

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

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

Rob Taylor; Timm Slater; Elaine Howard; A. LaMar Hoy, South Coast Development Council; Lanelle Comstock, Port Staff; Megan Richardson, 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 4:00 p.m.

2. INTRODUCTION OF DIRECTORS AND GUESTS

3. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Determine Future of the Agency

Lanelle Comstock opened the meeting with a presentation on proposed projects, emphasizing the Agency's ongoing importance in eliminating blight, building infrastructure, stimulating development, creating jobs, and expanding the tax base. Despite recent inactivity, she underscored Agency's alignment with community goals and its role in economic revitalization.

A potential project could be improvements to the Highway 101 and Transpacific Parkway intersection, suggested by Todd Goergen, which would require ODOT collaboration and could include lane widening, turn lane extensions, and possibly a traffic signal. Though no current cost estimate was available, the project was previously considered expensive. In addition, rock stabilization is needed along the parkway to prevent erosion.

Ms. Comstock also addressed the significant wear on Transpacific Parkway from daily traffic of 240 to 300 trucks, with estimated repaving costs at \$2.5 million if completed within three years or \$4 million if delayed five to seven years, according to David Milliron. Ms. Comstock stated the road faces serious drainage issues. A prior investment of \$78K in design work led to construction bids of \$425K and \$475K, but the project was never executed. Ms. Comstock noted the need for a full stormwater system

on the North Spit, where none currently exists, with 2016 cost estimates ranging from \$4 million up to \$16 million, depending on project scope.

Ms. Comstock stated that URA funds could be used for parks through tax increment financing. In the previous meeting Drew Farmer suggested developing an RV Park on Port-owned land to generate revenue. Elise Hamner proposed a partnership where URA could fund the infrastructure, the Port provide the land, and the County manage the RV Park. Ms. Comstock added the nearby North Spit Overlook, which is currently closed due to maintenance and homelessness concerns, could be restored and promoted as a community recreational asset.

Ms. Comstock highlighted the importance of the Coos Bay Rail Line swing span bridge, a key infrastructure asset for the railroad and local economy that supports train traffic to Ocean Terminals, GMA Garnet, and Danish Dairy, helping transport goods efficiently. Over the past four years, 5,920 loaded train cars crossed the bridge, reducing 15,089 truck trips and supporting 100 local jobs. Built in 1914, the bridge requires frequent repairs. Annual maintenance expenses total around \$1.5 million. Investing in a more reliable bridge could attract new businesses, boost rail traffic, and reduce traffic on the North Spit.

Ms. Comstock stated that URA funds could be used for site preparation to make undeveloped industrial zoned property more shovel-ready, reducing upfront development costs for potential tenants. Business incentives, such as low-interest loans and financial assistance for utilities or engineering support, are key to attracting industry. Concerns about tsunamis on the North Spit led to discussions on conducting a resiliency study and installing an alert system for better preparedness. Additionally, expanding natural gas infrastructure on the North Spit could be considered to support future growth.

Matt Hamilton emphasized the importance of addressing the road, highlighting its critical role for both recreational users and local industries. Delaying repairs would increase costs and maintaining access is vital for businesses, especially if the swing span bridge fails. Mr. Hamilton stressed the responsibility of the Agency to support local industry, as these businesses are significant taxpayers. He also noted that \$1.3 million would be returned to the State and urged the Agency to consider long-term challenges and plan for future needs.

John Sweet stated that he attended the meeting to gather community input ahead of the County's upcoming decision on discontinuing the Agency. He emphasized considerations beyond financial impacts and welcomed others' perspectives. Kyle Stevens expressed agreement with Mr. Hamilton's views, cautioning against dissolving the URA for short-term financial gain and advocating for a long-term solution. In response, Mr. Goergen proposed that the County manage the Agency through an intergovernmental agreement with a prepaid, fixed management fee. He stated this would ensure financial stability and preserve the Agency's focus on job creation and infrastructure. Mr. Goergen stated he saw no legal issues with prepaying the fees but advised checking with legal counsel and expressed strong support for a multi-year prepaid arrangement.

Joe Benetti stated he supports the continuation of the Agency, if school funding is protected, expressing concern over \$1.8 million potentially returning to the State, suggesting it could be better used locally. Mr. Benetti emphasized that the County will still face infrastructure maintenance costs, making the URA's continuation practical. He acknowledged Mr. Goergen's proposal as a possible funding solution for the County and suggested expanding the URA to include an RV Park to boost tourism and revenue.

Elaine Howard stated Mr. Goergen's idea of the County administering the URA and receiving a management fee is an eligible expense and administratively feasible. However, she raised concerns about prepaying for five years, noting it would require legal review. Mr. Goergen proposed prepaid contracts to offer financial flexibility for the County in addressing their budget. If the URA underlevies or doesn't levy, the County would receive \$52K annually.

A. LaMar Hoy suggested that combining the URA with other economic development tools, such as the foreign trade zone and enterprise zones, along with regional assets like deep water access, an airport, and rail, could be a good strategy. He stated the URA has worked in other areas and emphasized that success often depends on having the right plan and allowing sufficient time for it to take effect.

Jessica Engelke stated the presentation was informative and stressed the shared goal of enhancing economic development through interagency collaboration, supporting local businesses and pursuing grants. She stated rather than dissolving the Agency, it should be used as an economic development tool. She voiced concern about heavy traffic damaging roads and the lack of maintenance funding.

Mr. Goergen proposed that the Agency approve about \$300K in prepaid services, pending legal approval, and clarified that the roadwork on Transpacific Parkway could qualify as a rebuild, making it eligible for URD funds. Mr. Sweet stated urban renewal funds are meant for new development, not maintenance, and questioned the appropriateness of using local tax dollars for infrastructure that future developers should fund. Mr. Sweet also voiced hesitation about a proposed RV Park due to high costs and potential competition, while Mr. Goergen stated it would complement, not compete with, existing offerings and support local events. Discussions also touched on flood mitigation and the uncertain scope of future development, particularly the potential container terminal. In summary, Mr. Sweet warned against premature, costly commitments, while Mr. Goergen acknowledged the risks but stressed the importance of preparing for evolving needs.

Mr. Stevens highlighted that the group had carefully considered reasons to keep the Agency but stated the County may have already decided to end it. Mr. Sweet clarified that he has documented the group's input and shared his concerns about some suggestions, emphasizing that the Board of Commissioners will make the final decision. He noted that if the County were to take over management of the Agency it might need to hire staff and expressed concerns about potential criticism if the County were to profit too much from managing the Agency. Mr. Goergen suggested that the Agency might be able to fulfill its contract and address immediate problems, with the County relying on \$51K annually plus administrative costs to ease financial concerns in the short term.

Ms. Hamner expressed her support for the Agency but stressed it should not be treated as a savings account and should be utilized to fund projects ready for implementation. Ms. Hamner emphasized the importance of supporting the infrastructure needs for North Spit businesses, who provide living wage jobs. She also showed interest in exploring County management of the URA. Mr. Sweet noted staff were already stretched thin, while Mr. Goergen proposed a transition period for collaboration between the Port and County. Mr. Farmer agreed with this plan.

Ms. Hamner emphasized that the Agency should hold regular meetings to update and implement plans, address outdated project bids, and identify and prioritize business needs. Mr. Goergen pointed out it is the Board's role to make those decisions. Ms. Engelke suggested group training from Ms. Howard to better understand the Agency's purpose, noting that URAs are designed to attract development and future investment.

Mr. Sweet stated he would share the ideas with department heads and Commissioners, who will make the final decision. Ms. Howard emphasized the need to determine if funding for the upcoming project could come from sources other than URA. She noted that the 2017 plan amendment included proposed work on the roadway and flooding issues, raising the question of whether County funds were available for repairs.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Timm Slater clarified his recent remarks at the County Commission meeting, expressing appreciation for the ongoing dialogue and the project list that reflects his concerns and interests. His intent was to provide historical context about the industrial area's development, which began in 1979/80 with an interagency task force, where he served as an industrial monitor on key subcommittees. The area's first industrial project, a warehousing and oil rig fabrication facility, was proposed in 1983/84 with Mr. Slater as project manager, and while it ultimately did not proceed due to falling oil prices, all required permits were obtained. He was also involved in forming the URA in the mid-1980s and served through 1998, witnessing both successful developments like Southport Lumber and Roseburg Forest Products and less successful ventures such as the aquaculture facility and container port mill. Mr. Slater concluded by stressing the importance of maintaining the URA, particularly with major opportunities like a container terminal on the horizon, emphasizing that continued infrastructure support is vital for future success.

5. CONTINUE DISCUSSION

Upon a motion by Jessica Engelke (Second by Kyle Stevens) the Agency Board Members voted to recommend to the County Board of Commissioners that the Urban Renewal Agency not be disbanded or under levied, to continue its role as an economic development tool, and to explore potential options for County management of the Agency. **Motion Passed 6-0-2.** (Ayes: Benetti, Engelke, Goergen, Hamilton, Hamner, and Stevens. Nays: None. Absent: DiNovo. Abstain: Farmer and Sweet).

6. SCHEDULE NEXT MEETING DATE – To Be Determined.

7. OTHER/ADJOURN

Chair Todd Goergen adjourned the meeting at 5:12 p.m.