ORIGINAL

PORT OF BENTON
COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
October 14, 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 attended remotely

PORT STAFF PRESENT: Stuart Dezember, Summers Miya, Audrey Burney, Bryan Bell, Brandin Lopez, Ron Branine, Quentin Wright, Mardie Romero, Paul Brachvogel, Joe Pisca

ALSO PRESENT: Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation; Mark Underwood, Richland Airport; John Ray, Richland Airport; Rachel Hicks, WSU GEAR UP Tri-Cities; Emma Longstreth, WSU GEAR UP; Luz Goebel, WSU GEAR UP; Becky Reichel, WSU GEAR UP; Michael Mealer, Tri-Cities Rowing Association

The following attendees attended via remote communications: Wendy Culverwell, Tri-City Herald; Bryan Condon, Century West Engineering; Angela Saraceno-Lyman; Sheri Collins; Julia Mora; Dan Hanson, Apple Valley News; Shaylee Nilsson; Joshua Lott; Gareth Nisbet; one unknown phone number, Christy Mastin; SBDC, Rachel Visick, TCJOB

The Commission noticed the meeting as required by RCW 42.30.070.

B. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Interim Executive Director Ron Branine led those present in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. **CONSENT AGENDA**

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Approval of minutes of September 16, 2026, Commission Meeting
3. Approval of vouchers and certifications, including payroll for September, totaling $815,847.51
4. Certification of Surplus for Port of Benton Personal Property

Commissioner Bill O'Neil made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Scott Keller, and unanimously passed by the Commissioners present, to approve the agenda for the October 14, 2026, Commission meeting and approve the minutes from the September 16, 2026, Commission Meeting. Approve vouchers and certifications, including September payroll totaling $815,847.51, and the Certification of Surplus for Port of Benton Personal Property.

D. PUBLIC COMMENT

John Ray, a Richland Airport tenant, stated that airport hangar lease fees and HOA fees are affecting economic development at the airport and have discouraged growth and new hangar construction. John also asked whether the Port has decided to sponsor Aviation Career Day again, as he would like to issue invitations on time. John thanked Summers and Quentin for all their help with the event.

Clif Dyer with Sundance Aviation at Richland Airport raised concerns about the draft budget priorities, airport land rates, and economic development.*

*Attachment A

E. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Welcome and Update from Rachel Hicks, Washington State University Tri-Cities, GEAR UP OVP

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine introduced Rachel Hicks, Program Director, with WSU Tri-Cities GEAR UP.

Rachel Hicks explained that GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs.

- The program supports multiple postsecondary paths – including technical training trades, two-year and four-year institutions – and helps students develop plans for life after high school.
- Tri-Cities GEAR UP has two programs: One Vision Partnership (OVP) and Harvest of Hope (HOH). As of October 1, 2026, the program included five grants.
- Rachel stated that the program covers 21 school districts, with coverage extending from Tri-Cities to communities including Kiona-Benton, Finley, Connell, Burbank, Othello, Moses Lake, Warden, Davenport, Clarkston, and Vancouver. Middle school poverty thresholds and competitive grant criteria influence the program.
- The program services include academic support, mentoring, advising, tutoring, financial aid guidance, family outreach, college and career trips, STEM activities, and post-secondary transition support. Hicks stated that she was interested in learning more about the Ports Aviation career day as a potential student opportunity.

2. Welcome and Update from Christy Mastin, Small Business Development Council

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine introduced Christy Mastin with the Small Business Development Council via Zoom.

Christy Mastin presented an overview of the Washington SBDC, a nationwide network established under the Small Business Act of 1980. Mastin stated that the Washington program is hosted by WSU and supported by partners including the Small Business Administration, Washington State Department of Commerce, Community Colleges, and local economic development organizations. Mastin acknowledged the Ports' prior support and requested continued support.

Mastin cited program impact estimates: Over ten years, SBDC clients averaged 8.5% job growth compared with a Washington average of 3%, and 18% sales growth compared with a state average of 6.5%. Mastin stated the estimated failure rate for new businesses in their first 4 years remains about 50%. Clients often discuss Washington's tax structure and labor costs; SBDC advises them on planning for wage increases and related business adjustments.

3. Resolution 26-57 – A Resolution of the Port of Benton Commission Authorizing the Interim Executive Director to Execute Documents Related to a Perpetual Roadway Easement to the City of Prosser.

Airport Manager Quentin Wright sought approval of a perpetual easement for the City of Prosser roundabout near OIE and One Country Road, along with authorization for the Interim Executive Director to sign construction-permit documents after FAA environmental review is completed. Wright stated that the parallel approvals are intended to avoid delaying construction planned for early 2027.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Bill O'Neil and unanimously passed by the Commissioners present, authorizing the Interim Executive Director to execute documents related to a perpetual roadway easement to the City of Prosser.

4. Resolution 26-58 – A Resolution of the Port of Benton approving a Lease Agreement with the United States of America, acting by and through the General Services Administration, for 2019 Butler Loop, Richland Airport

Director of Economic Development Audrey Burney presented a proposed 48-month lease to a state agency through GSA for approximately 5,000 square feet, including 1,500 square feet of office space, 3,500 square feet of warehouse space, fenced yard space, and parking for roughly 30 vehicles. Burney stated the monthly rent is approximately $12,000 under a full-service lease. Burney stated the Port will retain building maintenance, insurance, and liability obligations; there is no security deposit, and federal substitution rights allow another agency to occupy the space.

A motion was made by Commissioner Bill O'Neil, seconded by Commissioner Lori Stevens and unanimously passed by the Commissioners present, approving the Lease agreement with the United States of America, acting by and through the General Services Administration, for 2019 Butler Loop, Richland Airport.

5. Resolution 26-59 – A Resolution of The Port of Benton Authorizing a Memorandum of Understanding with The Tri-Cities Rowing Association for Feasibility Planning of a Proposed Paddle and Row Center

Director of Capital Projects, Rail and Engineering, Brandin Lopez, recommended a 12-month memorandum of understanding for feasibility planning and engineering for the proposed Paddle and Row Center. Lopez said the MOU creates no funding obligation for either the Port or the association. Lopez said it supports coordinated planning with the City of Richland and allows development plans and master planning conversations to proceed in parallel where possible. The parties may extend the agreement if needed.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Bill O'Neil and unanimously passed by the Commissioners present, authorizing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Tri-Cities Rowing Association for Feasibility Planning of a Proposed Paddle and Row Center.

6. HMIS Lease Security Deposit Requirement, Richland Business Park

Director of Economic Development, Audrey Burney, requested a waiver of the $250,676.76 deposit. HMIS succeeded Mission Support Alliance (MSA) as the tenant and has maintained a long-term tenancy at the property. At the October 12, 2010, Commission Meeting, the Port waived the rent security requirement under MSA. Commissioner Scott Keller stated that HMIS has never been past due and has been a tenant since 2010.

A motion was made by Commissioner Scott Keller, seconded by Commissioner Bill O'Neil and unanimously passed by the Commissioners present, waiving the rent security requirement of $250,676.76 for Hanford Mission Integration Solutions pursuant to RCW 53.08.085 and authorizing staff, legal counsel, and the Interim Executive Director to prepare and execute any related documentation necessary to memorialize the waiver.

7. Schedule of User Fees and Charges

Director of Capital Projects, Rail and Engineering, Brandin Lopez introduced a draft schedule for discussion only; no action was requested. The goal is to consolidate Port fees and direct customers to the applicable authority or agreement. The draft distinguishes statutory fees (S), fees adopted by resolution (R), and contract-based fees (C). It is intended to include items such as public record charges, permits, easements, third-party expenses, and customer requests requiring additional staff effort. Lopez said cost recovery could apply to customer-specific work, such as engineering, surveying, or legal expenses incurred during negotiations that do not proceed. If a transaction moves forward, a proposed deposit could be credited toward the purchase price or lease. The draft will be expanded and revised; Lopez stated he plans to bring a proposed adoption resolution to the Commission in November.

8. Hi-Line Engineering Ground Lease Amendment, Richland Airport

Commissioner Bill O'Neil tabled this item.

9. Resolution 22-42 – Relating to Land Rates at Richland Airport Park, Review, Discussion and Possible Action

Commissioner Bill O'Neil discussed the airport rent study and rates established under Resolution 22-42, following public comments and Commissioner O'Neil's presentation.*

*Exhibit B

Commissioner Bill O'Neil made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Scott Keller, and the Commissioners present unanimously passed, to suspend Resolution 22-42 until a new lease rate and lease structure can be completed. Extend airport leases currently due, or becoming

due, before the end of calendar year 2025 at their current rates through December 31, 2027, allowing staff time to complete the work and WSDOT to issue its statewide assessment.

F. INFORMATION REPORTS

1. Grants Update

BUILD Grant / 2579 Stevens Dr. Modernization / 2501 New Construction:

Director of Capital Projects, Rail & Engineering Brandin Lopez said Century West Engineering reported the 2579 Stevens Dr. Modernization / 2501 New Building project was approximately 50% designed and engineered, with construction documents targeted for year-end 2026. Permit applications and construction bidding were planned for January 2027, with contractor selection or negotiations anticipated by February 2027. Permits were expected to take four to five months, and site and utility improvements were targeted to begin in Quarter 3 2027.

Commerce Grant/CRISI Grant:

Brandin Lopez reported a $232,800 Commerce Grant for design services related to additional rail spurs and rail yard development. The Port will leverage that work with a $2.5 million CRISI Grant. The Port is using the funds for design and permitting activities and future construction efforts. Lopez stated the broader funding sequence may push the $51 million effort into Quarter 1 2027.

RCO Grant:

Construction Project Manager Bryan Bell provided updates on Crow Butte Wastewater ponds. Century West reported that a $200,000 RCO planning grant had received the highest possible score so far and was under review, with an award decision expected the following Friday. If awarded, funds would support engineering design, cultural and environmental review, and waterfront permitting for wastewater ponds at Crow Butte, positioning the Port to seek a later construction grant.

Director of Capital Projects, Rail & Engineering Brandin Lopez demonstrated a newly launched Port Project Review Portal on the Port website. Lopez stated that it will consolidate information, links, requirements, and an intake form for requests involving Port property, including utility crossings and traffic-control plans. Lopez said the system is intended to improve customer guidance and internal assignment and tracking, and retrieval of records in response to public-records requests. The Port receives approximately 1.5-2 requests per week, or about 100 annually.

2. Capital Projects Update:

2579 Stevens Modernization / 2501 New Building:

Brandin Lopez reported that the project was about 50% designed and engineered, with construction documents targeted for year-end 2026. Permit applications and construction bidding were planned for January 2027, with contractor selection or negotiations anticipated for

February 2027. Lopez said permits are expected to take 4-5 months, and site and utility improvements were targeted to begin in Q3 2027.

3. Airports Update:

Airport Manager Quentin Wright stated that we are still waiting on the Prosser Airport FAA report regarding the new PAPI and lighting system. Wright noted that the informal report suggests the issue might involve trimming or removing trees on the Port property or installing Baffling if trees on the property affect the lighting. Still, the Port had not received the official report after more than a month.
Wright said the Richland Airport pavement work was largely complete; staff was waiting through the 30 days before applying the second layer of pavement markings. Wright said they are preparing thank-you letters for firefighters and aviation crews, including Northwest Helicopters, Dauntless Aviation, and Washington DNR personnel.

4. Crow Butte Update:

Facilities Manager Joe Pisca reported that the Crow Butte season will end on October 15. Pisca said the season ended with about $215,000 in revenue. Occupancy was down about 8% from the previous year, while returning guests increased about 8%. June, July, and August each exceeded $40,000 in revenue. Pisca discussed increasing attendance during the early-season months and reducing costs, including approximately $80,000 spent on garbage services the prior year and the possibility of a trash compactor. The park is approaching its 20th year of operation in 2027.

G. DIRECTOR REPORTS / COMMENTS

1. Real Estate

Director of Economic Development Audrey Burney reported executing two items: the WCU 3250/3251 lease and consent to assignment of the Cook's lease. Burney was working on approximately 10 active lease or modification matters, three lease terminations are expected around December 31, about 10 rental prospects, and six land prospects. Burney also described regional discussions about housing affordability, workforce housing demand through 2044, and the average age of first-time homebuyers, reported at about 44. The Treetop purchase-and-sale agreement had been sent for review; staff were awaiting a response on language related to the development agreement.

2. Marketing

Director of Marketing and Communication, Summers Miya, stated that third Thursday USS Triton tours have continued at full capacity since the last Commission meeting, highlighting the Silent Service Motorcycle group and the Blue Knights of Washington. Miya added that 545 individuals have toured Triton through Q3.
Miya stated that the team hosted the public tour on September 30 and thanked all who participated, including Commissioner Stevens.

Miya stated that the sunrise launch was cancelled on Media Day of the Balloon Rally and a reporter could not be identified for Saturday's flight, but she attended the event herself and complimented all involved with setup and participation.
Miya announced that the Port co-hosted a booth at the RiverFest event on Saturday, October 3 and thanked the staff who participated.
Miya highlighted several of the events she participated in, including the Elected Leaders Reception, Tri-Cities Rivershore Enhancement Council field tour with the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Benton County Courthouse Great Centennial event, the TRIDEC press release announcing that they have partnered with Avalanche Energy to advance plans for the first global fusion machine manufacturing facility in the Tri-Cities.
Miya added that she has been continuing with the Entrepreneurial Awards committee, with the event being held Tuesday, 10/20.
Miya added that she has been working on updates to the Comprehensive Plan, the fall newsletter and has assisted with coordination of the Project Review Portal and new project page for the 2501 Stevens Drive project.
Miya stated that she will be attending the WPPA Small Ports event October 21-23.

3. Port Attorney

Port Attorney Paul Brachvogel stated that there were no items for the regular session.

4. Finance Director

Director of Finance, Stuart Dezember, thanked staff for work on the budget workshop held earlier in the week and said the draft remained a living document as leases and other information changed. Dezember proposed a special meeting on October 27, preferably in the morning, primarily for a budget workshop. Dezember anticipated presenting a lease for approval and asking the commission to approve the draft budget so it could be made available for public inspection, along with the Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements (CSHI). Commissioner O'Neil asked to receive the notice early enough to issue the required notice.

5. Interim Executive Director

Interim Executive Director Ron Branine reported that Avalanche Energy planned to continue using Port's 2345 building for research and development, with office and restroom upgrades, while pursuing a separate manufacturing facility. The Port sought more information to assess impacts and safety for other building occupants. Branine also described restarting a regional "quad ports" group with the ports of Pasco, Kennewick, and Walla Walla, to meet monthly.

H. COMMISSIONER REPORTS/COMMENTS

Commissioner O'Neil thanked staff for the budget work, the public tour, and coordinating firefighting support.

Commissioner Stevens emphasized that the public tours help residents understand the Port's role in jobs, tourism, and economic development.

I. RECESS TO EXECUTIVE SESSION

The regular commission meeting was recessed at 10:30 a.m. with an announcement that an executive session would commence at 10:30 a.m. For 45 minutes under RCW 42.30.110(1)(c), to discuss real estate; RCW 42.30.110(1)(i), to discuss with legal counsel regarding potential litigation/legal risks; RCW 42.30.110(1)(g), to evaluate the qualifications of a candidate for appointment or performance of a public employee. The regular meeting will reconvene at 11:15 a.m.
At 11:15 a.m., it was announced that an additional 15 minutes would be added to Executive Session.

J. RECONVENE COMMISSION MEETING

The regular meeting was reconvened at 11:30 a.m.

No other action was reported after the executive session.

K. ADJOURNMENT

The regular meeting was adjourned at 11:31 am.

Lori Stevens

Lori Stevens, Commission Secretary