



## BENTON COUNTY HISTORIC COURTHOUSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes Friday October 20, 2023

Members Present: HCAC Chair: Chris **Westfall**, Oregon Judicial Department, Trial Court Administrator; Scott **McClure**, representing the Historic Resources Commission; Bob **Richardson**, OSU, Senior Land Use Planner; Christel **Birdwell**, Cultural Arts and Community Engagement Supervisor, City of Corvallis; Christina **Rehklau**, Executive Director, Visit Corvallis

Advisory Staff Present: Tomi **Douglas**, Director of Benton County Natural Areas, Parks & Events; Inga **Williams**, Benton County Community Development Associate Planner; Brenda **Downum**, Communications and Community Engagement, Downum Consulting

Members Absent: Commissioner Nancy **Wyse**, Liaison; Peter **Betjemann**, OSU, Director of Arts and Education, College of Liberal Arts; Jason **Allen**, Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, Survey Program Coordinator, Jessica **Hougen**, Benton County Historical Society

- I. Chair **Westfall** called the meeting to order at 1005. Minutes from the May 19, 2023 minutes will be moved to the next meeting due to lack of quorum.
- II. Citizen comments - none submitted.
- III. Welcome  
**Westfall** offered a welcome back from hiatus since May 19, 2023, and an apology for short notice on this meeting. Hoping to have everyone in attendance in November. Since we don't have a quorum, we will just have a conversation and all agree. Westfall asked for self-introductions since there are new members and a new staff support director. Scott McClure, liaison Historic Resources Commission, is no longer a member of the HRC but still representing those interests; Christel Birdwell, liaison for City of Corvallis, Cultural Arts and Community Engagement Supervisor which includes the Majestic

Theater. **Douglas** noted that Christy Wood from Corvallis Chamber of Commerce will be invited to join, she is replacing Simon Date and her first day is the end of October. She also noted that Christopher Jacobs could potentially replace Kate Porsche. He is in the City of Corvallis Community Development Department, and it would make sense for him to participate; Inga Williams, serves as support staff for the committee; Brenda Downum, communications support, contracted by Benton County; Christina Rehkla, Executive Director, Visit Corvallis; Tomi Douglas, staff support for the committee and eventually will have responsibility of the role of custodian of the courthouse building.

**Westfall** suggested it would not be useful to review where the committee had been in discussion of the “last two buckets”. He posted information about arts/culture/education and government/civic/public use. Since we don’t have a quorum, we won’t be able to develop that theme further today.

#### IV. OSU Class Project

**Westfall** reported that Bob Richardson brought forth the idea of engaging with OSU class/internship projects in collaboration with this committee. We would like to be able to tell the story of what we have done, including some graphic illustrations of possible use suggestions. Bob connected us with an OSU Interior Design class. The class has had a tour of the courthouse, and they will be presenting us with a few options in a few weeks and finishing up in December. That’s a good partnership and this will be a good project for our committee. These proposals will not be restricted by the potential costs, the possibilities could be anything except demolition.

Bob Richardson, Senior Land Use Planner, OSU; arrived and provided a self-introduction followed by a quick round of introductions of new people (Birdwell, Downum, and Douglas).

#### V. Status update on public outreach development planning

**Westfall** reminded the committee of the process of coming to consensus and giving time to public engagement prior to writing a final report. This is why the committee has been on a pause. We needed to get a public engagement process in place with adequate staffing capacity. We now have Tomi’s presence, following Lynn, then Jesse as interim, and now Tomi is here. We also have Brenda, as mentioned, she’s done JSIP work. She’ll be working with the county’s public information officer on communications and public engagement. Westfall will meet with Downum next week to develop a plan. In consideration is an open house at the courthouse and some public outreach. We’ve developed a rough placeholder.

**Downum** has been reviewing minutes from previous meetings. She is envisioning public engagement to be completed before holidays in December and initially planning on a six-week window from November 1 through December 15. An open house in the courthouse will be important. Showing up and talking with people is also important. This committee has been talking about a lot of big ideas. We will be creating a fact sheet, so the community is aware of the committee's work. Many in the community do not understand that a new courthouse is in the works. We will work on clear and simple information for the public and provide a clear explanation of the scope of the committee's work.

**Westfall** opened the conversation about things that would be of interest or essential to define, invited comment.

**Rehklau** asked if there would be an opportunity to do a "soft test" of the fact sheet. Share it with a small group before sending it out to the general public to make sure we are avoiding jargon, etc. She sat through the City's work session as they presented their campus vision, and they had some good examples of successful community engagement. Parks and Rec did community engagement for Porter Park that was very good. In this case, they got caught up on design. More important to focus on end results. One of the end results- do you want this to be a building open to the public "a gathering place" or do you want it to serve more of its original purpose for "restorative justice". Important to give people a rough draft to get their input rather than renderings that indicate a "final product".

**Westfall-** just a reminder that the renderings from the class will not be available before public outreach. It will provide some examples from a whole different perspective of how this building could be used and could be used in our report.

**Richardson-** we have the big topics/themes that we've been working on. Maybe we can get input from the community like "do you envision the courthouse as a space that's really open to the public or internal? Is it a tourist thing- or more localized?" Those guiding ideas- the big guiding ideas. There could be input from the community- "how do you see yourself interacting with this building?" Not even necessarily what is inside?

**Birdwell-** Seeing this for the first time. There is a need for "third places", just a place to hang out, a place where the community can gather without spending money. That comes to mind. **Westfall-** that lines up with the arts and culture conversation, for example game rooms in the basement.

**Westfall-** for our outreach, preservation is a paramount focus, and the history of the building is a pro and a con. The center for law and justice for decades, for some that is a negative connotation. How do we separate from that and move to an arts and culture use? **Downum** notes that there is survey fatigue. This will be designed as a questionnaire- “we want to hear what you think”. Is there a place for people to have their own ideas? Open-ended response?

**Westfall-** we want people to know what has been considered, what has been left behind, and present the major themes and focus that the committee is resolved to these two paths.

**Richardson-** agree with this. The message is that our guiding principles are that: “it is preserved, historic character is strongly considered, accessible and welcoming to all people, and other big guiding principles- like supporting community needs. In support of those guiding principles, this committee has identified two categories. There are multiple purposes in those categories.” Public might come up with purposes.

**Westfall-** we’re at a confluence, these two streams need to be combined into one. We had clear consensus, if there was government activity, it might not be the exclusive use. It could be multi-use. Government could be the steady presence, with other transient uses. We want to be sure we’re clear to share that we haven’t decided. Our charge is to make a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners, they will make the final decision.

**Richardson-** it seems like a recommendation we could provide to the Board of Commissioners after a public process, “what we heard are these two themes”, the Board of Commissioners could wrestle with that. Any scenario will need further exploration.

**Westfall-** our work is going to be a handoff. Seismic will be a pro and a con for any recommendation.

**Rehklau-** what will be our strategy to provide outreach to historically marginalized groups? **Downum-** my experience is tapping into organized groups, making a connection to those groups. **Rehklau-** glad to hear we’re going to them and not asking them to come to us.

## VI. Status update on drafting final report

**Westfall** shared that **Downum** is going to be helping to draft the final report. We want to provide a report that will have the history/story of this committee’s work. We’ve done a

lot and had a lot of conversations. We've gone from "how are we going to approach this" with a group of strongly committed people with professional expertise to get to this point. We've been asked to provide a recommendation about the most iconic building in the community. We want to make sure to acknowledge this work has been done and explain how and why we came to our recommendation. We will be working on a draft and will bring a draft to the committee.

**Downum** - assumes at the January meeting, the committee will have an opportunity to review public feedback. Report draft will take place in February.

VII. Updated, tentative overall timeline

**Westfall** reviewed the timing of receiving concepts from the OSU class in December, community engagement summary for final discussion in January, final discussions in January and February, followed by the final draft in March. The timeline has been pushed back from the original. We'll continue to have our meetings.

VIII. Next Steps-

**Douglas**- calendar invites have been sent to committee members through April.

**Downum**- will meet with Westfall next week, confirmed with committee members that the chair will represent, and committee members will step away from that responsibility.

**Rehklau** offered to be a backup if needed.

**Richardson**- how does all this tie together? **Westfall**- this is part of what we have as a challenge in our communications. JSIP was the bond measure, early on, it included a new courthouse and jail, then they added a law enforcement building, then crisis respite center, then an EOC. I was a member of the Technical Advisory Committee. The county looked at cost thresholds of the total cost of a bond and what would be supported. The courthouse was removed, and Benton County determined they could fund on their own in partnership with the state. A grant program with a 50/50 match is available. Despite the bond measure not passing, the courthouse is moving forward. Right now, the land use planning is underway for the new campus. **Richardson**- the courthouse will be built on the new campus? **Westfall**- yes, the campus plan will have to be approved. Westfall offered further comment on the timing of new courthouse construction and the importance of maintaining occupancy in the historic courthouse.

IX. Meeting adjourned at 1115.