

**PORT OF BENTON
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
April 8, 2026**

A. CALL TO ORDER: The regular monthly meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. at 3250 Port of Benton Blvd. Richland, WA 99354.

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

PORT STAFF PRESENT: Ron Branine, Quentin Wright, Summers Miya, Audrey Burney, Mardie Romero, Bryan Bell, Brandin Lopez

ALSO PRESENT: John O'Leary, Gravis Law; Gareth Nisbett, Mark Underwood, Richland Airport; Jon Ray, Richland Airport; Dan Hanson, Apple Valley News

The following attendees attended via remote communications: Sheri Collins, Wendy Culverwell, Tri-City Herald; Roy Keck; Shaylee Nilsson; Rachel Visick, Tri-City Area Journal of Business; Jorge Celestino; Trent Hall, Columbia Rail; Bryan Condon, Century West; and one unidentified caller

The Commission meeting was noticed as required by RCW 42.30.070.

B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Commissioner Scott Keller led those present to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. CONSENT AGENDA

A motion was made by commissioner Lori Stevens seconded by Scott Keller, and unanimously passed by the Commission approving the agenda for the April 8, 2026, Commission meeting, approval of minutes from the March 11, 2026, Approval of minutes of March 20, 2026, Special Commission meeting, vouchers and certifications, including payroll for the month of April, totaling \$870,138.95 and acceptance of work to Ecomodus, LLC for LED Lighting replacement projects at 2579 Stevens Drive for \$122,722.30 and 3250 Port of Benton Blvd., for \$117,417.74.

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

Jon Ray:

Expressed thanks for the support in organizing the aviation career day job fair (scheduled May 30, 2026). Noted an increase in positive responses and new participants compared to last year.

E. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Resolution 26-26: Acceptance of contract to Personal Touch Cleaning, LLC. For janitorial cleaning of all Port Properties, \$195,420.00 monthly cleaning + \$107,727.00 additional annual cleaning (windows, carpet, floors). \$303,147.00 Total cleaning excludes supplies at 20% markup. \$37.50 Hourly for miscellaneous cleaning.

Interim Executive Director Ron Branin presented the contract for janitorial services for all Port Properties at \$303,147 monthly cleaning, asking for acceptance of contract to Personal Touch Cleaning, LLC.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 26-26, acceptance of contract to Personal Touch Cleaning, LLC. for janitorial cleaning for Port Properties, \$303,147.

2. Resolution 26-27: Acceptance of contract to Sierra Santa Fe Corp. for Richardson Road Chip Seal project, \$106,608.77 - Technology & Business Campus.

Construction Project Manager Bryan Bell presented the Richardson Road Chip Seal Project, \$106,608.77, George WA Way to University, 10 – 15-year lifespan, asking for acceptance of contract to Sierra Santa Fe Corp for \$106,608.77.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens seconded by Commissioner Scott Keller and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 26-27, acceptance of contract to Sierra Santa FE Corp. For Chip Seal Project for \$106,608.77.3. Resolution 26-28: Acceptance of contract to Quicksilver Audio, LTD for Walter Clore AV system Replacement \$64,535.22 – Clore Center

Construction Project Manager Bryan Bell presented the Walter Clore AV Replacement project, \$64,535.22 (\$11,000 under budget). The system is repeatedly failing; will upgrade to Wi-Fi / Bluetooth control via iPad (wall /remote), retaining the existing equipment. The warranty is 10 years.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission to approve Resolution 26-28, accepting the contract with Quicksilver Audio, LTD for the Walter Clore AV System Replacement for \$64,535.22.

4. Resolution 26-29 & 26-30: Acceptance of Contract to Impervious Roof Coatings for 2579 Stevens Dr Roof coating area #1 & area #3 project, \$118,627.81 / \$118,895.91 - Richland Business Park

Construction Project Manager Bryan Bell requested the acceptance of the contract to Impervious Roof Coatings at 2579 Stevens Dr Area #1 & Area #3. \$237,523.72; 15-year warranty on coating, integrated into a 5-year roof maintenance plan - Richland Business Park.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving Resolution 26-29 and 26-30, acceptance of contract to Impervious Roof Coatings for 2579 Stevens Dr. Area #1 & Area #3, \$237,523.72 – Richland Business Park.

5. Resolution 26-31, Acceptance of Contract to Architects West Engineering for 2501 Stevens Dr. Building Design \$303,750.00 - Richland Business Park

Engineering and Capital Development Senior Manager Brandin Lopez requested acceptance of the contract to Architects West Engineering for 2501 / 2579 Building Design, \$303,750.00. \$15,000 Contingency (5%), Construction Admin not included. Rough projection for building \$4 million.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Scott Keller, and unanimously passed by the Commission to authorize negotiations with Architects West for 2501 / 2579 Stevens Drive building design, \$303,750.00 – Richland Business Park.

6. Amendment 1947 Track Use Agreement with BNSF and UP – Maintenance Car Charges

- Port to assume maintenance/operation responsibility for the City of Richland’s industrial spur track (excluding private loop).
- **Car Charge set at \$71 per car**, rolling 3-year costs.
- Historical city payment from railroads (\$45,000/year) to be dissolved.
- **Timeline:** Interlocal agreement to be drafted and sent for City review next week; will come to the Commission for approval at the next meeting.
- **Car charges are effective retroactively to 10/1/2025.** Expected finalization after two and a half years of negotiation.

F. INFORMATION REPORTS

1. Grants Update

Airport Manager Quentin Wright provided updates on the current airport-related grant projects:

- Application submitted for \$800,000 Congressional funding for new AWOS at both airports (five-year FAA CIP plan, but more urgent needed).
- Several letters of support were obtained.

Engineering and Capital Development Senior Manager Brandin Lopez provided an update on several grant projects:

Build / Raise Grant (\$9.56 million, Port \$2.4 million):

- Initial obligation meeting with FRA is complete. Staff will work on scope of work, SEPA, insurance obligations, and other requirements to advance the project toward obligation.

Commerce Grant 25-96647-125 (\$232,800)

- The initial obligation meeting is complete. The Port is addressing grant requirements to support the design of the new track around the 2579 Stevens facility for intermodal and transloading.

Congressional Directed Spending – Rail Modernization / CRISI

- A \$2.5 million federal earmark has been awarded for the White Bluffs Rail modernization and Intermodal Facility through the U.S. Department of Transportation.

CERB / EDA – 2579 Stevens Drive Modernization

- The Port has secured a \$2.4 million CERB loan for modernization of the 2579 Stevens Drive facility.

Additional matching funds include \$1.5 million from the port and \$1.7 million from Benton County (.09 funds).

2. Capital Projects Update

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine stated that the break room and meeting room at 3100 George WA Way are pending proposal; updated painting, new ceiling tiles, and updated digital monitors have been installed.

Engineering and Capital Development Senior Manager Brandin Lopez provided additional updates on capital projects:

Steptoe Rail Crossing

- The Steptoe crossing replacement is a developer-funded project moving forward in coordination with the city and the port.
- The full road and rail closure is scheduled for May 14-17, 2026. Work will occur Thursday through Sunday, replacing the crossing panels, rail and signals.
- Traffic control and public outreach are handled by the contractor and the city.

Electrification Project (Shore Power)

- The joint application for regulatory permit authorization (JARPA) and critical area survey is complete, and the JARPA has been submitted to the Corps of Engineers on 4/3.
- Conflicts exist with the city's proposed backup generator location, which overlaps with shore power access and operations.
- Fire line and hydrant requirements from the city still need resolution during design.
- Next steps: permit review, 90% design, City coordination, and aligning construction with in-water windows.
- The ports website has been updated and achieved milestones and next steps.

3. Airports Update

Airport Manager Quentin Wright stated that the Prosser Airport pavement maintenance project will begin next month.

Pre-Construction meeting for Prosser and Pre-bid for Richland airport projects is next week.

Discussion on airport lease language (reversion clause) to be revisited; draft for review underway.

H. COMMISSIONER REPORTS/COMMENTS

Commissioners Lori Stevens, Bill O’Neil and Scott Keller had no comments.

I. DIRECTOR REPORTS/COMMENTS

1. Finance Director

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine provided a finance update, highlighting the following items:

- **New staff:** Shaylee Nilsson: Administrative Assistant of Finance
- **Cash position:** Disbursements: \$870,139
- **Payroll:** \$187,744
- **Accounts payable:** \$682,395
- **Outstanding payables managed:** as of 3/31; \$57,471
- A/R Trending down; capital project outlays minimal so far. Heavier expenditures are expected from April to July.
- **Year-end report:** On schedule for May.
- **Next “Term” out:** April 20, 2026

2. Port Attorney

Contract Port Attorney John O’Leary stated:

- Weekly meetings continue for the airport utility committee.
- Issue: Difficulty gathering historical records/documents.
- All relevant interviews/parties contacted; City of Richland declined an in-person meeting, sent a written municipal code-based response.
- Technical review is ongoing to interpret the city's answers.
- Report anticipated soon as final details wrap up – may identify and differ from committee perspectives if needed.

3. Executive Director (Interim)

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine provided an update on the day-to-day at the Port.

- Continue to work daily with the HR consultant, formalizing and updating policies, job descriptions and more
- Since our last regular meeting, we have welcomed three new employees to the team.
 - Brandin Lopez has rejoined the Port as Engineering & Capital Development Senior Manager
 - Mardie Romero has joined as an Administrative Assistant, and is the first friendly face people see when they come into the office

- Shaylee Nilsson has joined as an Administrative Assistant with a focus on finance administration
- The onboarding plan for new employees was completely revamped and implemented.
- The third Thursday Triton tour kicked off on March 19. The first three months filled up within a few days of promoting the tours, and the demand seems as strong as ever. As previously mentioned, 2025 was a record year for tours. In 2025, 19 tours were given in the first quarter. 62 people toured in Q1 of 2026.
- Staff (Summers) has been working with the family of late Commissioner Bob Larson, and plans are moving forward for the dedication event at the Triton Sail Park on Thursday, June 4 at 10 a.m.
- The Port has partnered with the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments and will be the location of a public meeting next Tuesday, April 14 at 3 p.m. to present and request public comments on their draft regional freight plan.
- Work on the Crow Butte Master Plan is moving forward, including a public survey and open house scheduled for 4 p.m. on Thursday, May 7 in Paterson (at the community center).

Branine stated that since the March Commission meeting, he has attended several community events, including: Goose Lock and Dam tour with Brandin, the Prosser Airport public meeting, Tri-City Regional Chamber monthly luncheon, and the TRIDEC annual meeting reception.

Real Estate Updates:

Executed Lease Amendment:

1. **CBIT INC** – lease for Suite 140, 1857 sf of space for server room space, 3-year lease with 3-year option
 - a. **Lease has been executed**
 - b. **three-year lease revenue: \$58,495.50**
 - c. **option 1: three-year lease revenue: \$65,032.14**

Currently Work-In Progress Lease/Lease Modification

Currently, there are nine leases or leases in progress, including Central Washington Corn Processors, HIS, Energy Solutions, American Tower, Vertical Bridge, and more.

Lease Terminations

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.

Orano – Lease Termination April 30, 2026 – they are reducing their office locations, because their employees are working from home.

Rental Prospects – Currently 8 rental prospects

Land Prospects – Currently 7 land prospects

Update: The Navy has reached out – There will be approximately 3 packages this fall. Lampson will be prepping the barge space before this time to prepare the shipment in late August. The last shipment will be at the end of October. Summers has reached out to a few Benton City partners regarding holding a Commission meeting there.

Feedback received:

- Benton City’s Council’s Chambers will be a tight fit if the regular number of participants attend, along with the unknown number of public attendances.
- The school may be a viable option if the meeting is held during the summer, when school is not in session. (Either middle school or high school) Have not yet reached out to the school district but have received contact info.
- Benton County Fire District No. 2 training room
 - o Occupancy of 52
 - o Summers in process of scheduling a time to tour the training room (next week)

I. FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

Staff asked to review scheduled meetings and notify if corrections or RSVPs were required.

J. EXECUTIVE SESSION

The regular Commission meeting was recessed at 9:15 a.m., with an announcement that an Executive Session would commence at 9:15 a.m. for 45 minutes to discuss RCW 42.30.110(c), (f)(g) and (i) to discuss real estate, evaluate personnel and to discuss potential litigation/legal risks with Port counsel. It was noted that the regular meeting would be reconvened at 10:00 a.m.

The regular meeting was reconvened at 10:00 a.m.

Commissioner Bill O’Neil made a motion that this Commission directs the Interim Executive Director to release to the public the full, unredacted HR report on organizational analysis and recommendations by Eileen Griffin-Ray and to be posted on the port’s website. Commissioner Scott Keller seconded the motion, and the motion was unanimously passed by the Commission.

Commissioner Scott Keller read a prepared statement:

We are grateful the court has resolved the majority of the allegations raised in the recall petitions in our favor and dismissed the most sensational claims. While this has been a challenging process, we have always believed in allowing the judicial process to run its course.

We recognize that the matter is not yet fully concluded and remain confident that the remaining counts will likewise be dismissed on appeal. Throughout this process, we have been mindful of the responsibility entrusted to us as commissioners and deeply appreciative on the patience and support shown by so many.

As this matter remains before the court, we have no further comment at this time. We will continue to fully focus on the Port’s mission operating safe and reliable facilities, supporting local businesses,

and promoting tourism and economic development for the communities we serve. Respectfully, Port of Benton Commissioners

Commissioner Bill O'Neil made a motion that this Commission direct the Interim Executive Director to enter into an employment and compensation agreement with Sayre, Sayre, and Fossum to act as outside defense counsel for the Port with employment claims.

Commissioner Lori Stevens seconded the motion, and the motion was unanimously passed by the Commission.

K. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Bill O'Neil adjourned the meeting at 10:03 a.m.


Lori Stevens, Commission Secretary