



MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS WORK SESSION

Parks Update Minutes

Thursday, June 11, 2026, 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Commissioners' Boardroom
Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Suite 5231
Salem, Oregon 97301

ATTENDANCE:

Commissioners: Kevin Cameron, Colm Willis and Danielle Bethell.

Board's Office: Alvin Klausen, Trevor Lane, Jonathan Sanford, Jon Heynen, and Matt Lawyer.

Legal Counsel: Steve Elzinga, and Andrew Mittendorf.

Public Works: Brian Nicholas, Kevin Thompson, and Brian May.

Commissioner Kevin Cameron called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions

-Commissioner Kevin Cameron

2. March 10th Work Session Recap

-Kevin Thompson & Brian May

- Previous work session covered:
 - Overall parks financial situation and projected deficit in Parks Fund.
 - Expanded staffing and workload following wildfires and canyon park rebuilds.
 - Discussion of using service-level concepts (A-D) to describe park conditions.
- Current work session builds on that discussion to:
 - Show concrete progress since 2023.
 - Review major active and planned park projects.
 - Align on desired future service levels and how they intersect with funding.
 - Prepare for upcoming financial and policy decisions on parks operations.

3. Parks Project Update

-Kevin Thompson

- Progress:
 - Program-wide improvements since 2023:
 - Better and more frequent maintenance.
 - Higher quality of care.
 - Implementation of playground safety inspection program:
 - Not previously in place.
 - Use of on-site cameras at select parks to:
 - Monitor visitation without excessive drive time.
 - Adjust maintenance frequency based on actual use.

- Digital and outreach improvements:
 - Updated parks website with better navigation and language translation.
 - Implemented online reservation system (CampLife) for:
 - Campgrounds.
 - Picnic shelters.
 - Enabled digital payment and reservations.
 - Online purchase of annual passes available.
 - Increased social media presence to:
 - Raise awareness of county park locations.
 - Improve public understanding of Marion County's park system.
- Changes:
 - Expanded parking fees and installed digital pay stations.
 - Realigned camping and picnic shelter fees to match facilities and demand.
 - Developed plans for expanding camping in the future.
 - Track Trail kiosks with educational/scavenger-hunt style activities for kids.
 - Added four new bike racks and bike repair stations in select parks.
- Community involvement and volunteer projects:
 - Approximately 51 community events over 2.5 years:
 - Trails, bridges, boardwalks, planting, recovery and restoration.
 - Partners:
 - Trailkeepers of Oregon.
 - Environmental services.
 - Watershed councils.
 - Oregon Parks Forever.
 - Stop Oregon Litter and Vandalism (SOLVE).
 - Others.
- Fire recovery and specific park updates:
 - North Fork:
 - Rebuilt two main access points to the beach.
 - Added loop trail, allowing access to most of park.
 - Done by park staff with added full-time maintenance capacity.
 - Bear Creek:
 - Reopened couple of seasons ago.
 - Large stairway to river designed by engineering, built by parks.
 - Minto:
 - Rebuilt burned bridges, boardwalks, and picnic tables.
 - Improved picnic areas near river.
 - North Santiam (North Santiam State Recreation Area):
 - County took ownership last year after years of maintenance.
 - Tree removal impacted by post-fire stress, insects, and disease.
 - Arborist approach to keep as many viable trees as possible.
 - Replanting in fall, coordinated with future camping expansion.
 - Salmon Falls:
 - Wildfire recovery and redevelopment funded by Board and grants.
 - New parking lot with design room for future expansion.
 - New American with Disabilities Act (ADA) path to a river overlook.
 - New two-stall restroom with solar power supporting pay station.
 - Trail and stairway network rebuilt.
 - Wetland restoration.
 - Parkdale Park:
 - Very successful, with strong positive community feedback.
 - Install park boundary/no trespassing signage at south end.
 - Residents report reduced cut-through traffic on private property.

- In the Works:
 - Bear Creek Campground Redevelopment:
 - Preliminary engineering at about 60% design.
 - \$1.25M grant awarded.
 - Applied for Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) \$ 1M grant.
 - Total project is about \$2.25M:
 - RV sites with appropriate power.
 - Upgraded tent sites.
 - Day-use and picnic facilities.
 - New shelter and water infrastructure.
 - If full funding secured:
 - Move to invitation to bid after award notice.
 - Target construction Summer/Fall 2027 and opening Spring 2028.
 - If second grant not awarded:
 - Build reduced-scope project within \$1.25M.
 - Potentially add county funds (up to ~\$1M) to maintain scope.
 - Santiam Canyon Comprehensive Recreation Management Plan:
 - Corridor-wide plan for North Santiam/Opal Creek recreation corridor.
 - Consultant, SE Group, funded by Opal Creek Funding.
 - Coordinate with various recreation partners.
 - For seamless and coordinated recreation offerings.
 - Explore options for cost and resource sharing between agencies.
 - Current phase:
 - Data collection and public outreach.
 - Posting flyers at all open recreation sites in corridor.
 - Soliciting visitor feedback and desired improvements.
 - Additional public outreach to follow.
 - Auburn & Santana Village Conversions:
 - Finish Auburn conversion and pursue Santana Village conversion.
 - Acquired property near Scotts Mills to support Auburn conversion:
 - Appraisal value insufficient.
 - Proceed with Browns Island appraisal:
 - Add required property value (~\$40K+ needed).
 - Potentially satisfy both Auburn and Santana Village requirements.
 - Constraints:
 - Appraisals plus desk audits estimated at \$9K–\$11K each.
 - Need to avoid unnecessary appraisals due to limited budget.
 - Appraisal results expected around August to determine feasibility of both.
 - Niagara Park Reopening:
 - Stair system is moving away from top landing:
 - Structural failure risk not immediate, but safety compromised.
 - Keep stair gate locked and allow only upper viewpoints:
 - Defer full repair until priorities and funding questions resolved.
 - Open lower parking area with clear delineation and protection.
 - Minor restroom repairs, signage, and a few tables.
 - Internal park road as a trail only.
 - Estimated cost is \$88K.
 - \$51K Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reimbursement anticipated.
 - Local shortfall is about \$37K.
 - Questions around funding source:
 - Parks Fund vs. Opal Creek funds vs. other limited pots.
 - Concern of Opal Creek funds use would federalize project:

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and cultural clearance requirements.
 - Angling access point, but overall recreation footprint is small and narrow.
- Fire Memorial at North Fork:
 - Professionally designed memorial circle with two primary plaques:
 - For those who lost their lives and recognizing first responders.
 - Interpretive signage on fires and community response.
 - ADA-accessible trail tying memorial to existing ADA parking/restroom area.
 - Wanted trail alignment is close to ADA parking but may encroach BLM land:
 - BLM land disturbance starts federal review potentially taking a year.
 - Cost and review:
 - Estimate is about \$167K with unknowns like drainage and grading.
 - Funding consultant for cultural and environmental reviews for BLM:
 - Estimated additional cost about \$35K.
 - Funding status:
 - \$25K currently identified from Community Development.
 - Possible additional \$25K from similar sources under consideration.
- Scotts Mills – Parking, Safety, and Dam Condition:
 - Park visitors unable to find on-site parking.
 - Overflow parking in front of residences and businesses.
 - Trash issues.
 - Community surveys in city limits and broader Scotts Mills community:
 - Responses currently being collected.
 - Preliminary city feedback showed majority don't want more parking.
 - No grant applications submitted yet:
 - OPRD grants require 50% match and currently in closed cycle.
 - Dam structure comprises:
 - Upstream and downstream grouted rock walls.
 - Rubble interior core.
 - Concrete cap and cladding on top/downstream.
 - Recent observations:
 - New crack and loss of concrete cladding at a main channel location.
 - Interior rubble flushed out, void left and it was filled with sandbags
 - Additional cladding loss observed on the kiddie-pool sidewall.
 - Some rebar previously cut back.
 - Staff will continue to trim any exposed steel as needed.
 - Safety-focused maintenance/monitoring rather than full structural overhaul.
 - Visible degradation ongoing and will require continued attention.
 - Public decency/nudity concerns:
 - Multiple incidents reported and they argue public nudity isn't illegal.
 - Recommend adopting ordinance prohibiting nudity in county parks.
- Parkdale – Additional Amenities and Funding Concepts:
 - Remaining project funds:
 - \$19K of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) left to used by year end.
 - \$10K OPRD for scope-consistent work with 50% match requirement.
 - Community/project requests:
 - Use leftover construction funds for additional amenities.
 - Create some parity with investments at Santana Village Park:
 - East Salem Service District (ESSD) supports maintenance.
 - Potential amenities reviewed:
 - Cornhole and horseshoe pits being removed as they are underused.
 - Basketball court:
 - Noise concerns and potential loitering/tagging.

- Other courts are often used and positively patrolled.
 - Likely to consume most or all of available remaining funds.
 - Lower priority given budget and maintenance.
- Shade structures:
 - Interest in shade over playground.
 - Cost depends on coverage area and design.
 - Height and configuration must deter climbing and vandalism.
- ESSD funding concept:
 - Considering giving \$40K for maintenance at Santana Village.
 - Maintenance-focused options for \$40K ESSD contribution:
 - A year of contracted security at about \$7–8K/year.
 - ESSD reimburse \$8K/year of maintenance costs to parks fund.
 - Potentially increase service level at Parkdale:
 - Mowing, weeding/edging, playground and graffiti checks.
 - County invests about \$16K/year in Parkdale maintenance.
- Website & Reservation System Issues:
 - Difficulty reserving Spongs Landing shelter via CampLife:
 - Repeated failure at payment step.
 - Inconsistent system process.
 - Process seems more cumbersome than state park reservation systems.
 - Technical boundaries:
 - Platform for campgrounds, not shelters, has limited customization.
 - Shelters can only be signed up for as overnight sites.
 - Multiple questions can't be turned off for shelter reservations.
 - Many Oregon County park systems moved to CampLife limiting options.
 - Encourage users to contact parks staff directly when system issues arise.

4. Parks Future Service Levels

-Brian May, and Board of Commissioners (BOC)

- Service level framework (A–D) Proposal:
 - A: Highest service - very frequent, proactive maintenance.
 - B: Clean, safe, functional but less intensive than A.
 - C: Safe, functional and more reactive, limited aesthetic focus.
 - D: Minimal service:
 - Mainly safety and access, with limited grooming or amenity care.
 - Provide common language to discuss service expectations vs. costs.
- Current state:
 - When current Parks Manager arrived, overall estimated at roughly D+.
 - Added structure, accountability, and staff and overall level is roughly C to C+.
 - Prioritization:
 - Neighborhood parks have higher expectation of cleanliness and order.
 - Natural or remote parks allowed to be closer to D:
 - Less mowing, and less frequent aesthetic upkeep.
 - More variable vegetation conditions.
 - Parkdale is B and Eola Bend is D:
 - Goal of B/B- service level across most parks and campgrounds closer to A:
 - Long-term goal contingent on sustainable funding.
- Maintenance and time allocation:
 - 2025 workload breakdown - field staff only:
 - 50% of time on vegetation.
 - Remaining time split across other maintenance tasks.
 - Park-level time allocation:

- Spongs Landing and Scotts Mills receive largest share of hours.
- Efficiency efforts:
 - Reduced mowing footprints.
 - Strategic use of cameras to avoid unnecessary trips when visits low.
- Financial context:
 - Operating picture - excluding project-specific FEMA dollars:
 - Structure produces ongoing annual shortfall of over \$400K.
 - General fund funds staff as Parks Funds insufficient to cover total.
 - Without changes fund will deplete to near-zero in about 6–9 months.
 - Key financial details:
 - Administrative charges:
 - About \$96K is Public Works administration.
 - About \$142K is Central County administration.
 - Administrative burden as substantial depends on service costs.
 - Approximately \$72K in contingency built into budget:
 - Buffer for unexpected costs that rolls forward if not used.
 - FEMA reimbursements:
 - About \$400K from wildfire work booked as revenue has not arrived.
 - \$130K of FEMA-eligible work pending reimbursement this year.
 - If not done in good time cash will be worse than working capital:
 - About \$560K.
 - Would effectively have no spendable balance in near term.
 - \$120K from Pack Saddle must be spent only in that park.
 - Revenue trends and opportunities:
 - Fee-based revenue rising.
 - Parking is highest-yield.
 - About 40% of gross spent on collection/enforcement.
 - Future campgrounds to add annual revenue.
 - Revenue growth alone will not close the entire structural gap.
- Board's feedback:
 - Major improvement in parks conditions and operations over past few years.
 - Strong leadership and systematic progress from previous low service.
 - Service-level preferences:
 - Avoid lowering service levels if possible and continue improving.
 - Resource constraints and County priorities may require trade-offs.

5. Next Steps

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- Volunteer and community recognition:
 - Work with fair staff to recognize park volunteer organizations during fair.
- North Santiam / canyon parks:
 - Create replant plan for hazard tree area, align with potential camp expansion.
 - Return with a scoped project concept for:
 - Replanting plans.
 - Potential campground expansion footprints and phasing.
- Auburn & Santana Village conversions:
 - Complete appraisal and desk review for Browns Island property.
 - By August, report whether:
 - Auburn conversion requirements are fully satisfied.
 - Additional value is available to support Santana Village conversion.
- Niagara Park:
 - Prepare refined cost estimates and scope options for partial reopening.

- Analyze Opal Creek fund use and federal, environmental and cultural reviews.
 - Proposed timeline for achieving at least parking and trail access reopening.
- Fire Memorial:
 - Construction planning for the memorial circle and plinths.
 - Design and installation of temporary access trail from County property.
 - Finalize plaque and kiosk sizing that can handle large first responder name list.
 - Ensure plinth design accommodates future name additions.
 - Consolidate name lists.
- Scotts Mills:
 - Analysis of community survey data on parking and safety.
 - Summary of community input.
 - Recommendations for parking configuration and associated costs.
 - Continue dam monitoring and safety maintenance.
 - Legal draft parks nudity ordinance and coordinate signs and enforcement plans.
- Parkdale & ESSD:
 - Prepare maintenance and cost information for next ESSD meeting:
 - Could \$40K funds offset maintenance and support service or fund security.
 - Interplay of ESSD support at Santana Village and County funding at Parkdale.
- Reservation system and website:
 - Investigate reservation failures, including payment and availability issues.
 - Engage CampLife and internal IT/GIS to:
 - Identify user experience improvements.
 - Explore if simpler shelter-only reservation tool is feasible.
- Law enforcement coordination:
 - Request Sheriff's Office deputies to staff about park conditions.
 - Report back on agreed-upon communication channels and expectations.
- Service levels:
 - Maintain C/C+ overall service level as minimum floor.
 - Neighborhood parks at B or better, given community expectations.
 - Campgrounds at highest service tier over time, contingent on resources.
 - Cameras, selective mowing, and prioritization to stretch limited resources.
- Financial and structural issues:
 - Recognize that solving structural gap requires:
 - Cost control, administration reallocation, and revenue enhancement.
 - Coordination with Budget Officer and Central Services.
 - Explore adjustments in how lottery dollars and other resources support.
- Financial and service-level planning:
 - Treat FEMA receivables and contingency as short-term/one-time issues.
 - Prepare for the next parks work session:
 - Parking enforcement/contracting and other compliance strategies.
 - Revenue and cost changes, with potential admin allocation changes.
 - Specific, cost-level service scenarios.
 - Historical 10-year view of parks.

Adjourned – time: 11:06 a.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary L. White