



Board of Commissioners

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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
THURSDAY, JUNE 18, 2026, 1:00 PM**

Present: Pat Malone, Chair; Gabe Shepherd, Vice Chair; Nancy Wyse, Commissioner; Vance Croney, County Counsel; Rick Crager, 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; April Holland, Health Services; Erika Milo, Board Recorder; Christopher Dale, Jeremy Jewell, Don Rogers, Sheriff's Office

Guests: John Gotchall, ARC of Benton County; Roger Lichtman, Alan Richardson, Justice Planners; Carolyn Mayers, Corvallis City Council

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Malone called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM 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 *The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Presentation of Recommendations to the Benton County Board of Commissioners –**
Alan Richardson, President, Justice Planners; Roger Lichtman, Senior Vice President, AECOM

Richardson presented the Jail and Justice System Assessment (JJSA), a form of technical assistance provided by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), a Federal agency, and requested by Benton County. Richardson described NIC services and resources.

Lichtman, a specialist in justice architecture, described projects that he and Richardson are working on worldwide, including systems design and analysis.

Richardson posed the question, "What is the purpose of the Benton County Jail?"

Malone responded that the purpose of the Benton County Jail (BCJ) is providing accountability for people who have been charged with crimes in this community.

Wyse referred to the purpose and responsibility outlined in Oregon Revised Statutes.

Shepherd commented that the purpose should be to hold people through the trial experience, but currently, the BCJ is for people who have committed the worst crimes in the community, not just any crimes in the community. There is a difference between the jail's purpose and its actual current use.

Van Arsdall concurred that the purpose of the jail differs from its current use for warehousing adults-in-custody (AICs) who need to go before a judge. Everyone else is just cycled through.

Richardson emphasized the distinction between a prison and a jail.

Lichtman noted that everyone in jail is presumed innocent, because all are pre-adjudicated.

Wyse asked whether that was true of individuals at the BCJ.

Richardson replied that was true of most individuals held at the jail. Richardson explained that the JJSA examines the jail, its operations and conditions, and the system components as a whole. To make the assessment, Richardson and Lichtman toured the jail and the new courthouse, then interviewed about 50 local stakeholders to understand current conditions and future options. The goal is to provide a good understanding of the local criminal justice system and the various roles involved. This situation is not a jail problem; it is a local system problem that everyone is trying to solve.

Lichtman shared that everyone interviewed by the team praised the Benton County Sheriff's Office staff for how well they are cleaning and maintaining the jail, which is clearly beyond its useful life. Lichtman reviewed problems with the facility, including:

- Areas are generally small and extremely crowded:

- The turn in the sallyport (vehicular entrance) is a tight fit for modern law enforcement vehicles, and the area is also used for storage.
- Kitchen and laundry functions are combined in one room.
- Corrections Captain John DeVaney's office also holds a large refrigerator for medication storage.
- Records are still on paper; records storage areas are full.
- Old records, personal property, and other items are all stored together.
- The examination room is very small and houses all current medical records.
- Safety and security concerns:
 - In the past, technology infrastructure was added to the concrete building, resulting in cables covered by conduit in multiple halls and rooms.
 - Holding cells should be ligature-resistant, but the presence of conduit, beds, and wire mesh make that very difficult.
 - The two visiting booths are accessed directly from the front lobby.
 - There is little space for community resource providers to meet with clients, and sound isolation is poor.
 - The main corridor to the historic courthouse is situated so that anyone using it must pass the jail's property/old records storage area.
 - The nicest space is the program activity area, but it is not directly adjacent to the housing units, requiring a staff escort, and there is no sound or sight separation between individuals who need to be separated.
 - Exercise reduces AIC disruptions, but the BCJ's outdoor recreation area is very limited.
 - Bars in the housing units and throughout the facility pose ligature risks. Bars are no longer used in modern jail design.
 - The storage room has asbestos floor tiles, which are currently inert but would require encapsulation if the room were remodeled.
 - Housing units exhibit some wear and tear.

Richardson added that despite these issues, staff have done an excellent job of keeping the facility very clean and operational.

Richardson described the stakeholders consulted by the team. Every respondent to the preliminary survey agreed the County needs a new jail, and stated it is not a matter of if, but when new facilities or another arrangement will be needed. Comments addressed issues in the system, but everyone surveyed complimented the Sheriff and jail staff.

A jail ages three and a half times as fast as a typical county building because it operates continuously. Richardson identified major maintenance and safety issues at the Benton County Jail:

- The facility was built as a temporary stopgap pending a regional jail that was never built.

- Over 50 work orders for the jail have been submitted in 2026 to date, more than any other Benton County building, yet the jail is about one-tenth the size of any other Benton County building.
- The BCJ's emergency generator produces enough energy to operate the central control room, but not enough for all life safety systems.
- The roof needs to be replaced in about five years, which will cost over \$100,000.
- The BCJ has exposed systems, obsolete hardware, and areas of non-compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- The BCJ has frequent plumbing leaks; Facilities staff often must jackhammer concrete to find and fix a leak.
- Smoke detectors are installed near the floor, a life safety concern.
- The facility is far beyond capacity. In 2026 to date, 28 AICs were held in the Benton County jail, 10 in Polk County, eight at a contract facility, eight at the State hospital, and 12 monitored by Global Positioning System units. Benton cannot hold even half of its AIC population at this jail.

Lichtman shared that Benton County has the lowest jail capacity in Oregon at 0.29 beds per 1,000 residents (40 beds total). The national low-end average is .5 to 1.5 beds per 1,000 residents. Linn County, which has 30% more residents than Benton, has 230 beds, and is expanding to about six times as many beds as Benton.

Richardson noted that the County has a 'revolving door' system:

- County arrest statistics are comparable to local municipal police departments, but about 80% of arrests in Benton County are cited and released due to lack of jail space. The individual often has a failure to appear (FTA) in court, is re-arrested for the FTA, is released again, and re-offends. There are many repeat offenders, including an individual who has over 100 open cases (not including FTAs), yet is not in custody. Some other individuals have 40-60 open charges. Large numbers of FTAs make the case take longer to process through the judicial system.
- The Benton County crime rate is 293 crimes per 100,000 residents, near the national average. However, Benton's property crimes are two and a half times the national average.
- Benton ranks 35th out of 36 Oregon counties for safety, scoring two out of a possible maximum score of 100 points. Compared to the national average, Benton County residents' health and income levels are very high, but safety is very low.

Richardson commented that there are no 'teeth' in Benton's justice system in terms of detention. Some individuals tear up citations in front of the officer, which directly impacts safety scores. Staff estimate that about nine out of ten individuals in holding present some type of mental illness, and about 30-40% present severe mental illness; this is typical nationwide. Such individuals stay longer due to their condition and the lack of other resources or locations. Local healthcare providers said repeatedly that the jail has

limited to no meeting, assessment, or treatment space. Several providers refuse to work there because of limited space, but if the individual has not connected to resources by the time they leave custody, the destructive behavior will repeat.

Richardson addressed case processing times. The Oregon Judicial Department standard for misdemeanors is that 75% of cases should close within 60 days; Benton's rate is 32%. For felonies, the target is 90% of cases cleared within 60 days; Benton's rate is 28%. Judges are aware that the many FTAs cause delays. There is a possibility of adding a fourth judge, which should help dispose of cases faster.

The new courthouse was designed with an adjacent new jail in mind. Since the jail bond measure failed, the new courthouse has no central holding area for defendants. Deputies will have to shuttle AICs between the new courthouse and the current BCJ. However, a transport van will not fit in the jail sallyport, so the defendant must be restrained and moved outside the secure perimeter to be loaded into a vehicle. This presents a security risk.

Additional hidden costs of the current system:

- Officers are pulled off patrol duty to provide out-of-county transport.
 - Transport of AICs increases per diem costs, staff time, fuel use, vehicle wear, and overtime.
 - A high rate of cite-and-release can negatively affect staff morale and retention, as well as the comfort and safety of residents, business owners, and shoppers.
 - Crime may go unreported because residents know nothing will be done.
- Therefore, the actual crime rate might be even higher than these statistics show.

Wyse commented that another cost is to the individual in custody: a missed opportunity to receive interventional services. Providing those services is a priority for Wyse.

Richardson noted that one of Benton's advantages is having exceptional staff with great attitudes. There is strong staff retention and no vacancies, which is unusual at both the state and national level. The staff are the main reason the facility still functions.

Malone had not known about the lack of central holding at the new courthouse and how that would impact the courthouse's function.

Richardson replied that without an attached jail, Benton will have to adjust operations and logistics at the new courthouse. Another cost is that when Benton houses AICs with other jurisdictions due to lack of program space, the County usually has no control over the programs or treatment those AICs do or do not receive.

Wyse noted that most of the themes in the presentation were familiar, but some were framed in new ways, such as the safety ratings. Wyse has long supported building a

new jail, but the County simply cannot afford it. Currently, Wyse did not intend to launch another bond measure, but acknowledged that Benton County has a massive problem.

Gotchall, Benton County resident, physician, and president of the Board of Directors for the ARC of Benton County, commented that a jail is similar to a hospital in that the way the facility works should promote health and safety. The BCJ is arguably the largest inpatient mental health unit in the county. The effect of the jail on public safety has been discussed, but what about the safety of AICs, many of whom are disabled? The County gets a poor grade there. Jail staff get a good grade, but worker safety gets a poor grade. A system that incarcerates people, whether a hospital or a jail, has a duty of care to not make a bad situation worse, and the facility has a huge impact on that. All of this incurs a tremendous amount of liability, and Benton County has paid that cost.

Richardson described the development process for a new jail facility, involving nine phases from project recognition to post-occupancy.

1. Benton County is currently in the project recognition phase: defining the problem, identifying issues, and gathering stakeholders to make a plan.
2. Needs assessment: identifying options and going deeper into the data.
3. Pre-Architectural Program: the facility development process. The capital expense to build a facility is far less than the cost to operate and staff it. Staffing usually costs about 80% of an annual jail budget.
4. Project definition and implementation plan: turning the planning into a design; work with engineers and architects to estimate square foot cost.

Lichtman described the remaining phases:

5. Design and development of schematics and construction documents, which takes about eight to twelve months.
6. Bidding and negotiation, which takes about two to four months.
7. Construction, followed by a systems test and as-built drawings.
8. Occupancy and operation: plan the move, write policies, install furnishings, move in, and hold public events. Some of this work can be done during construction.
9. Post-Occupancy: monitoring warranties and fine-tuning policies, operations, or physical details. This takes about six to nine months.

Richardson recommended that leadership visit other facilities to collect ideas. The next step would be a more detailed needs assessment. In data collection, the two main drivers of bed space needs are how many people come to the jail and how long those individuals stay. Richardson compared Benton County to several other jurisdictions:

- Corvallis Police Department made 63% of all arrests in Benton County during 2019-2025.
- Between 2019 and 2020, jail transports dropped 55%, and have remained near that level through 2025, implying that the jail average daily population reflects a smaller subset of request activity.

- Arrest types: almost 2,000 FTAs and bench warrants were issued last year; this has been Benton's top charge category for years. If the jail had capacity, this number would probably be lower.

Shepherd asked why the 2025 number of FTAs and bench warrants is more than twice the 2019 number, even though Benton had the same quantity of beds throughout. The number spiked in 2021 and generally stayed high.

Wyse requested earlier data.

Van Arsdall suggested a possible correlation between FTAs and Oregon Measure 110, which had negative effects on behavioral and mental health. [Recorder's note: Measure 110 decriminalized most offenses of unlawful possession of a controlled substance in Oregon.]

Richardson reviewed the following:

- Aging: Benton's AIC population is aging at a higher rate (averaging 40 years old) than the national rate (averaging 20 to 30 years old). This increases demand for medical and mental health programming in the jail, which increases costs in turn.
- Repeat contacts: on average, every person who passes through the Benton County jail comes two and a half times per year.
- Gender: no meaningful gender-differential enforcement trend was observed.
- Forced releases occur when law enforcement has to release an AIC from jail early because a more serious offender needs to be held. From 2021 through 2025, Benton had 401 total forced releases, averaging 70 to 90 per year.
- Jail closures and booking full events: some individuals cannot be booked at all, because the jail or the booking area is full of special cases who cannot be held in the general population. For unknown reasons, numbers of these events are lower in 2025 than in previous years, but some individuals are still turned away from the jail.

Richardson and Lichtman will create a report and analysis of the Benton County Justice System and consider alternatives such as day reporting, house arrests, more GPS monitors, or more specialty courts to address the needs of this population without compromising public safety, which the current system does. All that information can be used to develop future population and bed space projections. Having alternatives to deflect people from jail means the County can build fewer beds. The team will present this report to the Board, who can use it to make a policy decision.

Lichtman described the "three D's" of the justice system: diversion, deflection, and detention. If one component is missing, the system cannot function.

Richardson noted that if the Board decides to proceed with a new jail, the NIC offers

additional training and assistance on planning new institutions. The right size for a new jail will come from an in-depth needs assessment. The key is to plan what kind of operation is desirable, then have an architect design the facility, not vice versa.

Malone commented the presentation was helpful for re-starting this process. In 2018-19, the County began work on justice system reform, but the pandemic interrupted that momentum. Malone has not received many community emails about the jail issue. It is a challenge to engage the community and quantify these measures economically and socially to prove that the current facility is inadequate on many levels. The safety metric (35th out of 36 Oregon counties) from today's presentation could be an effective public message. The County needs to develop multiple funding streams and educate the wider community about the need.

Wyse emphasized the importance of continuing to acknowledge this issue, which is a major problem. Wyse did not favor another needs assessment, because the County lacks jail funding and is unlikely to have funding in the near future. Like Malone, Wyse had not received many community emails about the jail, but as the Board liaison to the Corvallis Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, Wyse was aware of concerns, especially among the downtown business community. At this time, Wyse recommended pursuing the portion of the needs assessment about alternatives to incarceration, which could relieve some pressure on the current jail.

Shepherd concurred that funding was a major issue. Many community members agree that a new facility is needed, but viewed the last jail bond package as too expensive and/or containing too many or unnecessary parts. There is a general understanding that the current facility is inadequate, and a new one is needed. Shepherd did not anticipate being able to collect the funds needed from Benton's tax base any time soon, but wanted the County to be ready in case funding does appear. Shepherd asked how far the County could progress with a few thousand dollars to analyze and prepare, and whether there are any federal grants that help counties build new correctional facilities.

Richardson replied that a few thousand dollars could fund a needs assessment, a study to analyze the County's jail population, examine diversionary options, and project bed space needs. Richardson noted that local law enforcement has said that if Benton had more capacity, more people would go to jail. So initially the number of AICs would rise, then level off. The study could help determine how many square feet are needed, which would provide an approximate facility cost.

Lichtman suggested taking the cost for a 120-bed jail from the last bond measure and adding inflation to project the current costs. Lichtman estimated roughly 350-450 square feet per bed at \$750-1,000 per square foot, plus 20-25% for soft costs. Most justice system grants are for diversion programs, not jail construction. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation funds diversion programs and donations. DreamJustice is a foundation that funds jail alternatives. For direct jail funding, a

popular option is to jump-start projects with a public-private partnership in which private companies design and build a jail for the jurisdiction's needs and under its direction. This involves a combination architect-contractor, a finance partner, and a maintenance partner. The private financing has a 20- or 30-year period; then the jurisdiction offers general obligation bonds (the least expensive form of funding) in the first five to ten years and uses those to buy the project out. Canada funds most capital projects in this way.

Crager noted this is an expensive option, because the investors' incentive is a higher interest rate. A general obligation bond is always more efficient and less costly than private financing.

Malone commented that the County has many planning documents on the shelf; Malone did not favor another assessment for this project. Having to outsource many AICs to other facilities, and the lack of programs and counseling locally or at remote facilities, is hurting the whole community. Malone felt the community would want to do better than 35th out of 36 Counties on the safety metric.

Wyse observed that during the last round of justice system planning and the bond measure, the County neglected having a good website to share this information with the community, which was a hindrance and broke a great deal of community trust. Before jumping into another jail effort, Wyse preferred to first obtain a better understanding of all the County's needs and potential projects in the form of a strategic operating plan, with a focus on good governance and a good foundation. Then the jail and a needs assessment could be included.

Crager commented that community survey responses after the failed bond mentioned County outreach and how the work was too siloed; messages came from multiple places instead of departments and agencies working together on a collective message. There was general agreement that Benton County needed a new jail, but the County included too many other elements, so the message was lost. Van Arsdall has brought up regionalization as another option. Crager also expressed concern about the many work orders at the jail how much more use the current building could endure.

Wyse concurred that the County asked for too many pieces in the bond. It is good to understand that the criminal justice system is a continuum with many pieces, but the County lost the trust of the people, and Wyse would like to earn that trust back. The County has made progress since then; the Crisis Center and the Barbara Ross Children and Family Services Mental Health Building are operational, and a new courthouse is under construction, so hopefully the community will have more trust and willingness to work with the County.

Gotchall congratulated the County on collecting more data than in the past. Earned value management is a tool to compare the cost of continuing on the current path

versus a different path. Gotchall would like to know more about the County's liability risk. If the current jail were condemned, the County would be in crisis mode. The community has lost staff and AICs due to the safety risks of the facility. Gotchall wondered about the probability of lawsuits. Some numbers could be developed and shared with the voters on the cost of one path versus another.

Joslin stated he is passionate about pursuing a new Correctional Facility when the time is right. Recently, a grand jury foreperson shared that she had opposed the last jail levy, but after serving on the grand jury and touring the BCJ, she was convinced of the need for a new jail. Benton County has a highly educated jury pool and electorate. If facts are properly presented, the community will support the right decision.

Holland noted that the people who interact with the justice system are all our neighbors. We want to wrap those individuals with medical, social, or behavioral health services. The last bond measure grew too bulky; focus is very important. In our collaborations and partnerships, we always consider how everything is connected, such as community belonging, safety, health, and housing. We have to keep linking arms to ensure that people are not falling through.

Crager and Malone thanked everyone involved in the assessment.

{Exhibit 1: Jail and Justice System Assessment Presentation}

5. Other

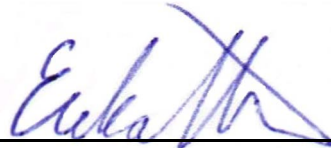
No other business was discussed.

6. Adjournment

Chair Malone adjourned the meeting at 2:57 PM.



Pat Malone, Chair



Erika Milo, Recorder

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