



**MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
WORK SESSION**

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**Economic Development Program Update  
Minutes**

Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
Commissioners' Boardroom  
Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Suite 5231  
Salem, Oregon 97301

**ATTENDANCE:**

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

**Board's Office:** Alvin Klausen, Chris Eppley, Toni Whitler, and Matt Lawyer.

**Legal Counsel:** Jennifer Rogers.

**Community and Economic Development:** Krista Ulm, Ashley Jackson, Sarah Coutley, Kelli Weese, Tami Cirerol, and Chip Bury.

**Finance:** Kathleen George.

Commissioner Colm Willis called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m.

**1. Welcome & Introductions**

-Commissioner Colm Willis

**2. Economic Development Program Update**

-Chip Bury & Tami Cirerol

- Opal Creek Opportunity:
  - \$15M Opal Creek wilderness and scenic recreation funding:
    - Focusing on \$12M for construction and non-construction activities.
  - Prior board direction:
    - \$3M application for Detroit Marina construction project.
    - Interest in projects such as:
      - Santiam Canyon Veterans & First Responders Memorial.
      - Canyon Radio project for Public Works.
      - Parks projects in canyon communities.
      - State & Soccer project.
  - Geographic and programming requirements:
    - Projects must occur in Opal Creek catchment area.
    - Projects must meet at least one federal objective:
      - Natural, scenic, recreational, historic, or cultural enhancement.
      - Support Santiam communities' economy.
      - Protection of drinking water resources in the canyon.
  - Eligible applicants, as proposed in draft guidelines:
    - Marion County
    - Cities in the county.
    - Chambers.
    - Nonprofits.

- Educational institutions.
    - Private businesses within catchment area.
  - Federal compliance:
    - County must follow open, fair, and transparent procurement.
    - All sub awardees must be registered at SAM.gov.
    - Timing of requirement should not be barrier to applying.
  - Application process - draft concept:
    - Application format similar to Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)/HOME/American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA):
      - Simple, and accessible.
    - Application components:
      - Project proposal/description and scope.
      - Budget narrative and budget table aligned to federal categories.
      - Timeline and outcome/performance metrics.
      - Braided/leveraged funding information:
        - Other funding sources.
        - Secured vs. pending funds.
        - Whether Opal Creek dollars are gap funding.
  - Internal review concept:
    - Economic Development team to conduct a first pass review:
      - Location in catchment, basic eligibility, correct Marion County.
    - Board to see applications that are non-qualifying:
      - To consider potential alternate funding.
- Detroit Marinas Project Update:
  - Timeline:
    - Overall project timeline remains unchanged from prior plans.
    - Permitting is primary schedule risk:
      - Target is to secure all remaining permits by August 2026.
    - Detailed permitting sequence has been prepared:
      - Multiple agencies and steps.
  - ARPA and project finances:
    - Approximately 30% of ARPA funds for project have been spent to date.
    - Updated budget assumes \$3M Oregon Business Development Department (OBDD) allocation:
      - Modest remaining contingency about 350K, and about 5%.
    - \$3M funding is critical to overall financial stability of project.
  - Near-term construction logistics:
    - About 70+ dump trucks of stone hauled to Detroit in coming months.
    - Communication plan prepared to inform residents and stakeholders:
      - To reduce confusion or complaints.
  - Legal/agreements:
    - Updated agreement with marina operator being prepared for commissioner review in executive session:
      - Includes commitments and timelines.

### 3. Discussion

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- Reimbursement vs. advance funding (OBDD/Forest Service):
  - Current reimbursement through Business Oregon and U.S. Forest Service.
  - Concerns were raised that:
    - Smaller organizations can't front costs and wait for reimbursement.

- County risks if fronting large amount without timely reimbursement.
  - Want to change reimbursement rules under new federal/state administration:
    - Proposal to send a formal request seeking:
      - Advance funding or at least partial, up-front tranches.
      - Flexibility in how and when reimbursements occur.
      - Agreement that county will provide robust quarterly reporting.
      - Claw backs could be used as a safeguard if necessary.
- Bringing OBDD funds in house:
  - Remaining funds can be transferred to two Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs):
    - One for construction projects.
    - One for non-construction projects.
  - OBDD and Forest Service would review and approve county's framework:
    - Program guidelines, criteria, and process.
  - County to manage sub grants and bill OBDD for reimbursement of invoices.
  - Eliminate need for OBDD review of projects and contracts one at a time.
  - Increase local control and speed of decision making.
- County cash flow / front funding solutions:
  - Various options to help small entities that can't advance their project costs:
    - Use lottery funds as short-term loan pool.
    - Reimbursed when OBDD pays the county.
  - Consider general fund as potentially better source for temporary advances:
    - Avoid tying up lottery funds that have other active community uses.
  - Structure milestone-based advances:
    - Provide initial small tranche once basic deliverable is submitted.
    - Additional disbursements tied to easy milestones and documentation.
  - Tie up county funds and have risk if projects fail or reimbursements delay.
- Scope and risk of advances:
  - Large, single project advances, \$1M, viewed as higher risk.
  - Smaller, staged advances considered more acceptable and manageable:
    - About \$200K per milestone.
- Application and outreach strategy:
  - Application should be simple, familiar, and modeled on existing tools:
    - Like CDBG or ARPA forms.
  - Scope, budget, regulatory compliance, and timeline to satisfy federal rules.
  - Debate on when and how to invite applications:
    - Previous consultant led processes generated long list of ideas:
      - Without a structured county run grant program.
    - Desire to move to formal call for applications:
      - Not necessarily announce full \$12M as immediately available.
    - County does not have an open, general invitation yet.
    - Prior project specific invitations were narrower:
      - Veterans Memorial, State & Soccer.
- Specific project handling:
  - Canyon Radio project - Public Works:
    - Recognized as time sensitive due to ARPA deadlines.
    - Believed to have sufficient existing invoices to support reimbursement.
    - Direction to move through new Opal Creek application process quickly.
  - Santiam Canyon Veterans & First Responders Memorial:
    - Project should ultimately be funded from Opal Creek funds:
      - Regardless of timing or interim loan mechanisms.
    - Timing and wetland permit constraint makes 4<sup>th</sup> of July target unlikely.
  - State & Soccer:

- Need a clear site plan, scope, and budget.
    - Have information but no formal application:
      - Pending clarity on the funding program to use.
    - Proponents complete standard application form:
      - Capture scope, cost, and resources, then bring the board.
  - Future call and set asides:
    - Interest in designating portion of funds as competitive grant pool for smaller projects.
    - Reserve some funds for major infrastructure or strategic needs:
      - Utilities, sewer rate smoothing, etc.
- Detroit sewer/canyon utilities:
  - Gap funding for utility and sewer systems until communities are fully online.
  - Opal Creek funds may help address some infrastructure gaps.
  - Subject to program design and priorities.
- Other funding/program concerns:
  - Administrative burden if every invoice is individually verified and submitted.
  - This reimbursement work is similar to CDBG/HOME processes:
    - Staff manage, but with slower OBDD reimbursement turnaround.

#### **4. Other**

-All

- Regional economic-development breakfast:
  - Elected officials breakfast organized by external partners:
    - Potential venue to coordinate economic development discussions.
  - Skepticism of relying on such events to drive economic development agenda:
    - Desire county hosted convening tailored to Marion County's priorities:
      - Not just partner organizations' visibility.
    - Staff may represent county, but prefer county led core strategy work.
- Agrivoltaics / solar in Marion County:
  - Is there interest in revisiting agrivoltaics as strategic topic:
    - Solar on agricultural lands
  - Board has no current desire to reopen issues at work session level.
- Willamette Falls Locks Authority funding request:
  - Received letter thanking county for prior support:
    - Requesting additional funding to help stand up locks' authority.
  - Board declined to provide more funding:
    - Significant state level funding is already provided in 2025 session.
    - Concern about current use of previously granted funds.
    - Lack of clear revenue or self-sustaining model for the authority.
  - Direction to decline requests and ask how earlier contributions were used.

#### **5. Next Steps**

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- Formal request to OBDD/Forest Service:
  - Send formal letter, via legal, to Business Oregon and U.S. Forest Service:
    - Request reconsideration of reimbursement only rules.
    - Ask for possible advances or block funding:
      - With county reporting and accountability commitments.
- Finalize program framework and funding structure:
  - Refine Opal Creek Opportunity Program guidelines based on feedback:
    - Clarify eligibility, catchment area, and federal criteria.

- Distinguish construction vs. nonconstruction categories.
    - Embed requirements for braided funding information and status.
  - Prepare and send program framework to OBDD and Forest Service for review.
  - Pursue creation of two IGAs with OBDD:
    - One for construction.
    - One for non-construction projects.
- Short-term financing options:
  - Propose county mechanisms to front project costs for smaller entities:
    - Options may include lottery funds, general funds, or hybrid approach.
    - Consider milestone-based advances and risk mitigation.
  - Bring recommendations back to the board for direction.
- Opal Creek application design and rollout:
  - Finalize simple application form modeled on CDBG/ARPA, ensuring it:
    - Captures project scope, budget, schedule, eligibility, and compliance.
    - Sections on other funding sources and secured and pending status.
    - Assistance for those who need help with forms or online submission.
  - Develop a publication/outreach plan for when and how to invite applications.
- Project specific follow-ups:
  - Canyon Radio project - Public Works:
    - Submit formal application under Opal Creek framework.
    - To move forward quickly and meet ARPA timelines.
  - Santiam Canyon Veterans & First Responders Memorial:
    - Ensure standard Opal Creek application is done.
    - Intent of final funding comes from Opal Creek dollars:
      - Regardless of temporary loan sources.
  - State & Soccer project:
    - Direct proponents to complete draft application:
      - Scope, budget, resources, and securing of funds.
    - Management update packet with materials and staff analysis for review and funding decision.
- Detroit Marinas project:
  - Schedule an executive session focused on Detroit Marina:
    - Proposed agreement language, key dates, and legal/financial terms.
  - Continue permitting work toward August 2026 target.
  - Public communications plan for upcoming stone deliveries to Detroit.
  - Keep budget and contingency updated and report material changes to board.

**Adjourned** – time: 2:26 p.m.

**Minutes by:** Mary Vityukova

**Reviewed by:** Gary L. White