County Commissioners
Colm Willis, Chair
Kevin Cameron
Danielle Bethell

Chief Administrative Officer
Jan Fritz

MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION

Solid Waste Update: Environmental Services (ES) Detailed Program Services Review

Minutes

Tuesday, July 7, 2026, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.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: Trevor Lane, Jonathan Sanford, Kendall Hall, Toni Whitler, and Matt Lawyer
Legal Counsel: Steve Elzinga.
Public Works: Brian May.

Commissioner Colm Willis called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions
-Commissioner Colm Willis

2. ES Detailed Program Services Review
-Brian May

- Organizational and Fund Structure:
    - 510 fund – Solid Waste:
        - Environmental Services – solid waste operations.
    - 310 fund – Parks.
    - 515 fund – Stormwater.
- Service districts' wastewater operators paid by 510:
    - Fully reimbursed by service districts.
    - Pass-through, not true cost to 510.
- Solid waste operations primarily consist of:
    - Transfer station operations:
        - North Marion Transfer Station (NMTS).
        - Salem Keizer Transfer Station (SKRTS).
    - Browns Island landfill and ash/Monofill and leachate management.
    - Household hazardous waste facility.
    - Waste reduction and support:
        - Significantly reduced.
- Labor and FTE Changes
    - Headcount in solid waste intentionally reduced over recent years:
        - Largely by not refilling vacant positions.
    - Several Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) reductions in solid waste operations confirmed for current year.
    - Two key positions are budgeted but are not filled per board direction:

        - Former program coordinator position
        - Waste reduction coordinator (bilingual)
    - Boots-on-the-ground staffing is lower than it appears on paper due to:
        - Pass-through wastewater operator positions
        - Positions left vacant and not backfilled.
    - Supervisors "boots on the ground" when needed
    - Operations at NMTS and SKRTS currently strained by employees on Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA):
        - Require supervisors to cover scale operations and other frontline tasks.
    - Using on-call scale attendants is strategy to cover lunches/breaks and keep full-time headcount down.
- Allocation by Facility / Service Level:
    - NMTS & Landfill:
        - Scale attendants.
        - Heavy/medium equipment operators.
        - Maintenance workers.
        - Environmental tech.
    - Browns Island:
        - Equipment operators.
        - Maintenance.
        - Environmental compliance.
    - Household Hazardous Waste:
        - Oversight and contract administration.
    - SKRTS:
        - Primarily scale attendants, with some crew lead/support time.
    - Leachate and gas collection functions at NMTS/Browns Island.
    - Detailed documentation tying each position to specific service levels for accurate cost allocation.
- Bilingual Staffing:
    - Bilingual scale attendant positions treated as an enhanced service:
        - Not a requirement.
    - Aim to have roughly three of eight full-time scale staff bilingual:
        - 5% premium for certified bilingual skills.
    - Bilingual capacity proven beneficial for customer service and operational efficiency.
- Financial Overview – 510 Solid Waste Fund:
    - Adopted 2026–2027 budget shows:
        - Strong beginning working capital:
            - Includes about $15.5M in closure/post-closure reserves.
        - Budgeted net loss of $4.4M if all budgeted appropriations fully spent.
    - Actual performance for current year to date (through May):
        - Year-over-year change in working capital currently around –$2.456M:
            - Estimated additional $300K loss expected by fiscal year end.
        - Actual loss expected to be much lower than budgeted –$4.4M, due to:
            - Labor savings from unfilled positions
            - Cost cutting in waste reduction and other programs
            - Emerging savings on leachate disposal.
    - Closure/post-closure reserves are restricted and will be drawn down as capping and closure work at NMTS proceeds:
        - About $15.5M.
- Leachate and Operational Efficiencies:
    - Leachate disposal has been major cost driver.
    - New receiving facility in Portland area expected to lower per-gallon costs:

        - Potentially allowing more volume at lower total cost than budgeted.
    - Recent investment in purpose-built material handler at transfer station has:
        - Replaced multiple backhoes:
            - Being rapidly destroyed under heavy loading use.
        - Reduced fuel consumption, especially diesel.
        - Supported staff reductions through improved efficiency.
- Parks Fund (310) Financial Concerns:
    - Adopted beginning working capital for 310 was $616K:
        - Preliminary year-end figures indicate current balance of about $49K.
    - Discrepancy is a serious concern and is being investigated for:
        - Potential missing or delayed transfers.
        - Including a $500K board-supported contribution.
    - Other accounting or timing issues.
- Stormwater Fund (515) Status:
    - Stormwater is currently in an acceptable position:
        - Shifts of labor and costs off of 510 to 515 will place greater pressure.
        - Additional review and future discussions with board are anticipated.
- Rates, Revenue, and Long-Term Stability:
    - Estimated gap for 510 fund currently projected in $2.7M–$3M range to stabilize operations.
    - Future rate strategy discussed in terms of:
        - Avoiding once-a-decade, very large rate increases
        - Move to smaller, regular adjustments to track actual operating costs.
    - Future transfer station–related rate increase is expected to:
        - Starting January 2027.
        - Improve the 510 fund’s outlook.
        - Be primarily supported by transfer station revenue.
        - Help stabilize the fund on an ongoing basis.
    - Legislative or regional changes could significantly alter financial picture:
        - A potential multi-county waste system.
        - Goal is to define “new normal” cost of operating existing system:
            - Pending any such changes.
- Use of Juvenile Work Crews and Labor Mix in Parks/Stormwater:
    - Reliance on juvenile work crews decreased during COVID when reported as unavailable:
        - Staff capacity and Adults in Custody (AIC) crew changes constrained field work, especially for vegetation and drainage maintenance.
    - There is renewed interest in:
        - Re-engaging juvenile crews for parks, stormwater tasks, and potentially battery recycling support
        - Comparing costs and benefits of seasonal/temporary employees vs. juvenile crews
        - Leveraging juvenile shops for work currently being contracted out.
- Budget Accuracy and Projections:
    - Past projections for solid waste have historically been within 1% of actuals.
    - Current year more difficult to project because of early budgeting and numerous organizational and program changes.
    - Interest in multi-year budget vs. actual trend analysis to improve projection accuracy and inform future budgeting.

3. Next Steps

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- Investigate 310 Parks fund financial discrepancy:
  - Adopted vs. actual working capital.
  - Confirm whether all planned transfers and board-supported contributions have been posted.
  - Reporting back with corrected or confirmed figures.
- Provide year-to-date detailed financials for:
  - 510 Solid Waste fund.
  - 310 Parks fund.
  - For further board review of program performance and cost structure.
- Continue:
  - Cost allocation by facility/service level to ensure revenues cover staffing and operations.
  - Leachate cost reduction strategies and project planning for NMTS closure work.
- Explore use of juvenile work crews and other labor options in parks and stormwater:
  - Historical change away from juvenile crews
  - Current availability and constraints
  - Targeted use in seasonal and project-based work.
- Plan for a site visit in transfer station scale house for understanding of day-to-day operations and customer interactions.
- Continue working toward a rate and contract structure:
  - Covers actual operating costs
  - Avoids large, infrequent spikes in customer rates
  - Positions the system for potential regional/legislative changes.

Adjourned – time: 2:38 p.m.
Minutes by: Mary Vityukova
Reviewed by: Gary L. White