ORIGINAL

PORT OF BENTON
SPECIAL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
October 27, 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, Stuart Dezember, Mardie Romero, Bryan Bell, Brandin Lopez, Quentin Wright, Jorge Celestino, Audrey Burney

ALSO PRESENT: Clif Dyer, Sundance Aviation; Mayor Pro Tem Shayne Van Dyke, City of Richland

The following attendees attended via remote communications: Sheri Collins, Shaylee Nilsson, Gareth Nisbit, Paul Brachvogel, Rachel Visick; Tri-Cities Area Journal of Business, Angela Saraceno-Lyman, Julia Mora

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. Review of the 2027 Port of Benton Proposed Budget Before Being Placed on File for Public Review

   Director of Finance Stuart Dezember presented a revised proposed 2027 budget; he explained that the Port's largest expenditure is Capital Projects at $10 million. Dezember stated that the proposed 2027 budget is $21.09 million and will maintain a cash reserve of $2.8 million, with $2.3 million in general reserve and $500k for future capital project obligations. Dezember said the 2027 property tax levy figures are not yet final, and assessed values are not expected to change significantly. He said the proposed 2027 levy includes a 1% increase, estimated at $26,000, plus about $31,000 from new construction. The total proposed levy is $3.3 million, or .29 cents per $1,000 of assessed value.
   Dezember stated that the commission will hold a public hearing on the tax levy at its next meeting on November 10.

   Dezember highlighted the anticipated grant work for the rail project and BUILD, $1.9 million for the shore power electrification, and the Ports allocation of .09 funds for construction and infrastructure. Crow Butte landscaping was increased by $30,000, bringing the proposed amount to $38,000, primarily for ongoing tree removal. Dezember described the long-term debt balance as about $9.7 million, with rates ranging from 1.9% to 4%; the budget anticipates no additional borrowing. Dezember discussed Capital Projects such as Port-wide pavement maintenance, roof and HVAC replacements, a $75,000 AWAS design project, and $100,000 to

remove orchard trees at the Prosser Wine & Food Park; the orchard tree removal is out for bid and is hoped to begin soon. A possible land sale remained under discussion and was not included as budget revenue.
2501 Stevens Drive: the proposed Port contribution was $1.55 million, alongside a $232,000 state grant, a $625,000 CRISI grant, and $3.5 million in BUILD funding. The $12 million project is multi-year, with substantial work anticipated in 2028. Shore power funding was listed at $2.1 million. The airport projects include a wildlife hazard management plan and environmental review and planning related to future wildlife fencing.

Dezember said that the facilities equipment plans include 2 additional lawnmowers and a landscape trailer, as existing mowers had accumulated substantial operating hours. Other adjustments included funding for the 20th anniversary of the Ports Crow Butte lease from the Corps of Engineers; reducing LoopNet from $8,400 to $1,600 for one site; combining engineering, surveying, and planning/development services into a $108,000 line; $750,000 for track operations; $100,000 for legal services; and $40,000 for audits. Totaling $1.5 million, compared with $2 million in 2026.

Commissioner Scott Keller made a motion to approve the proposed 2027 budget for placement on file for public review. Commissioner Lori Stevens seconded the motion, and the Commission unanimously passed it.

2. Review of the 2027 Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements Before Being Placed on File for Public Review

Director of Capital Project, Rail & Engineering, Brandin Lopez, stated that the updates to the plan are minor: refreshed maps, aerials, and photographs; he said they removed outdated or duplicate language, and clearer connections between long-range planning, capital investment, and annual implementation. Lopez said the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) would be maintained as a separate document attached to the comprehensive plan, allowing the CIP to be updated more flexibly without revising the entire plan.
Lopez stated the Port's overall direction had not changed, and major revisions were not anticipated unless circumstances, property holdings, or capital and operating priorities changed.

Commissioner Lori Stevens made a motion to approve the proposed 2027 Comprehensive Plan for Harbor Improvements for placement on file for public review. Commissioner Scott Keller seconded the motion, and the Commission unanimously passed it.

3. IRS Tax Lien

Director of Finance, Stuart Dezember, provided an informational report; no action is requested. Dezember stated the Port received an IRS letter on August 13, 2026, a notice of intent to lien Port property, followed the next day. The lien came to light during the closing of new tenants; Bunge, a title report identified it. Dezember said that he identified two underlying balances: a March 2026 payroll-tax deposit that the Port had not made, which was an actual error and has since been paid in full; and a roughly $20,000 balance associated with June 2025 that he believes resulted from an IRS data entry error. Dezember said the lien was filed in

August 2026. The Port is working with the IRS to have it removed and is seeking records to determine what notices and communications were sent and how the issue developed. The IRS agent reported an attempt to contact the former Port finance director. Dezember stated the overall amount referenced was $46,889 and confirmed that the balances and reports have been addressed. The lien did not hold up the Bunge closing or title insurance. Commissioner O'Neil stressed that all IRS correspondence should be flagged and brought to staff's attention immediately.

4. Tri Power, Inc. Lease Agreement, Technology and Business Campus

   Director of Properties, Audrey Burney, stated that this is a small business; they are a local electrical contractor serving the Hanford area and have been operating for approximately five years and are using a temporary trailer but need office space by the end of October. Burney said the space is located at 3250 Port of Benton Blvd. and is approximately 963 square feet. Burney said the lease will be for two years, with one-year renewal options. The first year is $19,000; the second year is approximately $24,000.

   Commissioner Scott Keller made a motion to approve the proposed lease agreement for Tri Power, Inc., in the Technology and Business Campus. Commissioner Lori Stevens seconded the motion, and the Commission unanimously passed it.

5. Authorize the Interim Executive Director to Offer Employment to a Facilities Maintenance Candidate

   The Interim Executive Director, Ron Branine, stated the landscaping position has been vacant for eight or nine months. The candidate has been working through Express Employment, and the candidate is doing exceptionally well. The position was budgeted as a backfill.

   Commissioner Lori Stevens made a motion to authorize the Interim Executive Director to offer employment to a facilities maintenance candidate. Commissioner Scott Keller seconded the motion, and the Commission unanimously passed it.

D. CONVENE EXECUTIVE SESSION

It was announced that an Executive Session would commence at 9:15 a.m. for 45 minutes to discuss, with legal counsel pursuant to RCW 42.30.110(1)(c) to discuss real estate; RCW 42.30.110(1)(i), discussions with legal counsel regarding potential litigation and legal risks; RCW 42.30.110(1)(g), to evaluate the qualifications of a candidate for appointment or performance of a public employee.

The special meeting was recessed at 9:15 a.m.

The executive session is expected to take 45 minutes.

The Special meeting will reconvene at 10:00 a.m. At 10:05 a.m., it was announced that an additional five minutes was added to executive session.

E. RECONVENE SPECIAL COMMISSION MEETING

The Special Commission meeting was reconvened at 10:05 a.m.

No action was taken following Executive Session

F. ADJOURNMENT

The Special Commission meeting adjourned at 10:06 a.m.

Lori Stevens

Lori Stevens, Commission Secretary