

# WEEKLY REVIEW

BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

August 3, 2021



*This document is a weekly review of the Board of County Commissioners meeting, Tuesday, August 3, 2021. Information related to agenda changes, Consent Agenda, and Public Comment are on the [County website](#).*

## Scheduled Business

### *Prosser Economic Development Association (EDA) Update – Neal Ripplinger, Executive Director*

Neal Ripplinger, Executive Director for Prosser Economic Development Association, gave a presentation to the Board to update on topics related to Prosser tourism and economic development, including:

1. Business retention, recruitment, and expansion in the Prosser area
2. Final results of the community assessment (tourism study) through USDA grant
3. Wayfinding banners for Tour Prosser – with a goal of driving traffic from Exit 80 into downtown
4. Prosser Leadership 2020/2021 class graduation and community project
5. [TBEX North America](#), the largest networking event for travel bloggers, will visit Tri-Cities with an optional stop in Prosser in October 2021

## Other Business

### *Office of Public Defense Staffing – Eric Hsu, Public Defense Manager*

The Public Defense Manager presented a proposal to the Board regarding transitioning the makeup of its office. Currently, the Office of Public Defense (OPD) is made up of mostly contract attorneys to provide public defense services, in addition to the existing five (5) staff attorneys. This model is currently failing. From quality control to extreme recruitment challenges, the model of relying primarily and heavily upon contracts to fulfill Benton County's public defense services is no longer viable. The presented proposal recommends shifting the department so that, within a year and a half, the majority of public defense services would be provided by full-time, staff attorneys rather than contract attorneys. Benton County OPD is the agency charged with providing all legally mandated public defense services on behalf of Benton County, in the Superior, Juvenile, and District Courts of Benton County. Additionally, Benton County OPD also contracts with the cities of Richland, Kennewick, West Richland, and Prosser, to provide public defense services on their municipal cases (which, in turn, are heard in Benton County District Court). Staff recommends hiring one (1) District Court Public Defender I position immediately, to join the current staff attorney assigned to District Court, by transferring funds from the contract (Professional Services) line item to a staff position. The Board moved and seconded to transfer funds within Public Safety Sales Tax Fund No. 0148-101, Department 136 to fund one (1) staff public defender. Motion carried.

### *Sheriff's Office Plane Discussion – Matt Rasmussen, Deputy County Administrator*

Staff reported back on the availability of rental aircraft on a 24-hour-a-day basis for the Sheriff's Office, as a continuation of the July 20, 2021 discussion. Renting an aircraft for this use means the County would no longer be required to carry insurance for the plane, would no longer be subject to hangar costs, and would no longer be responsible for maintenance, repairs, or upgrades. After hearing that a rental aircraft would indeed be available for use through various potential contractors, the Board gave consensus to move forward with the surplus process for the aircraft, and to schedule the required public hearing for a later date.

*West Richland 38<sup>th</sup> Ave Project Closeout – Matt Rasmussen, Deputy County Administrator*

The County participated with the City of West Richland to construct an extension of 38th Ave through portions of the City and County. At the conclusion of the project, it was determined that there are approximately \$90,000 of County contributed funds remaining. The City is currently working on another project in conjunction with the State of Washington that also includes work in the unincorporated County. The City has asked if the County would be agreeable to contributing the excess funding from the 38th Ave project to this new project. The funding will help to pay for the extension of a bike path, along SR 224, from the City limit to Antinori Road in the County. The Board agreed and gave consensus for staff to figure out the appropriate mechanism to transfer the funds to this new project.

*Assessor’s Office Staffing Discussion – Commissioner Delvin & Bill Spencer, Benton County Assessor*

The Board discussed, along with the Assessor, hiring out-of-state employees, working remotely, and additional topics and indicated that the County would not register as a business in another state for the purposes of having permanent employees there.

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