



MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION

Parks Update
Minutes

Thursday, September 10, 2026, 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.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: Trevor Lane, Alvin Klausen and Toni Whitler.

Legal Counsel: Andrew Mittendorf.

Public Works: Ryan Crowther, Brian May, and Kevin Thompson.

Guest: Kathy Rogers, and Linda Potts.

Commissioner Colm Willis called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions

-Commissioner Colm Willis

2. Current Project Updates

-Kevin Thompson

- Bear Creek Park Project:
 - Design is at about 50–60% and expected to reach that level by November.
 - Applied to Oregon Parks and Recreation (OPRD's) Local Government Grant Program for nearly \$1 million.
 - Presentation to grant committee expected around Sept 29th–30th:
 - Decision anticipated by mid–late October.
 - Target construction window:
 - Summer/Fall 2027 with a hoped-for opening in Spring 2028.
 - Full build concept is about \$2 million:
 - Fallback \$1.2 million option if full grant funding is not received.
- Auburn / Santana Village Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Conversion:
 - Auburn needed about \$45,000 in appraised replacement value after previous transaction.
 - West property near old end park was appraised at \$215,000:
 - Much lower than roughly \$1M on the tax roll.
 - Value is sufficient to complete Auburn conversion but insufficient to fully cover Santana Village conversion:
 - Estimated additional \$105,000–\$230,000 is likely needed.
 - Staff proposes using broader Browns Island property as future LWCF replacement site once C&D landfill is closed:
 - Area can be converted to park use.
 - Board direction:

- Ask OPRD if Browns Island could be a future conversion site for Santiam Village:
 - If a 2–5-year timeline to convert is acceptable.
 - Inquiry is not a decision to close compost/yard-waste operations.
 - Separate, full policy discussion required on solid-waste transition.
- Niagara Park Reopening:
 - Working toward reopening park by Spring.
 - Minimal improvements:
 - Parking lot refresh, replacement of burned wooden slats on bridge, and basic safety work.
 - Work is underway.
 - No major capital construction is planned.
- Farmworker Memorial Relocation:
 - Prior concept was to place fire/farmworker memorial at North Fork Park:
 - Board requested more options.
 - Three candidate locations were presented:
 - Salmon Falls:
 - Adjacent to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) parking and ADA concrete path to overlook.
 - Blowout / “Blankers”:
 - Highly visible from road but concerns about vandalism, graffiti, and visitor behavior.
 - North Santiam Park:
 - Area off existing concrete path near ADA parking.
 - Low likelihood of future disturbance.
 - Board direction:
 - Proceed with Salmon Falls as memorial location.
 - Engineering confirms most prior design work can be reused with minimal rework for new site.

3. Future Project Development Criteria & Staff Prioritization

-Kevin Thompson

- Used three primary criteria to evaluate and prioritize potential future projects:
 - Need / Issue Addressed:
 - Degree to which project addresses safety concerns, existing capacity constraints, or service gaps.
 - Revenue Generation Potential:
 - Whether the project can:
 - Pay for itself over time
 - Contribute to ongoing maintenance.
 - Is largely a service amenity with little direct revenue.
 - Implementation Challenges:
 - Permitting complexity.
 - Site conditions and existing infrastructure.
 - If land is county-owned or federal/other.
- Staff created a priority list (1–8) and color coded each project by:
 - Green:
 - Favorable in a category.
 - Clearly addresses a need, good revenue, or low challenges.
 - Orange:
 - Medium.
 - Purple:

- Low/weak in that category.
- Staff's initial top priorities were:
 - Additional parking in North Fork.
 - North Santiam Park – East expansion.
 - Scotts Mills parking improvements.
 - Pack Saddle ramp/parking improvements.
 - North Santiam Park – West expansion.
 - Eola / "Aps Landing" river access and possible camping.
 - Minto Park camping concept.
 - Other lower-ranked concepts.

4. Future Project Descriptions

-Kevin Thompson

- North Fork Park – Additional Parking:
 - Concept:
 - New parking area on county-owned land near existing lot.
 - Goal:
 - Address chronic road side parking, pedestrian safety, and emergency access conflicts.
 - Revenue:
 - Modest increase.
 - People in lots pay at higher rates than those parking along road.
 - Challenges:
 - Possible historic drainage/wetland feature around existing lot.
 - May require culverts/bridging and permitting.
 - Primary complexity is design and construction funding.
 - Board direction:
 - Treat as a high-priority safety/capacity project.
 - Develop design-level plans and cost estimates sufficient to support spring OPRD Local Government Grant application.
- North Santiam Park – East Expansion (Tents / Drive-in Sites) (Staff Priority #2)
 - Concept:
 - Expansion to east of existing campground.
 - Mix of walk-in tent sites and drive in tent/RV sites.
 - Preference for drive-in sites plus potential future yurts.
 - Vault toilets and shared water spigots:
 - No full hookups initially.
 - Need:
 - Adds camping capacity at a popular, constrained park.
 - Addresses demand for more campsites.
 - Revenue:
 - Tent-only camping tends to be break-even or modest net revenue.
 - Campground broke even last year at \$17,000 in costs vs. revenue.
 - Yurts or electrified sites could improve revenue.
 - Estimated Cost:
 - \$1 million for either drive-in or walk-in option.
 - About \$1.8 million for both.
 - Challenges:
 - Terrain is terraced.
 - Access and grading must be carefully designed.
 - Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain restricts building in some areas.

- Board direction:
 - Pursue comprehensive master plan for North Santiam Park:
 - Including financial feasibility.
 - Apply for planning grant by October 1st, seeking \$200,000:
 - 50% match.
 - Master planning of the park's expansion.
 - Board committed to providing \$100,000 local match:
 - Funding source to be finalized.
 - Staff to pursue lottery funded planning grant opening in spring.
- Scotts Mills Park – Parking Improvements (Staff Priority #3)
 - Survey:
 - Expanded from town residents to elementary school attendance area:
 - About 472 mailers.
 - 117 responses.
 - On parking changes:
 - Many respondents said, “no change”:
 - 47% preferred no change.
 - Remaining responses were split roughly evenly between:
 - Smaller entrance reconfiguration:
 - Angled parking from existing parallel.
 - A larger, separate parking lot in meadow area.
 - Primary complaints from neighbors:
 - Parking in front of homes, in business lots, and leaving trash.
 - Options:
 - Option 1:
 - Reconfigure road edge parking near entrance.
 - Estimated cost about \$145,000.
 - Option 2:
 - Construct a new 50 space lot in meadow beyond current lot.
 - Access road improvements and wetland mitigation.
 - Rough conceptual cost around \$450,000.
 - Option 2 would significantly reduce neighborhood parking conflicts and support better fee compliance:
 - Vehicles inside fee lots pay more reliably.
 - Challenges:
 - Wetlands and saturated soils in access corridor.
 - Extensive permitting and engineering needed.
 - Board direction:
 - Scotts Mills a priority following North Fork and North Santiam:
 - Do not drop it.
 - Develop design-level plans and cost estimate to compete for spring OPRD Local Government Grants.
- Pack Saddle Park – Boat Ramp & Parking Improvements (Staff Priority #4)
 - Current Issues:
 - Only dedicated raft/boat launch site in canyon:
 - Heavily used by both public and commercial outfitters.
 - Parking is informal, often muddy and congested, with trailer conflicts and damaged vehicles.
 - Some rafters avoid because of congestion and difficulty maneuvering.
 - Proposed Improvements:
 - Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB) worked with county on conceptual redesign of ramps and parking to improve circulation and capacity.
 - Funding:

- Strong candidate for OSMB non-motorized/boating access funding.
 - 50% match.
 - Potential match from Opal Creek economic recovery funds.
- Board direction:
 - Proceed with development of Pack Saddle project in coordination with:
 - OSMB.
 - Army Corps of Engineers.
 - Other partners.
 - Treat as Opal Creek eligible project.
- North Santiam Park – West Expansion / Higher-End Camping:
 - Concept:
 - Larger, more developed expansion to west, potentially including:
 - RV sites with power and water.
 - Yurts or cabins.
 - Showers and upgraded restrooms.
 - Playgrounds and other amenities.
 - Longer-term:
 - Potential lodge/event-type facilities.
 - Seen as main opportunity for high revenue park facility akin to Silver Falls or Linn County’s system.
 - Revenue:
 - High revenue-generating opportunity.
 - Compared to tent-only camping.
 - Challenges:
 - More intensive infrastructure needs.
 - May need greater up-front investment and detailed financial analysis.
 - Board direction:
 - Fold into North Santiam Park master plan to evaluate feasibility, phasing, and revenue model.
- Eola / “Aps Landing” – River Access & Possible Camping:
 - Project 1 – Non motorized Boat Launch:
 - Concept:
 - Formalize or expand river access for non-motorized use.
 - Giving an alternative to congested Kaiser Rapids boat ramp.
 - Marine Board indicated strong support.
 - Fills regional gap in non-motorized access:
 - Likely generate good parking-fee revenue.
 - Potential funding from OSMB:
 - 50–75% range historically.
 - Challenge:
 - Avoid “stacking” incompatible state grants on same costs where state rules prohibit using state funds as state match.
 - Project 2 – Small Campground Concept:
 - Concept:
 - Modest tent camping area supporting paddle-in/drive-in users:
 - Using existing water/septic/electrical near the store.
 - Benefit:
 - Close-to-town family camping option.
 - Economic benefit to nearby businesses.
 - Concern:
 - The area functions as a neighborhood.
 - Neighbors have historically opposed increased motorized use.
 - Board direction:

- For camping, no go-ahead yet:
 - Staff must consult neighbors and gauge community acceptance before advancing.
 - For non-motorized access improvements:
 - Board is open.
 - Want capacity and workload considered.
 - See an initial concept and cost before formal commitment.
- Minto Park – Camping Concept:
 - Concept:
 - New campground at Minto.
 - Filling gap while Fishermen’s Bend remains closed.
 - Serves another canyon campground between Detroit and existing parks.
 - Benefits:
 - Economic benefit to Gates and the county.
 - Potential long-term rail-trail/rest area-to Fishermen’s Bend concept.
 - Challenges:
 - No utilities on site.
 - Any host and camping would require full utility extensions.
 - Higher cost and complexity than other nearer-term projects.
 - Board direction:
 - Keep on the longer-term list.
 - No immediate design work directed at this time.
- Other Sites/Concepts:
 - Rainbow/Veterans Memorial Park:
 - Need to avoid having substandard park surrounding upgraded Veterans Memorial.
 - Coordinate park-condition improvements with any memorial upgrades.
 - Browns Island/Eola Bend long-term park concept:
 - If/when landfill and compost operations end:
 - Long-term vision is to integrate to larger regional park system.
 - No decisions yet, but it is integral to the LWCF conversion strategy.

5. Design/Cost Summary

-Kevin Thompson

- General Observations:
 - Preliminary conceptual design and costing for simple parking lot is significant due to:
 - Surveying.
 - Wetland delineations.
 - Preliminary engineering.
 - Compliance with OPRD grant requirements:
 - Often about 60% design needed at application.
- North Fork & Scotts Mills Parking – Design Cost Estimates:
 - Concept-only estimate for a site:
 - About \$5,000.
 - Insufficient for grant-quality submittal.
 - To reach grant-ready for each parking lot:
 - Approximate \$50,000 per site, broken down as:
 - ~\$20,000 – survey,
 - ~\$5,000 – wetland reconnaissance/delineation,
 - ~\$25,000 – engineering staff time/plan preparation.
 - Board direction:

- Authorize to pursue design for North Fork and Scotts Mills:
 - Up to \$50,000 each.
 - Use in-house engineering and external services as needed.
 - For North Fork:
 - Seek Opal Creek funding via Business Oregon to cover local match component for construction.
 - Apply for spring OPRD Local Government Grant for actual build.
 - For Scotts Mills:
 - Use county funds for design.
 - Apply to same spring OPRD grant cycle with separate application.
- North Santiam Park Master Plan – Planning Grant:
 - Target grant:
 - County Opportunity of RV Fee.
 - Planning grant with deadline Oct 1st.
 - Board authorized:
 - Application for \$200,000 total planning project, with 50% match:
 - About \$100,000 county funds.
 - Staff to coordinate scope so that:
 - East and West expansions.
 - Revenue model.
 - Environmental/site constraints.
 - All evaluated in one master plan.
 - Pursue lottery-funded planning grant in spring to go with RV-fee plan grant.
- Pack Saddle:
 - OSMB is engaged and has done some concept design work at their cost.
 - Next steps to refine project scope and develop cost estimates in partnership with OSMB and other agencies.
- Opal Creek & CDBG-DR Funding Notes:
 - Opal Creek funds are federal and introduce National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and related environmental review steps.
 - Increases cost and time but fits canyon recovery and economic development.
 - For CDBG DR disaster recovery funding:
 - State’s current action plan is heavily oriented toward housing:
 - Parks are not clearly included.
 - Use for canyon parks likely requires master plan amendment at state level with legislative engagement to direct agency to broaden uses.
 - Commissioners desire to pursue path to unlock remaining \$400M statewide:
 - Recognize complexity.

6. Other

-All

- Enforcement & Fee Revenue:
 - Concern of sheriff’s citations for North Fork corridor parking and fee violations are not clearly tracked back to parks:
 - Work with legal counsel and Jonathan Sanford to identify where citation revenue is currently going.
 - Review corridor signage regarding fee requirements for parking along road as well as in parks.
- Grants & State Coordination:
 - Commissioner Bethell shared conversations with Lisa Sumption:

- OPRD Director:
 - State has multiple grant sources and significant under-utilized county-focused funds:
 - Particularly RV fee and lottery-based programs.
 - Encouragement from OPRD to seek grants for planning and development rather than spending only local dollars.
 - Commissioners willing to use county staff to support grant writing when Parks/Public Works capacity is constrained.
- Browns Island Solid Waste / Compost Future:
 - No decision to close yard waste/compost operations at Browns Island.
 - Any closure or relocation must come back with:
 - Clear cost analysis.
 - Alternatives.
 - Impacts on residents, haulers, and transfer stations.
 - Brian May to follow-up policy discussion on long-term operations and timing.
- Opal Creek Strategy:
 - Board consensus that Opal Creek funds should be treated as key capital for:
 - North Santiam Canyon parks.
 - Projects that clearly support canyon economic recovery.
 - Staff to factor federal environmental requirements into schedules and budgets whenever Opal Creek is used.
- Staff Support
 - Toni Whitler to assist Public Works with grant applications and related tasks.
 - Coordinate with Parks, Engineering, and Board to keep projects moving across multiple funding cycles.

Adjourned – time: 11:28 a.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary L. White