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### Port Shares 2026 Budget Oversights

**RICHLAND, Wash.** – Port of Benton issued a news release on December 15, 2025, announcing that the 2026 budget was balanced. That December release is available online at [portofbenton.com/news](http://portofbenton.com/news).

The 2026 budget was approved on November 12, 2025, including the adoption of the 2026 property tax levy amount. At the time of approval, the budget was presented as balanced, with a net surplus of \$185,746.

The Port has experienced changes in financial leadership in 2026. In April, Stuart Dezember, CPA, returned to the Port as Director of Finance. Stuart previously served as the Director of Finance for over 15 years. During the review of the 2026 budget documents, several discrepancies were discovered in the Port's budget. Port staff presented the 2026 budget discrepancies during a May 28, 2026, special Commission meeting and outlined proposed actions.

#### 2026 Budget Variances:

- Beginning cash was understated by \$1,737,004
- Loan proceeds associated with the Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) were overstated by \$1,896,000
- 2025 budget carryover was overstated by \$300,000
- Property tax revenue was overstated by \$680,346

The variances create a net deficit of approximately \$1,139,342 in the 2026 Budget. “We take this issue very seriously and are moving quickly to correct it,” said Dezember. Stuart Dezember is leading the development of a budget revision that will be presented to the Commission at a future public meeting. This revision will rebalance the budget through corrective measures, such as pausing and reprioritizing capital projects and aligning grant-funded expenditures with revised project timelines. Dezember also emphasizes that “The Port’s focus is on ensuring accurate financial reporting and maintaining the public’s trust through transparency and responsible decision-making.”

The Port remains committed to transparency, accountability and responsible stewardship of public resources. This review ensures that financial decisions accurately reflect current conditions and support long-term economic development across Benton County.

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#### About Port of Benton

Port of Benton drives economic growth, development and private-sector investment in its district and the broader region through innovative projects and infrastructure improvements. The Port’s airports, rail, business parks, industrial facilities and tourism and recreation attractions further enhance the region’s economic vitality.