

**PORT OF BENTON
SPECIAL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
January 7, 2026**

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

PRESENT: Commissioner Scott D. Keller, Commissioner Bill O'Neil, Commissioner Lori Stevens

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

ALSO PRESENT: John O'Leary, Gravis Law; Clif Dyer, Richland Airport; Roy Keck, Richland; Gareth Nisbett; Dennis Collins; Mark Underwood; Council Member Shayne Van Dyke, City of Richland; Joe Pisca; Lori French

The following attendees attended via remote communications: Sheri Collins; Angela Saraceno-Lyman; Julia Mora; Bryan Bell; Cassie Losey; Wendy Culverwell, Tri-City Herald; Rachel Visick, Tri-Cities Area Journal of Business; Trent Hall; Jon Ray; Ashley Garza; Christy (No Last Name); R. Howard; Jeannie Beckett; Guest; 253-229-6727; 206-910-4573; Samsung

The Commission meeting was noticed as required by RCW 42.30.070.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Commissioner Bill O'Neil led those present in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Roy Keck read a prepared statement. ** Included as attachment A.*

Clif Dyer acknowledged retaliatory behavior as a central concern and called for process-driven, unemotional correction of dysfunction at the port. Dyer cited high costs incurred during recent investigations, attributing some to personal conflicts. Dyer emphasized a need for unity and forward progress post-election. Dyer urged all parties to do their jobs with honesty and integrity.

D. CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approval of Agenda

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Bill O'Neil, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving the January 7, 2026, special Commission meeting agenda.

E. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Motion to Amend the Rules of Port of Benton Port Commission Rules of Policy and Procedure

A motion was made by Commissioner Bill O'Neil, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving the motion to amend the rules of Port of Benton Port Commission Rules of Policy and Procedure.

2. Election of Commission Officers

Commissioner Bill O'Neil presented a slate of officers for consideration, with Commissioner Bill O'Neil, president, Commissioner Scott Keller, secretary, and Commissioner Lori Stevens, secretary.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Bill O'Neil and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Bill O'Neil as president, Scott Keller as Vice President and Lori Stevens as secretary.

3. Resolution 26-01, Resolution to Amend the Port Executive Director's Delegation of Authority

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 26-01, amending the Port's executive director's delegation of authority.

4. Motion To Delegate Authority to the Commission President to Review, Take Action, and Make Recommendations to the Commission at the Commission's next Meeting of January 14, 2026, on Port Organizational & Structure of Business Lines and Consultant Contracts, which may include directing the Executive Director to initiate any action, prepare any report, or initiate any project or study (Rules 13.2), and which may include communicating with Staff, seeking information from and giving direction to persons who report directly or indirectly to the Executive Director. (Rules 12.3)

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Scott Keller and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving the Commission president to review, take action, and make recommendations to the Commission at the Commission's next meeting of January 14, 2026, on Port Organizational & Structure of business lines and consultant contracts, which may include directing the Executive Director to initiate any action, prepare any report, or initiate any project or study (Rules 13.2), and which may include communicating with Staff, seeking information from and giving direction to persons who report directly or indirectly to the Executive Director. (Rules 12.3)

F. RECESS TO EXECUTIVE SESSION as legally allowed pursuant to RCW 42.30.110(1)(f), to discuss personnel and "to receive and evaluate complaints or charges brought against a public officer or employee."

The regular meeting was recessed at 9:15 a.m. It was announced that an Executive Session would commence at 9:15 a.m. for 30 minutes to discuss the items noted.

At 9:45 a.m., it was announced that an additional 30 minutes were required for the Executive Session, and the regular meeting would reconvene at 10:15 a.m.

At 10:15 a.m., it was announced that an additional 45 minutes were required for the Executive Session, and the regular meeting would reconvene at 11:00 a.m.

At 11 a.m., it was announced that an additional 30 minutes were required for the Executive Session, and the regular meeting would reconvene at 11:30 a.m.

At 11:30 a.m., the regular meeting was reconvened.

Commissioner Bill O'Neil made a motion to defer action until the next Port of Benton Commission meeting, on January 14, 2026, regarding the complaints or charges brought against a public officer or employee. Commissioner Lori Stevens seconded the motion and it was unanimously passed by the Commission.

Commissioner Bill O'Neil made a motion to suspend executive director Diahann Howard with pay, while an investigation takes place related to employee complaints, effective January 7, 2026. Commissioner Lori Stevens seconded the motion and it was unanimously passed by the Commission.

Commissioner Lori Stevens made a motion to appoint Commission president Bill O'Neil to facilitate any necessary personnel changes and any other steps as a result of the suspension. Commissioner Scott Keller seconded the motion and it was unanimously passed by the Commission.

K. ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 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