



**MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
WORK SESSION**

**Santana Park Update  
Minutes**

Thursday, March 26, 2026, 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.  
Commissioners' Boardroom  
Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Suite 5231  
Salem, Oregon 97301

**ATTENDANCE:**

**Commissioner's:** Colm Willis, Danielle Bethell and Kevin Cameron.

**Board's Office:** Matt Lawyer, Toni Whitler, and Trevor Lane.

**Legal Counsel:** Andrew Mittendorf, and Steve Elzinga

**Public Works:** Dennis Mansfield, Kevin Thompson, Brian Nicholas, and Lily Gimby.

**Santana Village Park:** Marilyn Long, and Rueben Gershon.

**NE ESSD:** Dennis Johnson, and Kathy Rogers.

Commissioner Kevin Cameron called the meeting to order at 2:10 p.m.

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

-Commissioner Kevin Cameron

**2. Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Requirements Update**

-Dennis Mansfield

- LWCF requires that parks funded by the program:
  - Remain in public ownership by the same public agency in perpetuity.
  - Be used for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity.
- Marion County is currently out of compliance in two areas:
  - Santana Village Park:
    - Originally acquired with LWCF funds in the mid-1970s.
    - Deed transferred to Santana Village Park Association (SVPA) in 2012:
      - Due to lack of county funding for maintenance.
    - This put county out of compliance with public ownership requirements.
  - Auburn Park / Scotts Mills Conversion:
    - Auburn Park divested in connection with expansion of Scotts Mills Park.
    - Between original appraisal and Auburn Park sale was about one year:
      - Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) stated it was too long.
      - Appraisal must be tied to the date of sale.
    - 2019 sale date reappraisal showed Auburn Park valued at \$45,000 more than Scotts Mills property.
    - Created a \$45,000 LWCF "conversion deficit" in land value.
    - Addressed by existing park expansion or acquisition of new parkland with equal or greater appraised value and appropriate recreational opportunities.
- Browns Island / Eola Bend Concept:

- Use portion of Browns Island as LWCF conversion property:
  - By incorporating it into Eola Bend Park.
- Adjoins Eola Bend Park to north and Minto Brown Park to east and south:
  - Potentially serve as connector and access improvement.
- Proposed improvements include:
  - Extend trail along Browns Island fence line to connect into park.
  - Pedestrian access via gate near Farrar/Farragut Road:
    - Retain vehicle gate control for solid waste operations.
  - Roadside parking along right-of-way not a secluded lot deep into site:
    - Reduce risk of illegal dumping, RV abandonment, and camping.
- Operational and safety considerations discussed:
  - Prevent visitors from being locked in at closing:
    - Due to long walking distance from the back to the entrance.
  - Coordination with existing gate operations and contractor schedules.
  - Ongoing issues with illegal dumping and homelessness activity in area.
  - Design access to minimize these problems.
- Regulatory and valuation context:
  - Conversion property must meet or exceed \$45,000 deficit in appraised land value.
  - Must have equivalent recreational value:
    - Determined by National Park Service (NPS).
    - Administered through OPRD.
  - Browns Island much higher assessed value than Santana Village Park:
    - Suggesting adequate value for conversion if accepted.
  - Environmental suitability for recreation on former landfill reviewed by OPRD and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ):
    - Found environmentally acceptable for proposed park use.
- Direction related to Browns Island:
  - Confirm with OPRD and NPS whether Browns Island concept:
    - Can close the \$45,000 Auburn Park deficit.
    - Could resolve Santana Village LWCF compliance issue.
  - If acceptable, at least for the deficit issue:
    - Proceed with formal appraisal of Browns Island parcel.
    - Estimated cost is about \$7,000.
  - Appraisal done after positive feedback from OPRD/NPS:
    - About recreational equivalency and conversion acceptability.

### **3. Santana Village Park Association Proposal**

-Dennis Mansfield

- Background and current arrangement:
  - Currently owned by SVPA, a nonprofit formed specifically to manage and maintain the park.
  - County transferred deed in 2012, and association provides maintenance:
    - Mowing, general upkeep, etc.
  - About five years ago, association requested financial assistance:
    - Due to cost and labor burden.
  - East Salem Service District (ESSD) approved 5-year maintenance agreement:
    - Up to \$40,000 over five years – About \$8,000 annually:
      - Reimbursed based on eligible park maintenance costs.
    - Unused amounts can roll over to subsequent years in five-year term.
  - That maintenance agreement expires June 30, 2026.
- Key elements of SVPA's proposal:

- Association would:
  - Continue as primary provider of labor and routine maintenance.
  - Enter into another multi-year maintenance agreement with ESSD.
- Proposal includes:
  - Schedule of capital improvement projects over multiple years:
    - Infrastructure repairs.
    - Hazard tree removal.
    - Fencing.
    - Playground and safety upgrades.
    - Equipment replacement.
  - Requests for funding support for capital projects in addition to ongoing reimbursed maintenance costs.
- The advisory group has reviewed the proposal and:
  - Expressed support for continuing the maintenance arrangement.
  - Requested more detailed cost estimates for the proposed capital projects before making a firm recommendation.
- Operational and liability considerations:
  - Parks staff noted that if deed were transferred back to county:
    - Would take liability for park:
      - Playground safety and compliance with current standards.
    - Upgrades likely needed to bring equipment up to code and maintain.
    - work and improvements would be slower than community nonprofit:
      - Potential frustration for community wanting quick action.
  - Existing deed from County to SVPA includes reversionary language:
    - If association fails the following the property reverts back to county:
      - Maintain open space/park use.
      - Maintain reasonable liability insurance.
      - Maintain property for public use.
      - Transfers its interest without county consent.
    - SVPA has been meeting these obligations.
- Community and equity perspectives:
  - Park maintained with extensive volunteer time:
    - Many hours a week mowing by individual using personal equipment.
  - Volunteers are aging, and replacement of key equipment will be needed.
  - Some tasks exceed volunteer capacity and require outside funding or work:
    - Hazard trees, major fencing work.
  - ESSD community representatives raised concerns:
    - Using funds for one park when other areas within ESSD have needs:
      - Lighting, stormwater, other parks.
    - Resources should benefit all of ESSD and not be perceived favoring one over others.
  - Value of community led stewardship and the high quality of SVPA's work.
  - Tension between volunteer outsourcing versus equity perception in fee use.
- Funding sources discussed:
  - \$8,000/year for Santana Village Park maintenance funded from ESSD funds:
    - From decades of delinquent sewer accounts served by City of Salem:
      - ESSD retains 20% plus a fee of collected delinquent amounts.
    - About \$700,000 and is for ESSD parks, lighting, and administration:
      - Also, for dedicated public safety and stormwater assessments.
  - Potential future capital and enhanced maintenance support options:
    - Community & Economic Development grants for capital improvements.
    - ESSD support for maintenance reimbursements, potentially adjustments to notional annual ceiling or structure.

- Explore additional grant sources dedicated to parks and recreation that nonprofit could use.

#### 4. Other

-All

- Value community stewardship models and potential applicability to other parks.
- Transparent and equitable ESSD fund use:
  - Make sure ratepayers understand how funds are allocated and why.
- Capital improvements grants come mostly from state lottery–fund community and economic development allocations:
  - Not from ESSD fee revenues.
- Avoid locking future boards in automatic escalators bypass annual budget oversight.

#### 5. Next Steps

-All

- Browns Island / Auburn and Santana LWCF compliance:
  - Work with OPRD/NPS to determine if Browns Island / Eola Bend proposal:
    - Acceptable to cover \$45,000 Auburn Park conversion deficit.
    - Serve as equivalent recreational replacement for compliance issue.
  - Formal appraisal of Browns Island once OPRD/NPS confirm it acceptable for at least Auburn deficit.
  - Remove Auburn Park deficit to access future LWCF grant opportunities.
- Santana Village Park agreement and planning:
  - Draft extension of existing five-year maintenance agreement with SVPA:
    - Use current reimbursement framework as baseline.
  - Work with SVPA to prepare and attach:
    - Detailed annual maintenance plan.
    - Prioritized, costed capital improvement schedule.
  - Coordinate with Community and Economic Development staff to:
    - Identify appropriate grant programs for SVPA’s capital projects.
    - Assist in making proposals aligning with county criteria and timelines.
  - Agreement and support plans brought back for decision before June 30, 2026.
- Deed and governance:
  - No immediate change in ownership was decided for Santana Village Park.
  - Treat current ownership/volunteer maintenance model as baseline scenario.
  - Reconsider potential deed transfer after:
    - LWCF compliance strategies are confirmed.
    - Financial and liability implications of county ownership fully assessed.
- ESSD funding structure:
  - Examine how parks and lighting funds are programmed and communicated.
  - Consider future support park maintenance should be drawn from ESSD funds or alternatively from county wide community development grant sources.

**Adjourned** – time: 3:08 p.m.

**Minutes by:** Mary Vityukova

**Reviewed by:** Gary L. White