

PORT OF BENTON  
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
MARCH 8, 2023

**A. CALL TO ORDER:** The regular monthly meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. at the Walter Clore Wine and Culinary Center, located at 2140 Wine Country Road, Prosser, Washington.

**PRESENT:** Commissioner Christy L. Rasmussen; Commissioner Lori Stevens; Executive Director, Diahann Howard, PPM®; Port Attorney, David Billetdeaux, Public Information Officer, Summers Miya; Director of Marketing, Wally Williams; Director of Facilities & Operations, Ron Branine; Accounting Clerk, Liz Renz; Airport Manager, Quentin Wright; Director of Real Estate, Teresa Hancock; Interim Director of Finance, Sara Marshall; Senior Accountant, Veronica Serna; City of Prosser, Tom Glover; Prosser Economic Development Association, Neal Ripplinger; Scott Keller, Community Member; Dan Holmes, Atlas Agro; Gina Zejdlik; Atlas Agro

**The following attendees attended via remote communications:** Commissioner Roy D. Keck; Contract Specialist, Sheri Collins; Joshua Lott, Anderson Perry; Bryan Condon, Century West Engineering; Ashley Garza, Consultant; Wendy Culverwell, Tri-City Herald; Karl Dye, TRIDEC

The Commission meeting was noticed as required by RCW 42.30.070.

**B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Commission Secretary, Lori Stevens led those present in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

**C. CONSENT AGENDA:**

Commission President, Christy Rasmussen noted that Item of Business #4, had been updated to Resolution 23-06, for the Purchase and Sale Agreement of 150 acres, North Horn Rapids to Pacific Green Fertilizer Corporation. A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission approving the revised agenda for the March 8, 2023 Commission meeting, approval of minutes from the February 8, 2023 Commission meeting, approval of vouchers and certifications, including payroll, for the month of February totaling \$1,533,051.54 approval of project vouchers and certifications for the month of February totaling \$345,823.58 and approval of Resolution 23-05, voiding warrant no. 081190, in the amount of \$26,012.85, which was printed in errors.

**D. PUBLIC COMMENT:**

There were no public comments.

**E. ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

1. Welcome and Update from Tom Glover, City of Prosser

Executive Director, Diahann Howard introduced Prosser City Manager, Tom Glover.

City Manager Tom Glover greeted the Commission and encouraged all to sign-up for his weekly updates.

Glover stated that two capital requests have recently been submitted to state legislature.

Glover added that the first is a monument welcome sign located at Merlot and Wine Country Road, where the gravel pit is currently.

Glover said that the second request is an archway sign at the entrance to downtown on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, which will help direct visitors to downtown.

Glover noted that a new police chief has been hired, Jay King, who is from Alabama. Glover added that the Washington State Police Chiefs were a big help in the process, which included interviews and a meet and greet at the Community Center with all candidates.

Glover provided an update on the City Hall replacement project, noting that the bond failed, which was a good lesson for the city team. Glover added that the process will change a bit, including listening sessions around the community and better communication regarding the plan and project.

Glover added that the grain elevator area where there was a fire last year will be cleaned up soon and all are looking forward to what happens next.

Glover stated that sales tax revenues were up from the previous January, which is a great start to the year.

Glover closed with an update that 1,100 – 1,200 homes will be built in the community in the next few years.

## 2. Welcome and Update from John-Paul Estey, Prosser Chamber of Commerce

John-Paul Estey was unable to attend the meeting.

## 3. Welcome and Update from Neal Ripplinger, Prosser Economic Development Association

Executive Director, Diahann Howard introduced Prosser Economic Development Association Executive Director, Neal Ripplinger.

Neal Ripplinger announced that Prosser Leadership has ten participants for the class of 2023, with the note on upcoming sessions: January – Introduction and Non-Profits; February – Public Services Day; March – Historic Downtown. Ripplinger thanked the Commission and Port for their support of last year's leadership class project, the orbital marker, which was placed at the Prosser Wine & Food Park. Ripplinger added that the class is still waiting on better weather before planning the official ribbon-cutting for the marker. Ripplinger added that the Class of 2023 project is focusing on native wild flowers in town.

Ripplinger added a bit more detail on the capital budget request archway sign, noting that the new sign will have a backlit archway, which will not only beautify the sign, but draw traffic toward downtown.

Ripplinger provided an update on the recent College & Career Fair, noting that once again 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade participated, including Paterson School District. Ripplinger noted that there were 55 vendors, virtual trainings and a push-up competition.

Ripplinger stated that the businesses of Vintners Village have been holding monthly meetings and he is attending when his schedule allows. Ripplinger noted that the businesses are in discussion about the possibility of creating an association so their wines can be sold at any of the businesses throughout the village. Ripplinger added that the group is also working together on a shared calendar to avoid conflicts and to have corresponding events that compliment larger ones.

Ripplinger provided an update on the MOU between IAREC and Prosser School District, adding that the agreement includes students visiting the station, where they learn about research, genetics,

robotics and AI. Ripplinger noted that this MOU creates a bridge within the community and IAREC, as there has been a disconnect with youth on the agriculture opportunities in the area.

Ripplinger provided an update on the Business, Recruitment, Retention and Expansion program, stating that the new hospital has broken ground and construction is expected to take a few years. Ripplinger added that PEDa is assisting with doctor recruitment and tours, as the hospital is in hiring mode with 29 new providers since 2017 and 16 more expected by 2024. Ripplinger added that the current facility is at max capacity.

Ripplinger stated that the #ProsserWAJobs Facebook page has been a successful and valuable local resource for those looking for employment, or looking for a place to post about employment opportunities.

Ripplinger added that PEDa continues to promote the Business Resource Initiative grant money available, adding that the second window just closed and the last window will open in June.

Ripplinger stated that the PEDa Annual Meeting will be on Wednesday, May 3 at 5:30 p.m. at the Prosser PUD Building.

#### 4. Resolution 23-06 – Purchase and Sale Agreement – 150 Acres, North Horn Rapids to Pacific Green Fertilizer Corporation

Executive Director, Diahann Howard announced that the Port has been in conversation with Pacific Green Fertilizer Corporation, adding that today's approval would be the first step in the process of the planning and permitting that is needed to move forward with the project.

Howard stated that Pacific Green Fertilizer Corporation (Atlas Agro) has agreed to put forth earnest money in the amount of \$400,000 for the purchase of 150 acres in North Horn Rapids Industrial Park for a purchase price of \$9M.

Howard added that the project is a \$1.1-1.2B project with 2027 as the goal for opening.

Howard noted that the project will necessitate a large electrical load from Bonneville Power as well as 25 rail cars and possible barge use. Howard said that the project will add 230 jobs to the community, including professional, skilled and semi-skilled and an additional regional impact of 1,000 jobs will also be added.

Howard stated that the facility will support value-added agriculture, as well as precision farming techniques and possesses the possibility to bolster the community's economy by \$200M.

Howard stated that the Port has been working with Commerce, TRIDEC and the city. A meeting was held with the Inter-Tribal Advisory Board that included PNNL and DOE. There are also plans to provide an update later this month during meetings in DC, as this project hits regional target sectors and will help the community reach towards a net-zero emissions goal.

Atlas Agro's Dan Holmes greeted the Commission, adding that the company went through extensive site tours around Washington and Oregon and the biggest factor about the Richland site was the local team, as there has been a ton of collaboration throughout. Holmes added that Diahann Howard has been professional and forthcoming throughout the entire project and the entire region has stepped up to the plate to welcome the project to Richland. Holmes added that attorneys for Atlas and the Port have discussed the finer details and have put forth a PSA that both parties believe is mutually beneficial and ready to be signed, pending the Commission's approval.

TRIDEC Executive Director, Karl Dye commented via Zoom communications, adding that there

have been many holdups throughout this process, but Atlas has been a willing partner to take the necessary steps with the team.

Dye added that the green technologies that Atlas Agro will bring to the community is an incredible asset to the community and if the community can help secure the needed power, we can do this. Dye noted that this project will put the Tri-Cities on the map as the innovative leader the community has always been, adding that TRIDEC fully supports this project.

Dan Holmes displayed an informative video on Atlas Agro.

Holmes stated that the formal process to move forward will start in a few weeks.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission approving the Resolution 23-06, a purchase and sale agreement of 150 acres in North Horn Rapids to Pacific Green Fertilizer Corporation.**

**5. Approval of Two-Year Janitorial Contract with Personal Touch Cleaning, Inc.**

Director of Facilities & Operations, Ron Branine announced that this two-year janitorial bid went through the formal process and two total bids were submitted.

Branine explained that Personal Touch came in with the lowest bid and has retained the contract.

Branine noted that monthly cleaning charges for all Port buildings is \$13,680 monthly (\$164,160 annually) and reminded the Commission that 2579 Stevens was added at the end of 2022.

Branine added that extra services include Crow Butte cleaning at \$30/hour and miscellaneous one-time cleanings at \$35/hour, adding that these costs exclude janitorial supplies.

Branine stated that the total annual amount minus hourly cleanings and pass through is \$134,750.

Branine added that total for all cleaning in 2022 before pass through was \$168,355.38.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission approving the two-year janitorial contract with Personal Touch Cleaning, Inc., noting monthly cleaning charges of \$13,680 – annual \$164,160 and additional services when needed at \$30/hour for Crow Butte and \$35/hour for Walter Clore or one-time cleanings.**

## **F. INFORMATION REPORTS**

### **1. Grants Update**

Executive Director Diahann Howard pointed out that the grants report was included in the meeting packet and Airport Manager, Quentin Wright would highlight the following:

- Items 4, 13-15 – FAA funding has been approved for 2024 projects, totaling \$3.75M for projects at both airports. Projects include taxiway, apron pavement reconstruction and other improvements.
- Items 8, 9 – Applications submitted; will be one or other, not both.
- Item 10 – Congressional request submitted for 2024. Working on rendering of project and other grant sources.

## **G. COMMISSIONER REPORTS/COMMENTS**

Commissioner Roy Keck noted that he was getting ready to attend the PNWA Mission to Washington event.

Commissioner Lori Stevens noted that the earlier PEDA and City presentation covered her Prosser updates. Stevens added that the Prosser Sip & Stroll was coming up this weekend.

Commissioner Stevens stated that she recently attended the PNWA Federal Affairs webinar.

Commissioner Stevens noted that she is planning to attend a focus group meeting for the Boys & Girls Club, who is looking to grow into the Prosser community.

Stevens added that she is also looking forward to the PNWA Mission to Washington trip.

Commissioner Christy Rasmussen stated that she recently attended the Manhattan Project National Historical Park board meeting and tours have opened for the 2023 season, adding that a traditional ranger program is also available and incredibly educational and entertaining.

Commissioner Rasmussen added that there is also a summer camp for high school students, which allows the students to experience Hanford and is a great way to connect youth with area history.

Commissioner Rasmussen agreed that she is also looking forward to the Mission to Washington trip.

## **H. DIRECTOR REPORTS/COMMENTS:**

### **1. AIRPORTS**

Airport Manager, Quentin Wright announced that the PAPIs, which were on backorder and an aspect of the Richland Airport Electrical Project arrived and have been installed.

Wright stated that the team is close to a lease agreement for the 1865 Bronco Lane facility at the Richland Airport with an existing airport tenant.

Wright noted that a three-year contract has been developed with the Ohler family at the Prosser Airport and added that he has one additional item reserved for Executive Session related to Richland Airport.

### **2. FACILITIES & OPERATIONS:**

Director of Facilities & Operations, Ron Branine announced that the LED conversion is ongoing at the 2579 Stevens Drive facility in certain areas.

Branine added that the oil/water separator at 2579 Stevens is also going to get repaired, including additional clean-up that is needed.

Branine stated that a well pump at the Prosser Airport had to be fixed and the team is waiting on warmer weather to begin pavement painting, as there is finally enough paint in stock to perform this task.

Branine informed that 69 work orders have been turned in since the February Commission meeting and the team should be seeing an average of 100 work orders a month. Branine reminded the team that this number will fluctuate up and down, but will be consistent until the team is able to get ahead of things through the preventative maintenance program.



Branine added that a total of 1,067 work orders have been received since September 2021, with 33 current open work orders. Branine stated that this system is capturing approximately 50% of the work actually being performed.

Branine stated that he plans to start the Facility Manager work order system in March, with the first several months being devoted to data collection, much as it was for the Voyager project. Branine added that thanks to the work the Voyager team has already established, much of the work has been completed!

Branine announced that Crow Butte officially opens for the season next Wednesday, March 15 and opening weekend is at 75% capacity and many of the following weekends filling up quickly as well. Branine noted that a conversation will be had with the Corps regarding an updated operating plan for 2024 to help minimize loss.

Branine stated that the McKinstry assessment team has been to the 2579 Stevens Drive facility and will soon be starting the process to figure out the best plan forward for leasing, safety and operations.

Executive Director, Diahann Howard provided an update on the railroad crossing at State Route 240 (SR 240), since the signal accident.

Howard reminded the Commission that the reconstruction of the signal is delayed due to the WSDOT funding, the team will need to move ahead with reconstruction of the SR 240 signal that was damaged in the accident.

Howard added that Engineer, Roger Wright is working on a construction scope of work to make the necessary signal repairs, but last week there was an inspection by FRA/WUTC, which the inspector ruled that without the cantilever and lights in place, this crossing must be in Stop and Protect. Howard added that the entire signal is working, other than one missing pair of lights. Howard stated that the railroads have been notified that the signal crossing will be in Stop and Protect for several months, until permanent repairs are made.

Howard added that both railroad companies have expressed concerns, as this actually makes a rail crossing at this location less safe, due to high volume of traffic on SR 240 and the trains required to stop, send flaggers out into the roadway, and then let the train pass.

Howard stated that the Port is requesting that the Commission declare this as an emergency so the team can immediately engage a contractor to make temporary repairs to the cantilever, using existing parts and allowing the signal to be fully put back into service while the team waits on new signal parts and permanent improvements.

**Commissioner Christy Rasmussen asked for a motion to declare an emergency at the SR 240 railroad crossing, so a contractor can immediately be engaged and temporary repairs can be performed to the cantilever until the new signal parts and permanent improvements can be performed.**

**A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission approving that an emergency be declared at the SR 240 railroad crossing, so a contractor can be engaged immediately and temporary repairs can be made until permanent improvements can be performed.**

### **3. REAL ESTATE:**

Director of Real Estate, Teresa Hancock announced that a Letter of Intent has been received for

the remaining 7,375 square feet of office space located at the south end of 3250 Port of Benton Blvd. Hancock added that she hopes to bring more forward at the April meeting.

Hancock added that three recent inquiries have been received for land or space, including industrial land, a Vintners Village existing tenant expansion and various building space inquiries.

Hancock complimented the entire accounting team, including Ashley Garza on the Voyager project, as the Voyager system is much more efficient for real estate efforts.

Commissioner Rasmussen thanked the entire team for the heavy lift the ongoing Voyager project has required.

#### **4. MARKETING:**

Public Information Officer, Summers Miya announced that work has begun on the spring newsletter. Miya added that Crow Butte Park signs and brochures have been updated in preparation of the new camping season. Miya added that Triton tours will also begin again on March 15 and spots are already filling up. Miya stated that the partnership with the Richland Public Library Tumbleweed Tourist program continues, which has spurred quite a bit of interest in Triton.

Miya stated she has been working with a submarine veterans group, who is planning to have a reunion picnic at USS Triton Sail Park on a Saturday in June, adding that that group will tour B Reactor on the Friday before their picnic. Miya stated that she plans to open the Visitor Center and set-up the Triton exhibit for the group, similar to last year's Triton ceremony.

Miya noted that she has been heavily involved in VERTical communications, including the graphic animation video that will be unveiled at next week's convening. Miya noted that the convening event as 100 RSVPs and plans are in line for a successful day of presentations and updates.

Miya added that she has been working with multiple groups on events at the Clore, including an upcoming Women in Washington Wine event that will take place on March 23 and highlights significant women in the area's wine industry.

Miya announced that she has been working with Pepper Preppers, who purchased the Benton City old fire station from the Port in late 2021/early 2022, adding that the owners, Bill and Cherie Smoot have put a significant amount of work into the facility and it looks amazing. Miya stated that she has been working with the Smoots on planning a ribbon-cutting event for Saturday, May 6 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. and the event will have vendors, a food truck specials.

Miya added that another event taking place on May 6 is the Prosser Wine & Food Park tenant, Tirridis' "Half Bottle in the Park" event, which is a first time event for Prosser.

Miya stated that she has been working with Communications & Marketing consultant, Rochelle Olson and will start incorporating quarterly Communications updates that are in line with the strategic plan.

#### **5. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS:**

Executive Director, Diahann Howard completed this section during the Executive Director Report.

#### **6. FINANCE DIRECTOR:**

Interim Director of Finance/CPA, Sara Marshall provided a financial status update, highlighting the current cash position with Port having \$3.6M available operating cash and the project fund with

\$1.57M.

Marshall highlighted the cash receipts at \$967k, with \$457k from tenants and \$510k in grant reimbursements. Marshall stated that cash disbursements were \$1.7M in February, with \$207k in payroll, \$754k to Railworks for the Van Giesen crossing project. Marshall noted that there is currently \$50k outstanding in Accounts Payable.

Marshall provided an overview of current Accounts Receivable activity, adding that the AR balance is not a clear picture of current status, due to working through the reconciliation between the Intacct system and the Voyager system.

Marshall overviewed the current finance initiatives:

- Data validation between Intacct and Voyager systems – complete. Have completed billing out of Voyager system. Continued monitoring and stabilization of Voyager billing.
- GASB 87 – Current Focus
- Assessing leases for GASB 87 applicability/lease terms, discount rates (interest rates) to be used, linking to general ledger and performing testing in test database and running and vetting calculation
- Year-end close
- Financial statement preparation
- Audit preparation

Marshall reiterated the importance of the updated financial systems, stating the improved efficiencies and added transparencies are incredibly important and valuable to the Port.

#### **7. PORT ATTORNEY:**

Port Attorney, David Billetdeaux stated that he has been focusing on the Atlas Agro deal, as it took quite a bit of time to drill down to the current draft.

Billetdeaux added that he is preparing trainings with Port staff, including ethics training.

Billetdeaux explained that he is also working on an updated RFP for the Clore Center as well as an RFP for an insurance company to see what else is out there.

Billetdeaux added that he has also been researching software solutions for archiving and public records purposes.

Billetdeaux noted that Columbia Rail is doing a good job and adding that the WUTC inspection went relatively well, giving added kudos to Columbia Rail for the hard work they have devoted to the Port rail system.

#### **8. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:**

Executive Director, Diahann Howard announced that Rep. Barnard's HB 1584 is now out of the house and moving forward and encouraged continued support.

Howard added that she has been working on the PNWA Mission to Washington itinerary overview and will email to all as soon as it is complete.

Howard stated that she recently presented the "This is the Place" PowerPoint to Department of Energy (DOE) Energy Storage and PNNL and is looking forward to future collaboration with PNNL and the Supplier Alliance. Howard added that Dr. Jim Conca will present at the Supplier Alliance meeting taking place at the Port tonight.

Howard added that PNNL Industry Days is April 3-7, with the reception on April 5.

Howard noted that next week's Convening will provide the "Who/What/Where" of what has been happening with the VERTICAL project teams.

Howard added that she had the unique opportunity to meet with the President of Finland, Sauli Niinisto, with Senator Marko Liias, adding that Niinisto is the first Finnish president to visit Washington



and the Pacific Northwest and was engaging at state level for new possibilities for business, people and Finnish investment, as Niinisto believes Washington and Finland will lead the industry on new innovations on climate.

Howard added that she has been asked to serve on the NetZero committee with PNNL, WSU Tri-Cities, Energy Northwest, CPCo, Lamb Weston, Fuse Fund and TRIDEC, which has a similar model as AWB Institute, 501c3.


Howard noted that she recently rode the Port rail from start to finish and plans to include this information in her presentations at the Mission to Washington event.

Howard announced that the finance position has been posted to the Port website and great applications have been received. Howard noted that the team is also searching for the engineer position, but may consider a construction project manager for the role.

Howard noted that she has a few items remaining for Executive Session, including issues related to rail and the Technology Enterprise Center.

**I. EXECUTIVE SESSION:** The regular Commission meeting was recessed at 10:02 a.m. and an Executive Session was convened at 10:05 a.m. to discuss real estate and personnel for 10 minutes. It was noted that if any action was required, we will reconvene the regular meeting and bring forward any item at that time.

**J. ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m. with an announcement that the next regularly scheduled Commission meeting would be held on Wednesday, April 12, 2023, at 8:30 a.m. at the Port of Benton Commission meeting room, located at 3250 Port of Benton Blvd., Richland, Washington.

  
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Lori Stevens  
Commission Secretary