

MINUTES

BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

Community Development, Natural Areas, Parks & Events and Public Works

Directors

July 9, 2025

9:00 a.m.

Present: Nancy Wyse, Commissioner; Pat Malone, Commissioner; Gabe Shepherd, Commissioner; Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator; Jesse Ott, Natural Areas, Parks and Events; Gary Stockhoff, Public Works; Laurel Byer, Public Works; Jennifer Ficek, Public Works; Petra Schuetz, Community Development.

Excused: N/A

The meeting was called to order at 9:03 a.m.

1. Approval of Minutes: April 9, 2025.

MOTION: Commissioner Wyse called for a motion to approve April 9, 2025, minutes with one correction: under 'Present', list members as "Commissioners" rather than "Board of Commissioners.". Commissioner Shepherd moved to approve. Commissioner Malone seconded the motion, which carried **3-0**.

2. Natural Areas, Parks, and Event, Jesse Ott

2.1 Historic Courthouse Reuse

The group discussed next steps for determining the future use of the historic Benton County Courthouse. A prior advisory committee, led by Commissioner Wyse, had compiled a wide range of reuse concepts, including restaurants, boutique hotels, art studios, and alternative justice facilities. However, no viable user or funding source has emerged, and a required seismic retrofit, estimated at \$25 to 30 million, remains a significant barrier.

Staff acknowledged the need to shift the focus from idea generation to actionable planning. Matt Weatherall, Special Projects Manager, is currently researching and exploring partnerships, including with arts organizations and groups experienced in adaptive reuse of historic structures. The group

discussed the potential for public-private partnerships, as well as leveraging grant opportunities and incentives through programs like Business Oregon and Energy Trust.

It was noted that certain types of use may trigger costly seismic upgrades, making them financially unfeasible. Conversely, government or quasi-government uses might avoid those requirements but are harder to justify without a defined occupant or funding plan. A proposed downtown Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district could eventually support beautification or minor upgrades, though not the needed seismic work.

Given the building's impending vacancy after the new courthouse opens, the group expressed urgency in advancing planning efforts. One suggestion included hiring a market analyst to help identify potential investors or users, including foreign entities.

Next steps include consolidating research findings, exploring energy efficiency improvements, and identifying potential partners or advisory groups to move the reuse process forward.

2.2 McBee Campground

Staff provided a project update on McBee Campground, which is scheduled to go before the Planning Commission on August 19 for zoning and plan approval. CADD (Computer-aided design and drafting) drawings are complete, and coordination is ongoing with the State Fire Marshal and County staff on stormwater management.

Field work is underway, including clearing understory vegetation using a masticator to prepare for road boundary surveying. The goal is to preserve the natural landscape while meeting fire access standards and minimizing tree removal.

The site remains open for day use only; overnight camping is not currently allowed. Limited use by family groups has helped maintain "continued use" status under planning guidelines.

A draft Master Plan is nearly complete and expected to be presented to the Board of Commissioners, tentatively at the September 2 meeting. The plan outlines phased development, funding strategies, potential operational models (including options with or without a camp host), and new amenities such as rentable picnic shelters. Commissioners will have the opportunity to review and suggest revisions before final approval.

Tree removal is scheduled for late fall or early winter, with staff aiming to capitalize on favorable timber prices. Logging will be limited to essential areas, avoiding steep slopes and sensitive terrain to reduce environmental risks. Staff anticipate harvesting approximately two truckloads of logs, enough to offset costs.

Water access will be provided via a gravity-fed line from the forest side of the property to a spigot, designed to support a future camp host role.

Participants expressed appreciation for a recent site tour, which also included visits to Irish Bend and Crystal Lake Cemetery.

2.3 Early Summer Parks Report and Fair

Staff shared updates on early summer activities, with a major focus on preparations for the Benton County Fair, the County's largest public event and its single most important fundraising day, the 4H auction.

Horse Fair is set to begin next week, with all preparations on track. Major efforts have gone into electrical system updates, site readiness, and coordination with volunteers.

Thanks to favorable weather, the grass parking area is already prepped, in contrast to last year when prep ran right up to opening day.

Staff and volunteers are actively beautifying the grounds through projects like, painting the rodeo arena, landscaping and bark dusting, and restoring the Irish Bend Bridge replica using donated materials and labor. It will serve as a centerpiece at the Westgate entrance, adorned with vintage fair posters and memorabilia.

This year's fair introduces interactive butterfly and ladybug tents, offering educational entertainment for families.

Staff morale is high. Despite being a mostly new team entering only their second season, they are energized, well-prepared, and applying lessons learned from last year. Staff recognize the upcoming weeks as a "marathon," but remain enthusiastic and focused.

Commissioners will be provided with access and promotional materials, including \$2 entry coupons, for distribution at Town Halls and community events.

Thursday's main stage will feature a Battle of the Bands with seven groups ranging from folk to metal, replacing last year's less successful headliner format to draw a more diverse and energetic crowd.

Wednesday remains Free Family Day, with youth-friendly programming and free admission for children.

Future programming possibilities, including wrestling events, were mentioned informally and may be considered for next year.

Next week the NAPE summer camp starts, 25 kids aged 8-12 attend. 10 receive a scholarship to attend. Adam Stebbins, Natural Resources Coordinator leads that group. He is a certified outdoor childhood educator. Annually, this is a popular event that has great community feedback.

2.4 Miscellaneous Updates

There was an issue at Hayek that shut down the restroom. Adair historically has water issues and leaks. This is brought up to highlight the aging original infrastructure and the need to start thinking about replacement.

Salmonberry retaining wall is finished.

Working with Laurel Byer, County Engineer, on ODOT trails and bridge crossing multimodal work group, as well as a transportation grant that could be used for trails and master plan.

August 14th will be the last open house for Corvallis Bike Park, there is a lot of community input on this project.

Jackson-Frazier Wetland Grant & Funding- Staff continue working with Oregon State Parks to determine how much of the current \$600,000–\$650,000 Local Government Grant can still be utilized before remaining funds may need to be returned. The grant has received several extensions, but allowable delays are nearly exhausted. State partners have recommended returning any unused funds and reapplying in the next grant cycle, noting the project still scores well and remains competitive. Staff emphasized the importance of proactively managing this relationship to avoid forced revocation.

Staff are evaluating eligible uses for the remaining funds, such as advancing construction document preparation or designing interpretive signage for future phases. Required studies, including archaeological assessments, remain reimbursable expenses.

The team aims to reapply for a larger grant tied to a more shovel-ready project, capitalizing on design progress and in-kind match value accumulated since the original application. Staff remain committed to maximizing remaining funding and strategically planning the next grant submission.

The Alliance for Recreation and Natural Areas (AFRANA) maintains a dedicated fund for Jackson-Frazier improvements. Recent donations have included several over \$10,000, along with many smaller contributions generated through QR code signage and word of mouth.

Staff are in early conversations with fundraising consultants and nonprofit partners, including Greenbelt Land Trust and the Bend Community Foundation, about growing donor engagement and preparing for a larger campaign.

While best practices usually recommend launching capital campaigns closer to construction, staff are considering an earlier start due to recent momentum and strong community interest.

Commissioners praised the strategic approach and commended staff for maintaining strong state partnerships. Interest was expressed in exploring options to increase the fundraising effort now—rather than waiting until the next grant cycle or finalized project budget.

3. Public Works, Gary Stockhoff

3.1 Traffic Safety Action Plan – Laurel Byer

The Transportation Safety Action Plan (TSAP) continues on schedule. Three task force meetings have been held, along with the first Stakeholders Advisory Committee meeting, which includes representatives from Monroe, Adair Village, Corvallis Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and ODOT.

A major focus is identifying the “high injury network” and narrowing it to approximately ten priority corridors or intersections for future safety investments. Independence Highway and Bellfountain Road emerged as top concerns, with Bellfountain already scheduled for upgrades.

An online comment map gathered over 800 comments. Key concerns include speeding, biking safety, and poor visibility. Staff are integrating crash data with public feedback to build a “systemic safety toolbox” of standardized safety solutions.

A second stakeholder meeting is set for October, with an open house in November to review draft solutions. The final TSAP is due March 2026.

3.2 Courthouse, District Attorneys (DA) Office, and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Updates

The old overhead power line running through the new courthouse site is being rerouted, and removal is expected by month's end. Coordination with PP&L has improved, and Hoffman Construction is advancing access road work.

In August, staff will bring naming options for the courthouse, EOC, and signage to the Board. Commemorative items honoring the Swick House and Judge McFadden are also under consideration.

A zoning application from the McFadden family for adjacent land may impact nearby development. Staff are coordinating with Hewlett Packard and the City of Corvallis to monitor that proposal.

Permitting for the EOC is nearly complete; once final permits are received, construction is expected to move quickly.

3.3 Benton Area Transit (BAT)

BAT will return soon with findings from its recent self-assessment and present related recommendations.

Separately, community discussions about extending Corvallis Transit System service to Country Club Drive have raised feasibility concerns. The area is already served by BAT Lift, which provides about 50 rides per week for eligible riders. County staff cited high infrastructure costs and lack of ODOT funding support as major hurdles to adding a fixed-route stop.

3.4 Alpine and Alsea Sewer

Design work is on track, with 90% plans expected by September. However, EPA grant approval has been delayed, likely until October, due to federal staffing limitations. Despite this, prospects for funding remain strong. Permitting and compliance work is progressing to allow construction once funding is released.

3.5 Innovation Mobility Grant

The County's mobility grant, intended to assess rural shuttle service options, has been delayed due to ODOT and DOJ review timelines. Once finalized, it will fund route feasibility studies in west and south County areas.

3.6 Other Grant Updates

The electric vehicle charging station at the Sunset Building is moving forward after delays. Only minor trenching remains once approvals are secured.

For the Monroe Clinic project, proposals from architects and engineers are under review. Once selected, the team will move toward site planning and early design, with USDA approval needed at each step.

Two experienced former federal employees will join Public Works in August and September, bringing valuable grant and compliance expertise.

3.7 Miscellaneous Updates

The courthouse funding agreement has progressed, thanks in part to legislative coordination. However, a last-minute amendment from OJD is under legal review.

The Monroe Clinic has secured \$1.7M, and an additional \$1.5M is pending in a federal appropriations bill, which would fully fund the project.

ODOT's budget challenges and potential layoffs remain a concern, and counties may need to continue advocating for a transportation package that includes local agencies.

County Surveyor Joe Mardis is retiring after 36 years. Recruitment for his replacement is underway.

Sweet Home Clinic renovations are moving forward under Gerding Builders, and the City of Corvallis will continue contracting with Benton County Fleet services. While the Sheriff's Office is exploring other fleet options, staff stress the importance of factoring in full-service support.

Public Works Project Updates, Laurel Byer

Corvallis–Albany Alignment Study – Consultant selected; kickoff expected in August. A public outreach process will follow.

Norton Creek Bridge – Crews will replace a failing timber bridge with a culvert. Benton County Roads will be doing the work. Work includes fish salvage and landowner coordination.

Country Club & 53rd Roundabout – Design is underway; construction planned for 2025.

19th Street (Philomath) – Grind/inlay project includes 27–30 ADA ramps. A request from the City of Philomath for a raised crosswalk near the school was deemed infeasible due to stormwater impacts. Staff will work on a rough estimate of what the redesign, including a raised crosswalk, would cost. Long-term improvements may be pursued separately. The grind/inlay project does include narrowing lanes, painting, providing additional buffers next to

parking/drop off area, and replacing delineators, all of which were outlined in the safety study from Philomath.

Commissioners have heard concerns about truck/freight traffic. Staff agreed and have been assessing optimal truck routes in the area and will also bring these concerns to ODOT. Staff are also assessing truck routes around Fern and Bellfountain, and Independence vs. Springhill.

Cardwell Hill Evacuation Route – Construction scheduled for fall, focusing on the uphill slope.

North Benton County Communities Project – Open house planned for August 14 to present alignment options near Jackson-Frazier and Hwy 99W.

4.0 Community Development, Gary Stockhoff

4.1 Coffin Butte Expansion, Petra Schuetz

The Coffin Butte Land Use application is nearing completion after a detailed and well-attended process. The sixth and final hearing is scheduled for tonight. The record will remain open in three phases before closing on July 30. Planning Commission deliberations begin July 22, with a follow-up on July 29 if approval is recommended.

Public engagement has been high, with nearly 2,000 comments and over 7,000 pages reviewed. The process has remained civil and procedurally sound. If appealed, the application would go to the Board for a de novo hearing by the statutory deadline of September 18. Staff continue working diligently to maintain legal timelines and avoid the risk of a writ of mandamus or further delay.

4.2 Comprehensive Plan & Development Code, Petra Schuetz

Benton County reached a major milestone in its Comprehensive Plan and Development Code update. Land Conservation and Development Commission unanimously approved the County's request for periodic review on June 27, with strong praise for both political alignment and technical quality. Benton County is the only jurisdiction in the current cycle, placing it in a strong position for funding.

The County has budgeted \$300,000 for this two-year effort and expects to submit a formal grant application soon. Staff are exploring an iterative approach to prioritize more urgent or widely supported code updates, including winery and agritourism regulations.

The regional housing subcommittee also came up, with agreement that it needs to be reassessed. Joint Planning Commission/Board meetings may be scheduled to redefine its scope. Commissioners expressed continued support for addressing housing issues, noting that while funds were not allocated in the budget, staff capacity remains available for targeted work. Relatedly, zoning regulations around adjacent land uses for wineries, such as food trucks, are under review.

4.3 Alsea Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC), Petra Schuetz

The Alsea CAC is receiving staff support on a Business Oregon income survey to improve grant eligibility. Participation is key due to historically low census responses. John Swanson, Community Solutions Coordinator, will now serve as liaison, helping the CAC narrow its focus to a single project. A recent permit issue with the school district was resolved swiftly, thanks to collaborative effort. Leadership changes in Alsea, including the superintendent's resignation, are being monitored. Staff also recommend considering surplus of the Haynes Road property used by the Gleaners, as it may no longer be needed for County use.

4.4 Floodplain – *No update.*

4.5 Solid Waste – *No update.*

4.6 Personnel Updates, Gary Stockhoff

A new Building Official is on board and actively performing inspections. An Assistant Planner hire is expected soon, likely creating an opening for a permit technician. An Executive Assistant offer is also pending. Shannon Bush, CD Coordinator, will return from leave on July 24, and her return is expected to accelerate progress on key projects. Staff emphasized that the Coffin Butte review represents a rare and complex challenge, highlighting the department's expertise.

4.7 Enterprise Permitting – Rick Crager

Phase One of the permitting improvement project (process documentation) is complete. Phase Two is underway and on budget, with about \$20,000 remaining. This phase includes the development of a web-based navigator tool to help the public find the right permitting contacts. This tool addresses a common complaint of "I need a permit, but I don't know where to start", and will reduce confusion and staff workload. Completion is expected by the end of August. Jen Brown has provided critical support during Shannon's leave, and staff expressed appreciation for her role in keeping the project on track.

4.8 Miscellaneous Updates, Rick Crager

Staff are tracking potential changes related to DEQ and likely Senate Bill 740, which could introduce new regulatory requirements. Bailey Payne, Solid Waste Program Coordinator, is monitoring this closely and will provide updates as available.

5. Other

Commissioners thanked staff for canceling the previous day's meetings due to lack of quorum. There's interest in rescheduling missed evaluation discussions, ideally before August. A special meeting may be considered if scheduling permits. Alternatively, agenda items might be added to the upcoming department head meeting to keep discussions on track.

6. Adjournment.

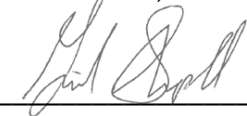
Chair Wyse adjourned the meeting at 11:57 AM.



Nancy Wyse, Chair



Pat Malone, Vice Chair



Gabe Shepherd, Commissioner