



BENTON COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

ADOPTED: 8 APRIL 2025 | REVISED: 31 OCTOBER 2025

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Jerome Delvin
District 1

Michael Alvarez
District 2

Will McKay
District 3

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Jerrod MacPherson

DEPUTY COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Matt Rasmussen

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

Adam J. Fyall

CONTENTS

- Introduction 3
- Purpose 3
- Approach 4
- Comprehensive Plan..... 4
- Guidance 4
 - Principles..... 4
 - Comprehensive Plan Goals & Policies5
- Funding..... 6
- Partnerships..... 8
 - Contract Partners 8
 - Non-Profit Partners..... 8
 - Government Partners 9
- Organization 9
- Projects..... 11
 - Community Development Block Grants 11
 - Rural County Capital Fund 11
 - Targeted Urban Areas 14
- Epilogue..... 15

INTRODUCTION

The *Benton County Economic Development Plan* is Benton County’s statement about its approach, goals, and activities relative to community and economic development. The Plan discusses the County’s approach to supporting its own projects and programs, and those sponsored or managed by other entities in the community. It also describes how the County builds partnerships in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to leverage everyone’s limited resources for maximum impact.

Benton County first adopted an economic development policy in 1996 for the purpose of guiding County activities related to sustainable economic and community development. Since then, at the core of the County’s economic development endeavor has been the identification of the regional economic development services the County provides and emphasizing the ways in which the County works with the private sector and local, state, and federal economic development organizations to achieve shared community goals. Most economic development functions are handled by Commissioners Office and Administration personnel, with a preference for partnering with other local governments and organizations who have the capacity and expertise to implement robust economic development projects and programs.

Beginning with the 2024 edition of the Plan, it will be revised at least biennially to coincide with the County’s two-year budgeting cycle; or more often if needed. The Plan is available on Benton County’s website in the ‘Sustainable Development’ section.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Economic Development Plan* is to communicate a coherent and consistent message about Benton County’s approach to sustainable community and economic development to its residents and other interested parties. The Plan profiles the various funds that the County uses for capital projects of its own and in the community, and it identifies the core team responsible for implementing the Plan. It also syncs with the County’s *Comprehensive Plan* to deliver a consistent message on philosophy, goals, and policies related to the topic. This document also fulfills statutory requirements tied to the expenditure of certain types of funds received and used by the County.

Specifically, the *Economic Development Plan*:

- Mirrors the “Economic Element” of the *Benton County Comprehensive Plan* (see **Comprehensive Plan** below).
- Is an official record of capital projects undertaken by community partners (cities and ports) that are funded in whole or in part from Benton County’s “Rural County Capital Fund”.

- Is Benton County’s statement of “comprehensive economic development strategy” (“CEDS”), which makes the County eligible and competitive for certain grants administered by the federal Economic Development Administration.

APPROACH

Benton County does not have an independent economic development department within its organization nor a staffed economic development program. There are other entities in the community which specialize in this area. The County prefers to work with and through these partners as well as with the local cities and port districts which have more specific missions and expertise.

Benton County’s point of contact for community and economic development matters is the Sustainable Development Manager, who reports to the County Administrator. Questions about contracts, advocacy, funding, and other technical, administrative, or political matters related to the County’s interests and roles in economic development should be directed to the Sustainable Development Manager.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The *Economic Development Plan* supports the *Benton County Comprehensive Plan* (Comp Plan), as adopted February 2018 and updated April 2022. Chapter 5 of the Comp Plan is the “Economic Element” which provides more of a narrative overview of the County’s existing economic conditions, trends, and priorities. The Comp Plan takes the various elemental threads – like the Economic Element – and weaves them into a fabric that tells a more complete story for Benton County focusing on the relationships of the different elements such as land use, water resources, and housing, for example. This *Economic Development Plan* focuses more on describing the various funds, partnerships, and projects the County uses to achieve the desired outcomes. The Economic Element of the Comp Plan is incorporated herein by reference.

GUIDANCE

PRINCIPLES

Important underlying principles central to Benton County’s approach to economic development include:

- Help, don’t hinder. The County is not the lead in most economic development projects and programs. Be a good **partner** and don’t get in the way.

- **Investing** as a mindset. We are responsible for the important asset that is the taxpayers' money. We invest wisely in community solutions instead of just throwing money at problems.
- **Understanding** the needs and wants of our varied communities in the County and realizing that what works for one won't necessarily work for others.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN GOALS & POLICIES

Chapter 2.6 of the 2022 *Comprehensive Plan* update adopted the following economic development goals and supporting policies:

Goal 1: Create a balanced and diverse economy that provides an opportunity to make economic and lifestyle choices for Benton County residents.

Policy 1: Promote industries that are diverse and support an agriculture-based economy.

Policy 2: Promote and protect tourism related to viticulture and other agricultural activities.

Policy 3: Provide adequate, accessible commercial areas while minimizing impact on surrounding uses.

Policy 4: Facilitate economic growth and prosperity while preserving the existing rural quality of life and character, as it is defined by rural residents.

Goal 2: Expand employment opportunities in unincorporated Benton County.

Policy 1: Maintain and protect the agricultural economic base of Benton County.

Policy 2: Locate commercial retail and service activities serving urban and regional markets within 'Urban Growth Areas'. Commercial development serving rural communities is appropriate on commercially designated lands within or adjacent to the communities of Finley, Plymouth, Paterson, and Whitstran. Evaluate 'Master Planned Resorts' and tourist-oriented visitor destinations for appropriate siting countywide.

Policy 3: Develop commercial activities in "nodes" or clusters as opposed to strip-type configurations.

Policy 4: Designate uses within "Rural Commercial" areas as those which either serve interstate freeway traffic or are located at the center of rural communities to serve their needs.

Policy 5: Plan, construct, and landscape commercial developments to be visually and physically compatible with surrounding areas and uses.

Goal 3: Provide areas for the location of light and environmentally acceptable heavy industrial uses, while minimizing impacts on surrounding rural uses.

Policy 1: Establish industrial sites on lands designated for industrial use to protect from incompatible uses by using performance and/or site design criteria.

Policy 2: Do not locate non-agricultural related industry on "Growth Management Act Agriculture" designated land.

Policy 3: Identify diverse industrial land uses in the Plan and locate these uses where minimal environmental impact occurs.

Policy 4: Encourage light and heavy industrial uses to locate in areas where:

1. Access can be provided by major transportation networks such as road, rail, air, and water
2. Existing development is characterized by and/or compatible with industrial activity
3. Utilities, including electric, gas, water, and sewer, can be adequately provided, either as extensions of municipal facilities (e.g., by service contract) or by on-site facilities

FUNDING

Benton County's self-funded capital improvements and community development partnerships are financed from a variety of sources. Each County fund has specific personnel responsible for fund administration, which includes budget preparation, audit compliance, expenditure tracking, and contract compliance. Funds are administered based on the *Benton County Budget Policies & Procedures*. County-sourced funds include though are not limited to:

Current Expense Fund – This fund finances routine and operational improvement activities related to economic development. Current Expense is funded primarily through property tax and sales and use tax revenues. *Administered by the Commissioners' Office.*

County Road Fund – The County Road Fund finances the design, construction, and maintenance of County roads, and can be leveraged by local improvement districts, grants, or other matching funds. County Road revenue comes from real and personal property assessments based on the local road levy, fuel taxes, and state and federal grants. *Administered by the Public Works Department.*

Capital Projects Fund – Benton County uses Capital Projects to fund its own capital infrastructure projects, such as buildings or other facilities that the County owns. The revenue sources for this fund are a surcharge collected from US Ecology for disposal of low-level radioactive waste at the Hanford Site, Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) paid the United States Department of Energy for properties expropriated from private ownership

for creation of the Hanford Site, and the annual year-end operating transfer from the Current Expense Fund. *Administered by the Commissioners' Office.*

Rural County Capital Fund – The Rural County Capital Fund (RCCF) receives revenue generated by a .09% optional sales and use tax refunds from the State as provided under RCW 82.14. Funds may only be used to finance public facilities projects identified in the County's *Comprehensive Plan*, a city's comprehensive plan, or the County's *Economic Development Plan* (this document); and funds are only available for such qualifying projects to the following jurisdictions: Benton County, Prosser, Benton City, West Richland, Richland, Kennewick, Port of Benton, and Port of Kennewick. The County has developed a program for the administration of these funds, including an application process for the cities and ports to request funding for qualified projects. (see **Projects** for more information) *Administered by the Commissioners' Office.*

Sustainable Development Fund – Replenished primarily through annual year-end operating transfers, this fund is more of an internal operating fund but does have resources for assisting with smaller, one-time community economic development projects. *Administered by the Commissioners' Office.*

Real Estate Excise Tax – Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) is used to finance a variety of capital projects, notably improvements at the Benton County Fairgrounds where a number of transformative projects are currently underway which are intended to make the Fairgrounds a more attractive year-round regional events center. *Administered by the Commissioners' Office.*

Park Development Fund – Dedicated for the continued development and improvement of the Benton County parks system, the Park Development Fund is funded primarily through the annual year-end operating transfer out of the Current Expense Fund, with additional revenues coming from donations and fees. *Administered by the Commissioners' Office in collaboration with the Benton County Park Board.*

Debt – Through bonds, loans, or other instruments, the County has additional leverage capacity that could be used for financing infrastructure and facilities with a long service life.

Contract, Grant, and Loan Funding - The County may receive some contracts, and a variety of state and federal grants and loans for study, planning, and construction of public facilities. The County actively pursues (individually or jointly with other jurisdictions) local, state, and federal grants and other funding opportunities to finance County economic development projects and initiatives. Grant and loan funding is administered by the department receiving the funding.

Other Sources - Government agencies, special purpose districts, developers, other private sector businesses, and individuals provide additional funding and services on specific projects. One relevant example is the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which has made substantial federal funds available for a variety of uses by local governments. Benton County has used ARPA funds to assist with both capital

infrastructure projects in the community (similar to RCCF) and business operational support. Using a source like ARPA on certain qualified projects can free-up other funds that might have otherwise been used for that purpose for use in other ways such as economic development.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are the cornerstone of Benton County's economic development program. The County is most effective in its roles as co-sponsor, cheerleader, and/or convenor. Benton County has historically partnered with public agencies and with the private and nonprofit sectors with regular and sustained success.

Indirectly, the County supports and conducts economic development activities largely through contracts with organizations who specialize in these fields and have the capacity and the expertise to do the work. *Directly*, the County works primarily with its city and port partners, but also with other agencies and companies on matters such as policy, planning, zoning, siting, utility access, and recruitment.

CONTRACT PARTNERS

Benton County currently supports three organizations in the community through annual contracts for promotion, recruitment, and development services:

Tri-Cities Development Council – TRIDEC focuses on recruitment and retention of large industrial, manufacturing, and agricultural businesses throughout the Tri-Cities metropolitan area, and also administers the Hanford Communities organization of which Benton County is a member.

Visit Tri-Cities – Visit Tri-Cities promotes the Mid-Columbia region as a tourism, convention, event, and relocation destination. Recently Benton County has worked with Visit Tri-Cities to bring an Ironman triathlon race to the Tri-Cities and in furtherance of renovating the lighting on the Cable Bridge across the Columbia River.

Tri-City Regional Chamber of Commerce – The Chamber gives the County a strong connection to the business community and assists with outreach. In 2023 the Chamber implemented the "Business Resource Initiative" on Benton County's behalf, which injected \$3 million of ARPA assistance funds into the local business community.

NON-PROFIT PARTNERS

Benton County works with numerous organizations both generally and on specific community development endeavors. One of the County's regular partners is the **Benton Franklin Council**

of Governments which often serves as a nexus in the community that can bring different governments to the table on complex interagency transportation or construction projects.

The **Prosser Economic Development Association** and the **Benton City Revitalization Organization** are two smaller community organizations that the County works with on various city-specific issues and also supports financially through the County's contract with TRIDEC.

The County's **state and national associations of counties** put the County in touch with legal and legislative expertise pertaining to county issues, as well as peer-to-peer contacts.

Trade associations and labor unions are infrequent partners but have been allies when working through specific issues or event promotion.

GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

Benton County works with fellow government partners of all levels.

Cities – Benton County works with the five cities within the County primarily in the economic development areas of joint policy advocacy, funding of capital projects, zoning, and transportation coordination.

Ports – Benton County has two port districts. The County's relationships with the ports are similar to those with the cities though economic development is more central to the ports' missions.

Counties – Benton County works with other counties primarily on policy and law, as well as on larger regional endeavors.

Tribes – The County is building its relationships with regional tribal nations, namely the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Wanapum, and Yakama confederations and tribes, primarily through memoranda of agreement which outline shared priorities and goals in economic development, the protection of cultural resources, and other issues of interest.

State – Relationships with state agencies are mostly contractual and grant related.

Federal – While the interaction with federal agencies on community development matters isn't commonplace, there are specific project examples of such arrangements, such as working with the Department of Transportation on interstate highway issues or with the Economic Development Association on grants to fund qualified projects.

ORGANIZATION

Benton County contributes directly and indirectly to community and economic development. This work improves quality of life and incentivizes businesses to locate or grow within Benton County. As explained throughout this document, the County's role in economic development is mostly in support of community partners who have a more primary and direct role in economic development activities. The County does however have departments and personnel with specialty and responsibility in this work. In general, these include:

Commissioners' Office / Administration – The Commissioners' Office and Administration department are the primary point of contact on economic development issues within Benton County, with the Sustainable Development Manager as lead staff person. Administration works with other County departments, economic development organizations, interested citizens, and private enterprise to ensure County activities and resources are effectively and efficiently dedicated to accomplish community and economic development objectives and priorities. This includes coordinating with all County departments to consider service requirements for new development. Administration also ensures Benton County fulfills specific contractual obligations with its community partners. The Commissioners' Office and Administration update and track implementation of this Plan, communicates with other County departments and external organizations, and regularly reports to the Board of County Commissioners. Administration monitors economic issues which impact the County and recommends courses of action for County involvement, including coordination and preparation of grant and other funding requests, and legislative actions.

Public Works Department – Public Works supports economic development by providing well-maintained roads and associated transportation infrastructure to ensure commerce can freely move throughout the County.

Community Development Department: – This department houses the Planning Division and the Building Division which lead activities related to land use planning, zoning, development reviews, and the issuance of building permits consistent with local and state regulatory requirements.

Fairgrounds & Parks Department – The Department operates the Benton County Fairgrounds & Event Center where the County is making substantial investments in renovations and new facilities that will make this campus a significant anchor and hub for economic activity in eastern Benton County in the coming decades. Benton County also maintains ten public parks for the community, some of which are regional attractions that host a variety of events.

Treasurer - Reviews and provides fund and business tax information, including revenue estimates for economic development activities.

Assessor - Provides recommendations for targeting areas of development, based upon assessed value analysis. Assists in calculating return on investment for County expenditures.

GIS Department – Provides graphical information and spatial analysis as it relates to locating industrial and commercial clients.

PROJECTS

The following are recently completed and ongoing projects which have been funded in whole or in part by Benton County through Community Development Block Grants or the Rural County Capital Fund, or are receiving a tax exemption under the new Targeted Urban Areas program.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANTS

Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs) originate as federal monies which are granted to states in large tranches for general categorical purposes as opposed to project-specific earmarks. States then further regrant the funds for specific projects at the community level to address needs per state and local priorities. Counties generally engage with CDBGs at the programmatic level while cities are more likely to fund capital projects. However, Benton County has started to work with the Washington Department of Commerce to use CDBGs to assist rural and disadvantaged communities which are outside of incorporated cities and therefore need a local government sponsor.

Specifically, Benton County has assisted with two local water projects in recent years, one in Plymouth and one in Finley. In both cases, older shallow wells were drawing from water sources that were compromised with high levels of nitrates, and these wells were further supported by aging and failing distribution infrastructure. The Plymouth project has been completed and serves upward of 300 connections. The Finley project remains in progress and will serve under 30 connections.

Completed Project

New Community Well -- Plymouth Water District (2021)	\$ 750,000
--	------------

Current Project

New Community Well -- Sundance Improvement Association	\$ 1,950,000
--	--------------

RURAL COUNTY CAPITAL FUND

In 1997, the Washington State Legislature created a “sales and use tax for public facilities in rural counties” to be operated as a tax rebate to the counties. In its current form, this program allows qualified counties, of which Benton is one, to receive the rebate at the amount of .09%. As such, the program is generally referred to in the vernacular as the “Point 09” and it is detailed in RCW 82.14. The Legislature established sunset dates on counties’ use of the rebate. During the 2023 legislative session, a statewide coalition of interests was able to prevail upon the Legislature to extend the sunset to the year 2052, and Benton County was at the vanguard of this effort for several years.

Benton County manages its Point 09 resources through what it calls the “Rural County Capital Fund” (RCCF). RCCF funds are available to assist the County and the five cities and two port districts within the County with implementing larger capital improvement projects which benefit economic development purposes in accordance with the state law and County policy. As a baseline, projects must be “public facilities serving economic development purposes” according to the legislation. All participating parties and the larger economic development community agree that RCCF has been a significant success and is a major asset. It was not difficult to rally support for extending the program.

RCCF has been managed in three phases since its inception in 1998. Phase 1, from 1998 to 2001, utilized funds to directly support community economic development projects. During Phase 2, from 2001 to 2017, all RCCF funds were used to service debt from the construction of the new Benton County Jail and District Courts facilities in Kennewick. The case for this was that the cities in the county would not have to contribute directly toward the construction and could use their own saved funds on other city endeavors. After the Jail debt was satisfied, Phase 3 began in 2017 and is currently ongoing, seeking to again fund community economic development projects similar to the first phase. Milestones were reached in March 2025 when the accrued amount of the RCCF account exceeded \$50 million and the amount appropriated by the County for community investment reached \$35 million.

Extensive and detailed information on the Rural County Capital Fund program is available on the County website in the ‘Sustainable Development’ section. This includes background and historical data, financial reports updated monthly, a complete survey of Phase 3 projects including a storymap, the current RCCF policy, and the current RCCF application.

Community economic development projects from the first and third phases which have been completed or are ongoing as of the adoption of this edition of the Plan include (name, project, approximate RCCF contribution):

Completed Projects (“Phase 1” – 1998-2001)

Port of Benton	Dave Ave Extension #1	\$ 150,000
City of Kennewick	Okanogan PI Extension	\$ 126,995
City of Richland	Interchange Loops	\$ 126,995
Port of Kennewick	Well & Water Acquisition	\$ 126,995
City of West Richland	Well & Water Acquisition	\$ 126,995
City of Prosser	East Prosser Industrial Park	\$ 126,995
City of Prosser	North Prosser Business Park	\$ 189,929
City of West Richland	Expansion of Municipal Water System	\$ 189,929
Cities of WR and Kenn	Continuation of Water Acquisition	\$ 189,929
City of Kennewick	Extension/Realignment of Quinault Ave #1	\$ 126,995

City of Kennewick	Extension/Realignment of Quinault Ave #2	\$ 189,929
-------------------	--	------------

Completed Projects (“Phase 3” – 2017-2025)

Port of Kennewick	Columbia Gardens	\$ 1,100,000
Port of Benton	Vintner’s Village II	\$ 1,200,000
City of Richland	Queensgate Dr Interchange Renovation	\$ 1,800,000
Benton County	Upgrade of Amon Rd	\$ 132,400
City of Richland	Swift Corridor – #1	\$ 500,000
City of Richland	Swift Corridor – #2	\$ 350,000
City of Richland	City Hall Demolition	\$ 350,000
City of Benton City	Lift Station 7	\$ 500,500
City of Benton City	Lift Station 4	\$ 330,000
City of West Richland	Van Giesen Corridor	\$ 1,000,000
City of Prosser	I-82 Utility Crossing – #1	\$ 340,000
City of Prosser	I-82 Utility Crossing – #2	\$ 2,463,000
Port of Kennewick	Clover Island Shoreline	\$ 1,000,000
City of Richland	Center Parkway Construction	\$ 2,840,000
Port of Benton	Richland Innovation Center	\$ 1,500,000
Port of Benton	3110 Innovation Center Acquisition	\$ 1,500,000

Community economic development projects currently under contract as of the most recent update of this Plan but not yet completed, as well as recently proposed projects which are under consideration for funding but have not yet been approved or under contract (name, sponsor, RCCF contribution):

Current Projects (“Phase 3”)

City of West Richland	Van Giesen Signalization	\$ 500,000
Port of Kennewick	Vista Field Redevelopment	\$ 500,000
City of West Richland	SR 224 Transportation Improvements	\$ 1,318,000
City of West Richland	Cooperative Way Improvements	\$ 250,000
City of Kennewick	Convention Center Expansion #1*	\$ 7,000,000
City of Kennewick	Convention Center Expansion #2*	\$ 5,000,000
Port of Kennewick	Vista Field – Azure Drive Improvements	\$ 1,000,000

City of Richland	Duportail Street Improvements	\$ 1,500,000
Port of Benton	Stevens Intermodal	\$ 1,700,000
City of West Richland	Sewer Extension	\$ 1,000,000
City of Benton City	Lift Stations 4 & 5 and Generators**	\$ 1,369,900

** These are two separate contracts for the same project. Like other RCCF contracts, Agreement #1 is a progress-driven reimbursement contract for direct capital expenditures, while Agreement #2 is an arrangement for ongoing bonded debt-service support for the completed project. Agreement #2 represents the first time Benton County has used RCCF this way.*

*** This project was originally to be funded entirely with American Rescue Plan Act funds, but delays in the project completion set against certain deadlines meant that it could ultimately only be partially funded with ARPA funds. The remainder of the project shall be funded via RCCF funds.*

In addition to the above items where Benton County invests in the projects of its city and port partners, the County uses RCCF programmatically to fund its annual economic development services contract with the Tri-Cities Development Council in lieu of funding its own economic development staff. The TRIDEC contract is funded at \$100,000 for both the 2025 and 2026 calendar years.

Finally, beginning in 2023 and continuing for the foreseeable future, the County is using RCCF to fund various public facilities improvements at the Benton County Fairgrounds & Event Center. The County believes that the Fairgrounds has been an underappreciated resource with untapped potential for serving the eastern Benton County communities as well as being an economic engine for that area and the wider Tri-Cities. The Fairgrounds is also located within one of the two “Opportunity Zones” in Benton County as defined by the Department of Commerce (#53005011300 / Census Tract 113), making it a further target for investment. The Fairgrounds can host local functions as well as regional and national events. A master plan for the 170-acre property suggests a suite of projects to be completed over the near, medium, and longer terms, many of which could qualify for RCCF assistance.

TARGETED URBAN AREAS

Targeted Urban Areas (TUA’s) are a new recruitment, retention, and expansion tool available in Washington per RCW 84.25. It allows cities and counties to offer certain exemptions from property taxes for the value of new construction of industrial and manufacturing facilities in qualifying designated geographic areas for up to 10 years. The City of Richland designated the “Horn Rapids Triangle Targeted Urban Area” in 2023, making it the first TUA in the state. Benton County may also grant similar exemptions within Richland’s TUA. Other cities in the county may create their own TUA’s, Richland could create another TUA or expand the Horn Rapids Triangle, and Benton County could create its own TUA in an unincorporated area. As of this edition of the Plan, the Horn Rapids Triangle is the only TUA that has been created in Benton County.

Further information on the Targeted Urban Areas program, including the property tax exemption application, is available on the Benton County website in the ‘Sustainable Development’ section.

A process for approving the tax exemptions was created by both the City and the County. As of this edition of the Plan, the City and County have approved exemptions for one applicant, with another possible applicant assumed to be forthcoming in the near future.

Horn Rapids Triangle Targeted Urban Area

Allegheny Technologies Inc *Approved: 07/18/2023 (City) | 01/09/2024 (County)*

Framatome *Approved: 01/17/2024 (City) | 08/06/2024 (County)*

EPILOGUE

The next scheduled revision for the Plan will be in early 2025 and it will be revised on a two-year cycle thereafter; however, the Plan may be edited or updated more frequently as needed. For more information, please visit the Benton County website at www.bentoncountywa.gov, or contact the Sustainable Development Manager, Adam J. Fyall, in Kennewick, Washington.

#