



Board of Commissioners

Office: (541) 766-6800

Fax: (541) 766-6893

4500 SW Research Way

Corvallis, OR 97333

bentoncountyor.gov

**MINUTES OF THE GOAL-SETTING MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MARCH 10, 2026**

Present: Pat Malone, Chair; Gabe Shepherd, Vice Chair; Nancy Wyse, Commissioner; Vance Croney, County Counsel; Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator

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

Staff: Rachel Bulder, Maura Kwiatkowski, Board Staff; Cory Grogan, Anne Thwaits, Public Information Officers; Carly Fredericks, Communications Coordinator; Seren Lloyd, Information Technology; Gary Stockhoff, Public Works; Sean McGuire, Sustainability

Guests: Cathryn Stephens, Eugene Airport

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Malone convened the meeting at 9:01 a.m. and introductions were made.

2. Review and Approve Agenda

No changes were made to the agenda.

3. Announcements

No announcements were made.

4. Work Session

4.1 *LIFT OFF EUG: The Future of the Eugene Airport – Cathryn Stephens, Eugene Airport Director

Stephens discussed the benefits of utilizing the Eugene Airport (EUG), which sees approximately 1.8 million passengers a year, with an opportunity to increase that amount. One challenge the airport is experiencing is it had reached airline gate capacity in 2021 and that has made it difficult to add additional flight options. Stephens shared

the expansion plan and a map of potential non-stop flight routes with a terminal expansion. Approximately 450 cars within the region drive to the Portland International Airport (PDX) per day to fly; Stephens stated that flying from EUG instead of PDX could save a net five metric tons of CO2 pollution per day. Stephens shared the Eugene Airport's impact on local jobs; the airport currently supports more than 10,000 local jobs directly and indirectly. The expansion of the airport would increase the economic impact from \$1.6 billion to \$3.6 billion. Stephens shared the cost breakdown of the expansion project and the grants that have been targeted for funding. EUG is actively working to utilize nontraditional funding methods to expand the airport at a quicker rate than current timeline projections. Stephens shared a QR code for the project's feasibility survey.

Shepherd asked if the airport would update its security plan to accommodate the projected increased capacity.

Stephens stated security would need to be reevaluated; however, the current security checkpoint can serve the addition of a C concourse. Stephens discussed the studies that have been done for the expansion proposal and how they addressed security, baggage, check-in, and additional supporting infrastructures that would require an expansion along with the addition of C concourse.

Stephens stated the airport is an enterprise fund of the City of Eugene that is self-sustaining. The airport is operated by 65 staff, and the airport receives support services from Eugene that are paid through essential service allocation and other funds.

Shepherd asked about the types of funding mechanisms that EUG is considering.

Stephens stated the airport has hired consultants to research all available options. Options include additional buy-in from the five-county region, additional state funding and congressionally directed spending, naming rights, and the benefactor model.

Shepherd asked about Stephens' interactions with the Southern Willamette Valley Innovation Corridor initiative.

Stephens stated the City of Eugene is involved in that initiative, and EUG has engaged in outreach and is looking to broaden stakeholder connections.

Wyse asked if there will be a plan to increase parking and car storage at the airport.

Stephens discussed the parking capacity; during peak travel periods parking is limited, but during the remainder of the year the current parking system works. Stephens mentioned that EUG has room to expand the economy lot but is hesitant to build a parking structure due to the limited return on investment opportunity.

Wyse discussed the importance of happy and engaged employees, growth, and accountability from the airlines that utilize EUG.

Malone asked about the project descriptions for the expansion.

Stephens stated the projects in the blue section of the slide were identified to be completed with a combination of funding from federal grants, airport revenue, passenger facility changes, and the addition of funding from a \$80 million bond. The projects in the green section are projects that do not have an identified funding source. Stephens discussed the project logistics.

Shepherd asked about the type of bond the airport is using.

Stephens stated a passenger facility backed bond, which is not a taxpayer funded bond.

Malone asked if the Eugene airport is tracking how many people utilize the new 99 Vine bus line service to go to and from the airport.

Stephens did not have the figures ready but confirmed it is being tracked and can provide the information to the Board.

{Exhibit 1: Handout with QR Code}

4.2 County Communications and Website Update – Anne Thwaits, Public Information Officer; Carly Fredericks, Communications Coordinator; Seren Lloyd, Web Content Specialist

Thwaits shared that the County's public newsletter has approximately 10,000 subscribers and a 53% open rate, which is higher than industry standards. Constant Contact informed the Communications Team regarding a change in its analytic tracking that could show a lower opening rate, but that change affected the data minimally. Thwaits reviewed the content in the newsletters that had the top engagement between December 2025 and February 2026. The clickthrough rate is 4%, which although a low rate, is double the industry standard. Thwaits mentioned that Public Information Officer Cory Grogan has been writing various employee spotlight stories for the newsletter. Thwaits reviewed the County's social media statistics; the social media engagement has doubled compared to the previous year. Benton County has 2,200 followers on LinkedIn, and the Communications Team has increased the amount of posts on the County's LinkedIn. Thwaits discussed the topics of interest and performance of the County's social media posts. Communications has been releasing approximately six to eight press releases and news stories a month. When media outlets pick up these County stories, it increases the County's engagement. Thwaits shared the news stories that media partners have been the most interested in. Grogan has been pitching stories to the Philomath News and the Corvallis Advocate.

Fredericks provided an update on the County's status towards compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) website regulations for qualifying organizations. Three hundred and ninety nine of the 934 compliance errors have been remediated as of February 10. Examples of compliance issues include heading issues, color contrast issues, and multiple titles on one page. Of the 370 errors remaining, 170 can be addressed by the Web Innovations Team.

Lloyd discussed why having a website that is ADA compliant can assist with search engine optimization of County content.

Fredericks discussed available accessibility tools and best practices.

Lloyd stated the importance of providing more training opportunities on website content creation and management for County employees.

Thwaites stated the team has received positive results from the website audits. For example, campground reservations have increased since the website update for Natural Areas, Parks, and Events launched. The Records and Elections Department's new website will be available to the public in late March.

Fredericks and Lloyd presented on webpage navigation from the user's perspective, new website features, such as menu icons, and the addition of related links and pathways on site pages to improve the user's ability to find relevant information.

Thwaites provided an update on department website audits and the Permits, Applications, and Licensing (PALs) tool. Thwaites has not received feedback on PALs yet, and Information Technology staff are working on the layout for users accessing the tool from their mobile device.

Fredericks shared PALs analytics.

Chair Malone recessed the meeting at 10:09 a.m. and reconvened at 10:15 a.m.

4.3 *Discussion Regarding County Administrator Position Vacancy – Pat Malone, Chair, Board of Commissioners

Crager reviewed the memorandum that was sent to the Board; it detailed the variables and challenges to be considered when evaluating the three options regarding the County Administrator position vacancy. Crager discussed the pros and cons for each option. Option 1 will leave the Board of Commissioners Office with a budget deficit of approximately \$370,000 by the end of the biennium and does not address the issue of double-fill staffing. Option 2 would leave the Board of Commissioners Office with a deficit closer to \$140,000 by end of biennium; however, it also does not address the

staffing double-fill. Option 3 allows the Board to appoint a staff member that currently serves in a leadership role to serve as the permanent County Administrator and enact a hiring freeze for the vacant position. This option will reduce the budget deficit to approximately \$185,000 by the end of the biennium, but it provides the option for long-term budget savings. Crager stated that Option 3 could potentially limit the opportunities for a change in direction that historically follows with new leadership.

Wyse asked about next steps after the Board agreed on an option.

Counsel stated the Board cannot discuss the vacancy fill options and process in an Executive Session, but the consideration of a specific staff member to fill the vacancy can be discussed in Executive Session. If the Board wanted to discuss Option 3 more in-depth, it can be done in Executive Session; a decision cannot be made in Executive Session.

Malone preferred to discuss all of the options before choosing one and discussing it in Executive Session. Malone discussed the importance of the Assistant County Administrator position regarding the amount of workload it removes from the County Administrator position. Malone was interested in more information regarding the budget constraints for Options 1 and 2 compared to Option 3.

Crager discussed the changes in the management structure of the Board of Commissioners Office over the previous few years. Option 3 provides the Board the opportunity to freeze and reserve the Assistant County Administrator position when the revenue forecast has improved. Crager believed the Board of Commissioners Office should maintain a position for a manager of Board staff that the County Administrator position does not have the capacity to manage.

Webb stated that Human Resources had previously recommended the Board of Commissioners Office modify the management structure before the addition of the Assistant County Administrator position. Webb stated the management structure of the Board's Office should fundamentally change regardless of the decision made regarding the County Administrator vacancy.

Counsel provided historical context to the current management structure of the Board of Commissioners Office. Counsel added that an interim position does not typically make structural changes, but rather maintains the current pace of operations. Option 2 does not allow for fundamental changes.

Shepherd asked for more information regarding the legal differences in Crager's current title as Assistant County Administrator versus Crager acting as the Interim County Administrator.

Counsel stated there is no difference legally.

Malone asked how the Board's Office operations would work if the Assistant County Administrator was acting as the County Administrator.

Crager stated the Assistant County Administrator acting as County Administrator would likely appoint certain Department Directors as Assistant County Administrator when necessary.

Shepherd preferred the options that lessened the Board's Office budget deficit and was not interested in engaging in a recruitment process for a County Administrator in the near future. Shepherd expressed interest in using Option 2 for approximately three months as a trial period with Crager, then voting on Option 3 after that trial period.

Wyse suggested the Board consider a vacancy freeze for the position and address the current chain of command model in the Board's Office. Wyse agreed with Shepherd's idea to enact Option 2 for three months, then evaluate before moving to Option 3.

Counsel suggested appointing an Interim County Administrator through the end of the fiscal year, which is approximately a three-month period.

Crager stated an Interim County Administrator is not in a position to address the Board of Commissioners Office structural issues, if the Board is interested in changing that.

Malone suggested scheduling another discussion near the end of June to evaluate the current course.

Wyse believed the Interim County Administrator discussion is an ideal time for the Board to reevaluate the code of conduct for the County Administrator position.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to appoint Rick Crager as Interim County Administrator through June 30 2026. Wyse seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

{Exhibit 2: County Administrator Vacancy Memorandum}

5. Consent Calendar

- 5.1 Approval of the January 13, 2026 Board of Commissioners Goal-setting Meeting Minutes**
- 5.2 In the Matter of Appointment of Moriah Avery to the Property Value Appeals Board, Order No. D2026-055**
- 5.3 Approval of the March 5, 2026 Board of Commissioners Applicant Interview Meeting Minutes**

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

6. New Business

6.1 Sponsorship Request for ABC House's Celebrate Hope Fundraising and Awareness Event – Maura Kwiatkowski, Administrative Services Manager, Board of Commissioners

Kwiatkowski reviewed sponsorship budget information for Items 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3.

The Board agreed to sponsor the three items at the Board's historic funding levels.

MOTION: Shepherd moved that the Board sponsor the ABC House's Celebrate Hope Fundraising and Awareness Event at the \$800 level. Wyse seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

6.2 Sponsorship Request for Jackson Street Youth Rising Annual Fundraising Event – Maura Kwiatkowski, Administrative Services Manager, Board of Commissioners

MOTION: Shepherd moved that the Board sponsor the Jackson Street Youth Rising Annual Fundraising Event at the \$250 level. Wyse seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

6.3 Sponsorship Request for Philomath 2026 Rotary Salmon and Jazz Event – Maura Kwiatkowski, Administrative Services Manager, Board of Commissioners

MOTION: Shepherd moved that the Board sponsor the Philomath 2026 Rotary Salmon and Jazz Event at the \$250 level. Wyse seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

6.4 Appointment of County Counsel – Vance Croney, County Counsel, Board of Commissioners

Counsel stated that Jane Vetto is the Board's choice for the next County Counsel. The terms of the agreement for Vetto's employment were provided in the meeting packet; if the appointment and contract is approved, Vetto's employment will begin on April 13.

Wyse asked for clarification on the terms of occasional outside employment in Vetto's contract.

Counsel stated that section of the contract refers to any opportunity for Vetto to be invited to a class or event as a guest speaker or other opportunities that are similar in that nature.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to accept the employment contract with Jane Vetto and appoint her to the position of Benton County County Counsel effective April 13, 2026. Wyse seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

7. Assistant County Administrator Update

Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator:

- Community Development Director hiring status update.
- County is beginning the Records and Elections Director recruitment
- Discussion ongoing regarding the Juvenile Department Director position.
- Benton Area Transit implementation plan is in the beginning stages; report will be ready by the end of the week that will outline the next steps.
- Advisory Boards update.
- State Legislative process update. CFM Advocates attend the next Leadership Team meeting.
- In the final stages of the Alsea Health Clinic transfer.
- Dashboard project update.

8. Commissioner Updates

Commissioner Malone:

- Attended Senator Wyden's Townhall and toured the Design Institute on Oregon State University campus.
- Attended a meeting in Monroe and received an update on their projects.
- Third meeting of the Solid Waste Task Force is March 20.

Malone departed the meeting at 11:30 a.m. Shepherd chaired the remainder of the meeting.

Commissioner Shepherd:

- Provided an update on the Association of Oregon Counties Board meeting.
- Community Services Consortium meeting structure has changed; future meetings will be open to the full governance team due to the importance of the decisions that will occur.
- Visited a scouts group.
- Provided a Senate update.
- Met with the community members who are requesting a speed study on Scenic Drive in North Albany and the intersection has been scheduled for one.
- Cannot attend the April 16 Department Head meeting.

Commissioner Wyse:

- Attended the NACo Conference in Washington D.C.
- Attended the Advisory Council on Immigration and Intergovernmental Affairs.
- Attended the Western Interstate Region Board of Directors meeting.
- Attended the National Democratic County Officials luncheon and workshop.
- Attended Linda Modrell's celebration of life.
- Attended Monroe's Townhall.
- Participated in the Philomath Visioning workshop.
- Attended Adult Prom at the Fairgrounds.
- Attended the Philomath Rodeo queen's coronation.
- Setting up meetings with local business owners.
- Will attend Legislative Breakfast.

9. Other

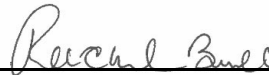
No other business was discussed

10. Adjournment

Vice Chair Shepherd adjourned the meeting at 11:42 a.m.



Pat Malone, Chair



Rachel Bulder, Recorder

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