



OREGON

MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

# Work Session Summary Minutes

## Coordination on Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) Property Maintenance

December 4, 2025. 1:30 PM

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:** Matt Lawyer, Trevor Lane, Heather Inyama, Toni Whitler, and Alvin Klausen.

**Sheriff's Office:** Jay Bergmann, Jeremy Landers, and Nick Hunter.

**Legal Counsel:** Steve Elzinga, and Scott Norris.

**Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT):** Kendal Weeks, Savannah Crawford, and Hannah Hansen

**Salem Public Works:** Mark Bethell.

**City of Salem:** Julie Hoy.

Commissioner Danielle Bethell called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

### **Properties of Concern**

- Several ODOT-owned sites in Marion County have become hotspots for unsanctioned camping:
  - Increased violence, property damage, and public safety risks.
- Hawthorne Avenue:
  - As well as intersections such as Sunnyview Road.
  - Repeat incidents of vandalism, obstruction, and threats to public safety.
  - Linked to nearby unhoused camps.
- Fisher Road:
  - Area known as the "fishbowl" (between I-5 and a field).
  - Escalated from informal camping to large encampment.
  - Chronic law enforcement and clean-up challenges.
  - Previous fire incident.
- Market Street:
  - An area with persistent homelessness issues.
  - Cycles of clean-up, mitigation (installing fences), and camps reemerging.
- Wallace Marine Park and Silverton Road:
  - Camps often move here after being disbanded at other sites, forcing continual law enforcement and clean-up needs. These locations are identified as sites where serious and violent crimes (including reports of rape and murder) have occurred.
- Park and Ride locations:
  - State and city sites.

- Ongoing problems with unauthorized camping, drug activity.
  - Insufficient clarity about enforcement responsibility.
- Recognized pattern of camps moving from one jurisdictional property to another:
  - ODOT, county, and city:
    - Driving repeat interventions and escalating costs.

## **ODOT Property Maintenance**

- ODOT has limited capacity for proactive maintenance due to statewide austerity measures:
  - Causes reduced frequency of camp clean-up and budget constraints.
- Standard rotation for camp posting and clean-up is targeted at every 4-6 weeks:
  - Not consistently achievable due to cuts.
- Clean-up procedures require:
  - Coordination with Oregon State Police (OSP) for enforcement and safety.
  - Adherence to statutory posting requirements.
  - Logistics for hazmat and contracted clean-up.
- Mitigation of recurring issues:
  - Increased fencing.
  - Hardscaping.
  - Consider release or repurposing of surplus properties.
- Efforts face regulatory, financial, and coordination challenges.
- Significant cost of maintenance and clean-up:
  - Marion, Polk, and Yamhill Counties spent \$871,000 over two years.
  - The broader region spent roughly \$2.45 million for the same period.
  - Garbage removed included thousands of tons annually:
    - Straining disposal sites and budgets.
- Challenges of handling personal property left at camps:
  - Legal obligations for notification, storage, and disposal.
  - Major operational and legal roadblocks.
- ODOT recognizes essential role of behavioral health and social service outreach:
  - Lack of a systematized partnership or funding model for integrating service clean-ups.

## **Discussion**

- Overlapping jurisdictions and resource burdens related to unsanctioned camps:
  - ODOT, city, county, law enforcement, behavioral health, public works)
- Widespread frustration with the reactive, cyclical nature of clean-ups:
  - Described as "whack-a-mole".
  - Camps simply relocate across property lines.
- Law enforcement is stretched thin:
  - City nor county police are mandated or resourced to follow camp residents between sites post-clean-up.
- Stakeholders floated new ideas for tracking:
  - Real-time patrols during and after major clean-ups.
  - Potentially using overtime.
  - Strategic use of surveillance (cameras, drones) to monitor known hotspots.
- Need for stronger partnerships emerged:
  - MOUs (memoranda of understanding) that allow for cross-jurisdictional enforcement and information sharing.
- Concerns about statutory requirements for ODOT and local jurisdictions:

- Relating to property posting, clean-up, and disposal of belongings.
- An interest in coordinated legislative advocacy to address laws and close regulatory gaps.
- Integrated, multidisciplinary approach is necessary to develop both immediate responses and longer-term solutions:
  - Including law enforcement, health, outreach, legal, and elected officials.

## Other

- Clean-up costs:
  - \$871,000 was spent over two years in Marion, Polk, and Yamhill Counties.
  - \$2.45 million spent in broader ODOT region for clean-ups over two years.
- Garbage removed:
  - In 2020, 481 tons were removed by ODOT.
  - In 2021, 337 tons were removed by ODOT.
  - In 2022, 267 tons were removed by ODOT.
  - In 2023, 176 tons were removed by ODOT.
  - Combined 2023–2024 (ODOT and Salem): Over 1 million pounds:
    - About 500+ tons.
  - \$213,000 spent on garbage service:
    - Recent annual figure.
- Human resources:
  - Marion County region has 7 dedicated teams in the community.
  - 4 officers from Salem PD are involved with homelessness.
  - Estimated 25–30 FTE (full-time equivalent) positions involved across teams:
    - Law enforcement, behavioral health, fire/EMS, peers/mentors, and 24/7 hotline support.
- Community safety concerns:
  - Shared stories of violence, injury, and fear among residents and unhoused on and near ODOT property.
- Data collection and tracking issues of individuals moving between camps/sites:
  - Existing state databases for behavioral health and homeless services are fragmented or non-interoperable at the local level.
- Lack of shelter beds is a limiting factor in resolving chronic, unmanaged camping:
  - Existing capacity may be underused due to lack of coordination or enforcement.

## Next Steps

- Marion County to identify representatives to participate in ODOT/Salem monthly coordination meetings:
  - From Sheriff's Office and Health Department.
  - May include Polk County and should be expanded as appropriate.
- ODOT to assess possible formal agreements with local jurisdictions:
  - Authorize trespassing/enforcement on ODOT sites.
- ODOT to provide Marion County and partners detailed list of statutory/legal barriers hindering property clean-up and maintenance:
  - Support joint advocacy for legislative changes.
- Broader integration of health/outreach teams for camp interventions and proactive service delivery:
  - Not only enforcement and clean-up,
- Confirm closure and coordinated clean-up of State and Park and Ride locations:

- With city and law enforcement.
- Continued dialogue and partnership are encouraged.
- Future agendas to cover:
  - Evolving gaps.
  - Enforcement authority.
  - Policy proposals.
  - Possibility of emergency declarations or policy amendments to expedite solutions.

**Adjourned** – time: 2:22 p.m.

**Minutes by:** Mary Vityukova

**Reviewed by:** Gary L. White