



MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION

Parks Financial Update
Minutes

Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Commissioners' Boardroom
Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Suite 5231
Salem, Oregon 97301

ATTENDANCE:

Commissioners: Danielle Bethell, Kevin Cameron and Colm Willis.

Board's Office: Jonathan Sanford, Alvin Klausen, and Matt Lawyer.

Legal Counsel: Steve Elzinga, and Andrew Mittendorf.

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

Guest: Kathy Rogers.

Commissioner Colm Willis called the meeting to order at 1:51 p.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions

-Commissioner Colm Willis

2. Keeping Current Service Level

-Kevin Thompson

- Current staff:
 - Two full-time parks maintenance technicians in field.
 - One long-tenured parks coordinator.
 - Program manager.
 - Funding for two half-time seasonal positions:
 - Only one filled this season.
 - Created some vacancy savings.
- Overall parks condition is assessed around "C+" level:
 - Emphasis on safety, access, and basic functionality over aesthetics.
 - Some parks are better, some worse.
- Routine operations and maintenance:
 - High-volume trash management.
 - Heavy restroom cleaning:
 - Frequent response to severe unsanitary conditions.
 - Vegetation control.
 - General safety-related upkeep.
- Contracted support was evaluated:
 - Adults in Custody (AIC) crews:
 - Flexible but expensive.
 - Inconsistent staffing and field time.
 - Limited to a single site per crew.
 - Juvenile crews:

- Much lower daily cost.
- Flexible.
- Good for manual labor.
- Variable crew size and leaders.
- Short workdays.
- Higher oversight needs.
- Test deployment at two high-maintenance parks showed they can effectively handle heavy-lift vegetation and cleanup tasks before/after weekends.
- Professional landscape crews:
 - Would provide consistent, higher-quality scheduled work.
 - Minimal county oversight.
 - Require binding contracts and further cost estimates.
- Maintaining current service levels relies on small core staff supported by targeted contracted and seasonal labor:
 - Especially at high-use, maintenance-heavy parks.

3. Additional Efficiencies

-Kevin Thompson

- Significant share of summer workload is windshield time:
 - About one-third of maintenance resources spent driving between parks.
 - Along with roughly \$11,000 annually in vehicle fuel for staff vehicles:
 - Excluding equipment fuel.
- Low-cost trail cameras give some visibility of park conditions but are unreliable:
 - They overheat, have solar/battery issues and intermittent outages.
 - Upgrading to more robust camera systems could:
 - Reduce unnecessary trips to low-use or low-impact parks.
 - Flag overused/problematic sites in real time to prioritize response.
 - Potentially support law enforcement and risk management.
- Volunteer engagement strong, with about 500 volunteers over last 2.5 years:
 - Construction and repair of amenities in fire-impacted parks.
 - Replanting and restoration:
 - Including proactive planting in areas expected to lose trees.
- Coordination with Sheriff's Office is developed for two complementary purposes:
 - Condition reporting so staff can deploy more efficiently:
 - Crowding, traffic safety, fires, obvious hazards
 - Enforcement presence by potential use of code enforcement officers, retired deputies, or seasonal enforcement positions:
 - Park rules, parking, citations, relaying visitor complaints.
- Concept under consideration is seasonal code-enforcement-type role:
 - Focus:
 - Parking and rule enforcement in key parks.
 - Citation revenue could offset or fully fund position rather than be a general revenue generator.

4. Current Fund Status

-Kevin Thompson

- For FY 2026-27:
 - Ongoing parks program:
 - Excluding Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) projects and other large capital projects.

- Faces projected annual operating shortfall of approximately \$345,000.
- Existing net working capital is around \$600,000:
 - About \$307,000 uncommitted and can be used for operations or projects.
 - About \$289,000 is committed to specific purposes and locations:
 - For example:
 - Revenue from certain parks such as Pack Saddle and timber receipts must be reinvested in those specific parks or uses.
 - Cannot be freely reallocated.
- Without additional revenue or cost reductions, program will likely need to draw down uncommitted working capital to cover projected deficit:
 - Leaving little cushion toward end of biennium.
- FEMA wildfire-recovery reimbursements remain approved but unpaid:
- Repeated rework cycles with state and federal reviewers have delayed payments:
 - Several years of reimbursement requests total estimated around \$700,000.
 - Project's eligibility window expires around October 30th:
 - Increases urgency to resolve FEMA/ Oregon Department of Emergency Management (OEM) issues and secure payment.
 - Otherwise, county risks losing these reimbursements.
 - Labor and overhead costs risen substantially over past decade due to:
 - Change from heavy seasonal dependence to stable year-round maintenance workforce post-wildfire.
 - Reassignment of supervisory and program management time to parks.
 - Growth in countywide central administrative charges and internal Public Works administrative allocations to parks fund.
 - Park improvements significantly increase ongoing operating costs:
 - Conversion of one site from open field to a developed community park roughly tripled annual maintenance costs:
 - From about \$6,000 to about \$18,000.
 - Shows each capital upgrade must be matched with sustainable OEM funding plan.
- Traffic:
 - High-use parks experience extreme congestion, overflow parking, and traffic safety issues, including blocked emergency-access routes:
 - River and swimming destinations.
 - Physical measures have improved conditions at some locations, but demand routinely exceeds capacity
 - Logs/boulders, new signage, restricted parking areas.
 - Traffic and parking patterns support view that certain parks function as regional destinations rather than neighborhood facilities:
 - Put disproportionate strain and maintenance costs on a few key sites.

5. Potential Future Funding Options

-Kevin Thompson

- User Fees and Pricing Strategy:
 - Evaluate incremental increases in parking and camping fees, using comparisons to nearby systems:
 - With projections for added annual revenue at various price points.
 - Consider expanding paid parking to additional high-demand sites and refine fee structures to better reflect actual usage and impacts.
- Revenue-Generating Amenities and Business Models:
 - Develop business plans for revenue-positive investments at high-use parks:
 - Rentable event facility at riverfront park:

- With food service concessions and wedding/event rentals.
 - Small convenience/park stores in strategic locations:
 - Selling snacks fishing tackle, and basic supplies.
 - Combine with staffing that handles cleaning and supervision.
 - Ensure analyses include both capital costs and long-term operating impacts:
 - Goal of net positive revenue to support system-wide OEM.
- Interest Earnings and Internal Allocations:
 - Incorporate share of interest earnings from dedicated funds to overall Public Works financial strategy.
 - Determine fair allocation of those interest revenues among programs.
- Administrative Cost Review:
 - Reexamine central administrative charges and Public Works internal admin allocations to parks fund:
 - Find reductions to burdens where possible.
 - Free up operating dollars for direct park services.
- Enforcement-Related Revenues:
 - Explore options for portion of parking and citation revenue generated go back into parks fund:
 - Particularly if expanded enforcement presence is established.
- Structural and Governance Options:
 - Consider larger structural options like parks service district or levy.
 - Economy and voter sentiment may not support new taxes in near term.
- Portfolio Management of Parks:
 - Analyze park-by-park usage and cost patterns to:
 - Prioritize investment in high-use, revenue-capable parks where improvements can generate income.
 - Evaluate low-use, neighborhood-scale parks for alternative models:
 - Partnerships with local community groups or other jurisdictions.
 - Disposition or transfer if maintenance cannot be sustained.

Adjourned – time: 2:59 p.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary L. White