

MINUTES

COLUMBIA GATEWAY URBAN RENEWAL AGENCY BOARD MEETING

January 20, 2026

5:30 p.m.

City Hall Council Chambers
313 Court Street, The Dalles, Oregon 97058
Via Zoom / Livestream via City Website

PRESIDING: Dan Richardson, Chair

BOARD PRESENT: Ben Wring, Kristen Lillvik, Marcus Swift, Jill Amery

BOARD ABSENT: Tim McGlothlin, Scott Hege, Watler Denstedt

STAFF PRESENT: Economic Development Officer (EDO) Jacob Anderson, City Attorney Jonathan Kara, Administrative Assistant Crystal Sayre

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Richardson at 5:40 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Richardson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

It was moved by Lillvik and seconded by Swift to approve the agenda as prepared. The motion carried 5/0; Richardson, Wring, Lillvik, Swift, and Amery voting in favor, none opposed, McGlothlin, Hege, and Denstedt absent.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Agency Board recessed into Executive Session at 5:42 p.m. pursuant to:

- ORS 192.660(2)(e), to conduct deliberations with persons designated by the Agency Board to negotiate real property transactions; and
- ORS 192.660(2)(f), to consider information or records that are exempt by law from public inspection.

Representatives of the news media and designated staff were permitted to attend the Executive Session. Members of the media were directed not to report on or disclose the substance of the deliberations, in accordance with Oregon law.

The Executive Session adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

CONTINUATION OF OPEN SESSION

Chair Richardson reconvened the open session at 6:16 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Wring and seconded by Amery to approve the minutes of October 21, 2025, as submitted. The motion carried 4/0; Richardson, Wring, Swift, and Amery voting in favor, Lillvik abstained, none opposed, McGlothlin, Hege, and Denstedt absent.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was received.

ACTION ITEM

A. Grant Agreement (Phase IV) with Giamei Properties for the America Legion Hall Building (201 East 2nd Street)

Board Member Ben Wring disclosed a potential conflict of interest due to a family member renting commercial space from the applicant. He stated that he did not believe this constituted an actual conflict, as the incentive program did not affect that rental space, the original program approval predated the lease, and he had no financial interest in the outcome. He disclosed the relationship for transparency and participated in discussion and voting.

EDO Anderson presented the Phase Four incentive grant agreement for Giamei Properties, describing the project as part of a phased, incremental rehabilitation of the former American Legion Hall. He explained that although the requested grant amount was modest, cumulative funding for the property exceeded the administrative approval threshold. The current request would fund installation of HVAC in the basement, enabling the space to become rentable commercial space. Anderson noted that the applicants had continued to invest private funds into the project, including asbestos abatement, without grant assistance.

Chair Richardson asked whether other property owners in recent years had pursued phased redevelopment approaches and requested staff's perspective on whether this model was effective for both applicants and the Urban Renewal program. He specifically inquired whether incremental grant requests created undue administrative burden or program inefficiencies.

EDO Anderson responded that while phased projects do require additional staff time due to multiple agreements or amendments, the process is largely administrative and manageable. He stated that phased redevelopment allows property owners to make steady progress while aligning improvements with available resources. Anderson noted that staff view the approach as worthwhile because it results in tangible, incremental improvements to downtown properties and encourages continued private investment.

Chair Richardson observed that the phased approach reflects consistent, small steps toward a larger redevelopment goal and commented that such incremental progress can be an effective and sustainable strategy for revitalizing older buildings.

Board Member Amery expressed support for the phased redevelopment model, noting that it provides flexibility for property owners who may not be able to complete large-scale renovations at once, while still advancing overall downtown improvement goals.

Board Member Lillvik indicated that she appreciated seeing ongoing reinvestment in existing buildings and supported approaches that allow older structures to be brought back into productive use over time, particularly when improvements result in additional leasable space.

Board Member Wring stated that phased redevelopment appears to strike a balance between accountability and feasibility, allowing the Agency to track progress while supporting realistic project timelines for applicants.

It was moved by Amery and seconded by Lillvik to approve the agenda as prepared. The motion carried 5/0; Richardson, Wring, Lillvik, Swift, and Amery voting in favor, none opposed, McGlothlin, Hege, and Denstedt absent

DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. 2025 Agency Review

EDO Anderson presented a summary of Urban Renewal Agency activities in 2025, noting updates to the incentive program guidelines intended to encourage participation. He stated that while interest exists, fewer applications have been submitted due to economic uncertainty and hesitation by property owners to undertake capital projects. He noted ongoing conversations with property owners regarding potential improvements.

Anderson reviewed major projects, including the conclusion of negotiations related to the Tony's site, which he described as a redirection that allows future opportunities and interim use of the property. He provided updates on Basalt Commons, noting that additional information is anticipated in the coming months, and on the Federal Street Plaza, including withdrawal from a federal bike hub grant due to timing constraints and receipt of a T-Mobile Hometown Grant for shade structures.

Anderson discussed First Street construction, explaining that bids came in lower than expected but cautioned that archaeological monitoring and potential mitigation could significantly affect costs. He stated that staff recommend maintaining contingency funds until construction risks are better understood.

Chair Richardson commented that the Agency's role includes taking calculated risks and that not all efforts will advance as initially envisioned. He stated that the outcome at the Tony's site should be viewed as a redirection rather than a setback.

Anderson provided a preliminary financial overview, explaining estimated available funds through the Agency's maximum indebtedness period and clarifying that funds may continue to be expended after revenue generation ends, provided projects are identified.

Chair Richardson asked the Board to begin considering how remaining funds could be activated over the next several years, including whether strategies beyond the incentive program should be explored.

Board Member Lillvik stated that downtown foot traffic remains a concern and observed that some storefronts remain vacant. She suggested focusing investment near the Tony's site to strengthen activity and expressed interest in exploring support for events, tourism, and arts programming.

Chair Richardson discussed the possibility of supporting entrepreneurs and small business operators in addition to building owners, noting that modest investments could help encourage downtown activity.

Board Member Amery asked about the timeline for expending funds relative to 2029. Mr. Anderson clarified that there is flexibility beyond that date as long as projects are identified. Board Member Amery stated that downtown housing would be critical to increasing activity.

Board Member Swift emphasized the importance of retaining existing businesses while supporting new ones and referenced incentive approaches used in other communities. He raised questions regarding vacant storefronts and the use of Urban Renewal funds.

City Attorney Kara stated that expenditures must align with the Urban Renewal Plan but noted that the Agency has broad authority within that framework and encouraged the Board to think expansively.

Chair Richardson requested that Board Members submit ideas to staff within two weeks for compilation and future discussion.

Board Member Lillvik suggested revisiting past activities such as Sunshine Mill drive-in movies and exploring market-style buildings or shared commercial kitchen space.

Board Member Wring encouraged reviewing projects that did not advance previously to determine whether regulatory or procedural barriers existed and emphasized the importance of lodging and visitor-oriented projects.

Mr. Anderson stated that staff intend to reconnect with Sunshine Mill representatives and explore alternative funding structures, as well as opportunities to activate downtown through events in conjunction with the Federal Street Plaza.

Chair Richardson concluded by encouraging continued creative thinking and collaboration to position downtown for long-term success.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS / QUESTIONS

Board Member Lillvik spoke about the importance of increasing foot traffic downtown and suggested focusing on catalytic development opportunities, including the Tony's site. She emphasized the value of arts, culture, and tourism-related investments and expressed interest in partnerships that appeal to younger audiences. She also suggested revisiting past successful initiatives, such as Sunshine Mill drive-in movies, and exploring concepts like market buildings and shared commercial kitchen space.

Board Member Amery asked clarifying questions regarding the Agency's timeline for expending funds and emphasized the importance of downtown housing as a key driver of economic vitality. She indicated she would be providing additional ideas following further consideration.

Board Member Swift expressed enthusiasm for collaborative brainstorming and highlighted the importance of retaining existing businesses while attracting new ones. He raised questions regarding vacant storefronts and accountability mechanisms used in other communities. Board Member Swift also provided an overview of the upcoming *The Dalles Hoot* music and arts festival, noting strong early registration and regional interest, and described efforts to coordinate with downtown businesses to maximize economic benefit.

Board Member Wring discussed the importance of reducing barriers to downtown investment, revisiting projects that did not previously advance, and examining regulatory constraints that may inhibit activation. He emphasized the role of hospitality, lodging, and visitor-oriented development in increasing downtown activity.

Chair Richardson encouraged expansive thinking and emphasized cultural support for experimentation, creativity, and entrepreneurship. He highlighted the importance of not allowing procedural or cultural barriers to hinder innovative ideas and urged Board members and staff to think boldly while remaining grounded in the Agency's mission.

STAFF COMMENTS / PROJECT UPDATES

Mr. Anderson thanked staff for their efforts to support the meeting and noted lessons learned regarding the logistics of holding an Executive Session at the beginning of the meeting.

Mr. Anderson also outlined upcoming opportunities to leverage additional capacity through interns and university partnerships. He stated that staff may receive an economic development intern from Lewis & Clark College for a limited number of hours and described ongoing coordination with the University of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program, which could provide multidisciplinary student support for planning and economic development initiatives. He explained that these partnerships could assist with advancing Board-generated ideas, researching potential projects, and exploring new approaches to downtown activation, while helping staff manage workload constraints and move initiatives forward more efficiently.

ADJOURNMENT

Being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

Meeting conducted in a room in compliance with ADA standards.

Submitted by/
Crystal Sayre, Administrative Assistant
Community Development Department

SIGNED:  2-17-26

Dan Richardson, Chair

ATTEST: 

Crystal Sayre, Administrative Assistant
Community Development Department

