

**PORT OF BENTON
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
October 15, 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 Roy D. Keck, Commissioner Lori Stevens (attended virtually)

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

ALSO PRESENT: John O'Leary, Gravis Law; Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation/Tym2Fly; Mayor Brent Gerry, City of West Richland; David Reeploeg, Hanford Communities/TRIDEC; Seth Kirshenberg, Energy Communities Alliance; Bryan Condon, Century West Engineering; Council Member Shayne Van Dyke, City of Richland; Adam Fyall, Benton County; Gareth Nisbet; Karl Dye, TRIDEC

The following attendees attended via remote communications: Bryan Bell, Sheri Collins, Cassie Hammond, Ashley Garza, Jeff (No last name given), Christy Rasmussen, Wendy Culverwell, Tri-City Herald; Rachel Visick, Tri-Cities Area Journal of Business

The Commission meeting was noticed as required by RCW 42.30.070.

- B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Mayor Brent Gerry 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 October 15, 2025, Commission meeting, approval of minutes from September 10, 2025, Commission meeting, approval of vouchers and certifications, including payroll, for the month of September totaling \$1,010,618.72 and approval of Resolution 25-40, to cancel warrant numbers 085030 through 085050, which were issued in error due to printer issues.

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation, Tym2Fly, LLC read a prepared statement. *

*Attachment A

E. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Resolution 25-41, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Approving the Second Amendment of the Purchase and Sale Agreement Between Pacific Green Fertilizer (Atlas Agro) and the Port of Benton

Executive director Diahann Howard commented that the original sale agreement took place in March 2023, and the first amendment took place on February 15, 2024. Howard stated that the current request requests an extension due to delays caused by regulatory, tariffs, utility equipment, and the continued wait on Bonneville Power Administration (BPA).

Howard added that Atlas Agro has invested \$25 million to date in the project.

Howard noted that if the sale fails, the port will retain the environmental and engineering documents.

Detailed discussion ensued relating to Atlas Agro's power requirements, which is currently not supported by BPA allocations.

Discussion also included transmission line issues, which is causing the bottleneck. BPA's project is behind, with a new anticipated completion of 2028.

It was stated that there has been engagement from the local farm community, as local farmers are investors, as they value the project for both product quality and a fixed-price contract option for fertilizer.

It was stated that the project is viewed by many from an economic development standpoint as providing infrastructure to multiple large-scale users, such as data centers.

Commissioner Scott Keller raised concerns about the lack of updates from Atlas Agro, site viability, and the reality of the timeline.

Commissioner Lori Stevens raised concerns on the project delays.

Commissioner Lori Stevens requested to abstain from voting on this resolution.

Commissioner Scott Keller seconded Commissioner Stevens request to abstain.

Commissioner Lori Stevens moved to amend and approve Resolution 25-41 to grant a six-month extension only, with a requirement that Atlas Agro provide a mid-term progress report and presentation to the Commission.

Commissioner Scott Keller seconded the motion, and the Commission unanimously passed amended Resolution 25-41, approving the amended second amendment of the purchase and sale agreement between Pacific Green Fertilizer (Atlas Agro) and the Port of Benton.

2. Welcome and Update from Karl Dye, TRIDEC

The TRIDEC executive director, Karl Dye, provided an update on recent TRIDEC initiatives and projects, including an update on recruiting projects, the Shrub Steppe Habitat WFWD, Energy Forward Alliance, and future land transfer opportunity.

3. Welcome and Update from Seth Kirshenber, Energy Communities Alliance

The Energy Communities Alliance executive director, Seth Kirshenber, provided an update on Energy Communities Alliance.

Kirshenber highlighted the recognition of the community's strengths, including its workforce, deep nuclear expertise, site readiness, and intergovernmental/agency cooperation.

Kirshenber stated that Tri-Cities is regularly referenced as a model for siting advanced reactors and associated manufacturing due to the unique mix of infrastructure and talent.

Kirshenber noted that companies are increasingly drawn to Port of Benton's transportation and supply infrastructure.

Kirshenber noted that state-level advocacy is important in order to remain competitive against other regions vying for the same projects.

Kirshenber encouraged proactive engagement with DOE, state and congressional reps for support on siting, regulatory and infrastructure needs. Kirshenber recommended a port delegation visit to Idaho National Lab for advanced SMR/AI-data center best practices and encouraged the Port to leverage ECA as liaison to developers/DOE for support and exposure.

4. Overview of 2026 Port of Benton Proposed Budget Before Being Placed on File for Public Review

Director of Finance Jeff Lubeck reviewed the proposed 2026 budget to the Commission, noting that the 2026 budget is balanced, with lease revenues slightly down due to loss of aggregate mining royalties and property sales, which are offset with increases elsewhere.

Lubeck noted that property tax levy rate is decreasing again.

Lubeck reviewed the major capital projects proposed for 2026, including projects at Prosser and Richland Airport, barge electrification, the 2579 Stevens Drive building and rail. The completion of the strategic plan, waterfront development plan and asset maintenance and management plan is also included.

Lubeck reviewed the breakdown of the port's 177 leases, with 55% representing small businesses, 27% hangars, and 10% large businesses.

Lubeck reviewed the debt service ratio for the Port of Benton, noting that the ratio is used by SAO during annual audits and should be less than 12%. Lubeck noted that this ratio compares annual principal plus interest payments to operating revenues and indicates the capacity to repay debt from ongoing operations. Lubeck noted that bond counsel indicates that the port has an additional \$11 million+ of debt capacity, which is more than double current levels.

Lubeck reviewed OpEx change by department from 2025 – 2026, noting an increase in airports due to repairs and maintenance moved from CapEx to OpEx. Lubeck pointed out that G&A has increased primarily due to reallocation of insurance premiums and marketing activity.

Lubeck reviewed the capital project distribution.

Lubeck stated that the detailed budget shows a commitment to fiscal responsibility, transparency, a focus on economic development and growth and an execution on operational objectives.

Lubeck reviewed the budget timeline, noting that if approved, the budget will be released for public comment and available in the Port office and on the website. The tax assessment is due to the Benton County Treasurer by November 30, 2025.

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving the 2026 proposed budget for placement on file for public review.

5. Overview of 2026 Comprehensive Plan of Harbor Improvements Before Being Placed on File for Public Review

Executive Director Diahann Howard stated that the comp plan is required per RCW.

Howard noted that the plan includes asset-by-asset, land use and project recommendations.

Howard stated that the updated comp plan reflects the industrial land exchange with the City of Richland and intermodal and waterfront plans.

Howard noted that \$18.3 million in projects is expected in 2026, which are noted in the comp plan. (73% are grant or loan funded.)

Howard stated that the plan will be updated to reflect recent sales/removals when applicable and a public hearing will be scheduled, as required by RCW 53.20.010.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck, and unanimously approved by the Commission, approving the 2026 comprehensive plan for placement on file for public review.

6. Contract with Century West Engineering, \$190,590.00, for Prosser Airport Pavement and Electrical Replacement Project

Airport manager Quentin Wright stated that the Port received a grant from the FAA, but a task order for inspection services for Century West is over \$50,000, it is being brought forward to the Commission.

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving the contract with Century West Engineering, \$190,590.00, for Prosser Airport Pavement and Electrical Replacement Project.

F. INFORMATION REPORTS

1. Grants Update

Executive director Diahann Howard reviewed the grants report.

Item 3 – Congressional Directed Spending Request – Possibly swept away. Possibly activity before year end. Funding would be used to improve rail.

Item 1 – Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development (BUILD). Grant contracting to take until April 2026. With the shutdown, the Department of Transportation is on hold.

Airports – Quentin Wright stated that the port completed the potential bid protest and have moved forward with a pre-construction meeting.

2. Capital Projects Update – Airports Update

Director of Facilities & Operations Ron Branine provided updates on current capital projects, including the energy efficiency upgrade focus, with LED over HVAC this cycle for Clean Building Act compliances, with the Port to receive substantial incentives.

Branine noted that the replacement door project at the Clore pavilion is underway and is under budget.

Executive Director Diahann Howard stated that the Navy shipment has been delayed, possibly causing three shipments in 2026.

Howard stated that the kickoff meeting with Maul Foster Alongi has begun, which will involve coordination with tribal governments and cultural resources, and the State Route 240 project is in closeout. Howard noted that the Steptoe crossing project will likely take place in early 2026.

Airport Manager Quentin Wright provided an update on airport projects.

Richland Airport Apron Reconfiguration Project:

Objective – Better serve larger aircraft, attract more corporate traffic, preserve current hangars.

Action – Met with users and stakeholders, which aided in plan development.

Plan – Four large aircraft spaces (49-79 ft. wingspan), additional small aircraft tie-downs, increased pavement thickness to prevent subsidence.

Funding – FAA to fund 95%, WSDOT to fund 5%.

Bidding – Spring 2026, with construction summer 2026.

G. COMMISSIONER REPORTS/COMMENTS

Commissioner Scott Keller complimented the 2026 budget and comprehensive plan that were presented.

Commissioner Lori Stevens announced that the Prosser Chamber of Commerce is close to announcing the hiring of a new executive director. Commissioner Stevens highlighted the upcoming event the Prosser Chamber will hosting next month at the Clore.

Commissioner Roy Keck complimented the staff and presentations, noting the presentations emphasize the Port's core mission, the creation of jobs, rather than focusing on distractions by nonproductive disputes.

H. DIRECTOR REPORTS/COMMENTS

1. Finance Director

Director of Finance Jeff Lubeck provided a financial status report.

Lubeck stated that the State Route 240 grant reimbursement of \$750,000 was received in October, property tax revenue deposits will come in October. Lubeck noted to expect continued volatility due to timing of large projects, grant expenditures and grant reimbursements.

Lubeck reviewed the September cash receipts and disbursements. Lubeck noted that receivables are settling at approximately \$25k > 90 days, <1% of the total.

Lubeck stated that operating revenues/expenses are within budget, slightly under-expenditure generally due to open staffing positions and timing.

Lubeck reviewed the departmental budgets, noting all are under budget, except the Richland Airport, which is \$35k over due to building repairs and maintenance at the airport.

Lubeck stated that the State Auditors Office 2024 audit requests are slowing and no significant issues.

2. Port Attorney

Contract Port attorney John O'Leary stated that he had no updates.

3. Executive Director

Executive director Diahann Howard provided an update on recent meetings and events, including the Port's public tour hosted on October 1, which was well attended and received.

Howard stated that she attended the AAPA annual conference, as she is on the AAPA Foundation Board and was able to announce the AAPA student scholarship.

Howard noted that she attended the EPRI conference, with 170+ attendees, strong international interest in Tri-Cities as site for repatriated manufacturing.

Howard added that she attended the National Governors Association nuclear conference at the State Capitol, with a broad turnout.

Howard noted that she has participated in rail and interlocal planning with ongoing discussions with Ports of Pasco, Walla Walla and the Northwest Seaport Alliance for logistics hub approach.

Howard provided a real estate update, including new tenants, lease modifications, lease cancellations and rental prospects.

I. FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

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

There were no comments.

J. EXECUTIVE SESSION

It was announced that an Executive Session was not needed.

K. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:16 a.m. with an announcement that the next regular Port of Benton Commission meeting would be held at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, November 12, 2025, at the Port of Benton Commission meeting room, located at 3250 Port of Benton Blvd., Richland, Washington.



Roy D. Keck, Commission Secretary