

WILLAMETTE FALLS LOCKS AUTHORITY

Authority Meeting
August 28, 2024, 2:00-4:00 PM
Meeting Minutes
(Minutes: Pat Vivian and Sandy Carter)

Authority Board Members Present:

Russ Axelrod [Geologist, former West Linn Mayor]
Mary Baumgardner [President, West Linn City Council]
Christine Lewis [Metro Council]
Denyse McGriff [Mayor, Oregon City]
David Penilton [Clackamas County Tourism/MERC Commission]

Virtual Attendance:

Sen. Mark Meek
Sandy Carter [Advocates for Willamette Falls Heritage]
Chris Mercier [Vice Chair, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde]
Will Worth [Rep. Walters]
McKenzie Worthington [SD 19- Pres. Wagner]
Clark Balfour
Martha Pellegrino
Bob and Donna Hansen

Excused Absences:

Robert Kentta [Tribal Council Treasurer, Confederated Tribes of Siletz]
Mini Sharma Ogle [PGE]
Tootie Smith [Chair, Clackamas County]

Staff:

Reed Wagner [WFLA Executive Director]
Georgia Langer [Metro]
Nicholas Cooley [Metro]
Pat Vivian [Notetaker]
Doug Riggs [Public Affairs]
Keith Hobson [Keith Hobson Accounting]

User Group Speakers:

Dave Bernert
Richard Chesbrough
Captain Lowell Gillespie

Thelma Haggemiller
Jerry Herrmann
Bob La Salle
Frank O'Donnell

1. Welcome, Agenda Review, Minutes Approval and Accounting Update

1a. Agenda Review and Meeting Minutes. Chair Christine Lewis called the meeting to order and introduced the agenda, which ended today with a Locks user group discussion. A quorum was established. The June meeting minutes were up for approval.

MOTION: Denyse McGriff made a motion that the minutes be approved as written and corrected. David Penilton second the motion.

ACTION: With all in favor, the minutes were unanimously approved as final.

1b. Treasurer's Report. Today's meeting packet included basic information on budget vs. actuals for June 2023 to June 2024, which Treasurer Denyse McGriff has reviewed.

The May and June 2024 statements show the actual fund balance is close to the estimated budget total for the end of the year. With an upcoming adjustment, the balance will be about \$20,000 higher than expected. Expenses relative to budget are looking good.

Keith has been working with a CPA firm and hopes to have a final report for the 2024 fiscal year by September. All anticipated contributions have come in, and we're on track financially, Denyse said.

MOTION: Russ moved to accept the treasurer's report, seconded by Denyse.

ACTION: With all in favor, the treasurer's report was unanimously approved.

2. Executive Director's Report: Legislative Agenda

2a. Financial. Executive Director Reed Wagner said legislative advocacy is a high priority at this point. Since the WFLA Board last met, KPFF Engineering updated its 2018 cost estimate with 2026 numbers to reflect inflation, erosion, and seepage. Reed will meet with Corps Project Manager Laura Hicks next week to discuss before following up with KPFF.

It would be helpful to have more background information on the seepage, Russ said. We need to know whether it's a functional or liability concern, Christine said. Discussion of this issue was postponed until PGE can be present.

Reed used the KPFF report to raise the estimate, based on 2026 assumptions, from \$14.5 million to approximately \$18.4 million in total capital costs. He asked for volunteers to form a subcommittee and work with him on refining these numbers for the Legislature.

ACTION: Russ Axelrod, Will Worth, and Sen. Mark Meek volunteered to serve on a subcommittee to identify appropriate costs forecasted for construction, based on the updated KPFF report.

2b. Statutory. Chair Lewis asked Doug Riggs to describe what's needed for state funding beyond an updated estimate of the construction cost.

The Legislature cut the Commission's 2021 request in half from \$14.5 million to \$7.2 million, with general acknowledgment that wouldn't get the job done. Doug urged the Board to double down on the accuracy of the funding request before the legislative session. Sen. Mark Meek agreed and reported that the current state revenues are higher than anticipated. It'll be imperative to provide legislators with funding needs in an easily digestible one- or two-pager, Doug noted.

The other part of financial support is for operations, Reed said. This fall, he plans to ask all WFLA partners to revisit their pledges. Some agencies are distinguishing between startup costs and perpetual costs, Christine added.

Christine and Reed agreed administrative expenses should be separate from operational expenses. Keith said budgeting two programs from the same general fund isn't a problem.

Chair Lewis proposed revisiting the legislative agenda in two months.

ACTION: There was Board consensus to proceed with budgetary refinements and prepare an updated funding request for the Legislature, with no objections.

3. User Group Discussion

Chair Christine Lewis introduced the first Willamette Falls Locks Authority user group discussion, inviting attendees to talk about their goals and vision for the Locks.

Reed summarized events since the Corps decided to close the Locks in 2011, then opened the floor. Today the following people spoke:

- Cpt. Lowell Gillespie, representing the Portland Spirit, expressed the company's support of the Locks for commercial and tourism uses of the river.

- Frank O'Donnell is a resident of Oregon City and a city commissioner. He's involved in a group called Rivers Assets and Opportunities that is working to open river traffic from Salem to the Columbia. Another restoration project, The Jon Storm Park Dock, is an important regional asset and potential companion project to the Locks.
- Richard Chesbrough is captain and owner of the Willamette Queen, a sternwheeler based in Salem. Since the Locks closed, he has struggled to get the boat inspected as required every five years because there's no drydock facility south of Portland. Reopening the Locks is critical to his company's survival.
- Bob La Salle is a resident of Oregon City and running for city commissioner. His focus is on the commercial aspect of Locks operation. There will be less roadway traffic once companies can ship their products by river again, which will also reduce costs.
- Jerry Herrmann distributed copies of a written description of the Jon Storm Park Dock. He was born in West Linn and co-chairs the River Operations Task Force. Locks operation is key to use of the dock, which was designed to support transportation and tourism in the Willamette Falls area.
- Thelma Haggemiller lives in Oak Grove and owns a business called Slow Poke Tours. She sees the Locks as an under-utilized state asset and wants to see them open again.
- Richard Chesbrough has 32 years of experience navigating up and down the river. When the Locks were operating, he took people on a cruise every Sunday to Champoeg Park that was very successful. The recreational potential of the Locks is enormous.
- Dave Bernert lives in West Linn and owns Wilsonville Concrete. The Locks have been vital to the company's business model, not only in terms of logistics but local employment. Of their 200 employees, about 50 or so are marine-based.

Treasurer Denyse McGriff said transfer of ownership is taking longer than anyone would like because ownership of the Locks has been fragmented and complex. The Authority has to find a competent operator and convince the Legislature to help fund the Locks. Today's public testimony will help the Board build a solid case for state funding.

Russ Axelrod, Sandy Carter and Denyse McGriff advised that it might be possible to move a boat through the Locks for Coast Guard inspection before the official reopening. The Corps has found ways to move vessels without passengers on an emergency basis.

Chair Lewis said the Board will hold user group meetings 2-3 times a year to hear user suggestions on infrastructure and successful Locks operation. Guidance on hydraulics in terms of passage time through the Locks is also welcome.

4. Adjourn Meeting

The next WFLA Board meeting will be September 25, with the location yet to be determined.