



MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION

Santiam Rail Trail
Minutes

Tuesday, January 6, 2026, 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Commissioners' Boardroom
Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Suite 5231
Salem, Oregon 97301

Attendance:

Commissioners': Kevin Cameron, and Danielle Bethell.

Board's Office: Matt Lawyer, Trevor Lane, Toni Whitler and Chris Eppley.

Legal Counsel: Steve Elzinga.

Public Works: Brian Nicholas, Ryan Crowther, Scot Tencza, Kevin Thompson, and Lani Radtke.

Community and Economic Development: Kelli Weese, Chip Bury, and Tami Cirerol.

Commissioner Kevin Cameron called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions

-Commissioner Danielle Bethell

2. Santiam Rail Trail

-Chip Bury & Ryan Crowther

- Focus on a 4.1-mile segment intended to connect Mill City and the rest area:
 - Broader long-term ambitions for a regional rail trail.
- Two main funding streams are informing the project's design and preliminary work:
 - \$650,000 in Opal Creek funding:
 - Earmarked for early design and planning.
 - \$560,000 in Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) Community Paths grant:
 - Preliminary engineering.
 - Funds available starting October federal fiscal year 2027.
- Vision has evolved:
 - From shorter trail segment in Minto Park:
 - County-owned property with significant engineering obstacles due to three large ravines.
 - To connected and community-beneficial alignment:
 - Between Gates, Mill City, and potentially Fisherman's Bend.
- Santiam Rail Trail concept builds on earlier feasibility studies:
 - Notably the 2004 Canyon Journey's report.
- Responses to economic recovery needs post-2021.
 - Congressional requests.
 - Collaboration with Senator Berkley's office.
 - Collaboration with the governor's regional team.

3. Discussion

-All

- Re-evaluate trail's plans:
 - Focus on maximizing economic and recreational impact by connecting major community centers.
 - Specifically Mill City and Gates.
 - Instead of prioritizing the originally envisioned Minto Park-to-rest area route.
- Financial strategy balances grant timelines and matching requirements.
- \$2 million Opal Creek funding can support pre-construction activities:
 - Bridging work before ODOT funds are released.
- Matching component for ODOT grant must be local:
 - Such as wildfire or lottery funds.
- A Request for Proposal (RFP) for design consultant will be released in phases covering:
 - Conceptual and detailed engineering.
 - Survey.
 - Public outreach.
 - Environmental reviews.
 - Utility and geotechnical studies.
 - Cost estimation.
 - Potential construction oversight.
- RFP scope may be expanded from Gates through Mill City to Fisherman's Bend:
 - Contingent on ODOT approval that grant funds can support larger study area.
- Public outreach will take a three-tiered approach:
 - Direct engagement with affected property owners.
 - Open houses for indirectly impacted residents.
 - General public notification.
 - Address concerns property owners have about trail proximity and land ownership.
- Project pacing depends on:
 - Consultant hiring timelines.
 - Federal fiscal year grant windows.
 - Need for rapid ramp-up once funding is available.

4. Other

-All

- Challenges:
 - Higher-than-expected engineering costs related to building bridges over ravines.
 - Clarifying use and phases of grant funding.
 - Project timelines to maximize available resources for construction versus design.
- Past visits by project teams and board explored trail routes and logistical challenges.
- Initial board decisions focused on short segments but evolved toward connecting more communities.
- Ongoing community interest supports extending the trail:
 - Access, recreation, and economic benefits for local towns.
- Feasibility studies and grant pursuits inform the project's long-term vision and strategy.
- Collaboration of Public Works and Community and Economic Development is strong:
 - Roles and grant management clearly divided.

5. Next Steps

-All

- Give regular updates to the board:
 - Progress on the RFP process.
 - Consultant hiring.
 - Funding status.
 - Design milestones throughout phases 1–2.
- Direct public outreach to affected property owners.
- Prepare open-house-style meetings for other stakeholders.
- Coordinate with consultants on general public information materials.
- Finalize local funding sources required as match for the ODOT paths grant:
 - Budget for this match in the next fiscal year upon grant award.
- Accelerate outreach to ODOT:
 - Prioritize processing of Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) for grant funds.
 - Secure earliest obligation for Paths grant and minimize retroactive eligibility issues.
- Prepare and release RFP for consultant selection as soon as possible:
 - Aim for consultant onboarding by July.
 - Project work commencement in August.
- Confirm ODOT's allowance to expand RFP/study to include additional trail segments to Fisherman's Bend:
 - Revise the scope appropriately.
- Prepare formal presentation after phases 1–2:
 - Conceptual designs, schedules, costs, and guidance for subsequent next phases.
- Internal planning and coordination to streamline consultant's start and set rapid progress:
 - As soon as ODOT funding is accessible.

Adjourned – time: 2:07 p.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary L. White