



Board of Commissioners

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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 2026, 9:00 AM**

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

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

Staff: Rachel Bulder, Maura Kwiatkowski, Board staff; Cory Grogan, Anne Thwaits, Public Information team; Sara Hartstein, Health Services; Sean McGuire, Sustainability; Erika Milo, Board Recorder; Jesse Ott, Natural Areas, Parks, and Events

Guests: Adrienne Fritze, Courthouse Preservation Committee

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Malone called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM.

2. Review and Approve Agenda

No changes were made to the agenda.

3. Announcements

No announcements were made.

4. Proclamations

4.1 In the Matter of Proclaiming April 6 through April 12, 2026 as Public Health Week, Proclamation No. P2026-004 - Sara Hartstein, Public Health Division Director, Health Services

Hartstein read the Proclamation aloud. The 2026 theme is "Ready, Set, Action!", which emphasizes turning public health aspirations into tangible outcomes.

Malone noted that everyone is included in the Benton County vision statement “A healthier community for all” and thanked all Health Services staff.

MOTION: Wyse moved to accept Proclamation #P2026-004, in the matter of proclaiming April 6, 2026 through April 12, 2026 as Public Health Week. Shepherd seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

5. *Comments from the Public

Leslie Glassmire, Corvallis resident, expressed concerns about the County’s proposed change to Dial-a-Bus (DAB), which provides support for some of the County’s most vulnerable community members. Public Works proposed spending an additional \$850,000 on new in-house staffing without increasing services. DAB is an invaluable service to many people and could use those funds to increase services with little disruption or further training. DAB’s volunteer drivers and staff are always friendly and genuinely concerned for clients’ health and safety. DAB drivers’ training is the result of experience. Glassmire noted that County staff had not answered her questions about the reason for proposing in-house service, despite assuring Glassmire and other community members that staff would reply. Glassmire asked the Board to help DAB rather than hinder it.

Sarah Power, Philomath resident, stated that DAB is essential for the health of residents in all of Benton County, including herself. DAB transports clients to health appointments on time. Powers expressed concern that timeliness would change if the service provider changed. Missing a medical appointment forces clients to pay a missed appointment fee and reschedule with the doctor, which can take months. An efficient plan will not improve service without including DAB. DAB drivers are extremely well-trained, caring, and able to work with difficult clients with mental health issues. DAB provides good transit service and does not need to be fixed.

Beverly Salvatore, Philomath resident, concurred with the previous commenters about DAB and its benefits for people in Benton County. DAB is lit by its own warm light, because the people who began the organization made it that way. DAB is a wonderful service. Such a quality is not introduced into an organization, but built from the bottom up.

Bettina Schempf, Corvallis resident, Executive Director of Old Mill Center for Children and Families, spoke in support of DAB. The Old Mill Center has contracted with DAB since 2019, and DAB is a joy to work with. The partnership between DAB and Benton County supports the health of the community and the vulnerable people who need transport services. DAB also has service contracts with the 409J Corvallis School District and the homeless coalition, which is possible because DAB has the infrastructure. If the County cuts DAB out, that will weaken the whole organization. Do

not fix something that is not broken. Use the identified funds for in-house service to increase DAB services. More service and drivers are needed. DAB staff are well-trained and provide high quality service. DAB clients are happy.

Donald Forbes, Corvallis resident, commented that DAB drivers are used to handling people with issues. The Kittelson report stated that volunteers exacerbate an efficiency problem, but those volunteers are the same ones helping clients. A person who is paid \$15 per hour will not have the same empathy. The Kittelson Frequently Asked Questions say that demand-response service would deliver 1.29 rides per hour, compared to a peer agency average of 2.66. However, Benton Area Transit (BAT) covers almost all of Benton County, including the Corvallis Transit System and Corvallis-to-the-Coast, so the only peer agencies close enough to make that comparison are the Cities of Portland, Salem, and Eugene. Those cities provide more rides per hour due to higher populations. Forbes felt the efficiency comparison was a stupid statement. Also, the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) will soon end its fiscal year. If a STIF recipient does not spend enough of their budget, they will not receive enough funds next year. According to the report, staff are trying to increase the STIF budget, which is not really worth it, because that would cause more inefficiency than actual quality service. "If you ain't broke, don't fix it."

Ron Mason, Corvallis resident, recalled being told by various people, including Malone, that the County had not decided whether to self-perform transit, but the County's information reads as if the County will do so. All the Kittelson report data seems to have come from the County. The report does not identify what the County wants to fix, or a desire to increase services to County residents. There was no interaction with BAT clients to see how well the system was working or what could be improved, nor any concern for County residents who use BAT services. BAT is a wonderful service which Mason has used for about three and a half years. Mason did not understand the lack of consideration for increasing services or surveying users, which angered Mason as a user of the service. If the County does what is proposed, it will disrupt service for many years. Kittelson wrote that it was not sustainable to use volunteer drivers. The County should drop the entire effort. This is a ridiculous use of county resources and will cost more than current services: \$850,000 that could instead be used to increase service. Mason did not see how Benton County could deliver BAT services as well as DAB in five years.

Lindy Burgess, Corvallis resident, retired teacher, shared that her husband had been a wheelchair van driver for DAB. Burgess developed back problems; following a long back surgery, she needed transportation to daily health appointments or wherever her needs were. Burgess found out how wonderful DAB was in taking her where she needed to go in Benton County, including daily visits to her husband in memory care. Burgess would like to see DAB remain as it has been, with the wonderful volunteers. Burgess was very grateful for the service and saw no reason for DAB to have to change and remove its volunteers, who are highly trained, patient, and knowledgeable. Burgess

thanked the volunteers for their service to her and her husband, and hoped that the volunteers would not ever be removed. DAB's paid staff are wonderful, too. Burgess would like to see DAB as is, as it has been for the last 50 years. DAB is excellent in every way.

Sally Utt, Corvallis resident, has been a client of DAB for many years and was extremely grateful for DAB's service. Utt agreed with previous commenters about how the service has been running. For a person with a disability, it is often just hard to leave the house. Sometimes the easiest course is to not step out into the world. It can be frightening not knowing what you will have to deal with, such as finding a doctor's office in a new building. Riders all have different disabilities and different needs. DAB volunteers have been wonderful at addressing clients' needs individually. Utt was concerned that if this service was lost, there would just be a curb pickup and a curb drop-off. It is daunting to be left at the side of the road with no way to understand where to go. DAB provides clients with information about how to get to their destination. Utt appreciates the timeliness of this service. When the County moved to a different scheduling system called VIA, it took much longer to schedule rides and return from rides. The whole circuit took longer than necessary. DAB works very well, and Burgess does not understand why the County is even considering taking DAB away.

Mark Yeager, Corvallis resident, described the DAB situation as another story of disrespect and disenfranchisement of residents and the services here. When reading the report, it is clear that when the authors developed and refined goals for the BAT system, they held peer agency interviews and work sessions with County staff and Commissioners, but did not interview anybody who uses the service. Staff want to create efficient operations, which, according to the reports, means limiting the days of service, linking multiple passenger trips instead of providing single service, and eliminating door-to-door service, all for twice the cost of the current service. Yeager asked how this supports the "vibrant, livable communities and equity for everyone" goal that is supposedly driving this process. The current model delivers services for 60% of peer agency costs, which the report presents as a bad thing. Yeager did not understand the logic that the County wants to pay almost twice as much for less service. Yeager noted he has been working with County staff and the Board of Commissioners for over five years on many important issues, and this approach is following a familiar Benton County model: you make your decision, and then you pretend to take public input. On March 2, 2026, County staff assured customers that no decision had been made, yet the Kittelson February 2026 report stated, "Commissioners decided that BAT will transition operations internally." The Kittelson March 2026 report said, "The decision to self-perform embodies the goals and vision for future services, and financial implications cannot be ignored for impacts to service reduction." Yeager did not understand how this situation developed. This is supposed to be a transparent community, yet the County does not talk to the people. There is a long history of screaming into the void. Yeager listed the food truck rule, the Solid Waste Advisory Committee and Disposal Site Advisory Committee issues, external fleet operations, and the landfill expansion

approval. It is no wonder that residents distrust County government. It is time for a change.

Christina Steiger, Corvallis resident, mentioned that she spoke at the March 17, 2026 Board meeting about her dependence on BAT for medical care and daily life. Others have spoken powerfully about what this service means to them. Steiger focused on what she learned during and after the Board meeting and why she remained concerned. Steiger has used BAT three to five times per week since 2021, following two neurosurgeries. Steiger is ambulatory today because this service has allowed her to continue treatment. Steiger's mother is hospitalized with advanced cancer. DAB makes it possible for Steiger to continue medical treatment, grocery shop for her family, and advocate for her mother at the hospital. Reliable transportation to treatment, food, and caregiving is a public health issue. Since the March 17, 2026 meeting, the County has released additional BAT materials, but Steiger remained concerned that the materials read less like a neutral exploration of options and more like the County is already leaning towards the self-perform option, even though County staff have said the decision is still in planning. The analysis does not appear to have systematically reviewed the actual riders who use this service every day. The documents repeat broad claims about DAB compliance, insufficient data, and inefficiency, but do not clearly itemize the current unresolved issues that supposedly require replacing the operating model, rather than helping to resolve problems within the existing system. After a STIF meeting, Steiger talked to Mary Powelson, a DAB Board Member and client. Powelson asked why the County needed to consider a much larger and more disruptive in-house model instead of helping to fix DAB directly. Steiger had heard references to peer agencies being more efficient, but Steiger's friends with disabilities in other large cities throughout the country refuse to take the paratransit system in their community because it follows a shuttle service model, exactly what the Kittelson report seems to propose. Steiger asked the Board to proceed carefully, make the evidence being considered fully public, including itemized compliance issues, and focus first on preserving and strengthening the service that people already depend on.

LauraLei Steagall, resident, uses DAB a great deal. Steagall has blood cancer, so she needs to have laboratory tests done three times per month. Because Steagall produces too much blood, she must have blood drawn if her blood count is too high. Steagall goes to a pharmacy at least three times a month. Due to a broken rib, Steagall cannot use the stairs, so she currently uses the lift. The drivers are courteous and help Steagall in many ways. They help Steagall up and down the stairs and the curb outside of her residence. The drivers are always friendly, which would be lost with a bus system. Steagall feels comfortable with DAB and feels as though DAB staff are family. DAB is always on time. Steagall could not understand why the County is changing a system that is working for everybody.

[Recorder's note: Chair Malone gave Donald Forbes additional speaking time due to technical difficulties during Forbes' first comment period. Forbes read aloud from his written comment, Exhibit 1.]

{Exhibit 1: Donald Forbes Written Comment}

{Exhibit 2: Leslie Glassmire Written Comment}

6. Consent Calendar

- 6.1 In the Matter of Proclaiming April 2026 as National Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month, Proclamation No. P2026-005**
- 6.2 In the Matter of Proclaiming April 12 through April 18, 2026 as Public Safety Telecommunicators Week, Proclamation No. P2026-006**
- 6.3 In the Matter of Proclaiming April 2026 as Alcohol Awareness Month, Proclamation No. P2026-010**
- 6.4 Approval of the October 22, 2025 Board of Commissioners Land Use Hearing Meeting Minutes, LU-24-027**
- 6.5 Approval of the October 23, 2025 Board of Commissioners Land Use Hearing Meeting Minutes, LU-24-027**
- 6.6 Approval of the November 4, 2025 Board of Commissioners Land Use Hearing Meeting Minutes, LU-24-027**
- 6.7 Approval of the January 20, 2026 Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes**
- 6.8 Approval of the March 3, 2026 Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes**

MOTION: Shepherd moved to adopt the Consent Calendar with items 6.4, 6.5, and 6.6 removed. Wyse seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

Shepherd requested that the names of individuals who provided public testimony be added to Items 6.4 and 6.5. On Item 6.6, page 5, Shepherd noted that Malone's vote should be added to the voting tally.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to approve the minutes of October 22, 2025 and October 23, 2025, with the attachment of the names of those who testified, and the

minutes of November 4, 2025, with the vote of Commissioner Malone added. Wyse seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

7. New Business

7.1 History and purpose of the Courthouse Preservation Committee - Jesse Ott, Director, Natural Areas, Parks, and Events; Adrienne Fritze, Courthouse Preservation Committee Chair

Ott explained that an ad hoc committee of community members called the Historic Courthouse Reuse Committee (HCRC) was formed to evaluate future uses of the historic courthouse. That work was completed in 2024. The Courthouse Preservation Committee (CPC) works with Public Works/ Facilities staff and includes local experts on the historic courthouse, who typically advise on matters very specific to that building. The CPC's current mission is to preserve the historic integrity of Benton County's historic buildings, using the Secretary of the Interior's standards for preservation and rehabilitation. Another part of CPC's mission is to administer the Louisa B. DuBosch Trust Fund for the Benton County Courthouse. After contacting the CPC about historic courthouse reuse discussions, staff noted a misalignment in the CPC's mission statement and bylaws in relation to ongoing reuse efforts. Staff asked the Board whether to change the CPC's role to focusing on reuse of the historic courthouse. The CPC's role is to advise the County on historic preservation of the courthouse, and with the courts moving to the new courthouse, the CPC's role would broaden to include the reuse phase.

Crager noted the CPC would meet later that week.

Shepherd felt the County has a great group of people to discuss historic courthouse reuse. To accelerate that conversation, the Board needs to decide whether to have a citizen advisory group, and if so, who would serve. A courthouse group seems appropriate as the point team on reuse.

Wyse asked why the reuse forum should be the CPC rather than the Historic Resources Commission (HRC).

Fritze mentioned that she chairs both organizations. The HRC is designed to ensure that historic resources follow the letter of Federal preservation law. However, the HRC would not guide reuse of a specific resource. The CPC is dedicated to the historic courthouse and other major area resources, has a deep sense of the courthouse's history and future, and has done considerable research on its reuse. Fritze felt the CPC was the right group to continue the process and guide staff to choose the next vendor. The committee is already deeply embedded in the project and wants to move forward as quickly as possible.

Wyse commented that the mission statements and bylaws should state that the CPC's primary purpose is preservation, but the scope could be expanded to include reuse. If the HRC wants to participate, then Fritze, as chair, will have that opportunity. Wyse recommended a joint meeting with the Corvallis HRC, since the County might eventually submit an application to that body.

Malone asked how repurposing the reuse study fit into this discussion.

Wyse replied the study was done by the HCRC. Survey respondents recommended two main categories: government and civic uses, or arts and culture uses.

Shepherd noted that in the draft CPC bylaws under 'Term of Office', Article Two [packet page 64], sections one and two have the same title. Everything else makes sense and feels fairly standard. Shepherd agreed with Wyse about the mission focusing on preservation, and favored the mission statement in the packet, particularly the phrase "by providing advisory recommendations to the Board on matters concerning the courthouse," which could include reuse. Regarding a feasibility study, Shepherd suggested including an examination of commercial and mixed-use zoning, which the previous study did not consider in detail. Shepherd asked about the plan and timeline for a feasibility study.

Ott replied that staff are exploring possible elements of a feasibility study and options for preferred plan holders. The study would be very broad, including requirements for monthly seismic retrofits. The County needs to find a use for the building that is meaningful to the community and to the structure, but also fundable and operable. Tools such as tax credits and incentives will be needed to fund the next phases.

Crager recommended that the County explore possible financing tools.

Malone concurred. Malone favored redirecting the CPC and receiving regular reports.

Counsel recommended that Ott include a purpose in the mission statement area, possibly as Article Two, in the next version of the bylaws.

Wyse did not want the County to spend more time and money to come full circle. Brainstorming is fine, but the most valuable factor would be a financial offer. Wyse asked whether community outreach could be included in the study, and whether any businesses were interested.

Ott replied that staff envisioned an anchor tenant with a strong presence, but were not sure how to contact prospective tenants.

Wyse favored the Board having input before a final decision on this matter. The bylaws and mission statement should make clear which body is the decision-maker.

Shepherd shared that CPC and HRC members were excited about hosting public forums and other forms of community engagement.

Responding to a question from Shepherd, Crager explained this process would involve a Request for Qualifications from firms who could perform the work and determine costs. Then the County would issue a Request for Proposals.

Fritze noted that both the HRC and the CPC were interested in being guided. Thwaites has become a close collaborator in this area, and is guiding CPC to proceed gradually, starting with Historic Preservation month in May 2026.

Crager commented that Ott will need staffing and support from the Board of Commissioners Office.

Fritze commented that the fate of the historic courthouse is the fate of small business in Corvallis; it also connects to many other aspects of the County, including Oregon State University and county residents. The job of the historic courthouse has always involved justice and community; now the building has a new opportunity to bring all the organizations and people together to elevate downtown Corvallis. This is an opportunity to coordinate and collaborate with many entities.

7.2 In the Matter of Authorizing the Sale of Two Benton County Real Properties, Order Nos. D2026-057 and D2026-058 - Rick Crager, Interim County Administrator; Sean McGuire, Sustainability Coordinator, Board of Commissioners Office

Crager described a plan to sell three unneeded County properties: the Alsea Health Center, the Annex Building (133 Northwest Fourth Street, Corvallis), and the former Board of Commissioners Office (205 Northwest Fifth Street, Corvallis). The Alsea Health Center was transferred to Alsea Community Action Collaborative. Today's Order begins the sale of the other two properties, which still need to be appraised. The Order will probably be amended regarding a minimum asking price. In approximately fall 2026, Crager will return to the Board to set a minimum bid. The former Board of Commissioners Office will be the first asset listed for sale. The County is still clearing records from the Annex. This includes State records for which the County must find alternative storage, possibly at the historic courthouse.

Malone noted these sales are part of the process of right-sizing the remaining County buildings and determining how to even out staff crowding at some facilities. This will help the County function at peak efficiency.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to adopt Order #D2026-057, authorizing sale of Benton County real property located at 133 Northwest Fourth Street in Corvallis, Oregon. Wyse seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to adopt Order #D2026-058, authorizing sale of Benton County real property at 205 Northwest Fifth Street in Corvallis, Oregon. Wyse seconded the motion, which **carried 3-0**.

8. Other

Regarding the visual timer for public comment, Wyse suggested adding a sound cue so that community members who are visually impaired can tell when their speaking time has ended.

Malone asked that community members signing up for public comment print their information on the sign-up sheet to ensure legibility for the record.

9. Adjournment

Chair Malone adjourned the meeting at 10:40 AM.



Pat Malone, Chair



Erika Milo, Recorder

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