



## Meeting Minutes

BENTON COUNTY HISTORIC COURTHOUSE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**February 16, 2024, 10:00 – 11:30 am**

**Benton County Courthouse Room 213**

Members Present: 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, Christy **Wood**, Executive Director Corvallis Chamber, 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; Christopher **Jacobs**, Economic Development Manager, City of Corvallis, Jessica **Hougen**, Executive Director, Benton County Historical Society.

Advisory Staff Present: Tomi **Douglas**, Director of Benton County Natural Areas, Parks & Events; Inga **Williams**, Benton County Community Development Associate Planner; Commissioner Nancy Wyse, Board of Commissioners; Cynthia **De La Torre**, Health Department, Brenda **Downum**, Communications and Community Engagement, Downum Consulting

Guests: Cornelia Levy-Bencheton, community member, Webster Slater, Benton County Community Development

I. **Call meeting to order**

Chair Westfall called the meeting to order at 10:06 am

II. **Approval of January 19, 2024, minutes**

VanBuren motion to approve, Keeney, second. Approved as written.

### III. **Citizen comments**

There were none.

### IV. **Public Engagement Results**

A preliminary summary of results was provided by Downum. The community awareness campaign kicked off on January 4 and continued through February 15, 2024.

Downum explained how the county tracks effectiveness of social media campaigns which includes reach and engagement. Analytics of January social media outreach was provided by Board of Commissioners Communications Coordinator JonnaVe Stokes. We will have a full report of the whole campaign in the appendix of the HCAC final report.

Five social media posts were published on County communications channels including Facebook, Instagram, X, NextDoor and LinkedIn. These five posts reached 28% of all county followers for a total of 10,523 people. Engagement measure how many of our audience reacted, commented, or shared our content. Our rates of engagement were double on FB, almost 3x higher on IG, 3.5x higher on X, 2.5 lower on ND, and 1.4x higher on LI than industry standards.

Keeney asked how many people filled in the open-ended questions? Downum responded that 137 open ended responses provide alternative perspectives. Jacobs asked if the full set of data would be available as he would like to see it. The full data set will be shared with committee members, but summary data will be included in the final report. De La Torres asked if there were any responses from the Spanish form. Downum noted that there were none.

Douglas shared that county staff will keep and use the public input on the form as a starting place for future work. The open-ended responses show the texture of what people really think.

VanBuren took a moment to announce open positions for the Historic Courthouse Preservation Committee. This is a committee created in the 1980's and she offered an invitation to HCAC members to apply. That committee meets once per month. VanBuren, Keeney, and McClure are all on the committee.

The public input from the comment form will be included in the final report. Results from question 5 was hard to decipher for McClure. He requested adding some narrative to interpret this graph.

Guest Levy-Bencheton opined that the online comment form forced people into predefined set of choices. She believes there may be some other idea out there that combines the ideas. Westfall reminded all that the purpose of this form was to communicate with the community the two major concepts the committee is considering for possible recommendations. The ranking question includes the values that the committee used early on to get to their recommendations.

V. **Develop plan for achieving consensus on final recommendation**

Chair Westfall turned the discussion to what the public input tells us about our two outcomes we are considering. Keeney feels there is interest and concern. She believes people value this building and it goes along with what we (as a committee) felt, which was to prioritize preserving the building. Westfall asked if anyone wanted to speak to how this might inform our conversation.

VanBuren requested a bullet point list of what we found from the comment forms. Downum will provide different summary report that provides more analysis and details of public comments.

Jacobs is concerned that the mixed-use term could be confusing. For some people that means residential combined with commercial. Westfall noted that the preamble to the questions provided examples. Jacobs requested that in the report, we use a different term rather than mixed use and avoid use of vernacular. We could say combination of uses.

Westfall noted that the committee will have the opportunity to make a final decision at the next meeting.

Committee members want to incorporate public input clearly in the report. Keeney opined that there was more public input than she expected. Her concern is that there has not been a public meeting. Douglas shared that the county would do additional community engagement that is based on the work of this committee. There will be more in person opportunities, and it will be very significant before a decision is made. Westfall reminded all that there was an

intention to do the open house and go out into the community, but the ice storm canceled some opportunities, and we couldn't pivot quickly. This information is what we have to work with. The next stage of the process will have robust engagement.

Richardson wonders what we want to do with this data, summarize the comments, lay that out. Taking quick look at the responses- it indicates there is flexibility of potentially acceptable uses for the building. The value questions we asked- responses are interesting. Our recommendation will align with the public if we are protecting the historic character of the building and furthers the life of the building. We don't necessarily need to throw anything out. We don't know what uses might present themselves to the commissioners but multiple uses in the building is generally supported by the public.

Westfall concurred and noted his view of the data is that the community supports either use type that we've identified, somewhat greater than 50%. The building needs to have a "long term job" but he doesn't see anything that is sharply one way or the other. Don't alter the historic character of the structure. Westfall directed Downum to finalize the summary of public input and share with the committee.

A draft report was provided to all committee members for review. Westfall requested comments on the draft. Keeney asked to include a recommendation about public engagement- this group recommends enhanced in person engagement for public input. The executive summary should include the whole process. Recommendation will be discussed and added to report as part of the Deliberation Process section. Reklau agrees the report structure is good.

Keeney asked about what will be included in the Appendix or in the report. She noted the Preservation Committee has some authority to what happens to the courthouse. What will happen to all the artifacts. Maybe our report needs to reflect that there is another process to review alterations to the building. Westfall suggested that we add a reference that the scope of this committee is to recommend repurposed use, recommending additional public engagement, and noting the existing Historic Preservation Committee would be responsible for the disposition the artifacts in the building.

Keeney noted that what keeps coming up in her other committee is the need for a seismic retrofit. McClure noted that a change in occupancy would likely trigger that requirement. Douglas added that the seismic discussion is for the next phase.

Commissioner Wyse noted the example of the Benton County Talks Trash Committee report. There was a section for each member to submit their own writing/opinion of final recommendation. This committee might want to consider that.

#### **VI. Discussion of draft text of final recommendation options**

As chair, Westfall noted that his goal is a consensus-based recommendation, with a report that is reflective of consensus reached. Hopeful that anything that is in our report, it's the committee's report. No need for individual submissions. There was head nodding by committee members.

Westfall senses generally similar views of public input. Hasn't taken the temp of the group yet. Asked Commissioner Wyse if the BOC is specifically looking for an option? How narrow should the recommendation be? Commissioner Wyse noted that the board isn't looking for one specific thing. It could be a range. There could be pros and cons. Not specifically one solution. She noted that she is speaking for herself but that potential uses are helpful as examples.

Westfall shared that the committee would have that conversation at the next meeting. Further analysis of public input data will be sent to all committee members. Voting members will come prepared to state their position on what they support. Hougen supported that idea and feels that the committee is getting close to consensus already. Birdwell noted that she feels comfortable as well.

It was also noted that within the recommendations that the committee provides, we need to add the negative connotations of the courthouse and the jail. These things will need to be taken into consideration going forward.

#### **VII. Adjournment at 11:32 am**

Next meeting, March 15, 2024, 10:00 – 11:30 am