

**PORT OF BENTON  
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
March 19, 2025**

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

**PRESENT:** Commissioner Scott D. Keller, Commissioner Lori Stevens, Commissioner Roy D. Keck

**PORT STAFF PRESENT:** Diahann Howard, Quentin Wright, Summers Miya, Ron Branine, Brandin Lopez, Wally Williams, Audrey Burney, Angela Saraceno-Lyman, Jorge Celestino

**ALSO PRESENT:** John O’Leary, Gravis Law; Neal Ripplinger, Prosser Economic Development Association; Nathan Radach, City of Benton City; Larelle Michener, Prosser Chamber of Commerce; Alex Steinbock, Prosser Chamber of Commerce; Mayor Gary Vegar, City of Prosser

**The following attendees attended via remote communications:** Sheri Collins, Julia Mora, Bryan Condon, Century West Engineering; Wendy Culverwell, Tri-City Herald; Ashley Garza

The Commission meeting was noticed as required by RCW 42.30.070.

**B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Commissioner Lori Stevens led those present to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

**C. CONSENT AGENDA:**

**A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission approving the agenda for the March 19, 2025, Commission meeting, approval of minutes from the February 12, 2025, Commission meeting, approval of minutes from the March 3, 2025, special Commission meeting, and approval of vouchers and certifications, including payroll, for the month of February totaling \$1,044,686.18.**

**D. PUBLIC COMMENT:**

There were no comments from the public.

**E. ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

**1. Welcome and Update from Neal Ripplinger, Prosser Economic Development Association**

Prosser Economic Development Director Neal Ripplinger provided an update on recent activities, including an update on the Prosser Leadership class of 2025, Mustang Business Plan Competition, the opening of Prosser Memorial Hospital, recent ribbon cuttings, updates to their business recruitment, retention and expansion efforts, College and Career Fair, Creative District application.

**2. Welcome and Update from Mayor Gary Vegar, City of Prosser**

City of Prosser Mayor Gary Vegar provided an update on city operations, including the encouragement of signing up for weekly updates, infrastructure projects, including signs and a road safety survey, code enforcement and the hiring of new personnel, an update on the police station location options, upcoming road projects and possible land exchange and future development.

3. Welcome and Update from Alex Steinbock, Prosser Chamber of Commerce

Prosser Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Alex Steinbock provided an update on annual events, current marketing and communications efforts, including a new website and updated Visitor Guide and an updated rack card to promote hiking and walking in the area.

4. Welcome and Update from Nathan Radach, City of Benton City

Public Works Director Nathan Radach provided an update on parks and recreation in Benton City, including adding a new park and refreshing tennis courts to pickleball courts. Other updates included an update on the acquisition of 11 acres of land, which the city envisions turning into Riverfront Park with the completion of several projects.

Radach provided an update on facility upgrades within the city, street and infrastructure projects, and growth and development within and surrounding the city. Radach noted that the city is pursuing grants to assist with development.

5. Resolution 25-10, Authorizing the Port to Proceed with the Electrification Contract with Washington State Department of Transportation – Technology & Business Campus

Engineering and Development Manager Brandin Lopez reviewed the grant the Port received from the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Lopez explained that the resolution finalizes the project and allows the Port to move forward. Lopez confirmed the Port's match responsibility was included in the budget.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-10, authorizing the Port to proceed with the electrification contract with the Washington State Department of Transportation for the Technology & Business Campus.**

6. Resolution 25-11, Approving a Lease Agreement and Lease Modification with Barnhart Crane & Rigging Company, Inc. – Richland Business Park

Executive Director Diahann Howard and Real Estate Manager Audrey Burney explained that they have been working with Barnhart on a \$2.4 million Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) loan application and a new five-year lease with one option that will be contingent on the CERB loan. The current lease terms and plans for future investment were reviewed. The CERB loan application will be discussed in greater detail at the April Commission meeting.

The facility's current condition was overviewed, including some required improvements to create a multi-tenant space.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-11, approving a lease agreement and lease modification with Barnhart Crane & Rigging Company, Inc. in the Richland Business Park.**

7. Resolution 25-12, Authorizing an Amendment to the Land Exchange Agreement with the City of Richland to Extend the Phase II Feasibility Study Period

Executive Director Diahann Howard explained that the amendment extends phase two of the industrial land exchange until July, with closing expected in September or October. Howard noted that the environmental assessment is ongoing. Howard added that this amendment was approved by the Richland City Council at last night's meeting.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-12, authorizing an amendment to the land exchange agreement with the City of Richland to extend the phase II feasibility study period.**

8. Authorization to Award Contract with Inland Asphalt Company for \$93,840.71, Including Washington State Sales Tax, for the Port of Benton Blvd. Pavement Replacement Project

Director of Facilities & Operations Ron Branine explained that the Port of Benton pavement replacement project covers a three-block, one-lane section of Port of Benton Boulevard from 6th through 9th Street.

Branine stated that Inland Asphalt Company was the low bidder at \$93,840.71, including Washington State sales tax.

**A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission, authorizing a contract with Inland Asphalt Company for \$93,840.71, including Washington State sales tax, for the Port of Benton Boulevard pavement replacement project.**

**F. INFORMATION REPORTS:**

1. Grants Update

Executive Director Diahann Howard reviewed grants included in the grants report.

Item 2 – Innovation Cluster Accelerator Program Application, Phase 3, Application due in April, elements for the NSF application are to be requested.

Item 7 – State Capital Request, tied to Item 9. May have lost an earmark of \$240k. Will resubmit.

Item 8 – Records Room Organization – The project is completed, and all close-out paperwork has been submitted. Pending receipt of payment for the final invoice.

Item 11 – CERB/EDA-updated – Submitted to CERB. May 2025 presentation planned. EDA application on federal hold.

Item 12 – NSF Engine – Support acceleration of the nuclear supply chain, local companies, workforce and entrepreneurship. Not directly going through Port of Benton, but helps small business and workforce development and the Port and VERTical are part of community collaboration and partnership on application. VERTical will submit final application.

Item 13 – 2025 State Transportation Budget Request – Pending legislative session. Based on the 2024 FRAP application. Port has been asked to resubmit for the \$1.6 million project.

Airport Manager Quentin Wright provided an update on airport-related grants.

Wright noted that there are no new updates other than \$50,000 was included in the CARB loan for the purchase of 1845 Terminal Drive, for the replacement of windows. A statement of work was sent out for that project, but it was not successful, so the scope will be resubmitted.

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

Commissioner Lori Stevens noted that the Prosser partners provided all relative updates today and noted that she is excited for possible future Clore partnerships.

Commissioner Roy D. Keck stated that he attended the Regional Chamber monthly luncheon related to the Hanford update, noting that there is more delineation between cleanup and clean energy.

Commissioner Keck added that he attended the recent PNWA Mission to Washington and was excited for the momentum for new nuclear.

Commissioner Scott D. Keller commented that the Richland Chamber of Commerce is growing and currently planning the Hogs & Dogs and Cool Desert Nights events. Commissioner Keller noted that he attended the recent wildfire aviation caucus and that he hopes to see the fire bosses return to Richland Airport.

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

##### **1. FINANCE DIRECTOR:**

Senior Accountant Angela Saraceno-Lyman provided a financial status report as of February 2025, including an update on the 2023 state audit and 2024 year-end closing.

Lyman overviewed current cash, with a note to expect continued volatility due to timing of large projects, grant expenditures and grant reimbursements, noting that \$1,583,000 of reimbursements are currently in process.

Lyman overviewed recent cash activity, including the status of accounts receivable, noting that the "Over 90 Days" category is at its lowest level in many years.

Lyman stated that the financial statement audit is ongoing and the team is responding to various State Auditors Office requests. The accountability audit has been completed with no findings, which include Open Public Meetings Act, financial health, compliance with loan agreement (CARB, WSDOT), disbursements, and use of restricted funds. The change order review is still ongoing.

Lyman noted that the team continues to work through the year-end closing checklist, which includes the review and reconciliation of all general ledger accounts. Lyman added that a schedule has been developed with a CPA firm and the process is on schedule to be submitted early to the SAO.

##### **2. PORT ATTORNEY:**

Contract Port attorney John O'Leary stated that he had nothing to report but had some items reserved for executive session.

##### **3. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:**

Executive Director Diahann Howard reviewed recent meetings she has participated in, including the Association of Public Ports Authorities Foundation Board, planning for a June 24<sup>th</sup> M-84

conference in Kalama, a presentation at the National Cleanup Workshop, Daybreak Rotary Club presentation, recent recognition as a Person of Influence at the Tri-Cities Journal of Business event. Other meetings included two recent Research District meetings, which may soon be restructured.

Howard recognized Real Estate Manager Audrey Burney for being recognized by the Washington Economic Development Association as an Emerging Professional.

Howard stated that the waterfront development planning continues, noting that the draft packets have been provided to each Commissioner.

Howard provided an update on the strategic plan, stating that the port received five bids with Maul Foster Alongi coming in as lowest bidder at \$49,933 and the team is moving forward to get them under contract to proceed.

Howard stated that there have been recent conversations with the class one rail operators regarding the car charge and all parties are now meeting every Friday until the agreement is finalized.

Howard recognized the engineering team on the recent rail tie replacement project, noting that final inspections are taking place before the track speed can be raised from 5 mph to 10 mph. Howard added that the team continues to work on the shore power projects and has met with Tidewater and has had continued conversations with the Navy.

Howard noted that the State Route 240 project to replace the crossing and rail signal has been awarded to Stacy & Whitbeck and the closure target is May 29 – June 2, which will be verified and communicated once verified by all involved.

Continued conversation ensued related to rail maintenance and projects.

Howard provided updates on recent real estate conversations, including the American Rock area, Kaiser lease, Talent Aviation, Barnhart, Hanford Mission Integration Solutions, Richland Airport and recent utility-related issues. The land exchange assignment document for the Richland Innovation Center have been drafted and 1845 Terminal Drive has been added to Loop Net. Additional real estate updates were provided related to Richland and Prosser property.

Howard reminded the Commission that State of the Ports will take place on April 23 and she will be leaving for an ECA meeting directly following to present for VERTICAL.

#### **I. FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER**

There were no comments regarding the Good of the Order schedule of events.

**J. EXECUTIVE SESSION:** The regular Commission meeting was recessed at 10:22 a.m. It was announced that an Executive Session would commence at 10:30 a.m. for 15 minutes to discuss real estate and potential litigation. It was noted that the regular meeting would be reconvened at 10:45 a.m.

At 10:45 a.m., it was announced that an additional 10 minutes were needed for the executive session.

The regular Commission meeting was reconvened at 10:53 a.m.

**K. ADJOURNMENT:** No action was required. The meeting was adjourned at 10:53 a.m. with an announcement that the next regular Port of Benton Commission meeting would be held at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, April 9, 2025, at the Port of Benton Commission meeting room, 3250 Port of Benton Boulevard, Richland, Washington.

  
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Roy D. Keck, Commission Secretary