

County Commissioners
Colm Willis, Chair
Kevin Cameron
Danielle Bethell



**Chief Administrative
Officer**
Jan Fritz

**MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION**

**Economic Development Program Update
Minutes**

Tuesday, June 16, 2026, 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 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: Alvin Klausen, Trevor Lane, Jonathan Sanford, Kendal Hall, Matt Lawyer, Chris Eppley, and Toni Whitler.

Legal Counsel: Jennifer Rogers.

Community and Economic Development: Kellie Weese, Ashley Jackson, Chip Bury, and Sarah Coutley.

North Marion Tourism Collaboration (NMTC): Sam Kaluf and John Zobrist.

Mt. Angel Oktoberfest: Monica Bochsler.

City of Idanha: Serena Morones.

Travel Salem: Kara Kuh, Irene Bernards, and Angie Villery.

Keizer City Council: Lori Christopher.

Keizer Chamber of Commerce: Dan Klem.

City of Mill City: Stacy Cook.

Woodburn Area Chamber of Commerce: John Zobrist.

City of Keizer: Kathy Clark.

Commissioner Kevin Cameron called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions

-Commissioner Colm Willis

2. Tourism Grant Program Introduction

-Sarah Coutley

- Review applications for Marion County's tourism grant program.
- Overview of three grant areas:
 - Salem Metro Grant:
 - \$100,000 per year, 3-year award for total of \$300,000.
 - North Marion Region Grant:
 - \$50,000 per year, 3-year award for total \$150,000.
 - Marion County Countywide Grant:
 - \$50,000 total per year, to be divided among multiple awards.
- Applicants invited to present projects, answer questions, and give additional context.

3. Marion County Countywide Grant – Applicant Discussion

- **Mill City**
 - **City of Idanha**
 - **Idanha Development Foundation**
 - **Keizer Chamber of Commerce**
 - **Mount Angel Oktoberfest**
 - **Travel Salem**
 - **NMTC**
- Stacie Cook, Serena Morones, Dan Clem, Monica Bochsler, Irene Bernards and Jame Zamrin
- Mill City:
 - Mill City Falls Park near EV parking lot and northeast side of bridge.
 - Background:
 - Developing since 2009 and North Santiam River retaining wall failure.
 - Forced return of prior Oregon State Parks & Recreation grant.
 - City put together multiple funding sources with contractor mobilized.
 - Project is moving forward with anticipated completion by end of 2027.
 - Request \$20,000 for interpretive sign with a total budget of about \$2.2 million.
 - Funds cover construction and additional funds may be sought later.
 - Grant application focuses only on interpretive signage, not full park budget:
 - Path, falls overlook, natural uncovered play area and Trellis structure.
 - City of Idanha:
 - \$8,000 request:
 - Wooden sign with interchangeable slats.
 - Digital marketing assets:
 - Update website and drone photography to show local assets.
 - Recreational assets:
 - North Santiam River:
 - Trout stock by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).
 - Close to various outdoor activities:
 - Detroit Lake, Hoodoo, McCoy area, and Jefferson Wilderness.
 - Make an economic development plan with University of Oregon (UO):
 - Grant funded by Marion County.
 - Idanha Development Foundation:
 - Acquire property from Detroit Community Church to make a community center:
 - Successful donation secured in May.
 - Take over food pantry operation with construction and transition work planned.
 - Request \$5,000 to support Idanha Mountain Festival:
 - Flagship annual summer event the third weekend in July.
 - Designed as family-friendly and alcohol-free.
 - This year's budget approximately \$7,000:
 - Goal to grow to \$8,000–\$10,000 over time.
 - Holiday Festival:
 - Future effort that is planned as second annual tradition.
 - Indoor, carnival-style holiday event.
 - Planning expected to start after completion of summer festival.
 - Board of six volunteers and 15 volunteers engaged in festival and food pantry.
 - Keizer Chamber of Commerce:
 - Up to \$50,000 for Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Designation Marketing Organization (DMO) position.
 - \$8 million transportation infrastructure and \$2 million turf field investments.
 - Keizer functions as tournament town with over 19 organizations using fields:
 - Significant growth in tournaments and tournament-driven tourism.

- City currently has three hotels with approximately 350 rooms total:
 - Third property coming with about 175 rooms:
 - \$30,000–\$50,000 annually in Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT).
 - Annual TOT from two existing hotels estimated \$75,000–\$100,000:
 - About \$50,000 to Keizer Chamber of Commerce.
 - \$30,000 to the public library.
 - \$20,000 to the cultural center.
 - City \$30,000/year library support as part of government requirement.
- Change from spot tourism for 19 event types to DMO model and use FTE:
 - Optimize field scheduling to fill unused capacity.
 - Better integrate tournaments and E-Play-Stay campaigns.
 - Stabilize seasonal employment related with tourism activities.
- Sustainability:
 - One-year grant, but application anticipates 3-year horizon of need.
 - Long-term funding and if future TOT growth could sustain position.
 - Chamber drafted internal business plan for position.
- City perspective:
 - Keizer’s strategic location as regional tourism hub.
 - Coordinate tourism flow so smaller communities benefit as well.
 - Two employees with more needed for existing businesses and DMO functions.
- Mount Angel Oktoberfest:
 - 501(c)(4) run by 19 volunteer board who handle planning and operations.
 - Over 60 years of festivals and donated over \$4 million to other nonprofits.
 - Event scale and impact:
 - Hosts more than 300,000 visitors annually over four days.
 - Features 40+ food booths:
 - Combined gross revenue over \$1 million last year.
 - Historically had reputation for being less family-friendly:
 - Successfully shifted to a family-friendly focus.
 - Request total shuttle program cost projected at approximately \$21,000:
 - Asking Marion County for \$4,000 toward shuttle operations.
 - Shuttle program:
 - 2023–2024 NMTC funded/operated shuttle:
 - Silverton, Woodburn, Salem, and Portland routes.
 - Budget around \$90,000.
 - Successful but unsustainable cost due to limited sponsorships.
 - 2026 approach focuses on cost reduction and sustainability:
 - Use Northwest Navigator buses for Portland route only.
 - Use school buses for local routes to dramatically lower costs:
 - Silverton to Mt. Angel.
 - Woodburn to Mt. Angel.
 - Salem to Mt. Angel.
 - Salem pickup at old Costco/Harbor Freight lot.
 - Goal to keep rider ticket prices low:
 - Encourage use.
 - Reduce local traffic and parking pressure.
 - Move to break-even or self-sustaining over next several years.
 - NMTC working with Oktoberfest:
 - Includes room-night packages that include shuttle access.
- Travel Salem:
 - Support tourism marketing of small and rural communities in Marion County.
 - City of Salem funding can only be used within Salem city limits.

- Core functions supported:
 - TravelSalem.com:
 - Central hub for all marketing efforts.
 - Events, attractions, wineries, farms, and recreation.
 - Smaller communities get exposure to larger pool of visitors.
 - Media Relations / Public Relations (PR):
 - Gathers story ideas at regional PR committee meetings.
 - Pitches to travel writers, journalists, bloggers, and influencers:
 - Travel + Leisure.
 - Sunset.
 - Other national/regional publications.
 - Mid-Willamette Valley Visitors Guide:
 - Annual circulation around 120,000 copies:
 - In Oregon, Washington, California, and British Columbia.
 - Invites visitors to explore full region and spend locally.
 - Travel Salem Visitor Center:
 - Staff are ambassadors actively promoting all corners of county.
 - Aim to lengthen stays and broaden exploration beyond Salem.
- Wide marketing for those lacking a budget of \$3 million and specialized staff.
- Rural community visibility, promotion, and economic regional tourism inclusion.
- NMTC:
 - Requesting \$7,500 for a North Marion Illustrated Regional Tourism Map:
 - \$27,000 from NMTC and contributions from cities:
 - Hubbard - \$5,000.
 - Woodburn - \$2,500.
 - Commitment expected from Silverton.
 - Businesses bought logo placements tied to recreation images on back of map:
 - Present North Marion as unified destination within Marion County.
 - Show communities and attractions are connected, not isolated stops.
 - Covers 10 North Marion communities:
 - Historic downtowns.
 - Farms.
 - Gardens.
 - Cultural sites.
 - Parks.
 - Trails.
 - Festivals.
 - Small businesses.
 - Major draws.
 - Shows driving distances of communities to Portland/Salem metro area.
 - Printed and interactive digital formats.
 - Benefits:
 - Functions as marketing tool and visitor infrastructure.
 - Spending at restaurants, retailers, farms, lodging, and attractions.
 - Cross-community identity-building and cooperative tourism branding.
 - Metrics:
 - Number of maps distributed.
 - QR code scans.
 - Digital engagement.
 - Website traffic.
 - Visitor inquiries.
 - Event attendance.
 - Business feedback:

- Sales.
- Foot traffic.
- Staffing.
- Seasonality.

4. Salem Metro Grant – Applicant Discussion

- **Travel Salem**

-Irene Bernards

- Travel Salem:
 - 3-year program, July 2026 - June 2029, with scope based on county guidance:
 - Interpreted Salem Metro as Salem addresses plus Keizer and Turner:
 - Discussed areas like Brooks/Powerland and near communities.
 - Request focus areas:
 - Photography:
 - Update and expand high-quality imagery for Salem Metro area.
 - All marketing materials to be current and appealing.
 - Sponsored Content:
 - Work with Travelzoo for editorial content promoting assets.
 - Estimated reach of about 6 million travel-oriented consumers.
 - Digital Advertising:
 - High target advertising on tourism platforms and Google.
 - Drive traffic to TravelSalem.com.
 - Maintain detailed online listings for visitor-facing businesses.
 - Data and performance tracking:
 - Adara tracks behavior from ads to website use and then hotel booking.
 - Placer.ai analyzes visitor movement, visitation patterns, and spending.
 - Track broader metrics:
 - TOT.
 - Length of stay.
 - Employment.
 - Gas tax via statewide travel impact studies.
 - Work with chambers to reflect assets in photographs, stories, and campaigns.
 - Framed as Salem Metro versus inclusive regional marketing:
 - Broader plan for separate streams of North Marion and Salem Metro.
 - Communities apply directly instead of a central DMO representation.
 - Grant chances may have unintentionally limited the canyon this cycle:
 - Requires procedural improvements.

5. North Marion Region Grant – Applicant Discussion

- **NMTC**

-Jame Zamrin

- NMTC:
 - North Marion Region Grant:
 - Request for \$150,000 over three years.
 - \$139,500 from NMTC for a total project budget of \$289,500.
 - Implement North Marion Tourism Marketing Plan created in 2025.
 - Go from uncoordinated, individual promotion to regional destination strategy.
 - Funding uses:
 - Woodburn staff member donates 50% of their time in-kind to NMTC:
 - Fund a part-time marketing manager employed by NMTC.
 - Dedicated to tourism marketing implementation.

- Social media and website content:
 - Updates, event promotion, itineraries, and visitor information.
- Photography and videography:
 - Professional asset use across campaigns and partner materials.
- Paid marketing for brand, promotion and stories to help off-peak visits.
- Expect increase in restaurant, shop, lodging, farm, winery, venue visits:
 - Strong slow season revenue and better capacity to retain tourism jobs.
- Governance and regional buy-in:
 - NMTC is an independent 501(c)(6) with multiple city participation:
 - Eight of nine cities formally signed cooperation agreements.
 - County-aligned regional economic development strategy.

6. Discussion

-All

- Total requested across applications exceeds available \$50,000 in county grant.
- Some requests, if fully funded, exhaust entire countywide allocation.
- Cooperation, shared branding, and cross-promotion of cities and organizations:
 - Encourage applicants to partner with each other where expertise overlaps.
 - Bringing new communities into tourism conversation is positive development.
- Metro versus countywide versus regional scope:
 - Past practice focused on funding limited number of central organizations.
 - Aims to encourage broader participation/ownership by smaller communities.
 - Concern that canyon area lacked clear path due to this cycle's framing.
 - Grant postings and guidelines need refinement to better reflect Board's intent.
- Equity and sustainability considerations:
 - Long-term sustainability of staff requests tied to one or three-year grants.
 - Future TOT growth might be reinvested in tourism promotion and staffing.
 - Ensure funding catalyzes durable capacity rather than ongoing dependency.

7. Other

-All

- Separate request about Idanha food pantry and church property renovation coming.
- Some high-value tourism assets fall outside rigid geographic definitions.
- Recognize of substantial work already done by NMTC and event organizers.

8. Next Steps

-All

- No final decisions or allocations made during this meeting.
- Staff and commissioners to:
 - Review all applications, budgets, and supporting documents in more detail.
 - Receive Keizer Chamber business plan for proposed tourism FTE.
 - Adjust future postings so all communities have clear path to apply.
- Follow-up meeting for formal deliberation and award decisions.

Adjourned – time: 3:12 p.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary L. White