

**PORT OF BENTON  
SPECIAL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
May 28, 2026**

**A. CALL TO ORDER:** The special 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:** Ron Branine, Summers Miya, Brandin Lopez, Audrey Burney, Jorge Celestino, Stuart Dezember, Angela Saraceno-Lyman

**ALSO PRESENT:** John O'Leary, Gravis Law; Clif Dyer, Richland Airport; Davis Raile, NBC; Gareth Nisbett

**The following attendees attended via remote communications:** Sheri Collins, Julia Mora, Shaylee Nilsson, Joe Pisca, Mardie Romero.

The special Commission meeting was noticed as required by RCW 42.30.070.

**B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Commissioner Lori Stevens led those present in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

**C. ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

**1. Contract Amendment with Tapteal II, LLC for Design Services Reimbursement and Rail Material Purchase**

Brandin Lopez, Senior Engineering and Development Manager reviewed the details of a contract amendment with Tapteal II, LLC for design services reimbursement and rail material purchase, highlighting key details of the contract:

- Amendment to the Tapteal II, LLC agreement originally executed in August 2023 for the Port's contribution to the Steptoe project.
- The amendment increases the Port's contribution from \$100,000 to \$112,500 to cover electrical service work that was missed during the initial design. The design portion was managed and funded by the Port.
- Any costs above \$112,500, up to a total project cost of \$130,000, will be reimbursed by the project. Based on the current invoicing of approximately \$105,000, the Port expects to exceed the Port share by completion.
- Staff are recommending approval of this amendment to align responsibilities under the agreement and allow the project to continue moving forward.
- This request also reflects Tapteal's continued investment in the corridor, including more than \$1 million in crossing improvements.

**Commissioner Scott Keller made a motion to approve the Contract amendment with Tapteal II, LLC for designing Services Reimbursement and Rail Material Purchase. Commissioner Lori Stevens seconded the motion, and it was unanimously passed by the Commission.**

2. Relinquishment of Public Access and Utility Easement (Auditor File No. 2018-026350)

Brandin Lopez, Senior Engineering and Development Manager reviewed the relinquishment of public access and utility easement (auditor file no. 2018-026350):

- Relinquishment of existing public access and utility easement.
- The easement is no longer needed for its original purpose or location.
- Removing it will clear title constraints on the property and improve future site flexibility.
- Staff recommend approval to move forward with the relinquishment.

**Commissioner Lori Stevens made a motion to approve the relinquishment of Public Access and Utility Easement (Auditor File No. 2018-026350). Scott Keller seconded the motion, and it was unanimously passed by the Commission.**

3. Access Easement with Central Washington Corn Processors, Inc.

- Establish new easement access with Central Washington Corn Processors.
- This replaces the existing easement and relocates access to the correct location.
- The easement includes two segments:
  - I. Northern Segment: non-exclusive access connection in Logston, allowing shared use by the Port and Port-related businesses.
  - II. Rail Loop segment: more restrictive to protect rail infrastructure and ensure operations are not impacted.
- Staff recommend approval to align access with current operations and support Port and tenant use.

**Commissioner Scott Keller made a motion to approve the access easement with Central Washington Corn Processors, Inc. Commissioner Lori Stevens seconded the motion, and it was unanimously passed by the Commission.**

4. Review 2026 Budget

Stuart Dezember, CPA, Director of Finance, announced that since returning to the Port on April 20, 2026, he has reviewed the 2026 budget. Dezember covered key aspects of the budget and reviewed the timeline of approving the budget.

Dezember noted that a budget workshop was held on October 13, 2025, and the budget was released for public comment at the October 15, 2026, commission meeting after another overview.

Dezember noted that the 2026 budget, including the property tax levy, was approved at a public hearing on November 12, 2026, and the final documents were submitted to Benton County by November 25, 2025, as required.

Dezember stated that the 2026 budget was originally reported and approved as balanced, with a projected surplus of \$185,746.

Dezember stated that after an in-depth review upon his return to the Port, he has discovered that the 2026 budget is not balanced with a deficit of \$1.1 million, identified due to several factors:

- Beginning cash balance understated by \$1,737,004
- Debt issuance for the CERB loan for 2579 Stevens Drive was overstated by \$1,896,000
- Prior year budget carryover was overstated by \$300,000
- 2026 property tax revenue is overstated by \$680,346
  - Port submitted two documents to Benton County on November 25, 2025, regarding the 2026 property tax levy:
    - 2026 property tax levy certification letter requesting \$3.3 million, signed by the former Finance Director
    - Department of Revenue levy certification form requesting \$2.6 million, signed by former Finance Director
  - When the tax levy amount(s) are requested using the DOR form, the tax amounts approved for the actual collection supersede any other amounts.

Dezember explained that the Port was notified of this reduction to the 2026 property tax levy on January 13, 2026, however no action was taken or notice provided to any Port staff or Commissioner. Dezember explained that, upon his return to the Port and review of the budget, the reduction was discovered.

Dezember reviewed the next steps including the possibility of pausing capital projects and updating the timing of grant-eligible expenditures based on current project timelines, staff is also proposing reducing the amount of funds that are being utilized from the project bond fund. Dezember added that formal action on the proposed 2026 budget revisions will be presented for consideration at a future commission meeting.

#### **D. CONVENE EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The special meeting was recessed at 9:20 a.m. It was announced that an Executive Session would commence at 9:20 a.m. for one hour to discuss with legal counsel pursuant to RCW 42.30.110(1) matters relating to real estate, litigation or potential litigation and legal risks.

The special meeting was reconvened at 10:20 a.m.

**E. ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting was adjourned at 10:21 a.m.

  
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Lori Stevens, Commission Secretary