

**PORT OF BENTON
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
December 10, 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 (virtually)

PORT STAFF PRESENT: Diahann Howard, Alicia Myers, Quentin Wright, Summers Miya, Ron Branine, Audrey Burney, Cassie Losey, Jeff Lubeck

ALSO PRESENT: John O’Leary, Gravis Law; Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation/Tym2Fly, Helen den Hoed, Jon Ray, Dennis Collins, Mark Underwood

The following attendees attended via remote communications: Bryan Bell, Sheri Collins, Jorge Celestino, Angela Saraceno-Lyman, Julia Mora, Joe Pisca, Jeff Losey, Wendy Culverwell – Tri-City Herald, Joshua Lott, Anderson Perry, Gareth Nisbett, Samantha Peterson – Century West Engineering, Stephen [last name missing], George [last name missing]

The Commission meeting was noticed as required by RCW 42.30.070.

- B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Commissioner Roy Keck led those present to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. CONSENT AGENDA

A motion was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission approving the agenda for the December 10, 2025, Commission meeting, approval of minutes from the November 12, 2025, approval of vouchers and certifications, including payroll, for the month of October totaling \$493,533.94, and resolution 25-51, to cancel warrant No. 083138, in the amount of \$3,340.16, issued to CWW-Columbia Rail, which has been deemed lost.

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

Richland Airport tenant Jon Ray provided an update on the 2026 Aviation Career Day, which is tentatively scheduled for May 30, 2026. Ray stated that NASA has made an unofficial commitment to attend. Boeing is expected to attend. Ray thanked the port staff and commissioners for their continued support.

Richland Airport tenant Clif Dyer noted the recent division of the port and urged the commissioners to work toward repairing trust and relationships. Dyer called for an end to personal attacks, especially by Mr. Keck, and urged reconciliation going forward.

E. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Resolution 25-52, Adopting an Amended Port of Benton Personnel Policy and Procedures Handbook.

Commissioner Scott Keller requested to table this item until January until the new commissioner is seated. Staff stated that there were no benefit changes, only compliance and clarification updates. Commissioners said they would table the adoption of this until January.

2. Architect, Engineering, and Professional Roster for 2026

Executive Director Diahann Howard explained that projects and responses are provided for the commission to review. The projects are set to begin in early 2026 to expedite a contract process.

A motion to approve the architect, engineering and professional roster for 2026 was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck and unanimously passed by the Commission.

3. 2026 Contracts (\$120,000 IC Corp. LLC, \$175,000 Gravis Law)

Executive Director Diahann Howard clarified that IC Corp., LLC is Ashley Garza, who has worked with the port for 20 years. Howard added that Gravis Law is the legal contract.

Commissioner Stevens recommended extending Gravis Law through January. Discussion ensued regarding the contracts.

A motion to approve the 2026 contracts for IC Corp, \$120,000, and Gravis Law, \$175,000, was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission.

4. Interlocal Agreement Between the Ports of Benton, Pasco, Walla Walla and the Northwest Seaport Alliance

Executive Director Diahann Howard explained that this interlocal agreement is a collaboration with the Ports of Pasco, Walla Walla and the Northwest Seaport Alliance to coordinate regional logistics and planning as state releases planning dollars.

Howard added that no financial commitment beyond staff time is required at this time and all future financial matters will be addressed separately. Howard stated that this agreement helps present a united marketing front for state trade efforts.

A motion to approve the interlocal agreement between the Ports of Benton, Pasco, Walla Walla and the Northwest Seaport Alliance was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Roy Keck and unanimously passed by the Commission.

5. Second Amendment with Columbia Rail Operating Agreement, Richland Business Park

Executive Director Diahann Howard stated that this extension is requested, as the current contract terminates on March 31, 2026. Howard noted that more time is needed to plan an intermodal strategy, align trackage rights with the City of Richland and plan to issue a long-term RFP for operator will take place next year.

Howard praised Columbia Rail for performance, reliability in maintenance, and responsiveness to urgent issues.

A motion to approve the second amendment of the Columbia Rail operating agreement was made by Commissioner Roy Keck, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and unanimously passed by the Commission.

6. Proclamation 25-03, Honoring Commissioner Roy D. Keck

Executive Director Diahann Howard read Proclamation 25-03, Honoring Commissioner Roy D. Keck:

WHEREAS Mr. Roy D. Keck took on the role of Commissioner for District 1 starting in 2007; he was reelected in 2013 and 2019.

WHEREAS, with 35 years in the nuclear power industry, Commissioner Keck brought extensive expertise in energy, infrastructure and economic development to ongoing service within the community.

WHEREAS Commissioner Keck's achievements and leadership provided a strong foundation for advancing initiatives that further strengthened the region's economy and quality of life;

WHEREAS Commissioner Keck supported and enhanced Washington's system of ports and working rivers via the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association and Washington Public Ports Association. Commissioner Keck is a small business owner, TRIDEC board member, past chairman of the Richland Economic Development Committee and the Richland Utility Advisory Committee. Commissioner Keck's additional leadership roles include Past President of the Washington Public Ports Association and on its nomination committee, Past President of Richland Rotary and Past Commodore of the Richland Yacht Club, reflecting a long-standing commitment to collaboration and progress.

WHEREAS, Commissioner Keck had a positive impact at the federal level through the Energy Communities Alliance and regionally as a Manhattan Project National Historical Park and Benton-Franklin Council of Governments representative.

WHEREAS, Commissioner Keck has remained focused on reducing property taxes and aligning Port leases with current fair market rates, supporting Richland and Prosser Airport projects, rebuilding the Port's railroad assets and leveraging his decades of nuclear power industry experience to facilitate and advocate for economic development, including through the formation of the Northwest Advanced Clean Energy Park in support of new nuclear and related projects, which encompasses expanding local manufacturing.

WHEREAS, Commissioner Keck has demonstrated leadership in advancing the Port of Benton's Vision and Mission and worked diligently alongside the Port team and his fellow elected officials for the good of the public. Commissioner Keck will be remembered for his many accomplishments and unwavering dedication to regional economic development.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED that the Port of Benton Commission and staff express their sincere and whole-hearted appreciation to Mr. Roy D. Keck for his commitment to the Port, the communities in the Port District and the surrounding region, and for his contributions while serving as a Port of Benton Commissioner.

Signed and dated by the Commission of the Port of Benton at its regular meeting held on this 10th day of December 2025.

7. Performance Review of Executive Director

Executive Director Diahann Howard read a prepared memo, titled **“2025 Review Summary”**:

The following are highlights of key 2025 Port of Benton initiatives:

- **Small Business Support & Tourism**

The Clore Center hosted 30 events for various organizations. Our team not only hosted the Triton event, but they also toured over 600 visitors. Coordination with the Richland Library to support tours and American Cruise line in support of Prosser businesses along with sponsorship of events will continue in 2026. WSU TC Small Business Development, Small Business Development Council support via the Hispanic Chamber, FUSE collaboration and Richland Rotary Entrepreneurial Awards are also planned to continue.

- **Asset Improvements**

Efforts remained focused on getting our rail back to a state of good repair; work included SR 240 rail crossing and tie replacements. We received \$9.5M RAISE grant to support new rail, ties and ballast. The Port Barge Complex facilities project began with use of a \$2.7 million Port Electrification grant to improve the asset, a \$2.1M Richland Airport apron reconfiguration project, and \$3M was secured to support Prosser Airport Pavement and Lighting project in 2026. The Port's 2579 Stevens Drive facility rehabilitation project partners with a CERB loan of \$2.4M and \$1.7M of Benton County .09 funds along with port dollars; the assessment of the building is completed, and the next phases of this project will move forward in 2026. We completed renovations of 1845 Terminal Drive with use of CARB loan dollars. We have \$18.3M planned for capital improvements in 2026; 44% improvement focused and 56% focused on economic development.

- **Economic Development**

Our 2025 economic development efforts resulted in the following:

- Completed the industrial land exchange with Richland valued at \$18 million that realigns and positions both entities to more fully fulfill

our industrial economic development missions.

- American Rock return of 143 acres of industrial land for development.
- Start of 50 acres of Waterfront planning within the TBC
- Sale of 9th Street building in Benton City per resolution to return to private sector and sale of land within TBC.

- Convening with state, community partners and local businesses via VERTical to discuss upcoming policy and align support for manufacturing and energy sectors.
- New and adjusted leases resulting in 3% increase, less loss of American Rock aggregate therefore limiting loss of revenues to only 2%.
- Partnered with Port of Pasco and Tri-Cities Regional Chamber on Ag Innovation initiative.
- Rail Open house and public tour of the port district.
- Collaboration with Ports of Pasco, Walla Walla and Northwest Seaport Alliance to expand logistics and intermodal to support our existing value add agricultural companies and support new industrial growth.
- Collaboration with Richland Airport tenant to support Aviation Career Day.
- Continued our strong partnerships with the state, cities of Benton City, Prosser and Richland and Benton County, PEDAs, TRIDEC and our local chambers. We also supported community events and expanded partnerships with industry.

Our Port team remains focused on managing our public assets and making strategic investments to be a catalyst for regional economic growth and prosperity.

We brought in new hires in Finance and grew our team internally into new roles to expand their professional growth. We added a work order module to our systems to strengthen our customers' experience when making work order requests. Our team continues to increase revenues, improved facilities and property tax rates were reduced again to \$0.301 (from \$0.305) to bring us to a 22-year low, benefiting Port District taxpayers.

In 2026, we are planning for \$18 million in capital projects, 56% of which are focused on economic development, including rail, intermodal and Prosser Airport.

We look forward to turning the page to the Port's next chapter in collaboration with the commission and our communities to bring new jobs and investment to our region.

We will continue to hold ourselves to leading private business standards and best government contracting and port practices in alignment with our core values.

F. INFORMATION REPORTS

1. Grants Update

Airports – Quentin Wright stated that GeoTech has been performing core sampling. It was noted that Richland and Prosser airports were listed as among the top 10 in Washington for pavement quality.

2. Legislative Update

Director of Governmental Affairs Cassie Losey outlined key 2026 legislative priorities:

- State trade strategy – focus on global trade, job creation and supply chain efficiency. This is a WPPA backed document the Port has been working on in tandem.
- Target Urban Area (TUA) – efforts to secure tax breaks for new construction for clean energy facilities where construction timelines are often an issue. It will not shift the tax burden to taxpayers per the City of Richland.
- Clean Energy Investments Bill – broaden the use of contracts to make it easier for public entities to invest in clean energy projects. This is in partnership with Energy Northwest
- Economic Development – Advocacy for continued CARB funding to airports, site certification readiness and port electrification grants
- Protection of .09 funds for economic development

Losey reviewed upcoming legislative events in Olympia that will take place in the first quarter of 2026.

3. Capital Projects Update

Director of Facilities and Operations Ron Branine noted that the lighting project for 3250 and 2579 should be wrapped up by the end of the year.

Branine provided a brief update on the 2579 Stevens Drive facility and the project is progressing. Branine noted that a Clean Building Act exemption is needed to avoid significant fines and a conceptual design will be presented in January or February 2026.commence.

H. COMMISSIONER REPORTS/COMMENTS

Commissioner Scott Keller provided comments on a recent WAMA report, where the main subject of discussion was aviation fuel taxes, which were supposed to come back to airports, but have been diverted to general funds.

Commissioner Lori Stevens stated that she had the privilege of meeting some port tenants at the Prosser Airport and there is interest in hosting an aviation day at the Prosser Airport.

Commissioner Roy Keck stated that this is his last Commission meeting after serving as port Commissioner for 18 years. Commissioner Keck ready a prepared statement.*

*Attachment A

I. DIRECTOR REPORTS/COMMENTS

1. Finance Director

Director of Finance Jeff Lubeck provided a financial status report.

Lubeck reviewed the cash financial status, stating that the cash balance is at a 4-year high, all 2025 grants are fully received.

Lubeck reviewed November cash receipts and disbursements.

Lubeck reviewed the accounts receivable financial status report over 90 days.

Lubeck stated that the 2024 audit is completed, with clean findings and an expected boilerplate recommendation on fixed assets.

2. Port Attorney

Contract Port attorney John O'Leary stated that he had no updates for the regular session, but has items for the executive session related to personnel that is expected to take 15 minutes.

3. Executive Director

Executive director Diahann Howard provided an update on recent meetings and events she has participated in.

Howard stated that she has been appointed chair of the Community Aviation Revitalization Board through 2026.

Howard stated that she participated in the 2026 comp plan update, monitoring zoning changes, especially pertaining to waterfront and data centers.

Howard noted that multiple waterfront stakeholder meetings were held.

Howard stated that the port has attracted an international industrial prospect related to forging, with the potential to support the nuclear, aviation, and maritime sectors.

Howard announced that the port is working on 11 new and/or existing leases and there are 11 rental prospects.

Howard stated that TreeTop has submitted a letter of intent regarding a purchase in the Prosser Wine & Food Park and more to come in the January meeting.

Howard stated that the ag prospect has withdrawn their interest in the Clore Center.

Howard requested to move the February 2026 Commission meeting to accommodate travel.

J. FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

There were no comments.

K. EXECUTIVE SESSION

The regular Commission meeting was recessed at 9:20 a.m., with an announcement that an Executive Session would commence at 9:20 a.m. for 20 minutes to discuss real estate and personnel

matters. It was noted that the regular meeting would be reconvened at 9:40 a.m. It was announced that an additional five minutes were needed in executive session.

Commissioner Stevens made a motion to adjust compensation. Commissioner Roy Keck seconded the motion. Commissioner Keller abstained. Motion carried.

L. ADJOURNMENT

With no action needed, the meeting was adjourned at 9:49 a.m. with an announcement that the next regular Port of Benton Commission meeting would be held at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, January 14, 2026, at the Port of Benton Commission meeting room, located at 3250 Port of Benton Blvd., Richland, Washington.


Lori Stevens, Commission Secretary