



## MINUTES

BENTON COUNTY HISTORIC COURTHOUSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Friday, December  
15, 2023**

### **Benton County Courthouse Room 213**

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, Scott **McClure**, representing the Historic Resources Commission; Christel **Birdwell**, Cultural Arts and Community Engagement Supervisor, City of Corvallis; Christina **Rehklau**, Executive Director, Visit Corvallis; Christy **Wood**, CEO, Corvallis Chamber; Christopher **Jacobs**, Economic Development Manager, Corvallis-Benton County EDO;

Advisory Staff Attending: Tomi **Douglas**, Director of Benton County Natural Areas, Parks & Events; Inga **Williams**, Benton County Community Development Associate Planner; Cynthia **De La Torre**, Policy Analyst, Health Services; Brenda **Downum**, Communications and Community Engagement, Downum Consulting

- I. Call meeting to order at 10:04 am, thanks to all for attending. Attendees were invited to introduce themselves.
- II. Chair Westfall called for review of meeting minutes.

May 19, 2023: Correction requested on page 2: Strike a statement attributed to Westfall that the courthouse would function as courthouse all the way into the future. **Rehklau** moved to approve, **Keeney** seconded. Minutes approved.

October 20, 2023: **Keeney** moved to approve, **Rehklau** second. Minutes approved.

November 17, 2023: **Rehklau** moved to approve, **Keeney** second. Minutes approved.

III. Citizen comments- no public comment.

IV. Review of OSU Interior Design class presentation.

**Westfall** noted that all committee members present today were able to attend. We have photos of the day and the student presentations. We will use as part of our outreach efforts. We also have the actual poster boards to be displayed and will potentially use at an open house or in other county facilities. This will help us communicate that there are a wide range of possibilities. Chair Westfall invited committee comment.

**Keeney** felt the student presentations were fun to watch and have a new vision for the use of the building. Really appreciated it. She noticed the students didn't talk about offices at all. "Too boring." That still is on the table but that didn't make the students excited. If we have an open house, we need to acknowledge that offices are one of the mixed use ideas. It was also a good reminder that artifacts in the building need to be thought of in the process.

**Westfall** noted that even though this is a national register designated building and there are interests that we preserve the interior, it is still possible to modify the interior. Students had an assignment for their classwork that was a little different than the HCAC assignment. The only "problem" they were trying to solve was interior design.

**Keeney** has shared with her community connections and the main thing coming up for people is the seismic safety.

**McClure** appreciated the design with a resource center in the basement and community center. If we can't have courts here, he would like to identify a long term need for the space. The building's future isn't rosy with only arts and culture organizations. He also agrees that seismic is an issue and we need to make people know that we are aware. He believes the courthouse anchors a "town square" and hopes that next use of the building considers that role.

**De La Torre** commented that the exterior of the building is important too. Some of the potential uses will provide a reason for people to come. This is a place where people have demonstrations, wonder if people will still use it like that or where they will go. Open house will be good to have so people can share their voice.

**Jacobs** asked if a market analysis has been completed. Eventually the market feasibility of these uses will be the way to go.

**Westfall** reminded the group that DLR did a market analysis prior to our work and the committee reviewed early in the process. A copy will be provided to new committee members for reference.

**Keeney** noted that the analysis was limited and conducted before pandemic. **Rehklau** concurred that it was limited and not a good reflection of tourism in Oregon.

**Keeney** asked if the jail will be gone when the courthouse is vacated. **Westfall** shared that the courts and DA will relocate but the jail facility will continue operations in the current facility.

**Keeney** believes the committee should recommend that jail needs to be relocated.

**Westfall** offered that the committee can recommend “in order for this to be successful” the jail should be relocated.

**Keeney** opined the president of OSU should hear about the design class collaboration and receive an acknowledgement from this committee. **Westfall** will follow up to see how we could communicate beyond the class instructor

**Birdwell** noted how the students drew inspiration from places they had grown up with. It seems full circle and will inspire future generations, this seems so appropriate for a historic building.

#### V. Public engagement timeline

**Westfall** noted we are behind our original timeline but making progress. The

Board of Commissioners recognizes committee needs an adequate amount of time. It will possibly be late spring to finalize our report. **Downum** provided an update on the planned timing and activities for January- February. Discussion followed about groups that might share the committee's engagement message.

VI. Discuss key topics for final report

The committee needs to provide a sense of what to include in the report.

Downum provided a rough outline for members to use as a starting point including an introduction, Executive Summary including the recommendation, background about the project including a brief history and current operations of the courthouse, description of committee deliberation process leading to the recommendation. The appendix may include the OSU student design projects.

VII. Next Steps

Public engagement will take place through February. The committee will then meet and discuss how to come to a final recommendation.

VIII. Adjournment at 11:32 am