

**PORT OF BENTON
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
August 12, 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

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

PORT STAFF PRESENT: Stuart Dezember, Summers Miya, Audrey Burney, Bryan Bell, Brandin Lopez, Shaylee Nilsson and Joe Pisca

ALSO PRESENT: John O'Leary, Gravis Law; Mark Underwood, Richland Airport; Jon Ray, Richland Airport; Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation; Council Member Shayne Van Dyke, City of Richland; Rachel Visick, Tri-City Area Journal of Business; Gareth Nisbett, Debbie Berkowitz, Jamie Stayrook

The following attendees attended via remote communications: Wendy Culverwell, Tri-City Herald; Bryan Condon, Century West Engineering; Angela Sarceno-Lyman; Mardie Romero; Sheri Collins; Julia Mora; Ron Branine; Josh Lozano, Benton REA; Dan Hanson, Apple Valley News; Joshua Lott, Anderson Perry; Christy; two unidentified callers

The Commission meeting was noticed as required by RCW 42.30.070.

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

C. CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approval of Agenda

2. Approval of minutes of July 8, 2026, Commission Meeting

3. Approval of vouchers and certifications, including payroll for the month of July, totaling \$1,273,970.41

4. Resolution 26-50, A Resolution of the Port of Benton to Cancel Warrant No. 082844, for \$463.75, Which Has Been Deemed Lost

5. Acceptance of Work to Sierra Santa Fe Corporation, Richland Road Chip Seal Project, \$113,823.59 (including WSST).

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott D. Keller, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and unanimously passed by the Commission, approving the agenda for the August 12, 2026 Commission meeting, approving the minutes from the July 8, 2026 Commission meeting, approval of vouchers and certifications, including payroll for the month of July, totaling \$1,273,970.41, approval of Resolution 26-50, a Resolution of the Port of Benton to cancel

Warrant No. 082844, which has been deemed lost and approval of acceptance of work to Sierra Santa Fe Corporation, Richland Road Chip Seal Project, \$113,823.59 (including WSST).

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

Debbie Berkowitz – Concerns regarding the Paddle and Row Center in the Willow Pointe / Shoreline area.

Jamie Stayrook – Submitted Documents* regarding concerns about Atlas Agro / Data Center being built on Horn Rapids Road.

Mark Underwood – Thanked the Commissioners for their honesty and for improvements at the Port.

*Exhibit A

E. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Resolution 26-51, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Amending Exhibit 1 to Resolution 22-42, Relating to Land Rates, Richland Airport Park

Director of Economic Development Audrey Burney explained that the Port adopted Resolution 22-42 in 2022 establishing Richland Airport land rates. Burney stated a minor clerical error in parcel size classifications on the original exhibit had a gap between 99,000 sq ft and 100,000 sq ft. The Amendment changes the categories to: Less than 100,000 sq ft.; 100,000 sq ft. and greater. No rental changes were made; only the exhibit was corrected.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Scott D. Keller, and unanimously passed by the Commission; Resolution 26-51, a Resolution of the Port of Benton amending exhibit 1 to Resolution 22-42, relating to land rates, Richland Airport Park.

2. Resolution 26-52, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Authorizing the Interim Executive Director to Execute an Assignment, Assumption, Consent and Amendment of Lease, 2221 Airport Way, Richland Airport

Director of Economic Development Audrey Burney stated that current tenants Jeramy and Vanessa Haley are selling their hangar at the Richland Airport; and Jeremy Seeliger will assume the lease and responsibilities if the sale closes. Burney explained that the lease began in 2018 and is a 30-year agreement with options. Burney stated that this assignment does not change lease revenue. The agreement specifies that the Haleys are not released from obligations and liability under the lease or amendment.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott D. Keller, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission; Resolution 26-52, a Resolution of the Port of Benton authorizing the interim executive director to execute an assignment, assumption, consent and amendment of lease, 2221 Airport Way, Richland Airport

3. Resolution 26-53, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Adopting the Updated Crow Butte Park Master Plan

Construction Project Manager Bryan Bell presented the new 6-year master plan for Crow Butte Park, prepared by AHBL. Bell explained that plan objectives include maintaining funding eligibility; consistency with state and local requirements; helping the Port respond to opportunities and guiding effective park management.

Bell stated the key goals are to maintain and improve Park facilities; provide high-quality service to park partners and users; seek grant opportunities; maintain a unique, welcoming, and safe atmosphere; operate in a fiscally responsible manner; maintain public awareness and maintain excellent environmental stewardship. Bell noted that the Park facilities are roughly 50 years old and require ongoing maintenance.

Bell discussed the increased day use activity over the last three years with day use fees of \$10 and annual pass fee of \$60. Complete projects such as sewer cleanout repairs; tree trimming; caretaker house remodels and HVAC upgrades; fish cleaning station; restriping; new playground slide and equipment updates. Bell stated that the capital and operating budget planning for 2026-2032 contains many items contingent on grant funding and local matching support.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens, and unanimously passed by the Commission: Resolution 26-53, a Resolution of the Port of Benton Adopting the updated Crow Butte Park Master Plan

4. Resolution 26-54, A Resolution of the Port of Benton Amending Resolution 25-27, Updating the Rate and Fee Structure and Cancellation Policy at Crow Butte Park

Director of Finance Stuart Dezember explained that the Port adopted a reservation and cancellation policy for Crow Butte Park in 2025 and had since received many cancellation calls for extenuating circumstances.

Dezember stated the proposed changes will include increasing the cancellation/change fee from \$8 to \$10 beginning in 2027. This will include a 72-Hour cancellation window, with certain fees being non-refundable. Dezember explained that fees will be applied to each site for multi-use reservations and no-shows are non-refundable. This update will provide clearer, more consistent guidance and better reflect the operational cost of cancellations, bank fees, and staff time.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lori Stevens, seconded by Commissioner Scott Keller, and unanimously passed by the Commission approving Resolution 26-54, amending Resolution 25-27, updating the rate and fee structure and cancellation policy at Crow Butte Park.

5. Paddle and Row Center Update

Brandin Lopez, Engineering and Capital Development Senior Manager, stated that a proposal was discussed for the Paddle and Row Center near the Willow Pointe/Columbia River waterfront area. Lopez emphasized that the Port has not entered into an agreement yet, and the discussions remain preliminary. Lopez explained that conversations with the City of Richland had not yet occurred in earnest, would be needed before moving forward and public comments from earlier in the meeting were acknowledged as timely and relevant.

David Curran and Steve Agni introduced the project on behalf of the Tri-City Rowing Association. Both stated that this facility would be open to the public, not just club members and it could support public recreation, economic development, and environmentally sound river access.

Brandin Lopez described the site as challenging from a permitting standpoint. Lopez emphasized the site is “Not ready to develop,” and will require substantial permitting work. The area already has stormwater and utility infrastructure nearby, including a storm pond, sewer lift station, and roadway connections. Potential funding sources exist, and the project would be a multi-phase effort. The Port reiterated that any capital costs would be borne by the project proponents, not the Port.

Commissioner O’Neil pointed out the project raises concerns due to the property being unique and because there is not yet a comprehensive waterfront plan for the area.

A motion was made by Commissioner Bill O’Neil, seconded by Commissioner Scott Keller and unanimously passed by the Commission authorizing the interim executive director to draft a MOU with Tri-Cities Rowing Association.

F. INFORMATION REPORTS

1. Grants Update

Brandin Lopez provided an overview of the current grant status of the following projects:

1. RAIL Grant – Still open, expected obligation timing moved to October.
2. WA Commerce Grant – \$232,000; to support design.
3. CRISI Grant – \$2.5 million; moving forward, to follow BUILD Grant timeline
4. Shore Power Electrification Project – The Shore Power Electrification Project is at 90% design. Permits have been completed and submitted through the Corps of Engineers, JARPA, and SEPA. A public hearing was held on Monday, and comments from Willow Point residents were noted. Staff must still demonstrate zero net loss and respond to the public through planning and the hearing process.

Project Manager Bryan Bell provided an overview of the current grant status of the following project:

5. CERB Loan – The CERB Project is under contract and under obligation.

The Port is making progress through design milestones on 2501 and is ahead of schedule.

Expected permit readiness shifted from Q1 2027 to November 2026. Terms are described as a 20-year loan at under 3%. Clarification was made that the \$2.4 million CERB amount is a loan, not a grant. Related local match was discussed as \$2.95 million, including Benton County Funds and Port Funds.

RCO Planning Grant – Bell provided an update on the \$200,000 RCO planning grant, with no match. The application has been submitted for Crow Butte wastewater ponds, with a determination in September and awards in October.

2. Capital Projects Update

Engineering and Capital Development Senior Manager, Brandin Lopez, stated the Steptoe paving work is essentially finished on the final lift, though the project is not fully complete. Remaining items include Fiber to the Hut and finishing coordination work. The AI downstream at the Center Parkway is functioning, with a few programming bugs still being addressed. A proposal from Ziply Fiber would provide Fiber Communications redundancy to the Hut.

3. Airports Update

Engineering and Capital Development Senior Manager, Brandin Lopez, states the Prosser Airport Pavement rehabilitation and lighting project is awaiting contract completion for rock on gravel edges. FAA flight check scheduling. The remote lighting activation system now triggers much earlier than before; reportedly about 15 miles prior to runway arrival. The Richland Airport Apron Reconfiguration is expected to start Monday, August 17th.

Commissioners asked that the disruption to Sundance Aviation and its fuel tanks be minimized. Stuart Dezember stated the contract allows 3.5 cumulative days of closure for the taxi lane in front of the fueling apron; staff is working to reduce that as much as possible. The phasing plan is intended to preserve access by routing traffic to taxiway Charlie when necessary. Richland Airport Overlay and Zoning coordination with the City of Richland and the WSDOT regarding an overlay in municipal code to protect airport land use and future expansion.

4. Crow Butte Update

Facilities Manager Joe Pisca presented performance figures noting that reservations are down 8.74% year to date compared with 2025. Guest return rate is up 7.09% year to date. Occupancy is down 7.03% year to date. Site revenue is up 8.10% year to date, reaching \$193,325 versus \$178,837 in 2025. Staff expects several figures to improve further before year-end.

G. DIRECTOR REPORTS/COMMENTS

1. Real Estate

Director of Economic Development Audrey Burney is requesting commission authorization for lease agreements with Intera Incorporated / Hanford TI Group, which are seeking a 1-year lease plus a 1-year renewal option for additional office space.

Burney added that CBIT (Columbia Basin IT) occupies approximately 1,900 square feet under a 3-year lease with one 3-year option. The Port clarified that lease agreements with terms of one year or more require commission authorization under delegation rules.

A motion was made by Commissioner Bill O'Neil, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and unanimously passed by the Commission authorizing Lease agreements with Intera Inc. and CBIT.

Burney added that WSU notified the Port that its grant moved forward, and it wants to continue leasing space at 3251 building, which is used for Hanford artifacts. The prior lease situation was affected by delayed grant payments and a month-to-month arrangement, the tenant is now current. A new lease may come back for commission approval, possibly for execution on October 1.

Burney stated that North Coast Enterprise; a month-to-month lease Area 13 is moving forward. The company processes used wind turbine blades into 10-foot sections, bundles them and ships them out. The Commissioners were advised that heavy truck traffic may be visible and that the site is the fenced 5-acre laydown yard behind the railroad building. Burney reported the ongoing lease and occupancy updates: XL SciTech is in the 3100 on a month-to-month lease. Lease negotiations continue with GSA. The Port is working with US Cellular on lease continuation. PNNL will exit 3190 George Washington Way by December 31, 2026. Graymar Environmental continues discussions about a 10-day exempt hazardous waste transfer facility next to the intermodal facility.

Burney explained that the Port has received a complaint regarding the condition of the former Bryson Orchard trees. Because the Treetop-related sale has taken longer than expected, the Port is evaluating long-term orchard management and removal options. The orchard is no longer in operation and should be taken out of service, with removal likely to be included in next year's budget and completed before spring 2027. The property also includes two residences that need to be secured and remediated.

2. Marketing

Marketing & Communications Manager Summers Miya announced that the third Thursday USS Triton tours are continuing at full capacity, with additional tours being added to meet demand. Miya added that there are five total tours scheduled for August, noting that American Cruise Lines continue to bring multiple loaded buses to the Sail Park each week and the Sail Park was also the site of a recent reenlistment ceremony.

Miya stated that the recent tenant appreciation BBQ was a successful event with a great turnout and thanked all for the support, particularly Administrative Assistant, Mardie Romero for all her support behind the scenes.

Miya stated that she attended the July Chamber luncheon with staff and continues to serve on the Entrepreneurial Awards committee. Miya explained that the format for the Entrepreneurial Awards event has changed this year and anyone can nominate a business or Sammy at TCEntrepreneurialAwards.com. Miya noted that she assisted the committee with the issuing of the press release that went out the previous day regarding this event.

Miya noted that she is working with the team on Comprehensive Plan updates and that registration for the public tour was announced at the tenant appreciation BBQ, adding that registrations have already been received.

Miya announced that she has introduced the Employee Hub with the Port team.

Miya stated that the American World War II Heritage City signs are ready to pick up at the Visit Tri-Cities Visitor Center, adding that she will work with Facilities on locations for installation.

Miya announced that the community outreach campaign has been launched and shared two of the completed commercials with those in attendance. Miya added that a third commercial is in development.

3. Port Attorney

Port Attorney, John O'Leary, stated that he had no items for the regular session but will have items for the executive session.

4. Finance Director

Director of Finance Stuart Dezember provided several updates:

The car counter machine is close to operational. The Port sent car charge invoices to the UP and BNSF railroads from October 1 through March 31: BNSF \$247,000 and UP \$101,000. The Port is expecting payment but is still working through the process.

Enduris Insurance premium for the next policy year is \$573,000, excluding railroad, airport, and underground storage tank coverage. The Port is considering insurance alternatives as part of the budget review.

The Port is exploring a potential payoff / refinancing of the Transload building note at Columbia Western Mountain Onion / Columbia Real Estate, which could generate \$745,000 in income.

5. Interim Executive Director

Director of Finance Stuart Dezember explained that the Interim Executive Director was on PTO this week and provided his remarks through other staff updates.

H. COMMISSIONER REPORTS/COMMENTS

Commissioner Scott D. Keller praised the Tenant Appreciation BBQ, the Crow Butte updates, and the Port staff efforts.

Commissioner Lori Stevens emphasized that the tenants are central to the Port's economic development mission and thanked the Port staff for the behind-the-scenes work.

Commissioner O'Neil thanked the Port staff and specifically recognized Sundance Aviation for 20 years of partnership at the Richland Airport, noting how important fixed-base operators are to the general aviation airports. O'Neil also thanked the Port staff for the Richland Airport tour and said it was very educational.

I. RECESS TO EXECUTIVE SESSION

The regular Commission meeting was recessed at 10:17 a.m., with an announcement that an Executive Session would commence at 10:17 a.m. for 60 minutes under RCW 42.30.110(c), (f), (g) and (l) 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 11:17 a.m.

At 11:17 a.m., it was announced that an additional 30 minutes would be added to the executive session. *

*Attorney, Carolyn Lake joined the executive session at 11:40 a.m.

At 11:47 a.m., it was announced that an additional 15 minutes would be added to the executive session.

At 12:03 p.m., it was announced that an additional 10 minutes would be added to the executive session.

The regular meeting was reconvened at 12:13 p.m.

J. RECONVENE COMMISSION MEETING

K. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Bill O'Neil adjourned the meeting at 12:13 p.m.


Lori Stevens, Commission Secretary