

**COOS COUNTY URBAN RENEWAL AGENCY
REGULAR BOARD MEETING**

7:30 a.m. Thursday, March 27, 2025

Port of Coos Bay Conference Room, 125 Central Avenue, Suite 230, Coos Bay, Oregon 97420

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE

Agency Board Members:

Chair Todd Goergen, At Large; Elise Hamner, Port Commissioner; Kyle Stevens, Port Commissioner; Matt Hamilton, City of North Bend; Jessica Engelke, City of North Bend; Joe Benetti, City of Coos Bay; John Sweet, Coos County; and Drew Farmer, Coos County. Absent: Lucinda DiNovo, City of Coos Bay.

Guests:

Rod Taylor, Coos County; Lexie Woodward, South Coast Development Council; Colton Totland, Coos County; Lanelle Comstock, Port Staff; Matt Friesen, Port Staff; Krystal Karcher, Port Staff; and Jennifer Sierra, Port Staff.

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chair Todd Goergen called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

2. INTRODUCTION OF BOARD MEMBERS AND GUESTS

3. CONSENT ITEMS

A. Approval of June 3, 2024 Board Meeting Minutes

Upon a motion by Jessica Engelke (Second by John Sweet), the Agency Board Members voted to approve the June 3, 2024 Board Meeting Minutes. **Motion Passed 6-0-2.** (Ayes: Benetti, Engelke, Goergen, Hamilton, Stevens, and Sweet. Nays: None. Absent: DiNovo. Abstain: Farmer and Hamner).

4. ACTION ITEMS

A. Determine Future of the Agency

John Sweet opened the meeting by clarifying that this was not an attack on Urban Renewal Districts (URDs) but rather an effort to assess their financial impact. He acknowledged the success of these districts, citing the North Spit as an example where infrastructure improvements attracted significant business. However, he and the County Commissioners believe the district may have fulfilled its purpose, and the \$500K annually diverted from other taxing entities might be better used elsewhere.

Mr. Sweet continued to say that the County faces a severe financial crisis, with a \$1.8 million budget deficit and recent layoffs. Mr. Sweet highlighted essential services including tax collection, law enforcement, the jail, and other areas at risk. He suggested that discontinuing the URD could release nearly \$3 million remaining in the URD account, providing much-needed funds to support various taxing districts. Mr. Sweet questioned whether the URD was effectively utilizing its funds and emphasized the County’s pressing need for financial relief.

Todd Goergen requested a breakdown of how the funds would be redistributed to the districts and what each entity’s share would be. Mr. Sweet then outlined estimates of several entities that would benefit from the distribution of these funds:

District:	Distributing URD Funds:	Annual Distribution, moving forward:
4H	\$28,000	\$4,000
Library District	\$234,000	\$35,000
County	\$348,000	\$52,000
North Bend Airport	\$78,000	\$12,000
Port of Coos Bay	\$197,000	\$30,000
Coos Bay Schools	\$1,400,000	\$221,000
North Bend Schools	\$11,000	\$2,000
ESD	\$142,000	\$22,000
SWOCC	\$226,000	\$34,000
North Bay Fire Department	\$123,000	\$19,000
Total	\$2,787,000	\$431,000

Mr. Goergen inquired whether school districts would remain financially neutral due to equalization, and Mr. Sweet confirmed they would. Mr. Sweet noted that other districts, particularly the Port, would benefit. Ultimately, the County will decide whether to continue the URD and may reconsider if there is a compelling case for significant benefits.

Mr. Goergen proposed that a portion of funds be retained to maintain a small debt while stopping revenue collection. Mr. Sweet confirmed the County explored this option and consulted with Elaine Howard. Mr. Goergen suggested that Ms. Howard may have indicated the Agency must be dissolved to return funds. Colton Totland added that the County finance director preferred this approach, as it aligns with statutes requiring Agency dissolution before fund distribution.

Jessica Engelke acknowledged the financial challenges many government agencies are facing with operational costs and available funding. She emphasized the North Bend Council's efforts to address this challenge while maintaining services and highlighted the Agency as a valuable tool for economic development that has had success and could support future projects. Before dissolving the URD, she recommends consulting with Ms. Howard and the South Coast Development Council to explore potential projects. While dissolving the URD might offer a short-term financial boost, the URD has the potential to generate long-term funding to address ongoing challenges.

Mr. Sweet responded to Ms. Engelke by acknowledging her concerns and providing context based on his ten years on the committee. He admitted that the URD has not made significant progress in recent years but believes its efforts have positioned the County well, particularly in attracting businesses like

Southport. Mr. Sweet also noted that while the future is uncertain, the County's financial outlook for the next year appears bleak.

Kyle Stevens acknowledged that the URD has not effectively utilized its funds but mentioned that a small aquaculture farming business has recently shown interest in setting up tanks and hiring local employees. When asked about the infrastructure the URD could offer, Mr. Stevens suggested site preparation. Mr. Stevens also recognized the County's financial difficulties and recommended following Mr. Goergen's approach of retaining \$500K and distributing the remainder.

Ms. Engelke inquired about whether the URD had received training or guest speakers, specifically asking about Ms. Howard's involvement. Ms. Engelke expressed concern over the lack of recent meetings, feeling the decision to disband the URD was rushed. Mr. Goergen suggested providing written documentation of options and relevant statutes to assist in the decision. Mr. Sweet highlighted the tight timeline, as the County is preparing for budget meetings next week.

Elise Hamner requested a legal opinion on URD rights and obligations, asking whether Ms. Howard or the County attorney could provide guidance on existing statutes. Ms. Hamner expressed concern about heavy traffic on Transpacific Parkway and inquired about the County's responsibility for road maintenance, as well as whether there is a budget for necessary repairs, including drainage and overlay work, due to increased wear and tear. Ms. Hamner expressed concern about funding bridge repairs, rehabilitation, or decommissioning if it goes out of service, suggesting a need for further analysis and Agency partnership. Mr. Sweet noted that the Transpacific Parkway is maintained by the County's road department, funded mainly by gas taxes and State contributions. The challenge the County is facing is not funding roads, but sustaining general fund services like assessment and taxation.

Drew Farmer stated he consulted the Roadmaster about potential projects but found no major ones, as URA funds can only be used for capital improvements, not maintenance. Drawing from his experience on the Coos Bay City Council, he noted that URA funds had been used for full road reconstruction. He expressed concern that the available \$2.8 million would not support significant progress. Mr. Farmer continued to say that regarding bridge decommissioning, he initially believed URA funds were restricted to land boundaries but later confirmed they could be used.

Mr. Farmer expressed support for reallocating URA funds to park development to generate County revenue but stated there are challenges with finding suitable locations. He proposed under-levying URA funds before dissolving, to ensure future funds remain local. Ms. Engelke clarified that the schools are fully funded, so no money would be lost annually. Mr. Farmer stated he had reached out to the State about keeping funds local without affecting school funding but had not received a response.

Mr. Sweet stated local taxes and timber revenues are considered local funding for schools. If a school district does not reach the \$12K per student benchmark, the State's equalization fund fills the gap. However, if the equalization fund does not have enough money to cover all districts' needs, it is distributed proportionally. Mr. Sweet noted while there is funding, it may not cover all needs.

Mr. Farmer stated he spoke with Melissa Cribbins about whether Agency funding was being considered for the Pacific Coast Intermodal Port (PCIP) project, but she confirmed it was not being discussed for a project of that scale. Mr. Stevens stated a new project interest had emerged the previous week and asked whether it was possible to disperse funds to the County as a loan or transfer, given the financial

crisis. Mr. Farmer added that the Agency has not spent more than \$100K on a project in over a decade and has not been active in recent years, with meetings typically occurring only once a year.

Ms. Hamner referenced the 2017 plan amendment, which proposed resurfacing Transpacific Parkway and raising the southern portion followed by an overlay of the entire length, and inquired about the outcome of that discussion. Mr. Goergen stated that the focus was on the flooding issue at the southern end, but the cost estimates were three times the budget, leading to the decision not to complete the overlay. Mr. Farmer noted that if the project had been feasible in the past eight years, it would have been done.

Ms. Engelke invited input from guests, emphasizing the need to discuss economic development opportunities. She sought insights from Lexie Woodward on potential projects. Ms. Woodward highlighted the value of preliminary work in attracting investment and discussed the success of Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones in supporting development. Drawing from her experience with these districts, she explained how such funding encourages businesses to exceed minimum standards. She provided an example of using URA funds to incentivize companies to contribute to public benefits, such as building a trail to the beach.

Ms. Engelke emphasized the benefits of retaining the URA, and suggested seeking a legal opinion and gathering more details before making a decision. Acknowledging the County's upcoming budget meeting, she pointed out that a mid-year budget amendment could accommodate the proposed \$52K addition, avoiding the need for a rushed decision.

The discussion focused on the use of \$350K in funding, with Mr. Farmer comparing it to the cost of three police officers for one year. Ms. Engelke raised concerns about long-term sustainability, while Mr. Sweet clarified that the funds were meant as a financial cushion rather than a one-time expense. Ms. Engelke emphasized the importance of long-term job security, and Mr. Farmer acknowledged her concerns, noting the Agency had not spent over \$300K in a decade. Mr. Sweet explained that past underspending resulted from a lack of projects rather than reluctance to use funds.

Rod Taylor emphasized the need for officials to be responsive to public concerns, stating he believed most voters opposed the Urban Renewal Agency and preferred redirecting tax revenue to local districts. Mr. Goergen and Ms. Engelke referenced the past public vote that established and maintained the Agency. Matt Hamilton acknowledged the County's economic struggles but expressed concern that dismantling the Agency would stall progress just as development gains momentum. Mr. Hamilton stated that meeting only once a year hinders development, as there is a lack of ideas and engagement. He stated the Agency needs more information on its capabilities and must take action to foster growth.

Ms. Hamner emphasized the importance of County-Agency collaboration, noting an increase in ideas compared to the past. Ms. Engelke suggested that the Jordan Cove project may have hindered the pursuit of other major projects, a point confirmed by Mr. Goergen.

Ms. Hamner highlighted that debt had not been discussed and suggested conducting an analysis and obtaining a legal opinion. She emphasized the importance of debt-funded projects for the Agency's existence, noting that \$2.8 million would not be sufficient for a major infrastructure project but could serve as a down payment on a loan. Mr. Goergen added if projects are not debt-funded then a deeper evaluation of the Agency's purpose and existence would be necessary.

Ms. Engelke emphasized the importance of addressing the County's budget crisis with sustainable solutions, rather than relying on one-time fixes. She proposed that the Agency meet within a month to discuss potential projects involving the Port, SCDC, and other stakeholders. Mr. Sweet suggested meeting sooner, even as soon as next week, since the Council will be finalizing their budget soon.

Mr. Sweet highlighted the meeting's goal to assess infrastructure needs that would justify the Agency's continued existence. Mr. Farmer proposed weekly meetings, but Mr. Sweet emphasized the Agency had had ample time to make progress and no further delays were needed. Mr. Stevens proposed a soft vote on the meeting schedule, while Mr. Goergen indicated the decision to dissolve the Agency might already be made. Ms. Hamner expressed interest in hearing from local stakeholders like Roseburg Forest Products and Southport on their infrastructure needs. Ms. Engelke called for a legal opinion before making a decision and noted that specific steps were required to dissolve the Agency.

Mr. Totland responded to Ms. Engelke about dissolving the Agency, noting that the process to terminate the URA is straightforward, but he was unsure if it could be coupled with an under-levy to disburse funds to the County, as that may not be permissible. Mr. Goergen questioned how the funds would be disbursed. Ms. Comstock stated the funds would go back to the County Assessor's office and that the debt must be paid off before distribution. Mr. Totland emphasized this would only occur after terminating the Agency, and disbursing funds this way might not align with the original plan.

Mr. Farmer asked about Board members' tenure and pointed out that most had attended meetings for less than five years. He questioned why the Agency had not accomplished anything in the past decade. Mr. Goergen explained that funds were being saved for the Jordan Cove project, which ultimately did not happen. Mr. Farmer pressed further, asking if the Agency was too focused on large projects like the PCIP. Mr. Goergen and Mr. Stevens stated the Agency was saving money for community benefits and infrastructure improvements, such as road maintenance.

Discussion shifted to the impact of increased truck traffic and infrastructure liabilities, with Mr. Farmer criticizing the Agency's inaction despite long-standing issues. Mr. Goergen defended the Agency's plans, stating they had prepared for expansions related to Jordan Cove, but Mr. Farmer argued funds could have been used to attract other developments. Mr. Goergen agreed that a new project was necessary to justify keeping the URA. The conversation also touched on concerns about aging infrastructure, such as the swing span bridge. Mr. Farmer emphasized that for the Agency to continue, it must take more action than it has in the past.

Ms. Engelke noted a general consensus, except from the County, in favor of continuing the Agency, particularly for economic development. Mr. Stevens suggested lowering the max cap and making a disbursement to address immediate financial concerns. Mr. Farmer stated he preferred keeping the Agency but emphasized the need for it to take action. Mr. Goergen inquired about the timeline for a plan amendment to align with the Agency's goals. Mr. Totland stated that Ms. Howard could provide insight, noting that a substantial amendment would be required, involving a formal process under state law, including notification requirements.

Ms. Engelke noted that the County hopes the Agency will meet soon, ideally within one to four weeks, to discuss options for pausing the Agency's termination. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to hear from SCDC or the Port regarding potential projects utilizing the remaining URA funds.

Mr. Goergen requested clarification on notification requirements for a plan amendment, as it could affect implementation speed. Mr. Totland noted that maximum indebtedness had been reduced from \$65 million to \$37 million. Mr. Stevens proposed allocating \$500K every two years, and Mr. Farmer stressed the importance of infrastructure improvements to attract businesses. Mr. Goergen explained that funds had accumulated due to Jordan Cove delays and should now be used for road overlays or other projects. Ms. Woodward highlighted marketing opportunities for regional business collaboration, while Ms. Engelke proposed training URA members.

Board members scheduled a meeting for the following week to invite Ms. Howard. Ms. Hamner requested information on current and projected truck traffic for the North Spit, including estimates from existing industrial users, the Army Corps of Engineers' projections for the next two years, and Southport's expansion plans.

Mr. Goergen mentioned a traffic study from the Jordan Cove project that could serve as a baseline, noting that traffic has increased due to the jetty project. Ms. Hamner also asked the Port to investigate whether a transload facility would be necessary if issues arise with the railroad bridge.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

6. SCHEDULE NEXT MEETING DATE

Monday, March 31, 2025 at 4:00 p.m.

7. OTHER/ADJOURN

Chair Todd Goergen adjourned the meeting at 8:40 a.m.