivables-based, so if anything disrupts receivables, CSC would have a margin of about $400,000, which is not enough to cover payroll. Also, CSC needs to repay the funds borrowed from LBFS. Most CSC funding is through State partners, so the Federal government shutdown is not causing immediate disruption, but that could change.

Malone noted that COG and CSC have integrated some teams and asked whether COG Finance staff were helping with the transition.

Vogt shared that the two organizations have not yet integrated their Finance teams, but both are using the same finance and payroll system. The COG finance director/ payroll manager has helped CSC staff understand the system and correct payment errors. The joint Information Technology director is trying to program the system, and the joint Human Resources staff are helping with some Finance functions.

Malone noted that part of CSC's deficit was due to grants that allowed a very low percentage for administrative costs. Malone asked how CSC has addressed that.

Vogt shared that the CSC business model has inherent risks because of the variety of services offered and because the organization is a government entity. CSC is mostly reimbursement-based, but often does not recover 100% of grant administration costs. Many grants through State partners limit cost recovery from 8-10% (a very narrow margin) to as low as 2-3%. CSC has subsidized operations with income from alternative sources. The CSC Governing Board has been discussing whether to adopt a policy of refusing grants that offer a recovery rate below a certain margin. In Vogt's observation, the CSC Board would prefer to help negotiate better rates or subsidize the funding rather than cut services. However, no official decision was made.

Malone requested more frequent financial updates through CSC meetings or email.

Shepherd observed that CSC Board meetings have discussed cost recovery issues for months. Shepherd felt that the CSC Board did not want to set a cutoff against grants that did not meet or approach 15% for administrative costs. Shepherd asked how the most recent payroll process went and what progress CSC had made on payroll-related grievances.

Vogt replied that payroll has improved gradually; the most recent round had few concerns. But the new system has many outstanding issues, and there are items in the collective bargaining agreement which CSC has been unable to provide as yet (such as a promised floating holiday and a higher contribution to an employee's deferred compensation plan). There are only two payroll employees, and both are very new to the system. For staff, it can feel as though CSC is not honoring its agreements, and any disgruntled employee can affect the morale of others. Vogt was unsure of CSC's current number of outstanding grievances.

Shepherd asked about CSC's staff recruitment status.

Vogt replied that three open positions were being posted. Recruitment for Finance positions has been difficult.

Shepherd stated that at the last meeting, the CSC Governing Board discussed a grant from the State with a recovery rate of about 2%. Shepherd asked if Vogt had any success working on this.

Vogt confirmed. The pass-through grant is from Oregon Housing and Community Services for shelter care and permanent supportive housing. There was a 10% overall administrative rate, but only in the sense that certain services had an 8% rate, while others had a 2% rate. CSC successfully negotiated for a 15% rate.

Shepherd noted that Vogt's memorandum and CSC's meetings indicated that the new Health-Related Social Needs (HRSN) program would be CSC's pathway towards financial recovery. The memorandum says CSC still receives those funds on a regular basis, with fewer delays than anticipated. Shepherd asked whether the HRSN program was still operating as hoped.

Vogt invited Shepherd to discuss HRSN in depth with CSC Finance staff. Due to an eligibility glitch in the State system, CSC has issued a number of bills that have not been paid yet. This is happening statewide. If a solution is not found quickly, CSC may have to consider discontinuing the service.

Shepherd asked when Vogt would provide similar presentations to Linn and Lincoln Counties.

Vogt will meet with the Linn County Board of Commissioners next week. Vogt was still trying to schedule with Lincoln County.

Shepherd noted that $10 million split across the three counties would be a major request for those counties, and encouraged Vogt to consider what level of support CSC will request. Benton had to make substantial budget cuts; while no filled positions were cut, only four months of this biennium have elapsed, and $2.3 million would be more than Benton County could provide. However, the three counties were governing and responsible when CSC took various financial actions, and thus need to be an active part of the solution. For Benton, Shepherd recommended that Vogt first talk to Crager and Chief Financial Officer Jennifer Ferrer-Santa Ines.

Vogt indicated awareness that county resources are limited. Vogt emphasized concerns about the immediate future. If the Federal shutdown continues into November 2025, this situation will become a crisis.

Wyse asked what Vogt's first funding target would be.

Vogt replied that CSC's highest priority is to pay staff accurately and to steadily resolve the remaining payroll issues. CSC has resolved all Family and Medical Leave Act problems. The Finance team is working on clean processes, good understanding of grants, and billables/ receivables. To aid Payroll staff, Vogt has retained a payroll contractor for the last 6-8 months.

Wyse asked whether Vogt had a financial assistance amount in mind, and whether the assistance would be one-time or ongoing.

Vogt noted that as the organizing bodies of CSC, the three counties would be responsible for CSC's debt if the organization were to cease operation. Vogt hoped for a one-time funding request, perhaps with a commitment for several years of support to bring CSC to a particular milestone. That would allow CSC to find more financial security. Vogt asked Lane County, Clackamas County, and other partners how much those entities subsidize their CAAs. Some of those commitments must be made at the Governing Board level. If the Governing Board feels strongly that CSC should continue administering grants that are not fully reimbursable because that is fundamental to the organization, then the Governing Board should consider how to subsidize those programs, so CSC does not lose funds administering them. Vogt had not identified a request amount yet.

Wyse noted that the Benton County budget is extremely tight. All employees are sharing the burden of unfilled positions. It would be helpful to know the amount of the CSC request. Wyse had heard that the CSC Board was hesitant to change the policy about grants that are not fully reimbursable, because some of CSC's core work comes from such grants. Wyse asked if the policy could be made more flexible to accommodate grants with complete or incomplete reimbursement.

Vogt shared that the CSC Board had an informal conversation on the topic that did not lead to a motion. In Vogt's observation, the CSC Board did not want to set a firm rule about recovery percentage, such that the organization would no longer administer grants below a certain reimbursement rate. But the CSC Board could still discuss such grants and whether CSC could help. CSC could ask a potential funder to increase the recovery rate; if the funder will not, then CSC could select an alternative agency, or choose to subsidize that work.

Chair Wyse recessed the meeting at 10:25 AM and reconvened at 10:39 AM.

6. New Business

6.1 2026 Environmental Health License Fees - Scott Kruger, Environmental Health Manager; Sara Hartstein, Public Health Division Director

Kruger explained that Environmental Health (EH) fees increased 7% in 2024.

Hartstein added that over the past decade, fees increased an average of 4% per year. It has been almost 20 years since the County made an increase over 10%.

Kruger explained how the cost per hour of fieldwork is calculated. Full cost recovery in 2026 would involve a rate of $311 per hour, a 30% increase over 2025. However, under Oregon Administrative Rules, the County can only charge 15% of administrative costs for these items. Kruger described several partial cost recovery scenarios [see presentation].

Hartstein noted that in the last few years, staff have tried to maintain an 88% cost recovery model, hence the recommended 14% increase. The Food Service Advisory Council approved and recommended the increase.

Kruger provided examples of fee adjustments at various rates, including some reduced fees for special circumstances (such as temporary benevolent restaurants) where the County subsidizes the remaining cost. Staff recommend a 14% overall increase with a General Fund contribution of $188,700, which is already budgeted.

Malone noted this was a significantly higher increase than the County had made in the past.

Kruger replied that this is not an unusual increase compared to most other Oregon counties. Kruger felt this increase was on target with projected revenue, covering expenses but keeping fees as low as possible.

Hartstein added that once Environmental Health stabilizes with 88% cost recovery, staff may consider a 2027 increase that is more typical of past increases. The current adjustment will cover the increase in salary and wages between the two biennia.

McEneny congratulated Kruger on his twentieth anniversary of working for Benton County.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to approve a 14% increase in Environmental Health fees, effective January 1, 2026, and direct Health Department staff to prepare and present an Order reflecting this action, to be presented at a future meeting of the Board of Commissioners. Malone seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0.**

6.2 Approval of Welcome Letter for New Executives and Business Owners - Anne Thwaits, Public Information Officer; Carly Fredericks, Communications Coordinator, Board of Commissioners Office

Fredericks reported that Communications is finding new ways to recruit new members for advisory groups. The County will sponsor Civic Outreach of Corvallis to send a welcome letter [see packet page 70] to executives, business owners, and other who seek ways to engage with the community. Communications staff also attend Civic Outreach's quarterly strategic luncheons, where new people are welcomed and given a contact card. Responding to questions from Wyse, Fredericks confirmed that staff provide County resource information to Civic Outreach, which disseminates the information through the luncheons, and the County receives information about the recipients/attendees.

MOTION: Malone moved to approve the addition of the Board of Commissioners' signatures to the welcome letter for new executives and business owners to Benton County. Shepherd seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0.**

7. Public Hearings

PH 1 In the Matter of the First Reading of Ordinance No. 2025-0326, Modification to Chapter 25 (Public Land Corner Preservation) of the Benton County Code - Gary Stockhoff, Public Works Director

Chair Wyse opened the Public Hearing at 11:05 a.m.

Staff Report
Stockhoff explained that an update to Benton County Code (BCC) is required to increase the recording fee for the public land corner program. Several decades ago, Oregon law capped the fee at $10 per document, which is no longer sufficient to cover costs. The State legislature removed the cap earlier in 2025, allowing Counsel and Stockhoff to modify BCC Chapter 25. Stockhoff will request approval of this and other Public Works Fees at the December 2, 2025 Board of Commissioners Meeting.

Public Testimony
No testimony was offered.

Chair Wyse closed the Public hearing at 11:10 AM.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to conduct the first reading of Ordinance Number 2025-0326, Modification to Chapter 25, Public Land Corner Preservation, of the Benton County Code. Malone seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0.**

Counsel read the Ordinance aloud (short title). The second reading will take place on November 17, 2025, and the effective date will be December 17, 2025.

8. Other

Shepherd noted that on November 7, 2025, there is a special Association of Oregon Counties meeting of the Health and Human Services Committee about the County Financial Assistance Agreement. Shepherd encouraged all Commissioners to attend.

9. Adjournment

Chair Wyse adjourned the meeting at 11:12 AM.

Nancy Wyse, Chair

Erika Milo, Recorder