



O R E G O N

MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

# Work Session Summary Minutes

## Economic Development Program Update

November 13, 2025. 9:30 AM

Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Salem  
5th Floor, Suite 5232, Commissioners Board Room

### ATTENDANCE:

**Commissioners:** Danielle Bethell, Colm Willis, and Kevin Cameron.

**Board's Office:** Alvin Klausen, Heather Inyama, Trevor Lane, Toni Whitler, and Matt Laywer.

**Community Services:** Tami Cirerol, Sarah Coutley, Chip Bury, and Kelli Weese.

Commissioner Danielle Bethell called the meeting to order at 9:36 a.m.

### **New Economic Development Specialist, Tami Cirerol**

- Ms. Cirerol recently transferred from public health.
- Experience as an accreditation coordinator:
  - Responsible for managing and submitting documentation for national accreditation.
- Highlighted achievement:
  - Marion County was first in Oregon to earn national accreditation in 2013.
  - With subsequent reaccreditation cycles.
- Excited for economic development projects and collaborating with the team to enhance community programs and county initiatives.
- Transition from public health to economic development is an opportunity for professional growth and broader impact.

### **Willamette Workforce Partnership Presentation**

- Critical role of convening entities:
  - Chambers of commerce, Chemeketa, Workforce Partnership, and Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to advance economic development.
- Need regular coordination (e.g., bi-monthly or quarterly forums) to support traded sector businesses and small local enterprises.
- It is important to include all regions in Marion County in collaborative efforts:
  - Not just Salem and Keizer.
- Prospect of joint educational programming:
  - Leverage expertise from organizations to help small businesses and workforce participants.
- Identify each partner's strengths to build annual workshops with rotating experts:
  - Increase support for business owners at all stages.
- Previous city surveys identify needs like business coaching and skill development:
  - Acknowledge that many recommendations are not yet fully acted upon.

## **Business Retention and Expansion**

- Longstanding partnership between Marion County and economic development contractor:
  - Received \$160,000 annually over the last decade.
- Review structure of business retention and expansion efforts:
  - Statewide (Business Oregon).
  - Regional (economic development organizations, e.g., SEDCOR).
  - Local (cities, chambers).
- Challenges in measuring contractor's value:
  - Concerns over lack of outcome detail in contractor reports.
  - Number of visits recorded:
    - Little evidence of concrete results or value-added for partners.
- Important to assess qualitative and quantitative metrics:
  - Jobs created.
  - Investments secured.
  - Business satisfaction.
  - Strength of local partnerships.
  - Increases in county's property tax base.
- Past high-performance management (when Nick Harville was involved) versus perceived decline in engagement or measurable success with current staffing.
- Solicit competitive proposals from multiple economic development service providers:
  - Possibly fund more than one organization to cover different priority areas.
- Need modernizing local industries (e.g., supporting agricultural shifts from grass seed to hazelnuts in partnership with Business Oregon):
  - Asked contractor to play more active convening role in such transitions.

## **Discussion**

- Debated best metrics for economic development:
  - Should focus be:
    - Tax base.
    - Job creation.
    - Investment in property/equipment; or
    - Per capita income.
- Disconnect between available programs and actual local business needs:
  - Some small business resources are ineffective, unavailable, or inconvenient.
- Marion County's lower per capita income compared to neighboring counties:
  - Analyze strategies for improving wage growth and job quality.
- Frustration with lack of "convener" for small business development:
  - Often leans heavily to larger industries and poor focus on small businesses.
- Revisit and leverage previous surveys of city economic development needs:
  - Aim to implement unaddressed recommendations.
- Contractor accountability and difference between:
  - Providing grants:
    - Less oversight.
  - Engage in contracts:
    - More direct management and enforced outcomes.
- Split economic development funding into separate contracts for different areas:
  - Current strengths versus gaps in service.

- Issue of transparency:
  - Contractor's contributions are often unclear in reports.
  - Difficult to directly link their efforts to positive outcomes:
    - Significant investments or business recruitment.
- Value of fostering conditions where local businesses can scale up:
  - Goal of "growing the next big company opposed to only seeking to attract large businesses.

### **Next Steps**

- Prepare comparative analysis of contractor outcomes during different leadership:
  - Measure performance changes and identify best practices.
- Outline new Request for Proposals (RFP) or revised contract structure:
  - Clearly define measurable economic development targets:
    - Capital investment, business assistance, and convening activities.
- Plan an initial stakeholder group meeting:
  - Chambers, workforce organizations, educational institutions, and SBDC.
  - To develop a countywide strategy and share resources.
- Establish routine economic development work sessions for next year:
  - Refine strategies, improve oversight, and integrate feedback from partners.
- Review, and potentially act on, results of county survey of needs done in 2021:
  - Priorities to be informed by direct feedback and past commitments.
- Follow-up on letters sent to marina stakeholders regarding American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) project participation:
  - Ready to reallocate funds depending on participation and partner commitments.

**Adjourned** – time: 2:20 p.m.

**Minutes by:** Mary Vityukova

**Reviewed by:** Gary L. White