Benton County
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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MEETING MINUTES
Benton County Planning Commission
Public Hearing
October 7, 2025
6:00-8:00 P.M.

I. CALL TO ORDER | ROLL CALL

Benton County Planning Commission Vice Chair Hamann called the meeting to order at 6:02 P.M. The meeting was open to the public virtually via a published Zoom link. Vice Chair Hamann confirmed a full quorum of the Commission.

Benton County Planning Commissioners
Greg Hamann, Vice Chair
Sara Cash
Andrew Struthers
Catherine Biscoe
Evelyn Lee
John Wilson (Virtual)

Benton County Staff
Petra Schuetz, Planning Division Manager
Meg Reehoorn, Recorder
James Wright, Associate Planner

Absent
Nick Fowler, Chair
Ed Fulford

II. APPROVE MINUTES FROM March 4, 2025 – July 29, 2025

Commissioners reviewed and approved multiple sets of minutes from prior meetings.

- **March 4, 2025:** Approved unanimously
- **April 29, 2025:** Approved with correction – duplicate paragraph removed ("staff report findings identifying bases from potential denial")
- **May 1, 2025:** Approved unanimously
- **My 6, 2025:** Approved unanimously
- **May 8, 2025:** Approved with one opposed vote. Commissioner Biscoe citing concerns about omissions in the record.

- **June 17, 2025:** Approved with one opposed vote
- **July 8, 2025:** Approved with correction ("heron rookeries" changed to "great blue heron rookeries")
- **July 9, 2025:** Approved with corrections
    - Replace "time-seating" with "time-seeding"
    - Strike the word "several" from "several proponents cited."
- **July 22, 2025:** Approved with amendment to include:
    - An additional bullet under "discussion Topics": "Additional topics discussed included wildlife risks, traffic impacts, and wildlife area impacts."
    - Motion passed with one opposed vote.
- **July 29:** Approved with corrections:
    - Add missing word "could" in "could potentially reopen deliberations."
- **August 19:** Approved unanimously.

Commissioners discussed long-term concerns about minute preparation and agreed to schedule a future agenda item to establish clearer standards consistent with County policy.

Commissioners expressed differing perspectives regarding the level of detail in meeting minutes.

- Staff clarified the Benton County policy requires minutes to be summative and action-oriented, not exhaustive or verbatim.
- Commissioners requested a future agenda discussion to review and standardize the Planning Commission's minute format to ensure consistency and clarity.

III. PUBLIC HEARING: STARKET FOREST CAMPGROUND CONDICTIONAL USE PERMIT – CONSIDER APPROVAL

Vice Chair Hamann reviewed the quasi-judicial hearing procedures. No ex-parte contacts, conflicts of interest, or bias were declared. No challenges were raised by participants.

Staff Report: James Wright, Associate Planner, presented the staff report for File No. LU-25-028, a conditional use permit requested by the Coyle Outside Foundation to establish an educational "Base Camp" campground on property owned by Starker Forests.

Mr. Wright outlined the applicable review criteria under the Benton County Development Code, including Sections 53.215 (Conditional Use Review Criteria) and Forest Conservation Zone standards. He summarized the procedural history, noting that the application was deemed complete on August 6, 2025, and public notice was mailed to surrounding property owners on August 20, 2025, with a legal notice published on August 23, 2025.

The staff report included findings addressing land use compatibility, transportation access, environmental impacts, emergency response, and compliance with the Benton County Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Wright noted that the proposed educational use was consistent with the intent of the Forest Conservation zone and that the project would

be subject to conditions ensuring limited occupancy, seasonal use, and environmental protection.

Staff recommended that the Planning Commission approve the conditional use permit, subject to conditions that:

- Limit the number of overnight occupants and duration of events
- Require compliance with fire safety and emergency access standards
- Preserve existing vegetation and minimizing grading or new construction
- Maintain access through coordination with Starker Forests and Philomath Fire Department
- Ensure adherence to all state and local health and sanitation requirements

Mr. Wright concluded by stating that the proposal, as conditioned, meets the applicable approval criteria and aligns with County goals for education, recreation and resource stewardship.

Applicant Testimony: Applicants Daniel Coyle and Jason Walsh representing the Coyle Outside Foundation, presented the proposal for an educational "Base Camp" campground on property owned by Starker Forests. They explained that the Foundation is a nonprofit organization providing outdoor education programs in partnership with Oregon schools and recreational departments.

The applicants stated that the campground would function as a seasonal educational site rather than a commercial campground with programming focused on forest ecology, outdoor skills, and environmental stewardship. Activities would occur on a scheduled basis with small, supervised groups.

They emphasized that the project is designed to have minimal environmental impact, using existing clearing, limited structures, portable sanitation, and a management plan consistent with Forest Conservation zoning standards. The applicants also noted planned coordination with the Philomath Fire Department regarding fire prevention and emergency access.

Public Testimony: Vice Chair Hamann opened the floor for public testimony. No testimony in opposition was received.

Several members of the public and community partners spoke in support of the application, commending the Foundation's mission and the educational value of the proposed campground. Speakers emphasized that the project would:

- Provide safe, structured outdoor learning opportunities for youth and schools across the region
- Support environmental education and stewardship goals identified in the County's Comprehensive Plan
- Foster partnerships between schools, local organizations, and natural resource agencies

- Utilize an existing forest site in low-impact, sustainable manner consistent with surrounding land uses.

Testimony described the Foundation's strong record of responsible programming, community engagement, and collaboration with Starker Forests and local fire and emergency services.

Vice Chair Hamann closed public testimony after confirming there were no speakers in opposition and that all written comments received would be entered into the record.

Commission Deliberation and Action:
Following staff presentation and testimony, Commissioners discussed the application's consistency with County code, compatibility with the surrounding forest zone and public benefit of educational programming.

Motion was made by Commissioner Struthers and seconded by Commissioner Cash to approve the conditional use permit (File No. LU-25-028), consistent with staff's recommendations and conditions outlined in the staff report.

Motion passed unanimously.

IV. PRIVATE FAMILY BURIAL – CONSIDER ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

James Wright, Associate Planner, presented an administrative review regarding a request for a private family burial site located on rural residential property within Benton County.

Mr. Wright explained that under the Benton County Development Code and Oregon Revised Statutes, private family burials may be authorized as an administrative review if the site meets specific criteria for parcel size, location, access, and environmental protection.

Staff verified that the property met the minimum acreage and setback requirements that the proposed burial area was located outside of any floodplain or wetland, and that access was available for emergency services and family use. Mr. Wright noted that state and county health regulations would apply to the preparation and registration of the burial site.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions regarding ongoing maintenance, record documentation and future land use disclosure requirements. Staff confirmed that the applicant would be required to record the burial site with Benton County Surveyor's Office to ensure it is identified in future property transactions.

ACTION: The Planning Commission acknowledged staff's review and findings, concurred with the determination that the proposal met the applicable standards for administrative approval and took no further action.

V. CONSENT CALENDAR – McBee Master Plan Acknowledgement

James Wright, Associate Planner, presented the McBee Master Plan for acknowledgement. He summarized that the plan was submitted to fulfill the post-

approval requirement associated with the previously approved land division and development application for the McBee property.

Staff noted that the Master Plan outlined the sequence of development, infrastructure improvements and open space preservation areas, and was consistent with the conditions of approval established by the Board of Commissioners.

No discussion or objections were raised by the Planning Commission.

ACTION: The Planning Commission acknowledged receipt of the McBee Master Plan as presented and confirmed staff's finding that the plan complies with prior approvals and applicable County development standards.

VI. NEXT MEETING | ADJOURN

The next regular Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for November 4, 2025
Vice Chair Hamann adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:38 P.M.