

**PORT OF BENTON
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
June 18, 2025**

A. CALL TO ORDER: The regular monthly meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. at the Port of Benton Commission Meeting Room, 3250 Port of Benton Blvd., Richland, Washington.

PRESENT: Commissioner Scott D. Keller, Commissioner Lori Stevens (attended virtually), Commissioner Roy D. Keck

PORT STAFF PRESENT: Diahann Howard, Quentin Wright, Summers Miya, Ron Branine, Brandin Lopez, Audrey Burney, Jeff Lubeck, Cassie Hammond

ALSO PRESENT: John O’Leary, Gravis Law; Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation; Jon Ray, Rest on High; Christy Rasmussen; Michelle Hrycauk Nassif, Washington State University Cougar Tracks

The following attendees attended via remote communications: Sheri Collins; Angela Saraceno-Lyman; Jorge Celestino; Wendy Culverwell, Tri-City Herald; Ashley Garza; Julia Mora; Tristan Nowak; Jeff (no last name given); Joe Pisca

The Commission meeting was noticed as required by RCW 42.30.070.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Summers Miya 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 June 18, 2025, Commission meeting, approval of minutes from the May 22, 2025, Commission meeting, and approval of vouchers and certifications, including payroll, for the month of May totaling \$1,594,940.63 and Resolution 25-21, to cancel warrant no. 084740, which was not issued due to printer issues and warrant no. 084158, which has been deemed lost.

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

Jon Ray, Richland Airport tenant, thanked the Commissioners and staff for their support and assistance with the first annual Richland Airport Career Day and Job Fair.

Ray provided an overview of the event.

Clif Dyer, a tenant at Richland Airport, complimented the aviation event at the airport. Dyer mentioned the recent negative press associated with the airport and urged the Port to investigate the matter thoroughly.

E. PUBLIC HEARING

Commission President Scott Keller opened the public hearing at 8:35 a.m.

1. Six-Year Transportation Improvement Program for Years 2026-2031

Engineering & Capital Development Manager, Brandin Lopez explained that per Washington State law, entities must annually update their six-year transportation programs for state/federal funding eligibility. Lopez noted that current projects remain listed until fully closed. The plan being presented covered years 2026-2031.

No public comments were received on this item.

Commission President Scott Keller closed the public hearing at 8:36 a.m.

F. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Resolution 25-22, Approving the Port of Benton's Six-Year Transportation Improvement Program for the Years 2026-2031 Inclusive

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-22, approving the Port of Benton's Six-Year Transportation Improvement Program for the Years 2026-2031 inclusive.

2. Welcome and Update from Michelle Hrycauk Nassif, Director, WSU Tri-Cities Cougar Tracks

Michelle Hrycauk Nassif provided an overview of the WSU Tri-Cities Cougar Tracks program and the partnership with the Port for workforce education and development.

Nassif overviewed the recent wine service excellence workshop, which the Port sponsored, noting that there were 47 participants from regional wineries. Statewide interest was received. Notable wineries sent their entire teams.

Nassif noted that the next step was a sensory workshop in the fall, possibly at the Clore Center in Prosser.

The Commission affirmed its support for hosting the sensory workshop at the Clore Center and encouraged offline conversations to further partnerships.

3. Resolution 25-23, Authorize Executive Director to Award the Richland Airport Apron Reconfiguration Design Services to Century West Engineering, \$181,761.00 – Richland Airport

Airport Manager Quentin Wright noted that this resolution allows the executive director to award the Richland Airport Apron Reconfiguration Design Services to Century West Engineering for \$181,761.00. Wright stated that the FAA grant covers 95% of the cost, the Port matches the remaining 5%.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-23, authorizing the executive director to award the Richland Airport Apron Reconfiguration Design Services to Century West Engineering for \$181,761.00, for Richland Airport.

4. Authorize Executive Director to Award the 2579 Stevens Drive Roof Replacement Project to C&C Construction Services, \$50,518.33 – Richland Business Park

Director of Facilities & Operations Ron Branine stated that two bids were received for the 2579 Stevens Drive Roof Replacement Project, with C&C Construction Services coming in with the lowest bid of \$50,518.33. Branine noted that this project was budgeted at \$60,000.

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, authorizing the executive director to award the 2579 Stevens Drive Roof Replacement Project to C&C Construction Services, \$50,518.33.

5. Resolution 25-24, Authorizing a Contract for Engineering and Architectural Services for the Pre-Design Assessment of the 2579 Stevens Drive Railroad Building, \$350,859.26 – Richland Business Park

Engineering & Capital Development Manager Brandin Lopez stated that this resolution authorizes a contract with a local company, CKJT, for \$350,859.26 for a pre-design assessment of the 2579 Stevens Drive railroad building.

Lopez reviewed the funding sources and plans for the building, which include a minimally disruptive modernization plan.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-24, authorizing a contract for engineering and architectural services for the pre-design assessment of the 2579 Stevens Drive railroad building.

G. INFORMATION REPORTS

1. Grants Update

Executive Director Diahann Howard reviewed the grants report.

Item 5 – Congressional Directed Spending Requests. A new request has been submitted to all congressional offices for 2026. Cantwell CDS has advanced, and the port request is back in the queue.

Item 7 – CERB/EDA – Submitted to CERB on May 15, loan secured: Benton County Rural County Capital Funds, .09 grant request submitted and presentation scheduled for July 24.

Item 8 – NSF Engine – NSF is proceeding with reviews; a notice of the virtual site visit is anticipated the week of July 7. Competing across the nation with 71 other applicants.

Item 10 – Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act at Richland Airport. Grant awarded and design work is underway.

2. Waterfront Update

Engineering & Capital Development Manager Brandin Lopez stated that the RFQ process has been completed for the waterfront planning and Maul Foster Alongi was selected. The scope includes existing conditions, market/cultural/geotechnical assessments, utility and power analysis, boat dock feasibility with the Corps of Engineers, public and stakeholder engagement, cost analysis and graphic renderings.

Lopez stated that there is an emphasis on cultural and tribal consultation, and the costs for the pre-development work are expected to be around \$300,000.

Lopez stated that there are multiple parties interested in land lease opportunities and community involvement will be prioritized.

Lopez announced that the final proposal will be presented at a future Commission meeting.

3. Crow Butte Park Update

Director of Facilities & Operations Ron Branine reviewed Crow Butte Park's financials, operations, and proposed fee changes.

Since 2012, the park has averaged \$213,000 in annual loss, noting a positive trend since 2020 amid operational reforms.

Branine stated that there is currently \$750,000 in deferred maintenance, including a sewer lagoon liner and pavement repair.

Branine explained that current site fees are lower than comparable Washington State Parks and overviewed that Crow Butte does not charge for boat launch, moorage, reservation changes, docking electricity or reservation fees, as state parks do. Additionally, the current system only captures an estimated 50-60% of day use traffic.

Branine reviewed proposed changes including:

- Raise full hookup and tent site to \$45-\$50 to align with the state market
- Implement \$8-\$10 online/phone reservation fee and an \$8 change/cancellation fee
- Reinstitute entrance gate/kiosk system to ensure full revenue capture
- Deploy ice and water vending machines (ROI in 18 months, \$15,000 per machine)
- Begin charging for boat launches and dock power

The Commission was supportive and direction was given to proceed with fee increases and infrastructure improvements as soon as practical, with a formal proposal at the next meeting, if needed.

Discussion ensued on the park's regional impact and the Port's presence is important for the Port's agricultural engagement in southern Benton County.

H. COMMISSIONER REPORTS/COMMENTS

Commissioner Lori Stevens announced that the annual Scottish Fest festival is coming up this weekend. Prosser Wine Network is also hosting a World Music Festival at Vintners Village and the Clore Center.

Commissioner Lori Stevens proposed pausing the final stages of the strategic planning update until after the November election.

Discussion ensued on whether to suspend the strategic plan update in light of the election.

Executive director Diahann Howard stated that the process is 80% complete.

A discussion on adding a public workshop and involving stakeholders was suggested for an additional \$4,000 - \$5,000, which was supported by the Commission.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Scott Keller, and opposed by Commissioner Roy Keck to suspend the strategic plan update until January or February 2026. Motion carried.

Commissioner Scott D. Keller complimented the recent USS Triton commemorative event,

noting that retired Commissioner Bob Larson deserves recognition for his role and impact in the history of bringing the Triton to the Port of Benton.

1. Workshop Discussion

Commissioner Keller announced that he would like to call a workshop on the Richland Airport utility connection issue.

Commissioner Keller announced that he would like to move to instruct the executive director to set a public workshop meeting to address approximately 30 years of history relating to:

- Utility infrastructure upgrades to Richland Airport
- Who paid for the infrastructure upgrades? Tenant and/or POB
- What agreements were made between POB and tenants regarding water usage and billing?
- What actions were taken to correct any perceived water meter issues during the meter relocation in or around 2013?
- Schedule the workshop meeting for the week of July 7-11
- Invitees:
 - Herb Brayton
 - Bing Matawato
 - Jim Leedy
 - John Haakenson
 - Ryan Hone
 - Roger Wright

Commissioner Keller read an email that he had from 2017. (Addendum A)

Commissioner Roy D. Keck suggested expanding the workshop to discuss compliance issues, as well as utility billing. Commissioner Keck questioned Commissioner Keller on his utility bills for his hangar.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott D. Keller, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving an airport workshop to discuss utility connections at Richland Airport.

I. DIRECTOR REPORTS/COMMENTS

1. FINANCE DIRECTOR

Director of Finance Jeff Lubeck provided a financial status report, including an HR policy update, financial review and 2023 SAO audit update.

Lubeck stated that he is working on updates to the HR handbook to ensure it is in alignment with current regulations. Draft comments have been received from the HR consultant and will bring to Commission when ready.

Lubeck provided a financial status report of current cash activity, including cash receipts and disbursements.

A review of accounts receivable was provided.

Lubeck overviewed 2023 draft State Auditors Office recommendations:

- Finalizing revisions to draft financial statements

- Clean audit – no adjustments
- Received draft “management recommendations” last week
- Recommendations included:
 - Strengthen its internal controls over capital asset reporting to evaluate and reassess the accuracy of the useful lives of its assets periodically, as required by GASB
 - Evaluate its method for implementing SBITAs and reporting amounts on its financial statements
 - Dedicate sufficient resources to preparing and reviewing accurate financial statements.
 - The Port should strengthen its review process to ensure lease calculations, expense classifications and the prepared financial statements are accurate and complete
- Fixed Assets
 - Port had 221 fully depreciated assets totaling \$2.8 million that are no longer in use
 - These have now been removed from the asset listing
 - \$0 impact to financial statements since these are fully depreciated
 - Asset list has not been reviewed/scrubbed for many years

Lubeck reviewed additional details on fixed assets, SBITA implementation, and sufficient resources related to GASB requirements and administration, including lease entry, billing, and modifications.

Lubeck stated that new internal processes and documentation has been developed, including the implementation of a year-end closing calendar, year-end assignments, year-end closing checklists.

2. PORT ATTORNEY

Contract Port attorney John O’Leary stated that he had an item related to legal course of action and real estate to discuss during executive session.

3. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Executive Director Diahann Howard reviewed recent and future speaking opportunities, including I-90 Manufacturing Conference, WSU Wine Science Center anniversary, CARB Board, Elevate Networking group.

Howard stated that the Tri-Cities Research District recently held its quarterly meeting. Howard noted that she met with the City of Prosser and Prosser representatives to review the Spring Barrel wrap-up, noting that the conversation has spurred the necessity to create an owners’ association or covenants.

Howard stated that she is now representing the Washington Public Ports Association as chair of the Legislative Committee.

Howard requested the August Commission meeting change from August 13 to August 6 to allow for her to attend a workshop with the state Governor’s office.

Howard updated on the rail car charge documents currently with Class I attorneys, noting that the Port remains committed to bringing this forward to the Commission at an upcoming meeting.

Howard overviewed several real estate leads and activities, including lease and land prospects and the closing of the Sigma land.

Howard noted that she had two items related to real estate to discuss in executive session.

J. FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

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

K. EXECUTIVE SESSION: The regular meeting was recessed at 10:02 a.m. with an announcement that an Executive Session would commence at 10:02 a.m. for 10 minutes to discuss two real estate items. It was noted that the regular meeting would be reconvened at 10:12 a.m.

The regular meeting was reconvened at 10:11 a.m.

L. ADJOURNMENT: No action required. The meeting was adjourned at 10:12 a.m. with an announcement that the next regular Port of Benton Commission meeting would be held at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, July 9, 2025, at the Port of Benton Commission meeting room, 3250 Port of Benton Boulevard, Richland, Washington.



Roy D. Keck, Commission Secretary