
Agenda

**August 15, 2024
4:45 PM**

Committee Members:

Judy Juntunen Jill Van Buren Peter Barnhisel Scott McClure
Adrienne Fritze Carol Chin Cornelia Levy-Bencheton David Dobson Roz Keeney

Staff Members:

Paul Wallsinger, Benton County Facilities Manager
Levon Atwood, Benton County Facilities Technician, Courthouse Maintenance
Amelia Butler, Facilities Administrative Specialist (Recorder)

I. Introduction & Visitor Comments:

- Introductions
- Visitor Comments

II. Agenda Review

III. Administration: Election of a new Committee Chair.

IV. Old Business

V. New Business: Discuss Bill visiting committee in an upcoming meeting to discuss project involving the newspaper.

Meeting Adjournment

Next Meeting Scheduled For: September 19, 2024

Minutes

**August 15, 2024
4:45 PM**

Committee Members:

Judy Juntunen Jill Van Buren Peter Barnhisel
Adrienne Fritze Cornelia Levy-Bencheton David Dobson

Staff Members:

Paul Wallsinger, Benton County Facilities Manager
Levon Atwood, Benton County Facilities Technician, Courthouse Maintenance
Amelia Butler, Facilities Administrative Specialist (Recorder)

Absent:

Scott McClure Carol Chin Roz Keeney

Meeting commenced at 4:48 PM.

I. **Introduction & Visitor Comments:** Judy started by sharing that a few members had informed her they would not be present at the meeting. She then provided some context about the meeting's history for the new committee members who have recently joined. Judy mentioned that she, along with Jill, Peter, and Scott, are original members of the committee. After the Benton County Board of Commissions (BOC) decided to add new members, she was invited to continue her role, which she accepted because of her interest in the committee and its historical significance. She emphasized the committee's importance and its future, particularly with the upcoming construction of the new Courthouse complex in the next few years

- **Introductions of new and existing members and staff:**

- **Jill Van Buren:** Jill spent many years at the Benton County Records & Elections department before she started leading historic tours of the Courthouse, a role she held until just recently. She highlighted her passion for storytelling about history and how important it was for the visitors she met during her tours.
- **Cornelia Levy-Bencheton:** Cornelia is a new member of the committee and shared about her passion for urban environments and development. With a professional background in historical preservation architecture, she highlighted a project in New York that focused on a historic building along the Hudson River, built around the same time as the Courthouse, and its preservation efforts. She also mentioned her work on preserving a historic Chateau in France, expressing admiration for the local community's commitment to

preserving their history. Cornelia hopes the committee will embrace a similar appreciation for historical significance. She holds multiple degrees and has experience in corporate communications, along with having written books on cities and urban studies. Additionally, she expressed her interests in art, architecture, and history, and noted that she relocated from New York to Corvallis during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Amelia Butler:** Amelia mentioned that she has worked as a County employee for more than three years, spending half of that time in the Benton County Engineering and Facilities divisions. She started taking minutes for the committee earlier this year.
- **Paul Wallsinger:** Paul mentioned that he has been employed by the County for six years. Prior to joining the County, he served in the US Coast Guard for over 20 years and then worked in the retail and the mall industry. He decided to leave that sector to work for the County and intends to stay here until he retires.
- **Adrienne Fritze:** Adrienne is a newly appointed member of the committee. She shared that she has experience with the Benton County Historic Preservation Commission. In addition to that, she is a local business owner and an artist. Adrienne expressed her pride in being part of this committee and the commission, emphasizing her commitment to preserving and reusing local resources. She shared her vision for the future of the Courthouse, hoping it will stand out as a key symbol of Corvallis, alongside its art, technology, and farming sectors. Her involvement with the commission has shaped her understanding of the significance of historic resources, highlighting how much we can learn from our past.
- **Levon Atwood:** Levon shared that he has spent his entire life in Benton County. He has experience in industrial maintenance and cabinetry, along with other jobs. He has been employed by the County for several years.
- **Pete Barnhisel:** Pete shared with the group that he has worked as a private lawyer in the area for many years and has lived in Corvallis several years. He has been part of the committee for many decades and believes his love for the Courthouse comes from his experience of handling many cases there throughout his career.
- **David Dobson:** David mentioned that he has been living in Corvallis for a while and has recently been employed by the City of Corvallis in the planning division, where he collaborated with the local historic commission. He has now moved into private land consulting and has been involved in several notable local projects that included some controversial developments. He talked about a project related to Corvallis High School, where he worked with the Corvallis School District on reusing materials to create new facilities. David shared that his passion for older buildings, like the Courthouse, comes from witnessing many historic structures deteriorate after losing their original purposes. His aim for the committee is to identify a practical and beneficial use for the Courthouse that also generates revenue to help preserve the building.
- **Judy Juntunen:** Judy shared her experiences as a lifelong resident of Corvallis and a graduate. She has always been passionate about history and worked as a history teacher before joining the historical society. Judy noted that there were

few programs focused on history in the past, but she has witnessed their growth over the years, which fueled her desire to teach local histories. She has been part of the committee since the Courthouse's centennial celebration. Initially, she felt hesitant to join the committee because she had been warned that there were no other women on the committee, but she decided to join anyway.

- **Visitor Comments:** There were no visitors or comments.

II. **Agenda Review:** The agenda was correct.

III. **Administration: Election of a New Committee Chair:** The group decided to delay the election of a new committee chair, due to some members not being present.

IV. **Previous Meeting Minutes Approval:** Jill moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Adrienne, minutes were approved.

V. **Old Business:**

- **Bylaws and Founding Document:** Judy distributed copies of the committee's bylaws and reports to everyone in the group. She mentioned that the old bylaws were no longer relevant and that she had helped update them to better match the committee's current goals. Judy also pointed out that the BOC asked for the committee to have a founding document along with the bylaws and mission statement, which she shared with the group. Additionally, she noted that Benton County Clerk James Morales played a role in locating this document from the County's historical records.
- **Courthouse Reuse and Seismic Upgrades:** Jill told the group that she was a part of the Courthouse Reuse Committee, which suggested ideas to the BOC on how to use the Courthouse in new ways. Paul added that the committee had made their suggestions and that he would pass along the details of the BOC meeting, which included the report from the Reuse Committee.
 - Judy asked Paul to talk about the challenges related to the structure and location of the Courthouse when considering a new purpose for it. Paul pointed out that the main problem is that the Courthouse does not meet current seismic safety standards. He mentioned that the County had investigated upgrading the building a few years ago to fix this issue, but it was never done due to time constraints or lack of funds. He informed the group that retrofitting the Courthouse to meet seismic safety requirements today could cost over \$20 million. Unfortunately, if the building's zoning is changed to a use other than governmental operations, it would require a mandatory seismic upgrade, which makes it difficult to find new uses for the building. The County would likely need to identify another operational use for the Courthouse, as changing it to retail, for instance, would lead to the expensive retrofit that may not be feasible.
 - Paul clarified that the design of the building makes it difficult to make changes. This means that it is not possible to add or remove walls or make structural modifications. The Courthouse was initially constructed for about 15,000 County residents, but it now serves over 100,000 people. Paul pointed out that this increase in population has made the Courthouse too small for its current needs. As a result, the decision was made to create a larger Courthouse complex, but this raises concerns about how to preserve the historic courthouse.

- Adrienne inquired with Paul about whether there has been a similar project in Oregon that focused on seismic improvements for a historic building. Paul mentioned a comparable project near Portland that had some resemblances, but the funding details were not clear. The group then talked about a project at Oregon State University where a historic building was brought up to current seismic standards, mainly funded by private donors, which is not an option for Benton County. Jill shared that during her time on the Reuse committee, it was evident that seismic upgrades were a significant concern for the committee when making their recommendations. She noted that one suggestion discussed was the possibility of transforming the courthouse into an arbitration center, a concept that has been implemented in other cities while maintaining its governmental function.
- Judy discussed the challenges facing the Courthouse, noting that these problems are made worse by the building's prominent location and the public's interest in it. David remembered a comparable case with Harding School, where the historic structure was divided; the older part became a storage space while the newer section remained in use. In time, funding was secured to make the entire building seismically safe, allowing it to be fully utilized for a single purpose.
- Jill inquired whether the seismic problems would still be just as serious and costly if the fault line beneath the Courthouse land did not exist. Paul responded that the issues would probably remain the same, even without the fault line present.
- Adrienne inquired with David about whether there were any funding matches from the state of Oregon for the project at Oregon State University that the group had talked about. David replied that he wasn't certain but thought he had heard of some funding matches for similar projects in the past, mentioning that a former governor of Oregon had allocated funds for seismic improvements. He wasn't sure if that funding was still available, but he believed that some buildings in Corvallis had been considered for it. Adrienne then asked if the government function needed to align with what is currently in the Courthouse, to which Paul responded that it did not have to match exactly; it just needed to be a governmental function for the whole building without splitting it for different uses. David shared his experience in land use consulting, noting that there might be some flexibility depending on the function, occupancy, and type of use as determined by the City of Corvallis. He also mentioned that the land is zoned for commercial use, allowing for a wide variety of applications under zoning regulations.
- **Mission statement:** Judy distributed copies of the mission statement to the committee members and started to explain its purpose. She clarified that the mission statement is designed to outline the committee's goals and intentions. Additionally, she emphasized the significance of the mission statement, highlighting the need to protect not only the Courthouse building but also the items inside it and the surrounding grounds.
- **Louisa B. DuBosch Funding & Historic Furniture:** Jill inquired whether Judy could clarify the addition of the Louisa Debauche goal in the Mission Statement for the new committee members. She shared with the group that several modifications were made to the Courthouse during the centennial celebrations years back, aiming to have the building recognized on the National Historic Register. After Louisa's passing, she provided funds to the committee to help preserve the courthouse's historical condition

and support the committee's activities. Judy then requested Paul investigate the current status of the funding, and he agreed to do so.

- Judy remembered several projects the committee worked on that involved the funding. One project was restoring the front doors, and another was buying historic Courthouse furniture that had been taken out and was for sale in a nearby antique store. Additionally, the original chairs from the building were repaired and reupholstered.
- Additionally, Judy also shared her research on furniture restoration. She reached out to Bryn Mawr College to ask for advice on how to care for historic furniture. The college representatives advised her that the best approach is to use the furniture regularly while ensuring it is properly repaired and maintained. This is a practice that the committee has followed throughout its history.

VI. **New Business:**

- **Guest Speaker:** Judy informed the group that a local researcher and writer will be giving a presentation to the committee next month. The topic will cover the history of the Courthouse and how it has been reported in local newspapers throughout the years.
- **Written Courthouse History:** Judy talked about the committee's hope for a written history of the Courthouse and highlighted how important this project is. She expressed her desire for it to include the experiences and stories of local people and experts. The group all agreed that this was an important topic to keep discussing.

VII. **Other business:** The team talked about when to have their next meeting and agreed it will be in September. Cornelia inquired if there was a place to find notes or details about the history. Amelia responded that she would provide the group with a link to the meeting minutes from the past ten years on the Benton County Public Works website, along with a link to the BOC meeting that included recommendations for Courthouse reuse.

VIII. **Questions:** Adrienne inquired about the new Courthouse complex project and the relocation of departments from the historic courthouse, seeking an update on its status. Paul clarified that a timeline has not been established yet, as preliminary work is still in progress. He mentioned that the project is moving slowly, with the earliest possible completion date being around late summer 2026, and construction is not expected to start until sometime next year. Judy then questioned whether the County currently owns the property, noting the County's use of eminent domain to acquire the land and the difficulties this posed for the project. Paul confirmed that the County has secured the property, having exchanged some acreage, and that the necessary land for the complex, which will include the Courthouse, District Attorney's office, and Emergency Operation Center, has been finalized. Judy further asked if there are plans to relocate the Benton County Jail to this new site, to which Paul responded that while it could be a possibility in the future, significant financial obstacles currently hinder this option.

Meeting Adjournment: 6:00 PM

Next Meeting Scheduled For: September 19, 2024