



## MINUTES

### BENTON COUNTY HISTORIC COURTHOUSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Friday, March 15, 2024**

**10:00 – 11:30 am**

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

Members Present: Chris **Westfall**, Oregon Judicial Department, Trial Court Administrator (HCAC Chair); Jill **Van Buren**, Benton County Courthouse Preservation Committee (HCAC Vice-Chair) Roz **Keeney**, Representing Preservation WORKS!, Scott **McClure**, Benton County Historic Resources Commission; Christel **Birdwell**, Cultural Arts and Community Engagement Supervisor, City of Corvallis; Christina **Rehklau**, Executive Director, Visit Corvallis, Jessica **Hougen**, Executive Director, Benton County Historical Society.

Advisory Staff Present: Jesse **Ott**, Interim Director of Benton County Natural Areas, Parks & Events; Inga **Williams**, Benton County Community Development Associate Planner; Paul **Wallsinger**, Facilities Manager, Benton County; Cynthia **De La Torre**, Policy Analyst, Health Department, Brenda **Downum**, Communications Support, Downum Consulting

Guests: Cornelia Levy-Bencheson, community member; Webster Slater, Community Development, Benton County; Joel Orton, community member

- I. Chair Westfall called the meeting to order at 10:05, three staff advisory members attended via the zoom link, all others attended in person.
- II. Approval of February 16, 2024 Minutes, **Reklau** made a motion to approve as written. **Keeney** provided a second. Minutes were approved.
- III. Citizen comments – there were no comments.

- IV. Chair Westfall opened the discussion to seek consensus on a final recommendation. He reviewed last month's public feedback discussion. If the committee is able to come to consensus today, this could be the final meeting.

Chair Westfall prepared three potential proposed motions of recommended uses as a starting point for the meeting discussion and handed out paper copies of the motions. These were the three options that the committee has already resolved to be considered for final review.

The committee spent 50 minutes of discussion on the Arts, Culture, Education recommendation description. **Reklau** requested to make a distinction between the concept of an anchor restaurant versus a café in this option. It also would include spaces for start-up opportunities for new food vendors and artists. Another topic from the Arts, Culture, and Education workgroup was the need for a "third space" for entertainment for youth and adults, especially those between the ages of 12 and 20. A third space is an informal, public space where people can connect, socialize and engage with their communities. The subcommittee had envisioned a family friendly space for all ages in this recommendation.

**The final language for the Arts, Culture, and Education recommendation is as follows:**

"I move to have the committee recommend to the Benton County Board of Commissioners that they **repurpose the historic courthouse as an Arts, Education, and Cultural use type.** This recommendation envisions a synergistic combination of the following: anchor restaurant, incubator spaces (artists, culinary, retail, etc.) and a family-friendly space for all community members."

The committee spent 20 minutes of discussion on the Government and Civic use recommendation description. **McClure** noted that a key theme for this use is that it would provide a long and stable "job" for the building. These services are enduring and would be needed long into the future. **Hougan** questioned the inclusion of the Community Reparation and Restorative Justice Programs in the Government and Civic Use option. Those who have had negative experiences in the courthouse would not want to come to this building. Committee felt it was a

legitimate possible program and concluded to keep this option in the recommendation.

**Keeney** noted that the combination option of the two uses could be challenging depending on the type of government uses for the building.

**The final language for the Government and Civic recommendation is as follows:**

“I move to have the committee recommend to the Benton County Board of Commissioners that they **maintain “the job” of the historic courthouse as a Government and Civic use type**. This recommendation envisions public meeting space, Community Reparation and Restorative Justice Programs; Specialty Treatment Court programs such as Drug Treatment, Mental Health Treatment, Veterans Treatment, and Family Treatment; Long-term diversion programs for substance abuse; Alternative Dispute Resolution such as domestic relations, small claims matters, and neighbor-to-neighbor.

Chair Westfall asked if committee members felt that ten minutes was enough time to make a final decision. Most agreed but before doing so, he requested a quick poll of where committee members are on the two options, a combination of the options, or including both as separate options in the final report. Chair Westfall reminded the members that each of the recommendation options will also include, as previously agreed, the committee’s position that the county seismically upgrade the building prior to initiating any new use or occupancy.

There was not enough time for full discussion so the committee will reconvene in April for a final discussion about their recommendation.

- V. The meeting was adjourned at 11:33 am.