



Board of Commissioners

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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026, 9:00 AM**

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

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

Staff: Shannon Bozigar, Community Development; Rachel Bulder, Maura Kwiatkowski, Board staff; Laurel Byer, Public Works; Cory Grogan, Anne Thwaits, Public Information; Kevin Hashizume, District Attorney's Office; April Holland, Health Services; Adam Loerts, Information Technology; Sean McGuire, Sustainability; Erika Milo, Board Recorder; Karen Vaughn, Financial Services

Guests: Janet Seiko Nishihara, Oregon State University; Sara Cash, Mystie Munsey, Alsea residents/Alsea Community Action Collaborative; Jason Schindler, Corvallis resident/Environmental and Natural Resources Advisory Committee

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 items were added under **10. Other:**

10.1 Benton Area Transit (BAT) Self-Perform Analysis - Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator

10.2 Delegate Contract Authority to County Counsel - Vance Croney, County Counsel

3. Announcements

No announcements were made.

4. Proclamations

4.1 In the Matter of Proclaiming February 19, 2026 as the Day of Remembrance for Japanese Americans Incarcerated During World War II, Proclamation No. P2026-002 - Dr. Janet Seiko Nishihara, Educational Opportunities Program Director, Oregon State University; Kevin Hashizume, Deputy District Attorney, Benton County District Attorney's Office

Nishihara read the Proclamation aloud. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9006, which would strip people of Japanese descent, including Japanese Americans who were born in the United States, of their liberty. This order authorized the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans living along the West Coast. Benton County acknowledged the unjust incarceration and harm done to the 120,000 Japanese Americans.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to adopt #P2026-002, proclaiming February 19, 2026 as the Day of Remembrance for Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II. Wyse seconded the motion, **which passed 3-0.**

Hashizume shared personal reflections about the forced incarceration of his father, aunts, and grandparents at Heart Mountain War Relocation Center under Executive Order 9006. This proclamation serves as a reminder of what happens when fear and prejudice override the Constitution. Today, such discussions center on other immigrants. The story of the Japanese American community can serve as a warning, but also a responsibility to all. Americans need to confront the past with honesty and make sure not to allow an event like this to happen again.

The Commissioners each thanked Hashizume for sharing those experiences.

Malone commented that looking at those events through a legal lens shows that the majority can go off track. The Supreme Court at that time approved this process, which shows the importance of being careful and making sure that everyone's rights are respected. Malone thanked Nishihara and Hashizume for keeping this information alive and comparing it to the present.

5. Comments from the Public

No comments were made.

6. Work Session

6.1 Permit, Application, and License Search (PALS) Navigator Tool Project Update - Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator; Shannon Bozigar, Community Development Program Coordinator; Adam Loerts, Information Technology Director

Crager explained that staff started this project because County permitting and licensing was complex and fragmented, with many systems that often were not integrated. Customers struggled with where to start, whom to contact, what is required, and when the process is complete. Also, the County relies a great deal on institutional knowledge about permitting and licensing, with many workarounds and manual handoffs between departments.

When staff asked customers how the extant permits/licenses experience was for them, typical replies were, "Convolutated, I didn't get a straight answer, my emails got lost," but also, "It was pretty easy once I talked to the right person." Finding that person was the biggest problem. Navigation was particularly difficult when the process involved multiple departments.

Goals of the project:

1. Simplify and improve the customer experience.
2. Improve internal coordination.
3. Identify item improvements and long-term system needs. It may not be realistic to expect a single product to meet all needs, so the County needs to focus on coordination and ease of use.

Bozigar explained that the initial \$100,000 from the Board helped the staff team undertake Phase 1, in which nine departments and over 30 staff members provided feedback. Phase 1 revealed that the County has staff with deep knowledge, but that knowledge is siloed, which makes it difficult to navigate between departments and divisions. Information can be difficult to find on the County website, and some software systems do not connect to each other. In Phase 2, which just finished, the team mapped each department's processes. Phase 2 included developing an online finder and navigation beta tool that launched a week and a half ago. The tool is designed to help the public understand what the County does and how to navigate the process.

PALS is in the beta launch/testing phase but is ready for some customer use. It helps users identify applicable forms by answering a few simple questions and to connect to the right department for more help. PALS reduces misdirected inquiries, incomplete applications, and applicant frustration. It is not a full permitting system and does not replace staff, nor does it automate application reviews. Bozigar demonstrated the web tool with different County forms. Many County forms are available in English and

Spanish, and more will be translated. A banner inviting visitors to try the new tool will appear on the County website beginning February 10, 2026.

In Phase 3, the team will finish developing a fully integrated system, continuing to test and refine the system and coordinate user surveys for ongoing improvement. The remaining components to integrate are construction and land development, which will connect to Geographic Information System data.

Malone asked whether there would be a financial request for Phase 3.

Crager replied the team does not anticipate needing additional funding for this project. The team will work with Loerts on what remains to be done.

7. Consent Calendar

7.1 In the Matter of Appointing John Phillips IV to Position No. 22 on the Willamette Criminal Justice Council, Order No. D2026-041

7.2 In the Matter of Retroactive Reappointment to the Benton County Budget Committee, Order No. D2026-042

7.3 Letter of Support for Funding for Maintenance of Greenhouses at the USDA-ARS Research Units in Corvallis, Oregon

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

8. Old Business

8.1 Oregon State University (OSU) 2026 Out of Darkness Event, Continued Discussion - April Holland, Health Services Director

Holland explained that this sponsorship request was first discussed at the February 3, 2026 Board Meeting. The Public Health Division has considerable intersection with OSU Counseling and Psychological Services, and Benton Mental Health Prevention and Promotion Coordinator Avalon Mason helped plan this event. Thanks to a suicide prevention grant from United Way, Health Services will sponsor the event at the \$2,500 level. Since departmental funds are used, this does not require Board action.

Shepherd asked whether there would be an opportunity to connect people to Benton County Mental Health services.

Holland confirmed. Health staff participate in the event every year. Holland will send a

follow-up email.

8.2 Amending Benton County Code Chapter 2 to Update Procurement Thresholds, Second Reading and Adoption of Ordinance No. 2026-0329 - Vance Croney, County Counsel; Karen Vaughn, Procurement Analyst, Financial Services

Vaughn explained that the Board discussed updating the procurement thresholds at the February 3, 2026 Board Meeting.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to amend Benton County Code Chapter Two to update the procurement thresholds and to conduct a second reading and adoption of Ordinance #2026-0329. Wyse seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

Counsel read the Ordinance aloud (short title). The Ordinance will take effect on March 19, 2026.

Chair Malone recessed the meeting at 9:52 AM and reconvened at 10:03 AM.

9. New Business

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

McGuire provided background about ENRAC, which was formed around 2018 and had links to the 2040 Vision Initiative. Due to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, ENRAC did not have much impact. One challenge is that the committee's focus is extremely broad: any areas related to the environment and natural resources. ENRAC has oversight from the Sustainability Program, Community Development, the Health Department, Public Works, and Natural Areas, Parks, and Events. ENRAC's bylaws did not always align with actual practice. There was confusion about recruitment. Members' interests and expertise rarely corresponded to County objectives, and members did not know exactly what the County wanted them to do. In 2025, the County asked ENRAC to take the position of the Solid Waste Advisory Council (SWAC) to provide context for the Coffin Butte Landfill expansion request.

Currently, there are only three official ENRAC members. The ENRAC Chair will step down soon and the Vice Chair moved out of Benton county. In late 2025, McGuire requested members' thoughts about the committee's future. Members created a memorandum [packet page 123] to share their perspective on ENRAC's future. Members recommended that the County not invest time to recruit more members

without addressing structural concerns. Members felt the committee lacked focus, a clear process of interaction with leadership, and challenges to engage all members. Members recommended rethinking a future advisory committee with more specificity and structure.

The memorandum identified three options:

1. Temporarily disband ENRAC and significantly alter the current bylaws.
2. Dissolve ENRAC and explore structural options to support the environment and natural resources.
3. Disband ENRAC and comprehensively integrate environmental issues within existing committees and structures.

McGuire recommended that the Board dissolve ENRAC, then identify specific questions with deliverables and deadlines, creating a better match between Board expectations and community member expertise.

Counsel shared that many of Benton County's boards, committees, and commissions have similar issues. Committees that are not required by statute can lose momentum, member interest, and participation because the original purpose is not addressed, or is no longer needed. In the future, the Board and staff should discuss the desired structure of Benton County committees. Some of the standing committees are not very productive. Ad hoc committees on specific topics might work better.

McGuire noted that since ENRAC was not given a specific request, committee members developed their own, which is proactive, but can lead to duplication of effort with other committees.

Schindler, who has been an ENRAC member for most of the committee's existence, stated that the membership understood the Board's intention. It was simply difficult to understand what ENRAC could do with its mission to compare the landscapes of the cities, the County, and rural areas. It was unclear how ENRAC would functionally advise the Board without greater direct input or requests. Many other entities were already investigating aspects of solid waste. To be more successful, ENRAC needs a clear focus.

Responding to a question from Malone, Counsel explained that ad hoc committees are formed when expertise from community members is needed to inform a project, goal, or initiative. Such a committee can be established for a specific purpose and goal. Then committee members have a reason to meet and know what to do. It is difficult for staff to have to make time to attend a meeting when the group does not have a purpose. An ad hoc committee can be disbanded when its original purpose is no longer relevant.

Wyse noted that it is hard to feel excited about volunteering for a committee without a clear charge; the County should have managed that situation better. However, Wyse did

not remember the Board of Commissioners ever being asked to assist with the ENRAC work plan. This probably indicates a larger structural issue. When Wyse became a commissioner, not all of Benton's boards, committees, and commissions were providing annual updates. Wyse suggested reviewing the work plan to help direct the work. Wyse did not want to disband ENRAC yet without a clear path forward.

Shepherd did not favor having a board that meets solely to meet. There is a financial cost for government staff to prepare an agenda and record minutes. Shepherd asked what would happen to ENRAC's temporary authority to review Coffin Butte Landfill if ENRAC were disbanded.

Counsel replied that if ENRAC were disbanded, that authority would end. The Board could then decide which committee could be delegated that authority if the situation arose in the future.

Shepherd shared that he did not want to lose sight of ENRAC's work, but the work needs purpose and direction. The Board needs to develop a work plan, whether for ENRAC, or a new committee. Not having the purpose and work plan as deliverables is a problem with all of Benton's committees. Shepherd wants to update the Community Action Plan because its scope is too limited to internal operations. Shepherd was not sure about disbanding ENRAC today but suggested temporarily pausing operations until the County determines a work plan and decides whether a standing or ad hoc committee would be preferable.

Wyse agreed ENRAC's charge was very broad. Wyse requested input from other departments about the purposes of committees, whether a committee is truly important, or ways to improve. Wyse asked about the desired timeline regarding ENRAC.

Crager summarized that the intent was to temporarily disband ENRAC so the committee would not do unnecessary or meaningless work, but also to explore options. McGuire and other departments can return with options for the Board within the next 30 days.

Wyse stated the timeline could be flexible as long as staff updated the Board. Wyse asked the other Commissioners whether to start addressing the larger issue of how County committees report to the Board and how work plans are addressed.

Malone felt that was a separate question. ENRAC has served its purpose and needs a fresh start. The County might need help integrating 2040 goals with the budget and daily operations, which includes keeping climate goals front and center. Thirty days seemed optimistic.

Crager offered to return in 30 days with next steps, but not an exact recommendation.

Shepherd agreed with Wyse about discussing boards, committees, and commissions in general at a future meeting.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to suspend the work of the Benton County Environment and Natural Resources Advisory Committee until the Board of Commissioners takes further action. Wyse seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0.**

Malone asked for a summary of progress on standardizing committee operations.

Counsel explained that staff standardized committee bylaws before and after the pandemic. The goal was to return the committee reporting structure to the departments that manage each committee. Benton County Code was changed to describe how members could be removed. Term limits were also included in many bylaws due to debate on whether to keep long-term members with expertise at the expense of new members with new ideas and expertise. Some bylaws were changed to include term expirations instead of hard deadlines: for instance, the phrase 'December 31, 2025, or until replaced' was used for committees that have difficulty recruiting replacements. This ensures the committee will maintain a quorum, because it can take months to recruit a new member.

McGuire will return with a plan highlighting some of these systemic challenges.

9.2 Good Samaritan Hospital Annexation - Laurel Byer, County Engineer, Public Works

Byer explained that the City of Corvallis and the potential developer of some Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center (GSRMC) properties have requested a County easement and land use permits which would allow Corvallis to annex those properties. Annexation requires a demonstration that it is feasible to provide services and utilities to the site. Corvallis has a sewer extension that would connect to an existing sanitary sewer next to Jackson-Frazier Wetland. This would include a pipeline through 20 feet of the wetland property and two pieces of City-owned property that are located in unincorporated Benton County. GSRMC has requested that the County work with the developer and/or Corvallis, because in addition to the easement, each property must undergo a County land use process. The Benton County Community Development Department, Natural Areas, Parks, and Events (NAPE), and Corvallis have met several times to determine feasibility. NAPE believes that as long as the easement does not violate the Jackson-Frazier Wetland Management Plan, it can probably be allowed. The City-owned strip of land on the east side of Highway 99-West is zoned exclusive farm use (EFU), but as long as that land is part of the City's master plan, the County can approve. This would be an underground utility, which has less impact on the land, so farm use could still occur.

The property on the west side of Highway 99-West is zoned Urban Residential 5 and is owned by Corvallis, which plans to use it as open space. Again, the developer would not need land use approval if the property is part of a master plan. Corvallis would like the County to document the Board's willingness to grant the 20-foot sewer easement across County property, and also to ensure it is feasible to move land use approval of a sewer extension to the GSRMC annexation. This would also allow annexation of other properties to the north and west, opening a large tract of residential land.

MOTION: Wyse moved to direct staff to work with the City of Corvallis and/or a developer to accommodate the proposed sewer extension to the Good Samaritan Hospital annexation, and to prepare the feasibility analysis for construction of the utilities through County zoned properties. Shepherd seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

9.3 Resolution No. R2026-001, Authorizing the Transfer of the Title for Benton County Real Property at 435 E. Alder Street, Alsea, Oregon -
Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator

Crager explained that if the County deeds a property back to a community, the property is legally required to be used by a qualified non-profit for specific circumstances, such as housing, childcare, or social services. The County has been moving towards this transition with the property at 435 East Alder Street, Alsea, Oregon. To allow more time for the plan to develop, the County offered Alsea Community Action Collaborative (ACAC) a no-cost lease on the property for one year. On January 10, 2026, the ACAC board voted against that proposal, preferring that the property be deeded to ACAC. ACAC also wanted further community engagement. Since then, ACAC sent the County a letter stating that the community clearly supported ACAC's position.

If the County deeded the property, the County would be obligated to have a security interest. This could be waived as long as it was in the best interests of the public. The Board of Commissioners showed interest in this approach at the January 10, 2026 discussion. ACAC plans to work with another non-profit organization on its service plan. Crager requested Board approval to deed this property to ACAC at no cost and requested consideration of the rules that would allow the County to waive its security interest on the basis that this property was given to the County by a non-profit organization in 2019. The County has no need for this facility and is unable to generate sufficient revenue to maintain and operate a medical clinic in this location. Also, the County wants this property to be used in perpetuity to serve the community of Alsea, not to return to the County, which would cause future liability, possibly requiring the County to use taxpayer funds to restore the property. The deed would require that the property be maintained for social service activity, without the security interest clause. Staff suggest replacing the security interest with a first right of refusal: if the current non-profit sold the property, the County would have an option to explore acquiring the building.

Crager noted that the Resolution states that the County would transfer not only the deed, but any additional property identified in Exhibit A. Staff are finalizing the inventory in consultation with ACAC, so Exhibit A is currently blank. If the Board proceeds with the title transfer, the process should be complete in early March 2026.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to adopt Resolution #R2026-001, authorizing the transfer of the title for Benton County real property at 435 East Alder Street, Alsea, Oregon, to the Alsea Community Action Collaborative, and to direct County staff to prepare a quit-claim deed to transfer the property. Wyse seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

Munsey, Vice Chair of ACAC, thanked the County. Many people in Alsea have strongly desired to reacquire the building and work to bring healthcare back to the community.

Cash, ACAC Board Secretary, thanked Crager, Counsel, and Shepherd for their outreach efforts and thanked the Board for approving this action. This building will strengthen social support services and serve the local school and other community organizations as the Alsea Community Services and Health Center.

10. Other

10.1 *Benton Area Transit (BAT) Self-Perform Analysis - Rick Crager, Assistant County Administrator

Crager explained that the February 16, 2026 memorandum [exhibit 1] is a point of clarification, especially for the Dial-a-Bus (DAB) board, which met with the County recently regarding concerns about the County's December 2, 2025 presentation of the transportation feasibility study by Kittelson and Associates. The December presentation requested Board approval to move to the next phase, but did not officially confirm that the County would self-perform future transportation. The approval simply allowed staff to complete a plan and consider implementation, to be proposed in the upcoming budget.

DAB raised these main concerns:

1. It was not made clear that DAB is not an entirely volunteer organization.
2. There was a lack of representation of the current cost for DAB to provide direct BAT services.
3. There was no consideration of customer opinions on the current quality and level of services provided by DAB.
4. The presentation gave the impression that DAB was being blamed for lack of compliance.

Staff discussed the situation with the DAB board and executive director and shared that conversation with the Board. The County acknowledges that DAB has paid employees,

particularly for BAT services. DAB's current contracted cost to the County is \$987,675 per year for direct service delivery. There are additional County costs. Crager noted that DAB's service cost is below market value due to some volunteer components.

Regarding concerns about consulting customer opinion, staff began with the Kittelson feasibility study to see if it was worth taking the next step, which will be Stockhoff's work on an implementation plan. The implementation plan will include public engagement. Also, a self-perform option (moving from contracted to direct services) would first have to be approved in the budget.

Regarding blame for non-compliance, staff clarified that BAT is a Benton County program; when there are compliance issues, the County must address those issues. Staff made it clear to the DAB board that the County had no intent to assign blame for past performance issues; the County's focus is to move towards the best service and compliance.

Responding to a question from Shepherd, Crager explained that the implementation plan would return to the Board for discussion and would not be implemented without additional Board action.

Stockhoff added that staff were preparing for the budget process in 2027, and any new service would begin around January 1, 2028. It will take time to design the program, during which the County will perform considerable due diligence to weigh the decision.

Shepherd asked when rider feedback would be part of that process.

Stockhoff was not sure, but will work with Thwaits on a plan. There will be robust outreach.

Crager shared that outreach might occur in summer 2026, but dates had not been finalized.

Malone noted that Federal funds come with many requirements the County must comply with. Some individuals wanted to use DAB for destinations outside of the Benton service area; that has improved through dialogue with the DAB board and executive director. This transportation is an important community service, and the County wants to ensure good value and compliance.

{Exhibit 1: Memorandum Regarding Dial-A-Bus Concerns}

10.2 Delegate Contract Authority to County Counsel - Vance Croney, County Counsel

County Counsel Croney explained he will soon select a successor. As the County

negotiates agreements with the next County Counsel, and employment-related agreements with the County Administrator, Counsel Croney asked that authority be delegated to him, which avoids the Board having to observe negotiations of minor details. If an unusual request arose, Counsel Croney would ask the Board for a variation from the ordinary contract terms. Responding to questions from Wyse, Counsel affirmed that he would receive general guidance from the Board and the Board would receive the final contract.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to delegate to County Counsel contracting authority for employment issues relating to Benton County Board of Commissioners direct reports. Wyse seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

11. Adjournment

Chair Malone adjourned the meeting at 11:20 AM.



Pat Malone, Chair



Erika Milo, Recorder

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