



Board of Commissioners

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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2026, 9:00 AM**

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

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

Staff: Rachel Bulder, Maura Kwiatkowski, Board staff; Cory Grogan, Anne Thwaits, Public Information; Sean McGuire, Sustainability; Erika Milo, Board Recorder; Bailey Payne, Community Development

Guests: Steve Clark, Julie Manning, City of Corvallis Downtown Vitality Strategy Task Force

1. Call to Order and Introductions

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

2. Review and Approve Agenda

The following item was deferred to the February 3, 2026 Board Meeting:

- 5.1 Future of Benton County Environment and Natural Resources Advisory Committee (ENRAC) -** Sean McGuire, Sustainability Coordinator; Jason Schindler, Chair, Environment and Natural Resources Advisory Committee

The following item was added to the agenda under **6. Other:**

- 6.1 Discussion and Decision Regarding Commissioner Attendance/Tickets Purchase for Celebrate Corvallis 75th Anniversary Event on March 14, 2026 –** Maura Kwiatkowski, Administrative Supervisor, Board of Commissioners Office

3. Announcements

Malone noted recent events in the State of Minneapolis, condemning lightly trained and unaccountable agents killing American citizens in the name of immigration enforcement. In Oregon, the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration Control and Enforcement made a proposal to site a detention center in the City of Newport. Newport Mayor Jan Kaplan is leading an effort to prevent this. It is important to pay attention to unacceptable actions around the country and determine what everyone can do.

4. Work Session

4.1 City of Corvallis Downtown Vitality Strategy Task Force Update - Steve Clark, Julie Manning, Co-chairs, Executive Committee, City of Corvallis Downtown Vitality Strategy Task Force

Manning provided an overview of the Corvallis Downtown Vitality Strategy Task Force [see presentation for details]. Manning explained that the Mayor-appointed 40-member Task Force formed in spring 2025 to create a strategy to nurture a thriving downtown as the hub and character of the City of Corvallis. This continues the momentum of a multi-year, multi-phased City effort to study specific aspects (such as parking and city-owned facilities) and identify enhancement opportunities. Manning described the structure of the Task Force. All nine Corvallis City Councilors are Task Force members.

The Task Force is currently developing a preliminary set of actions and ideas to help prioritize the work. In January and February 2026, members will gather feedback from individuals, downtown stakeholders, and content experts about the preliminary action ideas. In February 2026, the Task Force will begin to refine priorities and develop findings and recommendations for the Corvallis City Council later this spring.

Clark noted that the Task Force has already contacted 40 organizations and hundreds of community members through an online survey. In January and February 2026, the Task Force will meet with organizations and leadership groups such as the Board. The Benton County 2040 Thriving Communities Initiative is a leading example of the vision and goals of the Corvallis community and intersects with the work of this task force. Clark requested the Board's input on the preliminary actions, asking which actions would be the Board's top priority now, and in the next two to five years. The Task Force has identified 28 actions in nine areas of endeavor. Based on feedback, the Task Force will organize the actions into goals and outcomes, then create a report of strategic recommendations to the City Council on seven priorities for three time frames: now (first three years), next (four to seven years), later (eight years and beyond). Clark asked to share the survey link with County staff and visitors in the Kalapuya Building lobby.

Malone discussed developing partnerships; any large effort needs help to define the vision and implement it. Malone named these priorities:

- Safety and enhancing cleanliness downtown. The County is a partner with the Crisis Center for people in need. Benton has an inadequate jail that could be part of the safety solution, but due to space limitations, the County often cannot hold individuals overnight. Often Law Enforcement must release a person the County would prefer to detain longer.
- Transportation: making it easy for people to move around the community without a car. For instance, the Highway 99 Vine line has opened, connecting McMinnville and Yamhill County with Eugene and Lane County.

Shepherd had been involved in the downtown project for seven months. The Task Force has sought input from the diverse group on its Executive Board, including advocates for the unhoused, downtown residents, downtown business owners, Visit Corvallis, Oregon State University (OSU), the Corvallis School Board, Farmer's Market, and more. Part of the Task Force's charge is to consider an Urban Renewal District or a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District for downtown Corvallis. At the last Task Force Executive Committee meeting, members recommended that the City Council move forward. This means adding the TIF to the Corvallis City charter, which requires a public vote, so the item could be placed on the November 2026 ballot. Some members of the City Council were hesitant about the speed of the timeline. The Council will vote on February 2, 2026, on whether to place the TIF on the November 2026 or May 2027 ballot, or to end the project. City staff expressed excitement over a TIF district and stated they could complete the work by November 2026, so long as the Council approved. County Public Information staff will promote the survey.

Wyse asked how the Task Force decided to use this particular framework.

Clark replied this is an outgrowth of the Community Engagement Task Force (CETS), which collected considerable community feedback. The feedback expressed a strong appreciation of downtown and a strong interest in improvements. Priority issues included the typical ones, such as improving infrastructure, but comments also emphasized the environment, safety, and cleanliness. Business owners mentioned improving the downtown economy. Engagement identified the nine areas of interest. CETS proposed a multi-faceted Task Force to address these areas.

Wyse asked how the County could help in a way that leverages its skills, without encroaching on the City's jurisdiction. One economic development framework that Wyse favored was utilizing the competitiveness of a community. Wyse asked how the County could leverage available competitive factors to help downtowns in various cities. Wyse concurred with Malone about the need for partnerships. Wyse noted that downtown Corvallis is a historic district; Benton County's rich history can be a small tourism driver and is another feature the County should leverage.

Manning mentioned that Clark spoke to the Board of the Benton County Historical

Society last week. Historic buildings are a key part of the character of downtown.

Clark commented that members of the Historical Society Board and the Corvallis Museum Board acknowledge the cultural opportunities and historical connections downtown. Part of the Task Force's effort over the next several months will be to determine how the County might be involved. A government such as Corvallis, a service provider, and private organizations such as the Corvallis Chamber of Commerce and Visit Corvallis will need to collaborate. Clark and Manning will update the Board again in May 2026.

Wyse wanted to hear about all the feedback before it was built into the plan. Corvallis-Benton Economic Development Director Christopher Jacobs can also help bridge the City-County gap. Wyse prioritized improving bicycle safety downtown. When Wyse was a Corvallis City Councilor, the Council worked on and approved the Transportation Service Plan (TSP) and identified bicycle routes. Wyse asked whether anything in the current TSP could help downtown.

Manning replied that connectivity around safety and safe corridors had been a key theme. The City's existing planning documents, such as the TSP, can be built upon. Hopefully this strategy will help enable and prioritize plans and funds that already have groundwork in place. For instance, OSU has taken the lead on some recommended programs for safe transport between campus and downtown, which the City could connect with.

Wyse asked whether the Task Force had investigated what other cities have done.

Clark replied that the Task Force had not looked at specific cities. Transportation changes over time. City infill has placed additional opportunities and pressures on transportation. In some cities, public transit use is down, because infill has happened within walking distance of downtowns, and also because of remote work. All parties need to examine best practices in transportation and try to implement those practices in downtown Corvallis. Corvallis needs safe pathways to downtown from many directions. This includes signage.

Manning shared that leaders from Visit Corvallis, the Corvallis Chamber of Commerce, and OSU, among others, had provided anecdotal examples from other cities. The Task Force is now a member of the Main Street organization, which provides opportunities for groups to learn from each other.

Wyse asked if ideas from the past Downtown Advisory Group had been considered.

Manning confirmed she had consulted that information.

Shepherd mentioned the City of Independence as an example of another city's success

story. Regarding the economy, Corvallis just completed its statistically valid community survey, comparing the level of importance people place on a topic to how they rate the quality of services currently being offered. The quality of the economy was rated 90% important, but 38% quality, a significant gap.

Malone stated the Task Force can count on Benton County as a partner.

Chair Malone recessed the meeting at 9:51 AM and reconvened at 10:00 AM.

4.2 Solid Waste Management Activities in Benton County and the Region

– Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator, Board of Commissioners Office; Bailey Payne, Solid Waste Coordinator, Community Development Department

Crager noted the terms ‘solid waste’ and ‘sustainable materials’ can be confusing; it is important to make sure County messaging is clear on the distinction.

Payne explained the difference between sustainable materials management (SMM) and solid waste management (SWM). SMM considers the whole process of an object, including manufacturing, whereas SWM is a smaller aspect of that, and concerns garbage, composting, and recycling. Coffin Butte Landfill (CBL) is its own topic.

Payne reviewed committees and Task Forces relating to SWM and SMM, including Benton County Talks Trash (BCTT) and the Disposal Site Advisory Committee (DSAC), both of which largely focus on CBL. Benton County could reinstate the Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC), or, as staff recommend, create an ad hoc Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) Committee. Payne has begun writing the SWMP. The statewide Recycling modernization Act will influence how garbage is handled in the community. The State Task Force on Municipal Solid Waste in the Willamette Valley, chaired by Malone, is also looking at regional solutions for SWM and SMM. Benton County’s SMM Task Force, which ended last summer, had a subcommittee on solid waste.

Payne explained that an SWMP is an integrated, strategic approach to managing solid waste in an efficient, safe, and sustainable manner. BC has never had an SWMP before. CBL has a limited lifespan. The region needs to start planning and building future infrastructure now. Many other counties in the region, particularly those with the best waste recovery rates and the most programs, have SWMPs. Payne displayed examples [see packet page 20] of potential costs for a Benton County SWMP, if performed entirely by a consultant. The County could reduce costs if Payne did much of the work, then brought in a consultant only where additional expertise was needed. Payne had written about 60 pages of a draft SWMP. Staff would like to include community input and feedback in the plan. The ad hoc SWMP Committee would provide expertise and review drafts until later in 2027.

The State Task Force on Municipal Solid Waste in the Willamette Valley is studying and identifying solutions for solid waste disposal in the Willamette Valley. That body will review the findings and recommendations of the regional SWMP Task Force. The State Task Force will submit a report to the legislature by December 15, 2026. Payne will finish Benton's draft SWMP in March 2026, issue a request for proposals, select a contractor by June 2026, set up the ad hoc committee in summer 2026, and start meetings in September 2026. The committee would meet every other month until the plan is completed in approximately June 2027.

Crager noted that the Board approved \$100,000 in the 2025-27 biennial budget to create the SWMP.

Shepherd asked what the added value from a contractor would be in the final SWMP as compared to Payne's March 2026 version.

Payne replied the consultant would consider infrastructure needs and make recommendations about the cost of building a transfer station. Payne already had some recommendations but would like to discuss them with a consultant who has expertise about communities which have pursued similar efforts.

Responding to a question from Shepherd, Payne stated he could write the report's introduction, overview, and specifics about Benton's waste generation (such as the general waste recovery rate and composting). A consultant could help determine the necessary infrastructure and suggest ways of financing the recommendations. The Benton Task Force would then evaluate the contractor's recommendations.

Responding to a question from Shepherd, Payne confirmed that the Board would select and appoint Task Force members.

Responding to a question from Shepherd, Crager confirmed that the \$100,000 budgeted for the project came from surplus SMMP funds.

Shepherd noted that none of the comparable counties' costs were as low as \$100,000, and asked whether there was a contingency for additional funding.

Crager replied that the exact cost still had unknown factors, making cost difficult to predict until the County defines the consultant's scope of work and receives bids. However, the Community Development budget is overperforming, which presents opportunities. Staff hope to stay within \$100,000. Many of the other counties paid a consultant for the entire body of work, whereas Bailey and other staff have much of the needed expertise.

Payne commented that some SWMPs from other counties explore and analyze new

technologies. Payne did not plan to include that in the Benton County plan, thus reducing costs .

Shepherd noted that all the comparison counties had larger geography and population than Benton.

Crager observed that Benton's earlier SMMP work would also reduce costs.

Malone shared that the State Task Force staff were delighted that Benton County provided background information from the SMMP. The State has recognized that no one county can solve the situation alone. Malone noted that on waste recovery rates, Benton was only the tenth best county in the state, and asked why Benton was not doing better on that front, despite the community's best efforts.

Payne replied that the other, larger counties have much more robust education and outreach programs. In the SWMP, Payne wanted to address what programs would make Benton's system more effective and better educate the community. Payne predicted that Benton's standing in recovery rates would improve.

Malone observed that some of those counties have transfer stations, whereas Benton lacks any large transfer stations.

Payne commented that a transfer station could accept more types of waste, and was hopeful that Benton would have a station in the future.

Malone noted that three of eight State Task Force members participated in the SMMP process. The State Task Force will not forget the SMMP information. A likely outcome is to develop several legislative concepts by the end of 2026. Polk, Marion, Linn, and Benton County have considered the SMMP recommendations. One Yamhill Commissioner is interested in joining the discussions. Tillamook and Lincoln County send all waste to CBL, so they need to be included. There is a rough proposal for the Millersburg Transfer Station to become the hub for four to seven counties; then waste would be sent by rail or truck to a site in eastern Oregon. The ten- to fifteen-year estimated lifespan of CBL leaves little time to firm up an idea and determine what infrastructure is needed and how to fund it. It is important to think about solid waste holistically.

5. New Business

5.1 Future of Benton County Environment and Natural Resources Advisory Committee (ENRAC) - Sean McGuire, Sustainability Coordinator; Jason Schindler, Chair, Environment and Natural Resources Advisory Committee

This item was deferred to the February 3, 2026 Board Meeting due to staff absence.

6. Other

**6.1 Discussion and Decision Regarding Commissioner Attendance/
Tickets Purchase for Celebrate Corvallis 75th Anniversary Event on
March 14, 2026** – Maura Kwiatkowski, Administrative Supervisor, Board
of Commissioners Office

Kwiatkowski explained that previously, the Board paid \$1,200 to purchase a table at the Celebrate Corvallis event. This year, the event has concert-style seating. Seats cost \$50, \$75, or \$100, depending on location. The County budgeted the same amount for this purpose as the previous year, except for a slight increase to account for inflation.

The Board discussed attendance options and the number of tickets to be purchased.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to allow staff to purchase up to twelve \$75 tickets for Celebrate Corvallis. Wyse seconded the motion. Shepherd added that the tickets would be for the three Commissioners, the Sheriff, the District Attorney, the County Administrator, and one guest for each person, contingent on ticket availability. The motion **carried 3-0**.

7. Adjournment

Chair Malone adjourned the meeting at 10:58 AM.


Pat Malone, Chair


Erika Milo, Recorder