

**PORT OF BENTON
COMMISSION WORKSHOP MINUTES
July 8, 2025**

A. CALL TO ORDER: The Commission Workshop was called to order at 9:30 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,
Commissioner Roy D. Keck

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

ALSO PRESENT: John O’Leary, Gravis Law; Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation; Herb Brayton; Mark Underwood; Scott Urban; Dennis Collins; Gareth Nisbett; Helen den Hoed; Jane Hagarty; Teresa Hancock; Christy Rasmussen; Jon Ray

The following attended via remote communications:

Sheri Collins, Cassie Hammond, Ashley Garza, Angela Saraceno-Lyman, Joe Pisca, Bryan Bell, Julia Mora, Jeff (No last name given)

The Commission Workshop was noticed as required by RCW 42.30.070.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: John O’Leary led those present to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. WORKSHOP

1. Richland Airport Infrastructure Timeline and Discussion

Legal counsel John O’Leary reviewed the meeting structure and protocol, noting that the workshop format is designed for information gathering, and no decisions are to be made. Information from this session will inform Commission decisions later.

The Commission had outlined specific areas they wanted addressed:

- **History and documentation** of utility (water/sewer/electric) infrastructure, particularly any upgrades made since 1995.
- **Who paid for various upgrades:** distinctions between expenses covered by the Port or by tenants.
- **Agreements** between the Port and tenants for water usage and billing.
- **Billing statements**, commission meeting minutes, emails related to water meters (especially 1995–2001).

- **Drawings** related to water and sewer lines.
- **Utility locating findings** (including results from a ground-penetrating radar survey).
- **Legal/Procedural Clarifications:** Workshop procedures, documentation/evidence status, applicable regulations, transparency, fair participation.

Commission expressed the following concerns:

- Status and security of utilities serving tenants.
- Need for clarity on financial responsibility—ensuring taxpayers are not subsidizing airport tenants’ utility costs.
- Request for transparency, documentation, and adherence to law and due process.

Port of Benton executive director Diahann Howard presented a historical review and timeline, and a summary timeline of airport water and sewer infrastructure along with port investment.

Howard clarified that in 2022, an aircraft accident took place at Richland Airport, triggering a fire department review and subsequent request for training of the hydrants and requested inspection.

1993 – Port designed and built water mains and fire hydrants north of Butler Loop - \$53,765 (Port-funded)

1999 – (AIP 08) Utility upgrades for future hangars; pro-rata share paid by at least three tenants. No full project records found, but evidence from as-builts.

2012 – (AIP 24) Major airport project with utility relocations, including water meter relocation. FAA/WSDOT funded \$965,000, Port funded \$136,167.

2013 – Additional service lines and meter installation, Port paid \$25,904 for design, \$72,000 for construction. Utilities extended only to leased boundaries; tenants were responsible for further connections.

2025 – Ground penetrating radar used to map unrecorded utilities, identify discrepancies and undocumented hookups, particularly in the north end of Richland Airport.

Howard noted the Port typically funds mainline to encourage development, with hangar owners responsible for connections within the lease boundary. Several shell hangars were submitted without utilities, and later, many had undocumented or improperly permitted connections.

Several clusters identified:

Area 1 (West) – Proper main/private connections, fully permitted.

Area 2 – Port paid for and permitted mainlines, but a subsequent undocumented private system was built with only one Port-paid meter serving multiple hangars, public restroom, and office facilities – contrary to the current city code.

Area 3-4 – Some buildings permitted, others setting up shared, unmetered, or undocumented connections.

Area 5 – Port denied extension funding in 2012, later developer-built hangars without permitted hookup, currently being addressed with the City.

Area 6 – Utilities still under investigation as of July 8, 2025. Inspections are scheduled for July 10, 2025.

Several public comments noted that for decades, many connections were handled by handshake/verbal agreements with Port managers, with tenants not often billed directly for utilities (beyond initial pro-rata investments).

The port has paid an average of \$93 to \$104 per month for the meter in question.

Diahann Howard read a statement provided by Ryan Hone.

Diahann Howard read a statement provided by Roger Wright.

Individual hangar owner, Herb Brayton, initially invested \$21,000 and a pro-rata share, and has never paid utilities per verbal agreement with Port management.

Brayton stated that he has been an airport tenant since 1973, noting that he agreed to fund the public restroom at the time as the Port was tight on resources, with an agreement that the Port would cover the utility cost. It was noted that the restroom has been seen as essential public infrastructure, not merely a tenant benefit.

Brayton added that Scott Siefken, from the City of Richland, walked the utilities around 2010 and did not provide any comments.

Scott Urban, an airport user, provided a statement, noting that the communication from the port has been poor, with no transparency, related to this issue. Urban stated that the workshop should have been held five weeks ago. Urban stated that his trust level in the Port of Benton is pretty low currently and the port should have involved the people who own or operate hangars. Urban stated that he witnessed the ground penetrating radar and was not notified beforehand that this testing was taking place.

Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation, provided a statement, asking why we are here in this setting, noting that this issue provided the port with an opportunity to show leadership.

Dyer echoed what Scott Urban stated and added that this situation provided the port with the opportunity to display leadership and the ability to discover things without having newspaper articles written, which puts the airport in a bad light to the community. Dyer added that he has worked very hard for many years to make sure the airport is always in the best light.

Dyer stated that he has no problem with city code, adding that Sundance Aviation's building is not metered individually and the port pays, which has been a verbal agreement. Dyer added that the airport standards are a certain way and those standards should not be changed to fit a new

standard for 2025, when it would cause a taxiway to be torn up and new infrastructure.

Dyer explained that the port admitted to not having budget to add infrastructure years ago when Herb Brayton stepped up to build the restroom. Dyer stated that Brayton was aware that once he put the pipe in the ground and covered it with dirt, the port would own the pipe even though it was financed by Brayton. Dyer stated that is how it works and there is not a long line of people lined up ready to invest in the airport. At the time, the deal was made that Brayton would take on the investment and the port would pay the bill. Dyer added that the infrastructure needed to be built in order for the people to come.

Dyer stated that you don't nickel and dime people to death and he will walk away from doing business in that scenario.

Discussion ensued between Commissioner Roy Keck and Clif Dyer related to compliance and return on investment.

Gareth Nisbet provided a statement, noting that he is not an airport user, but commented that this meeting was a waste of time and resources.

Nisbet asked what the cost of this workshop was costing taxpayers and the return on investment on this meeting over a \$100 a month bill. Nisbet stated that the appearance of this workshop to the taxpayers is over nothing and is a waste of time and resources.

Jon Ray, an airport user, provided a statement addressed to Commissioner Keck, noting that an airport serves as an economic engine, offering numerous benefits to the community and the general aviation community.

Ray noted that the FAA spends a lot of money on airports around the country because airports are valuable infrastructure and an economic engine. Ray stated that the FAA values the infrastructure and economic engine that airports across the country bring. Ray provided examples such as the Young Eagles program, which is a great program, but would not exist locally without FAA support.

Ray added the airport also houses a lifeline in the time of need and aiding natural disasters, the Richland Airport currently is housing fire planes.

Commissioner Roy Keck stated that he appreciates the airport for those services, but the FAA funds 95% of all capital improvements, with the port covering the remaining 5% and the airport is upside down and the port needs to push leases so they are in accordance with FAA. Keck clarified that there is a \$300,000 liability to taxpayers every year.

Jane Hagarty, retired Port of Benton Commissioner of 25 years, provided a statement, noting that the restroom was a good investment, but the scope of the original utility agreement may have carried further than intended.

Hagarty recommended increasing transparency and ensuring all future agreements are documented to avoid repeating past ambiguities.

Hagarty stated that the port has a mess in front of them currently and encouraged all to think deeply about what's going on because what she witnessed today is not the Port of Benton.

Hagarty stated that when she served as Commissioner, they were very transparent, but looking at things now, perhaps they were not as transparent as they could have been from the Commission standpoint as far as some of the guidelines for the people who worked with the port and what was allowed. Hagarty stated that it was not their place to micromanage, but it is important to know what agreements are out there, verbal or not, so everyone is aware of what is going on.

Hagarty stated that there should never be a meeting like this again.

Hagarty stated that she was not involved in the Richland Airport bathrooms, but would have voted for it because it was a fabulous investment. Hagarty added that the agreement got out of hand, as it was created for a purpose, but was carried on longer than the purpose was expected, which is the issue that should be addressed.

Commissioner Scott Keller stated that he got a hold of Carlo's assistant, with the City of Richland's assistance and offered for them to come out and look at things at his hangar. Keller noted that he reached out a few weeks to a month ago and has not heard back. Keller added that he would be working with Port staff to take care of the issue.

Commissioner Lori Stevens stated that she looks forward to having continued conversations and develop clear policies and guidelines for the staff to prevent issues like this in the future.

Commissioner Roy Keck stated that he believes there are compliance issues at the Richland Airport and feels a doors up inspection would be the best way to approach the issue.

Detailed information and statements in full can be found by viewing the meeting recording on portofbenton.com/commission.

D. **ADJOURNMENT:** With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:59 a.m.



Roy Keck
Commission Secretary