

PORT OF BENTON
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
February 11, 2026

- 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 Bill O’Neil, Commissioner Lori Stevens

PORT STAFF PRESENT: Ron Branine, Quentin Wright, Summers Miya, Audrey Burney, Cassie Losey, Angela Saraceno-Lyman, Joe Pisca

ALSO PRESENT: John O’Leary, Gravis Law; Roy Keck, Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation/Tym2Fly, Mark Underwood, Richland Airport; Rachel Visick, Tri-City Area Journal of Business; Karl Dye, TRIDEC; David Reeploeg, Hanford Communities; Gareth Nisbett, Council Member Shayne Van Dyke, City of Richland; Eugene Pratt

The following attendees attended via remote communications: Sheri Collins, Jorge Celestino, Julia Mora, Jeff Moore, Bryan Bell, Hans Wellenbrack, Wendy Culverwell, Tri-City Herald; Bryan Condon, Century West; Lauren Granger, RJ Blahut, Jeff Losey, Dan Hanson, Apple Valley News; Curtis Earl, Fowler Construction, Christy Rasmussen

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 Scott Keller, and unanimously passed by the Commission approving the agenda for the February 11, 2026, Commission meeting, approval of minutes from the January 28, 2026, Commission meeting, approval of minutes from the February 2, 2026, special Commission meeting, approval of vouchers and certifications, including payroll, for the month of January totaling \$1,455,807.16.

D. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Eugene Pratt read a prepared statement.*

Roy Keck read a prepared statement.**

Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation, criticized the rate study basis, stating it was flawed, with comparisons with non-local/urban airports. Dyer suggested that the new rates discouraged investment and development.

Dyer downplayed the water utility infraction as minimal, with 80-gallons a month rooted in a

1990-era deal.

Dyer defended the Buckskin Golf Course lease as FAA-restricted, low-value land, stating the course provides a great deal of community benefit.

Dyer noted the high management turnover since 2019, with 22-25 departures. Dyer encouraged focus on construction resolution.

*Attachment A

**Attachment B

E. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Welcome and Update from David Reeploeg, Hanford Communities

David Reeploeg provided an overview and update on Hanford Communities, including background on the organization, its structure, a cleanup overview, progress highlights, challenges, and future plans.

2. Welcome and Update from Karl Dye, TRIDEC

The CEO of TRIDEC, Karl Dye, provided a TRIDEC update, including 2025 contract results and measurements, including an update on the Port's new tenant, Avalanche Energy FusionWERX, who moved into 2345 Stevens Drive in 2025. Dye provided an overview of how TRIDEC worked together with the Port and Avalanche, resulting in a three-party agreement that TRIDEC helped facilitate.

Dye overviewed the 2016 land transfer, noting the collaboration among the Port, TRIDEC, and City. TRIDEC reviewed details of the transfer, including current plans.

Dye commented on the electrical transmission issue, noting the TRIDEC and Port partnership to support Atlas Agro. Dye stated that BPA delays continue, with regional and congressional advocacy ongoing.

Dye commented on the handshake style of regional partnerships and collaboration with partners such as the Port of Benton, which he has always appreciated.

3. Resolution 26-13, Appointment of Claims for Damages Agent

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine stated that the Commission previously adopted Resolution 25-47 on November 12, 2025, and subsequently, by motion at the Special Meeting on February 2, 2026, appointed Angela Saraceno-Lyman as the Claims for Damages agent. A formal resolution is required, as it must be recorded with Benton County and subsequently posted to the Port website.

A motion was made by Commissioner Bill O'Neil, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 26-13, appointing Angela Saraceno-Lyman as the Claims for Damages agent.

4. Resolution 26-14, Appointment of Port Auditor

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine stated the Commission previously adopted Resolution 25-45 on November 12, 2025, and subsequently, by motion at the Special Meeting on February

2, 2026, appointed Angela Saraceno-Lyman as the Port auditor. A formal resolution is recommended.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Bill O’Neil and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 26-14, appointing Angela Saraceno-Lyman as the Port auditor.

5. Resolution 26-15, Appointment of Public Records Officer

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine stated that the commission previously adopted Resolution 25-46 on November 12, 2025, and subsequently, by motion at the Special Meeting on February 2, 2026, appointed Jorge Celestino as the Public Records Officer. A formal resolution is needed because the current resolution is posted on the website.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Scott Keller, and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 26-15, appointing Jorge Celestino as the Port Public Records Officer.

6. Resolution 26-16, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Amending Signers for Banner and Key Banks

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine stated that this is an administrative task, per the Commission’s decision to dismiss Alicia Myers as the Port Director of Finance at the February 2, 2026, Special Commission Meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Bill O’Neil, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 26-16, approving the amendment of signers for Banner and Key Banks.

7. Resolution 26-17, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Authorizing Lease Modification No. 1 with Barnhart Crane & Rigging Company, Inc. – Richland Business Park

Director of Economic Development Audrey Burney explained that Resolution 26-17 consolidates Barnhart Crane & Rigging Company’s warehouse footprint.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 26-17, authorizing lease modification No. 1 with Barnhart Crane & Rigging Company, Inc., in the Richland Business Park.

8. Resolution 26-18, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Approving a Variance to Allow Event-Oriented Amenities on Property within Vintners Village

Director of Economic Development Audrey Burney explained that approval of Resolution 26-18 authorizes event-oriented amenity development, such as plazas, band shells, courts, and VIP areas, contingent on details, site/development reviews, and compliance with local covenants and city permitting requirements.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission to approve Resolution 26-18, which authorizes a variance to allow event-oriented amenities on property within Vintners Village.

9. Contract Amendments No. 2 and No. 3, PND Engineers, Inc., \$82,793.00 – Technology & Business Campus, Barge

9. Interim Executive Director Ron Branine explained that the Port received a grant from the Washington State Department of Transportation for the Barge Electrification Project. The total grant award was \$2,701,730. In April 2025, the Port entered into an agreement with PND Engineers, Inc. for project engineering totaling \$480,900. In November 2025, the Port approved amendment No. 1 for \$14,517.30 for additional diving investigation due to excessive corrosion found during the initial engineering work.

In 2017, the City of Richland installed improvements to its existing irrigation pump station on the high dock. In that work, dissimilar metals were installed, causing increased corrosion to occur on the high dock piling. This corrosion was investigated during the Amendment No. 1 diving. Now that we understand the spread of corrosion, some of which is from the initial installation and some of which occurred as a result of the City's work, we need to design a corrosion prevention system for the high dock. The proposed amendment No. 2 is for \$38,120 for engineering for the corrosion protection system.

We have made the City aware of this work and their shared responsibility for this work. Staff is working on an interlocal agreement with the City to fund a significant portion of the corrosion protection system design and construction.

Additionally, during the design and preliminary permitting of this work, the City of Richland stated that the project will need Critical Areas Mapping and Permitting due to the presence of sensitive plants in this location. This is a relatively new requirement by the City. This Amendment No. 3 effort is budgeted for \$44,673 to complete both the mapping and permitting.

Amendment No. 2 and No. 3 are budget maximums only, so PND will only invoice and we will only authorize actual work up to and not exceeding the total budget for payment.

Branine stated that the Port is requesting Commission approval for contract amendments No. 2 and No. 3 to PND Engineers, Inc., for a total of \$82,793.00 for Corrosion Protection engineering and Critical Areas Mapping and Permitting. Branine noted that the Port anticipates both of these amendments to be grant-reimbursable.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Bill O'Neil and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving contract amendments No. 2 and No. 3, PND Engineers, Inc., \$82,793.00 – Technology & Business Campus, Barge

10. Ad Hoc Committee, Hangar/City of Richland Water Utility Issue – Richland Airport

Commissioner Bill O'Neil stated that this item relates to the ongoing controversy regarding historical agreements, water/sewer infrastructure ownership and tenant responsibilities, including past unpermitted connections by tenants/Commissioner.

Commissioner O'Neil requested a motion to establish an Ad Hoc committee to address the Richland Airport hangar/City of Richland water utility issues, noting that the committee members will include Quentin Wright, Sheri Collins, Bryan Bell, Summers Miya, Mark Underwood and will be chaired by John O'Leary.

Commissioner O'Neil stated that he would like the following questions answered and to make specific recommended actions this Commission should take to reach a conclusion on this issue:

- Did the Port of Benton have an original contract/agreement (1999) with Herb Brayton, Jim Leedy, David Kleese, Bing Matawatu, with regard to these Port tenants paying for water/sewer infrastructure in exchange for the POB paying the City of Richland water utility bill?
- If so, does this contract/agreement remain in effect today?
- Based on an initial investment of \$21,000, have the tenants reached a return on their investment?
- What agreements does the Port have with the City of Richland with regard to utility infrastructure?
- Who owns and who's responsible for maintaining the infrastructure?
- What utility permitting and work scope are the tenants responsible for?

Commissioner O'Neil stated that the committee chair shall give status reports at each regular commission meeting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Bill O'Neil, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and passed by the Commission, approving the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee, Hangar/City of Richland Water Utility Issue at Richland Airport. Commissioner Scott Keller abstained.

12. 2026 Updated Commission Meeting Dates

Summers Miya requested guidance on whether the March meeting should be rescheduled to the regular pattern (second Wednesday) and if the Commission advised going back to one meeting a month. Miya reminded the Commission that March meetings are held in Prosser.

A motion was made by Commissioner Bill O'Neil, seconded by Commissioner Scott Keller, and unanimously passed by the Commissioners, approving moving the March Commission date back to the regular pattern of the second Wednesday (March 11, 2026) and confirming there would not be a second March meeting.

F. INFORMATION REPORTS

1. Grants Update

Director of Governmental Affairs Cassie Losey stated that the \$2.5 million earmark from Senator Cantwell was officially approved, and the first year of funding will be realized.

Losey added that airports are now confirmed eligible for future earmark requests, with an application deadline of March 6, 2026.

2. Legislative Update

Director of Governmental Affairs Cassie Losey outlined recent legislative updates, noting that 3,300 bills have been introduced in 31 days, double the number introduced during the previous long session.

Losey added that she has been on several recent lobbying trips to Olympia, prioritizing engagement on rail, transportation, agriculture and clean energy.

Losey outlined recent successes, including attending the interlocal agreement signing ceremony, signed with Port of Pasco, Port of Walla Walla and the Northwest Seaport Alliance for joint logistical hub efforts.

Losey highlighted that she is monitoring key bills, including HB 2090, SB 5982, SB 5971, HB 1210. Losey stated that she advocated for green fertilizer incentives (Atlas Agro), support for relief from air quality regulations for overburdened communities.

Losey noted her active engagement with the Association of Washington Business, Tri-Cities delegation and other state agencies.

3. Capital Projects Update

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine noted that the Richland Fire Department was using the USS Triton for confined-space training, which highlights the strong partnership among organizations.

3. Marketing & Communications Update

Marketing and Communications Manager Summers Miya reviewed 2025 marketing and communications goals and metrics.

Miya's overview included:

2025 Metrics:

- 19 earned media placements for Prosser/Benton City; 90 total.
- 30+ speaking engagements, including hosting 623 USS Triton tours (record year, +24%).
- Produced and shared business/tenant highlight videos; visitor campaign and earned media success.
- NW Intermodal Facility guide completed.

Events:

- Facilitation of 25+ events at Clore Center, successful tenant appreciation BBQ, public tours, and collaborative events (e.g., M-84).
- Collaborative engagement with Pasco Aviation Museum, public library programs, and expanded newsletter footprint.
- 2025 Entrepreneurial Awards highlighted local Prosser Airport business (Precision Aviation).

2026 Preview:

- New "Third Thursday" Triton tour schedule; expanded collaboration; marketing/communications plan to broaden reach.

Collateral:

- New forms for tenant communication; updates/maintenance on multiple Port-managed websites.
- Extensive ad placements, press releases, project communication and newsletter campaigns executed.

4. Airports Update

Airport Manager Quentin Wright provided an update on the lease policy implementation for Commissioner Scott Keller's lease for a hangar at Richland Airport.

Wright stated that averaging the lease area was not feasible, as applying the lease policy would reduce the lease area. Wright stated that Commissioner Keller declined the modification.

Wright provided an update on the Prosser Airport land appraisal, stating that the appraisal report from appraiser Mike Fredrickson lists \$0.20/sq ft/year, which will be formalized at the next Commission meeting.

H. COMMISSIONER REPORTS/COMMENTS

Commissioner Bill O'Neil stated that he attended the recent TRIDEC Donuts & Developments event, which focused on shoreline Reconveyance. O'Neil added that he also recently attended the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments meeting.

Commissioner Lori Stevens stated that she recently attended the Prosser Wine Network meeting, announcing that the Red Wine & Chocolate weekend is coming up. Stevens added that she has also recently attended Prosser Tourism and Prosser Economic Development Association meetings. Stevens stated that she is excited about the Ms. Prosser event, which is celebrating its centennial this year. Stevens added that she is working with local pilots and airport manager Quentin Wright to bring back a Prosser fly-in event for Flight Day, June 13-14, 2026.

Commissioner Scott Keller had no comments.

I. DIRECTOR REPORTS/COMMENTS

1. Finance Director

Senior Accountant Angela Saraceno-Lyman provided a financial status report.

Saraceno-Lyman stated there were high disbursements in January, \$1.455 million, including three payrolls and quarterly taxes.

Saraceno-Lyman reported that the cash position remains steady, reserves intact. Accounts payable were temporarily high, but have been caught up as of this meeting date. Two major overdue receivables, > \$60,000 combined, are currently under review.

Saraceno-Lyman reported that she has engaged additional support for state audit submission.

2. Port Attorney

Contract Port attorney John O'Leary stated that he had no updates for the regular session.

3. Executive Director

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine provided a real estate update, stating that the port has executed one lease amendment - Aulick at 2579 Stevens Drive.

There are currently eight work-in-progress leases/lease modifications.

There are currently two lease terminations in progress.

- Bjornson Motors – End of February – we have scheduled an Exit Lease walk-through for February 27th.

- Barnhart - once the spaces have been surrendered – will be moving out of some of their warehouse spaces on the southern portion of 2579 Stevens. These smaller spaces will be available between April 1 or May 1.

Branine stated that there are 10 rental prospects and six land prospects.

Branine thanked Cassie Losey for representing the Port at the recent ILA signing ceremony.

Branine added that WPPA has reached out to determine who will serve on the association's Board of Trustees. Branine stated that this can be a Commission or staff member. The Board of Trustees governs the affairs of the Association. The Board consists of one member from each port and meets twice yearly. Trustees are chosen by a majority vote of their respective port commission. The Board of Trustees authorizes a six-member Executive Committee to oversee Association administration and management, and hires an Executive Director to manage day-to-day Association operations. It was announced that Roy Keck previously served on the Board of Trustees.

Commissioner Bill O'Neil agreed to represent the Port of Benton on the Board of Trustees .

Branine stated that the Port is looking for approval for a 20-foot easement to Cascade Natural Gas across the railroad tracks on the east side of Steptoe Street. The rest of that extension is within City of Richland road right of way. Branine stated that the Port is seeking permission to work with Cascade to work out the technical details of the easement and will bring it back for formal Commission approval.

Branine noted that this would be for a perpetual easement, but is parallel to other easements the Port has previously approved.

Branine added that he meets regularly with the HR consultant. The administrative and Director of Finance open positions were posted last week.

J. FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

Summers Miya pointed out that this document lists upcoming meetings and events and will be included in the monthly packets for transparency.

Cassie Losey added a note to her earlier remarks, stating that the Pullman Moscow airport did receive \$2.5 million for apron construction design in their new terminal, so funding is a possibility.

K. EXECUTIVE SESSION

The regular Commission meeting was recessed at 10:20 a.m., with an announcement that an Executive Session would commence at 10:20 a.m. for 30 minutes to discuss RCW 42.30.110(1), RCW 42.30.110(1)(g) and RCW 42.30.110(1)(i) to discuss personnel, potential litigation and real estate at Prosser Airport. It was noted that the regular meeting would be reconvened at 10:50 a.m. At 10:50 a.m., it was announced that an additional 15 minutes were needed in executive session.

The regular meeting was reconvened at 11:05 a.m., with a comment that a technical difficulty had prevented the meeting from restarting; it was resolved.

Commissioner Bill O'Neil made a motion that the Port of Benton will pay Commissioner Scott Keller's attorney fees resulting from complaints made against him by Commissioner Roy Keck and

Executive Director Diahann Howard. Commissioner Lori Stevens seconded the motion. Motion carried. Commissioner Scott Keller abstained.

Commissioner Lori Stevens made a motion that this Commission authorizes the interim Executive Director to hire and fill the Administrative Assistant and Capital Development Manager positions. Commissioner Bill O’Neil seconded the motion and the motion was unanimously passed by the Commission.

L. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Bill O’Neil adjourned the meeting at 11:10 a.m.


Lori Stevens, Commission Secretary