

PORT OF BENTON
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
September 10, 2025

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

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

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

ALSO PRESENT: John O’Leary, Gravis Law; Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation/Tym2Fly; Helen den Hoed; Mayor Gary Vegar, City of Prosser; Rachel Shaw, City of Prosser; Neal Ripplinger, Prosser Economic Development Association

The following attendees attended via remote communications: Angela Saraceno-Lyman, Bryan Bell, Julia Mora, Sheri Collins, Ashley Garza, Jeff (No last name given), Bryan Condon, Century West Engineers, Hans Wellenbrock, Christy Rasmussen, Brian Johnson, WUCG

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 September 10, 2025, Commission meeting, approval of minutes from July 8, 2025, Commission workshop, approval of minutes from the August 6, 2025, Commission meeting and approval of vouchers and certifications, including payroll, for the month of August totaling \$2,844,269.78.

D. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Clif Dyer, Tym2Fly, LLC commented that he was interrupted when commenting previously on Richland Airport utility hookups.

Dyer noted that past conversations centered on alleged illegal water and sewer hookups at Richland Airport and have also been used in recent campaign rhetoric and through violation notices issued to users.

Dyer provided examples of hangars identified as involved in the lack of hookups.

Dyer stated that nearly all hookups were permitted informally, but with no intentions to skirt regulations or avoid payment. Dyer stated that he, and other users have expressed a willingness to bring past hookups into current compliance and disputed the characterization of past events as “illegal”.

Dyer noted that airport users are upset about notices for connections or services, as some of the buildings do not have connections.

Dyer stated that many users view the matter as politically motivated and weaponized as a “campaign slogan” rather than a substantive issue.

Dyer added that there is a strong objection to the language used by Commissioner Keck, whom Dyer accused of reading a campaign-style speech that denounced users without proof. Dyer called for a public apology and potential censure of Commissioner Keck, citing bias against airport-related initiatives.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

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

Executive director Diahann Howard introduced Neal Ripplinger, executive director of Prosser Economic Development Association.

Ripplinger reviewed current projects and initiatives, including:

- Prosser Leadership
 - Eight participants in 2025
 - 2026 nominations open
 - Class project – lights on historic downtown poles
- Farmers’ Market
 - Youth vendor classes
 - 6-7 youth vendors
 - Funds paid for business license fees
- HAPO Reality Fair
 - Valuable financial literacy training for children
 - Budgeting, debt management, credit education
- Physician Tours
 - 825 total employees
 - 45-50 potential provider tours
 - Hospital already looking at a potential expansion opportunity
- Business Recruitment, Retention and Expansion
 - Continue to help new and existing businesses
 - New hotel permitted on Merlot Drive
 - Promotion of Cougar Tracks training
- National Night Out
- Yakima Valley Certified Tourism Ambassador
 - Certified ambassador
 - Annual renewal requirements

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

Executive director Diahann Howard introduced Prosser partners, Mayor Gary Vegar and city manager, Rachel Shaw.

Mayor Gary Vegar provided an update on recent projects and initiatives at the City of Prosser, including:

- Mission, Vision and Core Values Update
 - City is revisiting foundational statements
 - Community-wide survey launched; 68 responses received in the first week
- Parks and Recreation Board Revival
 - Board dissolved 10-15 years ago, is being reconstituted
 - Follows completion of a two-year, ten-year PROS plan (parks, recreation and open space)
 - Active community interest; 18 visitors attended a recent council meeting about parks
- Regional Park Project
 - Using the former Prosser spray field, north of the wastewater treatment, as a potential site for a regional park
 - Plans to short plat and sell parts north of freeway, develop play fields, multi-use areas and possibly a light industrial section
 - Seeking port participation in planning
- Housing Density Incentive Program
 - Reintroduced and showcased via new online resources/shorty maps
 - Initiated in the mid-2000s to address housing shortage
 - Outcomes: Total of 933 units/lots developed through the program, with seven current live projects
 - Provides public transparency and engagement through interactive data
- Infrastructure and Connectivity
 - Roundabout project approved at Old Inland Empire and Wine Country Road near airport, aims at traffic calming and supporting increased demand
 - Planning and funding in process
- City Facilities Updates
 - City hall and police station relocation. The new city hall will share the first floor of the Benton County Courthouse. Construction begins imminently, and move-in is likely delayed past mid-October due to supply issues.
 - New police station will be located at the old engineering building site (south side of courthouse). Feasibility study underway; purchase agreement with county nearly complete.
 - Funding through both existing capital and planned property sales
 - Consolidation of city/county services, freeing up downtown parcels for commercial/private development
- Community and Economic Strategies
 - Focus on expanding housing data accessibility to attract development
 - Partnership with Port for grants aimed at community connectivity (phases two and three discussed)
 - Recent park improvement at Crawford Park noted and praised for enhancing river visibility

3. Resolution 25-31, Extension of the Final Installment Date Under the Real Estate Contract with Jeromie O. Mead, Richland Airport Business Park

Real Estate Manager Audrey Burney stated that this resolution would extend the final payment date from August 1, 2025, to August 1, 2039, to align with the amortization schedule. There is no prepayment penalty if the loan is paid early or the business is sold.

Burney stated that the contract and payment schedule have previously been out of sync, and this resolution would correct it.

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-31, authorizing an extension of the final installment date under the real estate contract with Jeromie O. Mead, Richland Airport Business Park.

4. Resolution 25-32, Long-Term Ground Lease with Women of Wisdom (WOW) of Tri-Cities, Richland Business Park

Real Estate Manager Audrey Burney explained that this resolution is for a six-year ground lease with four one-year options for four parking spaces at 2345 Stevens Drive, in the Richland Business Park.

Burney stated that the tenant would be responsible for the installation, utility and equipment costs of two dual-port level three charges, 240kW.

An exploration of additional EV infrastructure in District 3 was recommended.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-32, authorizing a ground lease with Women of Wisdom (WOW) of Tri-Cities, Richland Business Park.

5. Resolution 25-34, Authorizing Second Amendment to the Development Plan for DFP, LLC, Richland Business Park

Real Estate Manager Audrey Burney explained that the approval of this resolution extends the submission deadline to December 31, 2025, and revises reimbursement for utility costs.

Burney added that it also waives the pre-notification requirement for cost overruns due to validated necessity and public benefit. Burney added that infrastructure improvements open new lot for large scale development, up to 100,000 sq ft.

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-34, authorizing a second amendment to the development plan for DFP, LLC, Richland Business Park.

6. Resolution 25-35, Authorizing Port of Benton Match for WSDOT Grant for Apron Reconfiguration Design Project, Richland Airport

Airport Manager Quentin Wright explained that Resolution 25-35 seeks approval for a 2.5% port match, in conjunction with WSDOT, at 2.5%. FAA will fund 95% of the project.

Wright added that he has had conversations with several users about the project.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-35, authorizing a Port of Benton match for a WSDOT grant for an apron reconfiguration design project, Richland Airport.

7. Resolution 25-36, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Establishing a Capital Asset Policy

Director of Finance Jeff Lubeck explained that the proposed Capital Asset Policy is a new policy that identifies any asset with a greater value than \$10,000 with a lifespan greater than one year will be capitalized and a mandatory mid-life review will be implemented. Lubeck added that this has previously been managed by procedure, but will now be formally in place through policy.

Lubeck added that this policy is in alignment with SAO, GFOA and MRSC best practices.

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-36, a resolution of the Port of Benton establishing a Capital Asset Policy.

8. Resolution 25-37, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Establishing a GASB 96 Subscription-Based Information Technology Policy Agreement (SBITA) Policy

Director of Finance Jeff Lubeck explained that Resolution 25-37 is a newly required accounting policy for present value calculations of qualifying information technology agreements with terms greater than one year.

Lubeck added that the policy clarifies handling of exceptions, recognizes current complexities, particularly for software like the port's accounting system.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-37, a resolution of the Port of Benton establishing a GASB 96 subscription-based information technology policy agreement (SBITA) policy.

9. Resolution 25-38, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Establishing an Apprenticeship Utilization Policy

Director of Finance Jeff Lubeck explained that the Apprenticeship Utilization Policy provides an incentive if requirements are met and a penalty if requirements are not met, with the goal of incentivizing the utilization of apprentices on projects of a certain type and dollar value in accordance with new State of Washington requirements. Lubeck added that this is a state requirement and is on a procurement-by-procurement basis.

Lubeck stated that the RCW does not address a set penalty and incentive, but the port is considering \$500. This will also be determined a project-by-project basis

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving resolution 25-38, a resolution of the Port of Benton establishing an apprenticeship utilization policy.

10. Resolution 25-39, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Authorizing a Contract with Maul Foster Alongi for Shoreline Waterfront Drive Planning and Engineering Services, \$111,375.00, Technology & Business Campus

Engineering & Development Manager Brandin Lopez explained that Resolution 25-39 presents a phase 1 approach that includes cultural studies and Stakeholder input.

1. Lopez, along with contract port attorney John O’Leary, clarified that the prior Resolution 25-28, which was tabled at the last commission meeting, is replaced by Resolution 25-39. Lopez explained that the new resolution includes a summary of existing conditions, a feasibility study for a boat dock, and stakeholder engagement efforts, with a total project cost of \$111,375.00, with an additional \$15,000 in contingency funding to address scope gaps and maintain the project schedule

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 25-39, a resolution of the Port of Benton authorizing a contract with Maul Foster Alongi for shoreline waterfront drive planning and engineering services, for \$111,375.000, Technology & Business Campus

11. Acceptance of Work, Impervious Roof Coating, LLC, 2579 Stevens Drive Roof Coating Project, Richland Business Park

Director of Facilities & Operations Ron Branine stated that this project saved 53% and is guaranteed for 15 years. The project total, including sales tax, was \$72,921.24.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission, accepting work completed by Impervious Roof Coating, LLC, 2579 Stevens Drive Roof Coating Project, Richland Business Park, total \$72,921.24.

12. Acceptance of Work, MP Construction, Inc., 1845 Terminal Drive Window Replacement Project, Richland Airport

Airport Manager Quentin Wright stated the work has been completed at 1845 Terminal Drive at Richland Airport and all windows have been replaced. The total project cost was \$55,113.07.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously passed by the Commission, accepting work completed by MP Construction, Inc. for the 1845 Terminal Drive window replacement project, Richland Airport, total \$55,113.07.

13. Contract with Western United Civil Group, \$1,695,720.65 for Prosser Airport Pavement and Electrical Replacement Project

Airport Manager Quentin Wright stated that two bids were received, not including one bid that was unresponsive (late), which was rejected. Wright stated that the lowest bid received was from Western United Civil Group for \$1,695,720.65 for the Prosser Airport Pavement and Electrical Replacement Project.

Wright added that there would be a public meeting held prior to the project to communicate about schedule and project plans.

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving a contract with Western United Civil Group for \$1,695,720.65 for the Prosser Airport Pavement and Electrical Replacement project.

E. INFORMATION REPORTS

1. Grants Update

Executive director Diahann Howard reviewed the grants report.

Item 3 – Congressional Directed Spending Requests – Port of Benton White Bluffs Rail Project Modernization and Intermodal Facility – New request submitted to all congressional offices for 2026. Senator Cantwell has advanced \$2,500,000.

Item 1 – \$9.56M BUILD, formerly RAISE – White Bluffs Southern Connection Rail, including ties and rail throughout the system – Will allow for heavier rail to level set the system for another 30 years. A rail open house is scheduled for Monday, October 20 at 4:30 to discuss rail projects.

Howard added that the car charge is set to collect starting October 1.

2. Capital Projects Update

Director of Facilities & Operations Ron Branine provided updates on the following projects:

3110 Landscaping – Nearing completion

3250 HVAC – Mandated by the state to meet all current energy requirements. One system for entire building. Less than \$125,000.

Pavilion – Door replacement. Add storefront door. Review the concrete on the west end.

3110 – \$45,000 monument sign to match the existing sign at 3250.

Equipment – Schulte 16-foot batwing mower purchased. Cut time in half and make the department more efficient.

Executive Director Diahann Howard stated that there is a coordinated tour with FMSIB next week. The Northwest Seaport Alliance wants to help market all the regions rail assets including Ports of Walla Walla and Pasco. The Port is working with the City to create an interlocal agreement for the City's 1.5 miles of spur line.

Brandin Lopez stated that he will keep the Commission apprised on 2579 Stevens Drive updates. Lopez added that he is working closely with the Navy on the upcoming package shipments and the Navy is excited about the future upgrades. Lopez added that he is working on the closeout of the State Route 240 project, noting at least 8 months of paperwork. Lopez added that there is a potential that the Steptoe crossing project will take place in 2025, but likely in 2026 to help reduce traffic detours

F. COMMISSIONER REPORTS/COMMENTS

Commissioner Roy Keck stated that the recent issues at Richland Airport have been distracting from the real work, which is facilitating jobs. Keck stated that there are legacy issues with rail and airports that tie back to the leadership at Richland Airport.

Keck stated that he had recently called for a "doors-up" inspection at Richland Airport.

Keck stated that he continues his extensive review of port leases and he is prepared to submit a complaint as a taxpayer. Keck stated that the bottom line is that the issues need to be resolved and the airports need to comply with the FAA.

Keck added that many unapproved and/or unpermitted modifications need to comply with current codes.

Keck stated that the bathroom in Commissioner Keller's hangar is not to code.

Keck added that he has reviewed his neighbor's lease rates, including the neighboring golf course, which is currently 55 acres and pays \$5,000 a year. The lease states an increase and a percentage of green fees.

Keck stated that he has written seven pages of a complaint, which will be submitted to the record.*

Commissioner Keller asked for all to look at the economic development these properties have brought in over the years.

Commissioner Keck stated that he would examine the laws, not the side deals with friends and family.

Commissioner Lori Stevens stated that the port has recently been spending time on some issues, but now is the time to move forward.

Commissioner Stevens read a prepared statement for the record.**

Commissioner Scott Keller read a prepared statement for the record.***

**Included as Exhibit A*

***Included as Exhibit B*

****Included as Exhibit C*

DIRECTOR REPORTS/COMMENTS

1. Finance Director

Director of Finance Jeff Lubeck provided a financial status report.

Lubeck reviewed the capital asset policy:

- Establish a capitalization threshold of \$10,000 and one-year or longer
- Defines what is capitalizable
- Established estimated useful life for depreciation
- Establishes straight-line methodology for calculating depreciation expense

Lubeck reviewed the GASB 96 – SBITA policy:

- GASB 86 requires a present value calculation of future cash flows for qualifying Subscription-Based Information Technology Agreements (SBITA)
- Establishes capitalization threshold
- Defines what is included/excluded
- Defines what costs are capitalized & what is expensed

- Establishes discount rate for present value
- Establishes process for recording asset & liability & subsequent expenses

Lubeck reviewed the Apprenticeship Utilization Plan Policy:

- New WA RCW (39.04.300) requires apprenticeship targets for public works contracts. The RCW establishes target percentages and requires incentives or penalties
- Required for public works contracts
- \$2.0M for 2025, \$1.5M for 2026, and \$1.0M for 2027
- Establishes reporting requirements
- Establishes compliance and monitoring practices

Lubeck reviewed the financial status report, noting that the bank statements have not yet been received from the Benton County Treasurer. Lubeck added that several large grant reimbursements were received in July 2025, and that continued volatility is expected due to the timing of large grant projects, grant expenditures, and grant reimbursements.

Lubeck reviewed recent cash activity, including payables and receivables, and stated that the 2024 audit was underway.

Lubeck provided an update on operating revenues, noting that they are consistent with the budget.

Lubeck provided an update on operating expenses, noting that actual OpEx is lower than budget by \$488,000.

Lubeck pointed out that all port departments are under budget.

Lubeck provided an update on the 2026 budget process and schedule.

2. Port Attorney

Contract Port attorney John O’Leary stated that he had no updates for the regular meeting, but would like to take some time during the executive session with the commissioners.

3. Executive Director

Executive director Diahann Howard reviewed recent highlights, including a successful appreciation BBQ and an interview with the Journal of Business regarding current Port projects.

Howard noted that several tours are upcoming, including one organized by Rep. Stephanie Barnard and another with the Northwest Seaport Alliance.

Howard added that a letter of support has been submitted to PNWA regarding the Defending Dams Act.

Howard stated that the port and city are completing the land exchange and the only two areas left in the Richland Innovation Center are the Salk shop and park.

Howard noted that Ben Franklin Transit has expressed interest in a stop at the Technology & Business Campus.

Howard stated that Vintners Village buyer, Francisco Gamez has lost his partners, but secured a second loan for the development of two parcels in Vintners Village. Howard noted that Gamez plans to submit plans to the City of Prosser in early 2026.

Howard noted that the Prosser orchard tenant has expressed the desire to end their lease.

Howard stated that the port will host the FMSIB board and she will also be attending the upcoming EPRI conference at PNNL’s Discovery Hall.

Howard added that she will be attending the National Governors' Conference on Advanced Manufacturing in late September.

Howard noted that the Port is hosting a public tour on October 1 and a rail open house on October 20. Howard added that a VERTICAL Convening will be held on October 15.

Howard added that there are items related to real estate and personnel for the executive session.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

Executive director Diahann Howard inquired if there were any comments for the Good of the Order.

Commissioner Keller noted the PNWA annual meeting conflicted with the October Commission meeting and asked if there was a desire to change the date, but no such desire was expressed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The regular Commission meeting was recessed at 10:28 a.m. It was announced that an Executive Session would commence at 10:29 a.m. for 45 minutes to discuss real estate and personnel. It was noted that the regular meeting would be reconvened at 11:13 a.m.

With no action needed or taken, the regular Commission meeting was reconvened at 11:06 a.m.

G. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:06 a.m. with an announcement that the next regular Port of Benton Commission meeting would be held at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, October 15, 2025, at the Port of Benton Commission meeting room, located at 3250 Port of Benton Blvd., Richland, Washington.

A special budget workshop would take place on Monday, October 13, 2025, at 8:30 a.m. in the Port of Benton Commission meeting room, located at 3250 Port of Benton Blvd., Richland, Washington.



Roy D. Keck, Commission Secretary