



## Minutes

BENTON COUNTY HISTORIC COURTHOUSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
**Friday, January 19, 2024**  
**10:00 – 11:30 am**

Members Attending: HCAC Chair: Chris **Westfall**, Oregon Judicial Department, Trial Court Administrator; Jill **Van Buren**, Representing the Courthouse Preservation Committee (HCAC Vice-Chair); Roz **Keeney**, Representing Preservation WORKS, Christel **Birdwell**, Cultural Arts and Community Engagement Supervisor, City of Corvallis; Christy **Wood**, CEO, Corvallis Chamber; Christopher **Jacobs**, Economic Development Manager, Corvallis-Benton County EDO; Peter B ED, Jessica **Hougan**, Benton County Historical

Advisory Staff Attending: Inga **Williams**, Benton County Community Development Associate Planner; Cynthia **De La Torre**, Policy Analyst, Health Services; Paul **Wallsinger**, Facilities Manager, Brenda **Downum**, Communications and Community Engagement, Downum Consulting

Guests: Tanya Freeman, Benton County Historic Commission, Cornelia Levy-Bencheson, community member, Edward Wienhoff, interested citizen

- I. Chair Westfall called the meeting to order at 10:06 am. Welcome to those attending in person and virtually, followed by self-introductions as noted above.
- II. Minutes of December 6, 2023, were reviewed and approved as written. Roz Keeney made a motion to approve as presented, with a second by Christy Wood. The minutes were approved.

Minutes of December 15, 2023, were reviewed. Keeney made a motion to approve as presented, with a second by Jessica Hougan. The minutes were approved.

- I. Citizen comments – There were no comments.

II. Public engagement update- Brenda Downum provided an update of communications and outreach to date.

Four videos were produced to use in the campaign. One video is 3 minutes long, and three are 30 seconds long which is an ideal length for social media. Keeney commented that she didn't get the video, Downum will resend the video links to committee members. The communications campaign started on January 4, 2024, with a press release to all media outlets, an announcement in the county's e-newsletter (sent to subscribers), and posts on the county's social media accounts including Facebook and Instagram and NextDoor.

Keeney shared that she has not seen the Facebook posts and would like to know the impact of the posts. Downum noted that she doesn't have those figures today but preliminary figures will be shared at the next committee meeting and the analytics from the outreach campaign will be included in the committee's final report.

Chair Westfall noted that part of the outreach plan was for him to provide presentations to groups. A couple of those were last week and the ice storm disrupted that. He also noted that we had hoped to have an open house at the courthouse but there are constraints that make that impossible. Roz Keeney asked if guided tours are possible, Westfall indicated that tours take place during open house and are possible, but a Saturday open house would require additional planning and staffing and we have resource constraints for that.

Keeney stated that it seems important to have an in-person opportunity to show what are we envisioning and to include the boards that the students presented so the community can see those creative ideas. The Majestic Theater was proposed, perhaps setting up in the lobby. Christel Birdwell noted it could be possible to identify a 3-hour window on a Saturday, interaction with public, presentation.

Hougan raised a concern that a longer timeline is needed to publicize an event and the idea was to be able to see the courthouse. Doing this somewhere else loses the draw. Jill VanBuren added the library as a possible meeting location.

Chair Westfall noted that we can continue the conversation, but time is of the essence, if we end up hosting something, it would be towards the end of February. He concurred that engagement with public is important to the committee.

Downum noted that there are over 125 responses to the online comment form so far and the form provides two questions with opportunities for open ended comments allowing the public to share any ideas or questions they wish. Keeney feels the online comment form is pretty basic and won't generate a deepness for how people can respond. She believes there could be more dialogue.

- III. Review draft final report outline- Chair Westfall reviewed that the intention of the report is to memorialize the work that has been done. This work is part of a longer process for the board of commissioners. The committee will be making a recommendation to the board, and they will have to mull through several things that we haven't been asked to consider.

He provided a high-level recap of the committee's process. The committee was not asked to look at a cost benefit analysis. There has been a lot of conversation, we looked at some case studies, and how other communities across the country and region have approached this. We explored what does the universe of possibilities include? The only limitation for us is that there will be no consideration of demolition. It could be private public partnership, county owned, or a sale. We need to decide how to narrow this down. We identified our values, guiding principles, and kept those in front of us as we considered the possibilities. Came up with a land-use type of classification of uses. We batched different potentials including the pros and cons. Some not appropriate to the building or to the needs of our community. For example, the museum idea, we have a new museum. We need to explain to the community why certain ideas moved forward or didn't move forward.

Our goal with the report is to tell our story and how got to the point of making a decision. Brenda is tasked with this; she has been absorbing minutes and all the data. A report outline is provided today for review.

Question from the public: Cornelia Levy-Bencheton about offering repurposing ideas to the committee. She stated that she has completed the online form and will attend future small group meetings.

Keeney is concerned that the public input data will be included in the report. Westfall sees public input as informing our decision and the data will be in the appendix. The report will include decisions informed by the data. The committee's original timeline called for bringing in someone to begin drafting the report while

public engagement is happening, then the committee's final recommendation will be folded into the report.

Hougen asked about the timeline. Westfall shared that we had hoped to present the report in April, but it may push into May. April is the earliest we would have a final draft. Paul Wallsinger noted that the new courthouse will start coming out of the ground in April or May, so this timeline seems about right. Westfall thanked members for sticking with this.

- IV. Develop a plan to come to consensus on final recommendation – Westfall opened discussion on how the committee will come to consensus on final recommendation.

He noted that we've narrowed it down to two big buckets, possibly a third. As members, going through conversations about what to leave in, what to leave out, lots of pros and cons, advocacy from different perspectives, then polling. We have given each other opportunities to reframe and revisit concepts. That conversation may start at February meeting. We need an agreed approach.

Wallsinger commented that the committee has done a fantastic job of taking a lot of ideas and breaking it down to categories. Keeping that category framework is a key to not spreading out the ideas. Hougen concurred that it is important to not let ourselves consider new ideas and throw everything to the wind. We've done so much work, we should hold ourselves to the public input on the ideas that we presented to the public. Keeney agreed and offered that is why she thinks we need a public meeting, but she agrees, let's stick with what we've got.

Cynthia De La Torre noted that it would feel hard not to share your entire opinion, we can still receive that information, it might not be feasible for the courthouse. We want to hear people's opinions, stories, experiences. She wondered if we have been thinking about our neighbors around the courthouse. Westfall responded that DLR did a market survey assessment, and it included some neighbors. We are open to suggestions and have open responses on our online comment form. They will be included in the report. The committee seems to have consensus to move forward with the concepts that we've narrowed it down to rather than opening to new uses. Wallsinger shared that the committee can provide more than one recommendation in their report.

Inga Williams asked about the open-ended comment form questions. She noted that we need to read those open-ended responses and consider them. Westfall agreed

and confirmed that those comments are valuable but not how we will move forward with our decision. Williams agreed that the committee should leave it at the concepts that we have identified.

Houge requested survey results prior to the February meeting so committee members can review. Westfall shared that preliminary data will be sent at least one day ahead of the meeting.

- V. Other- Comment from public. Cornelia Levy-Bencheton is very impressed with the committee's work. She suggested an idea for the hybrid use. Example in France, synchronized light shows and sound, put together with a historic building (very modern, education, inspiration, use of the entity as an entertainment staff) Westfall noted that this idea aligns with the education/culture use recommendation, which was a strong factor in the OSU design team presentations. It could incorporate how the justice system works and how the courts evolved and show how it is now navigating toward community engagement with restorative justice model. Levy-Bencheton said she could showcase the innovative idea, speak more about it, and show examples. Westfall asked for her contact information so he could talk with her more at a later time.
  
- VI. Westfall adjourned the meeting at 11:40 am

Minutes submitted by Brenda Downum